

Freedom's Body II  
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This week we've been talking in one way or another about a fundamental mystery of a way of being human. If we spend some time in Zen practice, with philosophy, and you begin to work with this sense of form and emptiness, why should it be that there is form and emptiness? Why should it be that things have two aspects that are so apparently different in contrast to each other? Why are we embodied? Why is it necessary for us to be embodied, to live in the world, to suffer *dukkha*, to have all these troubles in our lives and to change, to move? To hopefully go from one place to another and to change as we go, when at the same time there's this other aspect that is already perfect, complete, radiant, and eternal. Why not just live there?

That seems to be an important question in our practice. Why don't we just live there? Why don't we all hang out together and be radiant and eternal, and live there where everything is crystal and perfect and nothing ever changes? Why don't we just live there? But, in fact, we spend so much time and energy in the other aspect of life, which is this unsatisfactory, changeable, evanescent, fleeting, heartbreaking, tender, beautiful, infuriating, painful span of time we spend in a body and beyond? I'm not going to answer that question but I'm going to pose it, because it's tremendously important that we hold it while doing everything else.

I want to spend some time with it, play with it, talk about it, to offer some ways to hold this question and wonder about it. One of them has to do with this thing about *dukkha*. The nature of embodied life is a kind incompleteness, which is not a problem. It's its nature to be incomplete. It's supposed to be incomplete. If it were complete it would be on the other side, on the empty side. So, its nature is to be incomplete. What's that about? Why should that be a positive value? The most obvious answer is that it invites our participation. We live in a world where we're actively co-creating along with everything else. The empty world doesn't need to be created. It's done; it's finished already. The world of form is constantly being made, unmade, and remade by everything and all of us. What an astonishing invitation! Help make

the world. You get born, you're in a body? Guess what? You get to help make the world along with everything else that's making the world. Wow, that's really something! That's not an invitation to be sneezed or grumbled at.

Then, if we think of it from that perspective, when we think about the incompleteness of things, the question becomes, what can I bring that helps complete things? I will never complete them, but I can help. What can I bring that creates more wholeness? What a great way to approach any situation. Anything, the snarkiest, meanest, mingiest, nastiest little interchange that you have with someone you really can't abide, from that to the greatest cosmic question you have for the meaning of your life. What can I bring to make more wholeness? What's missing? What's incomplete? What's unperfected? What can I do about that? What a great way to approach things.

That brings me around to something I was saying the first night, which is thinking about relationship as a way of sanctifying each other — sanctifying meaning to support the growing wholeness of each other, to support the increasing holiness of each other. It's exactly the same thing. To sanctify each other is to look for what will help make whole and to support the becoming whole of the other, whoever or whatever the other is.

From our largely embodied stance, one thing we first want to check out is “Where are we not whole?” and “Where are we incomplete?” before we begin mucking around in the rest of the world. There was a recent Japanese Zen master Kosho Uchiyama, Roshi, who had a beautiful way of talking about it : opening the hand of thought. He said that so often the hand of our thought is clenched, either in anger or fear, contracted in some way. Or it's grasping; it's clenched and then it's grasping after something. But what if we opened the hand of thought? What if we used that open hand of thought as a beginning toward making things more whole and complete?

In this week as we focus on embodiment, embody your mind. Look into your heart-mind. Notice the quality of the hand of your heart-mind. Is it clenched, grasping, or open? What's going on? Can you open it over and over and over again when you notice that it's tightened up?

Okay, if we have this aspect of in-process already opening, already finished, already complete, are there aspects of our self that correspond? There are, and I want to talk about them tentatively. This isn't a system that I'm laying out. When you leave tonight just throw it

away because it shouldn't last longer than that, but maybe it will help how we might rectify and sanctify form and emptiness. How do we get those two things to marry each other so that they're sanctifying each other all the time, so that we don't feel the split and the alienation of one from the other, which is a source of a lot of our suffering, a lot of our discontent with things?

So we have, tentatively and arbitrarily speaking, a part of ourselves called, for the moment, spirit, which is that part that is at home in the vastness and emptiness, that's native to it. It completely understands that perfected, disembodied, understated, crystalline nature of things. It has its own way of belonging to that realm.

On the other hand, we have this constellation of soul and body, and I'm finding it more and more difficult to pull soul and body apart. They seem to be so connected to me. By soul I mean that part of ourselves which is what Sarah was talking about, the particular viewpoint. The particular part of ourselves that loves some things, hates other things, longs for other things, can't abide some things, feels sorrow, and cares deeply. All of that is the activity of the soul. We know pretty well the activities of the body. Those things have been linked forever.

I want to read a couple of small poems about the connection of the soul and body. The first one is by Anna Swir, the author of the poem we read at night, "... always inside us we carry the silence ..."

This is a poem called "The Soul and the Body on the Beach"

The soul on the beach  
studies a textbook of philosophy.  
The soul asks the body:  
Who bound us together ?  
The body says:  
Time to tan the knees.  
The soul asks the body:  
Is it true  
that we do not really exist?  
The body says:  
I'm tanning my knees.  
The soul asks the body:  
Where will the dying begin,  
in you or in me?  
The body laughs,  
It tanned its knees.

Anna Swir is a contemporary Polish poet and has several volumes of poems that are pretty wonderful.

This is a little poem that, surprisingly, the Roman Emperor Hadrian wrote to his soul :

Dear little fleeting pleasing soul,  
the guest and comrade of my body,  
into what regions must you go now --  
pale little, cold little, naked little soul,  
without your old power of jesting.

The sense is that when the soul is connected to the body it has the ability to jest; it has the ability to laugh, play, and make light and without that connection to the body, where does it go? What happens to it, he wonders?

I love the sense of the affection for the soul, the sense of guest and comrade of my body, so that the soul and body connection is a part of us that is connected to the world, and connected to the earth — the part that anchors us, the part that loves and hates being alive at the same time.

One last quote. Alice Munro, a Canadian whose forebears came from Scotland, wrote the memoir *The View from Castlerock*. She found some of their letters, journals, and things they had written when they first came from Scotland to Canada several hundred years ago. She quotes a great-great-great-grandfather near the end of his life as he was about to die. He's spent his whole life in Canada and is talking about the way we not only know a place but a place comes to know us. If we live in a place long enough, it comes to know us. He said, "The place that now knows us will soon know us no more for we are all old, frail creatures."

That was poignant, being somewhere that knows us and then passing away so that place will no longer know us. That's part of what our passing is.

Q1 : You were talking about form and emptiness today : the spirit, body, and soul, and then form and emptiness. Could you clarify : is body and soul, form and spirit, emptiness?

JIS : I'm making that sort of rough connection for the purpose of discussion, but I don't want to turn it into a dogma. I just want to say we have those parts. One of the things that's amazing about being a human being is that we're a confederacy of different states which work more or less better together. It's hard to imagine other beings being fragmented as we are, yet

there's also something powerful about that. There's a loss of unity, clarity, and purity, but there's a gain in that somehow, a loose-jointedness that's adaptable, flexible, and creative.

Q1 : It makes art.

JIS : Art gets made somehow in those places.

Q2 : It talks to itself.

JIS : So what might begin to look like a disability actually ends up looking like a tremendous strength.

Q2 : We hope.

JIS : Let me say just one more thing and we can come back to some of this tomorrow. We've been talking tangentially about the nature of the self. There's the question in the koan about that self that Sho sheltered [see Freedom's Body I]. Did it exist before the empty kalpa? Does it exist before anything else? Which is a way of asking : What is the nature of self? What is it exactly?

One of the things that seems important to talk about is this place that Sarah's also talking about, where the particular aspects of self – the particularities, the things that make each of us uniquely our own selves – intersect with the sense of the spirit which knows emptiness, which is made of emptiness. We are neither one nor the other, and to get stuck in one or the other is to be partial. If we think we are only our thoughts, feelings, obsessions, concerns, longings, opinions, that's being stuck in the inner landscape. In a way that's partial. If we think that we are only these transcendent beings trapped in a body and we are only trying to get free, that's being trapped equally somewhere else.

If we meet in the intersection of those two places where the particular touches the very, very large, that's where the true self lives, where the true self that partakes of all of it can be found and the most important thing about that is it's not inside of you — it's outside. It has to be outside of you. It has to be where you intersect with the largeness of things, the vastness. That's where your truest self is. Not inside the thoughts, feelings, obsessions, concerns, and all of that, but where that meets a recognition of, an experience of, the vastness.

Q3 : Did you say that is also the intersection of form and emptiness? That's where we say form is emptiness and emptiness is form. One can't exist without the other. Is that oversimplifying?

JIS : That's the way we talk about it. It oversimplifies it but that's the only way we can talk about it. That's exactly that. It has to have both of those dimensions together.

So, if you want to know what's it like, then, what is the view from that place? What are the eyes of that place? What does that look like? Think about the moments that Trungpa described about just seeing the pine trees, just feeling the breeze. Think about the times when everything got radiant or when the trees started talking to you.

SB : Intersection doesn't take any space.

JIS : Yes. Remember that experience and remember the proportion of your sense of self in that moment. Remember how much room you took up in comparison to everything you were experiencing when you were radiant. That's your true self, in that intersection outside what we usually think of ourselves, when we're connected, we know, and you can say, *I'm feeling great because I had a really good night's sleep* or *'the wind is cool, the air is fresh.'* Both of those are a report of the state of the self, simultaneously. To know that, just remember what the self felt like in a moment when everything went radiant and eternal. That's where you should live.

Q4 : What about when the wind makes my skin feel cold? Is that the same thing or have I gone back inside of myself?

JIS : That's the same thing.

SB : Especially if it's just cold.

Q4 : Not that I'm freezing.

JIS : There's a huge difference between *Cold!* and *Damn, I'm freezing.*

Q4 : Shortly after those moments, I tend to make a label for what that meant and that seems to be not necessarily so helpful. For example, with koans, I may have a wonderful perception of insight and it might be true. Do I bow and say thank you and maybe approach the koan from a different angle at that time, or do I stay with that to see if there's something further or to let go?

JIS : So stay with something like Kate's 'Cold persists' or 'Damn, I'm freezing,' If you're staying with 'Cold,' it's still alive and the self is in the mix in the right proportion. As soon as you go to 'Damn, I'm smart,' the proportions have gotten out of whack.

SB : When you say, 'I have a perception of an insight,' that's 'Damn, I'm smart.'

Q4 : I'm trying not to give the insight meaning beyond thinking it's insightful. For example, 'Hit in the middle' was wonderful. Should I move on? Or, another example : *It's so*

*wonderful that it feels like I'm in the middle now.* Should I move on to 'peaceful body establishing life?' Or should I stay with 'middle' and see where that goes?

JIS : Yes, because what can come after 'Damn, I'm smart' is 'Damn, that's uninteresting.' So notice what happens. What happened when you made that leap from one state to another? It's not inevitable that you do that.

Q4 : There's aliveness in that?

JIS : Yeah, that's alive! A live inquiry. On that inquiry you can climb back down to that pure state before the opinion about the pure state. Don't take it for granted that it's inevitable or that it has to happen. It's not.

Q5 : It's so helpful what you said about the true self being outside of that. Essentially, when am I going to get down to my true self and where is it?

JIS : It's all around you!

Q5 : That's really helpful because it's got relatedness, it's all in closer, and it reminds me of what you said last night about breathing with the koan, because you're breathing outside of yourself. It's not so selfish. If I breathe, it's going to show me what it is.

JIS : It's you talking to yourself; it's all you talking to you. It won't leave out the particular stuff of you. It just recognizes that's not the sum total of it. What a relief that is.

Q5 : Rilke's "your own small story." Every time I read that ...

Q6 : It's a really penetrating few words.

Q5 : I'm grasping for this. I want that and then I think, *oh*. Then I think, *wait*. *I had a pretty good day with this thing today. I was with the pine trees today. Pine trees are easy to be with it.* I'm imagining what this is going to be like to my kids on Friday afternoon, or what is this going to look like with my kids at home, or what is this going to look like when the dog craps on the floor? What am I taking this home for, why I do this? I'm uncertain. When I think in terms of the pine tree or the mountain they're talking to me but in a way that doesn't demand certain responses.

JIS : That's why we come to retreats and practice on the easy stuff. We build those muscles and develop those skills, and then we do it with the more difficult things. I'm thinking of the story you told about wanting to finish something you're working on in the studio and your daughter comes in and wants lunch. This is the part of me that's hungry and want's lunch.

Q5 : That's awesome.

JIS : That could change your whole life.

Q5 : Sweet!

JIS : So, fortunately, I get to make myself a sandwich.

Q5 : And I'm so damn cute.

Q6 : Good thing you were there to make that sandwich.

JIS : Anything else?

Thank you.