

Emotions and The Body in Buddhist Contemplative  
Practice and Mindfulness-Based Therapy

Padmasiri de Silva

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Body in Buddhist  
Contemplative  
Practice and  
Mindfulness-Based  
Therapy

Pathways of Somatic Intelligence

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*The willingness to pay deep attention to the inner wisdom and the movement of your body is a fully sufficient teacher to move you into a state of utter wholeness and aliveness.*

Risa F. Kaparo, *Awakening Somatic Intelligence* (2012, 6)

*To my family*

*Working through a tough winter at my desk, my family gave me the warmth and affection I needed and I am grateful to Maneesh, Adeesh, Chandeesh, Harini, Ananga and Sharon, Ishka, Ashan, Keisha, and Ged and Novah.*

*I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to the loving memory of my wife, Kalyani and the memory of my beloved parents.*

*With gratitude*

*To Prof. Venerable Kammai Dhammasami and the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University, Myanmar for sponsorship of the MYANMAR LECTURES (2012–2016)*

*To three great architects of pain management:*

*Jon Kabat-Zinn, Vidyamala Burch and Risa Kaparo*

*Somatic learning is the art and practice of embodied mindfulness*

## PREFACE

I wish to present the thematic relationships of the different chapters, as applied to the main objectives of this book. Somatic intelligence has been described by Risa F. Kaparo, whose specialty is pain and trauma management, as the ‘art and practice of embodied mindfulness’, or in ordinary language, the wisdom of the body. The centrality of the body is carried to another strand of this study: embodied emotions, theories of emotions and the use of mindfulness-based contemplative practice in managing afflictive emotions and developing positive emotions.

Somatic intelligence is directly related to the body. Thus, together with pain and trauma management, the sub-theme of this study refers to the emotions and the body in Buddhist contemplative practice and mindfulness-based counselling. Emotion theories focussed on the mind and the body have been a subject of my research for many years and this illuminates issues that emerge in this study. My work was partly stimulated by Howard Gardner’s ground breaking study, *Multiple Intelligence* in which he claims that bodily kinaesthetic intelligence in relation to the body is a neglected subject. Thus, this study is partly a response to Gardner’s request for research in this field. The subject of embodied emotions against the background of a historical perspective is presented through the classical emotion theories of Charles Darwin and William James, the more contemporary studies by Paul Ekman and Antonio Damasio, the neurological studies of Daniel Siegel and Richard Davidson, and the philosophical analysis of Jesse Prinz. So, I am not

restricting the intelligence of the body to pain and trauma management but to the intelligence of the body in emotion management. The body in Buddhist contemplative practice is presented with a highly focussed in-depth study of the emotion of disgust, the first of its kind in Buddhist studies. The study was highly acclaimed for its originality as an important contribution to the emerging field of moral psychology at the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) conference in Myanmar. While I present the emotions mainly from a *somatogenic* perspective, in dealing with theories of emotions, I also briefly introduce the *ideogenic* perspective of Sigmund Freud who said that his ‘clients acted as if anatomy does not exist’, and that hysterics suffer due to *ideas*.

The subject of ethics and the moral dimensions of managing the passions has been elaborated into this study. An anonymous reviewer of my original publishing proposal mentioned that Gardner (1993) had written in a preface to a later edition of his book that he had neglected the subject of moral intelligence, and requested that I explore this field. Chapters on bondage and passions, moral pain and moral indignation have been written as a response to this request, though the request is strongly linked to emotion studies. If a librarian wishes to classify this book, somatic intelligence, emotion studies and mindfulness practice are possible thematic labels. My previous book (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) offers a comprehensive background to Buddhist psychology and mindfulness-based therapies. I conclude this preface with a quotation from Jesse Prinz who summarizes the meaning of the term ‘somatic’:

Emotion researchers tend to use the term ‘somatic’ broadly. On a narrow use, the ‘somatic system’ refers to the part of the nervous system that receives information about the muscles of the body. In this context, however, the term ‘somatic’ encompasses any part of the body. Somatic states include states of the respiratory system, circulatory system, digestive system, musculoskeletal system, and endocrine system. A somatic change can be a change of facial expression, an increase in heart rate, a secretion of hormones, and so on.

William James thought that the range of bodily states underlying emotional experience is much more inclusive. James talks of changes in the viscera, facial expressions, and instrumental action—everything from tremors and tears to striking out in rage. It is this somatic feeling theory

that was developed by the neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio. This book will specifically focus on the somatogenic dimension of emotions or the body in emotions.

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## REFERENCE

Gardner, H. (1993). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligence*. London: Fontana Press.

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