

Audio File Transcript

Body Self-Appreciation

This practice is called body self-appreciation. There are three self-appreciation practices here, uniqueness, functionality, and core values, all of which focus less on dissatisfaction and shame and more on positive aspects of our bodies that are commonly overlooked. Seeing the good in our bodies shifts our attitude from aversion to kindness and compassion. So starting with the first approach, uniqueness, what I'd like you to do is to please raise your two forefingers in front of you, maybe six or eight inches apart, and then move them very slowly toward one another. And notice the first moment when your fingers touch. And that is a moment of mindful awareness. But now that your fingers are touching, holding your fingers together, see if you can begin to feel the texture of your fingertips. Gently rubbing them one over the other. So right now you're feeling your own unique fingerprints. No other person in the world has the same fingerprints as you. And actually, your entire body is unique, just like your fingerprints. There has never been nor will there ever be another body like yours in the history of the world. So just take a moment to let that thought sink in. And furthermore, there is no one in this world who is more unique than you. You are truly unique and therefore special just as you are. And if it feels okay to you, please begin to reflect on the combination of physical characteristics that is your unique body. So for example, your skin tone, your eye color, a mole on your cheek or your smile. And as you do this, we're not comparing ourselves to others, we're just recognizing What makes us unique? And now imagine how boring and sad it would be if we all looked the same, like robots created in a factory. Our diversity is beautiful, just like wildflowers in a field.

So please open to the possibility that your own uniqueness is genuinely beautiful. And no more or less beautiful than anyone else on the planet. You are truly unique, and so is everybody else. And that's what makes us beautiful. So this is a contemplation on uniqueness that can start to shift our attention from what's wrong with us to what's good, allows us to appreciate. The second approach is functionality. So let's take a moment and please reflect on how well your body is working in this very moment. So the human body consists of 37.2 trillion cells, and those cells are continuously disintegrating and being regenerated throughout our lives. And we don't know it. And even When you're in pain or overcome with worry, in that moment, most everything in your body is actually working perfectly. As Jon Kabat-Zinn famously said, as long as you're breathing, there's more right with you than wrong with you, no matter how ill or how despairing you may be feeling in any

given moment. Let's take a moment and reflect on the many body functions that we all have that are working really well right now independently of how we feel about our body. So what functions are vital to your health and your well-being that you tend to overlook? Can you think of a few? And to give you some ideas, right now your eyelids blink, your saliva flows, your lungs are bringing air into your body, your heart is beating, your nerves are communicating, your thoughts are coming up, and Even your DNA, super tiny things, are replicating perfectly. Maybe you can even take a moment to feel some of these processes. For example, maybe you can sense the saliva in your mouth, feel your heart beating or your chest breathing. Feeling the wonder of all that is working so well. And if you feel any gratitude or appreciation for all that's going well in your body, without any effort on your own, take a few moments to linger with the feeling of gratitude or appreciation. Just let yourself feel it. And it's sometimes helpful to reinforce insight into functionality, to take some notes about what's working, despite the many ways that our bodies may be disappointing or failing us. Because in this moment, most everything in your body is working perfectly. So shifting from how our body looks or aspects of our functioning disappoints us. Shifting that attention to all the many things that are working well again is a approach to body self-appreciation. Finally, core values. So as long as we're alive, not only are the vast majority of our body processes working really well, but our bodies themselves are always available to help us to live a meaningful life as long as there is breath in our bodies. That is, we can always live more closely with our core values. So what are core values? They're guiding principles that guide our decisions and our behaviors across time. So for example, some examples of core values are compassion, generosity, honesty, fairness, integrity, gratitude, happiness, safety, tolerance, loyalty, courage. Core values are what we believe in most deeply. Some people even say they're who we are. So what are your core values? Maybe just take a moment and write down your, say, top five core values, what you live for, what gives energy and meaning to your life.

So the interesting thing is, no matter what the status of our bodies might be, we can always find a way to express our core values, even if it's a very small way, and thereby have a meaningful life. We just need to be creative. For example, I know the story of a man who installed roofs on houses, and he fell and he became disabled. And he was quite depressed until he connected with the core value of community and being a part of a team. So then, even though he was disabled, he found work as an inner-city youth counselor in charge of team building. And it changed his life. He reconnected with his core values. Or there could be a woman who's unable to conceive a child and has a core value of family. And this person then could go on and perhaps have a satisfying life as a favorite aunt or even a beloved mentor at work. So our core values give direction and meaning to our lives. So the question is, is your body, or shame about your body, getting in the way of living your life more fully? If so, your core values can show you how to live a more meaningful life. So for example, would

you like to find a different way of doing something you're already doing, at work or at home? Or do you want to have the courage to do something entirely different, to spend your time in a very different way to make sure that what is most meaningful to you finds expression in your life? So please take a moment to think about that and if so you can write down some notes for yourself. The message being that as long as there is life in our bodies, we can still live a meaningful life. We just need to be creative. So before we close, perhaps just taking a moment to reflect on whether any of these three approaches, reflecting on uniqueness of our bodies, functionality of our bodies, as well as our core values, did any of them help you to appreciate your body a little more? In fact, right now, do you feel a little more positive? about your body after doing this exercise. And if you do, you may wonder if body self-appreciation can have a lasting impact on your life or is it just a momentary thing like just now. But you should know that research shows that body appreciation exercises definitely have an immediate positive effect on mood and body image. But also, longer term changes are very likely to occur when these exercises are practiced over time. In other words, remembering your uniqueness, remembering functionality, connecting with core values. Practicing them over time in a way that they become integrated into your daily life. And you may say, which practice should I do? And the answer is whatever you find most appealing. And thank you for your practice.