

The Energy Body and the Whole-body breath (Instructions and Guided Meditation)
Practising the Jhānas
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As I mentioned last night, the first – I don’t know – five or six (something) days will be quite dense with teachings, and then it should get a little more sparse. So again, it’s quite a lot to get through. Fortunately, there are only *jhāna* retreat people on tea wash-up tonight, so if we go a little into the teatime, it shouldn’t really affect anything, because those tea wash-uppers will go as a team to do that, right? But let’s see how we do. It shouldn’t be that long.

Okay. I want to start with a guided meditation in a minute, and then talk some after that. Again, as I mentioned last night, it doesn’t really matter how you get to Newton Abbot, and you can go in what look like completely opposite directions, and you still get to Newton Abbot. And actually, they take roughly the same time or whatever.

So yesterday we offered this counting that, for most of you, will have been unfamiliar. I think tomorrow and the next day we’ll offer techniques which are much more familiar, involving concentrating, focusing on the sensations that go with the breath at certain points in the body. The classical ones are upper lip, or nose, or in the abdomen. So we’ll also offer that in this kind of buffet or smorgasbord, whatever, of what might work for you. And there are certainly possibly other practices that we’re not even mentioning that are viable, that may work really well. Yeah, definitely. We’ll offer a few.

So if you don’t like this business about whole-body awareness and the energy body, don’t worry. We will get to a much narrower focus as an alternative, not as a better or worse – as a perfectly equal, viable alternative. We’ll get to that another time. But today, I do want to go a little bit more into what I call the energy body, or working with the whole-body breath. Energy body is a big subject, and it’s actually quite hard to sum it up in a sort of pithy sentence. It’s a concept that grows, that’s elastic, that has all kinds of avenues to it. But what I want to talk about today a little bit is energy body for *samādhi*, okay? For those purposes. And I’m just going to say a little bit. I’m not going to do a whole exhaustive thing.

[3:17] Two terms to get a little bit used to: one is ‘whole body.’ When I say ‘whole body’ on this retreat, what I mean – and I’m not going to say it every time, so every time you hear ‘whole body’ from now on, what it means is your felt sense, in the moment, of this whole space, actually a little bit bigger than your physical body. That whole space, that’s what ‘the whole body’ means, and the felt sense. So when I say “attention to your whole body,” “awareness of the whole body,” that’s what I mean, okay? A bit bigger, a bit larger than your physical body. But I’m really talking about the *felt sense* of that whole space, okay? So ‘whole body’ is shorthand for that. If I mean something else, I’ll try and say, “No, I really mean your toes,” or whatever it is.

Okay. That’s one vocabulary term. Another is just ‘energy body.’ What does this mean? Some of you are very familiar with this, some a lot less. Again, it’s hard to pinpoint what actually is meant by that, but if we just start very simply, it’s the vibration, the feeling, the texture, or the energy of this, of that space. That’s really what we’re talking about when we say that, just as an introductory idea. So

texture, vibration, feeling, energy is slightly different than what we're used to: I can feel the sensations of my backside pressing on the chair, or if I stub my toe, I feel those sensations. They're slightly different kinds of sensation. So we're actually talking about something that's a little bit more subtle. I remember being taught this by a monk when I was living in the States, and then going on a Mahāsi retreat, and having an interview with the teacher there, and explaining to him how I was working with the breath with this whole body. Of course they're very into mindfulness of body in the Mahāsi tradition and all that. He said, "What are you actually *paying attention* to?" So even for a long-term meditator, it was a bit of a baffling concept. Certainly in our wider culture, it's like, "What do you *mean* when you say 'vibration,' 'texture,' 'feeling,' 'energy'?" We're not trained with the kind of quality or poise of attention that reveals that kind of realm or stratum of experience. It's just not in our culture. I mean, it's *getting* in the meditation culture, but like that story says about that teacher, it wasn't around. It's [around] a little bit more now.

So texture, feeling, vibration, energy, as opposed to sensation of contact or that kind of thing. But even this, these are vague terms, and it's more pointing in a certain direction, in which hopefully your experience will begin to open up, and you start to get more familiar and confident with all that.

Second aspect that I would like to pinpoint about when we say energy body: the sense of the body – and especially as we're talking about energy body for *samādhi* – the sense of the body is integrated. This area, this space, feels like one whole, as opposed to "my feet are kind of over there, and my head is up here, and it's all made of bits." As we move, certainly as we move towards *jhāna*, towards *samādhi*, it gets more and more integrated. It really feels like one body area, one realm or one texture of experience. So we could define 'energy body' like that, or let's be a little bit more helpful, I think, and just say that's the direction. It's going towards this sense of an integrated space, an integrated experience, body area.

Secondly, for integration, and related, is homogeneity – like milk, you know, homogenized. What's homogenous there? Not only is the *experience* homogenous, or tending more and more towards homogeneity, but the *awareness*, too, is homogenous – meaning I have less and less of a feeling of my awareness being *up here* [in the head area], kind of peering down at my body experience, *down there* somewhere. It's more like the awareness inhabits equally, homogenously, the whole space, and even a little bit bigger. So the whole thing is integrated and homogenized. And we could make that a *definition* of energy body awareness, but let's just make it – this is the *direction*. This is what we're kind of working towards. After a while, that just becomes the norm. It just immediately is integrated and homogenized. But like so many things in *samādhi*, we kind of ease it toward. That's what we're working towards.

Let me say something else before we do our meditation. I've noticed [this], and it may be true for other people apart from me. So again, we're talking about energy body with respect to *samādhi*. Now, *samādhi* is a cultivation. It has a direction. It has a goal that we're interested in. We're wanting to develop something. We can relate to the energy body just, "How does it feel?", "What's happening there?", "Oh, that's interesting. Can I accept that? Can I open to it?", etc. That's fine. That's one way of relating to energy body. But with the whole *samādhi* practice, we're actually interested: can I coax this space, this experience, this energy body? Can I coax it into something nice? Can I encourage that? There's a directionality and a desire there.

So with respect to the energy body, with respect to *samādhi*, it may be – in terms of how coaxable it is, what actually is possible to open up – it’s actually much more sensitive in this context to something like temperature of your physical body. So sometimes I wrap in blankets, or it’s a cold day, so wearing a sweater, etc. I’ve noticed that if I dress like I would be comfortable in the house or wherever I am, or put a blanket on if I’m kind of like, “Yeah, it’s a little cool,” put a shawl on or whatever, I don’t feel too warm. I feel fine. I feel comfortable. When I come to the *samādhi* practice, if I take that shawl off, a lot more opens up. Now, it’s not like I take it off and then I’m shivering and my teeth are chattering. It’s the kind of difference that usually I wouldn’t even think about, I wouldn’t need to make. If it’s a hot day – let’s say it’s really hot, and I’m sitting in a t-shirt, and it’s uncomfortably hot – this doesn’t happen. So it’s something, weirdly, to do with the shawl or the sweater or whatever.

So I may be the only human being that that is the case for, but I would encourage you, again, to experiment. Careful of that inertia. You might have the opposite. You might find that, “Actually, no. I need to be a little warmer.” So what’s the criteria? It’s not, “Am I comfortable? How do I like it?” I don’t like cold. I don’t have anything apart from skin and bones, for a start, and my ancestry is North African, so I don’t like cold. But it’s not about that. We’re always interested in what helps the energy body experience. It’s this ongoing experiment. What helps? Check. Know yourself. You have to be willing to experiment with something like this. I’m just throwing that out as a little thing.

Okay. Let’s do a guided meditation to start, and I’ll talk later.

[12:38, guided meditation begins]

It’s worth taking those few extra moments to really find that posture. Again, don’t be lazy about this. Are you sitting, are you doing, just how you usually do, without paying much attention to it? Or are you taking the trouble to really find ...? It *feels* a certain way. When the posture reflects that kind of ideal balance between uprightness, alertness on the one hand, and openness, softness, receptivity on the other hand, it actually *feels* a certain way. We need to get it in the groove, and then, actually, you’ll feel that affect your mind. So it’s worth taking the trouble. Even if you’ve been meditating for thirty years, it’s worth just finding that.

Again, starting by feeling the posture, feeling that balance of qualities that are beautiful – dignity, nobility – that are expressed by that balance between those complementary faculties of the *citta* or qualities of the *citta*. There’s actually a poise, an uprightness, a firmness in the balance. It feels balanced, and it affects the *citta*. Feel the openness. Feel the receptivity, the softness in the body. Can you make it a little bit more open, a little bit more soft right now? What would you change? Can you feel the uprightness, the resolution, the alertness in the posture? What would you change to make it more right now? Subtle changes. Are you *willing* to change something in the posture right now?

So feeling the beauty of the posture. And then, when you’re ready, opening up the awareness to embrace, to include, the whole body. What that means, again, is that whole space, a little bit bigger than your physical body. Just getting a felt sense of what that whole space feels like. Inhabit the whole space. Bright, alive sensitivity permeating, pervading that whole space.

So you don’t have to get rid of any image of your physical form, your hands, your legs, your toes, if that’s there, but you also don’t have to reinforce it. What we’re more interested in is the felt sense, the

texture, the vibration of this space. So not a problem if there's an image of the body, but you don't have to reinforce it either. Eventually, that begins to fade. How does it feel? So the awareness will keep shrinking. It will shrink a thousand times. And just keep opening it out to just a little bit bigger than the physical body space, and fill that with alive awareness, presence.

And then, keeping that whole-body awareness, just noticing the breath as it comes and goes. And noticing how it affects the whole body, how it affects the sense, the felt sense, of that whole space, how it feels in the whole space or makes that whole space feel. Of course, that changes with the in-breath, with the out-breath, at different points. Whole-body awareness, noticing the effects of the breath.

And then, when you're ready, beginning to establish this longest breath. Right now, not with a count. We'll leave the counting out. What's the longest comfortable breath? Not a strain, but way longer than you would usually take. Slow, smooth, comfortable. You don't need to move a lot of air. Relatively speaking, it's quite a subtle breath. So whole body space, felt sense of that; longest breath in and out – long, slow, smooth.

Now, can you notice this whole space, the whole body, can you feel the expansion of that whole space with the in-breath? And just what does that feel like? So it's not just your ribcage and your lungs; the whole body, that whole space, including where your feet would be, your head – places we don't usually think of as breathing. Actually that whole space is expanding. What does that feel like? And with the exhalation, there's a kind of opposite movement. What does *that* feel like? So in the whole space, attuned, alive, filled with awareness; the longest breath. Just how does it feel, the expansion and the contraction with the breath? Really tuning to that and feeling it.

[23:00] Keep with the long breath, the longest breath, even if it feels a little awkward. You can just gently work to make it comfortable, smooth, slow. That's the first work. The second work is the attention collapses countless times. No big deal. Just open it out again, stretch it. And then, third piece of work, fill that space with real bright presence. Fill that expanded space with bright presence. Tuning to the feeling. Keep opening the space to the whole body, the attention to the whole space.

Okay. So keeping this longest breath, keeping this whole-body awareness, is it possible to add an awareness, a sensitivity to notice – *can* you notice, is it possible, that with the in-breath, there is also a sense of energization? The in-breath naturally, organically energizes the whole space, and you can feel that, or see if you can feel that. How does it feel? Can you feel it right to the edges of the space, the whole body? Can you tune to, even enjoy, open to, this experience, the sense, the feeling of energization with the in-breath?

And with the out-breath, there's something like a feeling of relaxation, of letting go. It also has a certain range of feeling, of tone. Can you notice that? Can you feel that? Can you open to that and enjoy it? Energization through the whole space with the in-breath; a kind of relaxation, easing, letting go with the out-breath. Qualities of energy that fill the whole space with the in- and the out-breaths. So this is what we want to tune to, open to, really feel.

Open, opening the body with the breath, with the breath energy. Letting the breath energy open the body. And the attention, the awareness, open to that whole space and how it feels, over and over and over. Right there, in the moment, alive, feeling it, opening to it – even subtly enjoying it.

Now let's try one thing. If you can, imagine the breath coming into the body at the solar plexus. So obviously, usually we think of the breath coming in the mouth, the nose. Just imagine it coming in at

the solar plexus. That's, maybe, even a kinaesthetic imagination. And this long breath coming in at the solar plexus, longest breath. How does that feel? How does it make the whole space feel, the in- and out-breath, the longest breath in and out, there at the solar plexus? How does it affect the whole body, the whole space? Maybe you notice it's just the same expansion and contraction, or energization/relaxation. That's great. If that's what you notice, then tune into that, just as you've been doing.

But people are different, and some people notice as if the breath comes in there, perhaps, and there are currents that ripple out or emanate out from the solar plexus with the in-breath, for instance going *down* the body and *up* the body at the same time. The wave or the current of energy, the double current, up the body and down the body, from this point of the solar plexus. So you may notice that. How does that feel, if you *do* notice it? No problem if you don't notice something like that. You might want to try imagining it. Can you imagine the feeling, a kinaesthetic imagination, the breath coming in at the solar plexus, and currents going simultaneously in opposite directions, up the body and down the body? Just play. Imagine that. Whole body space, longest breath. How does it feel? Over and over, opening the attention, sensitive to the whole space, the whole body. Letting the breath open the body. The breath energy, letting it open the body.

Last thing to try for now. You may want to stay with that point in the solar plexus, or just go back generally to the whole body. It really doesn't matter. Whatever you feel works for you right now. But put a question in there, as something to experiment with: what length of breath, what kind of breath, really feels best right now – actually gives you the nicest feeling in that space, allows the space, the whole body, to feel most pleasant? And it might just be comfortable. So is it keeping this really longest breath? Is it a very short breath? Is it somewhere in between? Is it a kind of very, very subtle breath, or a grosser breath? Smooth or coarse? What feels best right now? What way of breathing feels best right now? You have to experiment.

So not just your default way of breathing. Not just let it go, "It feels comfortable because I'm used to it." Not just the default. Play. Experiment. It might be that this longest breath, and the way it really opens up the body, that's what feels really good right now, or even a little bit good. Or it may be that a much shorter, subtler breath feels somehow, perhaps, more soothing, or more gentle, and that's what feels really good right now, or somewhat good. Whole body space. Feeling how the breath, how the different kinds of breath, make that whole body space feel. Tuning to that, intimate with that, open to that.

What you're really doing is bringing a kind of sensitivity to the whole space, the whole body, and a willingness to play and experiment a little bit. It's all very light.

And when you're ready, just opening the eyes, coming out of the meditation.

[42:34, guided meditation ends]

Okay, so let's just briefly recap what we just did. These are things to play with, things to experiment with, if you want. You may find some or all of them useful at different times, and you incorporate, or none of them – whatever. So the posture: even if you've been meditating for thirty years, it's really worth taking the trouble. After a while, posture matters less for *jhāna*, but at the beginning, it's going to

matter a lot, and this balance thing. So that's one thing. I'm not going to repeat what I said about 'whole body,' etc.; just what we did in the meditation. Longest breath, in this case, we started with – it doesn't have to be. The same principles apply. Three kinds of things to pay attention to: **(1) the expansion and contraction of the whole space.** Not just your ribcage, but the whole space, and it feels a certain way. **(2) Second thing: the energization and relaxation, again, that you can feel in the whole space.** **(3) The third aspect, actually, which we'll pick up again, is the possibility that, within that whole space, you notice certain currents of energy.** Some do, some don't. And if you find that you just imagine them and then you can feel them, great, and it feels good, and feels helpful – just go for it. Imagine them.

So those three things to work with, and then this piece about what way of breathing feels good right now – the longest, very short, coarse, smooth, etc. So often, we just go into a default breath, and the only reason it feels comfortable is just because we're used to it. At that moment, it may well *not* be that helpful in terms of really energizing, and opening, and healing, and soothing, and moving towards *samādhi*. So we have to be, again, willing to let go of our inertia, if it's there.

Okay. I don't know – I'm not sure the right name, but I remember taking lots of yoga classes years ago, and stuff like that, and there's a way that some teachers would encourage us to breathe while we were doing the postures. So it goes like: [strained breathing sound]. Yeah, *ujjayi*. No, we don't want it. Why? Because, great as it might be for all that other stuff, it keeps the breath coarse. That's why you *hear* it, because it's coarse. And again, like I said yesterday, *samādhi* is more dependent on open-heartedness than focus. I said that yesterday, right? I'm also going to say *samādhi* is really about increasing subtlety and refinement, much more than it is about focus. I want to emphasize that, and I'll explain why as we go on. So if I'm keeping the breath kind of coarse, either just because I'm used to it or whatever, or because – I don't know – it's a sound that I've associated with breathing or whatever in a certain way, I'm actually preventing myself deepening in *samādhi*, because the breath needs to get subtle, the mind needs to get subtle. The journey of *samādhi*, the journey into *jhānas*, is a journey into increasing refinement and subtlety, and we could say it's more *that* than it is into increasing ability to nail your mind to something and stay there all day, or whatever it is. Changing the view here for most people, who think very differently about what we're doing.

As I emphasized, with the length of the breath, and the kind of the breath – and we'll get more into this, if you're experimenting – what we want is a sensitivity that permeates the whole space, and a responsiveness, a responsiveness: I'm willing to respond to what feels good, what feels less good. Sensitivity, responsiveness, and willingness to experiment and play. So those principles – sensitivity, response-ability, and willingness – right now, we're talking about them in regard to the length of the breath and the kind of the breath. As we go on, and get more and more, and deeper and deeper, those same qualities – sensitivity, responsiveness, and willingness – start to apply to more and more aspects of the whole movement of *samādhi* and the deepening of *samādhi*. We become sensitive in relation to this, this, this, this, this, this, this, and responsive in relation to this, this, this, this, this, this, and willing to experiment and play. So right now, we're just talking about length and kind of breath, but those principles are absolutely key, and they're the *opposite*, again, of inertia (that we talked about yesterday).

So with the length of the breath and the kind of breath, it's a bit like riding a bike with gears, a bicycle. You get a sense of what gear is actually helpful now. I *could* stay in this gear to go up this hill, but it's going to be a lot of work, you know? *This* gear feels better. Or when I'm going downhill, you know? Or if you've improvised music with someone, or improvised dance with someone, it's got to be exactly what I've just said: sensitive, responsive, and willing to try stuff and do stuff differently. If you're improvising a dance together, or you're improvising music together, or whatever it is, or theatre or something, if you're making love, it's got to be that. I mean, it can *not* be that, but then your experience together, or you and the breath, or you and the energy, is going to be a lot more limited, right? So these are really key principles, opposite of inertia, opposite of whatever is the default.

Okay. Let me say something. I'll say it now, because I might forget to say it at the end, okay? It really should go at the end, but I'll say it now. In between formal practices – so in between sitting and walking, and when you're just moving around or whatever – as I said last night, what we want is a general kind of whole-body awareness, a general sort of awareness of this. Remember what 'whole body' means? It's how this whole space feels. If you can get the kind of energy body sense within that, great. But at least to start, the whole-body awareness, and a general, light kind of mindfulness, okay? This is very relaxed though. So I said yesterday about not too slow, not too fast, etc., just to help. But what I'm talking about is a kind of awareness as I'm moving through the day: as I'm in the lunch queue, as I'm doing my job, there's this whole-body awareness, but the whole feel of it is quite relaxed and open. So again, sometimes we get used to paying attention in a way that's a bit tense, a bit heavy. You can almost *feel* someone like that, when they're in that mode. If you can get a sense, it's like the space feels relaxed. It's not heavy, intense attention. Intense attention has its place, and we'll talk about that – the energization of attention. But what I'm really talking about as we move around is a kind of open, easeful attention, and an open, easeful body, and they go together. So it may not sound like a big deal, but if I've got that a little bit wrong, again, I'm not actually allowing the whole dough to rise here; I'm not allowing the process to cook properly.

So again, the question – it becomes a question, as a seed inside: what helps? Right now, in this moment, what helps me to get into that kind of poise, as I'm moving around, as I'm going to the toilet, whatever I'm doing? That kind of relationship, that kind of state of energy body awareness. What kind of stance or pressure do I have to have? Do I need to kind of loosen off and relax a little bit, or actually do I need to bring and cohere my attention a bit more? So always there's a question, and the question invites us into this playfulness, responsiveness, sensitivity – the whole deal.

And, in addition to that, as I said last night, just to say it again, we're also, as we're moving around, in between formal practices, we're cultivating, supporting, and inclining the *citta*, the heart and the mind, towards appreciation. We're taking care of that base – nourishment, in the deep sense, in the soul-sense; well-being; *muditā*, as we said. Yeah?

Okay. That was longer than I anticipated, but shall we break that, then? Thanks.