

Kāya (3 of 5) The Tranquil Body

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

tranquility, mind, activated, puppeteer, brain

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The topic is tranquility. The theme for the week is different ways to experience our body. It is possible to have the body be felt as a tranquil body, a peaceful body. This is a remarkable feeling of health and well-being. Everything feels right here. It is an experience of the body that comes when we are not disturbed or in conflict with anything. We are not spinning out thoughts and ideas.

It is a quieting of the mind, of the mental activities that are used to relate to the body. These different bodies I am talking about this week have a lot to do with the state of the mind, the activity of the mind. I have seen diagrams of the brain that show what parts of the brain are the biggest or most active. They show that when people do the same activity over and over again, that part of the brain grows. I do not know if it physically gets bigger or more activated.

Consider someone whose profession is typing – they spend their whole day typing – somehow the brain centers having to do with the fingers grow bigger. The brain centers that are involved with different parts of our body can grow and shrink depending on the usage we have of it. As the activity of that center grows, there is more orientation to feel, sense, experience, and know that part of the body. If those mental activities, the mental centers, get quiet and calm, then the ways in which the mind constructs and remembers the body fade as well.

We can have a very strong image of a part of our body. I recently clipped my fingernails, and I might be self-conscious that I did not clip them just right. Maybe they are a little uneven. Here I am with a few hundred people watching me and maybe noticing my fingernails. My whole world starts thinking about my fingernails. The fingernail part of the brain – probably other centers too – becomes bigger and more activated. In my mind, I have an image of my fingernails, and I am oriented around the image of it and the impact that it has on other people.

I am operating under an image of fingernails. If I let my mind become quiet and calm, then the part of the mind that is busy and activated thinking about fingernails – imagining what they look like, concerned about their shape and their smoothness – all goes quiet. In my experience, fingernails disappear from awareness. I sit here quietly meditating with my breathing, meditating with my torso, grounded, feeling centered, and quiet. For 30 minutes, I do not even think about my fingernails. In a certain kind of way, in experience, they do not exist. Of course, they exist, but I am not experiencing them. They fade away from attention.

In the same way, as the mind gets quieter and quieter, the body begins to recede from its defined definitions, from the image that we carry with us. Subconsciously, we carry images, ideas, projections, and priorities about the body. We are in conflict with the body. We are adjusting to it. We are reacting to the pain and pleasure in the body. There is a lot of subliminal, subconscious, and conscious activity going on in the brain concerning this body that we have.

As the mental activities quiet down, the body begins to feel more calm and peaceful. It is almost like the puppeteer in the brain has taken a vacation and is not pulling, tugging, directing, awakening, and being nosy about all the different things going on. Lots of things are going on in the body, but the body is just left radically alone.

Not obstructing, not interfering, not activating, not thinking about the body – leaving the body alone in a nice meditative way – allows the body to move towards a kind of health. The body has a tremendous movement towards homeostasis, to harmony, to settledness, to release. The body itself wants to relax, to relax the tensions that are being held there.

As the mind gets quieter, our relationship with the body shifts and changes. The way we experience the body changes. The body can have a very refreshing, peaceful feeling to it. The tranquility can be a feeling of suffused tranquility throughout the body or suffused coolness or refreshment, nice, and peaceful.

It is a more peaceful state than the bliss body – the joy body – that we talked about yesterday. That is still a bit activated compared to now. That quiets down as well. There is not exactly any solid place in the body. It is more like a glow of peace – a glow of tranquility, of refreshment.

It is a very different way of experiencing ourselves. It is a tremendous gift to the body when we no longer have the mind preoccupied with it, reacting to it, defining it, or having an image of it. Some people find that the edges of the body begin to dissolve. There is no clear sense of the boundary between the body and the air around it. The boundary itself, the shape of our body, is part of the mental construct, the ideas the mind has that are based a lot on memory.

If we drop into the feeling body without all the ideas and reactivities, the feeling body moves towards settledness, peacefulness, and calm. It only gets activated if the puppeteer pulls the strings – if the cook stirs the pot. If we are not pulling strings or stirring the pot, the body can go quiet and peaceful.

It is remarkable to feel the tremendous value, the wealth in a sense, that comes with this very deep sense of peace and tranquility. From the vantage point of that state of tranquility, peace, and calm, it is possible to have a clearer sense that many of the ordinary pursuits we have in our lives, especially if they involve tension, anxiety, ambition, or greed, are so much less valuable than the rich, peaceful, texture of this tranquility, peace, and calm.

This does not mean that we have to always be tranquil and calm. It does mean that we have a lesson – a dramatic contrast between different ways of being. We can begin appreciating how the puppeteer works, how the mind works in activating the body, prioritizing the body, defining the body, or being concerned with the body in such a way that the tranquility is lost.

It is a beautiful, marvelous thing to have this shift in the body from the karmic body to the joy body to the tranquility body. The experience of the body, the energies, the sensations, these qualities of well-being and tranquility seem to emerge from the inside out. They are not dependent on the ways that we relate to the body from the outside in. Individuals, families, and societies have tremendously painful attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and relationships with the outer body. How it looks in terms of size, shape, color, race, and all kinds of things can bring people a lot of suffering.

The body's experience of itself from the inside out – what emerges peacefully when we are not tamping it down or constricting it with all these outside in kind of concerns, preoccupations, and obstacles. What emerges or flows from the inside out can feel like it is really independent of the outside in concerns.

There is a liberation from outside in. There is a liberation from the societal pressures on the body – the judgments and ideas. Just to have the body have its own experience from the inside out, where its own flow of energy, its flow of sensations can settle and open to joy and tranquility, is a powerful lesson in freedom. It is a powerful lesson in an alternative way of living that is not outside in. It is not caught up in thoughts, ideas, and images of how the body should be.

So the tranquil body. You might see what you can do throughout the day to let the body be more tranquil. Maybe it is how you sit in a chair. You can sit in the chair in a way that the body is more settled and easier to relax – in a tranquil way. It is not necessarily slouching in a chair. I do not know if that gives us the most tranquility. Where do you feel the most calm, settled, rooted, and grounded?

Today, as you walk, work, talk, and drive – look and see how you can do these things with some modicum of calm, peace, or tranquility. See what you learn in the process. Certainly, you can learn what takes you away from the tranquility. For this exercise today, learn about the benefits of living a tranquil life.

Thank you very much. I look forward to continuing this series tomorrow.