

THIRTY-TWO PARTS OF THE BODY AND FOUR ELEMENTS

These **Samatha–Vipassana Asubha** meditations were taught over 2500 years ago by the Gautama Buddha. “Thirty-two Parts of the Body” is both a powerful meditation vehicle and a gateway to study of human physiology and anatomy. Theravada lineages consider it the most effective meditation route for transcending sensual fixations, for antidoting the two Root poisons of Ignorance (Unknowing) and Attachment (Greed), and for developing deep lucid insight into the true nature of mind/body.

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

These exercises are much more effective with practice, so DON’T rush them. Stay at each step until you know it well, and proceed at a speed you find to be manageable AND productive. The time required for the full process will vary considerably with each person.

This area of meditation and study can develop fruitfully for many years. After learning the Anatomy List in Step {A}, stay for as long as you like at any further 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, beatific meditations such as with Kasinas (colour, light, mandalas) or more energetic meditations of Mudra (movement) and Mantra (voice).

A}. Learning the Anatomy List

The Anatomy List on Page 2 is from the Visuddhimagga (known as The Path of Purification, 5th century CE) and has Ayurveda roots dating back approximately 4000 years.

- A1. Memorize the Names, forward and backward, of the six GROUPS in section {C} on Page 2.
- A2. After memorizing A1, memorize the BODY PARTS forward and backward in each group, one group at a time. Stay at a group until you can recite its parts forward and backward entirely from memory before moving on to the next group.
- A3. After memorizing A2, memorize the individual 32 BODY PARTS in complete sequences forward from (1) Head Hairs to (32) Urine and backward from Urine to Head Hairs.

B}. Spacious Anatomy Meditation

This meditation is directed outward. Do not internalize the studied anatomy into your own body.

During this step, consult anatomy illustrations and medical sources to learn the Location, Shape, and Colour of each Body Part. Other physical features such as weight are not part of the meditations. If using anatomy colouring books, select accurate colours to assist these studies.

- B1. After memorizing A3, go carefully and mindfully through the Body Parts in forward sequence from 1 to 32 in a meditation exercise trying to either visualize or conceptualize each of the Body Parts by itself as an external object floating in space outside of your body.
- B2. Focus on each Body Part for enough time to review its shape, colour, and location in a human body, as if you are visualizing or imagining a detailed anatomy diagram in front of you.

3}. Anatomy List (taught by Guatama Buddha over 2500 years ago)

<u>SKIN</u> Group Primarily EARTH element	1. HEAD HAIRS ¹ 2. BODY HAIRS ² 3. NAILS 4. TEETH 5. SKIN
<u>KIDNEY</u> Group Primarily EARTH element	6. MUSCLES ³ 7. LIGAMENTS ⁴ 8. BONES ⁵ 9. BONE MARROW 10. KIDNEYS
<u>LUNG</u> Group Primarily EARTH element	11. HEART 12. LIVER 13. FASCIA ⁶ 14. SPLEEN 15. LUNGS
<u>BRAIN</u> Group Primarily EARTH element	16. DIGESTIVE TRACT ⁷ 17. MESENTARY & MESOCOLONS ⁸ 18. UNDIGESTED FOOD ⁹ 19. DIGESTED FOOD ¹⁰ 20. BRAIN
<u>FAT</u> Group Primarily WATER element	21. BILE ¹¹ 22. PHLEGM ¹² 23. PUS ¹³ 24. BLOOD 25. SWEAT 26. FAT
<u>URINE</u> Group 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 in this instance
- 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 cross-reference anatomy information to your own body during your meditation exercises after you have memorized the Anatomy List AND you have also studied the Shape, Colour, and Location of every Body Part, even if you don't have a full grasp of all the precise details.

D}. Elemental Qualities

Integration meditations for the 32 body parts are enhanced by trying to feel or sense the characteristics (grouped into elements by ancient tradition) 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 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. Try to identify these elemental characteristics in yourself.

E}. Physical Integration Meditations

- E1. 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 in your mind at least once to begin a Physical Integration Meditation session.
- E2. After completing E1, focus in turn on each individual body part on its own and move your attention for an interval to its location in your body. Go through the 32 parts in the Anatomy List step-by-step in sequence. You can place a hand on relevant areas on your body or gently massage an area to help clarify the location of the body part and anchor your concentration.
- E3. Silently repeat the name of each body part as you try to sense or visualize or imagine it within your body. For example, while concentrating on your lungs in your body silently repeat the word "lungs".
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.
- E4. 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 E1.
- E5. As you focus on each part of anatomy, ask yourself if it holds and defines the essence of who you are as a unique living being. Are your personality, aptitudes, skill, history, personal identity fastened to your cartilage or bone marrow or spleen or any of the complex constantly changing individual body parts that natural biological processes assembled to build your physical form? These questions about the components of our physical bodies are the basis for the concepts of "no fixed unchanging identity" and "no self".

May You and All Beings be Safe, Healthy, and Happy.

May You find your Way in this lifetime to the Inner Liberation of Full Enlightenment.