

Meditation upon the Thirty-to Parts of the Body

by
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To our teacher, Kema Ananda
To all of our students, past and present
To all aspirants of Theravada Buddhist meditation practice

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List of Abbreviations

AN	Anguttara Nikaya
DN	Digha Nikaya
HBM	The Heart of Buddhist Meditation
MN	Majjhima Nikaya
PP	Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)
PSI	The Path of Serenity and Insight
Pts	The Patisambhidamagga
SN	Samyutta Nikaya
	The Book of Analysis (Vibhanga)
Vibh	The Dispeller of Delusion (Sammohavinodani -
VbhA	Vibhanga Commentary)
KhpA	The Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning (Paramatthajotika, Part 1 - Minor Readings Commentary)
Vim	The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimagga)

Introduction

Contemplation upon the 32 Parts of the Body is one of forty distinct practices in Theravada Buddhism that are labeled meditations. These practices are designed to do certain things — largely help a meditator to develop serenity and understanding. The latter is also called wisdom or insight in Buddhism. The term Insight is used to denote more than mere intelligence; instead it is the very seeing, through experience, into how all things come to be and how they pass away without remainder. Serenity, which is commonly termed concentration in most Buddhist texts, is necessary to the development of wisdom as much as wisdom is to the development of concentration. Both are considered factors of Enlightenment, a common term to describe a stage of sanctity that is the result of the work of meditation, but only when practiced correctly and practiced long enough to eradicate any Karma blocking the way to fully realizing the Buddhist Path of meditation and its fruits. Concentration and wisdom in tandem push the development of each to levels that are not commonly or often reached. For the beginner, the relationship between concentration and wisdom may be more clearly seen in the reverse (less of one equals less of another) as when one practice is developed without a sufficiently balanced effort in developing the other. For example, if concentration is developed without enough wisdom, then the mind becomes lethargic and bored; and when wisdom is developed ahead of concentration then the mind fails to stay centered upon anything long enough for wisdom to grow any further. Either imbalance stalls any effort until the balance is rectified. But once balance is achieved and maintained, the meditative process bursts asunder all blocks that arise to impede progress.

The development of concentration using different techniques and meditation objects was quite common at the time of the Buddha. But it was the Buddha that figured out how to use the concentration being developed by various meditation practices as a way to gain insight into reality. From that moment on he taught the development of the Jhanas¹ as a way to reach enlightenment. The common method prescribed back then was to develop

concentration up to the fourth Jhana and then, using the highly developed concentration to lend penetrative strength to insight, to turn discerning contemplation upon the very Jhana just experienced. One of the three defining characteristics of all phenomena, namely unsatisfactoriness, impermanence, or not self, will manifest quite clearly, two or three times. This then leads to Path and Fruit moments which define the realization of Nibbana, the Third Noble Truth in Buddhism, and is what's commonly labeled enlightenment.

Vipassana or Insight meditation is based upon the Satipatthana Sutta (MN 10, DN 22) and has remained predominant of late since its rebirth in Burma at the beginning of the 20th century. However, more and more teachers and meditation centers are offering instruction in Jhana development at the beginning of the 21st century, both in the East and the West. Until recently there have been so few resources available that most who wanted to learn the Jhanas could not find texts with sufficient instruction nor teachers with sufficient experience willing to teach it (particularly for lay-practitioners). At the time Nyanaponika Thera wrote *The Heart Of Buddhist Meditation* the disparity of teachings, resources, and even interest moved him to state an opinion that the necessary commodities of seclusion and noiselessness were not readily available anymore. He wrote that the combined factors of present-day environment and education have led to a predominance of interest in Vipassana meditation because it's seen as the more desirable way or the quicker and surest way.²

Thankfully increased interest for Jhana has been matched by more and more teachers able to teach it. But with more people teaching Jhana, there are also differences in style and content with

1. Jhana is the development of concentration to a much greater degree than normally experienced in everyday life. Jhana development requires virtue and a balanced practice of mental discipline. Virtue is achieved by strict adherence to at least the Five Precepts for Laity. Mental discipline is achieved through meditation practices such as Meditation upon the 32 parts of the Body. The meditation being presented here can only be developed to first Jhana, the lowest, while other meditation practices can be used to develop successively higher levels and modes of concentration up to eighth Jhana.

2. HBM, page 104.

minor debates over the variations. The differences range from what object to use to how far one has to develop practices that lead to Jhana before one can utilize a boosting positive effect on your insight work. However, differences in style and content have not stopped the development of different Vipassana techniques (i.e., Burmese method, Thai Forest tradition, Goenka) and hopefully Jhana practice and techniques will flourish under such diversity as well.

No matter how far one develops Jhana, the reason for it is secondary to the main goal in Buddhism, namely the realization of Nibbana. For this reason virtually all other Buddhist meditation practices other than Vipassana are considered secondary meditations and are seen as supportive to the work of Vipassana rather than an alternative. In effect, there are a set of Tranquility-based meditations (of which Meditation upon 32 parts of the Body is one) which serve as a base and potential catalyst for Insight-based meditations. Because successful Tranquility practice generates abundant tranquility, joy, and happiness accompanying increased concentration — concepts unimaginable to Insight-only practices, these two paths have also been called the wet-path and the dry-path. It is somewhat ironic that many Insight practitioners fear Jhana development outside of Vipassana retreats. This is most likely because when doing a Vipassana retreat one has to be aware of Jhana factors arising and put them aside while doing that practice. There is no support in the Suttas, or commentaries and sub-commentaries, for such a bias when the work is Jhana development instead of Insight. The development of Jhana factors as a separate practice, in support of insight work, smoothes out extremes bringing balance and ease to the practice of any meditation. In cases when blocks occur and keep arising in insight practice, you can select a secondary meditation that specifically targets the block or source of the blockage and undermines its ability to arise. The Buddha recommended this approach as the first method to handling thoughts which are not conducive to your meditation practice or life in general.³

The instruction presented here goes beyond being simply a secondary role in support of other meditation practices to a principle meditation taken to the fullest extent as taught by the Buddha, namely all the way to first Jhana. Meditation upon the 32

parts of the body suppresses sensual desires which are a major hindrance to development of all Buddhist meditation practices.⁴ Lust is one example of an unprofitable mental state⁵ born of sensual desire that can be easily dealt with using meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body. It even addresses subtle forms of craving such as anticipation, which may plague beginning and advanced meditators alike. Mastery of this meditation will lead to complete control of craving which is the cause of all suffering.

Those considering Jhana development should not worry whether they will become enthralled by the wetter path. In the *Simile of the Quail* the Buddha describes the mundane pleasures and joy we strive to experience everyday through our five senses as “a filthy pleasure, a coarse pleasure, an ignoble pleasure . . . that it should not be pursued, that it should not be developed, that it should not be cultivated, that it should be feared.” He then describes the first four Jhanas as “the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace, the bliss of enlightenment . . . that this kind of pleasure should be pursued, that it should be developed, that it should be cultivated, and that it should not be feared.”⁶

3. MN, Sutta 20, page 211, par 3 and accompanying footnote 240 where the meditation specifically recommended for dispelling sensual pleasure is the same as the one being detailed in this book. See also Soma Thera's *The Removal of Distracting Thoughts*, Wheel No. 21, available on-line at BPS, for another translation with commentaries and sub-commentaries as well.

4. Sensual desire is one of five major hindrances that are cited as impediments to spiritual development in Buddhism. There are four other hindrances ranked as major: Ill-will, Sloth and Torpor, Worry or Restlessness, and Doubt.

5. Unprofitable is a term used in Buddhism to mean anything that is not conducive to one's meditation practice or to the realization of Nibbana.

6. MN, Sutta 66, page 557, paras 19-21.

Meditation upon “The 32 Parts of the Body”

The combination of Insight and Tranquility developed in this particular meditation can be quite effective for achieving success on the spiritual path. There is a story in the *Visuddhimagga* about how an elder monk was walking down the road while meditating upon the 32 parts of the body, when the sound of laughter from a beautiful young lady caused him to break away from his meditation object. When he looked up towards the lady, the source of sound that had caught his attention, the perception of her teeth acted as a catalyst plunging him into Jhana. The monk immediately emerged from the Jhana and upon reviewing the Jhana went through the four successive stages of Insight breakthroughs culminating in full Arahatsip.⁷ What an incredible story of perfection powerful enough to propel a meditator to full spiritual realization. Experience and Karma aside, the vehicle that set up the monk for such a momentous spiritual development was meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body.

This contemplation of the body can be used as a secondary meditation in support of other practices. As such, it may be utilized when the meditator is in a formal retreat or if the meditator finds time to include the Meditation upon the 32 parts of the Body in their daily schedule of practice. By doing a little every day this meditation has a tonic effect, decreasing the power of sensual desires to interfere where not wanted, if and when they arise throughout the course of the day.

As an aid to breaking the hold of addictions, such as alcohol, cigarettes, gambling, etc., you may find the need for other practices such as Loving-kindness meditation (Metta) for developing happiness and well-being within, which lessens anger and rage reactions, and/or Mindfulness of Breathing meditation (Anapanasati) for calming worry, anxiety, or agitation. A skilful teacher with experience using these meditations can be very

7. PP page 23, Chapter I, par 55, and footnote 15, page 752.

helpful in developing a routine that would best match the stage of your addiction at the moment.⁸

Meditation upon 32 Parts of the Body is immediately effective as a counter-action to the hindrance of sensual-desire, whether in gross forms such as lust or in subtle forms such as anticipating the next breath. The practice helps the meditator to transcend both attachment and aversion toward the body. Meditation techniques and practices are something akin to maintaining a well stocked toolbox, having the right tool/meditation at hand when needed. Meditation upon 32 Parts of the Body is one tool that is indispensable, particularly for lay practitioners who still maintain a more worldly existence compared with celibate ordained monks.⁹ Learning this meditation early on in the enfoldment of your practice is highly recommended. No other meditation technique is so readily practiced, while at the same time so effective in countering the myriad forms of sense-desire, both gross and subtle, which arise as blocks and deterrents during meditation practice.

In Buddhism each moment of knowing and/or being is a manifestation of craving. The over-riding search in Buddhism comes down to finding the elusive moment where craving fails to manifest so that Nibbana can be realized. Such an occurrence is the result of mental discipline and wisdom, or Samadhi and Insight, usually developed over time and in perfect balance at the moment it occurs. This moment of awakening, or occurrence of Path and Fruit, is preceded by dispassion towards all possible things.¹⁰ At this point the dispassion is powerful enough to counter desire for any further development of the preceding thought and to block any desire, as a motivating force, to take-up any new object that

8. It should also be pointed out that there is also a meditation practice called *Perception of Repulsiveness in Nutriment* that could be very effective as an aid to handling eating disorders, as well as those who are slaves to their taste buds, but it should only be pursued with the guidance of someone experienced enough to tell you when you are doing it right or when you need to make an adjustment. See PP Chap XI, paras 1-26, pages 337-343, for how this meditation practice is developed.

9. Nyanaponika Thera offers similar views on the value of this meditation (HBM, pages 65-66).

10. *The Progress of Insight*, pages 28-29. See also PP, XXI, 63, page 679.

may manifest as an alternative focus of attention for the meditator. The non-action, the non-developing of anything related to the past moment and doing nothing towards developing attention to something new, is the moment before Nibbana, the moment the bellows of passions still, the moment the flames of desire cease. It is as far as a meditator can knowingly go, because to go any further would be to not-be, like the cat in *Alice in Wonderland*, or like finding a Boojum Snark in *The Hunting of a Snark* (both by Lewis Carroll). It is also like a reverse "Field of Dreams" effect whereby if you don't build it, no one will come.¹¹

Meditators get this close to realizing Nibbana and fall back, sometimes repeatedly, until the knowledge matures. As long as the effects of past unprofitable Karma are still infecting the effort, then the goal will not be reached. But by getting so close, the meditator is doing major work on reducing the effect and/or duration of remaining unprofitable Karma that will ripen and could impede progress the next time their meditation gets close to the realization of Nibbana.¹² The source of all unprofitable Karma is craving, whether it be craving for sensual pleasure, craving to be or craving not to be. Obviously any meditation which will help to control craving will also reduce the creation of unprofitable Karma. Meditation upon 32 Parts of the Body directly suppresses all forms of craving for sensual pleasure; it also produces dispassion which in turn suppresses the motivating force of the other two forms of craving (to be or not to be). By recognizing the importance of dispassion and becoming more familiar with it, we tend to do more and more of what is required to maintain our spiritual practice. Anything done to maintain such a state of

11. "Field of Dreams" is the name of a movie in which a farmer builds a baseball diamond on his farm for no reason other than, "If you build it people will come." Upon completion of the baseball diamond, people he never met start showing up. What is meant here is that any concept of a self, or another, or anything for that matter, requires attention in the present moment towards something. The something is an object currently presenting itself at one of the sense doors (flavor, aroma, sound, tactile sensation, visual object, or some form of cognition such as a thought or a memory). In a very real sense, by giving attention to what is arising at a sense door, we come into being. If we do not give attention to what is presenting at a sense door, including any new thought or memory, we cease to be.

dispassion will be wholesome, generating profitable Karma, and supportive of the realization of Nibbana.

Meditation upon 32 parts of the body when practiced properly results in a perception of un-loveliness towards the body, whether yours or another's, whether the whole body or the individual parts. And neither is the perception of un-loveliness arising in this meditation supportive or defined by any negative states such as loathsome, foul, or ugly whether perceived as oneself or as another. The perception of un-loveliness is not forced, but arises naturally, gently, as a by-product, during the practice of this meditation. Because of this perception, rather than attraction, the meditator produces dispassion towards the body. Dispassion is the mid-point between attachment and aversion and is the seed for equanimity. The dispassion generated by meditating upon the 32 Parts of the Body is similar in nature to the dispassion preceding Path and Fruit previously described. Dispassion in this case is towards the physical body specifically, while dispassion preceding Path and Fruit before realization of Nibbana is regarding all possible things. Dispassion generated from meditation upon 32 Parts of the Body is not sufficient by itself to trigger Path and Fruit. However meditation upon 32 Parts of the Body allows us to visit and become more familiar with that particular state of mind, albeit in a lesser context. The fact that the dispassion arises naturally makes this a particularly valuable meditation for people with addictive personalities.¹³

12. In Buddhism, Karma is seen as the fruit produced by any and all occurrences of speech, action, or intention. The fruit ripens and falls into play in the future, whether this life or a future life. The Buddha said "Beings are owners of their actions [Karma], heirs of their actions, they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions [like a friend], have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior." (MN, Sutta 135, par 4, page 1053). By not remaining attentive to our actions, thoughts, and speech we lose the gatekeeper of mindfulness which guards against the development of unprofitable Karma. Wants and desires are never satiated but instead seamlessly flow into more wants and desires, which if not controlled will develop into immoral behavior which produces unprofitable Karma. By living virtuously and by meditating, one creates Karma that is beneficial towards the realization of Nibbana. The meditator is not passive at all but actively engaged in creating the Karma needed for spiritual success.

There is much wisdom to be gleaned when the search for sensual fulfillment is suppressed. Attempts to appease craving in one form or another occupies virtually every moment of waking thought for most people. When one is so busy, so occupied in a never ending task, the futile reality of what they are doing is not seen. Without the drive to seek sensual desires, the conditioned patterns of behavior built upon futile attempts to appease craving are no longer supported. True insights into reality become plain and undeniable. Specifically, wisdom or Insight develops from seeing the body as made up of individual parts. Nowhere can a self be found within the sack of parts. When the body is seen as a collection of parts without a concept of self there is a lack of support for craving. Without sufficient strength of presence, craving cannot lead to the development of clinging¹⁴ which would mark the start of new Karma being formed. This relief from craving is non-attachment which in turn leads to renunciation and abandonment of all perceived unprofitable ideas, words, and deeds (in support of maintaining the very state of non-attachment). Synergistic momentum in both understanding and practice becomes possible.

Taken as a tranquility meditation, any one of the 32 parts which appear strongly to the meditator can be used as an object of concentration. The meditator keeps refining the perception of the individual body part until the concentration upon the part reaches the level termed "Jhana" in Buddhism. Jhana development is seen as so valuable because it suppresses the hindrances that impede spiritual development. With the hindrances suppressed and

13. Because it works indirectly on desires, it avoids perceptions of tackling or fighting the addiction directly. As such, this meditation practice will not seem quite as daunting as methods which work with the object of desire that stress restraint and resistance.

14. The Buddha gave a formulation of how beings come into existence called Dependent Origination (*Paticca-Samuppada* in Pali). It applies to lifetimes but is also a schematic on how we maintain our existence from moment-to-moment. In the formulation, craving in any of its three forms is seen as arising dependent upon a feeling, and with the development of craving there arises clinging in one of four potential ways: clinging to sense desires, clinging to false views, clinging to rule and ritual, or clinging to a self-concept (PP Chap XVII, Par 240, page 585; *Dependent Origination* [Wheel 15 a/b available on-line at BPS] pages 23-29).

alignment towards wholesome and profitable words, thoughts, and deeds as prevalent states, the meditator has a leg up on the development of any of the other 39 meditations prescribed by the Buddha. As a fringe benefit, enhanced performance in other non-Buddhist contemplative practices, or tasks requiring mental discipline, will also occur. It may seem strange that something as mundane as *sweat* or *urine* can be the object of developed concentration leading to what are described as exalted states of consciousness. However, such is the potential of Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body.

What is even more amazing is that from the dispassion will eventually come happiness of such magnitude that it cannot be easily described, if at all, to those who have not experienced it. When we talk about happiness within the practice we also talk in stages or degrees. The hindrances of *ill-will* and *worry* are suppressed by their polar opposites of rapture and bliss which manifest stronger and become much more pronounced in the meditator's perception whether they are sitting in meditation or not. These opposites have the added distinction of being Jhana factors because of the way they intensify and appear so much more clearly and strongly as one approaches development of Jhanic level concentration.¹⁵ When one reaches the stage in meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body where dispassion is prominent, the Jhana factors of rapture and bliss will increase

15. What constitutes Jhana is much more than just the Jhana Factors themselves. According to Abhidhamma texts there are 33 mental constituents that comprise first Jhana in 32 Parts of the Body meditation: Applied Thought, Sustained Thought, Rapture, One-Pointedness, Contact, Feeling, Perception, Volition, Attention, Life-Faculty, Desire, Decision, Energy, Mindfulness, Equanimity, Wisdom, Faith, Shame, Moral Dread, Non-Attachment, Non-Hatred, Tranquility of the Mental Body, Tranquility of the Mind, Lightness of the Mental Body, Lightness of the Mind, Pliancy of the Mental Body, Pliancy of the Mind, Adaptability of the Mental Body, Adaptability of the Mind, Proficiency of the Mental Body, Proficiency of the Mind, Rectitude of the Mental Body, Rectitude of the Mind. Translated terms vary across texts and we have used the more common designations; the reader is invited to check the sources to delve further — Bhikkhu Bodhi's *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, page 112; Narada Maha Thera's *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, pages 128-29 (but Narada Maha seems to include the three abstinences whereas Bhikkhu Bodhi does not).

resulting in feelings of mental and physical well-being. These forms of happiness are not the result of appeasing sense-desires, but arise as a result of increased concentration. In the course of developing this meditation one realizes that desires are not plaguing one's thoughts nearly as much as before and feels happiness as a relief. Finally, when one reaches Jhana or the occurrence of Path and Fruit the meditator will experience euphoria free from all negative mental states. Some may say that happiness as described here is the result of concentration, or the result of being free from desire, or the result of reaching a lofty goal, and not the result of dispassion which is normally seen as non-supportive of happiness in any form. And we would agree, but in each case described dispassion happened first, leading and contributing to further development that was accompanied by some form of happiness. So it is not that much of a stretch to say that happiness will come from non-attachment.¹⁶

Attitude and Perception

There are alternative names for this practice: "Meditation on Repulsiveness", "Meditation on Foulness"¹⁷, but we'd like to propose a better translation of the Pali term "Asubhasaññ?" as "Meditation on the Unlovely".¹⁸ For many meditators the use of terms such as repulsiveness or foulness carries connotations that are so negative they miss the mark and develop aversion instead of dispassion. The *Samyutta Nikaya* contains an account whereby a large number of monks misinterpreted the teaching on this

16. VhbA, par 1145, page 308, states that mental pleasure arises through seeing the blessings in this object of the repulsiveness; or it arises through the power of having unity. The latter is further expanded in a footnote with the statement, "For without liking and mental pleasure there is no appearance of unity to one who has not passed beyond rapture and happiness" (Footnote 33, page 357).

17. These are the two most commonly used terms in the texts that mention Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body where the aim is to develop Jhana. MN Sutta 119 uses the phrase "many kinds of impurities" to describe the 32 parts, but this translation may be more negative than necessary as well.

18. Soma Thera also uses the term "unlovely" when naming this meditation as a means to handling unwholesome thoughts such as lust, greed, and desire, as soon as awareness of such thoughts manifests (In *The Removal of Distracting Thoughts*, Wheel No. 21, BPS).

meditation. According to the Sutta they became “Repelled, humiliated, and disgusted” with their bodies, so much so, that many committed suicide or asked another to kill them.¹⁹ When doing this meditation you must not cultivate an attitude of repulsion toward the body — that would be merely exchanging attachment for aversion.

The object instead is to develop an attitude of dispassion by seeing clearly the repulsiveness, or foulness, inherent in the objects making up the body (e.g., skin, hair, flesh). An attitude of dispassion is conducive to neither lust, nor disgust, but fosters instead a balanced and mindful equanimity. The aspect of repulsiveness and foulness stressed so often in the texts is likely because of our usual attitude toward the body, our own as well as those of others, is so frequently colored by desire. To achieve the balance point of equanimity we must work to swing the pendulum in the opposite direction, but in doing so guard against swinging too far the other way. Indeed, proper practice should see a decrease in both attachment and aversion towards any and all aspects of the body. With such an aim in mind, we proffer substituting un-loveliness as the aspect to develop toward each part when practicing Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body. If the concept of unlovely falls short of developing dispassion for the meditator, then a teacher or mentor might suggest they try a starker concept such as impure, and if that doesn't work, then try the concept of foulness.²⁰

Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body, whether used as a basis for Insight meditation or Meditation upon Defining the Four Elements, doesn't incorporate the unlovely or other such aspects

19. SN, Sutta 54:9, page 1773.

20. If you don't have access to a teacher or mentor, then we suggest that you devote at least a few weeks to working with the un-loveliness concept before trying a different concept. Success occurs when the body part you are visualizing as unlovely becomes alive within you or in another. Be sure to apply all the instructions on skill development and mindfully determine whether other obstacles are impeding development before considering any change. If you do switch, try the concept of impurity first. Try foulness only if success is not reached after a few weeks with the concept of impurity. Switching concepts initially results in less concentration and can be the start of a bad habit if unwisely done.

towards the parts or the body as a whole. When working with the four elements, the aspects of each element (earth, water, fire, air) is determined within the same 32 body parts and/or in the actions of the parts. Dispassion arises as a result of disenchantment with the elements, particularly because of the lack of any identifiable self within the body when the body is perceived as comprised of elements.²¹ This approach doesn't give rise to negative views or unwholesome mental states towards the body in order to achieve the dispassion being sought when developing wisdom (Insight), but Meditation upon Defining the Four Elements fails to develop sufficient concentration to achieve Jhana.²² We mention an alternative course for two reasons. First, for those who fail to develop Jhana with Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body, the work will be of immediate use for developing wisdom (Insight) using the Meditation upon Defining the Four Elements. And secondly, for the few who have trouble finding the middle between attachment and aversion when trying to see the unlovely in the body, they can turn to Meditation upon Defining the Four Elements to develop the dispassion that is so useful in countering sensual-craving when working on Insight.²³

The 32 Parts Listed

The physiology known at the time of Buddhaghosa was relatively primitive; so much so that the detailed descriptions of the parts in the *Visuddhimagga*²⁴ are of limited use to the present-day meditator. Fortunately most readers will readily find pictures and modern descriptions of the 32 parts in books or on websites. The

21. MN, Sutta 28, Sutta 62, Sutta 140, and DN; PP Chap XI, Paras 27-117, pages 343-366 details the practice of *Defining of the Elements*.

22. All texts agree that Meditation upon the Four Elements reaches Access Concentration only, which is just short of absorption (Jhana). See PP Chap III, Par 6, page 86; Vim page 64. The object of concentration is too diverse, requiring an "active application of discursive thought" (PSI pages 24-25) which prevents the development of absorption concentration.

23. It is also possible for a meditator to develop Jhana using one of the colours perceived in the body parts (i.e., blue, red, yellow, white) but this would not be developing the unlovely aspect (repulsiveness) and as such we recommend trying this method only if the unlovely aspect doesn't develop for the meditator,

original list was only 31 parts, but the brain was added later. We know of no reason for the exact number of parts and can only surmise that the cadavers left in the open cemeteries at the time of the Buddha revealed the parts that compiled the list. There are a few variations upon this list.²⁵ The differences are small ones, and often amount to no more than differences of name. Differences probably arise out of translation difficulties, no doubt compounded by modern scholars' imperfect understanding of ancient concepts of physiology and anatomy.

For the sake of this meditation, the 32 parts are seen to make up the whole body. The parts are arranged in mostly natural groupings, which make memorization easier. The groupings are by lots of five and six parts called pentads and sestads, respectively. The final body part in each group is used as the name for that pentad or sestad. Notes on a few of the more obscure parts or alternatives will be found in 'Step 2' under 'Method of Practice'.

Hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin	<i>skin pentad</i>
Flesh, sinews, bone, marrow, kidneys	<i>kidneys pentad</i>
Heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs	<i>lungs pentad</i>
Bowels, mesentery, gorge, dung, brain	<i>brain pentad</i>
Bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat	<i>fat sestad</i>
Tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, urine	<i>urine sestad</i>

24. An abbreviated list of details for the 32 parts from the *Visuddhimagga* may be found in the Appendices along with a complete list combining all that is found in the *Vissudhimagga* (PP, Chap VIII, Pars 85-138, pages 243-258, and Chap XI, paras 47-80, pages 348-357), in the *Sammohavinodani* (VbhA, pages 290-307 and 311-313), and in the *Paramatthajotika* - part 1 (pages 42-68).

25. See *Living Buddhist Masters*, pages 186-191. Taungpulu Sayadaw presents another modern approach, somewhat different than the one presented here.

Method of Practice

The prescribed methods that follow are based upon both the description found in the *Visuddhimagga* (Chap VIII, paras 42-144, pages 235-259) and the honing of practice.²⁶ The primary instruction is derived from two small subsections titled “Sevenfold Skill in Learning” and “Tenfold Skill in Giving Attention.”²⁷ It is no surprise that the methodology found in the *Visuddhimagga* appears convoluted and overwhelming for a beginner. It is, after all, a translation of a technical manual which is attempting to explain all the different meditations in Theravadin Buddhism that have been practiced and passed down since the time of the Buddha. Indeed, it often seems written for someone already steeped in experience needing only a little clarification or for someone with access to a mentor who can help to flesh out details revealing the vast amounts of information contained within a few paragraphs of tightly packed sentences.

A proven effective, possibly simpler, stepwise development is offered here. Everything presented in the *Visuddhimagga* and other sources will still be found within the following meditation exercises, but certain skills are developed individually rather than in combination with other skills. The shorter steps, so to speak, make learning easier at later stages in the development of this meditation subject. Those who undertake this practice of Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body as presented may rest assured that the methodology and results coincide with Jhana development from learning the object of concentration to mastery of the Jhana itself.

For those who are looking for a way to help them resist addictions and addictive tendencies, there will be noticeable gain if this practice is developed to Step 3 as described below. Countering such thoughts and urges will be much easier. Lust is easily quieted by taking a moment to mentally work through the first five body parts when you have mastered Step 3. If you aspire

26. We also went to the relevant suttas listed in the texts and to any commentaries and sub-commentaries we could find (i.e., the *Sammohavinodani* and the *Paramatthajotika* both commentaries by the author of the *Visuddhimagga*, Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa, and all three translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli).

27. An abbreviated form of these subsections may be found in the appendices

to take this meditation as far as it can take you, then daily practice will probably need augmenting with meditation retreats to reach step 6. The Appendices contains a discussion on retreat preparation for those looking to take this meditation to Jhana and further meditative development. But to start it is recommended to set aside six months to devote your time to learning this meditation, which is stated to be “designed for a person of medium understanding.”²⁸

An attempt has been made to provide clear indicators of progress, including criterion to meet, and where applicable, notable changes in the meditation practice that will become evident. No matter how complete the set of instructions, they cannot replace the advantages from having a spiritual friend or mentor who is skilled in this meditation. The importance of the teacher in developing Jhana is stated in all credible texts²⁹ and for Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body in particular.³⁰

Step 1

Once seated comfortably in a posture conducive to concentration, but not leaning against anything, start by verbally reciting the list of 32 parts. If you lean on something like the wall behind you, it is likely you will fall asleep. Sitting in a crossed-leg position or in a lotus position is not required, and is counter-productive if the posture becomes too painful to maintain for an hour. You want to be comfortable enough that you do not need to move very often, if at all, but not so comfortable that you nod off.

Sitting alone in a quiet place is a special requirement because you will be verbalizing the list out loud. In the beginning all of your sitting time will go towards developing this first skill. We

28. From KhpA, paras 11-13, page 42, and VbhA, paras 1148-1150, page 309, but the methodology is presented as learning one line at a time, forwards and backwards, all the way to delimitation before taking on the next line of parts in the list. We have deviated a little from this approach as you will see, but as stated above, without loss of benefit.

29. PP Chap III, Pars 61-73, pages 98-101; Vim Chap V, pages 48-53; PSI pages 20-22.

30. See Nyanaponika Thera's *The Five Mental Hindrances*, page 11.

recommend having a hard copy of the list in front of you for when you forget a part. Recite exactly as follows:

**Hair of the Head, Hair of the Body, Nails, Teeth, Skin
 Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head
 Flesh, Sinews, Bone, Marrow, Kidneys
 Kidneys, Marrow, Bone, Sinews, Flesh
 Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head
 Heart, Liver, Membranes, Spleen, Lungs
 Lungs, Spleen, Membranes, Liver, Heart
 Kidneys, Marrow, Bone, Sinews, Flesh
 Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head
 Bowels, Mesentery, Gorge, Dung, Brain
 Brain, Dung, Gorge, Mesentery, Bowels
 Lungs, Spleen, Membranes, Liver, Heart
 Kidneys, Marrow, Bone, Sinews, Flesh
 Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head
 Bile, Phlegm, Pus, Blood, Sweat, Fat
 Fat, Sweat, Blood, Pus, Phlegm, Bile
 Brain, Dung, Gorge, Mesentery, Bowels
 Lungs, Spleen, Membranes, Liver, Heart
 Kidneys, Marrow, Bone, Sinews, Flesh
 Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head
 Tears, Grease, Spittle, Snot, Oil of the Joints, Urine
 Urine, Oil of the Joints, Snot, Spittle, Grease, Tears
 Fat, Sweat, Blood, Pus, Phlegm, Bile
 Brain, Dung, Gorge, Mesentery, Bowels
 Lungs, Spleen, Membranes, Liver, Heart
 Kidneys, Marrow, Bone, Sinews, Flesh
 Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head**

The verbal recitation should be performed until it becomes so familiar that when one brings the list to mind, you see the structure and the parts of the list comprising it (6 lines of 5 or 6 word groupings). As the *Visuddhimagga* says, "For it is through verbal recitation that the meditation subject becomes familiar, and the mind being thus prevented from running here and there, the parts become evident and seem like [the fingers of] a pair of clasped hands, like a row of fence posts."³¹

The beginning of this meditation seems to be merely memorizing a list, but because it is verbalized the parts eventually start to become more than words. The individual will connect the layout of the list to the body, but it is not necessary at this time; care should be taken not to let visualization become the new focus before the verbalized recitation is mastered.

Try to see each term as an individual word for an individual part before moving on to the next term. Work to find the right speed for reciting as you keep repeating the verbal recitation. The pace has to be matched to your ability. The more you do this practice, the more rapidly you will be able to recite it, so checking and adjusting your pace has to be evaluated and changed as necessary. If the list is done too quickly, distinctiveness of each part within the list fails to develop. The opposite of going too fast, namely going too slowly, must also be avoided. These two are the second and third skills to develop at this stage. One wants to complete the list in a reasonable time and if it is done too slowly you can get distracted by a variety of things via the sense doors. Balance between opposites is the cornerstone of the entire Buddhist path. This principle is present in all aspects of the teaching. Find the middle way between extremes such as trying too hard and not trying hard enough, too fast and too slowly. All have to be sorted out to maintain a balanced effort.

Awareness of what changes need to be made becomes clear with repeated practice. This increased awareness, or mindfulness, is what the fourth skill in the "Tenfold Skill in Giving Attention" is all about. The prescribed warding off of distraction starts with mindfulness. Obviously one wants to stay focused on the task of reciting the list and not be distracted by internal and external objects. But without directed awareness, one cannot even determine when the mind left the very object that one was trying to focus upon. As in other meditations, you have to strive to remain aware of the beginning and the end, as well as all that can be perceived between these two points. In the case of mastering the verbal recitation for this meditation practice, you need to know when you have left the last part, that you are now reciting the next part, that you have finished reciting the part completely,

31. PP, VIII, par 56, page 238.

and that the time to let go of the part to take up the next one has come. By breaking down the task into smaller components to be aware of, you develop more awareness inside the very practice you are doing. In this way you are presented with more opportunities to catch the mind before it loses touch with the object of your concentration. It is in this way you learn the skill to ward off distractions and how to determine the speed to work at. When you start the practice most likely you will not be able to maintain much mindfulness and distractions will seem, on occasions at the very least, to be constantly plaguing the work. Repeated practice yields increased mindfulness and increased mindfulness helps you to remain on the object without chasing distracting thoughts or other sense stimuli.

Meditators always want clear and easily identifiable indicators which will let them know when to move on in developing meditation practices. The hard part is to give something in writing that will apply to a myriad of differing abilities. Before making any changes to your practice or moving on in the practice it's always best to discuss such changes with your teacher. They know you well, often even better than you know yourself, and are therefore your best indicator. Having said that, there are also three criteria we use to judge if one has mastered the first part of this meditation or not. You should be able to orally recite the list in the prescribed manner without having to look at a written list. You should be able to recite the entire list without losing track of where you are in the list. And finally, you should be able to recite the list anytime, anywhere, with only a moment's notice, while still fulfilling the previous two criteria.

Depending upon the individual, mastering the first skill of the "Sevenfold Skill in Learning" could take a 100 times, a 1,000 times or even a 100,000 times. Recite the list whenever you have an opportunity and not just when you have set aside special time. Mastering the first skill is vital to all the rest of the skills in the "Sevenfold Skill in Learning." It is the foundation for all that follows.

Step 2

Once the verbal recitation is learned, it is time to move on to the mental recitation. At this point we would suggest obtaining a book on anatomy or other sources of information.³² Familiarize yourself with the physical appearance, location and other useful information about the individual parts listed.

Now that you have learned the verbalization of the list, from this point on, you verbally recite the list *only once* when you sit to practice the mental recitation. And only after a verbal recitation do you start the mental recitation. By 'only once' we mean once through perfectly before moving to the mental recitation. If it takes six times to verbalize it perfectly then that is how many times you do it for that sit, but the next sit may only take once or twice, while another may take more, but verbalize it until it is perfect before moving on, each and every time you sit to practice.

Starting at the beginning of the list you go through it again mentally, but as each part is mentally named, direct your mindfulness toward that part and attempt to visualize it. Some parts will naturally appear more clearly, and the specific parts which "stand out" may not be the same every time you practice. So, do not worry if it is difficult to visualize a part. This meditation takes time and one has to allow for a natural enfoldment. Avoid straining to visualize parts which do not naturally arise strongly. Instead, move on to the next part. If you strain the concentration you will tire and develop agitation. After the sit you can look up any body parts in the appendix, or another source on human physiology, to provide the missing details for your visualization the next time you sit. In this way, after a few sits, you will have a picture in your mind of each part.

Here are some tips for visualizing. For visualizing the skin the meditator should "insert his knowledge" between skin and bone and follow a path beginning at the upper lip, around the back of the head, down the back, up and around the crotch, up the torso and head, returning to the lower lip, with detours for each limb where required.³³ For toothless meditators or others who

32. Some suggestions may be found in the Bibliography under Additional Resources.

33. PP, Chap VIII, Par 95, page 246.

have had body parts such as a spleen removed, or if they are bald, you can work with memory of these parts or if that fails to work, then drop the part and don't try to develop it further. Flesh and muscle are considered the same body part, as are sinews and tendons. Membranes are the concealing tissue of the heart and kidney and covering the flesh under the inner skin throughout the entire body. Bowels are seen as the entire digestive tract from the gullet to the rectum. The Mesentery is the tough connective tissues binding the bowls, intestines, and organs in place. Gorge is the undigested food in the stomach. Grease is the oils found on the skin surface. Oil of the joints are the sacks of fluid that lubricate and absorb shock in the various joints of the bone structure. (This paragraph will go when I finish the appendix which details the individual parts)

The *Visuddhimagga* identifies certain characteristics that you refine while you visualize: note the color, define the shape, see the direction (which is determined by whether the part is above or below the navel) and determine the location (where and how the part is attached). The criterion for visualizing each of the 32 body parts are described in point-form via a spreadsheet, and via detailed description for each part, in the Appendices as an aid for this exercise. In this manner strive to see each part as clearly and as extensively as your mind is able without straining. When a part appears vividly, linger over it as long as the mind can hold the object without wandering. Again, balance is the key, moving too quickly will give nothing, and moving slowly will allow distraction to develop.

As in other meditations, one has to develop the skill of applying or "laying" the mind on the object of meditation without straining, and without developing attachment or aversion toward the process. No matter how difficult, unruly, resistant, or conversely, how easily, clearly or tranquilly the mind seems to perform the function of visualizing the various parts, one must resist the tendency to judge and compare what could be seen as "your" progress. This only leads to more and more discursive thinking, allowing feelings and emotions to randomly develop. These in turn disrupt the concentration causing despair, disgust, or at worst, abandonment of the practice. Strive to view the whole exercise with equanimity from beginning to end, whether easy or

difficult. If successful, one will understand the meaning of “diligent effortlessness,” and one will keep the fine balance required to avoid the pitfalls of desire that can mire progress. Take a moment after you have finished the allotted time for meditation practice to review how well it went, but do not review during the allotted time for the sit.

Step 3

When pictures of the various parts are starting to become clearer, it is time to broaden the visualization to include “delimitation” of the parts. This third step is twofold in nature. Now, when mentally reciting the 32 parts, first see the part as delimited by that which is above, below, and around it. For instance, the teeth are surrounded by gums at the root and air above the gum line. Second, see dissimilarities which apply (e.g. “body hair” is not “head hair” and vice versa). This will help to refine the image of the part, and amplify it to a three dimensional object. With the increased multiplicity of the parts being visualized, concentration will lengthen and deepen on its own accord.

This amplification marks a point in the development of this meditation practice if you are striving for Jhana. Within Jhana practice this stage has the label of the “Learning Sign.” It simply means that the object to be worked with has been learned. That’s right; all the effort thus far has been to learn in detail what the object of concentration is for each part. But this is a major step toward the development of Jhana.

The practice at this point becomes a readily useable tool for countering sensual desires from lust to physical addictions like cigarettes, other drugs, or even gambling and alcoholism. For the meditator in a retreat, one or two sits a day will also help counter desire for gain and help curb speculation—two particularly stubborn obstacles on the spiritual path for many. Turning to the practice for only a few moments, often with only the first five body parts, will remove your involvement with anything else. And the time with the practice will not evoke any thought that is rooted in desire, meaning that the causal chain is broken and no support for further unprofitable thinking will arise. Your ability has reached

“skilful action” status capable of driving out unwanted distracting thoughts connected with desire or lust.³⁴

Those looking for help to counter greed and nothing more may not see the need for more of this practice once this point is reached. But for the few who see the benefit of developing this practice further, it is time to practice as much as you can find the time for. One formula states that the practice of working the list of parts should be done 10 times in the morning, 10 times in the middle of the day, and 10 times in the evening, without fail—meaning whether you have lots to do, or if you are feeling sick or tired, you still recite the list 30 times each day.³⁵ Secluded meditation retreats of 2 weeks or longer are not uncommon requirements to reach the lofty goal of Jhana. For some it may even take a lifetime of practice. Regardless, further gain will only happen if you keep practicing and developing the meditation, and if you live your life in a way that is the most conducive towards practicing that meditation.

We will now continue the description of this meditation practice for those looking to develop Jhana, but no predictions of how long it will take to reach Jhana can be made. Indeed, such thoughts are only counter-productive to the effort being made and must be put aside as soon as they are noticed.

Progress is determined by what is termed “Signs” in Jhana development. As the meditator improves facility in the practice, certain abilities are mastered which in turn lead to notable changes in the perception of the meditation object (in this case one or all of the 32 body parts). These changes in perception of the meditation object are called *Nimittas*, which is Pali for signs. When these signs come forward in the practice it means that the mental discipline has increased substantially, sufficiently to be given new labels which indicate a major step in development towards Jhana. The approach of marking certain points of development along this continuum from normal everyday-type

34. As described in the commentary to the *Vitakka-santhana Sutta*, MN 20, found in Soma Thera’s *The Removal of Distracting Thoughts*, BPS Wheel 21, whereby the action works better than any other to accomplish the goal—like water eliminates fire better than any other means to extinguish it (page 15).

35. *VbhA*, para 1180, page 316.

concentration to Jhanic level concentration is common to all Samadhi practices found in Theravada Buddhism. Sources for the labels used in the schematic below borrow terminology from descriptions of Jhana development in various texts.

Signs	Steps and tasks at each stage of development <i>And the changes associated with sign development</i>
Learning Sign	1. Verbal Recitation 2. Mental Recitation (Color, Shape, Direction, Location) 3. Mental Recitation (Delimitation) <i>Body parts clearly and readily visualized 3-dimensionally</i>
Acquired Sign	4. Mental recitation <i>Body parts perceived as in your body or in others (including animals); food and drink seen in the body.</i>
Counterpart Sign	5. Surmounting the concept (using color, shape, odor, habitat and location) <i>Body Parts seen as unlovely.</i>
Jhana	6. Successive leaving - while mentally reciting the list, note which parts appear 3-D and unlovely. Drop parts that are not as clear and decide which one is the clearest in both aspects and work with that one part only for the rest of the sit. <i>Body Part disappears when absorption into Jhana occurs</i>

A synopsis of the new stepwise development for
Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body

With continued practice of Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body, perception of the individual parts increases in clarity and detail while simultaneously becoming easier and more readily visualized. As concentration increases, there is a change in perception whereby the body parts become three-dimensional and are seen as in you.³⁶ With further increases in concentration, the Acquired Sign is said to have arisen when the body parts are seen as if alive within your own body, or another's body, or even

in the bodies of animals. Concentration becomes so developed and steady that perception of body parts in any sentient being seems almost effortless and may happen spontaneously. When the repulsive aspect of the individual parts has been developed to the point that only the repulsive aspect is seen when a body part is brought to mind, then concentration at this level is labeled Neighborhood Concentration and the change in perception is called the Counterpart Sign.³⁷ And when taken as far as the practice will allow, namely Jhana, full concentration results in what is termed absorption into the object of concentration, the body part being maintained by perception will disappear while the practice carries on effortlessly.³⁸

Step 4

As you continue to work with the parts, aids are no longer needed and the practice will seem almost effortless. At any time you will be able to think of a part on a whim and it will appear in your mind. Spontaneous visualizations may happen; a flexing of your arm or leg that results in the skin moving from a muscle being worked can trigger a seeing of the muscle under the skin without the skin covering it. These spontaneous visualizations may be seen in your own body, the bodies of others, or in the body of animals. One can start stripping away skin, then flesh and muscle and sinews, right down to the bone, even when bodies are moving. Or, while visualizing a body part like the bowels and you simultaneously have a feeling of food or drink moving in your

36. This is a description of the Learning Sign. The *Vissudhimagga* states that the parts are only discerned by way of "color, shape, direction, location, and delimitation at this point in developing the practice. PP, Chap VIII, Par 141, page 258.

37. "Neighborhood" is meant to imply that the meditator is within close proximity to Jhana. The level of concentration at this point in Jhana development is also referred to as Access Concentration. It is only at this point that the repulsive nature of the individual parts is developed so that the perspective of unlovely-ness is seen in all aspects of the individual part.

38. Perception by way of the five sense doors is temporarily suspended along with the hindrances, but the mind remains fully alert and lucid. See Nyanatiloka's definition of Jhana in *Buddhist Dictionary*, page 83.

digestive tract, you will see the movement in the visualization of the body part.

If the practice is being done correctly, such occurrences may be surprising at first, but will become commonplace and elicit no reaction. There will be no fear from such visions, only a knowing that the visions are a result of meditation practice and nothing else. This move to animation in the visualization marks the change to what is called the “Acquired Sign” in Jhana development.³⁹ This corresponds to other Jhana meditation practices such as Kasina work where the object concentrated upon moves from a memory to something much more clear and lucid, without any defects, so different that it is obviously not the same as the “Learning Sign” developed earlier.⁴⁰

Step 5

What separates this step from the previous is the addition of seeing the true nature of the parts as repulsive⁴¹; it comprises the fifth skill under “Tenfold Skill in Giving Attention.” It is known as “surmounting the concept.” Any part that doesn’t naturally reveal its repulsiveness when visualized may be viewed utilizing one of five aspects which may make the repulsiveness clear, that is by way of color, shape, odor, habitat or location. The *Visuddhimagga* discusses hair as an example in this context for each aspect. Many people find hair a desirable and decorative feature, even provocative of lust. Yet, considered by itself, as just hair, it is

39. Compare with the Acquired Sign in the first of the ten Corpse Meditations (PP, Chap VI, paras 56-57, page 181).

40. The ability to see the individual part as alive whether in you or another, is taken here as a “reflex image” indicative of increased concentration where the object is seen as clearly in the mind as if seen by the eye. *Buddhist Dictionary*, under kasina, page 95. In some texts another term used is the “Arising” Sign. The *Vissuddhimagga* only discusses the Learning and Counterpart Signs in its description of developing this meditation.

41. We discussed earlier that the parts are to be viewed as un-lovely rather than repulsive to avoid developing aversion towards the body or its parts. Because up to this point in the practice the focus has been to develop visualizations of the parts as clearly as possible, their very nature may be obscured by the appeal to view them well. The meditator will reduce and drop attachments to the work or perceived gains when the unlovely aspect is re-generated at this point.

undoubtedly repulsive. As Buddhaghosa says, “Imagine a delicious meal served to you with a long black hair in the sauce. Would you not put the dish aside in disgust?” Likewise feeling the *shape* of hair in your mouth would bring repulsiveness to mind. Reflecting on the *odor* of unscented wet hair does not give rise to pleasant thoughts. To see hair as growing from pus, blood, urine, dung, etc., brings out the unlovely-ness of *habitat* and similarly for *location* when the part is seen as growing or existing amongst the heap of other repulsive parts of the body. As another example, wrapped around flesh and bone, skin is also, for many, an object of lust. But considered by itself as just skin, its repulsiveness is obvious. Imagine skinning a piece of chicken breast. Could you possibly see that shapeless, slimy stuff as an object of lust? Yet, that too is skin!

The *Vimuttimaggā* provides thirteen ways to bring out the unloveliness of each part: through seed, place, condition, oozing, gradual formation, worms, connection, assemblage, loathsomeness, impurity, dependence, non-awareness of obligation, and finitude. *Seed* means produced from impure seed. *Place* and *Condition* are the same as *habitat* and *location* in the *Visuddhimaggā*. *Oozing* regards how we expel impurities from our nine openings. *Gradual Formation* is the process of forming in the womb. The text points out in detailed groupings that there are eighty thousand *Worms* gnawing away on the body. *Connection* has to do with how the body is built up upon connected bones to keep it in position. *Assemblage* is the groupings of things that comprise the body, i.e., heap of bones, hundreds of muscles, thousands of body hairs, millions of head hairs, so many pints of blood, urine, and other fluids, etc. *Loathsomeness* refers to the way we are attracted at first to things but afterwards dislike them because they no longer please us. The *Impurity* listed here has to do with the inability to return the body to a pure state because it is already impure when it comes into being. *Depending* upon this body, various defilements and diseases are produced. Regardless of our efforts to maintain the body, it remains like a friend that fails to live up to its *Obligations*. And lastly, the body is *Finite*.⁴² Feel free to utilize any of these contemplations as required.

42. VIM, pages 172-177.

When the mind wanders off and you lose the visualized object, just re-visualize it again without judging yourself. A word of caution here — resist becoming caught up in the function or physical sensation of the body part. If you watch blood moving in and out of the heart for instance, or the air traveling in and out of the body while watching the lungs, these parts will become too complex to maintain one-pointedness. The same goes for hearing, or the tactile sensation of feeling the heartbeat. Constant movement may be difficult to isolate for some organs and, if so, just move on to another part.

Repeating the caution mentioned earlier, do not allow the repulsiveness to develop into aversion, it is only for counteracting attachment. Meditators who develop aversion towards the body should strive to see the parts as neutral. Bile is just bile; dung is just dung, etc. For some meditators aversion is not so easily dropped or put aside. Viewing the parts either by color or as composed of the four elements of earth, air, water, and fire may be of aid for this type of person. When dung is seen as a “solid earth element” its repugnant nature is eliminated. This particular practice is treated in detail in the *Visuddhimagga* (Chap XI-47f) but is designed for insight work only⁴³ and will not yield entry into Jhana. We mention this practice only for those who cannot overcome aversion towards the body or its parts after practicing Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body for a length of time. The work already done will readily support the development of this other meditation which also incorporates the same 32 parts of the body.

Step 6

There are two signs which mark significant steps in the progress of developing the highly concentrated state of mind known as Jhana or absorption; they are the “Acquired Sign” and the “Counterpart Sign.” The “Learning Sign” was explained earlier as clearly seeing all the parts which included only their color, shape, direction, location and delimitation. The Acquired Sign is a further development of the Learning Sign. The “Counterpart Sign” is reached when the appearance of the body parts are much more

43. As stated in PP Chap VIII, Par 60, page 239.

highly defined but also accompanied by their repulsive/unlovely element. Proficiency in this meditation will see such development regardless of which body part is being viewed.

At this point whether one is applying attention internally or externally all parts will become evident. The appearance of humans or animals will be seen as an assemblage of parts rather than as a whole. As you run through the list repeatedly, the unloveliness will appear simultaneously with the visualization of *each part*, but some parts will be seen more easily than others. When such differences manifest it is time to employ the skill of “successive leaving.” If a single part is clearly the one that is manifesting in your visualization better than any other body part, you can pick it without going through anymore mental recitations. If one or two parts have not presented clearly enough to separate them from the rest, then you can reduce the list in the following manner. Repeat the mental recitation once and pick the body parts that stand out. At this point the movement from one body part to the next has to be done very carefully. You do not let go of the body part you are on until you firmly grasp the next one.⁴⁴ Now repeat the mental recitations repeatedly with these parts until one out of any of them appears the clearest. With a single body part selected, the meditator now repeatedly brings attention to this single body part and its unlovely nature. You are doing everything right at this point and all that is left is to maintain the aspect of un-loveliness while visualizing the part for as long as you can. Eventually absorption, meaning Jhana, will arise.

Step 7

Simultaneously, with the arising of Jhana, the body part will disappear as a result of absorption.⁴⁵ However the level of developed concentration is so strong and continuous that the mind does not look anywhere but stays still with no apparent object entertaining it. The other senses beside the mind-sense

44. “Just as a leech standing on the place grasped by its tail scans and then grasps another place with its mouth, and when it has grasped that, it lets go of the first place” (KhpA, para 59, page 73; VbhA, para1190, page 319).

become so distant to awareness as to almost disappear. The mind-sense increases all its attributes and cognition is fully on the Jhana itself. Discursive thought fails to engage and keeps falling away. Outside disturbances will not affect you. Not even pain will register because of how concentrated the mind has become to enter Jhana. If everything required is developed fully or balanced as necessary then the Jhana could last hours at the same intensity without disturbance. The Jhana could also last only a few minutes, depending again on how well developed the practice has become, but it is no less than a Jhana that lasts longer. Either way, as energy fails to keep up the high level of concentration, the Jhana eventually fails. Some come out of Jhana in reverse order through the same stages they went in, but many are not that aware the first time they do this. Once the energy is back up again the meditator would be wise to repeat the whole process again, exactly as before,

45. The change in perception is the result of two things happening at the same time. First, suppression of the 5 hindrances which are particularly obstructive to entering or sustaining Jhana, results in a loss of desire for anything other than the object of your meditation, in this case the un-lovely body part. This is the result of equanimity, in the form of specific neutrality, arising and intensifying to the point of “looking on without interference” (Pts i, 25, page 18). The obstructive hindrances are replaced by their opposing factors: lust is supplanted by one-pointedness of mind, ill-will by rapture, stiffness and torpor by applied thought, agitation and worry by bliss, and doubt by sustained thought. The Jhana factor of applied thought arises first and is subsequently supported by the other factors. At the time of entering Jhana, applied thought is the first factor to come into play, whereby the object of concentration is grasped or seized much more lucidity than normal so much so that it is described as thrusting the mind into the object. The other four Jhana factors sustain the initial thrust. This immersion into the object leaves behind any perceived separation between watcher and object, and hence the statement that the body part disappears. Concentration has reached a superior state capable of remaining firmly engrossed with the un-lovely body part until the hindrances arise again or the Jhana factors subside (often a mutual occurrence). For more see PP Chap IV, paras 74-126, pages 135-148; VIM pages 79-96; PSI Chap IV, pages 49-76; Vibh 253-258, paras 542-570, pages 329-335. The descriptions are all generic based upon First Jhana being reached by way of an Earth Kasina, meaning that the way to Jhana is the same as long as the object of concentration can support the development (i.e., a kasina, corpse, body parts, etc. See PP, Chap III, paras 104-107, page 110 for a complete list).

and to do this as many times as they can to establish the fledgling ability.

Once you have gone in and out of Jhana a few times, move on to mastering the Jhana in five ways. By a few times, we mean as many times and for as long as you can stay in the Jhana and to do this repeatedly for at least a half day, if not a whole day or two. It is quite common to not realize or remember how you got into Jhana the first time and then have to go through a few days of struggling to find it again. The problem is that you went in when you weren't really looking and now that you are trying hard to discern the way, the very act of watching and anticipating is getting in the way. You may even gain the Jhana again, only to fall out of it once you realize it. Just keep trying; keep suppressing the desire and anticipation (which are the hindrances arising again). It may be a funny way to put it, but you have to stop trying to watch and do, and simply do. Don't get too hard on yourself; go back to practicing in a relaxed manner. Remember the Golden Mean: *with attention that is neither strained nor slack*. Take heart because you are where you are supposed to be. Eventually, you will find the way in again and establish the process of entry so that you can repeat it often and remain in for longer periods of time. The length of time that you can stay in is affected by the return of the hindrances and the weakening of the Jhana factors. Once you have purified your mind of the hindrances by bringing the Jhana factors to full strength, then the Jhana lasts a long time, for hours or a day.

Once you can repeat the Jhana without concern, it is time to move onto perfecting the Jhana. There are five ways to mastering the Jhana: adverting, attaining, resolving, emerging, and reviewing.⁴⁶ The texts speak also of extending the Sign, but that applies to a counterpart sign gained through the use of a Kasina which is not applicable to this meditation because the counterpart sign is un-loveliness and it cannot be extended.⁴⁷ Start with small steps, incrementally increasing each of these exercises. We're talking seconds here at the beginning, then moving it to minutes,

46. Surprisingly, Vim has only one sentence, page 100, in reference to this important stage of Jhana development. See PP Chap IV, paras 126-138, pages 148-151 for a detailed discussion, PSI, page 76 for a brief definition. The latter also notes Pts, page 97 as the canonical source.

and finally mixing up the durations of times where applicable to achieve mastery.

Mastery in Adverting is the ability to bring each of the Jhana factors forward individually and maintain only the individual Jhana factor for a short period of time after emerging from the Jhana.⁴⁸ Mastery of his ability is achieved when you can bring forward any of the Jhana factors wherever, whenever, and for as long as you decide.⁴⁹ A good practice is to run through all of them at night when you go to bed, holding each one for as long as you can. You can keep this up after a meditation retreat for as long as your ability to advert persists and it will persist a long while if you do daily practice.

Mastery in Attaining is the ability to go into the Jhana quickly.⁵⁰ And again it is done when, where, and for as long as the meditator likes, without difficulty when mastery is achieved.⁵¹ Program to go into Jhana 15, 10, or 5 minutes after you close your eyes and you will when you get this mastered. You can get it down to seconds. But, again I repeat, work in small increments or you will not make gains and get frustrated. All the masteries can be practiced after the retreat, but like mastery of adverting described previously this

47. For those who end up developing the color aspect in one of the body parts into a counterpart sign instead of repulsiveness (un-loveliness), refer to relevant sections in the texts that deal with color Kasinas (PP Chap V, paras 12-20, pages 168-169), and you should also develop 'extending the sign' as part of your mastering the Jhana and also as part of mastering the higher Jhanas that can be developed using a counterpart sign from a colour Kasinas.

48. PP, Chap IV, paras 131-137, pages 150-151, and PSI, pages 76-77, give the detail description on adverting. The five Jhana factors are Applied Thought, Sustained Thought, Rapture, Bliss, and One-pointedness (unification of mind) which are the major factors present in First Jhana. Pts, i, 100, Chap XXXIV, para 459, page 97, provides the same information on mastery but without the details explaining adverting.

49. Pts i,125 gives an example called the Blessed One's Twin Marvel as the "acme of perfection" for adverting. Or maybe Pts i, 53.

50. There is a story of one of the Buddha's disciples taming a giant serpent as an example of quickly attaining Jhana (see PP Chap XII, paras 106-116, pages 394-396).

51. This is almost a quote from PP Chap XXIII, para 27, page 733 which is a quote from Pts i, page 97.

one works well as a practice when you go to bed at night. Rather than counting sheep, you can run through Jhana factors and individual Jhanas that you have attained until you fall asleep. You will be more rested from practicing Jhana than if you were just laying there aimlessly thinking and waiting to be overtaken by sleep.

Mastery in Resolving is staying in the Jhana for the amount of time you decide. This means to the second and is called steadying the duration. You can use a watch, a timer, or a clock with a second-hand to practice until you get it right on. Start with a few minutes until you get it to the second. Then program longer periods of time until each one of them is perfected. Finally, mix up times, such as 5 minutes immediately followed by 30 minutes, and then followed by 16 minutes, followed by 4 minutes, etc. If you decide that you will stay in for 56 minutes, your eyes will open at exactly 56 minutes when this ability has been mastered. Working incrementally, you can program durations of hours, a day and night, or up to seven days before the body will force you out to tend to its needs.

Mastery in Emerging is coming out cleanly at the time you decide to come out. A major difference to the last ability is that you can determine to emerge based upon something other than time (i.e., when the bus comes, when the kettle boils, when somebody you're expecting knocks on the door, the expected telephone call, etc.).⁵² By cleanly, it is meant that there is no residual effect, whether bodily or mentally, from the Jhana. Even sitting all afternoon can feel like you just sat down when you get up. On the other hand, be careful until you master emerging. For example, if you start doing something like stretching in a yoga position while the Jhana factors are still in effect, you can easily stretch too far because of the lack of pain sensation. But once the residual effects from the Jhana are gone, the pain will be there and it will take days to recover from that blunder.

52. Another story of super normal powers is used to exemplify the mastery of resolving and emerging can be found in PP Chap IV para 135, page 151.

Mastery in Reviewing is the ability to look back over the Jhana, or the individual factors if you were adverting to them. My interpretation of this last mastery is not that you have to remember every second that you were in Jhana, which is possible, but instead it is to see the salient characteristics of the Jhana you just emerged from; meaning the ease of entry and emerging, disturbances strong enough to register while you were in, how solidly the Jhana manifested and if there were fluctuations, etc. Through reviewing you also learn the Jhana's characteristics and lose attachment towards it. The latter is required if you are going to use the Jhana as the object for insight development.

With mastery you will have two ways to enter upon Jhana, a fast way and the usual way. The latter is the way you entered upon it to begin with; developing the signs and then entering Jhana through absorbing into the counterpart sign. The fast way is marshalling the Jhana factors and diving into the Jhana on a turn of the mind, as quick as a whim. It is possible to enter the Jhana faster than you can formulate the command into word-thoughts. In this manner a short duration of Jhana is a way to prepare the mind and body for other practices. But, if the hindrances are not suppressed, or the body is not ready, you will not enter the Jhana fully, or strongly establish it, or maintain it for very long. Repeated attempts will make headway on suppressing the hindrances and calming the body and breath. But, you cannot go into Jhana on a full bladder, or if you are on too much caffeine, or are groggy from just eating.

Once mastered, the meditator can go into Jhana when they want, for as long as they want, can come out of Jhana quickly, and are able to review the entire Jhana from beginning to end for as long as they want. After you have mastered the Jhana in these five ways with one body part, you can then turn to another body part and develop it to Jhana as well. If you rush any of this you run the risk of losing the ability to enter Jhana. Take your time and do it right the first time.

Steps 8-10

Further Development, Balancing and Fine Tuning

The move from Counterpart Sign to Jhana is quick for some but not for all. Working to develop and maintain higher levels of concentration require equal consideration on energy development and other factors. If the factors of energy and concentration are not developed evenly then the whole effort comes to nothing. Balancing these two factors and others is recommended under many topics found in Buddhist literature for both Jhana and Insight development. The *Visuddhimagga* states that the last three skills to develop are each found and explained within separate Suttas from the *Anguttara* and *Samyutta Nikayas*. The first skill is on seeking 'higher consciousness', the second skill is about 'cooling down' latent or present tendencies as necessary, and the third skill is the denourishment of undesirable states. The *Visuddhimagga* states that the purpose of all three Suttas is to link energy with concentration.⁵³ We will approach each in turn.

Simply stated, this is fine-tuning the practice after learning the preliminaries. The instructions presuppose that you have been practicing long enough to be able to mindfully determine if, and where, the practice is lacking. A teacher or mentor is an invaluable aid in this decision process. The following guidelines give enough detail to help determine what may be a little off the mark and in need of attention if access to a teacher is not possible. Recommendations on remedial steps to bring back the balance are also provided and a synopsis is provided in the Appendices for quick reference when needed.

53. PP, Chap VIII, par 73, page 242. Repeated almost verbatim in VbhA, par 1083, page 288. KhpA on the other hand has subordinated steps 8-10 to be a further development under step 7. Furthermore, the "Three Suttantas" are stated to be sutras on impermanence, suffering, and not-self, but without Canonical referencing (see Chap III, paras 61-63 and particularly Footnote 67 regarding the discrepancy). It may be worth noting that Bhikkhu Nanamoli makes no reference to these paragraphs from KhpA in later works such as VbhA (see VbhA, par 1192, page 320 where he references the simile in KhpA that immediately precedes the passage in question).

Higher Consciousness

The sutta states that a Bhikkhu intent upon higher consciousness should give attention to three signs from time to time.⁵⁴ The phrase “intent on higher consciousness” refers to someone striving for Jhana as a foundation for further analysis in order to develop insight and realize Nibbana.⁵⁵ The three signs, or characteristics, are termed concentration, exertion, and equanimity. We will discuss the inter-relationship between the three when it comes to the development of Jhana, but utilizing the Jhana for further development is outside the scope of this text. For details on further development the reader is referred to the *Visuddhimagga*, chapters XVIII-XXII.

If you pay too much attention to one of these three characteristics it is probable that you will have trouble making gains, and create obstacles to overcome, whether in this practice or any Buddhist meditation practice. Exclusive attention to concentration could develop indolence or idleness. The mind will seem dull, sluggish, lazy, and slow to respond. This refers to the state of mind sometimes called “the shrunken mind.” Strive to uplift your spirits and stimulate zeal through such techniques as contemplation of the Buddha, Dharma (the teachings and practices) and Sangha (your supporters and those who have gone this path already) or of the perils and miseries of the wheel of rebirth (how many more lifetimes before liberation?). The point is to get the mind stimulated properly with a few proactive thoughts and reapply concentration with renewed vigor. Or, if you have sat too long, mindfully get up and do a walking meditation practice that will recharge the depleted energy and increase mindfulness.⁵⁶

Paying too much attention to energetic application or exertion may lead to distraction. When this obstacle is present the mind will fly off the intended object without any warning, no matter how much effort you bring forward to stop it, causing agitation. This is the opposite of the last obstacle and is often

54. AN i, 256-58, pages 235-236, is the basis for this section.

55. See Soma Thera's, *The Removal of Distracting Thoughts*, BPS Wheel 21, pages 6-8, for a discussion that proffers this definition.

56. See *Walking Meditation* by Ajahn Brahmavamso, et al, (BPS WH464).

brought on by overzealousness. The symptoms of restlessness and agitation if left unchecked could manifest as stubbornness, pride and craving for diversion. This can be a difficult obstacle to recognize and overcome since the remedy is contrary to the over-energetic meditator's inclination. They will want to suspend the practice and go for a walk, or clean house, etc., but such dispersion at this time will only make their condition worse! When agitated, one should strive to practice in a disciplined and relaxed manner. This certainly does not mean forcing long sits beyond one's endurance, as this too is an over application of zeal and will worsen the agitation. Rather, one should remember the doctrine of the Middle Path and strive for the golden mean of diligent effortlessness:

*Neither too energetically nor too sluggishly
 Neither too tensely nor too loosely
 Neither too rapidly nor too slowly
 Neither too much determination nor too little
 And with attention that is neither strained nor slack*

The Sutta states that if you were to develop only the characteristic of equanimity then it is probable that your "consciousness might not become concentrated rightly⁵⁷ for the destruction of the cankers." The phrase 'destruction of the cankers' refers to realizing Nibbana. But the meaning of the rest of this statement is not so clear if we are only looking at the development of Jhana. There are ten kinds of equanimity mentioned in the Visuddhimagga and other texts⁵⁸, and there are also two kinds of concentration depending upon whether the aim of the practice is to develop Jhana or Insight (wisdom). Sorting through the possible meanings and intent of this passage in reference to Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body will require a small digression to give a full explanation.

57. In *The Way of Mindfulness* Soma Thera translates as 'non-concentration' in his footnote to page 102.

58. PP, Chap IV, paras 156-171, pages 156-158; PSI, pages 88-90.

Equanimity denotes neutrality, a maintained balance point between opposing states, but emphasis on context is what distinguishes one kind of equanimity from another. In this way the ten kinds of equanimity can be grouped in four ways by their individual meanings. The first meaning is *specific neutrality*, whereby its function is to prevent deficiency and excess, or its function is to inhibit partiality.⁵⁹ Five other types of equanimity also fall under this meaning, namely, *six-factored equanimity* is experienced only by Arahats, *equanimity as a divine abiding* is experienced as equal love towards all beings, *equanimity as an enlightenment factor* is a mode of neutrality that arises along with other states while striving for Nibbana, *equanimity of Jhana* occurs as impartiality towards even the highest bliss experienced within third Jhana, while *purifying equanimity* is the equanimity experienced in fourth Jhana that is free of any opposition. When practicing insight meditation there are two forms of equanimity, being *equanimity about insight* and *equanimity about formations*.⁶⁰ While *equanimity as a feeling* is the lack of pain or pleasure in physical or mental phenomena, and *equanimity of energy* is evenness of energy which is neither over-strenuous nor over-lax energy.

The *Visuddhimagga* states that *equanimity of energy* is what the Sutta on higher consciousness (AN i, 256-58) is referring to. Be that as it may, *equanimity of formations* is present at the time of absorption in order to maintain the detachment from the hindrances, *equanimity of Jhana* is in first Jhana and rises to prominence as *purifying equanimity* by fourth Jhana. It is possible to have *equanimity of insight* without *equanimity of formations*, but not the reverse. Both pertain to perception with detached indifference, but beginners to Insight meditation can cling to this experience and think they have become enlightened because such a perception has never been so clear to them before. But *equanimity of formations* will only arise after a beginner has learned what is

59. PP, Chap XIV, para 153, page 470, provides the basic definition.

60. Pts, I, 64-65, pages 65-66, lists eight kinds of equanimity of formations that arise through the practice of serenity meditation and ten kinds that arise through insight meditation. The occurrences of any of these forms of equanimity are always profitable to the endeavour.

path and what is not path, and consequently put aside any imperfections to their perceptions.⁶¹ We mention this only because someone with only a little experience with Insight meditation who switches to this practice could possibly be caught by increased equanimity and, via craving and conceit, misapprehend what they are experiencing. As such, this reaction towards *equanimity of Insight* would not support development of concentration and energy needed to progress further. Finally, the equanimity of Fourth Jhana (purifying equanimity) is free from all obstacles, so much so, that it is possible for a meditator to delight in this pure-as-gold state and go no further because they erroneously think that nothing could be better than this. Something very similar, if not the same, as mentioned under the Imperfections of Insight.

Concentration is another variable worth mentioning in this context because it is of two kinds—absorption concentration and momentary concentration. The pinnacle of development for each is Jhana and Nibbana, respectively. Absorption concentration is reached with successful development of tranquility-based meditations such as Meditation upon the 32 Parts of the Body with the repulsive element as the counterpart sign used as the basis for Jhana. While momentary concentration is perceived in the course of developing Insight, such as Vipassana meditation practices, whereby concentration takes hold of an arising phenomenon at one of the sense doors just as strongly and completely as it does when it reaches absorption concentration, but it does so for only the length of time necessary to knowingly let go of the phenomenon, namely a moment. Only through momentary concentration is Nibbana realized, and that concentration will be preceded by equanimity of formations and the necessary supporting energy. We point this out because any discussion as to balancing these three characteristics requires understanding when

61. PP, Chap XX, paras 105-129, pages 656-661 has the warning and description of this state under the “Ten Imperfections of Insight” and as “Corruptions of Insight” in such texts as *The Seven Stages of Purification and The Insight Knowledges* (page 41), *The Seven Contemplations of Insight* (page 8, and footnote 14, page 132), *The Progress of Insight* (pages 18-19), or *Practical Insight Meditation* (pages 24-26 and footnote 10, page 50).

different facets of each are present and their relation to the goal, whether Jhana or the realization of Nibbana which is goalless.

Working too long with only one of these types of meditation practices develops symptoms of idleness, agitation or wrong concentration whether for the development of Jhana or Insight. Awareness of the symptoms is used to determine when to switch or when to develop another practice for a while. By following this prescription, the mind will become pliable (malleable), workable (wieldy), radiant (bright), not stubborn (not brittle), but instead poised for realization of higher consciousness and/or Enlightenment.

Supreme Coolness

The ninth skill under “Tenfold Skill in Giving Attention” introduces the obscure term “Supreme Coolness” which is realized through possession of six things. The first four have to do with using awareness to determine when to restrain the mind, when to exert the mind, when to encourage or gladden the mind, and when to look on at the mind with equanimity. Possessing resoluteness upon reaching higher states, such as Jhana, and finding delight in the thought of Nibbana are the two other things to possess. Further treatment on the first four can be found in the appendix under “The Skills to Absorption.” The fifth thing to possess is the recognition slackers and quitters will not reach any of the attainments mentioned here or elsewhere in Buddhist texts; only those who can establish a firm commitment and maintain the will towards success. Finding delight in Nibbana means that it is seen as the only thing worthy of pursuit and nothing else in the world comes close to matching it.

Seven Factors of Enlightenment

The final skill to be learned in balancing energy and concentration is the proper development of the Enlightenment Factors when needed to reestablish perceived imbalances. There are seven factors that need to be recognized and monitored. A meditator knows that the enlightenment factor of mindfulness is present in me or that the enlightenment factor of mindfulness is not present

in me. If mindfulness is present sufficiently to support the endeavor then the other six factors, namely investigation, energy, tranquility, concentration, equanimity, are reviewed in the same manner. Any imbalance in the endeavor will be perceived amongst these seven factors of enlightenment, with one or more seen as lacking when discerned. For Nibbana to be realized all of these seven factors must be fully developed and balanced to support each other. In the appendix you will find “Balancing the Factors of Enlightenment” which covers this approach in greater detail, providing details on how to increase the factors as needed.⁶²

Benefits

In him who gives wise attention to a (meditation) object of impurity, unarisen greed will not arise and greed that has arisen will be abandoned.⁶³

The benefits of the practice should become apparent almost immediately. The body will be seen in a new way, as a collection of strange and undesirable parts. Where now is there a place for desire to arise? None of the 32 parts considered separately are conducive to sensual-desire, so how can a body composed of their collection into a “sack” be desirable? This helps to counter all forms of greed and sensual-desire, but in particular, it is very effective against lust. When we speak of lust in this context, we mean in particular sexual lust toward the human body, either the pleasing of our own or possession of another’s. These “fires” of sensual-desire and greed are weakened and subdued by meditating upon the body, the root of all sense-desire, when its true nature is clearly perceived in the manner developed here.

Further, fear of death and worry over bodily well-being are also counteracted by this meditation. In some cases this may be of

62. The reader may also go to the Bojjhanga Sutta (SN V Chap II, Sutta 46, page 1567-1626) or the commentary from the Satipatthana Sutta (MN Sutta 10) contained in Some Thera’s *The Way of Mindfulness* (BPS BP501s).

63. This is a line from Sutta 68, in *The Book of the Threes* from AN, translated by Nyanaponika Thera in *The Roots of Good and Evil* (page 66). In *Gradual Sayings I*, a different translation by F. L. Woodward uses the terms “systematic attention” and “lust” instead of “wise attention” and “greed” (page 182).

more importance than in overcoming lust. By seeing the body as a compound entity without a substantial nature, we are freed from fear, which is rooted in attachment. One can become a conqueror of boredom, delight⁶⁴, fear and dread and can endure the arising of bodily feelings menacing to life.

This last point leads into the consideration of the 32 parts as an insight meditation. Much of the often difficult and tedious work of "putting away the body" will be done here, making the preliminary stages of "insight" easier. As well, there are benefits that carry through to the higher stages. In particular, seeing the body as composed of separate parts overcomes the illusion of "compactness" that is the principal obstruction to right understanding of the truth of "Anatta" (no self). To elaborate, the worldling sees his body as a compact "thing-in-itself", a substantial reality. This encourages him to believe in a "self," either as the body or as a "soul" residing in the body. In the clear light of right understanding, however, the body is seen as a compound thing, a collection of parts, subject to dissolution. No "self" or "soul" can be found. Not only "Anatta," but "Dukkha" too, is seen clearly through this exercise. Often translated as "suffering," "Dukkha" could perhaps be better rendered by the admittedly awkward word; "unsatisfactoriness." The "repulsive" aspect of the body will reveal this characteristic.

To conclude this essay, should the need arise, the meditator who develops this meditation over a period of time will be able to use the fruit of it swiftly. In other words, after the preliminary groundwork has been done by way of long practice, the yogin need not repeat the entire list to combat arisings of lustful thought. A selected group of parts, such as the first five, contemplated very briefly, will often serve to bring forward a mood of dispassion and detachment. This will extinguish any and all lust that has arisen. It "turns you off" in a nice way.

64. Delight is a negative in this context because it refers to sensual pleasure.

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Additional resources

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Appendix 1

Sevenfold Skill in Learning

Verbal Recitation: to verbally recite the 32 parts out loud as listed below using the first four “Skills in Giving Attention” - *Recite in order, not too slowly, not to fast, warding off distraction.*

Hair of the Head, Hair of the Body, Nails, Teeth, Skin

Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head

Flesh, Sinews, Bone, Marrow, Kidneys

Kidneys, Marrow, Bone, Sinews, Flesh

Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head

Heart, Liver, Membranes, Spleen, Lungs

Lungs, Spleen, Membranes, Liver, Heart

Kidneys, Marrow, Bone, Sinews, Flesh

Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head

Bowels, Mesentery, Gorge, Dung, Brain

Brain, Dung, Gorge, Mesentery, Bowels

Lungs, Spleen, Membranes, Liver, Heart

Kidneys, Marrow, Bone, Sinews, Flesh

Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head

Bile, Phlegm, Pus, Blood, Sweat, Fat

Fat, Sweat, Blood, Pus, Phlegm, Bile

Brain, Dung, Gorge, Mesentery, Bowels

Lungs, Spleen, Membranes, Liver, Heart

Kidneys, Marrow, Bone, Sinews, Flesh

Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head

Tears, Grease, Snot, Spittle, Oil of the Joints, Urine

Urine, Oil of the Joints, Spittle, Snot, Grease, Tears

Fat, Sweat, Blood, Pus, Phlegm, Bile

Brain, Dung, Gorge, Mesentery, Bowels

Lungs, Spleen, Membranes, Liver, Heart

Kidneys, Marrow, Bone, Sinews, Flesh

Skin, Teeth, Nails, Hair of the Body, Hair of the Head

Mental Recitation: now that you are familiar with the 32 parts you are on solid ground to perform a mental visualization of each part. Sometimes the visualization will come easily, sometimes not. The more you practice the better you will become. Using all of the “Skills in Giving Attention” mentally, recite the list in the same order as when running it verbally. The mental visualization of *each part* should include the following five aspects:

Color Definition: defining the color of each part.

Shape Definition: defining the shape of each part.

Direction: the part is seen in relation to the navel. The part is “upward” if the part is located above the navel and “downward” if the part’s location is below the navel.

Location: visualize the part as to whatever may be defining its root location (meaning how is the part attached or held in place).

Delimitation: visualize only the part as it pertains to its surroundings and their differences (i.e., teeth are not gums). An example to show the differences to other parts is the head and body hairs, they’re both hair but totally different parts.

Appendix 2

Tenfold Skill in Giving Attention

1. **Following the order in which it is given.** One follows the list in order so one doesn't become lost. It can become quite exhausting if the mind is constantly trying to remember if it has recited a part or not. Following the order given also generates a sense of accomplishment in completing the list from start to finish.

2. **Not too quickly.** If the list is done too quickly one has a tendency to not see the distinction of each part.

3. **Not too slowly.** One wants to complete the list in a reasonable amount of time. If it is done too slowly one can get distracted by a variety of things from other sense doors.

4. **Warding off distraction.** One wants to stay focused on the task (e.g., reciting the list) and not be distracted by internal and external objects.

5. **Surmounting the Concept.** After becoming familiar one uses the aspects of color, shape, odor, habitat and location to recognize the repulsiveness of the individual parts and sees the parts in their true nature.

6. **Successive Leaving.** Some parts will naturally appear more clearly and the specific parts which "stand out" may not be the same every time you practice. Eventually the mind settles on one part which will become clearer than the rest. That is the part to settle upon until absorption is reached.

7. **Absorption.** One should obtain absorption, meaning Jhana, with each of the 32 parts.

8. to 10. Three Suttas that link energy with concentration:

Higher Consciousness: is developed by giving attention from time to time to the three characteristics of "Concentration," "Exertion" and "Equanimity." If you only apply your attention to "Concentration" idleness or indolence will arise. If you only apply your attention to "exertion" agitation and distraction will arise. If you only apply your attention to "Equanimity" you will not become rightly concentrated. (A synopsis of the Anguttara-Nikaya i, 256-58.)

Supreme Coolness: is the realization of six things. They are the realization of knowing when consciousness should be restrained, knowing when the consciousness should be exerted, knowing when consciousness should be encouraged, knowing when consciousness should be looked at with equanimity, being resolute upon the superior (state of mind to be attained) and delights in Nibbana and final liberation from Samsara rather than wallowing in sense pleasures. (A synopsis of the Anguttara-Nikaya iii, 435.)

Enlightenment Factors: is basically knowing when to exert the mind and when to restrain it and which of the factors to develop in that regard. (A synopsis of the Samyutta-Nikaya v, 113.) See “Balancing the Factors of Enlightenment” Appendix for much more information.

Appendix 3

Body Parts by Visualization

Body Part	Color	Shape	Direction	Location	Delimitation			Etc.
					Bounded below by	Bounded above by	Also	
HAIK OF THE HEAD	black	measuring rods	upper	wet inner skin that envelops the skull	surface of their own roots	space (& around by each other)	repulsive by colour, shape, odour, habitat and location	Earth
HAIK OF THE BODY	blackish brown	palm roots with tips bent down	in two directions	inner skin that envelops the body	surface of their own roots	space (& around by each other)	similar to hair of the head	Earth
NAILS	white	fish scales	lower for toe-nails & upper for finger-nails	tips of the backs of the fingers & toes	flesh (on either sides) & the end by space	flesh (on either sides) & the end by space	Nails' is the name for the twenty nail plates	Earth
TEETH	white	various	upper	fixed in the jaw bones	surface of their own roots	space (& around by each other)	Various shapes are pumpkin seeds, jasmine bud & waggon prop	Earth
SKIN	white (inner skin)	takes the shape of the body	both directions	covers the whole body	fixed surface	space	also referred to as 'Taca'	Earth
FLESH	red	various	both directions	plastered over bones	its surface fixed on bones	skin (& around by each other in pieces)	900 pieces of flesh	Earth
SINews	white	various	both directions	found binding the bones of the whole body together	bone	flesh and inner skin	all around by each other	Earth

BONE	white	various	both directions	throughout the body	bone marrow (inside)	flesh	& at the roots by each other	Earth
MARROW	white	cane shoot moistened & inserted into a bamboo tube	both directions	set inside the bones	the inner surface of the bones (on the outside)....			Earth
KIDNEYS	dull red	a pair of mango fruits attached to a single stalk	upper	on either side of the heart flesh	by what appertains to kidney		They are two pieces of flesh with a single ligature. Inside the external structure of the heart, there is a hollow mesh-like structure filled with blood which supports the mind element & the mind-consciousness elements.	Earth
HEART	color of the back of a red-lotus petal	the shape of a lotus bud with the outer petals removed & turned upside down	upper	between the two breasts, inside the body	by what appertains to heart			Earth
LIVER	brownish shade of red	the shape of a kowilara leaf (with its single root & twin ends)	upper	the right side, inside from the two breasts	by what appertains to the liver		This is a twin slab of flesh.	Earth
MEMBRANES	white/the colour of muslin rags	the shape of its location	concealed membrane lies in upper while the unconcealed lies in both directions	concealed membrane: concealing the heart & kidney unconcealed the flesh under the inner skin in the body	flesh	by the inner skin & all round by what appertains to membrane		Earth

SPLEEN	blue	shape of a black calf's tongue & seven fingers in size without attachments	upper	upper side of the of the belly to the left of the heart	by what appertains to the spleen		Also, known as the flesh of the belly's 'tongue'	Earth
LUNGS	red	unevenly cut thick slice of cake	upper	inside the body between the two breasts, hanging above the heart & liver concealing them	by what appertains to the lungs		The flesh in lungs is divided up into 2 or 3 pieces of flesh.	Earth
BOWELS	white/the colour of lime mixed with sand	a beheaded snake coiled up & put in a trough of blood	in two directions	inside the body between the limits of the gullet & the excrement passage	by what pertains to bowel		The bowel tube is looped in 21 places. In man, it is 32 hands long while in a woman, 28 hands.	Earth
MESENTERY	white	the shape of roots	in two directions	double-layered membrane that supports the small intestine	by what appertains to mesentery		This is the fastening in the places where the bowel is coiled.	Earth
GORGE	colour of swallowed food	the shape of rice loosely tied in a cloth strainer	upper	in the stomach	by the stomach-lining & by what appertains to gorge			Earth
DUNG	colour of eaten food	the shape of its location	lower	in the receptacle for digested food (rectum)	by the receptacle for digested food & by what appertains to dung		This is excrement.	Earth

BRAIN	white/ the colour of turned milk that hasn't yet become curd	the shape of its location	upper	inside the skull, like four lumps of dough to correspond with the four sutured sections	by the skull's inner surface & by what appertains to brain	This is the lumps of marrow to be found inside the skull.	Earth
BILE	?	the shape of their location	local bile:upper, free bile:both directions	free bile: spread all over the body; local bile:near the flesh of the liver between the heart & the lights	by what appertains to the bile	There are two kinds of bile:free bile & local bile.	Water
PHLEGM	white	the shape of its location	upper	on the stomach's surface	by what appertains to phlegm	It measures a bowlful.	Water
PUS	the colour of bleached leaves	the shape of its location	both directions	no fixed location;found and develops wherever blood stagnates in damaged sections of the body	by whatever appertains to pus	Pus is produced by decaying blood.	Water
BLOOD	the colour of lac solution	the shape of its location	stored blood:upper r; mobile blood:both directions	stored blood:upper;mobile blood;permeates the whole body	by whatever appertains to blood	There are two kinds of blood:stored blood & mobile blood	Water
SWEAT	colour od clear sesamum oil	the shape of its location	both directions	no fixed location	by whatever appertains to sweat		Water

FAT	the colour of sliced turmeric	muslin rags with varying thickness	both directions	permeates the whole body(stout man) or accumulates on the shank flesh(lean man)	by the flesh	by the inner skin and all around by whatever appertains to fat	This is a thick unguent.	Water
TEARS	colour of clear sesamum oil	the shape of their location	upper	in the eyes sockets although it originates in the lacrymal glands	by what appertains to tears			Water
GREASE	the colour of coconut oil	a film in the shape of a drop of unguent spread over still water while bathing	both directions	palms of hands, backs of the hands,soles of feet,backs of the feet,tip of the nose,forehad & points of the shoulders.	by what appertains to grease		This is a melted unguent.	Water
SNOT	the colour of young palmyra kernel	it's the shape of its location	upper	filling the nostril cavities but not stored there	by what appertains to snot		This is impurity that trickles out from the brain.	Water
SPITTLE	white/ the colour of froth	the shape of its location	upper	on the tongue after it has descended from the cheeks on both sides & not always stored there	by what appertains to spittle			Water
OIL OF THE JOINTS	the colour of kalkara gum????	the shape of its location	both directions	inside joints	by what appertains to oil of joints		This is the slimy ordure inside the joints the joints of the body.	Water

URINE	the colour of bean brine	the shape of water inside a water pot places upside down	lower	inside the bladder	by the inside of the bladder & by what is similar to urine (by the similar); by the dissimilar, delimitation is like that for the head hairs	This is the urine solution.	Water
All information obtained from the Vissudhimagga, Chapter VIII, pars 81-138 for color, shape, direction, location, delimitation unless otherwise noted							
All information obtained from the Vissudhimagga, Chapter XI, pars 47-80 for elements							

Appendix 4

Synopsis of Signs

Signs	Practice or task at this stage of development
Learning Sign	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Verbal Recitation2. Mental Recitation (Color, Shape, Direction, Location)3. Mental Recitation (Delimitation)
Arising Sign	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Mental recitation (body parts become 3-Dimensional and seen as in your body)
Counterpart Sign	<ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Surmounting the concept (using color, shape, odor, habitat or location) to bring out the unloveliness of the 32 parts <i>Body Parts seen in others, animals and own body</i>
Jhana	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Successive Leaving - While mentally reciting the list, note which parts appear 3-D and unlovely. Drop parts that are not as clear and decide which one is the clearest in both aspects and work with that one part only for the rest of the sit <i>Part disappears when absorption into Jhana occurs</i>