

# The Kayas / Bodies of a Buddha

The original meaning of the Sanskrit word *Kaya* (Tibetan: *sku/ku*) is 'that which is accumulated'. In English *Kaya* is translated as 'body'. However, the Kayas of Buddhas do not literally refer only to the form aggregates of Buddhas but also to Buddhas themselves, to their various attributes, and so forth.

There are different ways to categorize Kayas:

1. The category into five Kayas
2. The category into four Kayas
3. The category into three Kayas
4. The category into two Kayas

## 1. The category into five Kayas

The category into five Kayas refers to:

- I. The Dharmakaya / Truth Body (*chos sku / choe ku*)
- II. The Svabhavakaya / Nature Body (*ngo bo nyid sku / ngo wo nyi ku*)
- III. The Jnanakaya / Wisdom Truth Body (*ye shes chos sku / ye she choe ku*)
- IV. The Sambhogakaya / Enjoyment Body (*longs sku / long ku*)
- V. The Nimanakaya / Emanation Body (*sprul sku / truel ku*)

Here the basis of the category is *Kaya*, which means that *Kaya* is categorized or classified into the five Kayas.

### I. The Dharmakaya / Truth Body

*Kaya* and *Dharmakaya* are synonymous. Whatever is a *Kaya* is necessarily a *Dharmakaya* and vice versa.

The definition of a *Dharmakaya* is: a final *Kaya* that is attained in dependence on meditating on its attaining agents, the three exalted knowers.

The three exalted knowers are:

- a) Knower of basis (the Arya paths in the continua of Hearers and Solitary Realizers)
- b) Knower of paths (the Arya paths in the continua of Buddhas and of Bodhisattvas who have reached the Mahayana path of seeing or the Mahayana path of meditation)
- c) Exalted knower of aspects (the Arya paths, that is, omniscient mental consciousnesses, in the continua of Buddhas)

### II. The Svabhavakaya / Nature Body

The definition of a *Svabhavakaya* or *Nature Body* is: a *Dharmata* body that possesses the two purities.

*Dharmata* (Tib.: *chos dbyings / choe ying*) means 'actual nature' or 'sphere of reality'. In general, *Dharmata* is a synonym of emptiness. However, since the *Nature Body* does not merely refer to emptiness, *Dharmata* here means 'that which is left in its natural state without being changed by causes and conditions.'

The *Nature Body* can be divided into two:

- 1) *Nature Body Free of the Defilement of Inherent Existence*
- 2) *Nature Body Free of Adventitious Defilement*

#### 1) *Nature Body Free of the Defilement of Inherent Existence*

A *Nature Body Free of the Defilement of Inherent Existence* refers to the emptiness of inherent existence (i.e. the ultimate truth) of the mental consciousness of a Buddha. Therefore, the emptiness of inherent existence of the omniscient mental consciousness of a Buddha is a *Nature Body Free of the Defilement of Inherent Existence*.

Formerly, the ultimate truth of the mental consciousness of the sentient being, who preceded that Buddha, is the Buddha nature of that sentient being.

Lack of inherent existence of the  
mental consciousness of a sentient being      →      Buddha nature

Lack of inherent existence of the mental consciousness of a Buddha



Nature Body Free of the Defilement of Inherent Existence

Here the defilement that this type of Nature Body is free of is inherent existence.

## 2) *Nature Body Free of Adventitious Defilements*

The Nature Body Free of Adventitious Defilements refers to the elimination of adventitious defilements, i.e. the elimination of the afflictive and cognitive obstructions. The afflictive obstructions are the obscurations to liberation whereas the cognitive obstructions are the obscurations to omniscience. These obstructions are the adventitious defilements this type of Nature Body is free of. Therefore, Nirvana or truth of cessation in the continuum of a Buddha is the Nature Body free of Adventitious Defilements.

The Nature Body is not a phenomenon that is accumulated because it is not impermanent. However since the Nature Body is attained in dependence on the accumulation of method and wisdom during the path of training, it qualifies to be called 'Kaya.'

Furthermore, it is called '*Nature Body*' because it is unaltered by causes and conditions, i.e. it is left in its *natural* state without being changed by causes and conditions. The Nature Body is unaltered or left in its natural state without being changed by causes and conditions because it is permanent. However, even though the Nature Body is permanent and therefore not produced in dependence on causes and conditions, this does not mean that it is not attained in dependence on particular meditational techniques, for it is attained in dependence on the practice of great compassion and of the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness.

According to Maitreya's *Abhisamayalankara (Ornament for Clear Realizations)* the Nature Body has three attributes:

### a) *The attribute of possession*

The Nature Body possesses the twenty-one sets of uncontaminated exalted wisdom (which will be explained below)

### b) *The attribute of separation*

The Nature Body is separated from the afflictive and cognitive obstructions

### c) *The attribute of entity*

The Nature Body lacks inherent existence

According to Maitreya's *Uttaratantra (Sublime Continuum)* the Nature Body has five characteristics and five qualities.

The five characteristics are:

- 1) The Nature Body is permanent
- 2) The Nature Body is indivisible from the ten powers and other enlightened qualities, i.e. it is of one nature with the ten powers and other enlightened qualities
- 3) The Nature Body has dispelled the deprecating and superimposing misconceptions
- 4) It is free from the three obstructions – afflictive obstructions, cognitive obstructions, and obstructions to meditative stabilization.
- 5) It is naturally pure

The ten powers are:

1. Knowledge of proper and improper vessels
2. Knowledge of actions and their consequences
3. Knowledge of concentrations, the doors to liberation, etc.
4. Knowledge of superior and inferior faculties
5. Knowledge of various aspirations
6. Knowledge of the classifications into 18 constituents, etc.
7. Knowledge of the paths that lead to Samsara and Nirvana
8. Knowledge of past lives
9. Knowledge of birth and death
10. Knowledge of the exhaustion of contamination

The five qualities are:

- 1) The Nature Body is immeasurable because it is so vast and extensive
- 2) The Nature body is innumerable because its qualities are infinite
- 3) The Nature Body is inconceivable because it cannot be expressed verbally or be perceived conceptually exactly the way it exists.
- 4) The Nature Body is unequalled because only Buddhas can perceive it directly. However, this merely refers to the Nature Body that is Free of Adventitious Defilements because sentient beings can directly perceive the lack of inherent existence of the mental consciousness of a Buddha and therefore the Nature Body that is Free of the Defilement of Inherent Existence.
- 5) The Nature Body is pure because it has dispelled the afflictive and cognitive obstructions.

### **III. The Jnanakaya / Wisdom Truth Body**

A Jnanakaya or Wisdom Truth Body refers to the omniscient, mental consciousness of a Buddha that directly realizes *all* phenomena.

The definition of a Wisdom Truth Body is: a final exalted wisdom that directly realizes suchness (ultimate truths) and the varieties (conventional truths)

There are three different ways of categorizing the wisdom body:

- 1) The most extensive of the three categories is the category of the twenty-one sets of uncontaminated exalted wisdom
- 2) The middling category is the category of the five exalted wisdoms
- 3) The briefest category is the category of the two exalted wisdoms

#### **The twenty-one sets of uncontaminated exalted wisdom are:**

1. The Thirty-seven Harmonies with Enlightenment
2. The Four Immeasurables
3. The Eight Meditative Liberations
4. The Nine Meditative Absorptions
5. The Ten Totalities
6. The Eight Magnificences
7. The Exalted Knowers of States of Prayer Wishes
8. The Unafflicted Meditative Stabilizations
9. The Six Clairvoyances
10. The Four Individual Correct Knowledges
11. The Four Purities of Body, etc.
12. The Ten Powers
13. The Ten Strengths
14. The Four Fearlessnesses
15. The Three Non-protections
16. The Three Close Placements of Mindfulness
17. The Nature of not Having Forgetfulness of Sentient Beings' Welfare
18. Thorough Conquest of the Predispositions of the Three Doors
19. Great Compassion for all sentient Beings
20. The Eighteen Unshared Qualities of a Buddha
21. The Three Exalted Knowers

#### **The five exalted wisdoms are:**

- 1) Mirror-like Wisdom
- 2) Wisdom of Equality
- 3) Wisdom of Individual Discernment
- 4) Accomplishing Wisdom
- 5) Wisdom of Dharmata / Wisdom of the Sphere of Reality

In Tantra the five wisdoms are associated with the five Dhyani or Wisdom Buddhas:

- i. Akshobya (Wisdom of Dharmata /the Sphere of Reality)
- ii. Ratnasambhava (Wisdom of Equality)
- iii. Amitabha (Wisdom of Individual Discernment)

- iv. Amogasiddhi (Accomplishing Wisdom)
- v. Vairochana (Mirror-like Wisdom)

Every Dhyani or Wisdom Buddha is associated with a particular Tantric initiation, direction, etc.:

	<b>Akshobya</b>	<b>Ratnasambhava</b>	<b>Amitabha</b>	<b>Amogasiddhi</b>	<b>Vairochana</b>
<b>Wisdom</b>	Wisdom of Dharmata	Wisdom of Equality	Wisdom of Individual Discernment	Accomplishing Wisdom	Mirror-like Wisdom
<b>Initiation</b>	Water	Crown	Vajra	Bell	Name
<b>Direction</b>	Centre	South	West	North	East
<b>Colour</b>	Blue	Yellow	Red	Green	White
<b>Aggregate</b>	Consciousness	Feeling	Discrimination	Compositional Factor	Form
<b>Element</b>	Space	Earth	Fire	Wind	Water
<b>Delusion</b>	Hatred	Arrogance/Miserliness	Attachment	Jealousy	Ignorance
<b>Lineage</b>	Vajra	Jewel	Lotus	Karma	Tathagata
<b>Implement</b>	Vajra	Jewel	Lotus	Sword	Wheel

**The two exalted wisdoms are:**

- 1) The omniscient knower that realizes suchness (ultimate truths)
- 2) The omniscient knower that realizes varieties (conventional truths)

#### **IV. The Sambhogakaya / Enjoyment Body**

The definition of a Sambhogakaya or Enjoyment Body is: a complete Rupakaya (Form Body) that possesses the five certainties.

A Rupakaya or Form Body of a Buddha does not refer to the form aggregate of a Buddha but to the actual enlightened Buddha.

The five certainties are:

- 1) The certainty of time (*dus nges pa / due nge pa*)
- 2) The certainty of the place (*gnas nges pa / nae nge pa*)
- 3) The certainty of the body (*sku nges pa / ku nge pa*)
- 4) The certainty of the Dharma (*chos nges pa / choe nge pa*)
- 5) The certainty of the retinue (*'khor nges pa / khor nge pa*)

1) *The certainty of time*

Enjoyment bodies possess the certainty of time because they abide until the end of Samsara without manifesting birth and death.

2) *The certainty of the place*

Enjoyment bodies possess the certainty of the place because they only abide in Akanishta (the Heavenly Adorned Pure Land) which is beyond the six levels of the desire realm, the 17 levels of the form realm, and the four levels of the formless realm.

3) *The certainty of the body*

Enjoyment bodies possess the certainty of the body because they are endowed with the 32 major marks and the 80 minor signs of a Buddha, and do not manifest any other way. The 32 marks are the marks or distinguishing features that characterize a person who possesses them as an outstanding person. The 80 signs are signs because they make known to others that the person who possesses them is an outstanding being.

4) *The certainty of the Dharma*

Enjoyment bodies possess the certainty of the Dharma because they only teach the Mahayana Dharma

5) *The certainty of the retinue*

Enjoyment bodies possess the certainty of the retinue because they are only surrounded by Arya Bodhisattvas, i.e. by Bodhisattvas who have realized emptiness directly and therefore reached the Mahayana path of seeing or the Mahayana path of meditation.

## V. *The Nimanakaya / Emanation Body*

The definition of a Nimanakaya or Emanation Body is: a complete Rupakaya (Form Body) that does not possess the five certainties.

Even though an Emanation body may possess some of the five certainties, it does not possess all five certainties.

Emanation bodies can be categorized into three:

1. Artisan Emanation Body (*bzo bo sprul sku / zo wo truel ku*)
2. Incarnated Emanation Body (*skye ba sprul sku / kye wa truel ku*)
3. Supreme Emanation Body (*mchog gi sprul sku / chog gi truel ku*)

### 1. *Artisan Emanation Body*

Artisan Emanation Bodies refer to the Emanation Bodies of Buddhas who are skilled in arts. For instance, the king of artisans named Bisho Karma was particularly skilled in making religious statues and is renowned for constructing the statue of Jowo Rinpoche in Lhasa.

Another example of an Emanation Body is the artisan emanated by Shakyamuni Buddha in the form of a lute player in order to tame the king of celestial musicians, Raja Pramudita. King Raja Pramudita was extremely arrogant; he believed that there was no lute player better than him and this attitude became a serious obstacle to this spiritual development. When the king heard the Artisan Emanation Body of Shakyamuni Buddha play the lute, he called him to play for him. The musician removed one of the strings of his lute, and was still able to play as well as before. He continued to remove strings until there were no strings left, but he was still able to play beautiful music. As a result of this the king's arrogance decreased and he became the Buddha's disciple. In fact, he became the last disciple of the Buddha before the Buddha's passing into Paranirvana.

### 2. *Incarnated Emanation Body*

Incarnated Emanation Bodies refer to the emanations of Buddhas who take rebirth in various forms in order to benefit sentient beings. They may manifest the aspect of being born as humans, celestial beings, animals, and so forth. However, this category of emanation bodies also includes Buddhas' emanations as bridges, boats, and other inanimate objects.

### 3. *Supreme Emanation Body*

Supreme Emanation Bodies are the emanations of Buddhas who possess the 32 major marks and the 80 minor signs, and who manifest the twelve deeds.

The twelve deeds are:

- 1) The descent from the pure land Tushita
- 2) Entry into his mother's womb
- 3) Taking birth in the Lumbini garden
- 4) Displaying skill in the worldly arts and youthful sports
- 5) Engaging in the amusements of a prince in the company of queens
- 6) Becoming a renunciate as a result of encountering the four sights (the sight of a sick person, an old person, a corpse, and a renunciate)
- 7) Engaging in ascetic practices for six years by the Nairanjana River
- 8) Approaching and sitting beneath the Bodhi tree
- 9) Defeating all malevolent forces
- 10) Becoming a fully enlightened Buddha on the full moon day of the fourth month
- 11) Turning the wheel of Dharma of the Four Noble Truths on the fourth day of the sixth month.
- 12) Passing into Paranirvana in the city of Kushinagar

The Kayas are attained simultaneously. The example for the Sambhogakaya and the Nimanakaya being attained at the same time is that of the moon that is attained at the time as the moon's reflection in a lake is. However, the Supreme Emanation Body is attained only after having attained the Enjoyment Body.

## 2. **The category into four Kayas**

The category into four Kayas refers to:

- I. The Svabhavakaya / Nature Body
- II. The Jnanakaya / Wisdom Truth Body

- III. The Sambhogakaya / Enjoyment Body
- IV. The Nimanakaya / Emanation Body

Here the Dharmakaya (Truth Body) is the basis of the category which is categorized into the four bodies.

The four Kayas are presented from the point of view of perception of the disciples.

- a) The Nature Body Free of the Defilement of Inherent Existence is directly perceived only by Arya beings (i.e. those who have directly realized emptiness and therefore reached the path of seeing, the path of meditation, or the path of no-more-learning).
- b) The Nature Body Free of Adventitious Defilements and the Exalted Wisdom Body are directly perceived only by Buddhas.
- c) The Enjoyment Body is directly perceived only by Arya Bodhisattvas (i.e. Bodhisattvas who have directly realized emptiness and thus reached the Mahayana path of seeing or the Mahayana path of meditation).
- d) The Supreme Emanation Body is directly perceived only by sentient beings with pure karma
- e) The remaining Emanation Bodies is directly perceived by any sentient beings

### 3. The category into three Kayas

The category into the three Kayas refers to:

- I. The Dharmakaya / Truth Body
- II. The Sambhogakaya / Enjoyment Body
- III. The Nimanakaya / Emanation Body

Here the Nature Body and the Exalted Wisdom Body are subsumed under one body, the Dharmakaya (Truth Body). The basis of the category is Kaya.

### 4. The category into two Kayas

The category into two Kayas refers to:

- I. The Dharmakaya that Benefits Oneself (*rang don chos sku / rang doen choe ku*)
- II. The Rupakaya that Benefits Others (*gzhan don gzugs sku / zhaen doen zug ku*)

Here the basis of the category is Kaya.

#### I. *The Dharmakaya that Benefits Oneself*

The definition of a Dharmakaya that Benefits Oneself is: a final object of attainment that is attained mainly in dependence on meditating on its attaining agent, the collection of wisdom.

Since this Kaya does not directly appear to sentient beings, it only benefits them indirectly.

The Dharmakaya that Benefits Oneself can be categorized into:

- I. The Svabhavakaya / Nature Body and
- II. The Jnanakaya / the Exalted Wisdom Body

#### II. *The Rupakaya that Benefits Others*

The definition of a Rupakaya that Benefits Others is: a final object of attainment that is attained mainly in dependence on meditating on its attaining agent, the collection of merit.

This Kaya directly appears to sentient beings and therefore directly benefits them.

The Rupakaya that Benefits Others can be categorized into:

- I. The Sambhogakaya / Enjoyment Body and
- II. The Nimanakaya / Emanation Body

