

THE THIRTY-TWO PARTS OF THE BODY

**A Samatha–Vipassana Asubha Method of Mental Cultivation
which can be of great benefit for the improvement of physical health
and is an effective antidote to the two Root poisons of Ignorance and Greed.**

These meditation techniques are part of the classic body of instruction originally taught by the Gautama Buddha. The “Thirty-two Parts of the Body” is a both a powerful meditation vehicle and a gateway to study of human physiology and anatomy. Theravada lineages consider it the most effective method for transcending sensual fixations and developing clear insight into the true nature of mind/body.

The first levels of these Asubha (“not beautiful”) exercises help dissolve illusions, delusions, misconceptions, and habituated problematic attitudes about the body with which people may have been imprinted. Persistent study of the “Thirty-two Parts of the Body” produces deeper levels of perception and increasingly subtle insight into the body’s cellular matrix, biochemical activity, electromagnetic energy, and atomic structure.

These exercises become more effective with practice so DON’T rush through them. Proceed systematically at a speed you find to be manageable and productive. The time required to learn the different exercises is going to vary considerably with each person.

This area of meditation and study can develop fruitfully for many years. After learning the Anatomy List, stay for as long as you like at any stage that is producing results.

CAUTION : The “Thirty-two Parts of the Body” as taught here is NOT advised for people in whom fear, anxiety, panic and/or anger, impatience, irritation are frequently triggered. Those conditions will get more benefit from more calming and beatific meditations.

I. Learning the Anatomy List

The Anatomy List on page 2 is from the Visuddhimagga (the Path of Purification, written in the 5th century CE) and has Ayurveda roots dating back approximately 4,000 years.

1. The Anatomy List has six groups containing 32 parts of the body.
 - (a). First memorize the Names of the six groups on page 2, forwards and backwards.
 - (b). Second, memorize the Parts in each group, forwards and backwards. Concentrate on memorizing one group at a time, starting with the Skin group, before advancing to the next group.
 - (c). Third, memorize the 32 body parts in one sequence forward from Head hairs (#1) to Urine (#32) and backward from Urine (#32) to Head hairs (#1).
2. Consult anatomy illustrations and medical sources to learn the location, shape, and colour of each body part. Their function, weight, etc., is not part of the meditations. If using Anatomy colouring books, select accurate colours to assist these studies.
3. After memorizing the Anatomy List, go through the list item by item in a meditation exercise trying to either visualize or conceptualize each of the body parts by itself as an external object in space outside of your body. Focus on each item separately in the sequence in the Anatomy List. Include the information you have learned about the location, shape, and colour of the individual body parts.
4. Do not try to internalize the parts of anatomy into your own body until you are familiar with the location, shape, and colour of every item in the Anatomy List.

II. Anatomy List (taught by Guatama Buddha)

<u>SKIN</u> <i>Group</i> Primarily Earth element	1.	Head hairs ¹
	2.	Body hairs ²
	3.	Nails
	4.	Teeth
	5.	Skin
<u>KIDNEY</u> <i>Group</i> Primarily Earth element	6.	Muscles ³
	7.	Ligaments ⁴
	8.	Bones ⁵
	9.	Bone marrow
	10.	Kidneys
<u>LUNG</u> <i>Group</i> Primarily Earth element	11.	Heart
	12.	Liver
	13.	Fascia ⁶
	14.	Spleen
	15.	Lungs
<u>BRAIN</u> <i>Group</i> Primarily Earth element	16.	Digestive tract ⁷
	17.	Mesentery & Mesocolons ⁸
	18.	Undigested food ⁹
	19.	Digested food ¹⁰
	20.	Brain
<u>FAT</u> <i>Group</i> Primarily Water element	21.	Bile ¹¹
	22.	Phlegm ¹²
	23.	Pus ¹³
	24.	Blood
	25.	Sweat
	26.	Fat
<u>URINE</u> <i>Group</i> Primarily Water element	27.	Tears
	28.	Grease ¹⁴
	29.	Saliva
	30.	Nasal mucus
	31.	Oil of the joints
	32.	Urine

¹ only head hairs on the scalp apply to this exercise

² eyebrows, eyelashes, ear hair, nose hair, moustaches, and beards are included in body hairs

³ there are approximately 640 muscle groups in the human body

⁴ ligaments are fibrous connective tissues which fasten bones to bones and keeps them stable

⁵ modern anatomy identifies 206 bones in adult bodies over the age of 21

⁶ fascia is sheathing on the internal organs, abdominal cavity, and muscles under the skin throughout the body

⁷ entire digestive tract of mouth, throat, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, rectum, anus

⁸ mesentery & mesocolon membranes anchor and support the small and large intestines

⁹ undigested and partially digested food in process of nutriment extraction in the stomach and small intestine

¹⁰ digested food in the large intestine from which primary nutriments have been extracted

¹¹ historically described as "Oil" of which there are two kinds:

a. "local bile" is in the gall bladder and concentrated near the liver between the heart and lungs.

b. "free bile" soaks the entire body, exudes to the outside of the skin, and spreads like oil over the body with the exception of teeth, nails, and hard dry skin.

¹² phlegm is an aqueous mucus secretion produced by the respiratory system

¹³ includes the pus itself and any damaged areas of the body that produced the pus

¹⁴ natural greasy oil that secretes on the surface of palms, soles of feet, nose, forehead, and shoulders

You can try to cross-reference anatomy information to your own body during your meditation exercises after you have memorized and studied the Anatomy List, even if you don't have a full grasp of the precise shape, colour, and location of each body part.

III. Elemental Qualities

Integration meditations for the 32 body parts are enhanced by trying to feel or sense the characteristics (traditionally labelled with ancient elements) in each body part of:

- Earth** : solidity of soft and hard densities within the body
- Air** : all movement of the body : voluntary, involuntary, visible, invisible
- Fire** : the temperature, hot or cold, of every part of the body
- Water** : everything adhesive and viscid in the body

All matter, including your physical body has these four properties in different proportions. Bones, for example, are predominantly Earth but their growth and adaptability is provided by Air, Fire, and Water. In the Anatomy List, Groups 1 to 4 are predominantly Earth element. Groups 5 and 6 are predominantly Water element. The meditations for the 32 Parts of the Body help you identify these elements in yourself.

IV. Full Integration Meditation

1. After memorizing all 32 body parts and having studied the the shape, colour, and location of each part, go through the complete Anatomy List forward and backward at least once in your mind to begin a full Integration Meditation session.
2. Then focus in turn on each individual body part on its own and move your attention to the location of the individual part in your own body for an interval. Go through the 32 items in the Anatomy List step-by-step in sequence. You can place a hand on relevant areas or gently massage an area to help anchor your concentration.
3. Silently REPEAT the name of each specific body part as you try to sense it physically or visualize it (or both if you can) within your body.

For example, while focusing on your lungs silently repeat the word "lungs" while feeling or sensing or visualizing or imagining your lungs in your body.

The silent repetition is a continual reminder of the specific part of the body you are concentrating on. The pace of your silent recitation should help you stay aware and focused. If the pace is too slow, your attention may drift. If the pace is too fast, it may interfere with the depth of your experience.

4. If your attention is strongly caught by a specific body part during this process, you can allow your attention to settle on that body part for the duration of the meditation after you have completed one complete sequence, forward and backward, of Step 1.
5. Consider the concepts of "no fixed unchanging identity" and "no self". As you focus on each part of your anatomy, ask if it holds the essence of who "you" are as an individual living being. Is your personal identity fixed to your cartilage, to your bone marrow, to any of the complex, constantly changing parts that somehow assembled to form your living body?

~ May You and All Beings be Safe, Healthy, and Happy ~
~ May You find your Way in this lifetime to Inner Liberation ~