

Reflections

Uncontrived Half-day Retreat

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We focused today on the body, at least that was the invitation, and the breath as an aspect of the body. Or maybe the body as an aspect of the breath. They end up kind of being similar in my experience. So I want to share a little bit about the body as a basis for Dharma practice, for wisdom, as the way it's conveyed in suttas as I understand it. And also from my own experience. So, let's see. So maybe you got the impression from the sip today that there's many different forms of the body, right? That phrase, the breath body is one body and one the body is a statement from MN 118 on Asante Sutta says that. I've tried to understand that, you know, experientially. Are there different bodies? And there are, right? What if we consider, I mean, what we would say conventionally is that the body feels different under different circumstances or different conditions, which is also true. But you know, it feels very different, like right now, for example, then at the moment that you first gain consciousness lying in bed this morning. You know, the body feels different at that time. Maybe in some ways it's more relaxed, warm, it's in a different, you know, lying down usually. But also it could be kind of have some stiffness and soreness as we get older, which gets better after we get up and move around a bit. And you know, it's different. But it's also different, you know, at night when we're tired or it's different when we're out hiking or when we're hungry versus when we're not, or when we're sick, it's very different. But we would, we always say it's, it's the same body, but just with all these different feelings in it. But what if it's just a different body, you know, completely different body. The body is what it is at this moment. And when I was little, I used to hang on the bars upside down with my knees over the top, you know, people did that. That's a totally different feeling in the body, right. I don't know if anybody does yoga now or you do in version. That's really different too, right. So, and then who knows what it's going to feel like, you know, five minutes before we die. And what that's going to feel like, what it's going to be a different body. So, the breath body happens to be one that we can experience pretty regularly because we're breathing a lot. But I really like that one for meditation. Apparently, you know, the Buddha really emphasized that one as one that's relevant for meditation, presumably because it can be to wisdom. The Buddha had an aim. He wasn't trying to catalog the whole universe. You didn't make a list anywhere of all

those bodies that I named as far as I know, but he pointed out that there are particular ones that could be useful for us if our aim is to walk the eight fold path and find the end of suffering. So the breath body seems to be a good one for that useful one. I really like to cultivate that one in my practice and there are potentials for it. It's one of the things that it does is it changes our habitual idea about the body, you know, we normally look at the body, like we can, I don't know if you have self you enabled but maybe you can see yourself on the screen or you look in the mirror. Yeah, that's me. That's what I look like and if I were to look in the mirror and see somebody different that could be disturbing right because, you know, but it's already of course it is a different one than the one I saw 50 years ago but it was a slow change so I didn't get upset about it. So, you know, but it this breath body really is quite different because we have eyes closed we're not seeing it in that conceptual way and so it's this different experience. But if we're mindful of the fact that this is a different body this is the breath body or something not to put a name on it, but it's very different. We can start to break down the idea that the body is this one thing, or has to be one way, which is really free. Actually, you know, there are things about the body that aren't going to change or that are on their own track changing in a way that I don't have control over. But there are also aspects of the body that are not fixed that are fixed only by the minds habitual recreation of them. So, you know, some of these are the things that are not fixed. Some of them are, for example, patterns of tension in the body that can be revealed through practice. I don't know. Some of you may have found those. Some people they're very prominent part of practice other people not so much. But for me they've been quite prominent is that as I've sat quietly being the body or the breath body. I don't have any physical origin in that moment. It's not like, you know, like my shoulder might hurt, but it's not because there's an injury there, or it's because there's something stored in the tissues there this is now talked about in trauma understanding but even that's only one way of conceptualizing it. And I'm just commenting to me that the sound is a little echoey. Oh, I know why this should help. I left original sound on after I see all these thumbs up. Thank you. I turned it on to ring the bell. That should be better. Yeah. So great. So some of these habitual tensions in the body are really being created by the mind, and some of them are things that are have gotten stuck emotions or memories or something. Some of them are actually just habits because we didn't notice that we were clinging in that way. And then we can actually change and those can actually bring a lot of relief over time. And it goes in both directions to like if you notice one of these tensions, and you release it again. We can't make it happen necessarily but if we've, we can learn to pay attention in a way that it will release that then turns around and feeds into greater freedom in the mind, the mind was actually fixing not only the body but itself, in certain ways, in these habitual tensions of the body. And then we discover that we feel lighter we feel happier or we can respond in a different way than we did before to some situation. You see this in longtime practitioners whose personality kind of shifts over time, people tend to loosen up a little bit

get happier, get softer, get more expressive. Not always and not evenly, but it can happen. And the body is of the vehicle by which we can do that reflective process of how the mind is holding sometimes we can't see in the mind where that structure or pattern is, but we can feel it in the body if it has a bodily and along. So again, some people. This is more relevant for others. Also for any given person, some of our patterns may be stored in body but maybe not all of them, maybe some of our mental patterns are only stored in the emotional mind and we have to find them there so I'm not saying the body is totally sufficient but for some it might be the Buddha kind of implies that the Buddha, the body could take us all the way. I like that quote from the Rojitasā Sutta. It's very commonly quoted so many of you have probably heard it before but with it anyway. So, and 445 for it is in this fathom long body with its perception and mind that I describe the world, it's arising, its cessation and the practice that leads to its cessation. That's the Buddhist speaking. So, you know, is the world actually in the body. And kind of kind of is. So, as we go into the body. I talked at the beginning about having this kind of structural sense of like, you know, the head and the shoulders and the belly, and then that may have sort of dissolved as your practice goes on with the body. So, we begin to realize we have this also this idea that like out there there's everything that my body is related to, you know, it's like I'm sitting in a room and there's the Buddha roof behind me and there's this window over there. And there's the floor and the ceiling you know I have a geometric configuration of the room also and then there's like me in the world. And that's like a whole structural concept in the mind that everybody carries and it's skillful. Please do because it helps us navigate. But then we also discover when we sit, you know we only have the internal experience we're not the eyes are closed we meditate usually with our vice closed in this tradition. And you don't have that. But then there's this whole geometry inside it's like you know you feel like you're going in or you're falling or you're, you know it's like you suddenly realize you only have the, the left half of your awareness field present, or something like that. And then you have to realize, oh I've got a whole geometry inside also, and it can feel like you can go down infinitely into the body, you know, isn't it true that eventually it opens into this thing that's as big as the galaxy at least inside the body. And that's that, you know this. So I think geometry is quite constructive, quite perceptual. And the Buddha points to it kind of poetically compactly in this idea that the body contains the world actually the word is local, which can be the world like, it can be the conventional world, but it can also mean something like universe, like we would say in our language. You know, like, just everything, you know, and so it's like, maybe everything is in the body after all how do I see what's out there I assume there's a world out there I project the chair and so forth. And what I know really is what I see, which is a combination of my eye and something out there I don't know exactly what but in my brain, interpreting it and my mind, understanding it. So, I think it was Marcia Rose who said, all we ever encounter is our own mind. And if you think about it, yeah, right. All I ever encounter is my own mind. I mean, even if I encounter other people

and I do believe that all of you exist as real things, by the way. Really, I don't have a totally solipsistic view of the universe. Nonetheless, I can't see all of you, I can only see the part of you that strikes my perception. And I do my best with that. And you only see the part of me that is that you don't see all of me so there's there's part of our conundrums unions. But this world is such a powerful concept, because we can then realize, oh, the Duke also is part of the world, it's part of this thing that my mind is doing. And so, could there be the origin of it and the cessation of it right here in this fathom long body. And that's actually really powerful. And for part of us objects to it because we think that there's a lot you know there's stuff that's, that's other people's fault, which is kind of true. Also, I mean everything is true on these different levels right, but the Buddha says you can solve a lot of the problem internally. And at first that's discouraging because we realize, gosh, I'm creating so much and it's going to take forever to work through all of this. But it's also really empowering because if it is in the world of the body and in mind it does say the body has its perception and its mind. And it's, it's also can't be taken away by somebody else. It is. You can do it. No one can stop you since because all we ever encounter is our mind right. So, it's practice and there's so much in just these few simple phrases from suitors that I kind of woven together so far. You can really go a long way, investigating experience. So the body, the literal body, the physical body, the problems of that are not going away. So, he had back pain and he had intestinal illness that we eventually died of that. So that part is, is with us through the physical elements, but this other part of the body, you know where there's more. Excuse me, the mind and the perception. So, you know, that can really change the practice. And so, you know, that's the part that we work with. And the part that is the, you know, the aggregates, the body and mind beyond that. So I wanted to read also a poem from Ajahn Man, who was one of the Thai forest masters of the last century. He was a teacher of Ajahn Chah, for example, and when you're part of this whole Thai forest lineage. And he is, he, they don't do too much with, you know, the arts and stuff in that practice, but he did write an awakening poem about about the body, and it's interesting. So it's called the ballad of liberation from the condos by Ajahn Man. So, he writes, once there was a man who loved himself and feared distress. He wanted happiness beyond the reach of danger. So he wandered endlessly. And then people said that happiness was found. He longed to go. But wandering took a long, long time. He was the sort of man who loved himself and really dreaded death. He truly wanted release from aging and mortality. One day he came to know the truth, abandoning the cause of suffering and compounded things. He found a cave of wonders of endless happiness. That is, the body. As he gazed throughout the cave of wonders, his suffering was destroyed, his fears appeased. He gazed and gazed around the mountainside, experiencing unbounded peace. But then there was another man, afraid of death, his heart all withered and discouraged. He came to me and spoke frankly in a pitiful way. He said, "You've made an effort at your meditation for a long time now. Have you seen it yet? The true dharma of your dreams?" He asked to stay with me.

So I agreed. And I said to him, "I'll take you to a massive mountain with a cave of wonders, free from suffering and stress, mindfulness immersed in the body. You can view it at your leisure to cool your heart and end your troubles. This is the path of the noble lineage. It is up to you to go or not." The cave of wonders. So I really like that poem. It's interesting. And it's interesting that it comes from a very tough forest master. I don't know if you've ever seen pictures of Ha-Jon Man. He was very aesthetic, very aesthetic. And yeah. So worth reflecting on our cave of wonders. It's the intimacy. I think it's helpful if this maybe it'll be the last one I'll wind up with is, it's okay to start developing kind of your own language for your internal bodily experience if you want. It doesn't mean like creating a dictionary and writing it all down. I mean, it can just be like a language of sensation or perception of some kind. But you know, you don't have to try to put words on everything or link it up to the sutras explicitly. But maybe you'll find sutra phrases coming in, you know, like, "The breath body is one body among the bodies." That actually occurred to me on the cushion while I was doing the long meditation. And I realized, oh, this is like, that was when I was doing that meditation where I was sort of it just in the mind and I would see the body creating itself and then falling away. I'm like, oh, all I'm seeing is that body coming and going. There's other bodies. You know, it's not like my body's dead. I'm sitting here meditating. But that body arises and passes completely. Yeah. And so, you know, just so let yourself start to have your own understanding of the internal world. And then start to see what resonates from the teachings rather than trying so hard to understand them. And you, with the experience, let that form itself in some way, particularly the felt sense of the experience, and then see what starts coming alive in the teachings. Start doing it from the other side. So that's my invitation to the words that are on my heart today. I wonder if anyone has any comments, questions, discussion. This is your time. And then at the, I'll just say as a preview. And then we'll do a chant at the end together. Just part of your talk early on when you were talking about the mind component of what seems like a bodily experience. I could really relate to as an experience I had was I think it was around two, two thousand three because I was on a monastic retreat. And Jill was at Barry. And when I first started sitting, I was had a lot of physical discomfort, a lot. And I wouldn't say that that was the case when I wasn't sitting. And I was fairly young and pretty comfortable. I was dealing on this particular time at this time with a pain that was in my upper back on the right side. And it honestly got me was so intense at one point I decided I'm just going to stay with it, that I was actually physically shaking. And, and then it's sort of started to morph a little bit just started to change in its experience. And it disappeared completely. And it disappeared completely for a little bit, maybe a minute or two. And then it reoccurred on the other side. And so, yeah, I'm thinking, wow, so what is this? What is the, you know, there is got to be something beyond something purely physical here. And so I think, you know, that was for me, that was a big teacher in my practice and it went on from there. Yeah, beautiful. Yeah, and it's important that you found

the way to be with that with the mind because there's so many responses we could have to that. And it's, and there isn't just one right one by the way, but you know, it's probably grasping it hating it, you know, these sorts of relations of great hatred and delusion perpetuated in some distorted and some of the more clean relationship with it such that it can have its life and then transform somehow. A lesser experience, but I noticed that when some particular discomfort, I've been working with this for a long time, of course, some particular discomfort arises. If, of course, if I become interested in it, everything changes the whole. So this is just the mind thing, but everything changes. It's not as painful. I can notice all the changes it's making. And I found that really useful. Yeah, just a simple thing. But the other part is, it's interesting to see if or if there isn't this underlying motivation to get rid of it. Because I don't know if it works then. Yeah, interest is one of the skillful relationships. And then there are these other ones creep in like when to can stop. Yeah, and if that's there by the way, then we just include that it's like oh yeah and then we're just mindful of, and I'm not too happy about that. Okay, that's included. And that's often said. Yeah. Hi. Thank you for this. It was just beautiful. Can you hear me. Yes, you're a little quieter than what I can see you're far from the computer so it's okay. Yeah, as in regards to this subject, I, my problem is that I'm in my body a lot, and I feel it a lot and sick and a lot of pain and stuff. And I can get into the breath body and really rise above all that pretty easily. But I also lose my body pretty easily. But when I have the body sensations I tend to not know what the connection is. Okay, I, it's just this feeling in my body and for some reason that's not completely okay with me I want to know, you know what it is. When you say what the connection is what, what, what do you mean by that. What my mind's doing to cause that. And usually, it's the body feeling. Okay, yeah. Well, not, not every bodily feeling is caused by the mind. And sometimes there can have to be a, yeah, I can understand that, especially with chronic long term illness, there can be more of that questioning. I had, I had a period of about 10 years of chronic pain that was related to my mind and I got very interested in the kind of the long term. Yeah, I can understand that it's possible to maybe include that wish as part of part of the awareness like where is this coming from, or leave it more as an open question. Sometimes you can ask that question like, instead of saying where's this coming from or what's the connection here, like you're going to get an answer that your cognitive mind can understand. Sometimes you can ask like a deeper part of the mind, like something like, you know where, like, how is that. How is that going to be held, or something like, you know, what, what would I have to let go up here. And then there's an invitation that something could change. And you could feel the change, but not ever quite know, cognitively what that was. I've had cases where I felt, I've just felt kind of in the fabric of the mind that there was a tension like a thread was being pulled on among the Afghan. And, and then at some point, you know, it released and something maybe even sort of falls away. But I never got to know what that was cognitively. And, or if it might come back like Bruce talked about it came back on the other side then.

this is like a version of plain chant. I talked earlier about music, right? So you can all read this music. That's the point of it. So I'll chant that first line that's in brackets. And then do your best and just follow along. And if you know, if you know the tune, that's great. And if you don't, I'll be tuning it. So. I'll be singing. Through the goodness that arises from my practice. May my spiritual teachers and guides of great virtue. The sun and the moon and all virtuous leaders of the world. May the highest God's and evil forces. Celestial beings. Guardian spirits of the earth. May those who are friendly. May all beings receive the blessings of my life. And realize the death list. Through the goodness that arises from my practice. And through this act of sharing. May all desires and attachments quickly sees. Until I realize me. In every kind of birth. May I have an upright mind. With mindfulness and wisdom. Austerity and vigor. May the forces of delusion not take hold. Nor weaken my resolve. The Buddha is my excellent refuge. Unsurpassed is the protection of the drama. The solitary Buddha is my noble guide. The song is my supreme support. Through the supreme power of all these. May darkness and delusion be dispelled. So, thank you. I hope that was in a key that was good enough. I could have gone a little finer probably, but anyway. Thank you so much for being here today. And feel free to unmute and say goodbye. And I hope to see you again sometime soon. Thank you. Everybody. Thank you. Thank you. Please consider supporting Dharma Seed with a year-end gift. Your donations allow us to offer these teachings online to all. Visit dharmaseed.org/donate to learn more. And thanks.