



BEFRIENDING YOUR BODY

Honor yourself with this meditation to appreciate your senses.

BY ERICA MATHER

We use mirrors, scales, and sizes incorrectly, as a referendum of sorts. As if they can actually measure all of what we are. They can't. Mirrors play funny tricks on us. Or do we play funny tricks on ourselves? Often we see things that no one else sees. When I look at myself, I can see my aging, but other people think I look the same as I did 10 years ago.

I recall my own mother's anguish and sorrow over what she saw reflected back to her in the mirror. In her mind, she was still 26, young and thin. In the mirror, she saw constant disappointment. It broke my heart for her that this was such an unrelenting source of suffering and unhappiness. I longed for her to have a different experience of herself, her life, her aging process. I wish she'd had the tools that I'd found to cope with self-image and ease mental agitation while getting older.

The mirror is the ultimate instrument

of self-perception. What you see reflected in it is usually the state of your mind. Hate yourself? You'll hate what you see. Love yourself? You'll love what you see. It's a metaphor for truth.

To see, in the Buddhist sense, means to look deeply and to therefore understand. To understand means that you comprehend the ways people suffer—and when you do, you have part of the key to relieving that suffering. This is an important element to the Buddhist practice of love called *maitri* (loving-kindness). When we look in the mirror, we have an opportunity to look deeply at ourselves, to understand the ways we suffer, and to do the work, on our own behalf, of relieving our own suffering. We can choose our thoughts about what we see.

The following is a meditation to help you begin to make friends with your body, through its avenue of experiencing the world: the five senses.

- ◆ Grab your journal and title a page "What Delights My Senses."

Answer these questions generously.

1. *What do I love the sight of?*
2. *What do I love the smell of?*
3. *What do I love the sound of?*
4. *What do I love the taste of?*
5. *What do I love the feeling of, on my skin?*

- ◆ Once you've made this list, think about how you can build more of these sensory experiences into your life. Please your body through its senses. If you discover that above all else you love the smell of the ocean, perhaps you'll start prioritizing trips to the beach. Get to know your body and start to take care of it from within. Knowing your body, spending time with it—these are the first steps to making it a safe place for you again. Along the way, you can begin to call your spirit home.

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