

## In the Body of Awakening | Part Three

---

### **Touching Enlightenment** (continued)

Drawing on Tibetan Yogic practices, a commentary on the modern crisis of disembodiment.

- Reggie Ray

I When asked “How do you exhaust karma?” Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche simply said, “When things come up in your life, you feel them completely and fully and you don’t hold back. You live them right through until they have completed themselves.” This applies to whatever is arising for us, not just what is painful, but what is pleasurable as well. When we are blissful and happy, we go along to a certain point but then pull back because we are afraid—perhaps it is too much and we feel we are losing our sense of self, or perhaps we are afraid it will slip away. This is because true bliss and true happiness, perhaps even more so than pain, are a negation of the human ego.

In the Yogachara teachings, within the “storehouse consciousness”—what we call the unconscious—are all the memories, all the experiences that we have not fully lived through. This understanding works well with modern psychological thinking. The process of the path to enlightenment, which can be demonstrated from the very earliest texts onward, is allowing the unconscious contents of our life to arrive in our awareness and to allow awareness to integrate what we find about ourselves and about the world. According to Buddhism, the unconscious is the body. Through working with the body in the way that I am describing, we actually are able to unlock and unleash all of these experiences and all of these things that have been insufficiently experienced and are therefore held throughout the body.

That’s why it is said in the Tibetan Yoga traditions that the body actually holds our own enlightenment. Until we are willing to live through some of the wealth

of information and emotions that have been offered to us but rejected, our awareness remains tied up and restricted. The way they put it in the tradition is that the experience of working with the body unlocks memories and images and emotions that become fuel. This fuel creates a fire in us, a fire of all the vivid and intense pain held by these previously rejected aspects of experience. That pain is a fire that gradually burns up the structure of our ego—it is a visceral inferno. It is said that this inferno purifies awareness and makes the field of awareness very, very bright. The more we do the work, the more our awareness actually opens up. According to the early tradition, enlightenment itself is when the fuel is all used up. Awareness, no longer tied up in evasatory tactics, is set free and liberated to its full extent.

Through the work, we begin to discover some fundamental shifts in the way we are. There is a rich interior life of the body that we feel and experience, but which also somehow remains shrouded in mystery. At a certain point, we realize that we can’t tell whether something is physical or energetic, whether it is emotion or sensation, and we realize that we don’t need to figure it out. It begins to unfold. The so-called self, that relatively consistent type of person we have always been trying to be, becomes much less important, and there’s a willingness on the part of the meditator, or the body contemplator, to allow the self, the conscious sense of self, to die and be reborn, over and over.

The first step in regaining our embodiment as meditators is to establish a clear, open, and intimate connection with our larger, macrocosmic “body,” the earth itself. In this practice, we will explore how the body can be felt as an incarnation of the earth. Earth breathing enables us to deepen our connection with the earth and to explore our identity with the earth

---

itself. This practice also enables us to feel the support the earth offers us. The more we allow ourselves to feel supported by the earth, the more we are able to identify with the earth, the more room we allow ourselves for the inner journey.

Take a good meditation posture and feel the earth under you. Even if you are on a cushion in a room on the sixth floor of a building, you are still supported by the earth. You may initially want to keep your eyes closed. Begin breathing into the perineum, the region between the genital area and the anus. Bring your breath into the bottom of your pelvis at the perineum. Feel any tension you may have in the perineum. Breathe in through your sitz bones. Let the bottom of your pelvis sink into the earth. Breathe into the area of your anal region and your genitals. With each out-breath, let your pelvis sink more and more deeply into the earth, so that you are sitting completely and without any reservation on the earth. Bring the energy of the breath up into the hollow of the lower belly.

Now begin to breathe into a point that is a few inches below your perineum, putting you in direct contact with the earth. We are extending our awareness beneath our body, into the earth. Bring the energy of the earth up into your body. Now reach a few inches lower and then a foot lower. You are literally reaching with your awareness down into the earth and breathing up through your bottom.

With each breath, let your awareness drop down a little further into the earth. Breathe in the inner breath, the inner energy of the earth. Sink lower and lower into the darkness of the earth, breathing the energy up. On the in-breath, you are bringing the energy up, and on the out-breath, you are dropping further down. As you breathe in, allow your attention to remain deep inside the earth.

Continue in this way, letting your mind sink down into the darkness of the earth with each out-breath. Allow yourself to come right to the point where you feel you are about to go to sleep, but stay present, and take the attitude that you are sinking into a mysterious

realm where all the answers you have ever sought are waiting. Try to be awake yet hovering on the boundary of sleep. On each out-breath let yourself sink a bit deeper, and take note of whatever images arise. Try to sense the extraordinary stillness and peace of the earth.

After about ten minutes, let your awareness drop more precipitously, further into the earth: one hundred feet, two hundred feet, a mile. See how far you can reach. Continue to breathe the earth's energy up into your lower belly, going further down each time. Then let the bottom drop out and let your awareness go in a downward freefall. As your awareness descends, gradually have the sense that the energy is filling your body: into your belly, your mid-chest, your upper chest, and your head. Keep reaching down, deeper and deeper. Continue reaching further and further, while continuing to let the energy further up into your body. We are now receiving the awakened energy of the earth in our entire body.

To conclude this practice session, transition by dropping all techniques. Simply sit in your body, feeling your body as a mountain, still and immovable, and notice the awake and present quality of your mind.

---

### **Mindfulness Immersion in the Body**

- The Buddha

(Mara is the term for evil or the unwholesome)

“Monks, whoever develops & pursues mindfulness immersed in the body encompasses whatever skillful qualities are on the side of clear knowing. Just as whoever pervades the great ocean with his awareness encompasses whatever rivulets flow down into the ocean, in the same way, whoever develops & pursues mindfulness immersed in the body encompasses whatever skillful qualities are on the side of clear knowing.

“In whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is not developed, not pursued, Mara gains entry, Mara gains a foothold.

---

---

“Suppose that a man were to throw a heavy stone ball into a pile of wet clay. What do you think, monks — would the heavy stone ball gain entry into the pile of wet clay?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is not developed, not pursued, Mara gains entry, Mara gains a foothold.

“Now, suppose that there were a dry, sapless piece of timber, and a man were to come along with an upper fire-stick, thinking, ‘I’ll light a fire. I’ll produce heat. What do you think — would he be able to light a fire and produce heat by rubbing the upper fire-stick in the dry, sapless piece of timber?’

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is not developed, not pursued, Mara gains entry, Mara gains a foothold.

“Now, suppose that there were an empty, hollow water-pot set on a stand, and a man were to come along carrying a load of water. What do you think — would he get a place to put his water?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is not developed, not pursued, Mara gains entry, Mara gains a foothold.

“Now, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is developed, is pursued, Mara gains no entry, Mara gains no foothold. Suppose that a man were to throw a ball of string against a door panel made entirely of heartwood. What do you think — would that light ball of string gain entry into that door panel made entirely of heartwood?”

“No, venerable sir.”

---

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is developed, is pursued, Mara gains no entry, Mara gains no foothold.

“Now, suppose that there were a wet, sappy piece of timber, and a man were to come along with an upper fire-stick, thinking, ‘I’ll light a fire. I’ll produce heat.’ What do you think — would he be able to light a fire and produce heat by rubbing the upper fire-stick in the wet, sappy piece of timber?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is developed, is pursued, Mara gains no entry, Mara gains no foothold.

“Now, suppose that there were a water-pot set on a stand, full of water up to the brim so that crows could drink out of it, and a man were to come along carrying a load of water. What do you think — would he get a place to put his water?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is developed, is pursued, Mara gains no entry, Mara gains no foothold.

Wild Geese  
- Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.