



## **Illuminating the Mind: Exploring Buddhism and Science with the Dalai Lama**

### **Guided Meditation with Willa Blythe Baker**

**Willa Blythe Baker (00:08):**

Hi, I'm Willa Baker, and I'm going to be offering an experiential module for the course. This module is going to include a small explanation of meditation, and then the practice itself. There's a quote that I really love from the Hevajra Tantra, "Vast wisdom lives in the body." I love this quote because it's kind of counterintuitive. It's kind of surprising. We don't usually think of wisdom as something that arises from or exists in the body. I tend to think of it as something that is a quality of the mind. But in some corners of the Buddhist tradition, the body carries an inherent, innate wisdom.

(01:21): And what does that really mean? Well, the body has ways of being, ways of knowing, that we can pay attention to. And these ways of being and ways of knowing in themselves can guide us into a stable and deep meditation practice. When the Buddha first taught his monks meditation. He taught something called the four foundations of mindfulness. And the very first of those foundations is mindfulness of the body, so paying attention to the body, listening to the body, is like the very basis of a stable meditation practice.

(02:30): In the Himalayan Buddhist tradition, there is a schema of the body that sees the body not as a single thing, not just as a lump of flesh, but the body as a layered entity. And specifically, the body has three layers. The first is the physical layer of embodiment, the flesh and blood body, the body that we think of when we think of this material thing, this heavy thing that is sitting on the Earth. You might also call this layer the Earth body.

(03:23): And the second layer of embodiment is called in this tradition, this corner of the tradition, the subtle body. And this word subtle really means that this layer of embodiment is more ephemeral, more in flow than the physical body. And we might say that layer of embodiment is called the energy body. We could call it the energy body or the subtle body. And it's referring to the layer of our embodiment that is just energetic, just vibrating with the electricity of our nervous system, our endocrine system, perhaps, the layer of our embodiment that is not so solid and stable, but that is more in flow.

(04:39): And the third layer of embodiment that we find in this corner of the tradition is the awareness layer of our embodiment, which is to say that there is a knower in our experience that includes and pervades our physical form. We might call that, for one of a better word, or maybe a more evocative way of talking about this third layer of the awareness layer of embodiment is to say that we have a sky body. We have a layer of our embodiment that is vast, open, and just aware. The knower is the third layer of embodiment.

(05:42): So these three layers of embodiment, by tuning into these three layers of embodiment, we can begin to experience our own body as a teacher, as a source of wisdom. So I'd like to

invite us into a practice in which we experience these three layers together in a simple way. In this meditation practice, like the three layers of embodiment, we'll have three phases. The first part of the meditation practice, we will be resting in the physical body, in the Earth body, connecting to the body as a material, grounded entity.

(06:38): In the second part of the meditation practice, we will tune into the second layer of our embodiment, our body as a field of energy, this all over body aliveness, that when we really pay attention, we can feel, we can sense. It's lined with this type of perception called interoception, which is awareness of the internal state of our body, the body as an alive and vibrant field of experience.

(07:21): And the third layer of embodiment that we'll pay attention to in this meditation practice is awareness. When we get into that part of our embodied experience, we're actually going to let go of any notion of a bounded body, something that is contained by our skin. But instead, we'll enter into a relationship with an open and vast awareness that includes, but also, it goes beyond the body. We might say a sense of the body that is en-worlded, as if our body doesn't stop with the skin, but extends out into the world around itself.

(08:16): So are you ready? Would you like to join me for that? So we'll begin by just getting comfortable on your seat. And you may want your eyes to be a little bit open to take in the light, but not focused, a soft gaze. Or you may prefer to close your eyes, if that's what you're used to. Feel your torso centered over the hips, your spine straight, but not rigid, just allowing the body, mind to naturally settle, coming to rest in this present moment.

(10:08): Now allow your attention to drop down to the place where your body meets the Earth, feeling the weight of the body, stable, present, grounded. Allow the groundedness of the body to stabilize this [inaudible 00:12:24] mind, Earth, body. When the mind becomes distracted, allow this feeling of groundedness at the base of the body to draw your attention back like iron filings are drawn to a magnet.

(14:30): Stable, settled, grounded. Now allow your attention to slowly migrate from the base of your body up into the hips and up to the diaphragm, where you can feel the rise and the fall of your breathing. Allow this rise and fall of the breath to connect you to this dynamic quality of the body, its natural flow. And as you ride this flow of the breath, you notice that everything in the body is flowing, this body alive with breath, with energy, with movement of the blood and the cells. Allow that awareness of the body's flow to relax into an all over body awareness, not focusing in on any one thing, but experiencing the whole body as a field of energy, relaxing into your body's all over vibratory aliveness, the subtle body.

(22:04): Attention, energy, inseparable. If the mind becomes distracted, hooked by a train of thinking, allow this body's all over vibratory aliveness to draw attention back like the sun draws the face of a flower. Now turn attention inwards to notice the one who is meditating, this naked, present awareness pervading this entire body and beyond. And as you notice that awareness, the separation between the tension and body dissolves into openness and luminosity, the sky body. Letting go of all effort, allow this sky-like awareness to meditate you.