

Chapter 4 : BODY and BREATHING

PART TWO - INTRODUCTION

Chapters 4 and 5 belong together. They are not about broadband sensing. Body and breathing awareness is a different dimension of empathising with animals. Our culture is rich in such relaxation exercises. These Chapters are merely a summary and a refresher.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss taste and smell. These add new depth to the feelings of inner security, peace, and reality, already found in many body and breathing meditations.

Whereas Chapters 2 and 3 were far more than theory; Chapters 8 and 9 may be considered as hypotheses. They discuss individual and cultural aspects and consequences, of broadband sensing in animals and humans.

TOUCH - BODY AWARENESS

Human culture has developed thousands of meditations and exercises on autogenic training, using our kinaesthetic sense, and the internal awareness of our own body. There are probably as many ways of doing this as there are ways of thinking. To my knowledge, they are all effective ways of re-energising, real-ising yourself, and finding some peace and happiness.

I have nothing truly significant to add, but i'd like to summarise a few ideas for beginners, and i'd like to shake things up a bit for routine meditators.

First i'd like to present 'My Theory of Evolution' : In the womb, there's a shape which we are and can move. This shape develops like a 5 legged starfish, and every one of the 5 ends is hard (bony) and sensitive. Both the sensitivity and the hardness make good sense, because that's where our ancestors kept bumping into things.

As we evolved, we started moving in one direction and collected all the main sensors at one of the ends (the end which got the most bumps), with the other four ends doing what the main-sensor end told them .. and so we developed arms and legs.

It is interesting to realise that every one of the 5 ends can "feel, hold and do things". The hands and feet feel, hold and do things with objects, and the mind feels (recognises, realises) holds (remembers) and does things with thoughts.

Inside our body, there are harder and softer parts, and sensitivity. I find the traditional idea of earth, water and fire, a useful basic exercise to explore the inside shape and feel of the skin we are in. (Wind comes later with breathing.)

Firstly the five ends are earth, hard. The arms, legs and neck are softer with hard thin long things, covered with a sort of watery jello blubber. Then comes sheets of hardness: the hips, and the shoulders and rib cage; and then (very sensibly) the very softest area, protected in the middle.

And the whole thing feels warm, ... and where does it feel most warm? And how does your spine feel - does it feel hard? or soft? or warm? And it's not static, there's a lot of activity from chemical exchanges going on, a sense of excitement with different areas fermenting, bubbling and fizzing ... (the stomach digesting, the blood circulating and, i think it must be, the nervous system itself).

And there is a beating, and we know it comes from the heart, but i find it easy to feel as though the beating comes from the middle body and the belly. I'd love parents to ask their 2 to 10 yr. olds : "where do you feel the beating and where do you think it comes from?"

BREATHING

When i was young, i would lie on my back - be aware of my breathing, feel my whole body expanding and contracting - and feel at peace.

If i'd been asked, i'd have thought i breathed into and out of my belly, i don't know how i'd have explained the expansion and contraction, i never questioned it. When i was around 17 (after uneducational school years) i started reading. I discovered we have lungs pumped by a diaphragm.

The anatomical science is good to know, but we seem to have forgotten the subjective feeling which has been at the foundation of every warm-blooded animals self awareness, over at least 150 million years ... and i find the feeling of breathing into my whole body is a far more wholesome experience than the scientific truth.

After activity, when i'm out of breath, the air goes clearly to my chest and lungs, and it feels as though it passes through my neck. No animal or child could ever imagine the air goes first down the wind pipe and then back up into the lungs.

I'm speaking of a general need to be in touch with our feelings. Even if our feelings are irrational, to heal ourselves we must acknowledge them and work with them. It is scientifically irrational to believe i breathe into my belly and that the whole body expands and contracts. But that's how it feels.

I would love parents now to ask their two to ten year olds: "when you breathe, where does the breath go in your body?"

When i started reading, i also discovered Buddhism. Religious texts and commentaries interested and distracted me for many years. But at some stage i picked up the Buddhist idea of "conscious i breath in, letting go i breath out". I still find this a very useful meditation idea. There are various ways to combine the breathing with being conscious and letting go. And though it may seem ideal to be consiousness and let go at the same time, it is effective to separate the two steps.

But as my basic practice, i find nothing has the purity of my experience when young. To recap: if i ignore everything i ever learnt about it, the sensation when breathing is that my whole body is minutely expanding and contracting, getting bigger and getting smaller.

Recently, since experimenting with smells, i would describe the feeling as filling up and emptying out. 'Filling up and emptying out', 'Conscious and letting go', 'Getting bigger and smaller' : I find all of these good and simple ways to feel whole inside my body. There is no reason to decide which is best, they are all good at different times.