

## Welcome

Hi friends. Welcome to Movement Monday of week four of Abolition Advent.

Our theme for this week, our intersectional exploration for the sake of justice and freedom for all bodies, dwells and lives dynamically at the intersectional site where the need for racial justice for black and brown lives meets the need or encounters the need for justice and love for all bodies of all shapes and sizes, for all bodily changes one may have gone through over a lifetime, through all expressions and ways of being embodied.

Before we move forward, I just want to again say my name is Coke Tani. I thank you so much for letting me accompany you through your Advent. I use she/her pronouns.

I'm joining you from the same room I have been throughout this season, except today I am wearing an olive, scoop-neck tunic.

I have large, silver, dangly earrings and today no glasses. I also join you as a single-breasted, whole-hearted woman and someone who is small in stature, at least height-wise, compared to other lives and bodies I see around me, where I live.

I am somebody who put eyebrows on my face today for the eyebrows that I lost during a course of chemotherapy.

And we could go on, couldn't we? Our bodies are living, sacred texts, with many a story to tell. And so we're going to look at look at what this site today might reveal to us and pray into that together using our very Bodyspirits.

Let's prepare with whatever a full-bodied breath means for you in this moment.

Good. Before we move on into our themes, I deeply want to thank the artistry and the culture of work of Sonya Renee Taylor, Kiese Laymon, and Roxane Gay. They are amongst others whom I'll cite along the way when we move through our sections for today's devotional. But for now, just as you are, welcome.

## Themes

By way of subthemes for our bigger theme of racial justice and body positivity today, I want to lift up these three to you for your consideration and embodied contemplation.

The first is that our human bodies, or any bodies, our bodies are living sites of the Imago Dei and they are also, in a way, living altars. And I say living altars because they are sites of sacred transmission and communication with the divine and with our ancestors.

They are also sites of how we connect to life around us, as well as life moving through us.

And finally, our bodies are sites of Imago Dei and the ancestors, in how any one body is apparently (or not apparently) filled with offerings to make, filled with blessing, filled with the intention of blessing.

The second subtheme is that we bump into injustice or body negativity for ourselves and others when we buy into this idea of an ideal body. And if I say ideal body, I'll bet a picture of that arises in your mind.

I just want to pause here before we stay with the image of it, to say conceptually that an ideal body then leads our minds and our beliefs down the path of, "Which bodies are attractive?" which leads to, "Which bodies are desirable?" and ultimately and grievously leads to, "Which bodies are lovable?"

So that is why it's an issue not just of changing one's attitude, but of social justice. The ideal body in our United States culture anyway, is (and I would say possibly in many places of our globe,) there's sort of this ideal body colonization that has happened, ideal body supremacy, where whiter and lighter are better; skinnier and slimmer are better; taller is better; apparently-able, more able is better; younger is better.

And all of these beliefs then translate into physical acts, including the objectification of ourselves and of others, and for ourselves. It may include things like skin lightening, or products that enhance hair growth, or hair removal, or hair coloring. It could involve attraction to products that promise the disappearance of fat on our God-given bodies.

And it could lead all the way to certain kinds of eating disorders, even paying for certain kinds of surgical procedures to actually alter certain parts of our body because they don't live up to an external authority standard of what a "good body" means.

That's the second subtheme.

The first is Imago Dei; sacred altar.

The second is injustice to self and others around this idea, this other construction of an ideal body.

And the third is, again, our subtheme of liberation.

"What does it mean to live?"

"What does it feel like to live into ecstatic and gentle acceptance of ourselves, just as we are, and of others, just as they are?"

It means being willing to be in a state of wonder, which involves a vulnerability and a defiance of external authority. It means being open to exploring what loving touch-ability feels like for any of us, as opposed to being considered untouchable or an object. It means discovering what inherent pleasure feels like for each of us, and it eventually, if enough of us are able to reclaim and gather that back, it then leads to collective joy.

So, body as site of Imago Dei and sacred altar.

The myth of the ideal body and what we do to ourselves to conform to that (what we demand of others or how we treat others who don't conform to that).

And third, living in to ecstatic acceptance, all-body love-ability and collective joy in flesh.

## **Movement Practices**

As we begin the first of our three movement practices for today, I want to invite you to the posture and position that you feel called into that best suits your body and your context today.

That could be lying down, sitting or standing. I'm going to stand. And our first practice is the removal of what we all have likely to internalize, to some extent, this supremacy of this ideal body.

And we're going to do this by and imagining those places in ourselves where we have internalized those messages. We are going to pull out those messages and fling them out and away from ourselves.

They may have lodged in all different parts of your Bodyspirit. So first I ask you to engage pulling out. Some things may take more than one action of pulling.

We're pulling out those beliefs that are false and that do not uplift our body just as it is, or other bodies just as they are.

Next, I want to go ahead and invite you to scrub. To kind of scrub those sites where you've done the pulling and yanking out, and kind of give it a nice, vigorous scrub, just to remind your body "I'm here. I'm not just going to take something. We're here to replace it with something better."

Then we're just going to lightly brush off our body and brush our space toward the holy composter. And brush the remains, the detritus, the residue, the remnants, and commit those, send those to the divine composter.

Our second movement practice involves, again, using our hands, our imaginations, the touch of either of those or otherwise with our bodies again.

Except this time, instead of helping something to exit that never belonged there, we're actually bringing our loving attention to different places on our bodies, through a light touch and a pause.

And then moving them--your hands, or your imagination, your attention--somewhere else. And then pausing. And moving your touch somewhere else and pausing.

I invite you to notice a place on your body that's asking for your attention, and giving it your attention through your touch. And just start to notice other places longing for your attention and indulging that, giving love to that site.

We're going to continue to do this--we started with the lightness of touch. And as we go on, feel free to kind of gently palpate certain parts of your body calling for your attention. And then if a deeper rub or massage, squeezing, or again, a brushing in of love works. Any of those, or even patting-- pats of assurance or energizing, reawakening, re-attending... all these ways that we can bring loving touch to our own bodies.

## Scripture and Quotes

As you continue to have that exploration of touch and pause in all the ways that feel satisfying and attentive and gentle to yourself (especially to those sites that may have felt forgotten or marginalized), I invite you to continue to take your time through this exploration, as I read through several texts.

And let's see what emerges for you when the words of old and of now meet your own touch with your body.

The first is from the Gospel of John, 1:14. "And the word became flesh and lived among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a parent's only son, full of grace and truth."

And then a bit of queering of that very text, "And the word became flesh and lived as us. And we have felt the soft radiance, the sweaty folds of possibility, full-bodied with longing and sufficiency and wisdom."

Take a breath right where you are as I bring up the next reading. And let's continue on this one, as is from Hildegard of Bingen.

"With my mouth, God says, 'I kiss my own chosen creation. I uniquely, lovingly embrace every image I have made out of the earth's clay.'"

As you continue your exploration of touch and attention, hear these words from Toni Morrison, from her work, 'Beloved.'

"In this here place we flesh. Flesh that weeps, laughs. Flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it, love it hard. Yonder, they do not love your flesh. They despise it.

They don't love your eyes. They just as soon pick them out.

No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder, they flay it.

And oh, my people, they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off, and leave empty. Love your hands. Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them. Pat them together.

Stroke them on your face because they don't love that either.

You got to love it. You! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth.

Yonder, out there they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it, they will not heed. What you scream from it, they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body, they will snatch away and give you leavens instead.

No, they don't love your mouth. You got to love it.

This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance. Backs that need support. Shoulders that need arms, strong arms, I'm telling you.

And all my people out yonder hear me, they do not love your neck un-noosed and straight. So love your neck. Put a hand on it. Grace it, stroke it, and hold it up.

And all your inside parts that they just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver. Love it, Love it. And the beat and beating heart. Love that too. More than eyes or feet, more than lungs that have yet to draw free air.

More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts. Hear me now. Love your heart. For this is the prize."

And our last reading is from Phil Porter and Cynthia Winton-Henry.

"Never underestimate a body's need for reassurance."

And bring your exploration of touch and attention to a close. Let your ending find you. Have and savor that.

Take a breath into it.

## **Closing Movement Meditation and Prayer**

For our closing Movement Meditation and prayer today, at the intersection of racial justice and body positivity, I want to invoke your memory, my memory, our memories of any times we have witnessed a baby or a young child discover a certain part of its own body, of their own body: its toes, its fingers, its mouth, its belly.

And that's the attitudinal spirit I want to invoke for this movement prayer.

Now, I want to invite you to bring that attitude to those parts of your body that you yourself may have internally marginalized or sidelined for not being another way.

The invitation is that you bring that state of wonder and discovery to those marginalized parts of your own body and to simply move and have stillness and embodied wonder and discovery, rediscovery of those parts of yourself.

As you do this, and if you're led to do so, I then invite you to remember that you are in a great field of all other bodies who are needing to reawaken this loving discovery of blackness, of brownness, of bigness, of partialness of all the places we may have internally marginalized.

We're going to let those marginalized parts of ourselves reawaken alongside one another and to let those marginalized parts play and dance together in this closing dance of discovery and blessing.

I'm going to put a piece of music on. I'll probably do mine standing today, but you do what suits you.

This is a lullaby. But I would invite us to consider this piece of music as a "lull-awakening."

I invite you to move to the place that you're going to start your movement prayer. And let's have this together, shall we? Let yourself be breathed into baby-like discovery, wonder, and blessing.

*[about 2 minutes of movement prayer]*

I invite you to have that afterspace of that ending. If you feel led to do a little bit of doodling. out of this. by way of transition, please feel free to doodle

May this—and all of our ways of praying the body—bless us, bless others, bless all of humanity toward true freedom for all bodies.

Amen.

And Merry Christmas!