

Bahu Dhātuka Sutta

The Discourse on the Many Elements

[The 18 elements, dependent arising, and possibilities]
(Majjhima Nikāya 115/3:61-67)
Translated by Piya Tan ©2008

1 Sutta summary and comments

The discourse opens with the Buddha remarking that problems (*bhaya*, *upaddava*, *upasagga*) arise only to the foolish, not to the wise [§1]. The meaning surely is that the wise do have problems, but these do not become fears (*bhaya*), mishaps (*upaddava*)¹ and troubles (*upasagga*) for them. This is because the wise are those “who investigate things” (*vīmaṃsaka*) [§2d].

The foolish, on the other hand, are easily troubled by their actions and by others like a fire starting from a small hut that burns down a large building [§2bc]. An important sense of this parable is that the foolish are greatly troubled by even small problems; or that the foolish tend to act in a manner that only worsen the danger they are already in.

The Buddha says that the wise is one who investigates things [§2d], and expounds what this investigative wisdom entails. The list that follows is reflected in the sutta title, “of many elements” (*bahu, dhātuka*), and are based on various forms of “elements” (*dhātu*), namely:

[§4]	The 18 elements	<i>aṭṭhārasa dhātu</i>	the 6 senses, 6 objects, 6 consciousnesses. ²
[§5]	The 6 elements	<i>cha dhātu</i>	earth, water, fire, wind, space, consciousness.
[§6]	The 6 elements	<i>cha dhātu</i>	in terms of the 6 kinds of feelings (<i>vedanā</i>). ³
[§7]	The 6 elements	<i>cha dhātu</i>	in terms of the 6 kinds of formations (<i>saṅkhāra</i>). ⁴
[§8]	The 3 elements	<i>ti dhātu</i>	the 3 realms (sense, form, and formless). ⁵
[§9]	The 2 elements	<i>dve dhātu</i>	the conditioned and the unconditioned. ⁶

One who has wisely investigated these elements is said to be “skilled in the elements” (*dhātu, kusala*).

Next, the Buddha defines the one who is “skilled in the sense-bases” (*āyatana, kusala*), that is, one who understands the six sense-organs and their respective sense-objects [§10].

This is followed by the Buddha’s definition of one “skilled in dependent arising” (*paṭicca.samuppāda, kusala*), that is, one who understands it, both as specific conditionality (*idap.paccayatā*) or the basic formula of conditionality and dependent arising [§11a], and the full formulas of both dependent arising [§11b] and dependent ending [§11c]. Analayo, in his comparative study of various ancient parallels,⁷ has shown that the Bahu Dhātuka Sutta (M 115) preserves a more original set of teachings on the elements (*dhātu*) than the Chinese or Tibetan versions (2009:151-160).

It is possible that the original discourse ends here, because the next section, which takes up the remaining half of the discourse, deals with the 28 “possibilities and impossibilities” (*thānāthāna*) [§§12-19]. Firstly, these 28 statements have nothing to do with “elements” (*dhātu*), which are *ontological* states,

¹ Comy glosses as “a condition of lacking single-mindedness” (*anek’aggat’ākāra*) (MA 4:102).

² Def at Vbh §§183-184/87-90; expl in detail at Vism 15.17-43/484-490. For other details, see §1 below.

³ Def at Vbh §180/85 f. For other details, see §6 below.

⁴ Def at Vbh §183/86 f as the 6 corresponding types of sustained application or pondering (*vitakka*): see Dve-dhā, vitakka S (M 19.2/1:114).

⁵ Comy says that the sense-sphere element (*kāma, dhātu*) as the 5 aggregates of the sense-sphere (*kāmāvacara-k, khandha*), the form element (*rūpa, dhātu*) as the 5 aggregates of the form sphere (*rūpāvacara-k, khandha*), and the formless element (*arūpa, dhātu*) as the 4 aggregates of the formless sphere (*arūpāvacara-k, khandha*) (MA 4:104). For details, see §8 below.

⁶ See §9 below.

⁷ See **On Women’s Inabilities** = SD 29.1b(1.2).

that is, they are about the nature of reality and existence. The 28 statements are about *epistemological*, about knowledge of whether some things are possible or not [2].

The discourse closes with Ānanda's exultation, and he asks the Buddha for its *name*, which betrays some sort of structured teaching, uncharacteristic of the early teachings. The Buddha obliges Ānanda with five titles [S20].⁸

2 The women's inabilities: a comparative study

The whole section on the 28 possibilities and impossibilities (*thānāthāna*) [S§12-19] is found in the **Aṭṭhāna Vagga** (A 1.15) and the **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh §809),⁹ which calls it "the Tathagata's knowledge of true reality regarding cause as cause and non-cause as non-cause" (*tathāgatassa thānañ ca thānato aṭṭhānañ ca aṭṭhānato yathā, bhūtam ñānam*) (Vbh 335). Its Commentary glosses "possibility" (*thāna*) as "cause" (*hetu*) (VbhA 423). A detailed analysis of these 28 statements is given in the **Sammoha, vino-danī** (the Vibhaṅga Commentary).¹⁰

Basically, this teaching says that an individual who is accomplished in right view would never regard formations (things of this world) as permanent, nor pleasurable, nor as self, but it is possible for an ordinary worldling to think so [S12]; or commit any of the five heinous karmas, that is, killing of one's own mother or father, or an arhat, or shedding Buddha's blood, or causing a schism in the order. Furthermore, only one Buddha can arise in a world-system at a time, and he will always be a man [S13].

A key statement here is that only one full self-awakened Buddha can arise in a single universe¹¹ at one time. This is like the discovery of fire or the invention of the wheel: it needs to occur only once. The Buddha is the most highly evolved of beings within a certain universe. This perfection in spiritual evolution takes an astronomical number of world cycles, and as such is rare indeed. As such, the Buddha is said to be *sui generis*, all in a class or species of his own.¹²

Similarly, the highest position of power, be it evil (Māra) or good in a mundane sense (Sakra), or in a globally political sense (a wheel-turning monarch), is always filled by the most powerful of men, and only one such being can exist at a time [S14].

All this is *neither* patriarchy *nor* anti-feminism on the part of early Buddhism, but a reflection of *the realities of ancient Indian patriarchal society and worldly politics*. A Buddha arises in a society that is culturally, economically and spiritually advanced, and understandably, such a society is always patriarchal. The arising of such an effective teacher may, in a way, be said to be *a spiritual evolution* based on a natural selection of the most physically and mentally developed of humans to become the Buddha of his time. On the other hand, the positions of worldly and celestial powers are always held by a male figure, arising from *natural selection of social evolution* [S15]. As we shall see in a separate essay [SD 29.1b], we have clear evidence that the passages on the women's inabilities were later interpolations.

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⁸ Similarly at the close of **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1), Ānanda asks for the name of "this Dharma," and is given 5 titles by the Buddha, and the fifth is the same as here: *anuttaro saṅgāma, vijaya* (D 1.148/1:46) = SD 25.

⁹ A 1.15/1:26-30 = Vbh 809/335-338; cf A 6.91-95/3:438-450.

¹⁰ VbhA 2138-2197/423-439 = VbhA:Ñ 2:171-187.

¹¹ The early texts, however, speaks of parallel universes: see (**Ānanda**) **Abhibhū S** (A 3.80.3/1:227 f) = SD 54.1 & Kosala S 1 (A 10.29.2/5:59) = SD 16.15.

¹² See (**Pāda**) **Doṇa S** (A 4.36/2:37 f) = SD 36.13.

The Discourse on the Many Elements

(M 115/3:61-67)

1 Thus have I heard.

¹³At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika's park in Jeta's grove near Sāvattihī. There the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus!”

“Bhante!” the monks answered the Blessed One in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

The foolish is often troubled

2a “Bhikshus, whatever *fears*¹⁴ that arise,
Whatever *mishaps* that arise,
Whatever *troubles* that arise,

they all arise to the foolish, not to the wise.
they all arise to the foolish, not to the wise.
they all arise to the foolish, not to the wise.

2b THE SPREADING FIRE. Suppose, bhikshus, a fire that started¹⁵ in a house of reed or a house of grass would also burn down pinnacled buildings, with walls plastered within and without, protected from the wind, secured with bars, with windows shuttered.¹⁶

Even so, bhikshus, whatever *fears* that arise,
Whatever *mishaps* that arise,
Whatever *troubles* that arise,

they all arise to the foolish, not to the wise.
they all arise to the foolish, not to the wise.
they all arise to the foolish, not to the wise.

The wise is not troubled

2c Thus, bhikshus, the foolish is beset by fears,
The foolish is beset by mishaps,
The foolish is beset by troubles,

the wise is not beset by fears.
the wise is not beset by mishaps.
the wise is not beset by troubles.

2d Therefore, bhikshus, thinking,¹⁷ “We shall be wise, those who investigate things.” Thus, bhikshus, you should train yourselves.¹⁸ [62]

The wise monk, a triple investigator

3 When this was spoken, the venerable Ānanda said this to the Blessed One:

“In what way, bhante, is it right to say that a monk is wise, who investigates things?”¹⁹

THE TRIPLE INVESTIGATOR.²⁰ “Ānanda, when a monk is

¹³ The Aṅguttara Book of Threes (*tika nipāta*) opens with §§1-2, except for the admonition at §2d, which there reads, “Abandoning those three conditions by which the utterly foolish is to be known, we will undertake and bring about those three conditions by which the utterly wise is to be known” (*yehi tīhi dhammehi samannāgato bālo vedītabbo te tayo dhamme abhinivajjetvā, yehi tīhi dhammehi samannāgato paṇḍīto vedītabbo te tayo dhamme samādāya vattissamā'ti*) (A 3.1.1/1:101).

¹⁴ The 3 key words in this para are *bhaya* (fear, danger), *upaddava* (danger, calamity, misfortune, nuisance) and *upasagga* (trouble, danger, attack, persecution).

¹⁵ “A fire that started,” *aggi mutto*, v1 *aggi mukko* (A 1:101); both being pp of √MUC, “to release, unharness.” See Pischel, *A Grammar of the Prākṛit Languages*, 1981 §566.

¹⁶ “Pinnacled buildings etc...” (pl) *kūṭ'āgārāni pi... ullittāvalittāni nivātāni phusit'aggaḷāni pihita,vātapānāni* (M 115.2/3:61; A 3.1/1:101); sg *kūṭ'āgāraṃ ullittāvalittam nivātam phusit'aggaḷam pihita,vātapānam* (M 12.41/1:76; A 3.34/1:137; A 8.30.10/4:231); loc *kūṭ'āgāresu...ullittāvalittesu nivātesu phusit'aggaḷesu pihita,vātapānesu* (M 77.9/2:8) . See AA 2:168.

¹⁷ On this sentence, see n at the start of §1.

¹⁸ *Tasmā,ti,ha, bhikkhave, “paṇḍitā bhavissāma vīmaṃsakā”ti evañ hi vo bhikkhave sikkhitabban'ti. On tas-mā,ti,ha, see W Geiger, A Pāli Grammar, 2000: §73.5.*

¹⁹ *Kittāvatā nu kho, bhante, paṇḍīto bhikkhu vīmaṃsakō ti alam,vacanāyā ti?*

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|--|---|
| (1) skilled in the elements | <i>dhātu, kusalo ca hoti,</i> |
| (2) skilled in the sense-bases | <i>āyatana, kusalo ca hoti,</i> |
| (3) skilled in dependent arising | <i>paṭicca.samuppāda, kusalo ca hoti, and</i> |
| (4) skilled in the possible and the impossible | <i>ṭhānāṭhāna, kusalo ca hoti—</i> |
- to that extent, Ānanda, a monk is wise, who investigates things.”

The one skilled in the elements

4 (1) “But, bhante, in what way, bhante, is it right to say that a monk is skilled in the elements?”
“Ānanda, there are these eighteen elements:²¹

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|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| (1) the <u>eye</u> element | <i>cakkhu, dhātu,</i> | |
| (2) the form element | <i>rūpa, dhātu,</i> | |
| (3) the eye-consciousness element | | <i>cakkhu.viññāṇa, dhātu;</i> |
| (4) the <u>ear</u> element | <i>sota, dhātu,</i> | |
| (5) the sound element | <i>sadda, dhātu,</i> | |
| (6) the ear-consciousness element | | <i>sota.viññāṇa, dhātu;</i> |
| (7) the <u>nose</u> element | <i>ghāna, dhātu,</i> | |
| (8) the smell element | <i>gandha, dhātu,</i> | |
| (9) the nose-consciousness element | | <i>ghāna, viññāṇa, dhātu;</i> |
| (10) the <u>tongue</u> element | <i>jivhā, dhātu,</i> | |
| (11) the taste element | <i>rasa, dhātu,</i> | |
| (12) the tongue-consciousness element | | <i>jivhā.viññāṇa, dhātu;</i> |
| (13) the <u>body</u> element | <i>kāya, dhātu,</i> | |
| (14) the touch element | | <i>phoṭṭhabba, dhātu,</i> |
| (15) the body-consciousness element | | <i>kāya.viññāṇa, dhātu;</i> |
| (16) the <u>mind</u> element | <i>mano, dhātu,</i> ²² | |
| (17) the mind-object element | | <i>dhamma, dhātu,</i> ²³ |
| (18) the mind-consciousness element | | <i>mano.viññāṇa, dhātu.</i> ²⁴ |

These, Ānanda, are the eighteen elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

5 “But, bhante, might there be yet another way whereby we could rightly say that a monk is skilled in the elements?”

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these six elements, namely,²⁵

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|-----------------------|------------------------|
| (1) the earth element | <i>paṭhavī, dhātu,</i> |
| (2) the water element | <i>āpo, dhātu,</i> |
| (3) the fire element | <i>tejo, dhātu,</i> |

²⁰ The term “triple investigator” (*ti, vidhūpaparikkhī*) is from **Satta-ṭ, ṭhāna S** (S 22.57.31/3:65), and should be understood in connection with the *elements* (Dhātu Saṃyutta, S 14), *the sense-bases* (Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta, S 35) and *dependent arising* (Nidāna Saṃyutta, S 12). Here (2) is meant [§4].

²¹ Def at Vbh §§183-184/87-90; expl in detail at Vism 15.17-43/484-490. See Intro (1) above.

²² The mind-element, according to Abhidhamma, includes the consciousness that adverts to the 5 sense-objects impinging on the 5 sense-faculties (*pañca.dvār’āvajjana, citta*) [see *Nimitta & Anuvyañjana*= SD 19.14 (2)] and the consciousness that receives the object after it has been cognized through the senses (*sampaṭicchana, citta*).

²³ The mind-object element includes the types of subtle material phenomena not involved in sense-cognition, the 3 mental aggregates of feeling, perception, and formations, and nirvana. It does not incl concepts, abstract ideas, judgements, etc. Though these latter ideas are incl in the notion of mind-object (*dhamm’ārammaṇa*), the mind-object *element* includes only things that exist by their own nature, not things constructed by the mind. (M:NB 1324 n1077)

²⁴ The mind-consciousness element includes all types of consciousness except the five sense-consciousnesses and the mind-element. In other words, it consists of purely mental events.

²⁵ See Cha-b, bisodhana S (M 112), where the elements are regarded as not-self (M 112.8/3:31).

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|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (4) the wind element | <i>vāyo, dhātu,</i> |
| (5) the space element | <i>ākāsa, dhātu, and</i> |
| (6) the consciousness element | <i>viññāṇa, dhātu.</i> |

These, Ānanda, are the six elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

6 “But, bhante, might there be yet another way whereby we could rightly say that a monk is skilled in the elements?”

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these six elements,²⁶ namely,

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|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| (1) the physical pleasure element | <i>sukha, dhātu,</i> |
| (2) the physical pain element | <i>dukkha, dhātu,</i> |
| (3) the mental joy element | <i>somanassa, dhātu,</i> |
| (4) the displeasure [grief] element | <i>domanassa, dhātu,</i> |
| (5) the equanimity element | <i>upekkhā, dhātu, and</i> |
| (6) the ignorance element | <i>avijjā, dhātu.</i> |

These, Ānanda, are the six elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

7 “But, bhante, might there be yet another way whereby we could rightly say that a monk is skilled in the elements?”

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these six elements, namely,²⁷

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|------------------------------|--|------|
| (1) the sensual element | <i>kāma, dhātu,</i> | |
| (2) the renunciation element | <i>nekkhamma, dhātu,</i> | |
| (3) the ill will element | <i>vyāpāda, dhātu,</i> | |
| (4) the non-ill will element | <i>avyāpāda, dhātu,</i> | [63] |
| (5) the cruelty element | <i>vīhimsā, dhātu,</i> ²⁸ and | |
| (6) the non-cruelty element | <i>avīhimsā, dhātu.</i> ²⁹ | |

These, Ānanda, are the six elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

8 “But, bhante, might there be yet another way whereby we could rightly say that a monk is skilled in the elements?”

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these three elements,³⁰ namely,

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|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) the sensual element | <i>kāma, dhātu,</i> |
| (2) the form element | <i>rūpa, dhātu, and</i> |
| (3) the formless element | <i>arūpa, dhātu.</i> |

These, Ānanda, are the three elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

²⁶ Def at Vbh §180/85 f. The pleasure and pain elements are *bodily* pleasant and painful feelings respectively. The pleasure and displeasure elements are *mental* pleasant and painful feelings respectively. The equanimity element is neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling. Comy says that it is mentioned because it seems to resemble the equanimity element (MA 4:105).

²⁷ Def at Vbh §183/86 f as the 6 corresponding types of sustained application or pondering (*vitakka*): see Dve-dhā, vitakka S (M 19.2/1:114); cf D 3:215; S 2:151; A 3:447. Comy reminds us that these elements refer to the “conscious” body (*sa, viññāṇaka, kāya*) (MA 4:104): see *Rūpa* = SD 17.2a.

²⁸ Be Ce Se so; Ee *vihesā, dhātu.*

²⁹ Be Ce Se so; Ee *avihesā, dhātu.*

³⁰ Also in Das’uttara S (D 34.1.10(13)/3:215); It 45. Comy says that the sense-sphere element as the 5 aggregates pertaining to the sense-sphere (*kāmāvacara*), the form element as the 5 aggregates pertaining to the form sphere (*rūpāvacara*), and the formless element as the 4 aggregates pertaining to the formless sphere (*arūpāvacara*) (MA 4:105). On the 3 realms, see The Person in Buddhism = SD 29.6b (7.2).

9 “But, bhante, might there be yet another way whereby we could rightly say that a monk is skilled in the elements?”

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these two elements,³¹ namely,

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|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) the conditioned element | <i>saṅkhata, dhātu,</i> and |
| (2) the unconditioned element | <i>asaṅkhata, dhātu.</i> |

These, Ānanda, are the two elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

The one skilled in the sense-bases

10 (2) “But, bhante, in what way, bhante, when is it right to say that a monk is skilled in the sense-bases?”

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these six internal and external sense-bases,³² namely,

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|----------------|-----|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) the eye | and | forms | <i>cakkhu c’eva</i> | <i>rūpā ca,</i> |
| (2) the ear | and | sounds | <i>sotañ ca</i> | <i>saddā ca,</i> |
| (3) the nose | and | smells | <i>ghānañ ca</i> | <i>gandhā ca,</i> |
| (4) the tongue | and | tastes | <i>jivhā ca</i> | <i>rasā ca,</i> |
| (5) the body | and | touches and | <i>kāyo ca</i> | <i>phoṭṭhabbā ca,</i> |
| (6) the mind | and | mind-objects | <i>mano ca</i> | <i>dhammā ca.</i> |

These, Ānanda, are the six internal and external sense-bases: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the sense-bases.”

The one skilled in dependent arising

11a (3) “But, bhante, in what way, bhante, when is it right to say that a monk is skilled in dependent arising?”

SPECIFIC CONDITIONALITY. “Here, Ānanda, a monk understands thus:³³

when this is, that is,	<i>imasmiṃ sati idam hoti</i>	with the
arising of this, that arises;	<i>imass’uppādā idam uppajjati</i>	
when this is not, that is not,	<i>imasmiṃ asati idam na hoti</i>	
with the ending of this, that ends;	<i>imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati</i>	

11b that is to say,³⁴

[DEPENDENT ARISING]

with ignorance as condition, there are	volitional activities;	<i>avijjā, paccayā</i>	<i>saṅkhārā</i>
with volitional activities as condition, there is	consciousness;	<i>saṅkhāra, paccayā</i>	<i>viññāṇaṃ</i>
with consciousness as condition, there is	name-and-form;	<i>viññāṇa, paccayā</i>	<i>nāma, rūpaṃ</i>
with name-and-form as condition, there are	the six sense-bases;	<i>nāma, rūpa, paccayā</i>	<i>saḷ-āyatanaṃ</i>

³¹ Also in Das’uttara S (D 34), where they are called “the two things to be directly known” (*dve dhammā abhiñeyyā*, D 34.1.3(9)/3:274). Comy: The conditioned element includes everything produced by conditions and is a designation for the 5 aggregates. The unconditioned element is nirvana. (MA 4:106). See also Vbh §167/72 f, §184/89, §1020/421.

³² The 12 bases are def at Vbh §§155-167/70-73 & explained in detail at Vism 15.1-6/481 f. The mind-base includes all types of consciousness, and thus comprises all 7 elements that function as consciousness. The mind-object is identical with the mind-object element.

³³ Also at Dasa Bala S 1 (S 12.21/2:28). For examples of how the two parts (ab & cd) this formula are applied and elaborated, see **Mahā Taṇhā, saṅkhaya** S (M 38): arising of suffering (M 38.19/1:262 f) and ending of suffering (M 38.22/1:264). See Dependent Arising = SD 5.16 (2). See also M:NB 30 f.

³⁴ See **Mahā Taṇhā, saṅkhaya** S (M 38.18-19/261-264). See also Dependent Arising = SD 5.16.

with the six sense-bases as condition, there is	contact;	<i>saḷ-āyatana, paccayā</i>	<i>phasso</i>
with contact as condition, there is	feeling;	<i>phassa, paccayā</i>	<i>vedanā</i>
with feeling as condition, there is	craving;	<i>vedanā, paccayā</i>	<i>taṇhā</i>
with craving as condition, there is	clinging;	<i>taṇhā, paccayā</i>	<i>upādānam</i>
with clinging as condition, there is [64]	existence;	<i>upādāna, paccayā</i>	<i>bhavo</i>
with existence as condition, there is	birth;	<i>bhava, paccayā</i>	<i>jāti</i>
with birth as condition there arise	decay-and-death,	<i>jāti, paccayā</i>	<i>jarā, maraṇam</i>
sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,			<i>soka, parideva, dukkha, -</i>
mental pain and despair.			<i>domanass'upāyasā sambhavanti</i>
—Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.			<i>evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k, -</i>
			<i>khandhassa samudayo hoti</i>

11c [DEPENDENT ENDING]

But with the utter fading away and ending of ignorance,	volitional activities end;	<i>avijjāya tv-eva asesā, virāga, nirodhā</i>	
with the ending of volitional activities,	consciousness ends;	<i>saṅkhāra, nirodhā</i>	<i>viññāṇa, nirodho</i>
with the ending of consciousness,	name-and-form ends;	<i>viññāṇa, nirodhā</i>	<i>nāma, rūpa, nirodho</i>
with the ending of name-and-form,	the six sense-bases end;	<i>nāma, rūpa, nirodhā</i>	<i>saḷāyatana, nirodho</i>
with the ending of the six sense-bases,	contact ends;	<i>saḷ-āyatana, nirodhā</i>	<i>phassa, nirodho</i>
with the ending of contact,	feeling ends;	<i>phassa, nirodhā</i>	<i>vedanā, nirodho</i>
with the ending of feeling,	craving ends;	<i>vedanā, nirodhā</i>	<i>taṇhā, nirodho</i>
with the ending of craving,	clinging ends;	<i>taṇhā, nirodhā</i>	<i>upādāna, nirodho</i>
with the ending of clinging,	existence ends;	<i>upādāna, nirodhā</i>	<i>bhava, nirodho</i>
with the ending of existence,	birth ends;	<i>bhava, nirodhā</i>	<i>jāti, nirodho</i>
with the ending of birth, there end	decay-and-death,	<i>jāti, nirodhā</i>	<i>jarā, maraṇam</i>
sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,			<i>soka parideva, dukkha, -</i>
mental pain and despair.			<i>domanass'upāyasā nirujjhanti</i>
—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.			<i>evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k, -</i>
			<i>khandhassa nirodho hoti</i>

Ānanda, to that extent, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in dependent arising.

The one skilled in the possible and the impossible

12 (4) “But, bhante, in what way, when, bhante, is it right to say that a monk is skilled in the possible and the impossible?”

THE 28 IMPOSSIBILITIES.³⁵ “Here, Ānanda, a monk

RIGHT VIEW. (1) understands that it is impossible, there is no chance,³⁶ that an individual attained to right view,³⁷ would regard any formation³⁸ as *permanent*—this is not possible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, would regard any formation as permanent—this is possible.

(2) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, would regard any formation as *pleasurable*³⁹—this is not possible.

³⁵ This section as in *Aṭṭhāna Vagga* (A 1.15/1:26 f) = Vbh 809/335-338: see Intro (2). Cf *Parihāna S* (A 4.-158), where 4 conditions are given as causing our spiritual decline, viz, too much lust (*rāga, vepullata*), too much hate (*dosa, vepullata*), too much delusion (*moha, vepullata*), and his wisdom-eye has not penetrated into the profundity of what is possible and what is impossible (*gambhīresu kho pan'assa thāṇa-ṭ, thānesu paññā, cakkhum na kama-ti*); but for the skillful this is not the case (A 4.158/2:143 f). See also Paul J Griffiths, *On Being Buddha*, 1994: 118 f.

³⁶ “It is impossible, there is no chance,” *aṭṭhānam etaṃ anavakāso*.

³⁷ Comy: An individual attained to right view (*diṭṭhi, sampanna*) is one possessing the view of path, ie, a stream-winner (the first of the 4 noble disciples) (MA 4:106), in which case, it would be the same as the “view-attainer” (*diṭṭhi-p, patta*): see *Kiṭṭāgiri S* (M 70) = SD 11.1(5.2(2B)).

³⁸ Ie a conditioned formation (*saṅkhata, saṅkhāra*), ie anything conditioned or thing in this world or universe. Cf (3) here where *dhmma* is used.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, would regard any formation as pleasurable—this is possible.

(3) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, would regard any thing [dharma] as *self*—this is not possible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, would regard any thing [dharma]⁴⁰ as self—this is possible.

13 RIGHT CONDUCT.

(4) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, would deprive his mother of life—this is not possible.⁴¹

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, would deprive his mother of life—this is possible.

(5) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that [65] an individual attained to right view, would deprive his father of life—this is not possible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, would deprive his father of life—this is possible.

(6) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, would deprive an arhat of life—this is not possible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, would deprive an arhat of life—this is possible.

(7) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, would draw the Tathagata's blood—this is not possible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, would draw the Tathagata's blood—this is possible.

(8) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, would divide the monastic order [the Sangha]—this is not possible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, would divide the monastic order—this is possible.

(9) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, would proclaim another Teacher—this is not possible.⁴²

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, would declare another Teacher—this is possible.

³⁹ *Sukhato*. Comy says that a noble disciple other than an arhat can still regard formations as pleasurable with a mind associated with wrong view, but he would not hold the view that any formation is pleasurable. Although perceptions and thoughts of formations as pleasurable arise in him, he knows reflectively that notions are mistaken. (MA 4:106)

⁴⁰ Here we see “thing” (*dhamma*) in place of “formation” in the prec two sections. Also not the tr is a conditional “any thing” and not the universal “anything.” Comy says that this change is made to include concepts, such as *kaṣiṇa* sign, etc, where the ordinary person is likely to identify as self (MA 4:106). However, notes M:ÑB (1325 n1086), as nirvana is said to be “imperishable” (*accuta*) and “bliss” (*sukha*), and is likely to be misconceived as self [see *Mūla,pariyāya S* (M 1.26/1:4)], the term *saṅkhāra* may be taken to incl only the conditioned, while *dhamma* includes both the conditioned and the unconditioned. But ÑB admits that this is not endorsed by Buddhaghosa. In fact, this interpretation of *Dhamma* here is incorrect and unattested: see *Dhamma,niyāma S* (A 3.134/1:285) = SD 26.8.

⁴¹ This section distinguishes the wise individual from the false individual, in that the latter is capable of any of the 5 heinous karma bearing immediate results (*ānantarika-* or *ānantariya kamma*, V 2:193; A 5.129/3:146; MA 2:351; AA 2:7 = VbhA 427; UA 243; PmA 402 ad Pm 1:124; KvuA 141-143; PugA 185 ad Pug 13). Comy states that a noble disciple is incapable of intentionally depriving any living being of life. The contrast is made to stress the potential of the ordinary person in committing matricide and patricide, and the strength of the noble disciple (MA 4:106).

⁴² That is, declare another being as the Buddha or highest spiritual teacher.

14 THE BUDDHA AND THE UNIVERSAL MONARCH.

(10) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that *two worthy fully self awakened ones* (*arahatā sammā,sambuddhā*) would simultaneously⁴³ arise in the same world system—this is not possible.⁴⁴

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, one worthy fully self-awakened one (*arahata sammāsambuddha*) would arise in one world system—this is possible.

(11) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that *two universal monarchs* would simultaneously arise in the same world system—this is not possible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, one universal monarch would arise in one world system—this is possible.

15 PATRIARCHY IN POST-BUDDHA INDIA.

(12) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that *a woman* would become a worthy fully self awakened one—this is not possible.⁴⁵

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that a man would become a worthy fully self-awakened—this is possible.

(13) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that *a woman* would become a universal monarch—this is not possible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that only a man would become a universal monarch —this is possible.

(14) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that *a woman* [66] would attain the state of Sakra—this is not possible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that *a man* would attain the state of Sakra —this is possible.

(15) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, *a woman* would attain the state of Māra —this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, *a man* would attain the state of Māra—this is possible.

(16) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, *a woman* would attain the state of Brahmā—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, *a man* would attain the state of Brahmā—this is possible.

16 UNWHOLSOME KARMA.

(17) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that a wished for, desired, agreeable result could arise from *bodily misconduct*—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an unwished for, undesired, disagreeable result could arise from bodily misconduct—this is possible.

(18) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that a wished for, desired, agreeable result could arise from *verbal misconduct*—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an unwished for, undesired, disagreeable result could arise from verbal misconduct—this is possible.

(19) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that a wished for, desired, agreeable result could arise from *mental misconduct*—this is impossible.

⁴³ *Apubbam acarimam*, lit “not before, not after” (D 2:225,5; A 1:28,1; Pug 13,26; Miln 40,30; DhA 1:12,17).

⁴⁴ As in **Mahā Govinda S** (D 19.13/2:224). **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28.19/3:114), **Bahu,dhātuka S** (M 115.14/-3:65), **Aṭṭhāna Vagga** (A 1.15.10/1:27 f), Vbh 335. Comy says that the arising of another Buddha is impossible from the time the bodhisattva take his final conception until his dispensation (*sāsana*) has completely disappeared (MA 4:113). For a discussion, see Miln 236-239.

⁴⁵ The fact is that so far only men have become Buddhas, but this does not deny that a woman today cannot become a Buddha in due course. However, by that time, he would be reborn as a man. See **Jina,kāla,mālī** (Ratana, -paññā, 16th cent Siam), where it is said that our Buddha was a woman in a distant past life (Jink:J 1978: 3): see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004: §18.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an unwished for, undesired, disagreeable result could arise from mental misconduct—this is possible.

17 WHOLESOME KARMA.

(20) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an unwished for, undesired, disagreeable result could arise from *good bodily conduct*—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that a wished for, desired, agreeable result could arise from good bodily conduct—this is possible.

(21) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an unwished for, undesired, disagreeable result could arise from *good verbal conduct*—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that a wished for, desired, agreeable result could arise from good verbal conduct—this is possible.

(22) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an unwished for, undesired, disagreeable result could arise from *good mental conduct*—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that a wished for, desired, agreeable result could arise from good mental conduct—this is possible.

18 BAD DESTINIES.

(23) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that one engaging in *bodily misconduct*, [67] on that account, dependent on that,⁴⁶ after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a happy state, in a heaven world—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that one engaging in bodily misconduct, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell—this is possible.

(24) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that one engaging in *verbal misconduct*, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a happy state, in a heaven world—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that one engaging in verbal misconduct, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell—this is possible.

(25) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that one engaging in *mental misconduct*, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a happy state, in a heaven world—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that one engaging in mental misconduct, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell—this is possible.

19 GOOD DESTINIES.

(26) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that one engaging in *good bodily conduct*, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that one engaging in good bodily conduct, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a happy state, in a heaven world—this is possible.

(27) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that one engaging in *good verbal conduct*, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell—this is impossible.

⁴⁶ “On that account, dependent on that” (*tan nidāna tap paccayā*): This conjunctive phrase is significant as, in **Mahā Kamma, vibhaṅga S** (M 136/3:207-214), the Buddha shows that a person who does evil may be reborn in a heavenly world, and a person who does good may fall into a lower world—in which cases, however, some karma other than his habitual ones predominates. From the Sutta we know there are 3 such predominant, viz, a fruit of a good karma done *before* such an evil karma, a fruit of a good karma done *after* such an evil karma, and the last thought process (M 136.18/3:214).

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that one engaging in good verbal conduct, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a happy state, in a heaven world—this is possible.

(28) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that one engaging in *good mental conduct*, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell—this is impossible.

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that one engaging in good mental conduct, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a happy state, in a heaven world—this is possible.

To that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the possible and the impossible.

Conclusion

20 When this was said, the venerable Ānanda said this to the Blessed One:

“It is marvellous, bhante! It is wonderful, bhante! What, bhante, is the name of this Dharma discourse?”

“In that case, Ānanda, this Dharma discourse—

remember it as the “many elements,”

bahu, dhātuka, or

remember it as the “four cycles,”⁴⁷

catu, parivaṭṭa, or

remember it as the “Dharma mirror,”

dharm 'ādāsa, or

remember it as the “Dharma drum,”

dhamma, dundubhī, or

remember it as the “supreme victory in battle,”⁴⁸

anuttara saṅgāma, vijaya.

The Blessed One said this. The venerable Ānanda joyfully approved of the Blessed One's word.

— evaṃ —

Bibliography

See under “On Women's Inabilities” = SD 29.1b.

080427; 090624; 090629; 091024 DS; 091118; 100322

⁴⁷ The “Four Cycles” are the elements, the sense-bases, dependent arising, and the possible and the impossible (MA 4:126).

⁴⁸ Cf **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1), where 5 titles, too, are given, and the fifth is the same as here: *anuttaro saṅgāma, vijaya* (D 1.148/1:46) = SD 25.