

Kathy Cherry

*The Wisdom of the Body: Connecting with Your Inner Resilience*

Part 4: "Releasing Patterns"

August 28, 2021



Welcome back. My name is Kathy Cherry, and this is the final video in our four-part series, "The Wisdom of the Body: Connecting with Your Inner Resilience." In week three, we were working with wisdom arising, these "I see you, Mara" moments that come from seeing *dukkha* [suffering] clearly, from seeing ourselves caught up in our conditioned reactivity over and over and over again there. We also talked about compassion, the deep caring that can arise when we witness the cycles of struggle. This compassion is an important component as we move into and explore this last step.

Bound up in our desire for happiness is the potential for a strong dualistic split around good and bad, yes and no, right and wrong. Naturally, that leads us to try to get rid of the bad and to be better people, and honestly, who could fight that? There's something a bit subtle about this last step that I've always appreciated: the letting go that starts to happen comes from this experience of wisdom and compassion. It's a clear seeing; it's not colored by aversion. The response is coming from a place of insight, where we understand on a level that's simultaneously simple and profoundly woven into the bigger picture of our experience.

This begs the question: What is it that we're understanding? In *Majjhima Nikaya* 19, the sutta that talks about the two sorts of thinking, the Buddha talks about an inquiry practice. He said, "Why don't I keep dividing my thinking into two sorts, seeing how some thoughts lead to ease and insight and how others lead to agitation and no insight?"

The more resilient our nervous system is, the more we're able to be present to the whole picture. Less and less needs to be left out or gotten rid of because we've developed more capacity. We know how to ground ourselves. There's more connection to that felt sense of goodness within us. This steadiness in the system allows us to divide up our thoughts, to see the sticky bits that are still wrapped up in our personalities, the behaviors that we use to numb or protect us, and we can start to see which thoughts or actions start to lead to this ease and insight and which thoughts or actions lead to agitation and no insight.

My modern translation of that is we're looking at something and the response is, "Oh, that doesn't work. Why would I do that?" It's actually seeing that it doesn't work that allows for the pattern to release.

To describe this in another way, the charge in the body or the story in the mind is met with mindfulness. And in that meeting, the charge and the story are held in check. It might not be particularly pleasant. It might not be comfortable. But we're able to tolerate it because it's familiar to us.

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We might be calling in some internal or external resources to help ground us and create a larger container to hold all of this experience. We can also call in our dharma wisdom. I often rest back into my teacher's shorthand for the three characteristics. She says, "Everything changes. When we hold on, it hurts. It's not personal." *Anicca* [impermanence]: everything changes; *dukkha* [suffering]: when we hold on, it hurts; *anatta* [not-self]: it's not personal.

Sometimes in the moment, when I say that, the pattern releases and there's this beautiful unfolding that starts to happen. Sometimes that works. Other times, the charge is just too much. There's not enough mindfulness presence and boom, we are flowing out into our old, conditioned patterns. Have so much compassion for that—it's just showing us where more work needs to be done, where more resilience needs to be built. In some ways, this is no different from when you're sitting and meditating and your mind has wandered off and you notice and you come back. It's always this process of noticing and beginning again, noticing and beginning again. In that way, it's so simple and so doable.

Let's do one final practice together. We'll be exploring the gesture of holding on and letting go using the hands themselves. We'll start with the simplicity of this gesture of just opening and closing, no content [opens and closes hands]. Then during the practice, I'll prompt you to bring to mind a pattern that you'd like to release. Maybe it's something that you've been working with throughout the four-week series.

The invitation is to move slowly. We want to stay with the sensations as they're coming and going. There's also an invitation to invite in a sense of play. You can't do this wrong. Another quality to bring in is curiosity. What's this actually like? What am I feeling? What's the direct experience—not the thoughts, but the direct experience? What's it like to let go or hold on?

You might take a pause here and get yourself set up, think about what you might want to release, and come back when you're ready.

Start by settling into your contact points—the seat, the feet, wherever your body's touching the ground, the surface below you. Feel the support of the chair and the cushion, and just reach down to the earth below us. The invitation is to release into the embrace of that gravity. We don't need to hold ourselves up. Spend some time here gathering and collecting.

Now that we have a nice sense of foundation and presence, I'll invite you to draw your attention to the hands, placing them in some way that they're accessible. Just tune in there, feeling the aliveness in the palms.

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Once you have a sense of your hands, slowly start to explore this gesture: opening, closing [opens and closes palms, with hands resting on knees, palms up]. Move slowly. Notice what that's like. [Pause, opening and closing palms.] You may be feeling the tightness of the fist or sense of vulnerability when the palms are open. Stay with it, being really curious.

Now, we can start to bring in some of that content. What pattern is ready to release? Can you let your hands start to express that? Again, move slowly. Stay with the sensations. What starts to happen as we add this content? Are we holding on tightly? What's the relationship there like? Can we love or appreciate this thing? Notice how your body responds to that. And if we can't love or appreciate it, can there be some compassion or kindness there? Notice how your body reacts to that.

Stepping down even a little further, what if there were just a bit more space? What's the gesture like now? Then let the whole thing start to dissolve. Feel things start to empty back out, moving back into the simplicity of this body breathing.

Thank you for that practice. I hope that there was something in the gesture that spoke to you in the way that our bodies can speak through movements and experiences. That brings us to the close of our time together, so thank you so much for joining me, and my greatest wishes that the benefits of our practice together go out to all beings. Thank you so much.