



17. Gross Body (72-75)

मज्जास्थिमेदःपलरक्तचर्मत्वगाह्वयैर्धातुभिरेभिरन्वितम् ।
पादोरुवक्षोभुजपृष्ठमस्तकैः अङ्गैरुपाङ्गैरुपयुक्तमेतत् ॥ ७२ ॥

*majjāsthimedahpalaraktacarmatvagāhvayairdhātubhirebhiranvitam,
pādoruvakṣobhujapṛṣṭhamastakaiḥ aṅgairupāṅgairupayuktametat. (72)*

72. Composed of the seven ingredients – marrow, bones, fat, flesh, blood, dermis and epidermis – and consisting of the following parts – legs, thighs, chest, arms, back and the head.....

अहं ममेति प्रथितं शरीरं मोहास्पदं स्थूलमितीर्यते बुधैः ।
नभोनभस्वद्दहनाम्बुभूमयः सूक्ष्माणि भूतानि भवन्ति तानि ॥ ७३ ॥

*aham mameti prathitam śarīraṁ
mohāspadam sthūlamitīryate budhaiḥ,
nabhonabhasvaddahanāmbubhūmayah
sūkṣmāṇi bhūtāni bhavanti tāni. (73)*

73. This body, the seat of delusion, expressing in terms of 'I' and 'mine', is termed by reputed sages as the gross body. Sky, air, fire, water and earth are the subtle elements.

In these two verses, Śaṅkara describes the gross body. In biology, we frequently find that an organ is discussed by describing its anatomy by an explanation of its cross-sections. This method does not seem unfamiliar to our ancient tradition, since it is used quite freely and liberally even in the realm of philosophy, when a philosopher explains such subtle things as the 'layers' of a human being. Śaṅkara too, makes free use of this technique of explaining through a cross-

section examination. In verse 72 we have a beautiful description, layer by layer, of a cross-section of the physical body.

Let us examine the contents of the body by studying the transverse section of, say, the upper arm. Therein, we shall find at its centre, a pulpy white matter called the marrow (majjā), bone (asthi) and still external, a layer of fat (medaḥ), enveloped by the flesh (pala). On the outer layers of the flesh are conspicuously the blood (rakta) vessels and all these are packed beautifully with two layers of skin of which the inner cream coloured tissue is called the dermis (carma) and the outer thicker layer which we see is called the epidermis (tvak). These seven items then form the bulk of the body in a transverse section of any part of it.

Gathered together in the above sequence and moulded into a human form, they form the most beautiful physical structure¹ fashioned in matter, consisting of various parts such as hands, legs and so on, enumerated in verse 73.

In the following verse we are told how this body, the harem of all our egocentric assertions and misunderstandings is the very seat of our vanities and possessiveness. All our 'I-ness' and 'my-ness' function from the headquarters of the physical body. This seat of all painful activities and ego prompted criminalities against our own divine nature, consisting of the filth of flesh and fat with its various appendages is described by the ṛṣis as the gross body.

The five great elements are described as first created in their subtle form and then through a process of combinations among themselves, they become the gross elements which we are able to perceive with our sense organs. The process by which the subtle elements become the perceivable gross element is described in the next verse.



¹ It has been declared by the greatest artists in the world, time without number, that the human male form outshines in beauty in everything else under the sun.