

# THE THIRTY-TWO PARTS OF THE BODY

**A Samatha–Vipassana Buddhist Method of Mental Cultivation  
which can be of great benefit for the improvement of physical health  
and is a renowned antidote to the two root poisons of ignorance and greed.**

This set of Samatha–Vipassana meditation techniques is part of the classic body of instruction taught by the Gautama Buddha. In the Theravada Buddhist tradition, the “Thirty-two Parts of the Body” is considered the most effective method for connecting people with the reality of their bodies. It helps develop insight and understanding into subtle aspects of the true nature of mind/body.

The first levels of work can help dissolve the illusions, delusions, misconceptions, inherent conditioning, and problematic subliminal attitudes about the body with which people may have been imprinted. Persistent work and deeper levels of insight can produce an increased physiological awareness of the body’s cellular structure, electromagnetic fields, and biochemical processes.

## **I. Thirty-two Parts of the Body: Learning the Anatomy List**

The Anatomy List detailed on page 2 is derived from the Visuddhi Magga and has its origins in the Vedas approximately 5,000 years ago.

1. Memorise the Anatomy List on page 2 in sequence forward from “Head hairs” (#1) to “Urine” (#32) and backward in reverse order from “Urine” (#32) to “Head hairs” (#1).

The Anatomy List is organised into six groups. It may help in memorizing the whole list if you first memorize the items, backwards and forwards, in each group.

2. Use valid anatomy illustrations and reputable medical references and sources to learn the shape, colour, and location of the individual body parts.
3. After memorizing the Anatomy List, go through the list item by item in a meditation exercise trying to either visualise or conceptualise each of the body parts by itself. Focus on each item separately in the sequence in the Anatomy List. Work with the information you have learned about the shape, colour, and location of the individual body parts.
4. Do not try to internalise the images and concepts in your own body until you are familiar with the shape, colour, and location of every body part in the Anatomy List.

## II. Thirty-two Parts of the Body: Anatomy List (taught by the Buddha)

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

<sup>1</sup> sheathing of abdominal cavity, internal organs, and muscles under the skin throughout the body

<sup>2</sup> entire tract from mouth to anus - includes oesophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine

<sup>3</sup> membranes anchoring and supporting the small and large intestines

<sup>4</sup> in the stomach (undigested)

<sup>5</sup> in the intestines (digested)

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> the flexible lining of the stomach

<sup>8</sup> includes the substance itself and any damaged areas of the body

<sup>9</sup> oil that secretes on palms, soles of feet, nose, forehead, and shoulders

### III. **Thirty-two Parts of the Body: Physical Integration**

The physical integration exercises work best after you have gained a basic understanding of the shape, colour, and location of the individual body parts in the Anatomy List. But you can try to work with this information internally within your own body during your meditation exercises once you have memorized the Anatomy List, even if you don't have a perfect grasp of those three aspects of each body part.

1. After memorizing all Thirty-two parts of the Body, go through the complete Anatomy List forward and backward at least once in your mind to begin a physical integration meditation session.
2. Focus in turn on each individual body part on its own as you go through the list in sequence, and move your attention to the location of the individual body part in your own body.
3. Silently and steadily repeat the name of the specific body part as you try to either feel or visualise it (or both if you can) within your body. For example, while focusing on the lungs, steadily and silently repeat the word "lungs" while feeling and/or visualising your lungs.

The silent repetition is a continual reminder of the specific part of the body that you are concentrating on. The pace of your silent recitation should be neither too fast nor too slow. 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 one particular body part strongly catches your attention while you were going through the Anatomy List, you can allow your attention to settle on that body part for the duration of the meditation after you have finished one complete set of the forward and backward sequence of Step 1.

### IV. **Thirty-two Parts of the Body: Conclusion**

The amount of time required to learn the different exercises for the Thirty-two Parts of the Body is going to vary considerably with each person.

These exercises become more effective with practice so DON'T rush through them. Proceed systematically at your own speed. You can stay for as long as you like at any stage that is producing results.

The study and application of these meditation practices can develop fruitfully for many years.

*May You and All Beings be Well and Happy.*