

(Saṅkhitta) Catu Dhātu Sutta

The Discourse on the Four Elements (Shorter)

[The four elements in brief]
(Saṃyutta Nikāya 14.30/2:169)
Translated by Piya Tan ©2009

Introduction

1 The Commentary on the (Saṅkhitta) Catu Dhātu Sutta (S 14.30) explains the four elements by way of their physical characteristic or function, thus:

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| (1) the earth element is | the foundational element | (<i>patiṭṭhā dhātu</i>), |
| (2) the water element is | the cohesive element | (<i>ābandhana dhātu</i>), |
| (3) the fire element is | the maturing element | (<i>paripācana dhātu</i>), |
| (4) the wind element is | the distensive element | (<i>vitthambhana dhātu</i>). (SA 2:151) |

Buddhaghosa gives a more detailed commentarial study on the four element in his *Visuddhi, magga* (Vism 11.85-117/374-370).

2 **The (Saṅkhitta) Catu Dhātu Sutta** (S 14.30) is clearly the shortest discourse on the four elements: it simply states what they are without any elaboration. This is quite characteristic of the *Aṅguttara* discourses, because their topics have been discussed in great detail in the three previous *Nikāyas*. As such, the teacher or student is expected to refer to their occurrences in the *Dīgha*, the *Majjhima* or the *Majjhima Nikāya*, or in this case, in other discourses in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.

For practice instructions on the four elements, see **the (Dhātu) Samaṇa, brāhmaṇa Sutta 3** (S 14.39).¹ For a more detailed discussion, please refer to a separate study.²

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The Discourse on the Four Elements (Shorter)

(S 14.30/2:169)

1 *Ekam samayaṃ bhagavā sāvatthiyaṃ viharati jetavane anāthapiṇḍikassa ārāme...*

2 “catasso imā, bhikkhave, dhātuyo. Katamā catasso?”

Pathavīdhātu, āpodhātu, tejodhātu, vāyodhātu—

imā kho, bhikkhave, catasso dhātuyō ti.

1 At one time the Blessed One was residing in Anātha, piṇḍika’s park in Jeta’s forest near Sāvattihī.

2 “Bhikshus, there are these four elements. What are the four?”

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| (1) The earth element | (<i>pathavī dhātu</i>), |
| (2) The water element | (<i>āpo dhātu</i>), |
| (3) The fire element | (<i>tejo dhātu</i>), |
| (4) The wind element | (<i>vāyo dhātu</i>). |

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¹ S 14.39/2:176 f = SD 29.14.

² See *Rūpa* = SD 17.2a.