

# Morning Instructions and Elements Meditation

Uncontrived Weekend Retreat

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So good morning or good day. It's nice to see everyone again. So, shamatha practice, which we emphasize a little bit more yesterday, leads toward an experience of refined awareness in the body, in the mind. And I like to talk in terms of energy, if you will, kind of the energetic sensations that course through the body. They're not really anatomical, but they're still part of the material realm. So sometimes this kind of practice is called working in the fine material realm. And we can learn a lot about how to interact with and shape this realm of experience. It's an interesting part of practice. Once that opens up. I found this interesting quote from Richard Schenckfinn that says, "The person who splashes in the shallows of the ocean does not find the pearls. If you want to understand, you have to dive deeply, and then you will find them." So that points maybe toward the potential of meditation practice. So today we're turning more explicitly toward insight or vipassana, the partner of shamatha. So remember from the Anvutra and Nikaya that I read yesterday, these two things pertain to true knowledge, what to, serenity, and insight. So we could say, how do we talk about insight? Sometimes it can sound kind of lofty or, you know, who knows what that is, or if I could have them or anything like that. But I like to say that there are insight ways of looking. It's really just ways of seeing our experience. There are so many ways that we could see the experience even that we're having right now. And Buddhist teachings say that there are certain ways of seeing that are worth training in. They're worth actually practicing. And if we practice looking in certain ways, then the mind can move along a path toward freedom from Dukha. That's pretty good news. That's the, that's the prospect, right? And then we test it out for ourselves. We see if I try that, does that seem to work? So there are many wonderful insight practices that are offered. A number of them are in the, it's called the Satipattana Sutta, and then 10, the fundamental detailed instructions on mindfulness practice. And there are so many that we won't try to do them all. We'll just focus on a few of them today that, that I found to be effective. So one of them is to see the body in terms of what are called elements. That's the translation. We don't mean elements, though, like some of us, it learns chemistry. And so we learn about hydrogen, helium, and the periodic table of the elements. That's not exactly, that's not the same kind of element. What, what's being referred to here are kind of basic or fundamental experiences of the body. What does it feel like from the inside? So maybe consider for a moment, you know, what, what can you actually feel right now in your

body? There's no experience that's called me, or back, or even gut. Those aren't experiences. Those are just words that we use to label things that we can see. But you might feel pressure of your bottom against the seat. You might feel warmth in your hands and coolness on your face, or vice versa. Maybe there's warmth in your face and your hands are a little cold. You may feel certain movements in the body because of the breath. Breath itself is a concept. That's an abstract idea that we put on to experience what you really feel are shifts of your clothing against your skin. You feel the pressure as your lungs expand. It exerts a certain amount of pressure and then you feel a collapse of the muscles from the exhalation. So these kinds of things, the subtle sensations of the shift of the breath are what are really the more elemental experiences there. If you're walking, of course, not sitting still like we all are now, then you have many more experiences of movement, many more cues that you're moving. It's an interesting question. How do you know that you're walking? What's telling you that? So if we try to collect all the many, many myriad different kinds of these basic sensations that we have, if we try to collect them up and organize them into some groups, concepts, what's still groups so that we could talk about them, understand them, what would that be like? Well, the Buddha gives us a suggestion in the Satipatanasuta. He suggests four main categories of fundamental experiences of the body. And they, in my experience, they cover quite a lot. And so I think they're good. So he calls these the four elements. But we could think of them as the four basic kinds of experience of the body that we have. So the first one is called earth. But it means the feelings of solidity or hardness. You have feelings like that in the body, don't you? Right now, you're probably you had some pain yesterday from the hardness of your knee against the floor. You know, it's if we didn't have that, you wouldn't have so much direct pressure there. So but also, you know, we experience that we can hold ourselves up against gravity. And if we tap in, it's like, oh, it's because they're bones. We can bones as a concept, but we can feel the hardness in the body that gives it some shape, some structure. So there's that there's solidity. We feel it also in our teeth. teeth are pretty solid, nails, some hard, hardnesses in the body. We also have experiences of liquidity, most notably in your mouth, right? We hope or your eyes fluid, we can also sense fluid in other areas. Sometimes the belly is making fluid like noises. And some people can feel the blood, although we might put that more in motion. So, you know, there's fluidity. And then there's also, with just a little bit of a little bit of imagination added, there is cohesion is also part of this is the water element, part of the water element is cohesion. I think of that in the same way, like when you go to the beach, let's say you start out pretty far from the water and the sand is powdery, you're walking along in it and it does support you, the earth is supporting you, but the sand is very sandy, it's not cohesive together. And then as you get closer to the water, the sand is wet, right? And suddenly the sand is a lot more solid, it's flat. When you walk on it, you make a footprint that endures a little longer. So, we can see that as there's water mixed in with liquid, it coheres in a different way. Wet sand is not like dry sand. What would your body be like if it

had no water? Powder or something or bones, you know? So, we need the water to cohere, to have the sense of, you know, the body being that consistency that it is. So, there's liquidity and cohesion is the water element. Then we have the fire element, a name for the heat and coolness experience in the body. And this varies all over the body. And the goodness, the temperature map of the body is quite varied. Given times, different parts are warm or cold. We may feel sudden changes in heat or gradual changes. If we've observed ourselves carefully, we know we have a cycle of where we, when we feel cooler during the day and warmer, independent of what the temperature is outside. If you were in a room that was the same temperature all day, you would still feel warmer and cooler at certain times of day. It's just how it works with our metabolism. And then the fire element is also related to the process of using energy in the body. So, it's related to digestion and to aging. It's said to be due to the fire element going through the body. We're slowly cooking. And we get like prunes, we dry out over time. I don't know if that's a good analogy or not, but you can kind of get it, the fire element being tied to aging, which in process. And then there's the air element, which is related to the breath. Of course, that's kind of the way that we feel it, but it's more abstractly said to be the motion in the body. So, the air element is our ability to move. And that's the flow in the body. So, if we practice seeing the body through this lens, as opposed to the lens of how does my hair look today and, you know, these kind of other things, does this look over? How does this make me look fat? You know, things like that, that we, other ways we see the body, we start to have a very different understanding of the body. This is a lot more experiential. It's not like what you see in the mirror. I mean, that's one way to see the body, but it's only one way. And if it's also not a very onward leading, liberating way to see the body, but seeing the elements, understanding the experience of the body is a much more intimate and also mysterious way of understanding the body. And it happens to be onward leading. It can lead toward greater liberation from being attached to the body, let's say it that way. So, we can deliberately turn our mind toward these four experiences, and we'll begin to notice, for one thing, that they're not so different between inside and outside. You experience your body in terms of certain kinds of hardness, like say your teeth. Is that really any different from the hardness of this kind of ceramic, you know, enamel ceramic, you know, similar? Right? So, same with water, the water outside, the water inside, the water, you know, it's all quite similar. So, we start to have a sense that we're really more intimately connected with nature than we thought. So, actually, I chose this deliberately because shamata practice, like we did more of yesterday, tends to bring up this experience naturally in the body. We tend to start to feel the body as energy, as something that's more just a set of experiences that are changing, energy flows, ripples, surges, these kinds of things, this more subtle experience of the body, less conceptual. You may have noticed that yesterday. So, the body tends to shift and change into something more basic, more fundamental. So, it might take a moment to really take in that you don't quite know what the body is. Is the body just that set of

experiences? Is the body the anatomy that you see in the mirror? What is it really exactly? Doesn't it feel quite different at different times? It's always changing, always in flux, through aging, certainly over the years and moment to moment, always changing. So, when we look at the Satipatanasuta, we see, I pointed to this in the Dharma talk yesterday, we see in what's called the refrain, the part in between each of the teachings, which is by the way labeled insight in Vigubodi's translation, even though it's not in the Pali labeled that as a section label. All of them include this part about change. So, it says, "The person abides contemplating in the body its nature of arising, or contemplating in the body its nature of vanishing, or contemplating in the body its nature of both arising and vanishing." That's in every single exercise that we do in the Satipatana exercises. So, we're always supposed to be looking at the change, the flow, the way that things are not static. They come, they go. And this helps us let go of concepts. Concepts are very stable, they're probably the only thing that's stable. Actual experience, not as stable. Actually, Jack Cornfield once asked a roomful of people, "Is there anything that's been continual in your whole life up to now?" And one person raised their hand and he was kind of surprised, because usually people can't think of anything. And they said, "Yes, ignorance." So, maybe, maybe. Even though, even then, I think we have moments, and I wonder if we don't have that. So, when we start to tune into, especially in the body, this very direct experience of the flow, the change, the shiftingness of it, this is maybe a more honest experience of the body, then we're having a direct experience of the nature. That's when there's potential for the mind to get something about that, which would be an insight. So, we don't make insights happen, we just do the process of the differences and let them come. So, insight, ways of looking, we'll look at some of those today. So, why don't we sit together? Why don't we sit together with that? So, coming into your meditation posture, allowing yourself to close the eyes, just gently feeling into your experience, coming into the sense of the body and the sitting posture. You have an overall sense of the body to start with. And checking that the posture is somewhat balanced. If you're sitting up, shoulders over hips, ears over shoulders, maybe feeling up the spine, gently relaxing and whining, letting yourself be supported by what you're sitting on, and allowing the body to float upward like a sea plant, floating with the sea floor, letting the arms be soft like the fronds of the sea plant, getting the head float on the spine, bringing up a sense of gratitude for practice, maybe your inspiration, value of meditation, value of this practice in your life. Mindfulness, bringing attention into the present, letting go of what happened earlier today, letting go what might happen later today, just here. With some softness around the edges, softening the edges of the body, softening the edges of the mind. It's natural to connect with the breath and body, and the first notice it in a particular place, how do you know that you're breathing? Loosing the breath is a way to gently gather the mind. Just do a few minutes of somebody practice to gather the mind. Settle down deeply into a simple flow of breathing. Now releasing our attention just on our breathing. Turn the attention to the

experiences in the body that are experiences of solidity or hardness. Use a place to connect will be where you're sitting or you're resting. Feel the firmness of whatever you're sitting on. Maybe you're touching the floor and there's some firmness and pressing against the floor. You may be able to sense the spine and the teeth. There are experiences in the body that are the earth element hardness or solidity. Shifting attention again. We can feel various kinds of emotion. The breath. Back to the breath. Below that. The chest moves up and down slightly as we breathe. We may feel subtle motions in the gut, which is moving all the time. The air element. Dynamic nature of having a body. Sensing all that is moving, even as you sit relatively still. Still quite a good emotion. So in a general sense, the experience of the body is a mixture of these four kinds of experience. That captures a lot of it. When we see these elements and the experiences of them are in constant. The body is a dynamic, alive entity. Even the parts that are hard, we really tune into them carefully. There's a little bit of shift happening there. What in your body has been constant for your whole life? What is this thing that we walk around in? Or that walks us around? Or there's no good language there? Just allowing yourself to rest. These are not things to think about, but ways of looking. So resting in the flow of the experience we call body.