

# **The Soul in Anatomy**

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Our introduction to Anatomy was with stories of girl-students blanking out at the dissection table (it wasn't conventional yet for boys to wait with open arms for such occasions) and students who swore off animal products for several months after their first dissection experience. We braved all this; more dreadful for us were the card tests.

I was not good at dissection, and at one time had wondered why body parts couldn't be created with nametags attached. Preparing slides for histology was not much better. After scraping through several tests with mediocrity, I had the unenviable experience of being told – by Prof. S M Bhatnagar, no less; that master of English language – that I should not even dream of clearing the finals. It's a different story that I breezed through it.

It was the fatherly Prof. K D Desai, Prof. Bhatnagar, Prof. M L Kothari (then, as now, more philosopher than anatomist), Dr J K Bhatt (who always smiled before closing in on the kill), Dr I M Mehta (the eternally humble teacher) and the soft-spoken and profound Dr Lopa Mehta, among others, who made all this possible for us. Our interest in Medicine was solidified especially when Anatomy and Physiology came in sync to unravel so fascinating a mystery as the human body. Biochemistry, the third subject in 1st MBBS, was a drab cousin.

If I were offered a chance to relive my 1st MBBS days, I would politely decline. Much of it dealt with morbid science, and we were eager to move on to clinical science. But things have changed today. With the introduction of vertically integrated teaching, the student of Anatomy also learns its clinical application now, something that I learnt over the years and am still learning. Today I realize the relevance of all that I learnt in those rooms 30 years ago, and I wish someone would give me the opportunity to sit with my teachers once again (without the sword of examinations hanging over me) and revise my knowledge of anatomy to perfection.

Let me leave a few thoughts for the eager-beaver students who will be digging into the human body like tens of thousands before them. Wasn't it the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin who said he looked for a God in the dark reaches of the heavens when he went up there in his spaceship, and did not find any? I too searched, unknown to my teachers (who judged me on other skills), for a mind and a soul or spirit in the recesses of the human body, and found none.

More people believe in a God than believe in anything else unseen and probably even seen. Does that put faith and belief on a realm higher than sight? Is that why I can locate the eyeball but not the mind or soul? Do I need to look elsewhere for the spirit that puts breath into those lungs, physiology into anatomy? Is metaphysical philosophy a higher extension of physical anatomy? Is that why some anatomists graduate to philosophy?