

The Subtle Body

Those who attend Francis's retreats will come across the term 'yoga meditation'. These are guided meditations which are designed to dissolve the feeling of separation that can seem to be encoded in the body. Through self-investigation or self-enquiry we may be clear at the mental level that our essential nature is pure consciousness. But it takes a while for the body to feel that and to know that. So yoga meditations are designed to help the body recognise what the mind knows. They are a post-enlightenment method, using a variety of techniques and tools.

One tool that Francis sometimes uses is the concept of the subtle body. He uses it as a stepping stone to the understanding that our real body is the world. Here is a simple description:

Q: When we were in the meditation before, you led us to experience the difference between the physical body and the subtle body. I've been wondering so long about that, because in some other retreats you have mentioned that the world is our body. So I was wondering if what you mean by subtle body is that in which the world appears?

FL: No, the subtle body is very simple. The experience of the subtle body is simply the experience of what we call bodily sensations and feelings, in contra-distinction with external perceptions like the body we see in the mirror or the body we touch. So that's what I call the physical body.

Another way to look at it is the physical body is a body which is shared with people around us. Everybody agrees on the colour of the eyes, on the colour of the hair, on the size, etc. These are physical qualities. The body we feel is a first-person experience of the body. It is not shared with other people. Only we feel our pleasure and pain. We always enjoy drinking when we are thirsty, etc. So the point is that we usually identify these two bodies.

But when we are born, when we don't know yet that we are newly born, when we don't know yet that we have a body, we don't have a map, a visual representation of the body. That develops later. And what we observe as we *[begin to]* liberate ourselves from identification with the body, we observe that we identify foremost with this image of the physical body and to a lesser extent with bodily sensations. In other words, we identify more with something which is in the world, the physical body in the world, with a sharp separation. We identify much more with that than with a more fluid, less localized, subtle body.

The subtle body is not the totality. It is still an appearance in consciousness. The real body is a totality. In other words, the real body includes the physical body that we see, but it includes also the mountains that we see. So the subtle body is kind of a stepping stone between the physical body and what you mentioned in the beginning when I say that our real body is the world. Because people who have had this experience of liberation have observed a change in the way they perceive their subtle body. They perceive a liberation of the subtle body from the visual pattern of the physical body.

In turn, in certain schools of yoga, they use this to try to convey to their students their experience. So they use the subtle body as a tool by first pointing their students toward the difference between the experience of the gross body and of the subtle body, which, by the way, is also the body we experience during our dreams. And because then this body is completely inside, by liberating this subtle body from the straitjacket of the physical body, so to speak, at the same time we liberate certain patterns, certain contractions that were consistent with

ignorance, that seem to be evidence that we are a limited entity with a very well-defined contour. So it is used as a tool in certain yoga techniques.

So I use this type of technique, but it is not necessary, not really necessary. It's an option. It's not necessary to understand what I'm saying or to practice this technique. Some people will just say, Oh, yes, that's true. That's my experience. And that's it. That's all there is to it.

Q: You were saying that there was peace in that subtle body. This is what I got out of the exercise. Yes?

FL: Peace is not in the subtle body. This meditation of basically doing nothing enables the subtle body to transition to a state of freedom, from a state of coercion, from a state in which there are patterns that tend to confine it, to materialize it. And as these patterns dissolve and the subtle body recovers its freedom, at the same time from the background, we feel the peace. All kinds of fears that were memorized in the form of bodily sensations go away – residues of ignorance, residues of fear. And that's why what's most important is the experience of this peace, of this fearlessness ...

And then what we did, we experientially realized that this fearlessness can be carried over to the waking state. We don't have to be seated in the same position where the body can move and the mind can work and think, and we can work towards goals, for instance, and still this peace in the background carries over. Although the state of the body and the state of the mind change, because the body needs to move, that's a different state, the mind needs to think, that's also a different state. So we transition to a different state of the body and of the mind, but at the same time there is a continuity of the peace. So that's what I was driving at towards the end of this experiment.

And then we realized that the sitting meditation becomes optional because we can directly access this state of peace during activities. We don't need to meditate before.

Q: Now, another question about, or maybe clarification about the accessing that state of peace that you are talking about now. I remember a long time ago, I was in meditation and I was trying to recall that feeling of peace in the physical body, in the chest area. But that feeling of peace somehow was not only in the chest area, but it was more in the subtle body because I could feel people around me.

FL: It's always a mistake to try to find a state of peace in the body being subtle or gross. Just allow for the peace to be in a place that you cannot put your finger on, so to speak. Just notice that you're at peace compared to what was the case before – for instance, that you feel that there is no fear, that everything is fine. Just fine. You don't want something extraordinary. Just that everything is fine. Just the absence of fear and the absence of worries. That's all that is needed. And notice at the same time then that it is not dependent upon the experiment you were conducting.

The experiment we conducted was simply a way to enter the meditation. But once you are inside, you should abandon the vehicle you used to get to this destination.

[Francis Lucille, 14/6/2026 Online retreat]

Another tool that Francis often uses is 'transparency' – transparent movements, feeling that the body is transparent. Although transparency is closely related to the subtle body, it offers a slightly different starting-point which is very simple, and as described below, can help to identify and dissolve residual feelings of identification with the body:

Q: What did you mean by 'transparency'?

FL: So, there are many ways to approach it. But the way I approached it yesterday, I think it's a good way, is you try to find the posture which is the most comfortable. And within this posture, you try, through fine adjustments, to find a position in which the bodily sensations are minimal. That's very clear. Minimal in intensity, in quantity, whatever. So that's the point of departure.

And then I define what is called the envelope of transparency, because once you are in this position, you can move the body slightly around this, without disturbing the transparency, without decreasing the transparency. So there is a kind of degree of freedom with an amplitude around it. If you do that from various positions the outcome is that it creates a kind of a space around the body as we feel it.

When I say space, it's on the level of feeling. I call it the envelope of transparency. It's a body, if you will, which is definitely bigger than the physical body. And sometimes this body is called the subtle body. But if you take an even closer look at the subtle body, it seems to us that this body has a contour, and it seems to have a contour for the following reason. If I go back to the way I defined the envelope of transparency, if I am here [*comfortable position*], I am transparent. When I move, bodily sensations are still very minimal, I am still transparent. But over here [*uncomfortable position*], I begin to feel more intensity in the bodily sensations. So it's not like there is a clear border, but as we move closer to the border, there is a transition.

So, if we do that globally, you do a yoga session, you explore all kinds of degrees of freedom – here, here... At the end, you have the impression that there is an envelope, but which still has borders. But then, if we go back to a position of comfort, of maximum transparency, and if we look at the border, we discover that the border is non-existent.

The border of this subtle body is simply the memory of all the walls, of the limits we have explored of the transparency. But in fact, there is no border. This subtle body, which is bigger than the physical body, this envelope of transparency, is a stepping stone, if you will, towards that which can be experienced and ascertained directly, which is that in our raw experience of the body and of the world, on the level of bodily sensations, there is no border.

In other words, our raw experience of the body, without the memories of past experience coming into play, is one in which I am not separate from the rest. That is the experience of the new-born child. The borders are the product of past experience and memory. What is interesting with the subtle body is that these borders are much more evanescent, because they are just a memory of some limits of my movement, but they don't come into play when I am comfortable. And if I am not comfortable, if there is a bodily sensation somewhere, this bodily sensation itself appears in this borderless space. That's what at some point we can do, you are suggesting some pleasurable stretches, but they appear in a borderless space. So it's a very organic way to explore the body.

I would add this, on the Hatha Yoga approach of the body versus a more direct approach. In a more direct approach we simply observe whatever bodily sensations are there that make us feel, I am this and not that. And by noticing them, we have an inventory, a catalogue of all the usual thoughts and concepts and bodily sensations with which we identify, and having memorized in a sense this catalogue, we can debunk them as soon as we identify with them.

That doesn't require a more thorough exploration of the body and all its nooks and crannies, which is the goal of the yoga. So the yoga is more ambitious, in the sense that it is not as

surgical. It does go directly to the specific points of identification, but it explores the body as a whole, bringing transparency everywhere, and by the same token, all the points of identification are removed.

Talking about that, the more aware we are of a certain part of the body, the less likely we are to identify with it. For instance, you can observe that if you ask yourself, well, which part of my body is a good candidate for 'me'? You'll see locations like here (forehead), or like here (mouth), or like here (throat), or like here (chest). But never your hands. Never the hands. Why? Because we have such a refined knowledge of our hands, because of the little tasks we do with them, such as playing a musical instrument, or writing, painting. There is no twilight in our hands. We know them. We know the details.

There are other areas of the body that are more in the twilight, and these are the places where, in this confusion, we can believe to be that. So the yoga is like looking everywhere. The direct path is more looking where there is a problem, and debunking it.

Q: When you say 'look at the totality, there you can see the body sensations appearing in the same space as the thoughts'. Is that the direct approach you're talking about?

FL: Yes, that is the more direct approach. And during the yoga, if I say for instance, offer the sensations to the space, that's the direct approach, because the goal is still there. But with this approach of the transparency, the yoga is kind of a stepping stone. In a certain sense, the moment you kind of move beyond the physical body already, it's much easier than to move from there to there.

It's kind of, if you want to go to a distant planet, ideally you would build the starship in orbit. Because you would save a lot of energies and you don't need to build something which is aerodynamic because in the space you don't need that. It can be any shape. So you have more freedom. So ideally you would build it in space, in orbit. So this subtle body or this envelope of transparency is like moving one step out.

Q: So focus on the subtle body and then you see that actually there is none.

FL: Exactly, yes. I would add this also that it may be that, and it happens mostly in the beginning, that sometimes people have extraordinary experiences and then all of a sudden they experience this subtle body because some deep contraction has been released within and all of a sudden they have access to that. It's a very sudden change and it is experienced as a great relief. But eventually it's just natural. It's no big deal.

[Francis Lucille 6/6/2024 June retreat week 1 day 5]

In this recent video, Francis explains in depth how the yoga meditations work and the role of visualisation:

Q: When you started the yoga, you said move the body from transparency, or have your movement come from transparency, not the body. And I was wondering if you could explain what that means. I think it was 'start the movement from transparency'.

FL: First, what I call the subtle body or the tactile body or the body of energy. Often people explain that as something a little mysterious. For me, when I talk about things, they have to relate directly to something we experience. Not to something that we hope we will experience someday, or something which is mysterious or something which not everybody has access to. That's very important.

So, the physical body is very simple. It's the body we see in the mirror, the body we can touch, the body which is in this room. The subtle body is the body which we perceive through bodily sensations and feelings. This body, we don't see it in the mirror. It is not in this room because it's made of sensations and sensations don't appear in the room. They appear in the same place where our thoughts appear.

So, what I call the subtle body, is made of bodily sensations. That's all. So that's simple. If I have a pain in the neck, it's part of the subtle body. It may not be that subtle, but it's part of the subtle body.

When we were in the womb, we had mostly just our subtle body. There was no mirror there in the womb to see the physical body. So, our experience was only the subtle body. Perhaps we would touch the walls of the womb or the amniotic liquid there. But basically, it was all one thing.

Then, after birth, we learn how to navigate in a room. We become aware of the external space of our physical body as a result. We looked in mirrors and people told us about our nose, etc. So as a result, we created a kind of a geography of the body that connects to bodily sensations. So we have kind of an internal image of the body, and we lose sight of the distinction there is between the subtle and the physical body. We feel that perception and experience coincide and we try to make them consistent with one another. There is something good to it, but there are also things that are not as good.

The way I explain it is when we close our eyes, if we don't refer to what we know about our physical body, we put that between brackets. We assume we have never seen our physical body, never touched it, never see a picture of it, etc. We reduce our experience of the body to the bodily sensations. In other words, to our subtle body. So, we experientially restrict our perceptions to the raw, real-time experience of the bodily sensations, in other words, to simply our subtle body.

Of course, there is kind of a representation of it, which comes from these perceptions. A kind of almost visual representation, like a map of it, with the eyes closed. In other words, we can, by observing our subtle body, see an image, an almost visual representation of it. And we can observe that this visual representation of it doesn't coincide at all with the memory we have of the body we see in the mirror. That's the crucial experience. To understand what I'm saying here.

With your eyes closed, if you assume we try to paint or to draw the body as it appears to us, simply through the bodily sensations, it will be very different from what I call the physical body or the gross body, which is the body that we see in the mirror. They are not the same, they don't appear in the same space, and they don't have the same shape.

So now, if you look solely at the subtle body, first it doesn't have a well-defined contour. It's a different map, a different geography, so to speak. It's not as precise. There are zones that are transparent, for lack of a better word, in contradistinction with zones that are more dense. For instance, contractions would correspond to zones that are more dense. So, our experience is not uniform, our experience is of the subtle body, but there are different areas. The contours are not well-defined, and also they evolve in time. They don't really correspond to the visual image.

OK, now we go to the technique we are using and try to answer your question. But first, we have to understand that there is a correspondence between the experience of the subtle body, and

the visual representation we have, which doesn't look at all like the physical body, but that this correspondence is not a one-way street.

From the body we perceive, to the body we imagine or visualize, the perception creates an image. Now, if we change this image, that's the other direction of the two-way street, it will change the perception. So that gives us a tool to manipulate the subtle body. And using visualizations, imagination, and this purification, the general rule is to dissolve the dense areas. So, if you have an image which is, not homogenous, which is heterogeneous, that's the image, we use our imagination, we make it more homogenous, and as a result, the sensation will become homogenous. It's a very powerful tool.

This process, whereby we, through various visualizations, we alter the perception of the subtle body, I call it purification, this process, and I can say we make the body more transparent. This process, moving from visualization to bodily sensation, in fact, is the core of the technique we are talking about here. That's the main point, to understand it's not necessarily easy to understand.

Moreover, as I said, this subtle body is not something which is constant, which is fixed. It evolves even if we are not moving the physical body. But if we are moving the physical body, these perceptions evolve. So, we can purify the picture at all times, whether it evolves slowly, just a little, or whether it evolves more rapidly. For instance, if we move the physical body, it seems to evolve more rapidly.

So, let's take an example of purifying a movement. And the one I use often is just to raise the right arm. Let's do the full process. I raise the right arm, just as I raise the physical body, and then, without moving the right arm, using only the sensations, I recreate the sensation of raising the right arm. It's like I've recorded a video of the sensation, and now I play it back. This point is not the purification yet, because it's simply a replay of what was going on.

Now for the moment of the purification. Now, I am going to change the image of the video I project, using some images. For instance, I imagine that I have a balloon attached under the right arm, which is deflated. It's a big balloon, so when it is fully inflated, it is like three meters in diameter, or ten feet in diameter. I slowly inflate it. In the beginning, nothing happens, but then the balloon starts pushing on my arm, which is glued to the balloon. It starts pushing on my arm. For the time being, it's just a visualization. I don't move my right arm. It pushes, it pushes, and at some point it's horizontal in front of me, at shoulder level, like as if my right arm was laying on a table. And then I keep inflating the balloon, and the right arm keeps rising, and in fact extending, because it's glued to the balloon. So it becomes huge, right? At the end, it's almost three meters in height.

Okay, that's a visualization. I do that several times, because that's a purification process. Why? Because there is no effort now. I've changed the image, the imagery, and as a result, I've changed the bodily sensations. I've made the movement with the subtle body more transparent. And now, I am going to take the right arm for the ride, as if the right arm was laying on top, for instance. The tactile right arm, it is just riding on the tactile right arm, and I raise it using the purified movement of the right arm. And that is the answer to your question, that is a transparent movement. And then I go down in the same way.

Now, all it takes really, doing it with this very simple exercise, is just to understand what I mean, how the process works, the purification, and then bringing the physical body for the ride. And that's the entire explanation of what I call transparent movements. And also, transparent poses,

because even if I don't move, the purification remains. You see, that's why, to properly take an asana, we take it properly with transparent movements, so that the body is transparent in the asana.

Q: Thank you. So, at home, we can practice that, say, before we eat a meal, we can kind of visualize lifting up the floor.

What is important is to understand it experientially. If you don't understand it experientially, you are going to do fitness yoga, but not real yoga. And then I would say the asanas are almost secondary. What is primary is the understanding of the subtle body.

And the other question would be, what is the connection between that and non-duality? And I think people who, in the past, had discovered their true nature, were able to observe this liberation of the subtle body. That the subtle body was really almost independent from the physical body, that it could move around effortlessly. And as a result, they use it as a means of teaching, or a means to take their disciples to the experience, to that which was their experience.

So, it is an approach which is absolutely non-verbal. I mean, the suggestions are made verbally, but once that is understood, there is absolutely nothing intellectual to it. The words are just used to convey the experience. Once the experience is there, understood, then we don't use words. We use images, yes, for the purification process, if you will.

But eventually we don't need to go through this more lengthy purification. When we get it, what we have understood about the right arm, we understood about the little finger, about the body, about the spine, about the legs, about everything, about the body as a whole. We just transpose that, which we have understood on a specific example, to the totality of the movements.

And so the asanas are secondary, but remember that the yoga is not just made upon static stretches, but there are also dynamic stretches and other elements, one of them being, for instance, breathing. Breathing is a movement, it's not something static. Breathing is not an asana, it's a full chapter of the Hatha yoga, the pranayama chapter. Also taking a posture, taking an asana, has to be done through transparent movements. And the transparency of the body has to be reasserted as we are keeping the posture.

Doing the asanas and all these movements is simply the entry level, because then the goal is that, almost unknowingly, this transparent way to perceive the body and the world will happen by itself. In the beginning we pay attention to it, but then it becomes second nature.

If you start skiing in the beginning, you are very careful, but then you don't think about what you are doing with your feet and with your legs. Sometimes you do, but not all the time. You do it when you want to improve. It's the same here, so then it infects all the movements, the whole way you perceive your body and the world.

So, why did that happen? And what is the connection with what we are talking about here? The ultimate goal of yoga is to perceive the world as being our body, the absence of separation. The world is the body of consciousness, we are conscious, the world is my body. And to move from a sensation of separation to, as it happens, the body of sensation, the body of energy, has more fluidity than the physical body. So, it is like a stepping stone from experiencing oneself as the physical body to experiencing oneself as the world. Because the transparent body moves everywhere, it isn't subject to the same limitations the physical body is subjected to. So, it's a

kind of a temporary stepping stone that leads to this experience.

[Francis Lucille May 2026, [Transparency: the foundation of Yoga](#)]

Contemplation

Yoga is whatever we do to get established in peace and happiness. Since the main desire of all human beings, is to be established in peace and happiness, all human beings are doing yoga. Although everybody is doing yoga knowingly or unknowingly, the ones who are doing yoga knowingly, are doing exercises that are really designed to remove the roadblocks