

# 11

## Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta

The Greater Discourse on the Advice to Rāhula | M 62  
Theme: Meditations to overcome attachment to the body  
Translated with notes by Piya Tan ©2003, 2010

### 1 Rāhula

#### 1.1 RĀHULA'S INSTRUCTION

**1.1.1** According to the Majjhima Commentary, once when the 18-year-old “venerable Rāhula” (*āyasmā rāhulo*) is following the Buddha on alms-round, he harbours carnal thoughts, being fascinated by the Buddha's physical beauty and noting that he is of similar appearance (MA 3:132). The Buddha, noticing Rāhula's unwholesome thoughts, gives him the teachings of the Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta (M 62).<sup>1</sup> In this Sutta, Rāhula is taught how the body is composed of the 4 elements [§§8-11] and space [§12], and to reflect on the body as “this is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self” [§§8-12].

**1.1.2** According to the Majjhima Commentary, the Buddha explains the meditation on form (*rūpa*) to Rāhula because he is too attached to his body (*atta, bhāva*), and does not see things with insight. It adds that Sāriputta, seeing Rāhula sitting in meditation, thinks that he is cultivating the mindfulness of the breath (*ānāpānā, sati*), unaware that Rāhula has already been instructed by the Buddha.

**1.1.3** The Buddha begins his instruction to Rāhula with the meditation on the 4 elements [§§8-11; 4] and on space [§12] to dispel Rāhula's attachment to the body, not yet removed by the brief instruction on the non-selfness of material form. The section on the 16 aspects of the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing (as satipaṭṭhāna practice) [§§24-29] is also found in **the Ānāpāna, sati Sutta** (M 118, 15-22).

#### 1.2 TEXTUAL SEQUENCE

**1.2.1 Analayo**, in his *Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya*, notices a discrepancy between the Pali text and its Āgama version in Chinese translation.<sup>2</sup> The Pali version reports that, on being asked by Rāhula about the breath meditation [§§6-7], the Buddha delivers detailed instructions on how to contemplate the 5 elements of earth, water, fire, wind and space [§§8-17], followed by taking up, in brief, the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*) [§18-21], the contemplation of the foulness of the body (*asubha*) [§22], and the perception of impermanence (*anicca, saññā*) [§23], before going into a detailed exposition of the breath meditation [§§24-30].

**1.2.2** According to the Ekottara Āgama version (Chinese translation) of the Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta, however, even before Rāhula asks about the breath meditation, the Buddha has already briefly taught him the divine abodes and the perception of foulness, and it is only after Rāhula's question that the Buddha elaborates on the breath meditation.<sup>3</sup> The detailed instructions on the 5 elements, given in the Pali version of the Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta, are not found in the Ekottara Āgama version at all.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **Cūḷa Rāhul'ovāda S** (M 147) records how, shortly after his higher ordination (presumably at 20), Rāhula attains arhathood (M 147/3:277-280), SD 70.7.

<sup>2</sup> Analayo, 2011:348 f.

<sup>3</sup> EĀ 17.1 = T2.581c16 & T 2.582a13.

<sup>4</sup> See Analayo, 2005:97 f.

The Mahārāhulovāda-sutta and its Ekottarika-āgama parallel agree that subsequently Rāhula approached the Buddha and inquired about how to fruitfully undertake mindfulness of breathing.<sup>5</sup> While in the Ekottarika-āgama version the Buddha directly replied to this question by describing mindfulness of breathing, according to the Pāli version he replied by giving a detailed instruction on contemplation of the five elements, followed by taking up the *brahmavihāras*, contemplation of impurity and perception of impermanence, before turning to mindfulness of breathing.<sup>6</sup> The detailed instructions on the five elements are not found at all in the Chinese version.

When evaluating this substantial difference between the two versions, it comes somewhat unexpected when the Buddha, instead of directly replying to Rāhula's question, broaches a different subject and gives it such a detailed treatment before taking up the topic of mindfulness of breathing. In fact, a discourse in the Aṅguttara-nikāya and its parallel in the Saṃyukta-āgama record an instruction given by the Buddha to Rāhula on the four elements as a discourse on its own.<sup>7</sup> Thus perhaps the instructions given by the Buddha to his son Rāhula on contemplating the elements should be associated with a different occasion, and during the course of oral transmission this instruction came to be added to the Mahārāhulovāda-sutta.

(Analayo, 2006:236 f; emphasis added)

### 1.2.3 The coherence of the Sutta

**1.2.3.1** Despite the misgiving of scholars that the certain sections [§§8-23] of the **Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta** were probably added later by sutta redactors [1.3], the Sutta as it is, stands as a wonderfully coherent whole in terms of meditation practice. The sutta teachings may appear a miscellaneous collection, but the teachings are all related to helping Rāhula overcome his lustful thoughts.

**1.2.3.2** The whole section on **the 5 elements** [§§8-12] is an important exposition on the practice of the 5 elements. Perhaps, the fifth element (space) was added to give a comprehensive set. In fact, the 4 elements—earth, water, fire and wind—are in themselves sufficient as a meditation leading on to the practice of breath meditation.

**1.2.3.3** The section on **the 5 element-like meditation** [§§13-17] are almost unique to this Sutta. These meditations especially effective for cultivating of the quality of impartiality (*tādī, bhāva*) or “suchness,” that is, accepting things around us as they are. These meditations are, in fact, also helpful for the overcoming of distractions from our environments. [1.3.2].

This set of 5 meditations is an interesting variation of the practice of the 4 divine abode, with the perception of space as an optional practice. Because of the elemental and visual nature of the meditations, they are suitable meditations for young children, too.

<sup>5</sup> M 62/1:421,24: *katha bhāvitā nu kho, bhante, ānāpānasati ... mahāpphalā hoti?* EĀ 17.1 = T2.582a6: 云何修行安般...獲大果報? *yún hé xiū xíng ān bān ... huò dà guǒ bào?*

<sup>6</sup> M 62/1:421,27-425,2. An extract of the present discussion has been published in Analayo “Some Pali Discourses in the light of their Chinese parallels (2),” in *Buddhist Studies Review* 22,2 2005d: 97 f

<sup>7</sup> A 4.177/2:164,26 and SĀ 465 (T2.118c29). SĀ 465 differs from A 4.177 in that it begins with an inquiry by Rāhula on how to go beyond notions of self and conceit in regard to this body with consciousness and all external signs (A 4.177 does not report any inquiry by Rāhula). Another difference is that SĀ 465 takes up 6 elements, whereas A 4.177 treats only 4. Compared to M 62, the examination of the elements in A 4.177 and SĀ 465 is also shorter, as they do not list the bodily manifestations of each internal element. (Analayo)

**1.2.3.4** If any sections were added to the Sutta, it would very likely be those on the divine abodes [§§18-21], the cultivation of foulness [§22] and the perception of impermanence [§23]. The section on **the divine abodes** [§§18-21], however, coming just after the 5 element-like meditations—which are variations on the divine abodes—understandably are only briefly mentioned.

**The cultivation of foulness** [§22], listed without any elaboration, is again related to the Sutta context, that is, Rāhula’s lustful thought. Hence, it is very relevant meditation here.

In the case of **the perception of impermanence** [§23], it is especially efficacious for the attaining of streamwinning.<sup>8</sup> Here, the meditation is located immediately before the breath meditation [§§24-29]. This perception is especially helpful in the *vipassanā* aspect of the breath meditation, when the practitioner, having experienced the peace of joy of the radiant breath, goes on to reflect them as being mind-made and impermanent.

### 1.3 THE MEDITATIONS ON THE ELEMENTS

**1.3.1 Sutta evolution.** **Analyo** has noted that the whole section on the 5 elements [§§8-17] is missing from the Chinese translation of the Sutta’s Āgama version. It is possible—although unlikely—that the original text omits the sections on the 4 elements, the divine abodes, the cultivation of foulness, and the perception of impermanence [§§8-23], and blends smoothly into the Buddha’s instruction on the breath meditation [§§24-30] [1.2; 2].

**1.3.2 The 5 elements.** Buddhaghosa explains that the 5 element-like meditations [§§13-17]—the meditation on the 4 elements and on space—are given to Rāhula so that he would train himself in impartiality (*tādī, bhāva*) or “suchness.”<sup>9</sup> In **the Vuttha Vass’āvāsa Sutta** (A 9.11)—where impartiality practices (1)-(4) recur—Sāriputta gives a lion-roar by way of telling the Buddha that he dwells with his mind like these 4 primary elements in this manner, but adding his own similes to each of them.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note here that space (*ākāsa*)—and sometimes, consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—are listed with the 4 primary elements (*mahā, bhūta*). However, as a set (of 5 or 6 as such), they are called **dhātu**, while the term *mahā, bhūta* is used only for the first four.<sup>11</sup>

**1.3.3 How to meditate on the elements.** The meditation on **the 4 elements** is an interesting combination of impermanence and lovingkindness as unconditional acceptance. These are the basic stages of practice:

- (1) Be familiar with the nature of each of **the elements**: earth (solidity, resistance) [§8], water (liquid, cohesiveness) [§9], fire (heat, digestion, decay) [§10], wind (gaseousness, the air, the breath, movement) [§11], and space [§12]. We may omit the fifth element, or let the reflection arise spontaneously. (For reflection, read only the first paragraphs of the respective sections on the element.)
- (2) Locate **the internal element** in the relevant part or parts of our body:
  - earth (eg, with the tongue feel the hardness of the back of the upper row of teeth; the hardness or softness of our seat; our weight pushing down on the seat or ground);
  - water (feel the saliva in our mouth, or sweat, or snot when we have a cold);
  - fire (feel the warmth in our joined palms, in our armpits, or on our seat);
  - wind (feel the touch or coolness of the wind on our skin); and

<sup>8</sup> See eg (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

<sup>9</sup> *Vism* 1.10/5, 7.71/214. On *tādī*, see SD 49.20 (1.3.1).

<sup>10</sup> A 9.11/4:374 f (SD 28.2a); see also Dh 81.

<sup>11</sup> See Karunadasa 1967:16, 91-98

space (feel the cavity of our mouth, the alimentary canal (the gut), our lungs, or belly.

- (3) Then, note, “This is the internal (earth | water | fire | wind | space) element. This is the internal ... element; there is the external ... element. They are the same ... element, simply the ... element.”  
[Unconditional acceptance]
- (4) Reflect thus, “**This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.**” [Reflection on non-self].

For a full sitting, all the 5 elements or just the 4 elements should be reflected on. This can be done by itself, or at the end of the whole meditation, that is, the wind-element meditation—when we can go on to feel the movement or touch of the breath, and go on to the breath meditation. Alternatively, we can meditate on a specific element, or, a couple of elements, as preferred.<sup>12</sup>

**1.3.4 The element-like meditations.** Each of the elements is reflected on for its positive qualities, to which we relate as in the cultivation of lovingkindness. Although this is a set of 5 elements, we could select one that we feel a close affinity for, and cultivate that element-like meditation.

Due to the simplicity of this set of meditations, it is suitable for children, too, and, on a more mundane level, is helpful in building up self-confidence and a positive mind. The main purpose of the element-like meditations is, of course, to serve as helping practices for the breath meditation or as a base for going on to deeper mental focus.

## 2 Breath meditation: a comparative study

**2.1** In terms of the actual instructions on **the breath meditation**, the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta [§§25 ff] and its Chinese version agree on starting the practice by directing the awareness in similar terms of the long or short nature of the in-breaths 入息 *rùxí*, and out-breaths 出息 *chūxí*. The Ekōttara Āgama, however, continues by directing the attention to the temperature of these in-breaths and out-breaths in terms of their coolness or warmth.<sup>13</sup>

From a practical perspective this instruction makes good sense, since usually the out-breaths will be to some degree warmer than the in-breaths, so that attention given to this difference in temperature is a useful way of developing distinct awareness of in- and out-breathing.<sup>14</sup> However, while this observation may work in cooler weather, it is not the rule in actual practice. Hence, it should be understood as an optional practice.

**2.2** Both the Sutta and the Chinese version continue by directing mindfulness to “the whole body” as the third step of its scheme of 16 steps of the breath meditation. According to **the Visuddhi, magga**, the term “body” (*kāya*) here refers to “the body of the breath,” in the sense of being aware of the *whole* process of breathing from beginning, the middle and the end (Vism 273). It is, however, possible to alternatively construe this instruction as taking the physical body itself as the object of mindfulness, that is, to take it as a focus of body mindfulness (*kāyānupassanā*), an interpretation that seems to be suggested by the Chinese version, too.<sup>15</sup>

This would then imply a broadening of awareness, a shift from the breath alone to the physical body in its entirety. Such would indeed constitute a meaningful progression in the present context, since with

<sup>12</sup> For kasina meditations on the elements, see SD 49.5b (1.1-1.4).

<sup>13</sup> EĀ 17.1 (T2.582a17): 冷 *lěng*, coolness; 暖 *nuǎn*, hotness. See Anālayo, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Anālayo, 2011:350 f.

<sup>15</sup> EĀ 17.1 (T2.582b1): “completely contemplate the body [when] breathing in, breathing out, having known it altogether and entirely,” 盡觀身體入息, 出息, 皆悉知之 *jìn guān shēn tǐ rù xī, chū xī, jiē xī zhī zhī*. The character combination 身體 *shēn tǐ* seems to be used predominantly to refer to the physical body. (Anālayo, 2005)

the earlier steps of directing mindfulness to long and short breaths, found in both versions, awareness of the breath in its whole length would have already been covered.<sup>16</sup>

**2.3** The Chinese version next instructs the meditator to be aware if the breath is present or if it is not present: “when there is breath, he knows it is there; when there is no breath, he knows it is not there,” 有時有息亦復知有,又時無息亦復知無 *yǒu shí yǒu xī yì fù zhī yǒu, yòu shí wú xī yì fù zhī wú* (EĀ 17.1 @ T2.582a19). From a practical perspective, this instruction makes good sense, since during the deeper stages of mindfulness of breathing, the breath becomes increasingly subtle, until a meditator may no longer feel it.

Although strictly speaking, the complete disappearance of the breath occurs only with the attainment of the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana [S 36.11/4:217,8], as a meditation-object, Buddhaghosa notes, the breath may seem to disappear at an early stage, so that the meditator may think that the meditation object has actually disappeared.<sup>17</sup>

**2.4** The Pāli Sutta and its Chinese version continue in a similar tone with regards to tranquillizing the “bodily formation.” However, where the Pāli Sutta goes on to instruct on the cultivation of altogether twelve more steps, *the Chinese version has only one more step at this point*. The Chinese version here instructs the meditator to be aware when the breath comes “from the heart” (EĀ 17.1 @ T2.582a20).

This instruction could imply to become aware of the breath in the chest area at this point. Such a way of [practice] is known in the Thai tradition, where the point seems to be that after some initial practice of mindfulness of breathing at the nose tip in order to build up continuity of mindfulness one shifts to focusing on the chest or heart area in order to further collect and concentrate the mind. (Anālayo, 2011: 352 n63)

Both the Pāli and Chinese versions then say that the Buddha concludes the exposition of breath meditation by saying that it is of great fruit and great benefit. While the Pāli sutta declares that, if the breath meditation is practised well, “even the last breath leaves with your knowledge, not without it” [§30], the Chinese version declares that, if practised well, the taste of the death-free will be gained, 得甘露味 *dé gān lù wèi*.<sup>18</sup>

**2.5** While the Pāli Sutta concludes here, the Chinese version goes on to describe how Rāhula puts the instructions into practice and develops the dhyanas as well as the three knowledges (*te, vijjā*).<sup>19</sup> Rāhula then goes to the Buddha and proclaims his achievement. The Buddha approves and then declares Rāhula to be the foremost of those monks who have the desire for training (EĀ 17.1 @ T2.582c3).

<sup>16</sup> Cf Analayo 2003:131.

<sup>17</sup> Vism 8.208 f/283.

<sup>18</sup> EĀ 17.1 (T2.582a23).

<sup>19</sup> The 3 knowledges (*te, vijjā*) are: (1) retrocognition (*pubbe, nivāsānussati, ñāṇa*, ie, the recollection of past lives; (2) the divine eye (*dibba, cakkhu*) or clairvoyance; & (3) the knowledge of the destruction of the mental influxes (*āsava-k, khaya, ñāṇa*), that ends rebirth (Cv 7.1.4 @ V 2:183 (Bhaddiya); D 33,1.10(58)/3:220, 34,1.4(10)/3:275; M 4,27-33/1:22, 27,23-25/1:182 f, 36,38-44/1:2478-249, 39,19-21/1:278-280, 51,24-26/1:347 f, 65,18-21/1:441 f, 76,47-50/1:522, 79,41-44/2:38 f, 101,42-45/2:226 f; S 6.5/1:146\* (v582), 8.7/1:192\* (v736), 8.9/1:194\* (v749); A 3.59,2-4/1:166 f; Sn 656; cf (on the 3<sup>rd</sup> knowledge, *āsava-k, khaya, ñāṇa*) M 9,70/1:55, 112,20/3:36. These 3 are superknowledges (*superknowledges*), but only the 3<sup>rd</sup> is a “direct knowledge” (*aññā*), as it leads to arhatood. The 3-knowledge arhat (*te, vijja arahata*) is one who, with *samatha* as basis, has attained at least the 4 dhyanas. The *te, vijjā* here is the antithesis of the brahminical *ti, veda* (A 1:163; Sn 594; SnA 463). See PED, sv vijjā.

### 3 Meaning of *parimukha*

**3.1** There are two applications of the term *parimukha* in the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta (M 62): the first is when Rāhula decides to meditate immediately after receiving instructions from the Buddha himself [§4]; the second is when the Buddha instructs him on the breath meditation [§25]. On both occasions, the phrase used is “having established mindfulness before him,”<sup>20</sup> *parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā*, where *parimukhaṃ*, literally means “around the mouth,” but idiomatically and adverbially means “in front.”<sup>21</sup>

**3.2** In connection with the breath meditation in the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta [§24] and in **the Ānāpāna-sati Sutta** (M 118),<sup>22</sup> however, **the Paṭisambhidā, magga** and **the Vibhaṅga** explain it as “at the tip of the nose or at the centre of the upper lip” as the proper location for the mindfulness of breathing.<sup>23</sup> This explanation is supported by the Āgama version of the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta, where **the Ekottara Āgama** discourse explicitly speaks of “keeping the mind at the tip of the nose.”<sup>24</sup> However, the standard description of sitting meditation found in other Ekōttara Āgama discourses do not speak of the nose-tip, but consistently speak of putting mindfulness “in the front.”<sup>25</sup>

**3.3** In the first appearance of *parimukhaṃ* in the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta, when Rāhula sits down after receiving instructions from the Buddha on the 5 aggregates [§4], the sense is clearly that of simply establishing mindfulness although the actual meditation is not mentioned. **Analayo** notes that:

In this context, however, the injunction to keep mindfulness “in front” seems to have a different meaning, since contemplation of the five aggregates does not bear any apparent relation to the tip of the nose. In fact, Rāhula at this junction of events was apparently not familiar with the practice of mindfulness of breathing, as he still had to be given instructions on it. This makes it rather improbable that he would have directed his attention to the nose tip. The Ekottarika-āgama version’s instructions on contemplation of the aggregates do in fact not mention the nose tip, but speak simply of establishing unification of the mind.<sup>26</sup> (2006: 238; cf 2011:350)

As such, **Analayo** concludes, this suggests that the instruction to keep the mind at the tip of the nose in the Chinese parallel to the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta may not be a translation of what in its Indic original corresponded to *parimukha*, but could rather be an explanatory gloss on the practice of mindfulness of breathing (2006: 239).

**3.4** In connection with the Chinese texts instructing us to keep the mind at the nose-tip and similar remarks, **Erik Zürcher** explains that the early Chinese translators “during the work of translation ... gave

<sup>20</sup> This tr may be adjusted to fit the context: at §25, it is rendered as “establishes mindfulness before him.”

<sup>21</sup> So U Thittila (Vbh:T 319, 328), Walshe (D:W 1995:335), Soma Thera (1998:42 f digital ed), and Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (M:ÑB 2001:527).

<sup>22</sup> M 118,17/3:82 (SD 7.13).

<sup>23</sup> Pm 1:171,19; Vbh 252,13 = §537. For further discussion, see **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118), SD 7.13 (2) & **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22; M 10), SD 13.1 (3.9.4).

<sup>24</sup> EĀ 17.1 (T2.582a15): 繫意鼻頭 *xì yì bí tóu*.

<sup>25</sup> Eg, in EĀ 37.3 (T2.711c19): 念在前, *niàn zài qián*, corresponding to *parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā* in its Pali parallel M 32.17 = 1:219,30. The same expression 念在前 as part of the standard description of sitting down for meditation occurs over 30 times in the Ekottara Āgama alone. In contrast, the expression to keep the mind at the nose tip, 繫意鼻頭 *xì yì bí tóu*, does not seem to recur anywhere else in the Ekottara Āgama or in the other three Āgamas. (Analayo, 2005 ad M 1:425).

<sup>26</sup> EĀ 17.1 (T2.582a12): 專精一心 *zhuān jīng yī xīn*

oral explanations ... concerning the contents of the scriptures translated. Explanations of this kind often appear to have crept into the text."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, such a gloss is also found in the work that contains what probably are the historically earliest parts of the Pāli Abhidhamma, the Vibhaṅga, as already noted.

## 4 The 4 primary elements

**4.1** In contemporary terms, **the 4 primary elements** (*mahā, bhūta*)—earth, water, fire, wind—may be known respectively as the elements (*dhātu*) of extension, cohesion, heat and motion, or as the basic states of matter, that is, solidity, liquidity, heat (plasma) and gaseousness. However, even today, science only accepts *three* states of matter (solid, liquid and gas). The early Buddhist 4-element model, however, is not meant to be a scientific model, but to serve as a meditative framework for reflecting on the true composition of our body,<sup>28</sup> and its interconnectedness with the world around us, as a support for an ecological awareness.

**4.2** **The Visuddhi,magga**<sup>29</sup> says that the 4 primary elements are only briefly explained in **the Mahā Sati-paṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22),<sup>30</sup> and at length in

<b>Mahā Hatthi, padôpama Sutta,</b>	M 28 <sup>31</sup>
<b>Mahā Rāhul'ovada Sutta</b> and	M 62 [§§8-17]
<b>Dhātu Vibhaṅga Sutta.</b>	M 140 <sup>32</sup>

Curiously, the Visuddhi,magga does not mention **the (Dhātu) Rāhula Sutta** (A 4.177),<sup>33</sup> the Chinese version of which is in the Saṃyukta Āgama (SĀ 465),<sup>34</sup> and which speaks of the 6 elements,<sup>35</sup> whereas A 4.177 treats only the 4 elements. This analysis of the elements does not list the bodily manifestations of each internal element, and as such, is shorter than the one in the Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta (M 62).

**4.3** The 4 elements are also explained in some detail in **the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** (M 1). The 6 elements (4 primary elements + space + consciousness) are mentioned in

<b>Saṅgīti Sutta,</b>	D 33,2.1 (16)/3:248
<b>Bahu,dhātuka Sutta</b> and	M 115,5/3:62
<b>Titth'āyatana Sutta.</b>	A 3.61 <sup>36</sup>

**4.4** In **the Thera,gāthā**, Sāriputta declares that he is like the first three elements in that he is neither attached to nor repulsed by sensory contacts (Tha 1014). In **the Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa Sutta** (A 9.11), Sāri-

<sup>27</sup> Erik Zürcher, "A new look at the earliest Chinese Buddhist texts." In *From Benares to Beijing, Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion*. Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1991:277-300.

<sup>28</sup> See, eg, **(Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2,11.2/2:3 f), SD 5.15, & also **Rūpa**, SD 17.2 (3.4).

<sup>29</sup> Vism 348.

<sup>30</sup> D 22,6/2:293.

<sup>31</sup> M 28,6-27/1:185-191 @ SD 6.16 esp (3).

<sup>32</sup> M 140,13-18/3:240-242 (SD 4.17).

<sup>33</sup> A 4.177/2:164 f.

<sup>34</sup> SĀ 465 (T2.118c-119a).

<sup>35</sup> The 6 elements are the 4 primary elements + space + consciousness: these are mentioned in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,2.1 (16)/3: 248).

<sup>36</sup> A 3.61,6/1:175 f (SD 6.8). See also Dhs 638. For the first 5 elements in later Buddhism, see Lama Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, London, 1959:183 ff.

putta gives a lion-roar by way of telling the Buddha that he dwells with his mind like the 4 primary elements, but adding five of his own similes.<sup>37</sup>

## 5 The Sutta closing

**5.1** Both the Pali and the Āgama versions of the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta close with the Buddha’s proclaiming that the practice of **the breath meditation** “is of great fruit and great benefit” [§30]. According to the Pali version, the Buddha adds that if the breath meditation is practised well, “even the last breath leaves with your knowledge, not without it” [§30], that is, even our last breath would be experienced with mindfulness. As already mentioned, the Chinese Āgama version records the Buddha explaining that, if the breath meditation is practised well, one will taste the death-free [2].<sup>38</sup>

**5.2** The Pali version concludes at this point with Rāhula’s joyful approval of the Buddha’s teaching. The Chinese version continues by describing how Rāhula puts the Buddha’s instructions into practice and develops the 4 dhyanas together with the 3 super-knowledges.

Rāhula then goes to the Buddha and proclaims his attainment, of which the Buddha approves, followed by his declaring Rāhula to be the foremost amongst the monks who have the desire for learning (or training).<sup>39</sup>

**5.3** While the Pali texts agree that Rāhula is the foremost of those monks who have desire for learning,<sup>40</sup> they record his full awakening as occurring on another occasion. According to **the Cūḷa Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 147) and its **Saṃyukta Āgama** version, Rāhula becomes an arhat after receiving an instruction from the Buddha concerning the true nature of the 6 sense-spheres.<sup>41</sup>

## 6 Related suttas

### **6.1 The (Catukka) Rāhula Sutta (A 4.177)**

**6.1.1 The (Catukka) Rāhukla Sutta** is a reflection of the non-selfhood of the 4 primary elements (*mahā,-bhūta,rūpa* or *catu dhātu*). It is an excerpt of the reflective sections on the 4 primary elements—earth (*paṭhavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*) and wind (*vāyo*)—from **the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 62) without the definition passages.<sup>42</sup> These A 4.177 reflective passages are not merely abridged parallels of the M 62 passages, but focus on the 4 elements themselves, instead of the physical body itself as a whole. While A 4.177 focuses on the “four-point emptiness” (*catu,koṭṭika suññata*) of the 4 primary elements (AA 3:152), M 62 defines the 5 elements—the 4 primary elements plus “element of space” (*ākāsa,dhātu*) [§12].

**6.1.2** The contents of **A 4.177** differ from the original passages in M 62 by having the closing line of each of the 4 element passages read: “His mind becomes revulsed at the ... element, by wisdom frees himself from lust” (... *dhātuyā nibbindati paññāya cittam virājeti*) [§§2-5]. This significantly comes from closing of the “awakening pericope” (usually in reference to the attaining of arhathood), where the meditator “is

<sup>37</sup> A 9.11,4/4:374 f (SD 28.2a). The 5 similes are those of the whisk-broom, the chandala boy, the hornless bull, the youth or maiden, and the leaking pot of fat.

<sup>38</sup> EĀ 17.1 (T2.582a23): 得甘露味 *dé gān lù wèi*.

<sup>39</sup> EĀ 17.1 (T2.582c13).

<sup>40</sup> A 1.14/1:24,16: *etad aggaṃ mama sāvakaṇaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ sikkhākāmaṇaṃ, yad idaṃ Rāhulo*.

<sup>41</sup> M 147/3:280,7 = S 35.121/4:107,28; SĀ 200 @ T251c9.

<sup>42</sup> M 62 §§8.2+9.2+10.2+11.2/1:421-423 (SD 3.11).

revulsed with form.” “Form” (*rūpa*) is here laid out as *the 4 primary elements*. The arhat’s review knowledge then follows, opening with “through revulsion, he becomes dispassionate” (*nibbindam virajjati*).

Here, *virajjati* = *virājeti*, both of which can be translated as “he becomes dispassionate,” or as “he frees himself from lust.” The noun for such a state is *virāga*, “freedom from lust, dispassion.” In other words, this is a short-hand for the “awakening pericope”—at least leading to the attaining of streamwinning. We see such a usage at the end of **the (Sotāpatti) Ānanda Sutta** (S 22.83).<sup>43</sup>

The significance of the A 4.177 passage, then, is that **the reflection on the 4 elements**—even merely seeing them as being impermanent—leads to streamwinning in this life itself, as stated in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

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### SD 3.11(6.1)

## (Catukka) Rāhula Sutta

The (Fours) Discourse to Rāhula | A 4.177/2:164 f

Traditional: A 4.4.3.7 = Aṅguttara Nikāya 4, Catukka Nipāta 4, Catuttha Paṇṇāsaka 3, Sañcetaniya Vg 7

Theme: Reflection on the emptiness of the 4 elements

**1** Then, the venerable Rāhula approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and sat down at one side. Seated at one side, the Blessed One said to the venerable Rāhula, thus:

**2** [M 62,8.2] Now, Rāhula, both the internal earth element<sup>44</sup> and the external<sup>45</sup> earth element are simply **the earth element** [hardness].<sup>46</sup> And that should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’<sup>47</sup>

When one sees it thus as it really is with right wisdom, one is revulsed by<sup>48</sup> the earth element and the mind becomes revulsed towards<sup>49</sup> the earth element,<sup>50</sup> by wisdom free himself from lust.<sup>51</sup>

**3** [M 62,9.2] Now, Rāhula, both the internal water element and the external water [2:165] element are simply **the water element**. And that should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom, thus:

<sup>43</sup> S 22.83,10-11 (SD 53.4).

<sup>44</sup> Comy refers to related suttas: see (6.2).

<sup>45</sup> *Bāhirā*.

<sup>46</sup> Comy to Mahā Hatthi’padōpama S ad loc says that this statement is made to emphasize the insentient nature (*acetanā, bhāva*) of the internal earth element by yoking it to the external earth element, thus making its insentient nature more apparent (MA 2:223 f). The Vibhaṅga lists more examples: iron, copper, tin, lead, etc (Vbh 82). According to Abhidhamma, it is characterized by hardness (*thaddha, lakkaṇa*).

<sup>47</sup> See §3n.

<sup>48</sup> “Is revulsed by” (*nibbindati*), n *nibbidā*. The full *nibbidā* formula or the 7 criteria of the true Dharma-Vinaya reads, “it leads to utter revulsion, to dispassion, to ending (of suffering), to peace [stilling], to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana” (*etaṃ ekanta, nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhismāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattanti*, D 1:189; S 5:82, 179, 255, 361; A 3:83, 4:143, 5:216): see **Nibbidā**, SD 20.1.

<sup>49</sup> “The mind becomes revulsed,” *cittam virājeti*.

<sup>50</sup> “Earth,” *paṭhavī*. On the 4 elements, see **Khandha 1 Rūpa**, SD 17a.2a (2).

<sup>51</sup> “The mind ... by wisdom frees himself from lust,” *paṭhavī, dhātuyā nibbindati paññāya cittam virājeti*. Bodhi curiously regards the reading *paññāya cittam virājeti* as “clearly wrong” (A:B 1711 n888)!

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

When one sees it thus as it really is with right wisdom, one is revulsed by the water element and the mind becomes revulsed towards the water element, by wisdom free himself from lust.

**4** [M 62,10.2] Now, Rāhula, both the internal fire element and the external fire element are simply **the fire element**. And that should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

When one sees it thus as it really is with right wisdom, one is revulsed by the fire element and the mind becomes revulsed towards the fire element, by wisdom free himself from lust.

**5** [M 62,11.2] Now, Rāhula, both the internal wind element and the external wind element are simply **the wind element**. And that should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

When one sees it thus as it really is with right wisdom, one is revulsed by the wind element and the mind becomes revulsed towards the wind element, by wisdom free himself from lust.

**6** When, Rāhula, a monk regards neither a self nor what pertains to a self in any of these elements, he is called a monk who has cut off craving, has unravelled the fetter, and by breaking through conceit, has made an end of suffering,<sup>52</sup>

— evaṃ —

## 6.2 SUTTAS ON THE ELEMENTS

**6.2.0 The Aṅguttara Commentary** alludes to the following suttas as dealing with the 4 elements in reference to Rāhula (AA 3:152):

<b>Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta</b>	M 62/1:421	SD 3.11
<b>(Rāhula) Dhatu Sutta 1</b>	S 18.9/2:248 f <sup>53</sup>	SD 3.11 (6.3)
<b>(Rāhula) Dhatu Sutta 2</b>	S 18.19/2:25	= S 18.9 <sup>54</sup>

The Commentary says that all these Suttas (except the first) teach “insight” (*vipassanā*)—that is, the nature of the 3 characteristics: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self—of reality. It also mentions the Amba,laṭṭhika Sutta (M 61, SD 3.10), which deals with truthfulness and mindfulness, not the 4 elements. (AA 3:152)

There is also **the Dhātu Nānatta Sutta** (S 14.1)—the discourse on the variety of the elements—but the “elements” here refers to the sense-bases, etc.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Yato kho rāhula bhikkhu imāsu catusu dhātūsu n’ev’attānaṃ n’āttani yaṃ samanupassati, ayaṃ vuccati rāhula bhikkhu acchecchi taṃhaṃ vivattayi saṃyojanaṃ sammā mānābhisamayā antam akāsi dukkhassāti* On the passage on the *bhikkhu*, as at **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2,22/2:12), SD 7.1..

<sup>53</sup> S 18.9 is to be taught to Rāhula when he approaches the Buddha, as recorded at the start of the S 18, **Rāhula Saṃyutta** (S2:244). This introduction applies to S 18.1-10, which prob forms a sutta although numbered separately.

<sup>54</sup> S 18.19 is identical to S 18.9 except that in S 18.19 the Buddha himself instructs Rāhula without being first approached for a teaching by Rāhula.

<sup>55</sup> S 14.1/2:140 (SD 29.9).

**6.2.1 Mahā Hatthi, padôpama Sutta** (M 28,5.2-25), SD 6.16

This Sutta gives the most detailed analysis of the 4 elements. Each of the 4 element-cycles comprises reflections on the following:

- (1) the internal element (as our body-parts);
- (2) the external element which are defined.  
Both (1)+(2) are then reflected on in the light of the 3 characteristics as being impermanent, suffering and non-self.
- (3) The “psychological” application, that is, how each element arises in our body, and how we should not identify with it, so that we are equanimous.
- (4) This then arouses a sense of urgency (*samvega*) to practise the Dharma in us.
- (5) The closing practice is the reflection on the dependent arising of the 5 aggregates in the 12 elements (the 6 sense-bases and their respective sense-objects).

**6.2.2 Dhātu Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 140,13-19), SD 4.17

This Sutta gives “a brief analysis of the 6 elements”—the 4 primary elements, space and consciousness. A “person” (*purisa*) is these 6 elements. Wisdom is cultivated through reflecting the nature of each of these elements, thus:

- (1) the internal element (as our body-parts);
- (2) the external element which are defined.  
Both (1)+(2) are then reflected on in the light of the 3 characteristics as being impermanent, suffering and non-self.
- (3) Understanding this leads to equanimity of deep meditation (the dhyanas).

At this point, the listener, Pukkusāti attains non-returning (M 140,22.2)). The Buddha then teaches him how to go on to attain arhathood, beginning with understanding the true nature of feeling.

**6.3 THE (RĀHULA) DHĀTU SUTTA 1**

**6.3.1 The (Rāhula) Dhātu Sutta 1** (S 18.9) is a reflection of our conscious being as basically comprising the 6 elements, which are all impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self—without any reality that is “I,” “me” or “mine”; or, in sutta language, “This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.”<sup>56</sup>

**6.3.2** The (Rāhula) Dhātu Sutta 1 applies what is called **the “6-cycle element-characteristic pericope.”** This refers to each of the 6 elements—earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness—in the light of the 3 characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. This Sutta is a reflection on the **emptiness** (the 3 characteristics) of the 6 elements, that is, our physical-mental being.

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<sup>56</sup> See **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62,3.1), SD 3.11 below.

**SD 3.11(6.3)****(Rāhula) Dhātu Sutta 1**

The First Discourse on the Elements (to Rāhula) | S 18.9/2:248 f

Traditional: S 2.7.1. 9 = Saṃyutta Nikāya 2, Nidāna Vagga 7, Rāhula Saṃyutta1, Paṭhama Vg 9

Theme: A reflection on the emptiness of the 6 elements

**1** At Sāvattḥī**2** “What do you think, Rāhula:(1) is the **earth element** (*paṭhavī, dhātu*) permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

‘Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?’<sup>57</sup>

‘Unsatisfactory, bhante.’

‘Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

“This is mine, this I am, this is my self”?’<sup>58</sup>

‘No, bhante.’

**3** (2) Is the **water element** (*āpo, dhātu*) permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

‘Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?’

‘Unsatisfactory, bhante.’

‘Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

“This is mine, this I am, this is my self”?’

‘No, bhante.’

**4** (3) Is the **fire element** (*tejo, dhātu*) permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

‘Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?’

‘Unsatisfactory, bhante.’

‘Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

“This is mine, this I am, this is my self”?’

‘No, bhante.’

<sup>57</sup> *Dukkhaṃ vā sukhaṃ vā*. Here, the alternative tr, “painful,” reminds us that whatever brings us pain or discomfort (bodily or mentally) is not liked by us. When the pain is gone, we feel some pleasure. However, even the pleasurable is impermanent, and when it is gone, we feel pain. Hence, both the painful and the pleasant are “suffering” (*dukkha*). It is useful to understand this difference between pain and suffering. Simply put, pain is natural (we have a physical but conscious body, so we feel pain, whether tolerable or intolerable, which is a sign of irritability or sensitivity of our experiences); suffering is optional (we can train our minds not to be attached to what is pleasant or to reject what is unpleasant, and to regard even the neutral as being impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.)

<sup>58</sup> *Etam mama, eso’ham asmi, eso me attāti*. These are “**the 3 graspings**” (*ti, vidha gāha*), ie, of view (*diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*) (MA 2:111, 225). The notion “This is mine” arises through craving; the notion “This I am” arises through conceit; the notion “This is my self” arises through views. These 3 considerations represent respectively the 3 kinds of mental proliferation (*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), and of conceit (*māna*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f). The opposite formula, *n’etaṃ mama, n’eso’ham asmi, na mēso attā ti*, is applied below to the 5 aggregates [§§17-21]. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f. For detailed studies, see **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1; **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a; **Mine: The nature of craving**, SD 19.3.

5 (4) Is the **wind element** (*vāyo, dhātu*) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

'Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?'

'Unsatisfactory, bhante.'

'Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

"This is mine, this I am, this is my self"?'

'No, bhante.'

6 (5) Is the **space element** (*ākāsa, dhātu*) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

'Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?'

'Unsatisfactory, bhante.'

'Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

"This is mine, this I am, this is my self"?'

'No, bhante.'

7 (6) Is the **consciousness element** (*viññāṇa, dhātu*) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

'Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?'

'Unsatisfactory, bhante.'

'Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

"This is mine, this I am, this is my self"?'

'No, bhante.'

## Revulsion

8 Seeing thus, avuso Ānanda, the tutored noble disciple  
 is revulsed [disenchanted]<sup>59</sup> with the earth element,  
 is revulsed with the water element,  
 is revulsed with the fire element,  
 is revulsed with the wind element,  
 is revulsed with the space element,  
 is revulsed with the consciousness element.

## Liberation: Review knowledge<sup>60</sup>

9 Through revulsion,	he becomes dispassionate.	<i>Nibbindaṃ virajjati</i>
Through dispassion,	he is free.	<i>Virāgā vimuccati</i>
Freed,	there arises the knowledge: "Free!" <sup>61</sup>	<i>Vimuttasmiṃ vimuttam iti ñāṇaṃ hoti</i>

<sup>59</sup> On revulsion, see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1.

<sup>60</sup> This is the arhat's review knowledge, when it ends by stating, "And the venerable *so-and-so* became one of the arhats," eg (**Arahatta**) **Māluṅkya,putta S** (S 35.95,18), SD 5.9. Or, the arhathood is stated in the Conclusion. On the arhathood of the 5 monks, see **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,24), SD 1.2; that of the 1000 matted-hair ascetics, see **Āditta Pariyāya S** (S 35.28,11). SD 1.3. Here, it only serves as Ānanda's "review knowledge," as it refers only to his attaining streamwinning.

10 He understands:

“Destroyed is birth.  
The holy life has been lived.  
What needs to be done has been done.  
There is no more of this state of being.”

*Khiṇā jāti  
vusitaṃ brahma, cariyam  
kataṃ karaṇiyam  
nâparam itthattâyā’ti  
pajânâtīti*

— evaṃ —

## Mahā Rāhu’ovāda Sutta

### The Greater Discourse on the Advice to Rāhula

M 62

1 Thus have I heard.

#### The Buddha instructs Rāhula

At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika’s park in Jeta’s grove near Sāvattthī.<sup>62</sup>

2 Then, when it was dawn, the Blessed One, having dressed,<sup>63</sup> taking bowl and robe,<sup>64</sup> entered Sāvattthī for alms. The venerable Rahula,<sup>65</sup> too, [421] having dressed, taking bowl and outer robe, followed close behind the Blessed One.

<sup>61</sup> *Vimuttismim vimuttam iti ñāṇam hoti*, or “When free, there is the knowledge, it (the mind) is free.” Note that the self is not addressed here. On “Free!” see SD 50.1 (3.1.2.2).

<sup>62</sup> **Sāvattthī** (Skt Śrāvastī). According to the Purāṇa (records of brahminical mythology), Śrāvastī was founded by Śravasta, an early member of the Ikṣvaku (Pali Okkaka) line; hence its name. It was located on the bank of the Acira, vatī bank (the modern Rapti) and was 6 leagues (about 45 mi = 72 km) from Sāketa (V 1:253), a distance that could be covered in one day with 7 relays of horses (M 24.14/1:148 f). The site of Sāvattthī has been identified with the twin villages of Saheth Maheth, on the south bank of the Rapti river, about midway between Bahraich and Gonda (about 26 mi = 42 km either way), in the district of Oudh in Uttar Pradesh. (J Finegan, *An Archaeological History of Religions of Indian Asia*, NY: Paragon House, 1989:93).

<sup>63</sup> “Having dressed,” *nivāsetvā*, lit, “having worn the *nīvasana*.” A *nivāšana*, “inner garment,” is prob a broad term that incl the *antara, vāsaka*, “undergarment ‘worn in between.’” The two words are often synonymous (V 4:185,18), but *nivāšana* (“that which is worn below”) specifically may refer to “underpants.” ***Nivāsetvā*** is def in Vinaya as “having put on his inner garment all around so as to cover the 3 circles, having bound on the girdle” (*ti, maṇḍalaṃ paṭicchādentena parimaṇḍalaṃ nivāsetvā kāya, bandhanaṃ bandhitvā*, V 1:46,16). Comy def **the “3 circles”** (*ti, maṇḍala*) as those at the level of the navel (*nābhi*), the knees (*jaṅghu*) and the lower legs (from the knee to the ankle) (*jaṅgh’atṭhi*, “shin-bone”): “The inner garment should be worn to cover all around from above the ‘circle of the navel’ down to below the ‘circle of the knees’ to some [at least] 8 fingers [6” = 15.24 cm] below the ‘circle of the ankles’” (*uddhaṃ nābhi, maṇḍalaṃ adho jāṇu, maṇḍalaṃ paṭicchādentena jāṇu, maṇḍalassa heṭṭhā jaṅgh’atṭhikato paṭṭhāya atṭh’āṅgula, mattaṃ nivāšanaṃ otāretvā*, VA 4:889): see Sekh 1 (V 4:185,18).

<sup>64</sup> *Patta, cīvaraṃ ādāya*. ***Cīvara*** here refers to any of **the “3 robes”** (*ti, cīvara*), viz: (1) the outer robe (*uttar’āsāṅga* = “a robe worn on one side,” *ekamsika cīvara*), (2) the under-garment or “sarong” (*antara, vāsaka* = *nīvasana*, V 1:46) [prec n], and (3) the upper robe (*saṅghāṭī*) (V 1:94,8 = 2:272,11 ≈ 5:175,2). In the Buddha’s days, this prob meant that, a monk, having worn the under-garment, carried his folded outer robe usu on his left shoulder. When “amongst houses” (ie, in habited areas) the outer robe is spread to cover both the shoulders down to the ankles. However, when showing respect to elders or the sangha, it should be placed on one side (*ekamsaṃ uttarā, saṅgaṃ*

3 Then, the Blessed One turned around to look<sup>66</sup> at the venerable Rāhula<sup>67</sup> and addressed him, thus:<sup>68</sup>

“Rāhula, whatever form—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near<sup>69</sup>—all forms should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom, thus:

**“This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.”**<sup>70</sup>

3.2 “Only material form, Blessed One? Only material form, Sugata [well-farer]?”<sup>71</sup>

*karitvā*, V 1:45,32, 46,5, 2:126,32). *Cīvara* is a generic term, meaning “robe,” and can refer to any of the 3 above. Here, however, the context clearly refers to it being used as an “outer robe,” *uttarāsaṅga*. See CPD: *uttarāsaṅga*; also C S Upasak, *Dictionary of Early Buddhist Monastic Terms*, Varanasi, 1975:88-91.

<sup>65</sup> *Āyasmā rāhulo*. He is so respectfully addressed despite being only 18 and not yet a *bhikkhu*. He is ordained as a *bhikkhu* at 20 (M 147 = S 35.121), SD 70.7. The rule of ordination candidates to be of a minimum age of 20 lunar years was prob introduced in the case of Kumāra Kassapa (Mv 1.75.1 @ V 1:93,15-23).

<sup>66</sup> “Turned back to look at,” *apaloketvā*, lit “having looked back.” Traditionally, the Buddha is said to turn his whole body around—the elephant look (*nāgāpalokita*)—when looking at someone (eg, the Māra Dūsī, M 50,21/1:337), SD 36.4, or at something (eg, at Vesālī, D 16,4.1/2:122), SD 9. Anyway, it is highly unlikely that the Buddha would give someone a teaching and have a dialogue in a most indecorous—not to say uncomfortable—position by turning his neck (as *apaloketi* literally means).

<sup>67</sup> Note that there is no mention that Rāhula is the Buddha’s son, although this episode seems to fit that context. For a discussion on whether Rāhula is, in fact, the Buddha’s son, see Thomas 1949:59 f.

<sup>68</sup> According to the Majjhima Comy, when the 18-year-old venerable Rāhula is following the Buddha on alms-round, he harbours carnal thoughts through being fascinated by the physical beauty of the Buddha and noting that he is of similar appearance. At once, the Buddha decides to admonish him to regard the non-ownership of the body by way of reflecting, “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.” (MA 3:132). See foll n.

<sup>69</sup> See (Dve) **Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47) + SD 17.1a (3). This “totality formula” classification of the aggregates is explained in detail in **Vibhaṅga** and briefly in **Visuddhimagga**: “internal” (*ajjhatta*) = physical sense-organs; “external” (*bahiddhā*) = physical sense-objects; “gross” (*olārika*) = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “subtle” (*sukhuma*) = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “inferior” (*hīna*) = relating to undesirable or unattractive physical sense-objects; “superior [sublime]” (*paṇīta*), relating to desirable or attractive physical sense-objects; “far” (*dūre*) = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “near” (*santike*) = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) [this last pair is by way of distance] (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986: 41). See Gethin 1986:40 f; Karunadasa 1967:38 f; Boisvert 1995:43-48. As regards the terms “internal” (*ajjhatta*) and “external” (*bahiddhā*), it should be noted that they have two applications: (1) the aggregates (*khandhā*) composing a particular “person” are “internal” to them and anything else is “external”; (2) the sense-organs are “internal” and their objects—which may include aspects of the person’s own body or mind, which are “internal” in the first sense—are “external.” Boisvert (1995: 43, 47), however overlooks these applications.

<sup>70</sup> This sentence refers to the 3 graspings (*ti,vidha gāha*): (1) “This is mine” (*etam mama*), which arises from craving (*taṇhā*); (2) “This I am” (*eso ham’asmi*), which arises from conceit (*māna*); (3) “This is my self” (*eso me attā*), which arises from self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*): see SD 19.1 (1.2). **Mahā Hatthi, padopama S** (M 28,7) more concisely says: “There can be no considering that (element) as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’” (M 28,7/1:185), SD 6.16, which represents respectively the 3 kinds of mental proliferation (*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), craving (*taṇhā*) and conceit (*māna*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f), or as “graspings” (*gāha*), namely, view (*diṭṭhi*), craving, conceit (MA 2:111, 225). On their opp: *n’etaṃ mama, n’eso ‘ham asmi, na mēso attā ti*, applied to the 5 aggregates, see **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,12-16), SD 1.2. On the nature of the 3 graspings, see respectively: **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1; **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a & **Mine: The nature of craving**, SD 19.3.

<sup>71</sup> “**Sugata**,” from *su* (good, well) + *gata* (gone) here untr since it is polysemic; a common epithet of the Buddha, variously translated: (1) emphasis on *su-*: the Sublime One (Ñāṇanamoli), the Fortunate One (Bodhi); (2) emphasis on *-gata*: the well-gone, the Well-farer (Rhys Davids, Woodward, Horner, Walshe, Norman). If there is a need for

“Material form, Rāhula, and feelings, too, Rāhula; perception, too, Rāhula; mental formations, too, Rāhula; and consciousness, too, Rāhula.”<sup>72</sup>

4 Then, the venerable Rāhula thought,

“Who indeed,<sup>73</sup> after being personally exhorted by the Blessed One himself today, would go into the city for alms?”

So, turning back, he sat down at the foot of a certain tree, crossed his legs and, keeping his body upright, established mindfulness before him.<sup>74</sup>

### Sāriputta meets Rāhula

5 The venerable Sāriputta saw the venerable Rāhula sitting at the foot of the tree, with legs crossed, keeping his body upright, with mindfulness established before him. Having seen the venerable Rāhula, he addressed him:

“Cultivate the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing, Rāhula. When the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing is cultivated and continuously developed, Rāhula, it is of great fruit and great benefit.”<sup>75</sup>

6 Then, when it was evening, the venerable Rāhula came out of his retreat<sup>76</sup> and went up to the Blessed One. Having approached and saluted the Blessed One, he sat down at one side. Then, sitting at one side, the venerable Rāhula said this to the Blessed One,

7 “Bhante, how is the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing cultivated and continuously developed so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?”<sup>77</sup>

### The 5 elements<sup>78</sup>

8 EARTH ELEMENT.<sup>79</sup> (1) “[What, Rāhula, is **the earth element** [hardness]?]”<sup>80</sup>

Rāhula, whatever that is hard, solid [solidified]<sup>81</sup> and clung to,<sup>82</sup> within oneself, separately,<sup>83</sup> namely,<sup>84</sup>

choice, I think “well-farer” (I prefer the initial letter in low case) is most suitable here, even though “well-gone” is more technically accurate.

<sup>72</sup> Note here that the 5 aggregates are not elaborated on. Clearly here the Buddha is reminding Rāhula of teachings he is already familiar with. On the 5 aggregates, see **(Dve) Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47 f), SD 17.1a.

<sup>73</sup> “Indeed,” *nu* from *n’ajja*.

<sup>74</sup> “Established mindfulness before him,” *parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā*, where *parimukhaṃ*, lit “around the mouth,” idiomatic and adverbial, meaning “in front”: so U Thittila (Vbh:T 319, 328), Walshe (D:W 1995:335), Soma Thera (1998:42 f digital ed), and Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (M:ÑB 2001:527). Here, the sense is clearly that of simply establishing mindfulness although the actual meditation is not mentioned. Cf §25 where *parimukha* appears again.

<sup>75</sup> Sāriputta, seeing Rāhula sitting in meditation, thought that he was cultivating the breath meditation (*ānāpānā-sati*), unaware that Rāhula had already been instructed by the Buddha. (MA 3:137 f).

<sup>76</sup> “Retreat,” *paṭisallāṇa*, alt tr “solitude.”

<sup>77</sup> This is the “thesis question” that the rest of the sutta answers. The specific answer (on breath meditation) to this question starts at §24. On an apparent problem in the textual sequence, see (1.2).

<sup>78</sup> **Mahā Hatthi, padōpama S** (M 28/1:185-191), SD 6.16, deals with the 4 great or primary elements in detail: see also SD 17.2. On how the 4 elements cannot exist in themselves, see Boisvert 1995:36 f. Practical meditation instructions on the elements can be found in Vim:ESK 1961:197-205, Vism 351, Pa Auk 1996:17; Fryba 1987:123. On how the 4 elements build up to the breath meditation, see (1.3.3).

<sup>79</sup> Comy says that the Buddha begins his instruction to Rāhula with *the 4 elements* rather than mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing to dispel Rāhula’s attachment to the body that is yet undisputed by the brief instruction on the non-selfness of material form. See foll n.

<sup>80</sup> This sentence is not found in the text, but is found in, eg, **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,14/3:240), SD 4.17.

head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth,	skin; <sup>85</sup>
flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow,	kidneys; <sup>86</sup>
heart, liver, membranes (around the lungs), <sup>87</sup> spleen,	lungs; <sup>88</sup>
large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents, <sup>89</sup>	dung, <sup>90</sup>

or whatever else<sup>91</sup> that is hard, solid and clung to, within oneself, separately—this, Rāhula, is called internal<sup>92</sup> earth element.

8.2 Now *both the internal earth element and the external<sup>93</sup> earth element* are simply the earth element [hardness].<sup>94</sup> And that should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’<sup>95</sup> [422]

When one sees it thus as it really is with right wisdom, one is revulsed by<sup>96</sup> the earth element and the mind becomes revulsed towards<sup>97</sup> the earth element.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>81</sup> “Solid, rigid [solidified],” *kakkhaḷam kharigatam*. The former is the element’s characteristic (*lakkhana*) and the latter its mode (*ākāra*) (Vism 286). In the Abhidhamma, the hardness (*kakkhaḷatta*) itself is the earth element (VismṬ 362 f). See Karunadasa, 1967:17 f.

<sup>82</sup> “Clung to,” *upādiṇṇa*. In the Abhidhamma, this is a technical term applicable to bodily phenomena that are produced by karma. Here, in Mahā Rāhulovāda S (M 62), as well as **Mahā Hatthipadōpama S** (M 28), it is used in the general sense as applicable to the entire body insofar as it is grasped as “mine” and misapprehended as a self.

<sup>83</sup> *Ajjhattam paccattam*. The idea here, I think, is to regard these body-parts as “within” (ie, internal parts of ourselves), and they are to be reflected on “separately” (ie one by one, on their own), so that the general effect is the understanding that we are a patchwork of these parts. This may also include reflecting on a particular external object or an aspect of the object as merely being an element.

<sup>84</sup> These sets of body parts are named after the last item, eg, the first is called the “skin pentad” (*taca, pañcaka*).

<sup>85</sup> The meditation on these 5 parts “with skin as the fifth” or “skin pentad” (*taca, pañcaka kamma-ṭ, ṭhāna*) (Vism 242=8.50) forms the basic spiritual practice first taught to novices on their initiation.

<sup>86</sup> *Mamsam nahāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhi, miñjā vakkam*.

<sup>87</sup> “Membranes,” alt tr “pleura,” *kilomaka*, ie a pair of membranous sacs surrounding the lungs.

<sup>88</sup> *Hadayaṃ yakanam kilomakam pihakam papphasam*.

<sup>89</sup> *Udariyam*, lit “that which is in the *udara* (stomach),” sometimes tr as “gorge” (Vism:Ñ 8.120/-122/258 f); technically, this includes chyme (food half-digested by gastric juices, expelled into the duodenum).

<sup>90</sup> *Antam anta, guṇam udariyam karisam*. See M 3:90; KhA 38. Later traditions add the 32<sup>nd</sup> part—*matthake mattha, luṅgam* (lit “the brain in the head”) (Kh 3, Pm 1:6 f; Vism 8.42-144/239-266): “brain” is not listed at S 4:111). Although “brain” is usually listed last, Comys list it as no 20, after “dung” (KhA 60; Vism 8.126/260) in the set headed by “large intestines” since they have similar or related appearances. For a fascinating discussion on how ancient ascetics obtain such knowledge of the human anatomy, see Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*, 1998:34-37.

<sup>91</sup> The phrase “whatever else” (*aññam pi kiñci*) is intended to include the earth element as comprised in those parts of the body not included in the above enumeration. According to the Abhidhamma the 4 elements are primary qualities of matter in which they are all inseparably present in varying degrees of strength. Thus “each element is also included though in a subordinate role, in the bodily phenomena listed under the other three elements” (M:ÑB 1221 n329). See also BDict: Dhātu.

<sup>92</sup> *Ajjhattam*.

<sup>93</sup> *Bāhirā*.

<sup>94</sup> Comy to Mahā Hatthi’padōpama S ad loc says that this statement is made to emphasize the insentient nature (*acetanā, bhāva*) of the internal earth element by yoking it to the external earth element, thus making its insentient nature more apparent (MA 2:223 f). The Vibhaṅga lists more examples: iron, copper, tin, lead, etc. (Vbh 82). According to Abhidhamma, it is characterized by hardness (*thaddha, lakkhana*).

<sup>95</sup> See §3n.

<sup>96</sup> “Is revulsed by” (*nibbindati*), n *nibbidā*. The full *nibbidā* formula or the 7 criteria of the true Dharma-Vinaya reads, “it leads to utter revulsion, to dispassion, to ending (of suffering), to peace [stilling], to direct knowledge, to

**9** (2) And what, Rāhula, is **the water element** [cohesion]?<sup>99</sup>

The water element may be either internal or external.

And what, Rāhula, is the internal water element?

Rāhula, whatever that is water, watery and clung to, within oneself, separately, namely,  
*bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat;*<sup>100</sup>

*tears, skin-grease [tallow], saliva, snot, oil of the joints,*<sup>101</sup> *urine.*<sup>102</sup>

or whatever else that is water, watery and clung to, within oneself, separately—this, Rāhula, is called internal water element.

9.2 Now *both the internal water element and the external water element* are simply the water element. And that should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

When one sees it thus as it really is with right wisdom, one is revulsed by the water element and the mind becomes revulsed towards the water element.

**10** (3) Rāhula, what is **the fire element** [heat]?

The fire element may be either internal or external.

And what, Rāhula, is the internal fire element?

Rāhula, whatever that is fire, fiery, and clung to, within oneself, separately, namely,

*that by which one is warmed, ages, and burns,*<sup>103</sup> *and that by which what is eaten, drunk, chewed and tasted*<sup>104</sup> *gets completely digested,*

or whatever else that is fire, fiery and clung to, within oneself, separately—this, Rāhula, is called internal fire element.

10.2 Now *both the internal fire element and the external fire element* are simply the fire element. And that should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

When one sees it thus as it really is with right wisdom, one is revulsed by the fire element and the mind becomes revulsed towards the fire element.

**11** (4) Rāhula, what is **the wind element** [motion]?<sup>105</sup>

The wind element may be either internal or external.

And what, Rāhula, is the internal wind element?

Rāhula, whatever that is wind [air], wind-like [air-like] and clung to, within oneself, separately, namely,<sup>106</sup>

self-awakening, to nirvana” (*etaṃ ekanta, nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhismāya abhiññāya sambo-dhāya nibbānāya saṃvattanti*, D 1:189; S 5:82, 179, 255, 361; A 3:83, 4:143, 5:216): see **Nibbidā**, SD 20.1.

<sup>97</sup> “Becomes revulsed towards,” *cittam virājeti*.

<sup>98</sup> “Earth,” *paṭhavī*. On the 4 elements, see **Khandha 1 Rūpa**, SD 17a.2a (2).

<sup>99</sup> “Water,” *āpo*. Abhidhamma characterizes it by cohesion (*ābandhana*).

<sup>100</sup> *Pittaṃ semhaṃ pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo*.

<sup>101</sup> *Lasikā*, ie synovial fluid.

<sup>102</sup> *Assu vasā kheḷo siṅghānikā lasikā muttaṃ*. Here there are a total of 31 parts of the body. See here (4) n.

<sup>103</sup> Apparently, these preceding three terms—*santappati*, *jiriyati*, *pariḍayhati*—refer to the body metabolism. In fact, the whole section refers to the body metabolism.

<sup>104</sup> *Asita, pīta, khāyita, sāyitā*. These are the 4 modes of consuming food, namely: *eat* food; *drink* liquids; *chew* solid food, a toothstick, betel-nut, chewing gum; *taste* (or lick) sweets, ice-cream.

<sup>105</sup> “Wind,” *vāyo*, or “air” element, that is, motion, in Abhidhamma, said to be “strengthening” or “supporting” (*vitthambhana, lakkhaṇa*). On how winds cause pains, see **Dhānañjāni S** (M 97,28-29/2:193), SD 4.9.

<sup>106</sup> See **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118), SD 7.13 (2.1.1).

<sup>107</sup>up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the chest,<sup>108</sup> winds that course through the limbs,<sup>109</sup> in-breath and out-breath,

or whatever else that is wind, wind-like and clung to, within oneself, separately—this, Rāhula, is called internal wind element.

11.2 Now *both the internal wind element and the external wind element* are simply the wind element. And that should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ [423]

When one sees it thus as it really is with right wisdom, one is revulsed by the wind element and the mind becomes revulsed towards the wind element.

**12** (5) Rāhula, what is the element of **space**?<sup>110</sup>

The space element may be either internal or external.

And what, Rāhula, is the internal space element?

Rāhula, whatever that is space, spatial and clung to, within oneself, separately, namely, *the ear-canals, the nostrils, the mouth cavity, and that (opening) whereby whatever is eaten, drunk, taken, and tasted, is swallowed, and where it collects [stays], and whereby it is voided from below,*

or whatever else that is space, spatial and clung to, within oneself, separately—this, Rāhula, is called internal space element.

12.2 Now *both the internal space element and the external space element* are simply the space element. And that should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

When one sees it thus as it really is with right wisdom, one is revulsed by the space element and the mind becomes revulsed towards the space element.

## The 5 element-like reflections<sup>111</sup>

**13** <sup>112</sup>(1) Rāhula, cultivate **an earth-like meditation**. For, when you cultivate an earth-like meditation, Rāhula, agreeable and disagreeable<sup>113</sup> contacts<sup>114</sup> that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>107</sup> According to **Visuddhi, magga**, “winds” are responsible for the various internal motions of the body, namely, “up-going winds” (*uddhaṅ, gamā vātā*) for vomiting and belching, “down-going winds” (*adho, gamā vātā*) for the expelling of faeces and urine (Vism 350). “Wind” here clearly refers to elemental “motion,” not to the object moved.

<sup>108</sup> *Koṭṭha* means “the stomach or abdomen” (PED); and, *kucchi* is “stomach.” As such, here I take *koṭṭhasayā* to be cognate with or related to Skt *koṣṭhya* (mfn), meaning “proceeding from the chest, emitted (as a sound) from the centre of the lungs” (SED), which makes clear sense here.

<sup>109</sup> “Winds that course through the limbs,” *aṅgam-aṅgānusārino vātā*. In reference to this, **Peter Harvey** says, “Note that the ‘motion/air’ element might be related to the modern concept of electrical discharges of the nerves ... In that case, the mind would move the body by effecting the electrical modulation of nerve discharges.” (1993:7 digital ed). In contemporary terms, these “winds” clearly refer to the oxyhaemoglobin, ie, the oxygen in the blood, coursing through the body.

<sup>110</sup> “Space,” *ākāsa*, according to Abhidhamma, is not a primary element but is classified under “derived (or derivative) material form” (*upādā rūpa*). See **(Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56.7) in SD 3.7 n on “forms derived ...” See also Sue Hamilton, *Early Buddhism: A new approach; The I of the beholder*. Richmond: Curzon, 2000:168-172.

<sup>111</sup> The first 4 element-like meditations are described by Sāriputta to the Buddha in **Vuṭṭhā Vass’āvāsa S** (A 9.11-4:374). SD 28.2a. However, in place of the 5<sup>th</sup> element, “space,” Sāriputta uses “the duster” (*rajo, haraṇa*), which wipes away both the pure and the impure (A 4:375 f). On *rajôharaṇa*, see ad loc, SD 28.2a.

Rāhula, just as they throw things clean and foul<sup>116</sup>—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—the earth is not troubled, ashamed, or disgusted,<sup>117</sup> because of that.<sup>118</sup>

So too, Rāhula, cultivate an earth-like meditation. For, when you cultivate an earth-like meditation, Rāhula, agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.

**14** (2) Rāhula, cultivate a **water-like meditation**. For, when you cultivate a water-like meditation, agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.

Rāhula, just as they wash things clean and foul—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—water is not troubled, ashamed, or disgusted, because of that. [424]

So too, Rāhula, cultivate a water-like meditation. For, when you cultivate a water-like meditation, Rāhula, agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.

**15** (3) Rāhula, cultivate a **fire-like meditation**. For, when you cultivate a fire-like meditation, agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.

Rāhula, just as they burn things clean and foul—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—fire is not troubled, ashamed, or disgusted, because of that.

So too, Rāhula, cultivate a fire-like meditation. For, when you cultivate a fire-like meditation, Rāhula, agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.

**16** (4) Rāhula, cultivate a **wind-like [an air-like] meditation**.<sup>119</sup> For, when you cultivate a wind-like meditation, agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.

Rāhula, just as the wind blows on things clean and foul—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—the wind is not troubled, ashamed, or disgusted, because of that.

So too, Rāhula, cultivate a wind-like meditation. For, when you cultivate a wind-like meditation, Rāhula, agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.

**17** (5) Rāhula, cultivate a **space-like meditation**. For, when you cultivate a space-like meditation, agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.

<sup>112</sup> Comy: The methods given in §§13-17—the meditation on the elements and on space—are given to Rāhula so that he would experience the quality of impartiality (*tādī, bhāva*) or “suchness” (Vism 1.10/5, 7.71/214). The first 4 methods are also listed by Sāriputta as his practice of impartiality in **Vuṭṭha Vass’āvāsa S** (A 9.11,4/4:374 f), SD 28.2. See (5).

<sup>113</sup> “Agreeable and disagreeable,” *manāpāmanāpa*, here simply refers to the 2 kinds of perceptions of the contacts (*phassa*). In the phrase *manāpaṃ ... amanāpaṃ ... manāpāmanāpaṃ*, (as in **Indriya Bhāvanā S**, M 152), it refers to our reacting to a “neutral feeling” as being both agreeable and disagreeable or “mixed” reactions: see M 152,4/3:299 (& passim) @ SD 17.13.

<sup>114</sup> “Contacts,” *phassa*, ie all experiences through the 6 sense-bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind.

<sup>115</sup> “Overpower ... and remain,” *pariyādāya ṭhassanti*. One who practices meditation on the elements can see the strength of his own mind in applying his understanding of things to unwholesome objects that arise at a sense-door (sense organ). By reflecting on the experience in terms of conditionality and impermanence—as “guests” (*āgantuka*) at the sense-doors (*dvāra*)—he transforms the potentially provocative situation of being subjected to the powers of sense-experience into an opportunity for spiritual insight. See MA 2:225 f.

<sup>116</sup> “Things clean and foul,” *sucim pi ... asucim pi*. Here I follow Nina van Gorkom, email 23 May 2003.

<sup>117</sup> “Is not pained, humiliated, disgusted,” *aṭṭiyati vā harāyati vā jigucchati vā*. For fuller analyses of these terms, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,5/1:213), SD 1.7 n sv.

<sup>118</sup> A shorter form of this figure is found in **Doṇa Brāhmaṇa S** (A 5.192.7.7/3:229), SD 36.14.

<sup>119</sup> “Wind-like meditation,” *vāyo, sama bhāvana*, alt tr “air-like meditation.”

Rāhula, just as space is not established anywhere—  
so too, Rāhula, cultivate a space-like meditation. For, when you cultivate a space-like meditation, Rāhula, agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.<sup>120</sup>

### The 4 divine abodes<sup>121</sup>

**18** (1) Rāhula, practise the cultivation of **lovingkindness**. For when you cultivate lovingkindness, any ill will will be abandoned.

**19** (2) Rāhula, practise cultivation of **compassion**. For, when you cultivate compassion, any cruelty will be abandoned.

**20** (3) Rāhula, practise the cultivation of **gladness**. For, when you cultivate gladness, any discontent will be abandoned.

**21** (4) Rāhula, practise the cultivation of **equanimity**. For, when you cultivate equanimity, any aversion will be abandoned.

### Cultivation of foulness

**22** (5) Rāhula, practise **the cultivation of foulness (of the body)**.<sup>122</sup> For, when you cultivate foulness, any lust will be abandoned.

### Perception of impermanence<sup>123</sup>

**23** Rāhula, cultivate **the perception of impermanence**. [425] For, when you cultivate the perception of impermanence, the conceit ‘I am’ [egotism]<sup>124</sup> will be abandoned.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>120</sup> **Milinda,pañha** qu this para (Miln 388).

<sup>121</sup> These 4 divine abodes and the following perception of impermanence are elaborated in an interesting way in **Saṅgīti S** (M 33) as the “six elements making for deliverance” (*nissaraṇīyā dhātu*) (M33,2.2(17)/3:247-250). See further **Brahma,vihāra**, SD 38.5.

<sup>122</sup> “Foulness (of the body),” *asubha bhāvanā* (cultivation of foulness); called *asubha, nimitta* (sign of the foul) at **Āhāra S** (S 46.51,15/5:105), SD 7.15, which Comy says is one or other of the 10 foul objects, ie, a corpse in one of the 10 stages of decomposition (Vism 6.1-11/178 f). However, in the suttas (eg, **Mahā Satipatṭhāna S**, D 22,5/-2:293), SD 13; **Ānāpāna,sati S**, M 10,10/1:57 (SD 13 = SD 7.13); **Giri-m-ānanda S**, A 10.60/5:109 (SD 15.15), *asubha, saññā* (perception of foulness) or simply *asubha* (the foul) or *asucī* (the impurities), and refers to the observing of the 31 parts of the body, of which the Comys list 32 parts, adding “brain (in the head” (Khp 3, Pm 1:6 f, Vism 8.42-144/236-266 & KhpA 60), calling them *kāya,gata sati* (mindfulness of the body). The 31 parts of the body are also listed at **Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja S** (S 35.127,6/4:110-113). A slightly different list on the body meditation is given in **Vijaya S** (also called *Kāya,vicchandaniya S*) (Sn 193-206/no 11) where it is said, “And the hollow of its [the body’s] head | is filled with the brain” (Sn 199). In Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S, *asubha bhāvanā* may either refer to the stages of bodily decomposition (or the charnel ground meditations), or to the meditation on the 31 parts of the body, some of which have earlier on been defined in terms of the 4 elements (M 62,8-11/1:421-423). From canonical usage, it is more likely to refer to the latter.

<sup>123</sup> On the divine abodes, see §18 n.

<sup>124</sup> *Asmi,māno*. This refers to the breaking of the fetter of self-identity view (*sakkāya,ditṭhi*), and by extension, the fetters of doubt and of attached to rituals and vows. These are the 3 “lower” fetters of the 10 fetters: see **Kīṭa,giri S** (M 70) @ SD 11.1 (5.1); (**Sekha Uddesa S** (A 4.85), SD 3.3(2); also S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377.

<sup>125</sup> This brief but highly significant statement shows that the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*) is instrumental in overcoming the major fetter, which then makes one a streamwinner. See (**Anicca Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225) + SD 16.7 (5).

## THE CULTIVATION OF IN-AND-OUT BREATHING<sup>126</sup>

### Physical preparation

**24** Rāhula, cultivate **the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing**. Rāhula, the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing, when cultivated and continuously developed, is of great fruit and great benefit.

And how, Rāhula, is the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing cultivated and how is it continuously developed so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?<sup>127</sup>

**25** Here, Rāhula, a monk<sup>128</sup> who has gone to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty place, sits down, and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright, establishes mindfulness before him.<sup>129</sup>

—Mindfully he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out.

### 26 (A) The First Tetrad: Observing the body

- |                                       |                    |  |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| (1) Breathing in long, <sup>130</sup> | he understands:    | ‘Breathing in long.’ <sup>131</sup>                      |
| Or, breathing out long,               | he understands:    | ‘Breathing out long.’                                    |
| (2) Or, breathing in short,           | he understands:    | ‘Breathing in short.’ <sup>132</sup>                     |
| Or, breathing out short,              | he understands:    | ‘Breathing out short.’                                   |
| (3) He trains himself thus:           | ‘I will breathe in | experiencing the whole body (of breath).’ <sup>133</sup> |

<sup>126</sup> See foll n.

<sup>127</sup> See M:ÑB 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 2001 nn140-142. This section is as at **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,4) except for the similes in the latter. The whole section on the Mindfulness of the Breath (M 118,16-22) here is identical to that of Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S (M 62,25-29/1:425-7). The Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S however ends by mentioning that breath meditation benefits one in that “even the final in-breaths and out-breaths are known as they cease, not unknown” (M 62.30), that is, the practitioner dies with a calm and clear mind. On terms here, see Vism ch 8.

<sup>128</sup> DA on the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S with the identical context here says that “monk” (*bhikkhu*) indicates “whoever undertakes that practice...is here comprised under the term *bhikkhu*.” See Dh 142; also Dh 362, 260-270. Cf the Bhikkhu Vagga (ch 25) and the Brāhmaṇa Vagga (ch 26) of Dh.

<sup>129</sup> Cf §4 where *parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā* appears again, **Paṭisambhidā, magga** and **Vibhaṅga**, in connection with **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118), however, explains it as “at the tip of the nose or at the centre of the upper lip” (Pm 1:171,19; Vbh 252,13 = §537). For discussion, see Intro (3) above; see also **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118), SD 7.13 (2) & **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22; M 10), SD 13.1 (3.9.4).

<sup>130</sup> Brahmavaṃso: “As one relaxes and settles down, the breath becomes short by itself. When the body is relaxing, you don’t need as much oxygen to give the body energy. So it’s quite natural that these two steps usually follow one after the other. The whole point of these two steps [long breaths, short breaths] is just to experience the breath instead of attending to many things. What you’re doing is to focus on one thing.” (“The Beautiful Breath,” 1999).

<sup>131</sup> I have rendered these important sentences and those of the first 2 (“noting”) tetrads to reflect a “bare noting” (denoted by *pajānāti*) that should occur in meditation whose purpose is mental focus and not grammatically complete sentences. Only the steps 1-4 are noted by *pajānāti*; the rest (5-16) are *sikkhati*, or “training” aspects (ie one has to put in more regulated effort).

<sup>132</sup> In practical terms, focusing on the first 2 factors of this tetrad, viz, maintaining our focus on the breath or our conception of it can lead to dhyana. However, in (**Pabbateyyā**) **Gāvī S**, the Buddha advises Moggallāna not to go into the 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana until he has thoroughly mastered the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana (A 4:418 f = 9.35 qu at Vism 153 f).

<sup>133</sup> “The whole body,” so Thich Nhat Hanh (1990:6, 46-49) & esp Bodhi (2001 n141). MA glosses as “the whole body of breath,” ie, its three phases of each in-breath and out-breath through its three phases of beginning, middle and end. Brahmavaṃso keeps to this tradition, teaching that “you have just the target in your mind—just the

	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe out	experiencing the whole body (of breath).'
(4)	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe in	calming the bodily formation (of breath).'
	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe out	calming the bodily formation (of breath).'

## 27 (B) The Second Tetrad: Observing feelings

(5)	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe in experiencing zest.'
	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe out experiencing zest.'
(6)	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe in experiencing joy.'
	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe out experiencing joy.'
(7)	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe in understanding the mental functions.'
	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe out understanding the mental functions.'
(8)	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe in calming the mental functions.'
	He trains himself thus:	'I will breathe out calming the mental functions.'

breath and nothing else...the full attention on the breath" ("Beautiful Breath," 1999). Cf the remark that in-and-out-breathing is "a body among the bodies" (§24). Cf transpersonal psychology (esp bodywork and breathwork): the whole *body* breathes.

<sup>134</sup> *Saṅkhāra*. The bodily formation is the in-and-out-breathing itself (M 44,13). This calming process may lead to the development of dhyana, but this is not the primary object here (Walshe 1995 n641). See the Cūḷa Vedalla S (M 44,14 @ SD 40a.9) for explanation of *kāya,saṅkhāra*.

<sup>135</sup> Brahmavaṃso: "Once you have full attention on the breath, the next stage is where the beauty and the bliss have a chance to arise... This is where you calm down that object of mind, the breath, by giving the suggestion, 'calm, calm, calm.' Instead of just an ordinary breath that you're aware of, you deliberately, by an act of will, calm that breath down...it gets softer and softer...more and more beautiful. But you have to be careful here ... If you calm the breath in the fourth stage before you complete the third stage, that's when you go to sleep... **When the attention is fully there, then calm that object inside your mind.**" ("Beautiful Breath," 1999)

<sup>136</sup> *Pīti*. Sometimes tr as "rapture," but "zest" is closer to evoking the more subtle yet enthusing nature of *pīti*. One experiences zest in two ways: by attaining either the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana in which zest is present, one experiences it in the mode of calm (*samatha*); by emerging from that *jhāna* and reflecting that zest is subject to destruction, one experiences zest in the mode of insight (*vipassanā*). Psychologically, zest is a kind of "joyful interest," as such may be associated with wholesome, unwholesome or neutral states (BDict: *pīti*). Zest belongs the formation group (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*) while joy (*sukha*) belongs to the Feeling Group (*vedanā-k,khandha*). Zest is like when a thirsty man lost in the desert finds water; joy is what he feels when he is drinking the water. See Vism 4.94 ff.

<sup>137</sup> Brahmavaṃso: "As you calm the breath down, you get to the stage where the breath becomes very, very refined, very peaceful, and very smooth. It is the nature of such a mind state that it should be very happy... This is another type of happiness, and it takes wisdom to be able to recognize it...the Buddha taught the fifth and sixth steps to arouse that [un arisen] beauty." The 5<sup>th</sup> step is the deliberate arousal of zest (*pīti*) with the beautiful breath; the 6<sup>th</sup> step is the deliberate arousal of joy (*sukha*). "This is one important training in meditation, to be able to extract the perceptions of happiness and joy from whatever you're doing...When the breath is very peaceful, search for that bliss and you will find it." Brahmavaṃso calls this "the beautiful breath." ("Beautiful Breath," 1999)

<sup>138</sup> "Mental functions," *citta,saṅkhārā*. The same method given in the previous note applies to the second and third clauses. According to Brahmavaṃso, "When the beautiful breath is established, it may appear that your breath has disappeared, that you have this beautiful stable peace but no breath...you are still breathing, but the breath is no longer being experienced as a touch of the body, instead it is experienced as an object of mind. You are switching from feeling to knowing...That is why the Buddha called this seventh stage...'knowing the breath as a mind object.'" ("Beautiful Breath," 1999). According to some teachers, in the second, the three lower dhyana are present and in the third, all four are present. Mental formations here refer to feelings, perceptions and other mental concomitants, and which are calmed by the development of successively higher levels of calm and insight. See Cūḷa Vedalla S (M 44,14), SD 40.9, for explanation of *citta,saṅkhāra*.

## 28 (C) The Third Tetrad: Observing the mind

- (9) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe in experiencing the mind.'<sup>139</sup>  
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe out experiencing the mind.'
- (10) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe in gladdening the mind.'<sup>140</sup>  
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe out gladdening the mind.'
- (11) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe in concentrating the mind.'<sup>141</sup>  
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe out concentrating the mind.'
- (12) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe in freeing the mind.'  
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe out freeing the mind.'<sup>142</sup>

## 29 (D) The Fourth Tetrad: Observing dharmas<sup>143</sup>

- (13) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe in observing impermanence.'<sup>144</sup>

<sup>139</sup> "Experiencing the mind." According to Brahmavaṃso, "It's only at this stage that you can know the mind ... **the only place where you can know actually experience the mind**...by what we call a *nimitta*, a reflection of the mind. Remember the mind is that which is 'knowing.' ("Beautiful Breath," 1999). According to Bh Bodhi "experiencing the mind" is to be understood by way of the fourth dhyana (2001 n1118). *Citta*, "mind" is syn with *mano* and *viññāṇa* (*Yaṃ ... idaṃ vuccati cittan ti vā mano ti vā viññāṇan ti vā*, D 1:21; *Yaṃ ca kho etaṃ ... vuccati cittam iti pi mano iti pi viññāṇa iti pi*, S 2:94 f), so too in most traditions following the Abhidharma period, but they were clearly differentiated within the Yogācāra. SA says that all the three are names for the mind-base (*man'āyatana*). See Bodhi, *Connected Discourses*, 2000:769 n154.

<sup>140</sup> "Gladdening the mind." According to Brahmavaṃso, the mental reflex (*nimitta*) may appear to some as being "too dull" or "unstable," which are addressed by the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> steps, respectively; "shining the *nimitta* and sustaining the *nimitta*." "The more joy there is in the mind, the more brilliant shines the *nimitta*. To enter *Jhāna*, the *nimitta* has to be the most brilliant thing that you have ever seen, and on unearthly beauty." ("Beautiful Breath," 1999). The reflex may be dull also due to poor moral conduct or to low mental effort. In the latter case, one should remedy it by switching to "the inspirational meditations" like a reflection (*anussati*) on any of the Three Jewels, on giving (*cāgānussati*) or *mettā, bhāvanā*. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, "gladdening the mind" is either the attainment of the first 2 dhyana (containing zest) or as the penetration of those dhyanas by regarding them with insight as subject to destruction. (2001 n1118)

<sup>141</sup> "Concentrating the mind." Sometimes, "even the brilliant *nimitta* can appear unstable...it is just a reflection of the knower... If the knower moved so did [his] reflection, the *nimitta*." The solution, according to Brahmavaṃso, is to "focus on the knower, that which is experiencing this, and calm that into stillness." ("Beautiful Breath," 1999). According to Bodhi, "concentrating the mind" refers either to the concentration pertaining to the *jhāna* or to the momentary concentration that arises along with insight (2001 n1118)

<sup>142</sup> "Freeing the mind." Here, according to Brahmavaṃso, "the mind usually has two experiences that are exactly the same, but just depending on your perspective. You either find yourself "diving" into the *nimitta* ... The attention just sinks in there. Or else that *nimitta*, that 'beautiful light' or 'feeling,' just completely 'envelops you.' 'You' don't do this...it just happens... You enter the *Jhāna* through freeing the mind. The Buddha called the *Jhānas* stages of freedom (*vimokkha*) [D 16.3.33, A 8.66]" This is probably the most truly powerful experience in one's life, when one can really call oneself a "mystic." It is a kind of momentary "joy of awakening" (*sambodhi sukha*, M 1:454). ("Beautiful Breath," 1999).

<sup>143</sup> These last 4 stages relate to the meditator who has just emerged from dhyana. The first thing one should do then is to review that state: "What was that?" "How did that arise?" "How do I feel?" "Why do I feel that way?" "What have I been doing all this time?" "What worked and what failed?" "What was the result of the meditation?" "Why is it happy?" All such reflections give rise to deep insight. Having reflected thus, "you either take up *Satipaṭṭhāna* ... or just go directly to the last four stages of *Ānāpānasati*." The meditator has any one of these four following things to contemplate on after emerging from the *jhāna*. (Brahmavaṃso, 1999)

- He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe out observing impermanence.'
- (14) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe in observing the fading away (of lust).'<sup>145</sup>
- He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe out observing the fading away (of lust).'
- (15) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe in observing the cessation (of suffering).'<sup>146</sup>
- He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe out observing the cessation (of suffering).'
- (16) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe in observing the letting go (of defilements).'<sup>147</sup>
- He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe out observing the letting go'<sup>148</sup> (of defilements).'

### Benefit of breath meditation

**30** Rāhula, this is how the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing, when cultivated and continuously developed, is of great fruit and great benefit. Rāhula, when the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing is cultivated and continuously developed in this manner, **[426]** even the last breath leaves [ends] with your knowledge, not without it.<sup>149</sup>

Satisfied, the venerable Rāhula rejoiced in the Blessed One's word.

— evaṃ —

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<sup>144</sup> *Anicca*, "impermanence." What we call the "self," something that appears to be so constant that we do not even notice it. In *jhāna*, it disappears. If you experience this deeply as "non-self," "it's very likely to give rise to the experience of Stream Winning." (Brahmavaṃso, "Beautiful Breath," 1999).

<sup>145</sup> *Virāga*, also translated as "dispassion" (see §42). If a reflection on impermanence does not work, then we should go on to reflect on "fading away" (*virāga*). "This is when things just disappear ... things which were so close to you, that you thought were an essential part of you ..." (Brahmavaṃso, "Beautiful Breath," 1999).

<sup>146</sup> *Nirodha*. Something that was once there has now disappeared. "So much of the universe that you knew has ceased, and you're in a completely different space ... what you thought was important has gone ... Cessation is also the Third Noble Truth [the cessation of suffering]. The cause of that cessation is letting go...And what's left? ... the opposite of *dukkha* ... it is *sukha* (happiness). The ending of suffering is happiness." (Brahmavaṃso, "Beautiful Breath," 1999).

<sup>147</sup> While the previous 3 tetrads deal with both calm and insight, this tetrad deals only with insight. "Observing fading away ..." and "observing cessation ..." can be understood both as *insight* into the impermanence of formations and as the supramundane path leading to nirvana, ie, the fading of lust (*virāga*) and the cessation of suffering. "Observing letting go ..." is the giving up of defilements through insight and the gaining of nirvana through the path.

<sup>148</sup> *Paṭinissagga*, "letting go, abandoning." "In this context *Paṭinissagga* is not giving away what's 'out there,' but giving away what's 'in here' ... the letting go of the "doer," ... even of the "knower" ... especially letting go of ... the "will," the "controller." This is the path to the end of suffering. (Brahmavaṃso, "Beautiful Breath," 1999)

<sup>149</sup> *Ye pi te carimakā assāsā te pi viditvā nirujjhanti no aviditā ti*. When a dying person is mindful of his breath, he dies calmly with mindfulness and clear awareness. **Visuddhi, magga** says: "Herein there are three kinds of final breaths on account of cessation, that is to say, final in *becoming*, final in *dhyana*, final in *death*. For, among the various kinds of existence, in-breaths and out-breaths occur only in the sense-sphere existence, not in the form-existence nor the formless existence. That is why there are final ones in existence. They occur in the first three dhyanas but not in the fourth. That is why there are final ones in the dhyanas. Those that arise along with the 16<sup>th</sup> consciousness-moment preceding the death-consciousness cease together with the death-consciousness. They are called 'final in death.' It is these last ones that are meant here by 'final'" (Vism 8.241/291 f). On the 17 thought-moments, see Abdh 4.6, rev tr Bodhi 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 1999:153 ff. For a brief explanation, see G P Sumanapala, *An Introduction to Theravada Abhidhamma*, Singapore, 1998:137 (ch 8). For a comparative study of the closing, see (5)