

## Living in the Body

So far we have dealt with two of the five pillars of transformation. One becoming familiar with awareness through meditation that promotes familiarity with our natural condition of stillness and spaciousness. The second pillar seeing the importance of taming restlessness and how it manifests throughout our entire being and realising how a state of restless agitation muddies the waters of clear seeing and freedom. And I hope you are coming to realise that these two pillars need to be put in place in order to help create the structure of transformation, so essential if we are to aspire to liberation from the wheel of becoming. Now let's move on to the next pillar and ponder its importance. This next pillar brings us to our body and why we need to understand that to truly enter the transformation process we cannot leave this part of our makeup to one side in the assumption that it is somehow irrelevant to the spiritual path; and learn that in fact if we try to ignore the body genuine transformation will never be truly possible.

By learning to abide in our awareness during our meditation and experiencing the spaciousness that this abiding gives us, in time we will begin to realise that awareness has a depth and potential that makes it different from the other parts that construct our sense of what I am. In time we begin to realise that awareness doesn't have the constraints and limitations in the way the rest of my experience has; discover in its very nature there isn't a person there that can be found with its characteristic limitations, but is discovered to be spacious and bright and without an owner. Before we've thought of ourselves as being a collection of thoughts, feeling etc., that we call consciousness; but always remember consciousness manifests due to conditions, so is therefore also conditioned itself. Awareness for us has always been seen as a part of our consciousness but now it begins to open up and although still accepted as being an aspect of consciousness it now begins to extend beyond this collection of conditions.

Through the stillness of awareness we soon arrive at a gateway to that which is beyond conditioning, and discover if we are prepared to trust stillness and abide within it we will make the discovery that it takes us away from our dualistic mind and conditioned consciousness and down into the body.

Because we have awareness as the centre of our mandala of practice we've now come to realise that this most crucial feature of our practice isn't actually in the head after all, but is to be found in the body instead. This most important of discoveries brings us to a very important turning point on the spiritual journey we've chosen to follow.

Now to aspire to the centre of our mandala of practice it is into the body we now need to learn to return and abide if we are to go on to nurture and mature our practice.

I'm sure you wouldn't disagree with me when I say we spend just about all of our waking hours caught in the chattering mind. No matter what we engage ourselves in, and no matter what the posture may be we are nearly always distracted and captured by this ceaseless chattering. We've become so seduced by the mind we spend almost all of our time locked in there. Whether we stand, walk, sit or lay down this is where our attention seems nearly always to be. It seems no matter what we happen to be doing we can never leave our chattering mind to one side and just be with whatever the experience in front of us may be. Always living in our head with our thoughts that are continually reinforcing this sense of a self in this realm of mind where it always seems to be abiding.

Us western people with our educated minds that have become so profoundly conditioned into developing a strong sense of individualism and ego, that our culture seems to demand, will find a practice that has the body as its centre a great and difficult challenge. But it is one that has to be accepted so that slowly we come to realise that despite our absolute conviction that wisdom and liberation must surely be developed or discovered in our head and intellect is actually just another fallacy of the deluded mind; in fact it is in the body where liberation is to be discovered.

## Awakening to the Body

We all very much identify ourselves as being someone that lives in the head, and although this body which of course is a part of me, isn't where I actually abide. We do have great attachment for the body but really it is seen as more of a possession; but when we meditate and become still and open we temporarily let go of any attachment to it, and it is at this time whilst abiding in non-dualistic awareness we can discover that is actually where we are.

The real me is not up in this head that seems always to be whirling around in this world that I create that I get then get lost in, but beyond that when we let that world go we actually discover that we are in the form. Our awareness, our sense of aliveness, our sense of being is actually in the form, in the body; and that is such a massive realisation. Because if you follow on from that and are on the path of freedom, of learning to understand and learning to let go, learning to abide, learning to come back into that openness, into that freedom beyond the prison of duality and the sense of self, you will be learning to live in the body.

This clarity of aliveness and lucidity of awareness where we rest in spaciousness is actually taking place in the body. And as our ability to get to know and understand ourselves develops we see with ever growing conviction our path to awakening depends on coming into the body and learning to abide there. To begin to see with ever growing conviction that it is in the body and at the heart of awareness that wisdom of how things are is to be discovered. To take refuge with ever growing conviction in our awareness because it is here beyond the grasping self where seeing takes place; where knowledge and where freedom is to be found and where we really abide as a living being.

By coming into the body and by being in the body means we are coming into the present moment before thinking that creates the dualistic world by way of our conditioning; so we are therefore in a very real sense stepping out of the sense of me and mine, and taking refuge away from the dualistic world. Learning to come into the body and into the present moment is to let go of our conditioning that we've had since we were a child.

## **Identifying with the Mind**

It is because of our culture that we are taught from a very early age to develop a sense of self and self-interest. It is our ego that should be strong because it is those that have a strong ego and sense of self that are the ones that usually succeed. To be successful in this world we are taught that we need a strong sense of individuality; and our upbringing, and education is focused around that cultivation.

We are taught that a developed intellect is king, which means we will have to live and function out of our head. Almost everything that we strive for, everything that we want to achieve will primarily be because of the intellect. This nurtures the ever developing sense of self and individuality, so we come to identify ourselves as one who lives in the head. This is the culture and way of being we are familiar with here in the west; but historically I don't think this has always been the case. I think the way we do things today is historically quite a new way of being.

## **The Industrial Revolution**

My view is that this emphasise which has detached us from the whole of what we are has only been with us since the industrial revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to this time man had a history of many thousands of years of primarily living off the land whereby he had to harmonise with the seasons and the natural flow of life to exist. His body and mind were connected to nature and the earth, and therefore more connected to his organic body and his natural roots in nature. In order to live he accepted he had to remain connected to nature's laws and flow with the seasons.

With the invention of efficient industrial machinery in the 18<sup>th</sup> century he discovered by adapting his mind he

could become more prosperous and so began to turn his back on his natural roots and connection with nature. This revolution became complete when it spread like wildfire throughout Europe as it transformed the family and the social structure, and even the very way we thought as individuals. This new mind therefore was not the mind of the Buddha's era or indeed was ever present throughout the entire history of Buddhism as it developed. The mind at the foundation of the development of Dharma was then very different from our new found western conditioning and instead a mind that was more integrated with the body, grounded and harmoniously connected with nature. Not a mind so conditioned that it became so disconnected from any sense of wholeness and estranged from the body.

Historically those that practiced the Dharma were without doubt more integrated and in touch with their body. Because of the shift in our consciousness at this time of great change in us westerners we have become conditioned to live much more in our heads and have taken this as being the natural way of living.

Eastern practitioners have always practised coming from the body and because of that have been grounded and not having this strong sense of an individual that living out of the head promotes. Not having such a strong sense of a separate self-identity and self-interest; but rather the willingness to abide in the more natural environment with a more natural sense of community. Now the teachings have come to the west and we've picked them up, but have missed the very foundation of where the Dharma is to be fundamentally practiced.

## Living in Our Head

We live in our head, we know nothing else but our head. We pick up the teachings and take them straight to our intellect. But by doing so we are taking them into the realm of delusion, of a deluded self divorced from any sense of reality that has no substance, only dream like creations that become the world. We take these profound teachings into that realm and wonder why over so much time we never realise freedom, never realise liberation.

We never realise freedom and liberation because we by-pass the most fundamental aspect of our nature and by by-passing the fundamental reality of where the Dharma is actually to be found and cultivated. Not just the Dharma but even the place where ignorance and the whole world that ignorance creates is to be pondered and understood, so also becoming the path of insight. So even the unfolding of wisdom does not take place in the head; we think that it does because we cannot imagine anything else. We've lived in the head, we've developed our life and our world through our thinking faculty. Now we've come to the Dharma we have the exact same attitude that even the truth is something we can create if we just think about it long enough, if we can somehow just work it out or if we study enough. We're going to work it all out and were going to become free and we're going to become enlightened. This error is a fundamental error that most of us in the west have made, but I believe we are now just beginning to wake up to this basic misunderstanding.

I would like to refer you to three short articles by an American who is a Tibetan scholar and teacher called Reginald Ray. I don't often recommend reading but I thoroughly recommend that you read his three short teachings entitled '*Three Articles on the Body*', because they will show you how since the beginning of Buddhism every practitioner has taken for granted that practice comes from within the body, because that is where they've always been. To learn live in the body, and to cultivate the path in the body is just the way it is.

Reginald Ray thinks our alienation from the body goes back still further to early Christianity and although he is far more detailed and articulate than me on this topic we at least agree that western man has lost his basic natural integration of mind and body that make our western approach to Dharma highly questionable. I think his articles are so valuable that I've copied them to the Dharmamind Buddhist Group website. If you go to the website and then to the readings section, you will find them (or click here, <http://www.dharmamind.net/teachings/RR.html> ). I recommend them because they are so valuable and so revolutionary for us people that we really must learn to awaken to these fundamentals in order to discover the Dharma.

To learn how to practice correctly is to come into the body and to turn away from this fascination, this delusion

that somehow the head is going to get us out of trouble, while in truth it is the head that gets us into trouble in the first place; and to imagine that the thing that got us into trouble is going to get us out of trouble is akin to trying to pull yourself up off the ground by pulling on your boot laces – it can't be done but that's exactly what we try to do. We are pulling on our boot laces and trying to get ourselves off the ground by living in our head; by thinking that liberation is to be found just there if only I can work it out. We are so profoundly conditioned in this way, and we need to wake up.

We will certainly come into the form when we are truly still and spacious, truly empty of thoughts and mental pictures, we will be in our body. When you are truly aware you will go beyond that sense of duality and be at one with the environment, in samadhi and intimate with your body. You will have left the immaterial deluded world behind and returned to your body and begin to uncover the profound secrets that have always been there.

When we abide in our awareness unsullied by any thoughts or mental pictures we are in our body, whole and complete and abiding in this present moment before the world comes into being. This is awakening or waking up, and is the essence of practise.

How strange and mysterious this may sound but we're actually in our body at this time and beginning to taste our ground of being and where we truly are. It's in that ground of being that nirvana and all wisdom is to be found and where release from suffering becomes possible.

## **Engaged Meditation**

So when you engage in your walking meditation today just be aware that you're walking; not caught up in the chattering world of thinking about the next meditation period or thinking "I wonder what we're going to have for dinner tonight", or what you're going to do when you get home at the end of the week. Come back into your body and awareness and as the Satipatthana sutra tells us "When you walk, know you are walking"; that's all, there's nothing else. When you walk know you're walking in the same way when you sit know you're sitting. Have that clear empty mind with no distraction, only awareness. When you're in awareness you are in your body so at that time when you are sitting, that's all there is. When you walk, that's all there is, when you get off your cushion and stand, know you're getting off your cushion and standing, that's all there is. This is called living in your body so it is not something mysterious, it is actually very concrete and doable, just like tasting the ice cream, when in that moment before thinking the experience fills the entire universe.

When you're drinking a cup of tea, know you're drinking a cup of tea. When you're talking to somebody, know you're talking to somebody. Be alive to yourself, know yourself, see yourself, be aware of yourself: this is to be with your mirror-like awareness and living in the body. Not doing something and then at the same time being lost somewhere in thought and having no awareness of what you are actually doing.

But if we're honest isn't being distracted our experience most of the time?

When you walk down the road and get to the other end don't you suddenly realise "gosh, I've just walked down that road and I have absolutely no recollection of the experience. I've no recollection of the environment, of the smells, of the sounds, of just the experience of walking because I've been captured by my thinking and locked up in my head", isn't this so often our experience?

So habitually caught by our mind that we've given so much attention to over the years with education and the development of a strong sense of self and disconnectedness from the body and what we really are; but don't imagine you can apply this one-sidedness to the cultivating and understanding of the Dharma. The Dharma will never be found in the cultivated mind that gives shelter to the self, but only found where it has its home, and that is in the body.

## **The Dharma Mind**

The Buddha said what we practitioners are aspiring to is like being carried along by the current of a stream and intentionally turning around and begin to swim against it. This means we are nurturing a new fresh revolutionary mind that gets its nourishment not from the dualistic conditioning we are familiar with but nourishment found in another part of our makeup.

In this apparent spiritually irrelevant part of what we are is found the key to release from suffering. Here within the form is to be found the answers to the mystery of life. All the wisdom, human qualities and love that fills the universe is waiting whole and complete deep within each and every one of us. Nirvana, samsara, eternity beyond space and time quietly wait to reveal their secrets. Yet like fools we chase this quest for freedom in the realm of dreams and ignorance. The dualist world that forever entices us with promises of wisdom yet in and of itself has no life or substance.

We need to wake up now and rise to the challenge of creating a new mind, a Dharma mind. The mind that has its home centred in the body, and whilst learning with the support and guidance of the five pillars of our practice we will be returning over and over again to this present moment and tasting the freedom of our true nature.