

Mindfulness of Breathing (36) Embodiment Leading to Joy

February 19, 2021

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

meditation, body, joy, embodied, unification, pleasure, tingling, contentment, mindfulness, relaxing, goodness, gladness, happiness, wholeness, ease, bodyfulness, *ānāpānasati*

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Many of you have heard me and other Buddhist teachers teach the value of being embodied. Sometimes I imagine that it would be nice if we translated *sati* not as mindfulness, but as “bodyfulness.” It’s such an important part of this practice.

The two classic teachings by the Buddha on mindfulness practice – the “Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness” and the “Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing” – begin with an emphasis on mindfulness of the body. One reason for this is that the more present we are for our body, the more awareness is alive and available through the body – and the more the body becomes an instrument for the growth of

meditation practice. The body becomes the vehicle and space for some of the deeper feelings and qualities of meditation that begin to arise. As the body receives some of the benefits of meditation, those benefits grow and fill out – and we get the most out of them.

As the body becomes more alive and sensitive – and more of an instrument of sensations, experiences, and feelings – it is not just feeling the body itself. The body becomes the sense door for feeling some of the goodness that comes from meditation. I use the word goodness in an abstract, vague way to describe some of the positive feelings that can come with meditation – classically, joy and happiness. It could also be contentment. I like the word ease quite a bit. There can be gladness. Deep feelings of equanimity or confidence can arise. Even feelings of inner cleanliness and purity, as embodied feelings, can course through us.

All these qualities are felt more fully when they're felt throughout the whole body – felt with the body. If the body is not available, then it becomes a mental thing. Sometimes that's quite wonderful and profound in its own way. But, especially in the beginning stages of meditation, that experience can be limited. It gives us a different impression of what meditation is about.

An orientation that is too much towards the mind doesn't really help us develop the wholeness and the unification of all of ourselves – which is ideally what we're looking for in Buddhist meditation. One meaning of *samādhī* is unification: bringing it all together here – present.

The body is not just a bunch of physical stuff that we have to carry around with us. The body is a significant repository of nerve endings. It is a significant location for the emotions, feelings, and goodness of meditation to course through us, or fill us, and be here. To begin tuning in – relaxing the body, sitting in with the body, feeling the body – is one way that we begin to open up to this repository of goodness.

Classically, what comes after the first four steps of *ānāpānasati*, as the practice deepens, are feelings of well-being, joy, ease, or gladness. To know that this is coming and that it is part of meditation encourages us to be a little more sensitive to when hints of these feelings appear. We start feeling the good feelings that come. Sometimes it feels like pleasure in the body or tingling in places or a sense of lightness.

We're not trying to make it happen. We're not searching or striving for it. But rather, when the feelings begin to show themselves, there's an art to opening to them, relaxing with them, or including them – so they go along

with the breathing, or the breathing goes along with them. This encourages us to become even more embodied – to feel these good feelings in our body. As we feel this goodness, we breathe with it and open with it. We continue this process of feeling, sensing, and developing.

Contentment is part of this. To feel contentment isn't a moral obligation, but it allows for filling out the practice, and really being rooted and centered here in this body, feeling more and more. It is the same thing with the idea of being in the present moment and not thinking about the past or the future. To do that is not a moral obligation.

But when we're no longer caught up in the past, in the future, and in thoughts, it allows for the possibility of filling out more into the wholeness of this moment, which includes so much more of us. It's like there's momentum – a movement – towards becoming whole and present with all of who we are. Part of that comes along with relaxation, tranquility, and calm – and more space for delight, joy, well-being – a sense of pleasure in just being alive and being here.

I think of the joy of meditation as being joy that has no opposite. Joy just exists in its own way. If joy had an opposite, then we could swing from one to the other. But

it has no opposite. Certainly, we can *not* have joy. But it doesn't swing. It's not like a pendulum that swings from one thing to another.

For example, if your joy is dependent on praise, then the opposite is blame. The pendulum can swing because the joy is dependent on getting something. Or if your joy is dependent on success, then there can be failure. If your joy is dependent on physical pleasure, then there can be discomfort. But the joy of meditation has no opposite. It just has a wonderful, simple, clear quality of surfacing, arising, and being here – without depending on the things that come and go in the world. It's a wellspring that flows within the body.

The more we can center ourselves in the body – relax and be present – the more we will start to open up to our potential – our capacity – for well-being, joy, and happiness. That's a wonderful thing. It turns out that meditative joy and happiness continue the process of unification, of wholeness – bringing more and more of ourselves into the picture so we can continue on the path to liberation.

Thank you very much.