

Kāya (5 of 5) The Liberated Body

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We come to the last talk in this five-part series on the different ways to experience our body, the *kāya*. The experience we have of our body is very much influenced by the states and activities of our mind, our thoughts, judgments, and attachments. As those shift and change, then the experience of the body changes as well.

When we practice meditation, the different states and ways the mind works can give us a different experience of the body. Which experience is the true experience of the body? The most common way you feel and know your body, is that how you really are, the true body?

In fact, I think that there is no basis for deciding whether the karmic body is the accurate body or the real body. It is accurate enough as a karmic body. That is what the karmic body is – experiencing the body through the lens or mind states that are caught in the world of karma. As the mind becomes free of that world, relaxes, and settles in, then sometimes we start feeling the joy body – wonderful feelings of suffusing joy or well-being, contentment. As practice deepens, then the tranquil body becomes more evident. The body is very peaceful and equanimous.

As mindfulness develops, we have the insight body – the body as experienced through observation or perception that is very present and attentive. This body is freed of the labels, ideas, and concepts we overlay on top of experience. Part of the value of seeing more the stream and the flow of the body – free of all the concepts and ideas – is to loosen up the attachment to the body, attachment to self in relationship to the body, and all attachments.

As we release our attachments – as clinging, grasping, striving, resisting, judging, bias, fear, and hate finally quiet down – the experience of the body changes dramatically. We can have the experience of the liberated body. The liberated body is the body that is not entangled in the mind. The experience of a liberated body is a bit a product of the mind, but of the mind that is free, non-clinging, at ease, and peaceful. The result is that the body feels much more at ease. It feels lighter. It feels more refreshed.

It does not have to live with the weight and the stress of the puppeteer, the mind that may be constantly thinking, reacting, being afraid, desirous, angry, and all the ways this seeps into the body. Certainly in muscles being tense and tight. Also in stress chemicals that are released into the body from stressful activities of the mind.

As the body gets freed of all this, it tends to have a feeling of more unity, flow, and ease. It has a certain kind of delight, joy, lightness, and weightlessness. It feels almost like grace to move an arm, walk, or do anything. Maybe partly because it is a wonder, a surprise, and a delight to be present for all that.

The liberated body is one where we do not impose on the body all the issues of identification: me, myself, and mine – this is who I am. We do not put on the body expectations that it should be different or have judgments and ideas that interfere with the natural functioning of the body. A liberated body is a body that has harmony to it. A body with all the parts of it as they are, are just fine as they are, in and of themselves.

A few days ago, I injured my finger a little bit. It is a small cut. You know, I would like it to heal properly. But my finger does not mind. My finger does not know it should be any different. It is just a natural way in which this world exists at this moment. There is a finger with a cut in it.

From the point of view of our body, whether we are bald, have long hair, thin hair, curly hair, kinky hair, or straight hair, it is all just fine. From the inside out, it just is what it is. Just like looking at the twisted or bent branch of a tree, you would not say, "That branch is all wrong." It is all the way that nature works. The way nature grows – all kind of a marvel.

To give that kind of freedom to the body. Let the body be the body. Let it be the natural event that it is. We do not identify this as *my* body. We do not define ourselves by it. At the same time, we care for it. It is just as worthy of our care and love as some other person or animal. Some of you love your pet. I do not know if you should see the body as your pet exactly. But the body could be something that you love and care for with respect. It is not an afterthought. The body is not just a convenient vehicle for getting you from one place to the other. The body is a valued, vital, important part of this whole process.

I wanted to read a couple of quotes from the ancient Buddhist texts. One is from the verses of the elder monks. I delight in this little poem. I see it as a poem about a liberated body.

Hey, my body is light. Having been touched with vast joy and happiness, my body feels like it's floating, like cotton blowing in the wind.

Here is another quote, from the Buddha himself, describing a luminous body.

I immerse the body in the mind and the mind in the body. And when I dwell having entered upon a blissful perception and a buoyant perception in regard to the body, on that occasion, my body becomes more buoyant, malleable, wieldy, and luminous.

These are all different ways of experiencing the body. The karmic body is not the only body to experience. We want to free ourselves from the idea that this is the real body – the singular real body. It is real enough. We have to respect the karmic body and take care of it on its own terms. But there are other ways of experiencing the body. So we free ourselves up from attachment or fixity in thinking, “This is how the body is and I have to constantly negotiate, struggle, and work with this.”

As the mind meditates – as the mind becomes freer, more concentrated, and more insightful – the experience of the body changes. As the experience of the body changes, in return, it changes the mind. There is kind of a reciprocal relationship that goes on here. As you begin feeling the lightness of the body, the freedom of the body, the joy, the tranquility of the body, that is a lesson for the mind. That is a teaching to the mind of what is possible. It is a reminder to the mind, “Yes, here, this is a good place to dwell – to be centered and relaxed here,” as opposed to being carried away on the freight trains of thoughts.

It is fascinating to me how dynamic, complex, and sophisticated this human body is. So many systems are working – so many complicated chemical, neurological, and mechanical systems are operating – that any one of us, even with a Ph.D. in engineering and biochemistry, simply could not track and manage it all. The amazing, complicated thing that happens, mostly on its own.

In addition to that, the mind itself is a wondrous thing. Most of the mind happens offstage. We do not really know all the complicated ways in which the mind works. In our conscious self, I do not think any of us is smart enough to direct, manage, and supervise all the ways in which the brain, the mind, and the body work.

The part that we have some say in – the part that we get attached to, cling to, and get preoccupied with – is actually a very small sliver of who we are in our totality. It is remarkable how much trouble we can get into, in this little slice that we are conscious of, where we take it to be: “This is who I am, and this is what I have to do. It’s all up to me, and I have to navigate and do all this.”

This practice of ours can teach us what it is like to let that little sliver – the little subset of our whole that is the conscious part – rest, let that be at peace. Then it can be informed and guided by this huge percentage of who we are that we are not so conscious about.

That is where living a dharma life – living a life that is ethical, peaceful, not caught up in greed, hate, and delusion – we come into this beautiful harmony of the dharmic body, the *dharmakāya* – the liberated body operating in the fullness of all its systems, integrated, harmonious and free.

Thank you for today and this week. I hope this has given you an interesting perspective on your body. If what I have talked about today is of interest to you, maybe through this weekend, you could spend some time meditating, walking, and doing simple things with your body. See if you can intuit or feel what a liberated body is like. What is your body like when the body is not just peaceful or tranquil but has a sense of operating free of attachments, free of clinging?

Thank you.