

## *The Body In & Of Itself*

*May 10, 2008*

When you focus on the breath you're focusing on the body in and of itself. That's your frame of reference, and you want to hold to that frame of reference. Take that as the world you're inhabiting right now.

As for the outside world, just let it drop away. Friends, family, issues at work, issues at school—you don't have to get involved with them right now. You tune into *this* world right here. We live in many worlds and the mind tends to wander from one world to the next, sometimes very quickly. You could sit here five minutes and go through lots of different worlds: the worlds of the past, worlds of the future. But that's not what you want right now. You want to get to know this world right here: your awareness in the body.

That's why the Buddha talks about giving your mindfulness a place to get established. This is your frame of reference right here. Mindfulness means the ability to keep something in mind. Right now you're going to remember the breath, keep the breath in mind, keep the body right here in mind—in other words, keep reminding yourself that this is the world you're going to stay focused on.

As for other issues in the outside worlds, just let them go. A thought may come up about something stupid you did in the past: Just let it go. You don't have to get involved in it. If there's something you want to get out of the world in the future, let it go. This is called putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world.

After all, at the moment, all those worlds are just fabrications, total fabrications. You think about your friends: Your friends aren't here right now. You think about issues at work: They're not here right now. They're just baggage you're fabricating and carrying around.

What *is* here right now: You've got the body sitting here breathing. And even though there's a certain amount of fabrication that goes into that experience, still it's really grounding. It gives the mind a foundation. You can learn how to do it skillfully, learn how to work with the breath skillfully.

Try to sensitize yourself to what feels right right now. What kind of breathing feels good? And try to notice if your body feels out of balance or out of whack. How can you breathe in a way that brings it back into balance? If you're feeling tired, maybe long in-breaths and short out-breaths will feel right, will give you more energy. If you're feeling tense, short in-breaths and long out-breaths can help relax you.

Because what you notice is as your awareness stays grounded in the body, the body helps your awareness, your awareness helps the body. In other words, you can adjust the breath so it feels more comfortable to be here right now. And after a while you notice that the mind, if it has a chance to settle down and be still, has a sense of well-being.

The Buddha once said there is no happiness other than peace: *N'atthi santi param sukham*. You might argue that you can think of all kinds of happiness that are not very peaceful at all, but are they really happiness? There's a sense of excitement, there's a sense of thrill—but there's an awful lot of stress that goes along with those feelings, and you can't endure them very long. The sense of ease, however, that comes with this peace: This you can endure for long periods at a time. The mind gets grounded, has a sense of solidity, stability. It doesn't have to jump around the way it used to.

And you can begin to explore the potentials of the body right here. The Buddha talks about different properties you can look at. You can look at the breath property, which you're looking at right now. When the breath property gets comfortable, you can think about the fire property, the warmth in the body. The liquid property, the cool sensations in the body. The solid property, earth property, heavier solid parts of the body. You can bring those into balance as well.

Sometimes when you're feeling really light-headed, you want to think, "solid, heavy." Or when you're feeling depressed, think, "breath-energy flowing through the body." It's interesting that just by bringing those perceptions to mind and holding on to them steadily, you can foster corresponding sensations in the body, nourish them, strengthen them in the body, bringing things back into balance.

The same with the balance between heat and cool sensations in the body. If you're feeling a little cold right now, just try to notice where the warm sensations are in the body right now. Which spot in the body seems warmest? You can focus your attention right there and then think of the warmth growing stronger. As it grows stronger, you can think of it radiating out. So instead of obsessing, say, about feeling too cold, you're looking for the potential for warmth in the body. It's there, and you can bring it out.

In this way, by keeping the mind with the body, you get both sides helping each other. Because the mind does need a place to rest. Otherwise it travels around looking for happiness in what other people do, other people say, activities outside. This is placing your happiness on really shaky foundations. You want to bring your awareness inside and look for happiness here. This is a lot more solid, a lot more dependable. As you pay attention here, the body feels a lot healthier as well. You're not putting a squeeze on the nerves.

So even though there are lots of different things you could focus on right now, choose to focus on the breath, just hang on to that perception, and see where it'll take you. Try to get sensitive to what you've got right here in terms of the potentials in the present moment.

So it's not just a matter of clamping down on the mind and forcing it to stay in one spot. You stay in one spot, you stay here with the body, because you find that it's interesting. After all, this is your body, this is your mind. And the issue at stake is your happiness.