



MIND & LIFE

Mind & Life Podcast Transcript

Anne Klein – The Wisdom of the Body

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Opening Quote – Anne Klein (00:00:03): *It's really one of the potentially deadliest things about our culture — this separation between the somatic and living in the head. Ideas are very dangerous if they're not anchored in human reality, and human reality is an embodied reality. The worst atrocities in human history really have to do fundamentally with a total indifference to human suffering, which I attribute in part to just being in one's head. So being in the body is really, really important.*

Intro – Wendy Hasenkamp (00:00:42): Welcome to Mind & Life. I'm Wendy Hasenkamp. Today I'm speaking with Buddhist scholar Anne Klein. Anne teaches Buddhism and Tibetan language at Rice University, where she's Professor of Religion. She's also a co-founder of Dawn Mountain Center for Tibetan Buddhism in Houston, where she teaches traditional practices and texts as well as basic life arts, such as resting in awareness and kindness. Her passion is for understanding how knowing works, especially knowing our minds and bodies. And through this knowing, how we can gain compassion.

(00:01:19) I spoke with Anne last winter on Zoom and our conversation feels as timely today as it did then. We discuss how she came to see Buddhism as a lens on the mind, the role of the body in contemplative practice, and the dangers that can come with not being embodied. We also talk about the method of inquiry called microphenomenology, (this also came up in my conversation with Andreas Roepstorff) and how she's applying it in various aspects of her work. Later in the episode, Anne shares her wisdom on the Eastern conception of the subtle or energy body, the construction of self and other, how the body can help us break out of rigid self-concepts, the power of the imagination, why we think things will always stay the same, and how studying the feminine sheds light on interdependence.

(00:02:16) As always, you can check out the show notes for this episode on our website if you'd like to learn more about Anne's work. And we've also posted a bonus clip there of Anne discussing her retreat center, Dawn Mountain. I find Anne's perspective on the mind to be both refreshing and deeply grounding. I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did. It's my pleasure to share with you Anne Klein.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:02:43): Well Anne, welcome. Thanks so much for joining us.

Anne Klein (00:02:47): Thank you, Wendy. It is lovely to be with you.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:02:50): So I'd be curious to start just hearing how you got interested in Buddhism as a lens on the mind.

Anne Klein (00:02:59): Well, actually it was when I realized that Buddhism was a lens on the mind that it totally hooked me, because I did not know that at all. In the early seventies and even late sixties, there wasn't much... There was a little bit from Zen telling you that you were already a Buddha, which I found unfathomable. Then I went to the University of Wisconsin–Madison because they had a Buddhist studies program. And Jeffrey Hopkins invited Kensur Ngawang Lekden, who was the last Abbot of Gyume Tantric College of Lower Lhasa, and as such one of the great figures of his generation. And he was invited to Madison my second year there. And Jeffrey taught Tibetan, which she said would be required to take a seminar with him, which of course I wanted to do. So that was the beginning of my learning anything about Tibetan Buddhism.

(00:04:01) And we started reading about dependent arising, and about emptiness, and compassion, and all the great topics that are obviously so nuanced in how they talk about mental/emotional — and now I would even say somatic — states, that I just had never heard anything that precise at that time, East or West. And I was just thrilled, absolutely thrilled. I couldn't get enough of it. And I felt well, this is what I have to make time for the rest of my life.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:04:37): I want to unpack some of those fascinating topics that you mentioned there, maybe as we go along. But I know that you have done a lot of your work on embodiment and the role of the body in contemplative practice. And I think a lot of the discourse in the contemplative research world so far is really focused on the mind, oftentimes viewed as the brain, but very much also on mental, not necessarily embodied, experiences. So can you talk a little bit from your perspective about the role of the body in this path?

Anne Klein (00:05:14): I would love to talk about the role of the body, because that was actually another huge discovery for me personally. I mean, I was in graduate school, I was all about the brain and knowledge and all of that. And Kensur Ngawang Lekden in Madison, he taught meditation as well as seminars. And so I actually was a practitioner for 17 years before I discovered that I had a body.
[laughter]

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:05:45): I think that's a common experience.

Anne Klein (00:05:47): Well, I think it is... I think maybe not so much now. I mean now, in my academic and dharma teaching, I point it out right from the beginning because I don't want anybody else to wait quite so long. But of course Buddhism is so intellectually stimulating. And some of the first practices I taught did seem to emphasize reflection, analysis, impermanence, dependent arising, emptiness. At the same time, using the imagination — what I now call a trained imagination — to touch into compassion, love, which of course involves the body. It's not just the head. And so this is very important.

(00:06:35) I think it's one of the... I'm going to take a little loop out here and maybe a bit of a digression for a moment, but I feel that it's really one of the potentially deadliest things about our culture, this separation between the somatic and the ideologue. There's nothing more dangerous than a disembodied ideologue. Ideas are very dangerous if they're not anchored in human reality, and human reality is an embodied reality. The human body is the instrument of pain, as well as pleasure. And a lot of the worst atrocities in human history really have to do fundamentally with a total indifference to human suffering, which I attribute in part to just being in one's head. People who make policy, people

who cracked India, you know, just draw a line on the map. That's a famous and pernicious example of really, really abstract disembodied thinking. So being in the body is really, really important. And the Cartesian emphasis on objects being "out there," which many people have talked about — that deeply impacts our experience. It's not just philosophy of some guy in France, some time back. It filters down to us, even if we never heard of Descartes.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:08:04](#)): Yeah. I've been really struck by that. The last several years, I've been very aware of how much Descartes' ideas continue to really pervade our society. Can you, for listeners who might not be familiar, summarize a little bit about his view?

Anne Klein ([00:08:20](#)): Well, he famously said, "I think, therefore I am." Well, he didn't say I feel, and I know what's going on in my body. And also, that then coincides with, as you know, the tremendous so-called enlightenment, the emphasis on the rational as opposed to superstitious, which was a really important step in history. And it didn't have to end up the way it did, but it did function to precipitate what I think Buddhism would consider proclivities that we all have anyway really — to reify, to objectify, to over-substantialize what we think is more "out there" than it really is. In other words, to fail to recognize how much our own experience, our own what we might call projections, our own imputations... You know, most of what we see is what we put out there.

([00:09:30](#)) So we feel very disconnected. It's possible for us to rationalize tremendous disconnection. And that also contributes to legalized cruelty, it seems to me. And actually Descartes didn't really only think that, but he actually wrote about how the body and perception and objects and so on are really kind of connected. And even he recognized emotion, to some degree in some of his more famous letters. But anyway, that's what got iconicized for us.

([00:10:07](#)) And it merges very well with the tendency that human beings do have, in any culture, to project. I mean, it's just something that we do. Because we have very lively minds, and we can intentionally imagine something in a way that is positive for us. And some of the Tibetan style practices really do that, that's really what they do. As you know, you imagine that you're compassionate. You just pretend.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:10:37](#)): Fake it till you make it?

Anne Klein ([00:10:38](#)): Exactly. But that's helpful. It does train your brain in a way, I'm sure that neuroscientists could explain. So, but that's a trained imagination. There's also the confused imagination, which is mostly what we walk around in. We either think there's more out there than there is, or we think there's less than there is. So for me, I think anybody who does practice, at some level eventually recognizes that body and mind are profoundly... "interconnected" doesn't even... They're one dynamic. Like the drum, it was always the sound of the drum because you can't separate the sound from the drum. And you can't separate our mind from our body. And they each impact the other. And if I understand neuroscience, it's not only the brain directing the body, but the body is sending signals to the brain, the vagus nerve, all of that. So this is actually coming up now, which I think is really, really important culturally.

([00:11:46](#)) And the whole... Ancient sciences of course see body and mind as a single organism. From the very moment of conception, there's a little bit of energy, a little bit of consciousness, and just a tiny, tiny bit of matter to keep it in place, so to speak. And then, it grows and then we maybe end up paying more

attention to the mind. But when we really pay attention to the mind, we can't help but see that that itself affects our embodied experience.

(00:12:23) So I like to say that, certainly Tibetan practice — any practice really, breathing practice, which all the traditions do — is a whole-body experience. It's a whole-person experience. Of course your body is involved, you're in a certain posture. Your breath energy is involved, that's what you're attending to. And that itself affects the other energies. We famously feel a little more settled. We say, we feel a little more calm. We land on some kind of somatic experience. "Oh, my shoulders are not up around my ears anymore. My belly is more relaxed, there's breath, there's air coming into it." It's somatic.

(00:13:09) And also we have our own intention of why we're doing it. Or if we're merging breathing practice with compassion practice, there's some cognitive element also. So the cognitive, the somatic, and within the somatic, the body and the energy, they're all working together. And that's one of the powerful things about practice, because it does engage us as whole beings. And as organisms, just a living organism loves to be engaged with all of itself. I mean, it just makes us more alive. So more and more, I think of practice as being whole, entering a state of wholeness of some kind. And that seems very important.

(00:13:54) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:14:18): I'd love to hear your take on something that we actually don't talk about much in the Western academic scientific world, but I know it was a very common concept in Eastern thought, which is the idea of the "subtle body." And you were mentioning energies and words like prana, chi, and in Tibetan, lung. These are very central, as I understand, for those philosophical systems and even medical systems.

Anne Klein (00:14:47): That's true.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:14:47): But [it] definitely hasn't entered really our Western concept. Could you talk a little bit about that idea?

Anne Klein (00:14:53): Yeah, and thank you for asking also. It's very significant, really, really significant to understand that appreciation of oneself has an organism, whether medically or psychologically, or just as person who's alive and wants to sense into what being alive feels like. The energetic dimension, which I have sometimes called the energetic sensibility, because it is somatic, it's not... I want to be clear that it's not an abstract idea. And I want to say two things about that, at least to start with. One is that, it is an intrinsic part, as you said, of medical wisdom throughout Asia. It is said that the Asian systems developed through observation of a living body; Western systems, to a large extent, developed through working with the dead body.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:15:55): Interesting.

Anne Klein (00:15:56): So we have very, very sophisticated — how the bones are connected, how the different blood vessels carry blood here and there, and so on.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:16:07): All the material... physical material elements.

Anne Klein (00:16:09): Exactly, the material part of what is going on. But even then, it seems to me, if we look closely there is... So what is energy? And Tibetans (they have a definition for everything), so air, which is the element which is associated with energy, is that which is light and moving. So that's what prana is. It's light and it's moving. And there's plenty of that in Western medicine. It's just not put out as a category. I mean, blood moves. How does it move? The heart beats, it sends the blood here and there. Well, you don't have to add anything onto the Western system to recognize that there is what Asian traditions will call energy already there.

(00:17:01) To talk about energy is really what functions to heal the division that we were just talking about between mind and body. Because energy — the wind horse, the Tibetans talk about — the mind, how does it know? How does it get to its object? It rides on energy; it rides. It's not just some kind of abstract... I don't know what it would be. It has to contact its object. Another human being, when you look in the eyes of another human being, there's what we now call limbic resonance. And that's a certain kind of energetic... To use the vocabulary of Asia, we could say that limbic resonance is coming into sync, in a certain way, with the energy of the person whose eyes you're looking into. And we say, eyes are the mirrors of the soul. Well, there's a connection between the eyes and the heart. What's in your heart, comes out through your eyes somehow. And traditional physiologies make this very explicit, but we know very well that looking at another person will shift us. And it's not just our ideas, "Oh, this is a really nice person because they're looking at me kindly." We may think that, but that's not all that happens. Something in us perhaps grows softer. Or maybe resists — "don't look at me like that" — some kind of defense coming up. But that's neither strictly an idea, nor is it strictly the body as a material expression either. It makes a lot of sense to talk about that as an energetic response.

(00:18:44) Now, an energetic response can also be an emotional response. So, we know very well, just from our experience in a human body, that emotions are definitely connected with different kinds of energies, right? You're angry. You're in love. You're nervous. It's clear. And what that does is to, as I said, give us a kind of... And not just a middle ground, actually, it's actually the field in which ideas and the body itself exists, you could say. Not just little bits of energy running around the body, but there is a kind of energetic support.

(00:19:21) There's energy everywhere in the body. One of the great Dzogchen figures of Tibet, Longchen Rabjam, says, "Wisdom exists throughout the body." And that's a very interesting statement. He doesn't say it's in the brain, it exists throughout the body. And what everybody in Asia knows is that wherever you have mind, you have some kind of energy supporting it. So we know the difference between looking out at space and staring at our computer, everybody knows how that feels different. And one way in which this is explained, according to at least basic Tibetan type traditions and probably not limited to Tibet, is that — okay if you're looking at space, the energy that is supporting your eye consciousness as well as your mental consciousness is actually expanding. It feels good. You're staring at your computer, [it's] cramped.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:20:24): Restrictive, yeah.

Anne Klein (00:20:25): The area's restricted, and we feel tight and so on. So it's a very helpful category [energy], it seems to me. And really not as strange if we look at it closely, as we might think, because we actually operate with knowledge of that all the time. We just haven't vested it as a kind of nameable category. It's too bad that has been captured on the one hand by the oil industry, as a word. And on the other hand, a little bit by new age, you know, "woowoo." But I mean and it's important to say, that the map of prana in the body is extremely complex.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:21:09): Yeah. I was going to ask about that. So I know that there are yeah, very detailed maps and multiple maps, as I understand. Is there an understanding of how it relates to, for example, the nervous system or other material, physical systems that we know of in Western science?

Anne Klein (00:21:28): That's a great question. And I'm not sure, I think there is maybe it's like the Venn diagram, there's some overlap. I've heard it said that some are at least beginning to make some kind of connection between what these systems, the Asian systems, call the central channel — which basically starts sort of mid belly, about four fingers down from the navel and forefingers within, and then goes straight up to the crown. And it's open at the crown. Well, the place that it's open at the crown is the same place that is very soft when we're born. Also, I have heard that the vagus nerve, there's some similarities.... The location may or may not be identical, but there are actually — actually it was Lama Willa [Miller] who did an amazing dissertation on the debates that went on in Tibet (I think the 14th centuries, I forget exactly which centuries) about the location of the central channel. You know, was it like right up against the spine? Is it in the middle of the body?

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:22:38): Oh, interesting.

Anne Klein (00:22:39): Yeah it's really interesting. So at the very least, there's an agreement that something that runs from deep in the body up to the crown is really important, East and West.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:22:52): Right. And, I also wonder — you know, the Western scientist in me wonders — how, with the technologies and tools that we have, is there a way that this could be measured? Because I feel like that's the currency for something to be "real", right? If you can actually measure it. And I know, did you work with Cathy Kerr before she passed?

Anne Klein (00:23:14): Yes.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:23:15): I know that she was probably the only person that I knew of who was really making efforts to do this in a rigorous, scientific way.

Anne Klein (00:23:21): Wonderful efforts. And I was invited to be one of the people who is going to be on her project that was going on...

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:23:28): Yes. I think it was the Vitality Project, is that...?

Anne Klein (00:23:31): Yes. I think some of her students are still carrying it on. When I was at Brown, I met some of them and they said they were, but I haven't heard anything.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:23:41): I'll have to check in about that, yeah. I hope so.

Anne Klein (00:23:44): Yes. Where I've gone with that is... Yeah, there's measuring through machines, that's one way. I'm not going to be the expert who can tell you whether that can be done or not. But there's also refining our own sense of lived experience, which is what Claire Petitmengin has been working for so long with. And I've done several trainings with her and really have incorporated into everything I do, because... She did say to me once, actually at the European Mind & Life, that she really feels that finally the conversation between science and the Eastern ways of understanding body-mind is going to depend very much on the ability to be precise about one's own experience.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:24:39](#)): Yeah. That makes sense.

Anne Klein ([00:24:40](#)): I find that very exciting.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:24:42](#)): Yeah. And so — just so listeners understand this context — you're referring to Claire Petitmengin and her work in what's now called microphenomenology?

Anne Klein ([00:24:53](#)): Yes.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:24:54](#)): Can you give a little overview of what that's about?

Anne Klein ([00:24:58](#)): Well, she teaches a very simple method for drawing someone else out (but one can also draw oneself out), by asking pertinent questions about one's experience. And if we do this in the context of meditation... for example, she did a training at Dawn Mountain, for people who had been meditating for a long time. When you really want to delve in a precise way into experience, it has to be a very bounded experience. If we talk about "how you feel today," that's never going to get a really precise description. So, we did a little meditation and then we asked people, I think, to pay attention to an object and notice what happened, and then they would get distracted, of course. And then what happened, exactly right then? So in order to do that, you will ask a person to go back to that experience, in a way to relive it. (I'm not claiming that experiences can be identically reproduced, but that's not so much the point.) To get back to that feeling that you had in that experience, and then answer interesting questions about it. Like you might discover you felt something in your body. You might discover that there was a train of memory which turns out to be meaningfully connected to your own sense of not staying with an object, for example. Often with these kinds of inquiries, people actually have very amazing experiences. Amazing in the sense that, we often will say afterwards, I never dreamed I could talk for 45 minutes about brushing my teeth — one moment of brushing. But the truth is, we are extraordinarily rich in body, speech, and mind, and we always have so much going on. And so to be able to have trained people, it does take training to interview in the most productive way. And it takes some training also to allow yourself to really go into your [experience], go down there. Because the first reaction usually, of being interviewed is, "Well, that's not important." But everything's important. We're trying to understand.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:27:31](#)): So, you use this method now, you said, in all of your work. How has it come into play?

Anne Klein ([00:27:37](#)): So I actually did a class at Rice — I called it *Flowing Body, Glowing Mind*, or something like that.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:27:43](#)): Oh, that's great. I would love to take that!

Anne Klein ([00:27:44](#)): Oh, good. Please come. *[laughter]* And I introduced — I will not say that I am teaching microphenomenology as she does — but I did introduce key aspects of her training, which involves, for example, her first lesson on satellite experience. So mostly when we talk about experience, people will often talk about why I went there, what I was hoping to accomplish, how good I am as a photographer because I wanted to take pictures, the time, the weather, the fact that I didn't eat breakfast... These can be important, but none of those are actual descriptions of experience.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:28:29](#)): Right, those are like all the external conditions.

Anne Klein ([00:28:31](#)): Exactly. She calls them satellites. And the first lesson is to learn for yourself to distinguish between when you're actually talking about experience, and when you're talking about, "Oh, and then she said the darnedest thing." That's not an experience, the experience is when you say, "She said that, and my body was about to explode! And then I remembered how my big sister used to..." You know, and just go into... As one of my friends said, when I was interviewing her at one of Claire's trainings in Europe, we listened to a sound. And she talked for 45 minutes. And she went back to her grandmother, and the history of her family. And then she looked up at me and she said, "So really, when you hear a sound, you hear it through the lens of your whole life."

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:29:28](#)): Yeah. That's very true.

Anne Klein ([00:29:29](#)): Yeah. When you live, when you talk to anybody, when you do meditation practice, you do it through the lens of your whole life. So I've taught it some at Rice, I think it was kind of revelatory. It was hard actually for students to do. One of the things I pair with that when I teach it in connection with Buddhism (which is how I teach it generally), is, you know, the difference between... Going back to this Cartesian pervasive sense of just being in one's head. I find that it's very important to have an experiential sense of the difference between thinking and feeling. And I have found, to my utter astonishment, that some people don't know the difference. People feel that thinking is... So, "How do you feel?" "Well, I think that's wrong." And that's really pervasive. So I suppose that may be part of my mission in life. *[laughter]*

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:30:32](#)): It's an important mission.

Anne Klein ([00:30:35](#)): Trying to get that difference, you know?

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:30:37](#)): Yeah. And again, it speaks to what you were saying about the disconnection from the body, right? And it's just, everything's in our mental space.

Anne Klein ([00:30:45](#)): Exactly. And it really vitiates vitality – living in the head. It's not enough for us to live in the head, no matter how brilliant we are. I think it's so wonderful that at Mind & Life you usually do some Tai chi or Qigong or something like that. It's so great.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:31:04](#)): Yeah, absolutely.

Anne Klein ([00:31:05](#)): So everybody at Mind & Life appreciates energy, even if they're not willing to name it. *[laughter]* Cathy Kerr herself was not. That's how we first became friends.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:31:15](#)): Oh yeah?

Anne Klein ([00:31:16](#)): Yeah, yeah. It was at the Garrison Institute and somebody – I felt it was a little bit of a spacey question from somebody – who was charming and young and full of enthusiasm and said, "Well, won't you talk about energy?" And Cathy said something like, "Not as a scientist, I won't!" *[laughter]* And then slowly we got to know each other and I said, Cathy, you do Tai-chi! How can you...

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:31:41): That's funny because it was such a central part of her experience. But she was so good about making clear what we know through scientific investigation, and what we don't. I really appreciated that about her work.

Anne Klein (00:31:54): Yeah. Invaluable. And what was so exciting and so precious – and so tragic if in fact it's ended – about her Vitality Project was that she was going to put those things together. And she had done amazing research, as you know. I think I'd say it would be healing for this culture, I mean, even just to talk... The way politicians talk, the way they make policy. It's like, nothing to do with the human being. Pollute the water. Profit. Profit is not always profit. It is a crushing drain on most other people, besides the profiteers. So I feel that there's a cluster of issues that come together that can contribute to a very mean, not life-supporting culture. And being "objective," feeling that the world is "out there," and there's a chasm between you and the ecosystem that you live in, is very problematic. Failing to realize that everything is so profoundly interconnected is a huge blind spot.

(00:33:15) And if you think of it, one of the most pernicious things in the world, as we know, is hatred. Hatred of who? Hatred of people who aren't like you. And who aren't that much "not like you." They eat the same food, they have the same bodies. They have the same emotions. Oh, but they're a different color. Or their imagery of the divine is different. I mean, really? And yet we know how powerful this is, how dangerous this is. It's horrifying. And until recently, and still in a very few places, most people hadn't met people from other cultures. So it was very easy to tag them as weird, or evil, or people we should get rid of. But we have no excuse now. And maybe this needs to be further emphasized in our educational system. I mean, people should be taught in kindergarten that race is really not a thing. And we need to emphasize the similarities among people. Similarities in how we react to life, and also similarities in where we come from. We came from the same source, however we might understand that.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:34:30): Yeah. I'd love to talk more about this. This whole idea of othering is something that we've been thinking a lot about too at Mind & Life, and obviously it's very alive in our culture today. And it seems intrinsically related to the sense of self, and the way that we construct our sense of self. And therefore, almost inherent to that, there is the other, right? The non-self.

Anne Klein (00:34:53): Absolutely.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:34:54): So, I know you've done a lot of thinking about this too, and the role of the body and the way we understand ourselves. Can you say more about that?

Anne Klein (00:35:03): Well, the construction of self, in all the ways that occurs – cultural, physiological, psychological, et cetera – it fundamentally means drawing a boundary around this and calling it self. And then as soon as you have a line of self, as you just said, everything else is other. And we like to do that. Actually, Larry Barsalou, he wrote this wonderful article called The Vice of Nourning. So, as children, and I remember this very well, we gravitate toward what is concrete. And I think child development theories have shown that... certainly Piaget and following him, there's certain stages that you go through before you can grasp intangibles, abstraction. And he suggests that this is something that doesn't quite go away. We like to have something that we can draw a line on and say, this is this. And he says that even scientists, who know better than anyone how contextualized nuance is essential to account for, will like to have a theory that puts a box around things, because you can hold on to it. And that feels secure. And that's fundamentally what we do with this idea of self.

(00:36:21) Everyone does it. It's not like people who grow up in Asian cultures don't have an idea of self. Although it could be quite different from ours... Alan Roland, he had a book called *In Search of the Self*, I think. Anyway, he did a lot of study in India, in particular. And he said that in India, the self is really is not an individual. It's the family unit, which would consist probably of the couple, their children, the parents, maybe aunts and uncles. And that would be "I," really. That when you say I, that would be what you were referring to. Still, it's a unit that will suffice to other everybody else.

(00:37:09) And the very fact of self and other create each other, shows how they're interdependent. As Shantideva, the eighth century Indian Buddhist poet famously said, "Self and other are like far and near, they're relative terms. Nothing is intrinsically far. Nothing is intrinsically near." And so we have these kind of reified notions. We glom the idea of far and near onto – and emotionally far and near also – onto certain groups. It's so easy to do. And then people have noticed that they can gain a lot of power by playing on this natural inclination. And they will reify those others in certain ways that finally convinces others (yet others) to really be inhumanly disembodied. It's just like totally forgetting that we're talking about human beings. And all the things that we've talked about until now, I think contribute to that capacity in some people. In all of us, actually, if we don't guard against it.

(00:38:21) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:38:43): Is there a way that working with the body, in your experience, can help to maybe loosen our sense of a restricted self?

Anne Klein (00:38:56): That's another great question, Wendy. Thank you. I think it's powerful, in several ways. Being sensitive to one's body also puts us in touch with our feelings. And the kind of situation that we're describing, the kind of hatred that we're describing, or the kind of indifference that we're describing – locking teenagers up in a freezing building in Texas, separated from their parents – we might say it's very hard hearted. But I think it's also, these people, if you look at them, they're not in their bodies. They're ideologues. They're focused on whatever it is they want – political advantage, money, just some kind of celebrity. They're not in their bodies. If you're in your body, I feel, you can't hear these things and be unconcerned. So that's one thing. It gets one in touch with one's own feelings. People who are not in touch with their own feelings are very unlikely to care about the feelings and experience of others.

(00:40:16) Also, being in touch with our body actually puts us in the present. The body is always in the present; sensory experience is always in the present. Thought and ideas almost never are. So it's grounding, what we call grounding. When I say grounding, I mean, okay, here – in conversation, emotionally and intellectually, with all of the permutations that will come out of an action that I am now contemplating. So a lot of information comes through the body, and we're learning more and more about that. A lot of information. So discounting it is really pernicious. It cuts us off from our energy, it cuts us off from our feelings. And cutting off from our own feelings, as I said, means we're less likely to care about others. It takes us out of the present. Being with the body keeps us in the present.

(00:41:07) And it teaches us things. You know, it teaches about impermanence and interdependence. I realize that when a certain person walks up to me in a certain way, I feel something. So I realize, well, I wasn't feeling that before. We're affecting each other. No person is isolated from the influence of anyone else, of others, at any level. Even if you're in a room alone, you have history. You remember people. They've impacted you. We carry those experiences in the body. The body remembers; the body remembers. We don't know why we're tense in a certain place, or why we always kind of go like this if

somebody moves towards us too directly. We might not remember, but physiologically the imprint is there.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:41:56](#)): Something you were just saying reminded me of... You were speaking earlier about the role of the imagination. And practices in Buddhism that – particularly in Tibetan Buddhism maybe – that intentionally leverage our capacity to imagine in order to become aware of things we might not normally be aware of. Like you spoke about impermanence in a piece you recently wrote. Could you unpack that a little bit, how imagination can work to help us?

Anne Klein ([00:42:27](#)): Imagination is so lovely. I mean, it has so much potential. And I think one of the things, at least in Tibetan Buddhism, one of the fundamental things about reality – speaking, particularly in a kind of Dzogchen orientation – is that infinite creativity is possible. Fundamentally, creativity is an inalienable part of reality. Big Bang – what happens? And so from the space of the [universe] comes the Big Bang, and everything else follows. From the space of our minds comes ideas. And everything comes from that. Everything we do comes, really starts with our mind. So to be able to train, to use this capacity to train the mind, is a very big deal. So imagination has a bit of a bad rap and all, "Oh that's just imagination."

([00:43:22](#)) There's confused imagination, as I said before, most of what we do is that. But there's trained imagination, which actually has perhaps been developed to its hilt, from what I understand, in sports. People imagine doing whatever their maneuver correctly, and it absolutely impacts the whole capacity of the body to actually carry it out. I remember when I was at camp as a kid, and I was having trouble coordinating the breaststroke. You know, you put your arms out, and then when your elbows bend, your knees bend, but until then your legs are straight... And so I spent most of the night just imagining, I just decided to do that. Because I understood what I was supposed to do, but my body wasn't doing it. And I imagined it. And I got it. No problem ever since.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:44:12](#)): Yeah, I think it is – from a neuroscience lens, the idea is that you're running those circuits. You don't actually have to be moving or enacting them, but because they still operate at a lower level of activity when you're just thinking something, that you are re-patterning and kind of reinforcing circuitry that way. So it strikes me, yeah, that these are using that same capacity.

Anne Klein ([00:44:33](#)): Absolutely. So for example, if I'm not in a good mood, I don't really care about how anybody else feels right now. But am I willing (and I feel my resistance) to imagine what it would be like to put myself in their shoes for a moment? Oh, they've just had a loss. They're hungry. They're afraid. And start to encourage, I would say encourage... But a little imagination helps. Imagining these people's faces, round-eyed with fear. Or little kids holding their stomach, or shaking with fever. Right? We could decide to imagine that as a way to bring forth a quality that we've decided we want to cultivate. So this is very purposeful. I can imagine happy kids too, but I'm going to do this, because I want to develop my empathy or compassion.

([00:45:31](#)) So this kind of imagining is used a lot. I'm writing about it now in Longchempa's Seven Trainings. So it's used... Or to understand impermanence, to bring the seasons to mind. Oh yeah, the trees are really different in the Fall. Or, I really looked different 10 years ago. And my mother, when I see a picture of her as a child, I can't even recognize her. You know, we bring these images to mind as a way of teaching ourselves. That's one thing.

(00:46:04) And then in a Tibetan way, what is most common – what I'm really interested in, just learning a little bit about how this might work – so a lot of Tibetan practice, as you know is, imagining really that let's say Green Tara, this female enlightened being (or any number of others, Buddha) is right in front of you. So, that means you're entering the world of your imaginaire. And it feels to me, more and more, that there's something that one does, right? To leave behind, if only for a moment and if only partially, the ordinary surround. And feel that no, it's not just my bookshelves here. I have Tara, and she's made of light! So that's one whole thing, to see how that affects one. How do I feel being in front of an enlightened being? And then how do I feel if I... In many, many practices, one of the main things that one does is imagine that one's own body is light. And I'm really curious, and that is somatically very powerful in my experience, and in the experience of I think most people who do it in an intensive way. Or having light wash through your body and wash out whatever illness, et cetera, you need to get rid of. It's really a powerful experience. And it is not like ordinary imagining. And it is not like thinking, either. And often you're chanting also, so you've got that sound vibration going through you. So there's something energy, there's something cognitive, and just your whole sense of the field that you're in changes. And at the very least, it means you're not as, in that moment, under the power of whatever happens to be in front of your senses. And that's quite important for many things. And in Buddhist practice, it's important for cultivating equanimity, so that you have a power to remain as you are, as it were. Even, people are smiling or they're being really, really nasty, and equanimity doesn't mean you're stupid. It doesn't mean you don't know that they're doing something wrong, or even dangerous. And you protect yourself. But it doesn't contract your heart, as it normally would. So you keep that space open, through being free of that kind of reactivity. And so if you're imagining your body as light, that gives you, in a way, a further remove from a certain kind of reactivity. Or you're reacting now to what you have chosen for a particular purpose, to bring to mind. And then that's the world you're living in at that moment.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:49:01): That strikes me as really related to the idea of resilience in Western medicine and psychology. Equanimity, and being able to bounce back from adversity, or kind of remove a little bit from the immediate circumstances, I guess.

Anne Klein (00:49:22): Yeah, yeah. Very, very important connection.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:49:26): In the piece you wrote about the imagination, and you were talking about using it to recognize impermanence more — and you just gave some examples of how you would do that — something clicked for me. Because you were just saying something, that I think is very obvious to all of us about... We see someone years later and they look different, and somehow that's a surprise. Or we think everything's just, we just assume everything will stay the same, somehow.

Anne Klein (00:49:52): It's crazy. We totally do it.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:49:54): Yeah. That's really a common experience. And so I started thinking about why. Why would our minds and our brains be set up like that? Because it's clearly not the way things are, in the long-term. And I had two thoughts about it, both of which I need to think more about. But one is — are you familiar with ideas that are really gaining a lot of traction now about the mind as a prediction machine, or predictive mind?

Anne Klein (00:50:24): No. I would like to, yeah.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:50:27): Okay. So this is a massive oversimplification, and I may not be getting it totally right. But my understanding is that the view is that a lot of what the brain is up to, is predicting what should be coming next.

Anne Klein (00:50:45): Oh, I have heard this. I didn't realize it was a thing, but I have heard that. Yeah. Okay.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:50:50): Yeah, there's models being developed and it's kind of a very popular idea in cognitive science now. And it's actually a very old idea — the mind as being involved in prediction — but it's becoming more formalized now mathematically, and being applied as we learn more about anatomical structures and things like that. So the general idea that I take from it is that, we have this model of the world that we are operating with based on all of our experiences. And we're using that to predict what we think is most likely to be happening next. And then when things don't match, that's called a "prediction error" and that motivates us to do any number of things to remedy that error.

(00:51:36) So in that case, the prediction, you could say, is kind of always the same. It's just like a default that it stays the same.

Anne Klein (00:51:43): Ah, yes. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:51:46): And to me that was interesting to think about, even just in a very simple way, you could think about a visual scene. And if you're just sitting still, that visual scene... It's a pretty safe bet to predict that the majority of that incoming information will remain the same. Unless you move or someone comes in or something happens. But it's kind of a safe bet maybe as a default, that things are going to stay as they are. Or maybe it's just simpler to do that because you wouldn't know how they would change, right? If you don't have any information suggesting that they would change in a certain way.

(00:52:23) And it could also be the lowest energy state. So a lot of the things I've been thinking more and more about brains and minds, is that there's such an energy conservation rule about it. And so whatever is the lowest energy is what we will tend to do. Similarly, with habits in the mind and things like that. They're more hard-wired and they literally take less energy to enact. So I'm just thinking about that as — maybe it takes less energy to assume that everything will stay the same, than to generate ideas about what it could be.

(00:52:58) But then also I think we're set up very much to operate for the immediate future, in our minds and bodies. We don't think a lot about long-term. There's a lot of work about, for example, with climate change. We're not designed to — even though we understand future consequences — we don't act on them. So maybe it is more about the immediate... In most cases, you see someone, you see them the next day, they're going to pretty much look the same. And so we don't understand, we're not as bombarded with the changes. I'm not sure. Anyway, those are just things I was thinking about.

Anne Klein (00:53:36): I think that's really interesting, and I think there's a lot to it. I think the energy conservation part is surely there. And I think there's also an emotional bit to it. We really are creatures who want stability. Well, we don't want things to change in ways that will surprise or endanger us. So it's just more soothing. And in that way also, I suppose, conserving of energy.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:53:59): That's true, staying the same is safe.

Anne Klein (00:54:01): Is safe. I survived it before, It will be okay now too. And I also think that, this thing about the vice of nouncing... It's just somehow easier — emotionally, energetically, pedagogically, somehow — to grasp these things that are clear cut. And I'm reminded that in psychology, they talk about invariant representation. So it's the same idea. Basically, we get stuck in our head that... I'm a lousy cook. Or, nobody wants to talk to me at parties, or something like that. And one thing that we discover, I think by going into the body, is that we have a lot of ideas about ourselves, and a lot of self judgment, which often have very little to do with reality. But they're absolutely fixed.

(00:54:50) And it's hard to change your story. This is one of the things that I think therapists know — and Buddhist practitioners and teachers know — that even when there's genuine progress, the person will say, "Ah, what's the use. Nothing is changing." Even when they've just told you an amazing story about how they handled a difficult situation differently than they ever could before. And then the next moment they'll say, "But you know, I don't think my meditation, or therapy, is helping." And Harvey and I talk a lot about this, and the difficulty of accepting a new narrative, because it does mean new identity. And that's a change, and that's scary. Even if it's what you want.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:55:33): I was going to ask you, personally... What have you noticed for yourself, if you have experiences to share, in all of your work with the body? Are there ways that you're different now, or transformations that you've experienced?

Anne Klein (00:55:50): Yeah, that's a great question. It's completely... It's a process. I mean, it's not black and white for me, but it's... yeah. Definitely I pay more attention to, or I'm more aware of, what I am actually experiencing. In fact, I've learned that I am very aware of what I'm experiencing, if I open my mind to it. And that a lot of information comes. Not as ideas, but maybe as colors and shapes, or a feeling that I wouldn't have noticed otherwise. And that's very consonant, actually, with how Tibetan practice expresses itself in the body. There are colors, there are feelings, certain parts of the body. So all of that has been very helpful. And I think it's also helped me to become a little less spacey. I'm definitely an air person, you know? Feet barely touch the ground. But that is changing, and I'm grateful for that. I actually can feel the ground now, and this is something very important. I think groundedness is actually crucial for kindness. You know, you can just space out and say, well la-di-da, everything is happy because you're flying in the sky, and you're not noticing anything. So yeah, those kinds of changes.

(00:57:08) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:57:24): One other thing that I know you have studied a lot is the role of the feminine in Buddhism in contemplation. I just wanted to open that door, if there's anything you feel is relevant to the conversation we've had.

Anne Klein (00:57:41): Well, I think it's not accidental that a lot of the people who have been studying and interested in the body — and I would include Claire Petitmengin, really, even though she doesn't frame it that way, because in fact the process of inquiry that she teaches does inevitably involve looking at your body — have been women. And culturally, in Western culture, the guy is the head, the brain, the rational, and women are the body. And feminists have been writing about that since (at least more modern) feminism began. So it's probably not an accident. And it's probably not an accident that a woman in academia doesn't pay attention to her body for a good while, because nobody else is supposed to, anyway. That's kind of not what you're there for. And then it's just kind of so hard in

graduate school, anyhow, to keep everything in your head. So the emphasis goes there. And then after a while, if you're lucky, you're finally like, "No, this is not it. This is not the whole thing."

(00:58:55) And I think the problem is, which I tried to talk about in my book *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen*, is still that women are... So, I think partly what happens maybe in academia, is a reaction against the over-identification, culturally, of women with the body. And we don't want that. And yet that's what makes us women, in a certain way, gender-wise. And that of course is getting even more complicated in this day and age. So it's kind of like a middle way thing for the culture, that maybe women are the canaries in the coal mine on this. To be too in the head is no good. To get assimilated entirely to the value or visual exquisiteness or muscular accomplishments of the body, that's also reductionistic (for a man or a woman).

(00:59:53) So what interested me about thinking about the whole gender-feminine-female nexus of terms is, because I started to see it as rather analogous to what the Buddhists were talking about. In other words, being — the old debate, the essentialist-constructionist conversation among feminists. So feminist said, "Why is it when women are finally getting some voice in the world that all of a sudden we have deconstruction? And we even have Buddhism talking about no self, we don't want to hear about no self — we're about to get one." And so that's a very important point, and it's also a kind of confusion of terms, I think. And so, there are problems with both the essentialists and the constructionists position taken to extremes. And I think that's what I was talking about. They kind of are analogous in Buddhism to the eternalist and nihilistic positions. Like, either you have nothing to go on, or you are essentially a woman (as if there was ever an essential woman, or there's some essential quality that makes one a woman). But still, there is a category that has some meaning.

(01:01:11) And so those kinds of questions, I think, are kind of at the heart of the whole business of self and other. And connection and disconnection. And interdependence. And now that there's more acknowledgement of a spectrum of sexual identities, I mean, that also makes sense. There's a spectrum of everything. And look at how the culture is desperately trying to hold on to the vice of nouning. You know, we have male and female, and that's clean and clear cut, and that's where we used to. And that's what we want, because that's the way it is. But obviously that's not the way it is.

(01:01:54) So, it seems like, okay, I think bottom line — whether we're talking about gender issues, self-other issues, the world getting along issues — if we understand the interdependent arising of all beings on this planet, I think we have to recognize that holding to the vice nouning, of nation and national boundaries, simply can't work anymore. So I think, a bottom line is something like that. That there really isn't a sealed boundary around anything — a nation, a gender... It doesn't mean that everything is just "puff" and you can mix everything together anyway, and willy-nilly without thinking about it. But things are more open and fluid than we tend to recognize. And I suppose that's frightening, but that's the way it is. That's just the way the world is. It's a universe. And even if there are multiple universes, then it's a multi-verse. But there's some kind of huge field that we are all a part of, and affected by, and affect. And somehow we have to figure out at every level — personal relationships, distribution of land and wealth, gender allocation, self-othering — I mean, we just have to figure out how to live in the truth of that. And the good thing is, that now it's not only philosophies and religions that are pointing this out, science is also. And maybe we can kind of get together on this, and make it something that people can really absorb, and live in the light of.

Wendy Hasenkamp (01:03:36): That's a wonderful note to end on, I think. Thank you so much for taking the time — I really enjoyed chatting with you.

Anne Klein ([01:03:43](#)): That was great. Thank you. Thank you for asking me, and putting thought into it, and having these great questions.

Outro – Wendy Hasenkamp ([01:03:55](#)): *This episode was edited and produced by me and Phil Walker. Music on the show is from Blue Dot Sessions and Universal. Show notes and resources for this and other episodes can be found at podcast.mindandlife.org. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on iTunes, and share it with a friend. If something in this conversation sparked insight for you, we'd love to know about it. You can send an email or a voice memo to podcast@mindandlife.org. Mind & Life is a production of the Mind & Life Institute. Visit us at mindandlife.org, where you can learn more about how we bridge science and contemplative wisdom to foster insight and inspire action towards flourishing. There, you can also support our work, including this podcast.*