

Based on the book "An Altar in the World" by Barbara Brown Taylor
Week Two Reading - Chapters 3 and 4

Week Two Discussion Questions

"The miracle is not to walk on water but on the earth." - Thich Nhat Hanh

1. Take a few minutes to see if anyone had an aha or insight when engaging the homework practices from week one.
2. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the physical body, in which we all live. Taylor begins with a story about being a guest speaker in a church where she noticed a painting of Jesus and shocked a member of the altar guild by stating that he had no body hair.
What role do you think religion has played in the historic denigration of the body/flesh? Do you believe it gives rise to dualism of body and spirit? Please discuss.
3. Taylor addresses cultural obsession with body image by confessing "that it is time to do a better job of wearing my skin with gratitude instead of loathing". What is your relationship with your own body? Do you usually wear your skin with loathing or with gratitude? Can you identify an error belief that you hold about your physical body?
4. She goes on to write, "This is no small thing, in a culture so confused about the body that most Americans cannot separate the physical from the sexual." How do you differentiate between the physical and sexual? What do you think are the personal and cultural risks of failing to differentiate and uphold the two?
5. Describe a time when you have recognized your body as the temple of the spirit, "your soul's address"? (P. 38)
6. Most of us, Taylor writes, "walk without really thinking about what we are doing". Have you experienced walking as a mindfulness practice? Describe an ordinary task or routine that you have used as a mindfulness/presence practice?
7. As time allows, please share any other insights, feelings or observations you have regarding this week's reading and discussion.

Notes:

Week Two Practices

1. Begin and end your day by blessing your physical body. Practice seeing it as beautifully made, holy and integral; a perfect container and companion for your spirit.
2. Our minds seem to be set up to go into autopilot for those actions that we repeat over and over. This mindfulness practice will help you (1) notice what "autopilot" is like for you, and (2) return to the present moment - which brings you into Presence.
 - When you go to brush your teeth, instead of being lost in thought the whole time, gently bring your attention back to the body each time you realize the mind has wandered off. What can you see? What can you hear? What's the color of the toothpaste? The smell? What flavor is it? You don't need to think too much, it's more a case of being present to notice all these things.
 - Next, gently focus your attention on the sensations, just as you would concentrate on your breathing during meditation. Be mindful of your arm moving and the sound of the toothbrush against your teeth. Feel the bristles against your gums, against your teeth. At first glance this might sound a bit silly, but brushing your teeth is an especially good activity for practicing mindfulness, precisely because it's so repetitive. Like meditation, it offers a very defined framework within which be present and engage the Presence.

Reading for week 3 - Chapters 5 and 6

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