

Dharmakaya

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Dharmakaya means the Truth-Body or Body of Dharma. In the particular teaching presented by H.P. Blavatsky in *The Voice of the Silence*, it names the formless consummation of spiritual realization, in which consciousness is merged in Universal Consciousness. Its defining emphasis is freedom from every attribute and earthly relation. *Sambhogakaya* concerns a vesture retaining perfected knowledge and spiritual fruition; *Nirmanakaya* concerns the compassionate presence retained for helping humanity. These distinctions place *Dharmakaya* within a demanding question about the purpose of liberation.

The word body can mislead us from the beginning. We ordinarily imagine something with an outline, occupying a place and carrying a recognizable identity. Blavatsky deliberately interrupts that expectation. Her explanatory note calls *Dharmakaya* no body at all, describing it as an ideal breath. The image loosens our habit of treating every reality as an object. We are being asked to consider a realization whose character cannot be measured by the boundaries of an embodied personality.

Dharma includes law, truth and the teaching that sustains a spiritual life. Joined with *kaya*, it directs thought toward the consummation of truth rather than a beautiful covering acquired by an individual. Someone may possess accurate information while living in contradiction to it. The expression Truth-Body points beyond that division between what is known and how consciousness is. It should therefore make spiritual language more exacting for us, beginning with the truths we already understand well enough to practise.

The three vestures together are called *Trikaya*. In reading them here, we must preserve the context of the source. Blavatsky explicitly distinguishes the esoteric account she presents from other explanations of Buddhist terms. Her contrast between final absorption and continuing help is central to her ethical teaching. It would be careless to turn that contrast into a definition binding upon every Buddhist school, or to assume that all uses of *Dharmakaya* describe withdrawal from compassion in precisely this way.

Within *The Voice of the Silence*, however, the contrast is unmistakable. One who enters the *Dharmakaya* condition leaves behind earthly relations. An Adept who would continue to aid humanity renounces that consummation, retains the great knowledge associated with *Sambhogakaya*, and remains in the *Nirmanakaya* vesture. The distinction concerns beings of extraordinary spiritual attainment. It is not a description of the ordinary choices between a quiet

evening and helping a neighbour, although those choices can disclose something about our motives.

The grandeur of *Dharmakaya* should not be diminished to make its ethical setting easier. Liberation from the limitations of separative existence is no trivial achievement. Nor does formlessness mean annihilation. The mind accustomed to objects may mistake the absence of its familiar supports for sheer nonexistence. Professor Iyer's discussion of enlightenment cautions that the limited cannot comprehend the unlimited by enlarging its own limitations. We can acknowledge the inadequacy of our categories without replacing careful inquiry with an empty assertion of mystery.

A second mistake would be to imagine *Dharmakaya* as personal immortality, with our favourite traits preserved in a perfect environment. The teaching asks us to question precisely that possessive expectation. What seeks survival unchanged? What wants certainty that its preferences will remain important forever? Such questions bring an exalted term close to self-study. They do not require us to deny the value of individual effort. They ask whether effort serves truth or merely protects an increasingly refined picture of ourselves.

Consider a person who has spent years becoming a trusted adviser. Others value this person's understanding, and the role has become a source of quiet pride. Then a younger colleague recognizes an error in the advice. The immediate temptation is to preserve the image of wisdom. A more truthful response is to examine the correction, acknowledge what is valid, and repair whatever followed from the mistake. The person loses no real understanding by doing so. What loosens is the need to possess the appearance of infallibility.

This is a modest exercise in non-appropriation, not an experience of *Dharmakaya*. Its relevance lies in the direction of motive. A truth cannot illuminate us while we insist that it must first protect our reputation. The distinction between realization and an admired image of realization becomes less abstract when a useful correction costs us something. We begin to discover that freedom may involve relinquishing a cherished self-description while becoming more dependable to others.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception extends this inquiry beyond the private seeker. A doctrine of liberation belongs within a world of interdependent lives. We can ask what our freedom makes possible for those who remain troubled, uninstructed or afraid. The Voice places the prospect of bliss beside the cry of the world. Its question changes the horizon of aspiration: the concern is no longer only how far consciousness can rise, but how the fruits of understanding may serve beings.

Human Solidarity gives that wider horizon a practical field. A student who admires spiritual freedom can become less possessive of knowledge, more willing to teach patiently, and less eager to withdraw when cooperation becomes inconvenient. None of this confers an exalted status. It makes the doctrine bear fruit where responsibility already exists. Professor Iyer's account of the Masters emphasizes that they assume responsibility without appropriating another person's free will. Help should strengthen a person's capacity to act, rather than make that person an extension of the helper.

Detachment also needs care in this setting. The quiet required for reflection can support service, while a refusal to feel anything may simply conceal fear. We need not abandon solitude or deny the need for rest in order to honour compassion. The useful question is what those intervals restore. Do they return us to life with greater patience and clearer judgment, or become a permanent explanation for avoiding every difficult human claim? Honest answers require attention to circumstances, not a harsh rule applied indiscriminately.

The same care applies when teaching someone who asks about liberation. A description pitched beyond the listener's present understanding may impress without clarifying. A more responsible explanation begins with the particular question, distinguishes what the source says from our interpretation, and allows an uncertainty to remain open. Reverence then appears as accuracy and patience. This is one way to keep a profound term from becoming an ornament of authority. The teacher's task is to make inquiry possible, including the freedom to ask again when an answer has not yet become clear.

Meditation upon *Dharmakaya* can therefore begin with reverence for the limits of picturing. Every imagined scene of ultimate attainment remains a scene produced by the mind. We may let such images fall quiet and examine the impulse that keeps producing them. This is preparation in humility. It leaves room for study, ethical discipline and the slow clarification of motive. There is no need to announce that the unconditioned has been realized because, for a moment, thought seemed still.

The image of an ideal breath remains with us because it resists possession. Nothing can be enclosed in the fist of spiritual ambition. Yet the accompanying teaching of the compassionate vestures prevents that spaciousness from becoming an excuse to forget the world. *Dharmakaya* directs thought toward truth beyond our familiar boundaries. Contemplated beside the *Nirmanakaya* ideal, it asks that whatever measure of freedom becomes ours should deepen the generosity with which we place understanding at the service of life.

Glossary

Anahata — Unstruck; in Professor Iyer's passage, the deathless heart-centre associated with the Soundless Sound.

Arhat — A being who has attained an advanced stage of spiritual realization; *Arhats* is the plural. Blavatsky uses the term in her explanation of the compassionate vestures.

Attribute — A quality assigned to something; in these essays, any predicate that would limit the Absolute if applied literally.

Avidya — Fundamental ignorance or mistaken identification, from which the other afflictions arise.

Bodhisattva — A being on the path of awakening and compassion. The sources distinguish human, metaphysical and hierarchical uses of the term.

Buddha — An awakened one; the title refers here particularly to Gautama and, more broadly, to perfected spiritual wisdom.

Chitkala — A ray or spark of consciousness; Professor Iyer associates it here with the developed disciple's inward perception.

Consummation — Completion or fulfillment; here, the culmination of spiritual development.

Dharma — Sustaining law, duty, or right relation; the precise meaning depends upon the context.

Dharmakaya — The Truth-Body; in Blavatsky's cited account, formless realization beyond attributes and earthly relations.

Dialectic — A disciplined inquiry through distinctions and related or opposed ideas; used in the quotation concerning wisdom and voidness.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception — Widening the frame of understanding to include more relations, perspectives, and responsibilities.

Esoteric — Concerning an inward or deeper teaching; the essays identify Blavatsky's particular interpretation rather than attributing it to every Buddhist school.

Finitizing — Reducing a conception to fixed limits; the quotation questions the mind's habitual narrowing of a universal idea.

Fruition — The fulfillment or result of development; used of spiritual attainment and its relation to compassionate service.

Human Solidarity — Shared human dignity and interdependence, expressed through considerate responsibility for others.

Initiation — A deepening of spiritual knowledge and corresponding capacities, distinguished from an outward ceremony alone.

Kaya — Body or vesture; in the present teaching, a designation for a mode of spiritual being, not an ordinary physical garment.

Kwan Yin — The figure of compassion called the Mother of Mercy and Knowledge; also the Divine Voice in the Theosophical symbolism discussed here.

Latency — A condition in which a possibility or power is present without differentiated expression; latent is the related adjective.

Mahakaruna — Great Compassion; unconditional compassion inseparable from *Prajna* or spiritual wisdom in Professor Iyer's teaching.

Mahat — Universal Mind or cosmic intelligence in Theosophical philosophy.

Motive — The inward purpose of an act, distinct from its outward appearance or the praise it receives.

Nada — Spiritual sound; associated with the Soundless Sound in *The Voice of the Silence*.

Nirmanakaya — A transformed vesture; in Blavatsky's esoteric account, the condition retained by an Adept who remains available to help humanity after renouncing final nirvanic fruition.

Nirvana — Spiritual liberation; the quoted teaching considers its relation to *samsara* and the continuing practice of compassion.

Non-appropriation — Refraining from treating insight, service or attainment as a possession that establishes personal superiority.

Personality — The temporary personal constitution, memories, and roles of a particular life, distinguished from the enduring individuality.

Plane — A level or mode of being or consciousness; not necessarily a location in physical space.

Prajna — Spiritual or intuitive insight; its precise level depends on the passage.

Prajnaparamita — The perfection of wisdom; the quoted passage refers to Buddhist texts exploring wisdom and its inseparability from compassion.

Renunciation — Relinquishment of selfish claims or attachment, so that thought and action can serve a wider purpose.

Sambhogakaya — The Body of Enjoyment or spiritual fruition; Blavatsky associates it with perfected knowledge and additional perfections, including freedom from earthly concerns.

Transcendence — Going beyond a particular set of limitations; transcendent and transcendental describe what exceeds ordinary conditioned experience.

Trikaya — The three Buddhist vestures: *Dharmakaya*, *Sambhogakaya* and *Nirmanakaya*. The essays follow Blavatsky's particular esoteric explanation.

Ubiquity — Presence everywhere; used of suffering in the quoted discussion of the vow.

Vesture — A robe or covering; in the three-kaya teaching, a symbolic designation of spiritual being or condition.

Vidya — Knowledge or wisdom; here, spiritual understanding or illumination.

Voidness — Freedom from limiting or separative conceptions in the quoted contemplative teaching; not merely vacant physical space.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Seven Portals", *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 54.

"Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt thou be saved and hear the whole world cry?"

Meditation thought: The cry of the world is placed beside the prospect of bliss. Let the question widen aspiration toward the beings whose suffering still calls for help.

2. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Two Paths", *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 25.

"Know, O beginner, this is the Open PATH, the way to selfish bliss, shunned by the Bodhisattvas of the "Secret Heart," the Buddhas of Compassion."

Meditation thought: The contrast belongs to the ethical teaching of The Voice. Preserve its source context while examining the attraction of a peace reserved entirely for oneself.

3. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Two Paths", *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 25.

"To don *Nirmanakaya*'s humble robe is to forego eternal bliss for Self, to help on man's salvation."

Meditation thought: The humble robe directs admiration toward service without display. Consider one useful capacity that could be offered with less dependence upon recognition.

4. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Two Paths", *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 25.

"No longer can the perfect Buddhas, who don the *Dharmakaya* glory, help man's salvation. Alas! shall SELVES be sacrificed to Self; mankind, unto the weal of Units?"

Meditation thought: Blavatsky's sharp question challenges exclusive fruition. Contemplate its ethical force without turning it into a judgment upon every different Buddhist use of the vestures.

5. R.N. Iyer, "The Pledge of Kwan Yin", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II, pp. 163–164.

"A vow is sacred; it must germinate in silence. It invokes sacred speech, but it must ripen through suffering. Where the vow involves a recognition of the ubiquity of human suffering and where one chooses to make one's own suffering meaningful and creative for a larger purpose, the vow has self-correction built into it."

Meditation thought: A vow remains educative when suffering brings renewed attention to its purpose. Quiet self-correction is more dependable than the excitement of a grand declaration.

6. R.N. Iyer, "The Pledge of Kwan Yin", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II, p. 164.

"There is a latent Kwan Yin in every human being. It is the voice of conscience at the commonest level. It is the *Chitkala* of the developed disciple. At the highest level it is *Nada*, the Voice of the Silence, the Soundless Sound, that which is comprehended in initiation, and ceaselessly reverberates in the *Anahata*, the deathless centre of the human body, transformed into a divine temple."

Meditation thought: The passage distinguishes several levels of compassionate voice. Begin with fidelity to conscience while respecting the greater conditions of discipleship and initiation.

7. R.N. Iyer, "The Message of Buddha", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 227.

"Meditation upon voidness and fullness can increase the seeker's insight into the dialectic of transcendental wisdom in the *prajnaparamita* texts as well as reveal the indissoluble connection between wisdom (*prajna*) and unconditional compassion (*mahakaruna*)."

Meditation thought: Wisdom and compassion belong together. Understanding becomes more exact when it remains attentive to suffering, and help becomes wiser when it welcomes discrimination.

8. R.N. Iyer, "Enlightenment", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 236.

"Ultimately, there can be no true comprehension of enlightenment or of the path outside of enlightenment itself. Mortality cannot judge of immortality; *avidya* cannot conceive of *vidya*. The insubstantial self of mayavic matter cannot encompass the boundlessness of the Real. The shadow cannot comprehend the light that casts it."

Meditation thought: The limited cannot measure the unlimited by its own boundaries. Humility keeps an exalted idea available for study without converting it into a personal claim.

9. R.N. Iyer, "Transcendence and Transformation", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 352.

"It is impossible for the mind to reach the plane of *Mahat* or the universal mind until it is willing to forego its addiction to finitizing tendencies."

Meditation thought: The higher possibility asks for a wider standpoint. Study can prepare that widening when it loosens a habit of reducing every truth to personal concerns.

10. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Seven Portals", explanatory note, *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 54.

"The *Dharmakaya* body is that of a complete Buddha, i.e., no body at all, but an ideal breath: Consciousness merged in the Universal Consciousness, or Soul devoid of every attribute. Once a *Dharmakaya*, an Adept or Buddha leaves behind every possible relation with, or thought for this earth."

Meditation thought: The ideal breath resists the image of an object with boundaries. Let the passage loosen spiritual possessiveness while retaining its precise context in the three vestures.

11. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Seven Portals", explanatory note, *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 54.

"Thus, to be enabled to help humanity, an Adept who has won the right to Nirvana, "renounces the *Dharmakaya* body" in mystic parlance; keeps, of the *Sambhogakaya*, only the great and complete knowledge, and remains in his *Nirmanakaya* body. The Esoteric School teaches that Gautama Buddha with several of his *Arhats* is such a *Nirmanakaya*, higher than whom, on account of the great renunciation and sacrifice to mankind, there is none known."

Meditation thought: The helping Adept retains knowledge while renouncing exclusive consummation. The ethical emphasis falls upon making the fruits of understanding available to humanity.

12. R.N. Iyer, "Creative Emanation", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 184.

"Masters of Wisdom and Compassion voluntarily assume responsibility without appropriating the free will of any person or atoning for anyone's sins. Taking responsibility for the whole world, they can shoulder it, and in assuming that uncircumscribed responsibility, they define themselves."

Meditation thought: Responsibility does not require taking possession of another person's freedom. Help becomes more trustworthy when it strengthens that person's capacity for choice and learning.