

Ralph Steele  
Week Three, *Mindfulness of the Body*  
February 13, 2017  
“Attachment to the Body”



[Chants.] Hi. As we continue the mindfulness series, *Mindfulness of the Body*, I want to emphasize the disadvantages of attachment to body, which is so important. Remember, we are physicians: [we are] continuing with that [idea].

One of the disadvantages of attachment to the body is . . . how we utilize sensuality. Take food for example, it can be, and it is for me, a very sensuous process. I love to cook, and in the wintertime I love baking and the various spices and so forth. However, it can get out of control [when we are] not eating the proper kinds of food . . . knowing how it destroys the body. It is the most potent medicine that we have in existence, food. When the body is all plugged up with unhealthy food, it's very difficult to understand that. But when you have knowledge of that, just of any food, as soon as it touches your tongue, or sometimes just the smell of it or looking at it and how it affects your system, helps you to understand that this is food and this is body and your attachment to it decreases.

Another one is drugs, [whether they're] over-the-counter or under-the-counter. We all know that drugs, with regards to the body, can damage our system and has damaged it—[both] over-the-counter drugs or under-the-counter drugs.

[Electronic] devices, that's a new one: in the new generation, there are various kinds of devices that can really destroy us. Literally, they can destroy us. Let me give you one example. For several years now, China has had the first treatment center for addiction to electronic devices. The reason they did that was because they had, not one, but several incidents where the parents took devices away from their kids. At night, the kids killed their parents so they could get their devices back.

Sensuality is a big one to understand and keep tabs on. Anger is another one. Congenital heart disease, let's utilize that as an example. There are cancer institutes and cancer centers. In every major city there's a heart hospital, not with one floor but with several floors, three, four, sometimes five, if not more. A hospital just for one purpose, various kinds of congenital heart

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disease. That tells you something right there. One of the biggest things in our country is what I just said and that's why right mindfulness, and my dear friend Jon Kabat-Zinn [founder of mindfulness-based stress reduction], took off in the health industry. Not just in this country but around the globe, because it is a very good medication with regards to reducing stress, anger, how to work with anger, right mindfulness, and mindfulness of the body.

Subduing greed, subduing stress—we all are aware of these [reasons for practicing]. We had a very good example in 2008 when the housing market crashed. That didn't happen only in this country but around the globe, we all got to experience what greed and money does. So many people committed suicide, so many deaths, and so many families know the story and the distress that occurred. We can understand that it's all a temporary process, meaning that we know we're going to die. You know you're going to die, you just don't know when. I guarantee that we were born, now we're going to die; we came in one door and there's that other door, do you want to look at that other door? No, I don't want to look at that door.

Well I'm just 66, but I must look at that door. But when I turned 50, and it usually happens to most people who turn 50, a little voice came into my ears [that said] “You're going to die.” Understanding that death is coming, your view of life and how you carry yourself through life changes, you have a better understanding of mindfulness of the body.

Let's talk about the body itself and wanting it to stay the same. There's the cosmetic surgery we have, nothing wrong with it, beauty is in the eye of the beholder and we have the right to beautification. The primary purpose [of practice] is to become disenchanted, not disrespectful of the body. I'll say that again, the primary purpose of the practice is to become disenchanted with the body but not disrespectful of the body. It will take you to a whole different level.

Here's the classic question that was posed to the Buddha, “Is there self or is there no self?” He responded by giving the five aggregates—aggregates means pile, heap. My word for that is bag of

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bones, and I will say more about that. Just to name them: form, feeling, perception, identification and consciousness.

Remember it's about training our mind here, and it has been trained to be attached to the body, so I call it a bag of bones. My good friends say, “How are your bones doing?” We're talking about the classic elements here, the four great elements, which are fire, water, wind or air, and earth. As the Buddha said, “Nothing of my knowledge governs the elements, the elements are bigger than me.” We live in the elements. We are more intimate with the elements than anything else in the universe. You want to learn how things work, learn how the elements associate with each other, because we live with them 24/7. That's a personal decision and you will learn so much, so much. Now the other four are in the mental realm: form is the only one that's particular to the body, mindfulness of the body. Since these other four are in the mental realm, it [can be] so easy to fall into a delusional world.

The next one is feelings. Basically, there are three levels of classified feelings: there's aversion, [there's] pleasure, and there's neither aversion nor pleasure. With aversion there's the fear of the unknown. You get caught in that trap with aversion and pleasure because with the pleasurable comes sensuality, and you get caught in-between those two. There's the analogy of the Ping-Pong ball. Awareness could be the Ping-Pong ball itself: there's the table and there's the paddle. One paddle is saying aversion, the other paddle is saying pleasure, and you're getting bounced back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. You're pushing something away for a reason—because you desire something else—you're getting caught in this whirl here. When you come to the level where the first step is desiring either one, then there's a practice, the beginning of your practice. Something begins to happen inside of you, your awareness changes.

What causes us to go back and forth is our perception, our memory component. We instinctively begin taking in that information from before we even come out of the womb, from the amygdala. We have a lot of storage, a lot of data there. But we must understand that's not who we are, it is just data, and data can be removed just like body parts. Having that understanding really helps. By

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feeling perception we experience identification, and identification is the merging of the mental world with the physical world, for example, the mental world of sound. What you're hearing right now at this very moment, [what is] hitting your eardrums, is coming from the physical world, and you're judging, planning, and criticizing—that's what we do, that's how it works.

With that we create consciousness, and this quality of consciousness is important to understand. It's the level of consciousness in the *Theravada* system—that which knows—and we create it from moment to moment. Whether we are aware of that or not, our bag of bones is, and it's working. It has that understanding of form, feeling, perception, identification and consciousness, and especially feelings, perception, identification and consciousness. When we have that knowledge of how they interrelate and constantly cognize, and we are cognizing and it's influencing us, [and we're] being triggered by various kinds of sensations from the mental world or physical world, it affects the body. Having that knowledge, it deepens our mindfulness of the body, and that's important to have.

The basic formula is like training wheels on a bicycle. We start crawling [before we] walk, [we start with] training wheels on a bicycle—that is what this basic formula is: remaining focused on the body with ardency, alertness, and mindfulness while subduing greed and distress with no reference to the world.

Let me break down this powerful formula so we can understand: ardency is putting your heart into it. When you put your heart into something you're putting a on little smile. There isn't a *buddharupa*, a Buddha statue, that if you look at it very closely doesn't have a slight smile on his face. The carpenter, the artist, [added this] smile because it changes your nervous system. You got that little smile, shit's happening, stuff's going on, [things are] difficult, but notice: the smile brings a little heart into it.

Alertness has several components, we're bringing in our intention. It's so important to have the proper intention. I emphasize working with discomfort in the talk on discomfort, and being

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attentive to one’s intention and noticing its results. It’s like you are washing dishes and your kid moves from one point in the room to another point. While you are watching that, your intention is not to say anything, [not to] tell that person to go back. You’re just watching and noticing what they’re doing. [This is] attentiveness—you’re noticing the results. You’re not letting your perception, the memory component, get in the way, [like:] “Oh, you need to go back, you need to do what I tell you to do right now,” instead of just letting it unfold. This is so important.

Another component is mindfulness itself. Intention, attentiveness, and noticing the result [make up] right mindfulness, so you have that. The final component is subduing greed and distress with no reference to the world. It sounds difficult, but here’s a short story: You go on a retreat that you put so much aside to get to. Now you’re on this retreat and you’re worried, maybe thinking, “Oh, did I [finish everything] at home, did I pay the bills, is my family going to eat properly, with regards to the scheduling, will things get done?” You’re so worried that you get up and you go to the retreat master or the retreat teacher and you say, “I need to go home but I’ll come back, I just need to go home and check on things.” The retreat master says, “Well what if you’re dead?” You get it: “Wow, if I die, if I’m dead, they will get it together, they will know what to do,” so you go back to your cushion and you practice. This is how you subdue greed and distress with no reference to the world. “I’m dead. I’m just right here being mindful of my body in this retreat.”

Here are the training wheels: remaining focused on the body with ardency, heart, alertness, and attentiveness; noticing the results (mindfulness, or right mindfulness); and subduing greed and distress with no reference to the world. Remember it’s training the mind. You begin to practice that, and once the mind gets it, you download it and it becomes automatic in your practice. That is very important. We’re so fortunate to have this practice, especially in this time with what’s going on around the planet. There are so many incredible changes happening on the environmental level, the political level, the housing level, the employment level, and the healthcare level. Around the globe, so much change is going on. To have a practice, to have that stability, wow, that’s priceless, that’s absolutely priceless. [*Singing.*]