



The purpose of this practice is to see the body as it really is as impersonal elements.

- Sayalay Susilā

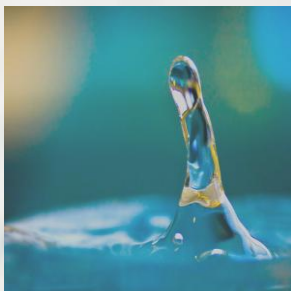
The body is composed of the four elements. The body is a conventional truth, the four elements are ultimate truths.

The Characteristics of :



earth

hardness, roughness,
heaviness,
softness, smoothness,
and lightness



water

flowing and cohesion



fire

heat and maturing



wind

supporting and pushing

To master this meditation, one begins by learning how to discern each of the characteristics of the four elements, one at a time. Follow this sequence.

First, feel the hardness of the head, then scan down from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet. Feel the hardness all over the body. Recognize this as *earth* element.

Second, feel the flowing of blood or energy (*chi* in Chinese) throughout the body. Recognize this as *water* element. The binding force in the body (cohesion) is also water element.

Move on to *fire* element. Pay attention to bodily temperature from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet. As a little warmth is felt, mentally note, "Fire element, fire element." Cold, relatively speaking, is also part of fire element.

To discern *wind* element, feel how air is moving in and out of the nostrils. Become aware of the pushing as the abdomen or chest expands when breathing. Mentally note, "Wind element, wind element."

After meditation on each element, contemplate it simply as impersonal element, not my body, not a being, not an enduring self.

Once the four elements become clear, stop scanning from head to feet. Simply take the body as a whole, seeing the four elements one by one. Sometimes when noticing one element, other elements may be noticed together. This is very good; however, they must also be distinguished one by one as earth, water, fire and wind element. In this way, they will not get mixed up. As one keeps discerning the four elements repeatedly, seeing them as mere elements, one gradually loses the perception of a "living being."

The mind establishes itself upon the elements.

Extending one's knowledge externally, one realizes all matters – animate or inanimate – are composed of the four elements only. As concentration and wisdom develop, the discernment speeds up and one reaches a point where the body appears as billions of vibrating particles, incessantly arising and passing. The entire body is in a state of radical flux. There is no solidity at all.

For some meditators, the body may appear to be bubbling. In the "Lump of Foam" discourse (SN 22.95), Buddha likens the body, this internal materiality, to foam: "It is hollow, void, insubstantial." One feels weary and humiliated with this uncontrollable occurrence. One sees the impermanent, suffering and inevitably impersonal nature of the body. Such seeing is seeing it rightly, just as it is in truth.