

## *Getting into the Body*

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One of the Buddha's terms for concentration is *adhicitta*, which can be translated as "heightened awareness" or "the heightened mind." It can also be translated as "heightened intentness." In other words, you really do pay careful attention to what you've got here, the object you're focused on—in this case, the body, the breath. Give all your attention to how the breath feels. Whichever aspect of the breath seems most prominent now—the in-and-out breath, the sense of breath energy in the body, whatever seems the most congenial place to focus the mind—let the mind settle there and just be very intent on sticking with it, noticing what you've got here.

The image of heightening is useful. Think about how you go up in an airplane and look down on the land below. You see a lot of things you didn't see before. Your perspective is different. Things that loomed large when you were on the ground suddenly seem very small. And you can see patterns that you didn't notice before. You can see where the roads go. You can see the layout of a city, or the layout of a countryside. You can see whole mountain ranges. And it changes your perspective on the land.

It's the same with getting your mind in a state of heightened awareness or heightened intentness. When you really give all your attention to the body right here, the more time you spend here, it changes your perspective. When you leave this state and go back to your daily concerns, or if you can carry the state into your daily concerns, that's even better. But either way, you come back with a different perspective. Things that seemed so large and overwhelming suddenly seem a lot smaller.

This is one of the ways in which concentration is really, really useful. It gives you another place to go, a place that can give you a different perspective. Problems you have in day-to-day life look different from this perspective. And that change in perspective can often help you. You see the problem in a different light. You see the larger pattern of which it's a part, and you can do something about it. Or if it's a problem that you can't change, at least you have a different perspective on it, so that you can see what you can do not to suffer from it.

So it's important that you pay careful attention to what's going on in the body. One of our problems in the West is that we have a very limited vocabulary for how things feel in the body.

This is where the Buddha's teachings on the elements is useful. Think of the energy flow in the body as a kind of breath, a kind of wind in the body. As for the solid sensations, the liquid sensations, the warm sensations, sort out your sense of the body in these terms, and try to gain a sensitivity for exactly which sensations in your body they correspond to. Once the terms start making sense to you in terms of what you're actually experiencing, then you can use them to change what you're experiencing. You can bring more of a balance into the body.

If you notice that when you're breathing, you pull things up in the body, or someplace in your mind has the idea that the breath has to be pulled up in the body, that can lead to headaches. So you can think of the energy going down as you breathe in. Or you may be pulling things into your shoulders, pulling things into the back of your neck, which of course leaves you with a lot of tension in your shoulders and the back of your neck. Think of the breath coming in from the other side, coming in from the back of the neck into the neck, from the back of the shoulders into the shoulders. Or you can think of the breath energy being centered in a line that goes down the middle of the front of the body, radiating from there. It doesn't have to be pulled at all. As you breathe in, it radiates.

When you can do this, you find that it changes the way you relate to the body. It's a lot easier to inhabit the body. This is where your heightened awareness can stay: in the body in and of itself as your frame of reference. Instead of looking at the body in the frame of reference of the world, you've got the body just in and of itself. That puts you on a more solid footing so that the events in the world don't bowl you over so much. You feel at home here. You feel grounded here. You can really inhabit the body.

It may sound like you're identifying with the body, and that's exactly what's happening. The whole purpose of concentration is not only to give you an alternative to your attachments in the world, it's also to provide a very steady attachment here so that you can look long and hard at this process of attachment. The Buddha says that if you really want to see your attachment to form, feeling, perceptions, fabrications, and consciousness, this is the place to see it: in a concentrated mind. As you fully inhabit the body, you can see what it's like to identify with the body.

Ordinarily, our sense of identification is very erratic. It's like the reflections of sunlight off water. It dances around. Sometimes you identify with the body, then oops, you're identifying with a feeling, or a thought. It moves around so quickly you can't see it. All you see is the movement. You can't really pin it down.

But if you can develop this sense of really inhabiting the body all the time, continually, no matter what, then you can look at the process of identification and

attachment a lot more easily, because it's right there: solid, continuous. It's not absolutely continuous, there will be little fluctuations in it, and it's the fluctuations that allow you to see the process. But the fact that it's repeatedly coming back to the same thing over and over and over again: That's what enables you to see it clearly for what it is. And you can learn to see right through it.

This is why concentration is so important for insight. It gives you a perspective on things outside, you gain insight into those things, the ways of the world, and then you can start getting insight into the ways of the mind as well.

So take the time to develop this heightened awareness, inhabiting the body. If you find there are parts the body that are strange to you, get to know them well. Those are the ones that make it hard to stay here, the parts where the energy is cut off, blocked, bottled up. Take the time to explore them. Learn how to open up the energy channels in the body, what Ajaan Lee calls the breath channels. And although it may seem that you're not getting anywhere with the more abstract notions of insight, you're giving yourself a really important grounding. Without this grounding, insight is just as ephemeral as sunlight dancing off the water. You have a little bit of insight, then it goes. Doesn't have much chance to do any work. But when the mind is settled, permeating the body, suffusing the body with a sense of ease and rapture, that's when your insights can begin to suffuse the body as well.

There's a passage in the Canon that talks about people in jhana, in strong states of concentration, who can touch the deathless with their bodies. This is how they do it. They have to get really into their bodies before the body can touch anything like that.

So whatever time is required to explore your inner sense of the body is time well spent, because it's in this sense of inhabiting the body that you gain all the insight you're going to need, that ultimately will take you beyond the body. You can't skip over this, saying, "I'm not greedy for rapture or pleasure. I just want to go straight to insight." You've got to go through the process. This is the territory where the deathless is touched, so learn how to inhabit this territory. If the body is a stranger to you, then the deathless is going to be a stranger as well.

So get on familiar terms. As the Buddha said, those who develop and pursue the practice of immersing mindfulness in the body are those who touch the deathless, because it's touched right here.