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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 while 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).¹ The Buddha, noticing Rāhula's unwholesome thoughts, gives him the teachings of the Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta (M 62).² 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.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵

¹ Further on Rāhula, see SD 3.10 (1.0).

² **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.

³ Analayo, 2011:348 f.

⁴ EĀ 17.1 = T2.581c16 & T 2.582a13.

⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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 misgivings 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 passages on **the 5 element-like meditation** [§§13-17] are almost unique to this Sutta. These meditations are 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 abodes, with the perception of space as an optional practice. Due to the elemental and visual nature of the meditations, they are suitable meditations for young children, too.

⁶ 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?*

⁷ M 62/1:421,27-425,2. A part of this 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

⁸ 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 a very relevant meditation here. Such a meditation should not be done just by itself, and should close or follow up with some breath meditation, lovingkindness, or similar meditation.

In the case of **the perception of impermanence** [§23], it is especially efficacious for the attaining of streamwinning.⁹ 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. **Analayo** 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.”¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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.¹²

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: 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;

⁹ See eg (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

¹⁰ Vism 1.10/5, 7.71/214. On *tādī*, see SD 49.20 (1.3.1).

¹¹ A 9.11/4:374 f (SD 28.2a); see also Dh 81.

¹² See Karunadasa 1967:16, 91-98

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;
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.¹³

1.3.4 The element-like meditations. Each of the elements is reflected on for its positive qualities, to which we relate 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ 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 3rd step of its scheme of the 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

¹³ For kasina meditations on the elements, see SD 49.5b (1.1-1.4).

¹⁴ EĀ 17.1 (T2.582a17): 冷 *lěng*, coolness; 暖 *nuǎn*, hotness. See Anālayo, 2005.

¹⁵ Anālayo, 2011:350 f.

take it as a focus of body mindfulness (*kāyānupassanā*), an interpretation that seems to be suggested by the Chinese version, too.¹⁶

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 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.¹⁷

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 4th 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.¹⁸

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*.¹⁹

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 3 knowledges (*te, vijjā*).²⁰ Rāhula then

¹⁶ 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)

¹⁷ Cf Analayo 2003:131.

¹⁸ Vism 8.208 f/283.

¹⁹ EĀ 17.1 (T2.582a23).

²⁰ The 3 knowledges (*te, vijjā*) or “true knowledges” 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),

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).

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,”²¹ *parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā*, where *parimukhaṃ*, literally means “around the mouth,” but idiomatically and adverbially means “in front.”²²

3.2 In connection with the breath meditation in the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta [§24] and in **the Ānāpāna-sati Sutta** (M 118),²³ 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.²⁴ 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.”²⁵ 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.”²⁶

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.²⁷ (2006:238; cf 2011:350)

8.9/1:194* (v749); **A 3.59,2-4/1:166 f**; **Sn 656**; cf (on the 3rd knowledge, *āsava-k, khaya, ñāṇa*) **M 9,70/1:55, 112,20/3:36**. Of these 3 superknowledges (*abhiññā*), only the 3rd is a “direct knowledge” (*aññā*), leading to arhathood. The 3-knowledge arhat (*te, vijja arahata*) is one who, with *samatha* as basis, has attained at least the 4 dhyanas. The 3 true knowledges (*te, vijjā* or *tisso vijjā*) here are the antithesis of the brahminical *ti, veda* (A 1:163; Sn 594; SnA 463). See PED, sv vijjā.

²¹ This *tr* may be adjusted to fit the context: at §25, it is rendered as “establishes mindfulness before him.”

²² 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).

²³ M 118,17/3:82 (SD 7.13).

²⁴ 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).

²⁵ EĀ 17.1 (T2.582a15): 繫意鼻頭 *xì yì bí tóu*.

²⁶ 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).

²⁷ EĀ 17.1 (T2.582a12): 專精一心 *zhuān jīng yī xīn*

Hence, **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 is in its Indic original, that is *parimukha*, but could rather be an explanatory gloss on the practice of mindfulness of the breath (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 oral explanations ... concerning the contents of the scriptures translated. Explanations of this kind often appear to have crept into the text.”²⁸ 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,²⁹ and its interconnectedness with the world around us, as a support for an ecological awareness.

4.2 **The Visuddhi, magga**³⁰ says that the 4 primary elements are only briefly explained in **the Mahā Sati-paṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22),³¹ and at length in

Mahā Hatthi, padōpama Sutta,	M 28 ³²
Mahā Rāhul'ovada Sutta and	M 62 [§§8-17]
Dhātu Vibhaṅga Sutta.	M 140 ³³

Curiously, the Visuddhi, magga does not mention **the (Dhātu) Rāhula Sutta** (A 4.177),³⁴ the Chinese version of which is in the Saṃyukta Āgama (SĀ 465),³⁵ and which speaks of the 6 elements,³⁶ 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

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ See, eg, **(Paṭicca, samuppāda) Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2, 11.2/2:3 f), SD 5.15, & also **Rūpa**, SD 17.2 (3.4).

³⁰ Vism 348.

³¹ D 22, 6/2:293.

³² M 28, 6-27/1:185-191 @ SD 6.16 esp (3).

³³ M 140, 13-18/3:240-242 (SD 4.17).

³⁴ A 4.177/2:164 f.

³⁵ SĀ 465 (T2.118c-119a).

³⁶ The 6 elements are the 4 primary elements + space + consciousness: these are mentioned in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33, 2.1 (16)/3: 248).

Saṅgīti Sutta,
Bahu,dhātuka Sutta and
Titth'āyatana Sutta.

D 33,2.1 (16)/3:248
M 115,5/3:62
A 3.61³⁷

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), Sāriputta 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.³⁸

5 The Sutta closing

5.1 Both the Pali and the Āgama versions of the Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta close with the Buddha 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].³⁹

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).⁴⁰

5.3 While the Pali texts agree that Rāhula is the foremost of those monks who have desire for learning,⁴¹ 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.⁴²

6 Related suttas

6.1 The (Catukka) Rāhula Sutta (A 4.177)

6.1.1 The (Catukka) Rāhula 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 (*paṭhavi*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*) and wind (*vāyo*)—from **the Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta** (M 62) without the definition passages.⁴³ These A 4.177 reflective passages are not merely abridged parallels of the M 62

³⁷ A 3.61,6/1:175 f (SD 6.8). See also Dhs 638. On the first 5 elements in later Buddhism, see Lama Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, London, 1959:183 ff.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ EĀ 17.1 (T2.582a23): 得甘露味 *dé gān lù wèi*.

⁴⁰ EĀ 17.1 (T2.582c13).

⁴¹ A 1.14/1:24,16: *etad aggaṃ mama sāvakaṇaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ sikkhākāmaṇaṃ, yad idaṃ Rāhulo*.

⁴² M 147/3:280,7 = S 35.121/4:107,28; SĀ 200 @ T251c9.

⁴³ M 62 §§8.2+9.2+10.2+11.2/1:421-423 (SD 3.11).

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,koṭika suññata*) of the 4 primary elements (AA 3:152), M 62 defines the 5 elements—the 4 primary elements plus the “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 detaches himself from lust” (... *dhātuyā nibbindati paññāya cittaṃ virājeti*) [§§2-5]. This significantly comes from closing of the “awakening pericope” (usually in reference to the attaining of arhathood), where the meditator “is 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 [detached]” (*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).⁴⁴

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, Sañcetanīya 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* element⁴⁵ and the *external*⁴⁶ *earth* element are simply **the earth element** [hardness].⁴⁷

And that should be seen, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’⁴⁸

Having seen it thus, as it really is, with right wisdom, one is revulsed towards⁴⁹ the *earth* element,⁵⁰ by wisdom the mind becomes detached [lust-free].⁵¹

⁴⁴ S 22.83,10-11 (SD 53.4).

⁴⁵ Comy refers to related suttas: see (6.2).

⁴⁶ *Bāhirā*.

⁴⁷ 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,lakkhaṇa*).

⁴⁸ See M 62,3 n.

⁴⁹ “Is revulsed towards” (*nibbindati*), n *nibbidā*. See **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62,8.2) n below.

⁵⁰ “The earth element,” *paṭhavī,dhātu*. On the 4 elements, see **Khandha 1 Rūpa**, SD 17a.2a (2).

3 [M 62,9.2] Now, Rāhula, both the *internal water* element and the *external water* [2:165] element are simply **the water element** [cohesiveness].

And that should be seen, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

Having seen it thus, as it really is, with right wisdom, one is revulsed towards the water element, by wisdom the mind becomes detached [lust-free].

4 [M 62,10.2] Now, Rāhula, both the *internal fire* element and the *external fire* element are simply **the fire element** [heat, decay].

And that should be seen, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

Having seen it thus, as it really is, with right wisdom, one is revulsed towards the fire element, by wisdom the mind becomes detached [lust-free].

5 [M 62,11.2] Now, Rāhula, both the *internal wind* element and the *external wind* element are simply **the wind element** [motion].

And that should be seen, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

Having seen it thus, as it really is, with right wisdom, one is revulsed towards the wind element, by wisdom the mind becomes detached [lust-free].

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.”⁵²

— 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):

Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta	M 62/1:421	SD 3.11
(Rāhula) Dhātu Sutta 1	S 18.9/2:248 f ⁵³	SD 3.11 (6.3)
(Rāhula) Dhātu Sutta 2	S 18.19/2:251	= S 18.9 ⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Paṭhavī, dhātuyā nibbindati paññāya cittaṃ virājeti*. Bodhi curiously regards the reading *paññāya cittaṃ virājeti* as “clearly wrong” (A:B 1711 n888)!

⁵² *Yato kho rāhula bhikkhu imāsu catusu dhātūsu n'ev'attānaṃ n'āttani yaṃ samanupassati, ayaṃ vuccati rāhula bhikkhu acchecchi taṇhaṃ 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.

⁵³ 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.

⁵⁴ 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.

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,laṅṅhika 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 in the elements—but the “elements” here refers to the sense-bases, etc.⁵⁵

6.2.1 Mahā Hatthi, padōpama 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) is defined;
- (2) the external element (the physical element or another being) is defined.
We reflect on both (1) + (2) 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 (*saṃvega*) to practise and realize the Dharma within 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 on the nature of each of these elements, thus:

- (1) the internal element (as our body-parts);
- (2) the external element (as those in others and as natural elements).

The elements—both the internal and the external—are then defined. We then reflect on both (1) + (2) in 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.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ S 14.1/2:140 (SD 29.9).

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

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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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 Saṃyuttam 1, 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]?’⁵⁷

‘Unsatisfactory, bhante.’

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

“This is mine, this I am, this is my self”?’⁵⁸

‘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 permanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

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

‘No, bhante.’

⁵⁷ *Dukkhaṃ vā sukhaṃ vā*. Here, the alternate 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.)

⁵⁸ *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.

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.'

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, Rāhula, the tutored noble disciple
 is revulsed [disenchanted]⁵⁹ 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.

⁵⁹ On revulsion, see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1.

Liberation: Review knowledge⁶⁰

<p>9 Through revulsion, Through dispassion, Freed,</p>	<p>he becomes dispassionate. he is free. there arises the knowledge: “Free!”⁶¹</p>	<p><i>nibbindaṃ virajjati virāgā vimuccati vimuttasmiṃ vimuttam iti ñāṇaṃ hoti</i></p>
<p>10 He understands:</p>	<p>“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.”</p>	<p><i>khiṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahma,cariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇiyaṃ nāparaṃ itthattāyā’ti pajānātīti</i></p>

— 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.⁶²

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

⁶⁰ 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. “Review knowledge,” of a lesser degree, may also arise in a non-arhat, even a lay practitioner, who is well rooted in the Dharma.

⁶¹ Alt tr: “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).

⁶² **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).

⁶³ “**Having dressed**,” *nivāsetvā*, lit, “having worn the *nīvasana*.” A *nīvasana*, “inner garment,” is prob a broad term that incl *antara,vāsaka*, “undergarment ‘worn in between.’” The two words are often synonymous (V 4:185,18), but *nīvasana* (‘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 paṭic-*

3 Then, the Blessed One turned around to look⁶⁶ at the venerable Rāhula⁶⁷ and addressed him, thus:⁶⁸

“Rāhula, whatever **form**—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near⁶⁹—all forms should be seen, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’”⁷⁰

chādentena parimaṇḍalam nivāsetvā kāya, bandhanam 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’” (*uddham nābhi, maṇḍalam adho jāṇu, maṇḍalam paṭicchādentena jāṇu, maṇḍalassa heṭṭhā jaṅgh’atṭhikato paṭṭhāya atṭh’āṅgula, mattam nivāsanaṃ otāretvā*, VA 4:889): see Sekh 1 (V 4:185,18).

⁶⁴ *Patta, cīvaram ādāya. Cīvara* here refers to any of the “3 robes” (*ti, cīvara*), viz: (1) the outer robe (*uttar’āsaṅga* = “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 (*saṅghāṭi*) (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 (*ekamsam uttarā, saṅgam 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,” *uttar’āsaṅga*. See CPD: *uttarāsaṅga*; also C S Upasak, *Dictionary of Early Buddhist Monastic Terms*, Varanasi, 1975:88-91.

⁶⁵ *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).

⁶⁶ “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, 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 only turning his neck (as *apaloketi* literally means).

⁶⁷ 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.

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ 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” (*oḷārika*) = 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.

⁷⁰ 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*),

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

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

4 Then, the venerable Rāhula thought,

“Who indeed,⁷³ 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.⁷⁴

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.”⁷⁵

6 Then, when it was evening, the venerable Rāhula came out of his retreat⁷⁶ 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, how is it continuously developed so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?”⁷⁷

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.

⁷¹ “**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 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.

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

⁷³ “**Indeed**,” *nu* from *n’ajja*.

⁷⁴ “**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 Ñāṇanamoli & 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.

⁷⁵ 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). This is only a “cognitive ignorance” on Sāriputta’s part, not a *spiritual* ignorance: he could have used his psychic powers, but he does not.

⁷⁶ “**Retreat**,” *paṭisallāna*, alt tr “solitude.”

⁷⁷ 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).

THE 5-ELEMENT MEDITATIONS⁷⁸

8 (1)⁷⁹ “[What, Rāhula, is **the earth element** [hardness]? (*paṭhavī, dhātu*)]⁸⁰
[The earth element may be either internal or external.]⁸¹

Rāhula, whatever that is **hard, solid [solidified],⁸² clung to,⁸³ internally, separately,⁸⁴ namely,⁸⁵**
head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, **skin;⁸⁶**
flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, **kidneys;⁸⁷**
heart, liver, membranes (around the lungs),⁸⁸ spleen, **lungs;⁸⁹**
large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents,⁹⁰ **dung,⁹¹**

or whatever else⁹² that is **hard, solid and clung to, internally, separately—**
this, Rāhula, is called *internal earth element*.

⁷⁸ The 4 great or primary elements together with space are here analysed in detail: also SD 17.2. On how the 4 elements cannot exist in themselves: Boisvert 1995:36 f. For practical meditation instructions on the elements: Vimm:ESK 1961:197-205, Vism 351, Pa Auk 1996:17; Fryba 1987:123. On how the 4 elements progress into breath meditation, see (1.3.3).

⁷⁹ 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.

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

⁸¹ *Paṭhavī, dhātu siyā ajjhattikā siyā bāhirā*. Interestingly, while there is a similar sentence, mutatis mutandis, for each of the other elements [§§9.1+10.1+11.1+12.1], it is absent in almost all 4-element pericopes, except in **Mahā Hatthi, padōpama S** (M 28,6.1/1:185,14 f), SD 6.16; **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,14/3:240,19 f), SD 4.17 (6 elements).

⁸² “**Solid, rigid [solidified],**” *kakkhaḷam kharigatam*. The former is the element’s characteristic (*lakkaḥaṇa*) and the latter its mode (*ākāra*) (Vism 286). In the Abhidhamma, the *hardness* (*kakkhaḷatta*) itself is the earth element (Vism-Ṭ 362 f). See Karunadasa, 1967:17 f.

⁸³ “**Clung to,**” *upādīṇṇa*. 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.

⁸⁴ “**Internally, separately,**” *ajjhattam paccattam*. “**Internally**” (*ajjhatta*) refers to our own body-parts, which are then reflected on “separately” (*paccatta*, ie, one by one, on their own), so that we understand them as a patchwork of these “**external**” parts (*bahiddhā*). *Paccattam*, then, includes reflecting on a particular *external* object or an aspect of it in a conditioned existence merely as an *element*.

⁸⁵ These sets of body parts are named after *the last item*, eg, the first is called the “skin pentad” (*taca, pañcaka*).

⁸⁶ The meditation on *these 5 parts* “with skin as the 5th” or “skin pentad” (*taca, pañcaka kamma-t, ṭhāna*) (Vism 242=8.50) forms the basic spiritual practice first taught to novices on their initiation.

⁸⁷ *Maṁsam nahāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhi, miñjā vakkam*.

⁸⁸ “**Membranes,**” alt tr “pleura,” *kilomaka*, ie, a pair of membranous sacs surrounding the lungs.

⁸⁹ *Hadayaṁ yakanam kilomakam pihakam papphasam*.

⁹⁰ **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).

⁹¹ *Antam anta, guṇam udariyam karisam*. See M 3:90; KhpA 38. Later traditions add a 32nd part—*matthake mattha, luṅgam* (lit “the brain in the head”) (Kh 3, Pm 1:6 f; Vism 8.42-144/239-266; unlisted at S 4:111). Although it is usually listed last, Comys list it as no 20, after “dung” (KhA 60; Vism 8.126/260) in “large intestines” set, since they have similar appearances. For a fascinating discussion on how ancient ascetics obtain such knowledge of human anatomy, see Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*, 1998:34-37.

⁹² The phrase “**whatever else**” (*aññam pi kiñci*) is intended to include *the earth element* as comprised in those body-parts 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.

8.2 And whatever is **the internal earth element** and whatever is **the external**⁹³ **earth element** are simply the earth element [hardness].⁹⁴

And that should be seen, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

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

Having seen it, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

one is revulsed towards⁹⁶ *the earth element*,⁹⁷ detached [lust-free] towards the earth element.⁹⁸

9 (2) And what, Rāhula, is **the water element** [cohesion] (*āpo, dhātu*)?⁹⁹

The water element may be either *internal* or *external*.

And what, Rāhula, is **the internal** water element?

Rāhula, whatever that is water, watery, clung to, internally, separately, namely,

bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat;¹⁰⁰

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

or whatever else that is **water, watery and clung to, internally, separately**—

this, Rāhula, is called **internal** water element.

9.2 And whatever is **the internal water element** and whatever is **the external water element** are simply the water element.

And that should be seen, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

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

Having seen it, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

one is revulsed towards *the water element*, detached [lust-free] towards the water element.

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

The fire element may be either *internal* or *external*.

And what, Rāhula, is **the internal** fire element?

Rāhula, whatever that is fire, fiery, clung to, internally, separately, namely,

⁹³ **Bāhirā**. Note that the “external” earth element (and the other “external” elements, respectively) are not mentioned separately: they are implied. In fact, their externality is highlighted after this, in the “**5 element-like meditations**” [§§13-17].

⁹⁴ 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*).

⁹⁵ See §3 n for totality formula, where “internal” refers to the 6 sense-faculties and “external” the 6 sense-objects. This may be understood, respectively, as our own physical body and that in the body of others, or external matter in general.

⁹⁶ “**Is revulsed towards**” (*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.

⁹⁷ “**Earth**,” *paṭhavī*. On the 4 elements, see **Khandha 1 Rūpa**, SD 17a.2a (2).

⁹⁸ *Paṭhavī, dhātuyā nibbindati paññāya cittaṃ virājeti*. “The mind becomes detached,” *cittaṃ virājeti*.

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

¹⁰⁰ *Pittaṃ semhaṃ pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo*.

¹⁰¹ *Lasikā*, ie synovial fluid.

¹⁰² *Assu vasā kheḷo siṅghānikā lasikā muttaṃ*. Here there are a total of 31 parts of the body. See **Kāya, gata, sati S** (M 119,7), SD 12.21.

that by which one is **warmed, ages, burns,**¹⁰³ and that by which what is **eaten, drunk, chewed, tasted,**¹⁰⁴ gets completely digested,
or whatever else that is **fire, fiery and clung to, internally, separately—**
this, Rāhula, is called internal fire element.

10.2 And whatever is **the internal fire element** and whatever is **the external fire element** are simply the fire element.

And that should be seen, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

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

Having seen it, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

one is revulsed towards the fire element, detached [lust-free] towards the fire element.

11 (4) Rāhula, what is the wind element [motion] (vāyo,dha)?¹⁰⁵

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, internally, separately, namely,¹⁰⁶
¹⁰⁷**up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the chest,**¹⁰⁸ **winds that course through the limbs,**¹⁰⁹ **in-breath and out-breath,**

or whatever else that is **wind, wind-like, clung to, internally, separately—**
this, Rāhula, is called internal wind element.

11.2 And whatever is **the internal wind element** and whatever is **the external wind element** are simply the wind element.

And that should be seen, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

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

Having seen it, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

one is revulsed towards the wind element, detached [lust-free] towards the wind element.

¹⁰³ Apparently, these preceding 3 terms—*santappati jiriyati pariḍayhati*—refer to body metabolism and decay. In fact, the whole section refers to metabolism and decay.

¹⁰⁴ *Asita, pīta, khāyita, sāyitā*. The 4 modes of consuming food: we eat food; drink liquid; chew solid food, a tooth-stick, betel-nut, chewing gum; taste (lick or suck) sweets, ice-cream. Cf (Pañcaka) Nāgita S (A 5.30,12), SD 55.12a.

¹⁰⁵ “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.

¹⁰⁶ See *Ānāpāna, sati S* (M 118), SD 7.13 (2.1.1).

¹⁰⁷ *Visuddhi, magga*: “winds” are responsible for the various internal motions of the body, viz, “up-going winds” (*uddhañ, 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,” such as peristalsis, not to an *object* moved.

¹⁰⁸ *Koṭṭha* means “the stomach or abdomen” (PED); and, *kucchi* is “belly.” 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.

¹⁰⁹ “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.

12 (5) Rāhula, what is **the space element** (*ākāsa, dhātu*)?¹¹⁰

The space element may be either internal or external.

And what, Rāhula, is **the internal space element**?

Rāhula, whatever that is space, spatial, clung to, internally, 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, internally, separately—*

this, Rāhula, is called *internal space element*.

12.2 And whatever is **the internal space element** and whatever is **the external space element** are simply **the space element**.

And that should be seen, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

Having seen it, as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:

one is revulsed towards the space element, detached [lust-free] towards the space element.

The 5 element-like reflections¹¹¹

13 ¹¹²(1) Rāhula, cultivate **an earth-like meditation** (*paṭhavī, sama bhāvanā*).

For, Rāhula, when you cultivate *an earth-like meditation*, agreeable and disagreeable¹¹³ contacts¹¹⁴ that have arisen will *not* overpower your mind and remain.¹¹⁵

13.2 Rāhula, just as they throw things clean, they throw things *foul*, **on the earth**;¹¹⁶

they throw dung, they throw urine, they throw spittle, they throw pus, they throw blood upon it— but the earth is neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted¹¹⁷ because of that.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁰ "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.

¹¹¹ 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 5th element, "space," Sāriputta uses "the duster" (*rajo, haraṇa*), which wipes away both the pure and the impure (A 4:375 f). On *rajōharaṇa*, see ad loc, SD 28.2a.

¹¹² 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 **Vuṭṭhā Vass'āvāsa S** (A 9.11,4/4:374 f), SD 28.2. See (5).

¹¹³ "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.

¹¹⁴ "Contacts," *phassa*, ie all experiences through the 6 sense-bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind.

¹¹⁵ "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.

¹¹⁶ "Things clean ... foul," *sucim pi ... asucim pi*. Here I follow Nina van Gorkom, email 23 May 2003.

¹¹⁷ "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.

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

So, too, Rāhula, cultivate an earth-like meditation.

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

14 (2) Rāhula, cultivate a **water-like meditation** (*āpo,sama bhāvanā*).

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

14.2 Rāhula, just as they wash things clean, they wash things *foul*, **in water**;
they wash dung, they wash urine, they wash spittle, they wash pus, they wash blood *in it*—
but the water is neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted because of that. [424]

So, too, Rāhula, cultivate a water-like meditation.

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

15 (3) Rāhula, cultivate a **fire-like meditation** (*tejo,sama bhāvanā*).

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

15.2 Rāhula, just as **fire** burns *the clean*, burns *the foul*,
It burns dung, it burns urine, it burns spittle, it burns pus, it burns blood—
but the fire is neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted because of that.

So, too, Rāhula, cultivate a fire-like meditation.

For, Rāhula, when you cultivate a **fire-like meditation**,
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** (*vāyo,sama bhāvanā*).¹¹⁹

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

16.2 Rāhula, just as **the wind** blows on *the clean*, it blows on *the foul*,
it blows on dung, it blows on urine, it blows on spittle, it blows on pus, it blows on blood—
but the wind is neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted because of that.

So, too, Rāhula, cultivate a wind-like meditation.

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

17 (5) Rāhula, cultivate a **space-like meditation** (*ākāsa,sama bhāvanā*).

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

17.2 Rāhula, just as *space* is not established anywhere—
so, too, Rāhula, cultivate a **space-like meditation**.

For, Rāhula, when you cultivate a space-like meditation,
*agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower your mind and remain.*¹²⁰

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

¹²⁰ *Milinda,pañha* qu this para (Miln 388).

The 4 divine abodes¹²¹

18 (1) Rāhula, practise the cultivation of
For, Rāhula, when you cultivate lovingkindness,

19 (2) Rāhula, practise the cultivation of
For, Rāhula, when you cultivate compassion,

20 (3) Rāhula, practise the cultivation of
For, Rāhula, when you cultivate gladness,

21 (4) Rāhula, practise the cultivation of
For, Rāhula, when you cultivate equanimity,

lovingkindness.

ill will will be abandoned.

compassion.

cruelty will be abandoned.

gladness.

discontent will be abandoned.

equanimity.

aversion will be abandoned.

Cultivation of foulness

22 (5) Rāhula, practise **the cultivation of foulness (of the body).**

For, Rāhula, when you cultivate *foulness*,

lust will be abandoned.¹²²

Perception of impermanence

23 Rāhula, cultivate **the perception of impermanence. [425]**

For, Rāhula, when you cultivate *the perception of impermanence*,¹²³

the conceit ‘I am’ [egotism]¹²⁴ will be abandoned.¹²⁵

¹²¹ These **4 divine abodes**, the signless freedom of mind (*animitta ceto, vimutti*) and letting go of the conceit “I am” [§23], cultivated with insight are listed in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33) as the “6 elements for escape (from suffering)” (*nis-saraṇīyā dhātu*) (D 33,2.2(17)/3:247-250). See further **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5.

¹²² “**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 Satipaṭṭhāna 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, vicchandānika 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.

¹²³ On the perception of impermanence, see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

¹²⁴ *Asmi, māno*. This refers to the breaking of the fetter of self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), and by extension, the fetters of doubt and of attachment 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.

¹²⁵ This brief but highly significant statement shows that the perception of impermanence (*anicca, saññā*) is instrumental in overcoming a major fetter (the 1st of the 3 fetters), 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 BREATHING¹²⁶

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?¹²⁷

25 Here, Rāhula, a monk¹²⁸ 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.¹²⁹

—Mindfully he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out.

26 (A) The 1st Tetrad: Observing the body

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| (1) Breathing in long, ¹³⁰ | he <u>understands</u> : ¹³¹ | ‘Breathing <i>in</i> <u>long</u> .’ ¹³² |
| Or, breathing out long, | he understands: | ‘Breathing <i>out</i> <u>long</u> .’ |
| (2) Or, breathing in short, | he understands: | ‘Breathing <i>in</i> <u>short</u> .’ ¹³³ |
| Or, breathing out short, | he understands: | ‘Breathing <i>out</i> <u>short</u> .’ |

¹²⁶ See foll n.

¹²⁷ See M:ÑB 2nd ed 2001 nn140-142. This section [§§16-22] is as at **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,4) except for the similes in the latter. 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” [§30], that is, the practitioner dies with a calm and clear mind. On terms here, see Vism ch 8.

¹²⁸ 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*,” ie, not a ritual or social *status*, but a spiritual state of practice, living the Dharma: see Dh 142; also Dh 362, 260-270. Cf *Bhikkhu Vagga* (ch 25) and *Brāhmaṇa Vagga* (ch 26) of Dh.

¹²⁹ 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 its proper application, see (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).

¹³⁰ As we relax and settle down, the breath slows down and becomes shorter by itself. As the body becomes more relaxed, we need less oxygen for the body because the body is less active. These two steps naturally follow one another. In fact, these steps of watching long breaths, short breaths, is just to more fully feel the breath instead of being distracted by other thoughts. We are training the mind to focus on just one thing: the present moment.

¹³¹ Note that “he understands” (*pājānāti*) is used only in the steps of stages 1+2. In practice, this often occurs as “directed meditation”: **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.10) + SD 24.2 (1).

¹³² 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).

¹³³ 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 2nd dhyana until he has thoroughly mastered the 1st dhyana (A 4:418 f = 9.35 qu at Vism 153 f).

- (3) He trains¹³⁴ himself thus: 'I will breathe *in* experiencing the whole body (of breath).¹³⁵
 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).¹³⁶
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *out* calming the bodily formation (of breath).¹³⁷

27 (B) The 2nd Tetrad: Observing feelings

- (5) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *in* experiencing [feeling] zest.¹³⁸
 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.¹³⁹
- (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.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Note that in all the steps of the rest of the stages of breath meditation, the verb is "he trains himself" (*sikkhati*). In simple terms, this refers to undirected meditation: **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.10) + SD 24.2 (1).

¹³⁵ "The whole body." Most teachers are uncertain what this means exactly: Thich Nhat Hanh (1990:6, 46-49), Brahmavamso (1999, but cf 2002:60) & esp Bodhi's uncertainty (M:ÑB 1191 n141) take this to refer to the *whole physical body*. Comy, however, glosses as "the whole body of breath," ie, the 3 phases of each in-breath and each out-breath, viz, beginning, middle and end (Pm 1:184,12; PmA 1:312,38; 2:516,4; VA 2:411,1-17; VAT:Be 2:192). 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." However, if we have any difficulty with this idea (esp when it involves thinking), simply get back to the breath as it is. See SD 13.1 (3.9.6).

¹³⁶ *Saṅkhāra*. The bodily formation is the in-and-out-breathing itself (M 44,13), ie, the breath free of the body (physical aspects). This calming process may lead to the development of dhyana, but this is not the primary object here (Walshe 1995 n641). See **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,14 @ SD 40a.9) for explanation of *kāya,saṅkhāra*.

¹³⁷ Once we are fully aware of the breath, we can feel joy arising, a peaceful sense of a fully clear mind free from any distraction. Now we are ready to calm the breath further, by gently "directing" it: "Calm, calm, calm." Instead of just the physical breath, we are now aware of our mind naturally calming the breath down to be even gentler and more beautiful. We should not try to calm the mind before completing the 3rd stage; then, we may mentally tire and even fall asleep! Only when our *mind* is readily calm do we go on to calm the breath.

¹³⁸ *Pīti*. Sometimes tr as "rapture," but "zest" is closer to evoking the more subtle yet enthusing nature of *pīti*. One experiences zest in 1 of 2 ways: by attaining either the 1st or 2nd 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 to 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.

¹³⁹ As the breath calms down, we feel, even "see," it becoming subtler and smoother. This occurs when the mind is simply happy. We need some wisdom (esp through sutta understanding) to notice this beautiful state. In the 5th and 6th stages, we "see" the breath's peace beginning to brighten up. In the 5th stage, the beautiful bright breath arouses zest (*pīti*); in the 6th stage, that zest settles as joy (*sukha*). This means the mind is freeing itself even more from the body. As we diligently keep up our breath meditation, we will better understand what this really means.

¹⁴⁰ "Mental functions," *citta,saṅkhārā*. The same method given in the prec n n applies to the 2nd and 3rd clauses. When the bright breath is established, the physical breath "disappears" We are still *breathing* but it is no more a *bodily* experience, but a mental state that gets more peaceful and radiant. In this 7th stage, we are switching from knowing (sense-based) to feeling: the breath is now *mental*. Some teachers say that, here, the 3 lower dhyanas are present and in the 3rd, all 4 are present. Mental formations here refer to *feelings, perceptions* and other mental

- (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.**'

28 (C) The 3rd Tetrad: Observing the mind

- (9) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *in* experiencing [feeling] **the mind.**'¹⁴¹
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *out* experiencing **the mind.**'
- (10) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *in* **gladdening the mind.**'¹⁴²
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *out* gladdening **the mind.**'
- (11) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *in* **concentrating the mind.**'¹⁴³
 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.**'¹⁴⁴

29 (D) The 4th Tetrad: Observing dharmas¹⁴⁵

- (13) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *in* **observing impermanence.**'¹⁴⁶
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *out* observing **impermanence.**'

concomitants: they are stilled 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*.

¹⁴¹ "**Experiencing the mind.**" This is when we really experience the mind, ie, as "mental sign" (*nimitta*), a reflex of the fully calm mind. Remember, the mind is "knowing" itself: this is what "feeling" means in meditation. *Citta*, "mind," *mano*, *viññāṇa* are syn (*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 follow the Abhidharma period, but the Yogācāra differentiated them. All 3 are names for the mind-base (*man'āyatana*) (SA 2:98). See S:B 769 n154.

¹⁴² "**Gladdening the mind.**" The mental sign (*nimitta*) may appear at first as being "too dull" or "unstable": this is dealt with in 10th and 11th stages, when we, respectively; "brighten up the sign and sustain it." The more joy there is in the mind, the brighter the sign shines. When the sign is most brilliant, appearing to encompass everything, as if infinitely, then, we are ready to enter dhyana (*jhāna*). When the sign is dull, it may be due to poor our moral conduct or lack in mental effort. In the latter case, we should remedy it by switching to an "inspirational meditation" like a reflection (*anussati*) on any of the 3 jewels, or on giving (*cāgānussati*), or doing *mettā, bhāvanā*.

¹⁴³ "**Concentrating the mind.**" Sometimes, the radiant sign (*nimitta*) can appear unstable: it is simply a reflection of our own mind as the knower. We have stopped feeling, but may start thinking even momentarily. Then, we should simply focus on the knower; just smile at it, let go.

¹⁴⁴ "**Freeing the mind.**" At this stage, we should understand that there are usually two experiences that are exactly the same, depending on our perspective. We either find ourselves "diving" into the sign (the attention just sinks in there) or the sign (the beautiful light) as a "feeling" completely overwhelms us. "We" don't do this: we just let it happen. Dhyana arises when the mind is fully free from the body, from any thought of it; hence, it is called stages of freedom (*vimokkha*) (D 16,3.33; A 8.66). This is probably the happiest experience in our life, when we can really call ourselves a "mystic." It is a kind of momentary "joy of awakening" (*sambodhi sukha*, M 1:454).

¹⁴⁵ These 4 stages follow when the meditator has just emerged from dhyana. The first thing we should do here 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?" Such reviews give rise to deep insight. Having reflected thus, we either turn to satipatthana or go directly to the last 4 stages of breath meditation. This is one of the 4 things we can do upon emerging from dhyana.

¹⁴⁶ *Anicca*, "impermanence." What we call the "self" is something that appears to be so constant that we do not even notice it. This idea disappears in dhyana. When we see this deep experience as "impermanence," even "non-self," we are ready for streamwinning, to take the first step on the path.

- (14) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *in* observing **fading away** (of lust).'¹⁴⁷
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *out* observing fading away (of lust).'
- (15) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *in* observing **cessation** (of suffering).'¹⁴⁸
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *out* observing the cessation (of suffering).'
- (16) He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *in* observing **letting go** (of defilements).'¹⁴⁹
 He trains himself thus: 'I will breathe *out* observing letting go¹⁵⁰ (of defilements).'

Benefit of breath meditation

30 Rāhula, this is how **the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing**, when cultivated and continuously developed in this way, 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.¹⁵¹

31 The Blessed One spoke thus. Satisfied, the venerable Rāhula rejoiced in the Blessed One's word.

— evaṃ —

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¹⁴⁷ **Virāga**, also tr as “dispassion” (see §42). When a reflection on impermanence does not work, then, we should go on to reflect on “fading away” (*virāga*). This is when all thoughts and things just disappear: there is, as it were, just the mind.

¹⁴⁸ **Nirodha**. Something that was once there has now disappeared. So much of the universe that we knew has ended, and we are in a different space-time reality. Cessation is, in fact, the 3rd noble truth: the ending of suffering. The cause of this cessation is the mind letting go of itself. What is left is the opp of *dukkha* (suffering), ie, *sukha* (happiness).

¹⁴⁹ While the previous 3 tetrads deal with *both* calm and insight, this tetrad deals only with insight. “Observing fading away ...” and “observing cessation ...” may 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.

¹⁵⁰ **Paṭinissagga**, “letting go, abandoning.” Here, letting-go is not giving away what’s “out there,” but giving away what’s “in here,” the letting go of both the “doer” and the “knower,” ie, letting go of the “will,” the “controller,” the self. This is the path to the end of suffering.

¹⁵¹ *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 3 kinds of final breaths on account of cessation, that is to say, final in *existence*, final in *dhyana*, final in *death*. (1) For, among the various kinds of existence, in-breaths and out-breaths occur only in the sense-sphere existence, neither in the form-existence nor the formless existence. Hence, they are the final ones in existence. (2) They occur in the first 3 dhyanas but not in the 4th. Hence, they are final ones in the dhyanas. (3) Those that arise along with the 16th consciousness-moment preceding the death-consciousness ceases 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*s 4.6, rev tr Bodhi 2nd ed 1999:153 ff. For a brief explanation, see G P Sumanapala, *An Introduction to Theravāda Abhidhamma*, 1998:137 (ch 8). For a comparative study of the closing, see (5).