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*The Art of Somatic Mindfulness*

Week 2: “Connecting with the Body in the Body”

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Welcome to week two of "The Art of Somatic Mindfulness." In week two, we will explore the topic of the body in the body. Bringing body wisdom into our practice can counterbalance our tendency to be in the head. Some scientific studies indicate that when we turn our attention to the body, activity in the brain's rumination network decreases, along with associated states of anxiety and depression. This may explain why our experiences of tranquility and stability in meditation stabilize the more we introduced ourselves to the body's innate wisdom. When attention turns towards the body, the mind's attention is drawn away from rumination and into present wakefulness.

You might think you have just one body, but everyone has two: a conceptual body and an experiential body. The conceptual body consists of all the ideas and opinions we have about the body. Our conceptual body might be fat, thin, beautiful, ugly, young, or old. Social scientists call this "body image," the multifaceted psychological experience of embodiment. So think for a moment when you think "I like my body" or "I dislike my body." What is it that you like or you dislike about your body? So if we just take a moment and think about that, we have these thoughts coursing through our mind, many times a day. Maybe 'I like my feet,' or 'I like my eyes.' And then thoughts like 'I don't like my nose,' or 'I don't like my waist.' In fact, when we say 'I like' or 'I don't like,' we're really working with our concepts, our thoughts and ideas about what the body is. But in reality, there's much more to our body than what we think about it.

In fact, from the perspective of Buddhism, the conceptual body is not the real body. The conceptual body is a set of ideas. The real body is the body of this present moment, the one you are experiencing, the one you are feeling, right now. It is beyond your beliefs and ideas. It is beyond image and appearance. So take a moment to notice, what are you hearing right now? What are you feeling on your skin, for example? What is the lower part of your body feeling right now? How do your feet feel? The body of this present moment is feeling, hearing, seeing, smelling, breathing, and vibrating with life.

The Buddha called this experiential body “the body in the body,” or *kaya kaye*. It is where peace, focus, and joy are found. So take a moment now to see if you can drop into the feeling sense of your body. Not what we're thinking about the body, but what's actually happening right now in the present moment in your own body. So let's just take a moment to close our eyes and come into contact.

With this feeling body, it can sometimes help to drop down from the head, from the place of thinking, into your feeling body. Descending from the head, into the neck moving down into the shoulders. Letting your attention flow down like water into the upper arm, the elbows, the lower arms, the wrists, the hands, the fingers. Letting your attention flow down into your chest. Feeling



the chest expand on your inhale and feeling how the chest releases on the exhale. Moving into the belly, letting attention flow into the hips. Feeling the lower part of the body, how it is so tethered to the earth below. Feeling the weight of the body grounding you against the earth.

You may have noticed, just in that short practice, how coming down into the body calms the mind, how that redirection of attention from the frenetic and restless energy of thought—moving through the waterfall, moving down that waterfall of thought after thought—slows down as we drop into the body's feeling presence. It's this that the Buddha referred to as “the body in the body,” *kaya kaye*, in the *Satipatthana Sutta*, the body's feeling presence. Quite different from what we think about the body, our opinions about the body, our stories about our body, it's goodness, and what we see as limitations. For mindfulness practice the first step is just this, a somatic mindfulness practice is just letting the body draw you into a relationship with the earth. And that drawing in can be as simple as this slow descent from the crown of the head all the way down to where the body meets the earth. I like to call this practice “grounding” because we are going from our kind of ungrounded frenetic state that we're in most of the day, to a state of being stable and in touch with the earthy quality of the body. Even if the body wanted to, it doesn't fly away; the body is tethered to this earth, and we can take that gravitational experience of being held by the earth below as a teaching to bring the restless mind into a state of greater ease and groundedness.

So I hope you'll try this practice yourself at home in the week between now and next week, maybe even every day for a minute or two minutes, coming down from the thinking mind into the feeling body, the *kaya kaye*, the body in the body, this very present, feeling sense of being grounded on this earth. Thank you, and I look forward to seeing you next week.