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Bahu Dhātuka Sutta

The Discourse on the Many Elements | M 115

Theme: The 18 elements, dependent arising, and possibilities

Translated by Piya Tan ©2008, 2022

1 Sutta summary and comments

1.1 The discourse opens with the Buddha remarking that **fears, difficulties and problems** (*bhaya, upadava, upasagga*) affect only the foolish, not the wise [§1]. Both the foolish and the wise face problems, but these do not become fears (*bhaya*), mishaps (*upaddava*)¹ and troubles (*upasagga*) for the wise. This is because the wise are “those who investigate things [they are investigators]” (*vīmaṃsaka*) [§2.4].

1.2 The foolish, on the other hand, are easily troubled by their actions and by others: the foolish is like a fire starting from a small hut that then burns down a large building [§2.2-3]. A vital sense of this parable is that the foolish are greatly troubled by even small problems; or that the foolish tend to act in a manner that only worsens the danger they are already in.

1.3 The Buddha says that **the wise** is one who investigates things [§2.4], and expounds what this investigative wisdom entails. The list that follows is reflected in the sutta title, “**of many elements**” (*bahu, dhātuka*), and are based on various forms of “elements” (*dhātu*), namely:

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

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

1.4 Next, the Buddha defines the one who is “**skilled in the sense-bases**” (*āyatana, kusala*), that is, one who understands the 6 sense-organs and their respective sense-objects [§10]. Basically, this refers to how we experience things, that is, how the senses perceive sense-experiences and how the mind conceives thoughts and other mental experiences. In a more technical sense, these sense-bases are examined as **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k, khandha*)—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—by way of the “7 bases” (*satta-ṭ, ṭhāna*), as laid out in **the Satta-ṭ, ṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57), that is, the nat-

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

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

³ See **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,7+14-19), SD 4.17.

⁴ Def at Vbh §180/85 f. For other details, see §6 below.

⁵ Def at Vbh §182/86 f as the 6 karmic types (3 unwholesome, 3 wholesome) of thinking (*vitakka*): see **Dvedhā, vitakka S** (M 19,2/1:114), SD 61.1; SD 60.1d (2.2.1.5).

⁶ Comy says that the sense-sphere element (*kāma, dhātu*) as the 5 aggregates of the sense-sphere (*kāmāvacara-k, khandha*), the form element (*rūpa, dhātu*) as the 5 aggregates of the form sphere (*rūpāvacara-k, khandha*), and the formless element (*arūpa, dhātu*) as the 4 aggregates of the formless sphere (*arūpāvacara-k, khandha*) (MA 4:104). For details, see §8 below.

⁷ See §9 below.

ure of the aggregates, their arising, their ceasing, the way to their ceasing, the gratification, the dangers and the escape [SD 29.2 (2.2)].

1.5 This is followed by the Buddha’s definition of one “**skilled in dependent arising**” (*paṭicca.samuppāda,kusala*), that is, one who understands both specific conditionality (*idap,paccayatā*) or the basic principles of conditionality and dependent arising [§11.1], and the full workings of both dependent arising [§11.2] and dependent ending [§11.3]. **Analayo**, in his comparative study of their various ancient parallels,⁸ has shown that **the Bahu Dhātuka Sutta** (M 115) preserves a more original set of teachings on the elements (*dhātu*) than the Chinese or the Tibetan versions (2009:151-160).

1.6 It is possible that the original discourse ends here with dependent arising; the next section, which takes up the remaining half of the discourse, deals with the 28 “possibilities and impossibilities” (*thānā-thāna*) [§§12-19]. Firstly, these 28 statements have nothing to do with “elements” (*dhātu*), which are *ontological* states, that is, they are about the nature of reality and existence. The 28 statements are about *epistemology*, about knowledge of whether certain things are possible or not⁹ [2].

1.7 The discourse closes with **Ānanda’s exultation**, and he asks the Buddha for its *name*, which betrays some sort of structured teaching, uncharacteristic of the early teachings. The Buddha obliges Ānanda with 5 titles [§20].¹⁰

2 The women’s inabilities: a comparative study

2.1 The whole section on the 28 possibilities and impossibilities (*thānāthāna*) [§§12-19] is found in **the Aṭṭhāna Vagga** (A 1.15) and **the Vibhaṅga** (Vbh §809),¹¹ which calls it “the Tathagata’s knowledge of true reality regarding cause as cause and non-cause as non-cause” (*tathāgatassa thānañ ca thānato aṭṭhānañ ca aṭṭhānato yathā,bhūtam ñāṇam*) (Vbh 335). Its Commentary glosses “possibility” (*thāna*) as “cause” (*hetu*) (VbhA 423). A detailed analysis of these 28 statements is given in **the Sammoha,vinodanī** (the Vibhaṅga Commentary).¹²

2.2 Basically, this teaching says that an individual who is accomplished in right view would never regard formations (things of this world) as permanent, nor pleasurable, nor as self, but it is possible for an ordinary worldling to think so [§12]; or commit any of **the 5 heinous acts**, that is, killing of one’s own mother or father, or an arhat, or shedding Buddha’s blood, or causing a schism in the order.¹³ Furthermore, only one Buddha can arise in a world-system at a time, and he will always be a man [§13].

2.3 A key statement here is that only one full self-awakened Buddha can arise in a single universe¹⁴ at one time. This is like the discovery of fire or the invention of the wheel: it needs to occur only once. The Buddha is the most highly evolved of beings within a certain universe. This perfection in spiritual evolu-

⁸ See **On women’s inabilities**, SD 29.1b(1.2).

⁹ See SD 29.1b (3.1.3).

¹⁰ Similarly at the close of **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1), Ānanda asks for the name of “this Dharma,” and is given 5 titles by the Buddha, and the 5th is the same as here: *anuttaro saṅgāma,vijaya* (D 1.148/1:46), SD 25.

¹¹ A 1.15/1:26-30 = Vbh 809/335-338; cf A 6.91-95/3:438-450.

¹² VbhA 2138-2197/423-439 = VbhA:Ñ 2:171-187.

¹³ See **Parikuppa S** (A 5.129/3:146), SD 40b.2(2.8.3.2); M 115,13/3:64 f @ SD 29.1a; V 2:193; MA 2:351; AA 2:7 = VbhA 427; UA 243; PmA 402 ad Pm 1:124; KvA 141-143; PugA 185 ad Pug 13.

¹⁴ The early texts, however, speaks of parallel universes: see (**Ānanda**) **Abhibhū S** (A 3.80.3/1:227 f), SD 54.1 & **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29.2/5:59), SD 16.15.

tion takes an astronomical number of world cycles, and as such is rare indeed. As such, the Buddha is said to be *sui generis*, a class or species of his own.¹⁵

2.4 Similarly, the highest position of power, be it evil (Māra) or good in a mundane sense (Sakra), or in a globally political sense (a wheel-turning monarch), is always filled by the most powerful of men, and only one such being can exist at a time [§14]. This power may be concentrated in some kind of Being at the top, some God or supreme essence, defined by the powerful themselves to lord over others. Or, this power is evenly distributed, as it were, latent in life itself, so that life is capable of intelligence, that evolves into wisdom, a self-knowledge that frees us from the world of power for a joyful peace.

2.5 All this notion of **the possible and the impossible** [1.6] is *neither* patriarchalism *nor* anti-feminism on the part of early Buddhism, but a reflection of the realities of ancient Indian patriarchal society and worldly politics. A Buddha arises in a society that is culturally, economically and spiritually advanced, and understandably, such a society is always patriarchal. The arising of such an effective teacher may, in a way, be said to be *a spiritual evolution* based on a natural selection of the most physically and mentally developed of humans to become the Buddha of his time.

On the other hand, the positions of worldly and celestial powers are always held by a male figure, arising from *natural selection of social evolution* [§15]. As we shall see in a separate essay [SD 29.1b], we have clear evidence that the passages on the women's inabilities were later interpolations.

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Bahu,dhātuka Sutta

The Discourse on the Many Elements

M 115

1 Thus have I heard.

¹⁶At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika's park in Jeta's grove near Sāvattḥī.

There the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

"Bhikshus!"

"Bhante!" the monks answered the Blessed One in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

The foolish is often troubled

2 "Bhikshus, whatever **fears**¹⁷ that arise,
Whatever **mishaps** [difficulties] that arise,
Whatever **troubles** [problems] that arise,

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

¹⁵ See (Pāda) Doṇa S (A 4.36/2:37 f), SD 36.13.

¹⁶ The Aṅguttara Book of Threes (*tika nipāta*) opens with §§1-2, except for the admonition at §2,4, which there reads, "Abandoning those 3 conditions by which the utterly foolish is to be known, we will undertake and bring about those 3 conditions by which the utterly wise is to be known" (*yehi tīhi dhammehi samannāgato bālo vedītabbo te tayo dhamme abhinivajjetvā, yehi tīhi dhammehi samannāgato paṇḍīto vedītabbo te tayo dhamme samā-dāya vattissāmā'ti*) (A 3.1.1/1:101).

¹⁷ The 3 key words in this para are *bhaya* (fear, danger), *upaddava* (danger, calamity, misfortune, nuisance) and *upasagga* (trouble, danger, attack, persecution).

2.2 THE SPREADING FIRE. Suppose, bhikshus, a fire that started¹⁸ in a house of reed or a house of grass would also burn down pinnacled houses, with walls plastered within and without, protected from the wind, with bolted doors,¹⁹ and shuttered windows.²⁰

Even so, bhikshus,	
whatever <i>fears</i> that arise,	they all arise to the foolish, not to the wise.
Whatever <i>mishaps</i> that arise,	they all arise to the foolish, not to the wise.
Whatever <i>troubles</i> that arise,	they all arise to the foolish, not to the wise.

The wise is untroubled

2.3 Thus, bhikshus,	
the foolish is beset by <i>fears</i> ,	the wise is not beset by fears.
The foolish is beset by <i>mishaps</i> ,	the wise is not beset by mishaps.
The foolish is beset by troubles,	the wise is not beset by troubles.

2.4 Therefore, bhikshus, thinking,²¹ ‘We shall be wise, investigators [wise investigators]’; thus, bhikshus, you should train yourselves.²² [62]

The wise monk, a triple investigator

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

“In what way, bhante, is it right to say that a monk is called **wise, an investigator** [a wise investigator]?”²³

THE TRIPLE INVESTIGATOR²⁴

“Ānanda, when a monk is	
(1) skilled in the elements, ²⁵	<i>dhātu, kusalo ca hoti</i>
(2) skilled in the sense-bases,	<i>āyatana, kusalo ca hoti</i>

¹⁸ “A fire that started,” *aggi mutto*, vl *aggi mukko* (A 1:101); both being pp of VMUC, “to release, unharness.” See Pischel, *A Grammar of the Prākṛit Languages*, 1981 §566.

¹⁹ “With bolted doors,” *phassit’aggaḷam* (M 3:61; A 1:101, 137). Broadly, *aggaḷa* can mean (1) a bolt (for door or window); (2) a door-leaf or panel, ie, *kavāṭa*. The Comy lemma reads *phussit’aggaḷam* (MA 2:39), which is preferable. Comy also explains that the door-leaves (*kavāṭa*) (by which the opening is closed) is shut tight against the door-posts (*dvāra, bhāhi saddhiṃ supihita, kavaṭam*, id).

²⁰ “Pinnacled buildings etc ...” (pl) *kūṭ’āgārāni pi ... ullittāvalittāni nivātāni phusit’aggaḷāni pihita, vātapānāni* (M 115,2/3:61; A 3.1/1:101); sg *kūṭ’āgāraṃ ullittāvalittāṃ nivātāṃ phusit’aggaḷaṃ pihita, vātapānaṃ* (M 12,41.3/-1:76; A 3.34/1:137; A 8.30,10/4:231); loc *kūṭ’āgāresu...ullittāvalittesu nivātesu phusit’aggaḷesu pihita, vātapānesu* (M 77.9/2:8). See AA 2:168.

²¹ On this sentence, see n at the start of §1.

²² *Tasmā-ti-ha, bhikkhave, “paṇḍitā bhavissāma vīmaṃsakā”ti evañ hi vo bhikkhave sikkhitabban ti. On tasmā-ti-ha*, see W Geiger, *A Pāli Grammar*, 2000: §73.5.

²³ *Kittāvatā nu kho, bhante, paṇḍito bhikkhu vīmaṃsakō ti alaṃ, vacanāyā ti?*

²⁴ The term “triple investigator” (*ti, vidhūpaparikkhī*) is from **Satta-ṭ, ṭhāna S** (S 22.57,31/3:65), and should be understood in connection with the *elements* (Dhātu Saṃyutta, S 14), the *sense-bases* (Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta, S 35) and *dependent arising* (Nidāna Saṃyutta, S 12)—as listed here. A possible reason for this is that the most familiar list is mentioned first; then, additional sets of “elements” follow [§§6-8]. While **M 115** analyses the 18 elements (sense-faculty + object + consciousness), **S 22.57** analyses the 7 bases of the 5 aggregates. See SD 29.1b (3.1.3).

²⁵ Note that although (one) “skilled in the elements” is mentioned first, followed, secondly, by (one) “skilled in the sense-bases,” the 2nd is mentioned *first* [§4], and the 1st mentioned following this [§5].

(3) skilled in dependent arising, and
 (4) skilled in the possible and the impossible—
 to that extent, Ānanda, a monk is called wise, an investigator [a wise investigator].”

*paṭicca.samuppāda, kusalo ca hoti
 ṭhānâṭhāna, kusalo ca hoti*

The one skilled in the elements

4 (1) “But, bhante, in what way, bhante, is it proper²⁶ to say that a monk is **skilled in the elements?**”

“Ānanda, there are these 18 elements:²⁷

- (1) the **eye** element
- (2) the form element
- (3) the eye-consciousness element
- (4) the **ear** element
- (5) the sound element
- (6) the ear-consciousness element
- (7) the **nose** element
- (8) the smell element
- (9) the nose-consciousness element
- (10) the **tongue** element
- (11) the taste element
- (12) the tongue-consciousness element
- (13) the **body** element
- (14) the touch element
- (15) the body-consciousness element
- (16) the **mind** element
- (17) the mind-object element
- (18) the mind-consciousness element

*cakkhu, dhātu,
 rūpa, dhātu,
 cakkhu.viññāṇa, dhātu;
 sota, dhātu,
 sadda, dhātu,
 sota.viññāṇa, dhātu;
 ghāṇa, dhātu,
 gandha, dhātu,
 ghāṇa.viññāṇa, dhātu;
 jivhā, dhātu,
 rasa, dhātu,
 jivhā.viññāṇa, dhātu;
 kāya, dhātu,
 phoṭṭhabba, dhātu,
 kāya.viññāṇa, dhātu;
 mano, dhātu,²⁸
 dhamma, dhātu,²⁹
 mano.viññāṇa, dhātu.³⁰*

These, Ānanda, are the 18 elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

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

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these **6 elements**, namely,³¹

²⁶ *Alaṃ*, “fir, adequate, able to, sufficient, worth.”

²⁷ Def at Vbh §§183-184/87-90; expl in detail at Vism 15.17-43/484-490. See Intro (1) above.

²⁸ The mind-element, according to Abhidhamma, includes the consciousness that adverts to the 5 sense-objects impinging on the 5 sense-faculties (*pañca.dvār'āvajjana, citta*) [see **Nimitta & Anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14 (2)] and the consciousness that receives the object after it has been cognized through the senses (*sampaṭicchana, citta*).

²⁹ The mind-object element includes the types of subtle material phenomena not involved in sense-cognition, the 3 mental aggregates of feeling, perception, and formations, and nirvana. It does not include concepts, abstract ideas, judgements, etc. Though these latter ideas are incl in the notion of mind-object (*dhamm'ārammaṇa*), the mind-object *element* includes only things that exist by their own nature, not things constructed by the mind (M:ÑB 1324 n1077). See SD 60.1b (2.1.1.6).

³⁰ The mind-consciousness element includes all types of consciousness except the 5 sense-consciousnesses and the mind-element. In other words, it comprises purely mental states arising in all the 6 sense-bases.

³¹ See **Cha-b, bisodhana S** (M 112), where the elements are regarded as nonself (M 112,8/3:31).

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| (1) the earth element, | <i>paṭhavī,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> |
| (5) the space element, and | <i>ākāsa,dhātu</i> |
| (6) the consciousness element. | <i>viññāṇa,dhātu</i> |

These, Ānanda, are the 6 elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

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

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these 6 elements,³² namely,

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

These, Ānanda, are the 6 elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

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

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these 6 elements, namely,³³

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|
| (1) the sensual element, | <i>kāma,dhātu</i> | |
| (2) the renunciation element, | <i>nekkhamma,dhātu,</i> | |
| (3) the ill will element, | <i>vyāpāda,dhātu</i> | |
| (4) the non-ill will element, | <i>avyāpāda,dhātu</i> | [63] |
| (5) the cruelty element, and | <i>vīhimsā,dhātu</i> ³⁴ | |
| (6) the non-cruelty element. | <i>avīhimsā,dhātu</i> ³⁵ | |

These, Ānanda, are the 6 elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

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

“There might be, Ānanda.

³² Def at Vbh §180/85 f. The joy and pain elements are *bodily* pleasant and painful feelings respectively. The pleasure and displeasure elements are *mental* pleasant and painful feelings respectively. The equanimity element is neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling. Comy says that it is mentioned because it seems to resemble the equanimity element (MA 4:105).

³³ Def at Vbh §183/86 f as the 6 corresponding types of initial application or thinking (*vitakka*): see **Dvedhā,vitakka S** (M 19,2/1:114); cf D 3:215; S 2:151; A 3:447. Comy reminds us that these elements refer to the “conscious” body (*sa,viññāṇaka,kāya*) (MA 4:104): see **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,19.2), SD 1.11 & **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (6). See also **Rūpa**, SD 17.2a.

³⁴ Be Ce Se so; Ee *vihesā,dhātu*.

³⁵ Be Ce Se so; Ee *avihesā,dhātu*.

Ānanda, there are these 3 elements,³⁶ namely,

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

These, Ānanda, are the 3 elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

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

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these 2 elements,³⁷ namely,

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

These, Ānanda, are the 2 elements: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the elements.”

The one skilled in the 12 sense-bases

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

“There might be, Ānanda.

Ānanda, there are these 6 internal and 6 external sense-bases,³⁸ namely,

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

These, Ānanda, are the 6 internal and 6 external sense-bases: insofar as he sees them, to that extent, Ānanda, it is right to say that the monk is skilled in the sense-bases.”³⁹

The one skilled in dependent arising

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

³⁶ Also in **Das’uttara S** (D 34,1.10(13)/3:215); It 45. Comy says that the sense-sphere element as the 5 aggregates pertaining to the sense-sphere (*kāmāvacara*), the form element as the 5 aggregates pertaining to the form sphere (*rūpāvacara*), and the formless element as the 4 aggregates pertaining to the formless sphere (*arūpāvacara*) (MA 4:105). On the 3 realms, see **The person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b (7.2).

³⁷ Also in **Das’uttara S** (D 34), where they are called “the two things to be directly known” (*dve dhammā abhiñeyyā*, D 34,1.3(9)/3:274). Comy: The conditioned element includes everything produced by conditions and is a designation for the 5 aggregates. The unconditioned element is nirvana. (MA 4:106). See also Vbh §167/72 f, §184/89, §1020/421.

³⁸ The 12 bases are def at Vbh §§155-167/70-73 & explained in detail at Vism 15.1-6/481 f. The mind-base includes all types of consciousness, and thus comprises all 7 elements that function as consciousness. The mind-object is identical with the mind-object element.

³⁹ On the significance of being “skilled in the sense-bases,” see SD 50.1 (3.5.1.4). On the conditioned and the unconditioned, see **Das’uttara S** (D 34.1.3(9)/3:274).

SPECIFIC CONDITIONALITY. “Here, Ānanda, a monk understands thus:⁴⁰

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

11.2 that is to say,⁴¹

[DEPENDENT ARISING]

with ignorance as condition, there are	volitional formations;	<i>avijjā,paccayā</i>	<i>saṅkhārā</i>
with volitional formations as condition, there is	consciousness;	<i>saṅkhāra,paccayā</i>	<i>viññāṇaṃ</i>
with consciousness as condition, there is	name-and-form;	<i>viññāṇa,paccayā</i>	<i>nāma,rūpaṃ</i>
with name-and-form as condition, there are	the 6 sense-bases;	<i>nāma,rūpa,paccayā</i>	<i>saḷāyatanaṃ</i>
with the 6 sense-bases as condition, there is	contact;	<i>saḷāyatana,paccayā</i>	<i>phassa</i>
with contact as condition, there is	feeling;	<i>phassa,paccayā</i>	<i>vedanā</i>
with feeling as condition, there is	craving;	<i>vedanā,paccayā</i>	<i>taṇhā</i>
with craving as condition, there is	clinging;	<i>taṇhā,paccayā</i>	<i>upādānaṃ</i>
with clinging as condition, there is [64]	existence;	<i>upādāna,paccayā</i>	<i>bhavo</i>
with existence as condition, there is	birth;	<i>bhava,paccayā</i>	<i>jāti</i>
with birth as condition there arise	decay-and-death,	<i>jāti,paccayā</i>	<i>jarā,marañam</i>
sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,		<i>soka,parideva,dukkha,-</i>	
mental pain and despair.		<i>domanass’upāyasā sambhavanti</i>	
—Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.		<i>evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k,-</i>	
		<i>khandhassa samudayo hoti</i>	

11.3 [DEPENDENT ENDING]

But with the utter fading away and ending of ignorance,	volitional formations end;	<i>avijjāya tv-eva asesā,virāga,nirodhā</i>	
		<i>saṅkhāra,nirodho</i>	
with the ending of volitional formations,	consciousness ends;	<i>saṅkhāra,nirodhā</i>	<i>viññāṇa,nirodho</i>
with the ending of consciousness,	name-and-form ends;	<i>viññāṇa,nirodhā</i>	<i>nāma,rūpa,nirodho</i>
with the ending of name-and-form,	the 6 sense-bases end;	<i>nāma,rūpa,nirodhā</i>	<i>saḷāyatana,nirodho</i>
with the ending of the 6 sense-bases,	contact ends;	<i>saḷāyatana,nirodhā</i>	<i>phassa,nirodho</i>
with the ending of contact,	feeling ends;	<i>phassa,nirodhā</i>	<i>vedanā,nirodho</i>
with the ending of feeling,	craving ends;	<i>vedanā,nirodhā</i>	<i>taṇhā,nirodho</i>
with the ending of craving,	clinging ends;	<i>taṇhā,nirodhā</i>	<i>upādāna,nirodho</i>
with the ending of clinging,	existence ends;	<i>upādāna,nirodhā</i>	<i>bhava,nirodho</i>
with the ending of existence,	birth ends;	<i>bhava,nirodhā</i>	<i>jāti,nirodho</i>
with the ending of birth, there end	decay-and-death,	<i>jāti,nirodhā jarā,marañam</i>	
sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,		<i>soka parideva,dukkha,-</i>	
mental pain and despair.		<i>domanass’upāyasā nirujjhanti</i>	
—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.		<i>evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k,-</i>	
		<i>khandhassa nirodho hoti</i>	

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

⁴⁰ Also at **Dasa Bala S 1** (S 12.21/2:28). For examples of how the 2 parts (ab & cd) of this formula are applied and elaborated, see **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38): arising of suffering (M 38,19/1:262 f) and ending of suffering (M 38,22/1:264). See **Dependent Arising**, SD 5.16 (2); also M:ÑB 30 f.

⁴¹ See **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38,18-19/261-264). See also **Dependent Arising**, SD 5.16.

The one skilled in the possible and the impossible

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

THE 28 POSSIBILITIES AND IMPOSSIBILITIES⁴²

12.2 “Here, Ānanda, a monk⁴³

RIGHT VIEW

(1) understands that it is impossible, there is no chance,⁴⁴ that an individual attained to right view,⁴⁵ **would regard any formation**⁴⁶ **as permanent**—this is not possible. And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, *would regard any formation as permanent*—this is possible.

(2) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, **would regard any formation as pleasurable**⁴⁷—this is not possible. And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, *would regard any formation as pleasurable*—this is possible.

(3) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, **would regard any thing [dharma]**⁴⁸ **as self**—this is not possible. And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an ordinary worldling, *would regard any thing [dharma] as self*—this is possible.

⁴² This section as in **Aṭṭhāna Vagga** (A 1.15/1:26 f) = Vbh 809/335-338: see Intro (2). Cf **Parihāna S** (A 4.158), where 4 conditions are given as causing our spiritual decline, viz, too much lust (*rāga, vepullata*), too much hate (*dosa, vepullata*), too much delusion (*moha, vepullata*), and his wisdom-eye has not penetrated into the profundity of what is possible and what is impossible (*gambhīresu kho pan’assa ṭhāṇa-ṭ, ṭhānesu paññā, cakkhuṃ na kamati*); but for the skillful this is not the case (A 4.158/2:143 f). See also Paul J Griffiths, *On Being Buddha*, 1994: 118 f.

⁴³ §§12-13 refers to the individual “attained to right view” (*diṭṭhi, sampanno*), ie the streamwinner: his 9 qualities are listed in, eg, (**Avijjā**) **Paccaya S** (S 12.27,16), SD 39.12, where see nn.

⁴⁴ “It is impossible, there is no chance,” *aṭṭhānam etaṃ anavakāso*.

⁴⁵ Comy: **An individual attained to right view** (*diṭṭhi, sampanna*) is one possessing the view of path, ie, a streamwinner (the first of the 4 noble disciples) (MA 4:106), in which case, it would be the same as the “view-attainer” (*diṭṭhi-p, patta*): see **Kiṭṭāgiri S** (M 70), SD 11.1(5.2(2B)).

⁴⁶ Ie a conditioned formation (*saṅkhata, saṅkhāra*), ie anything conditioned or thing in this world or universe. Cf (3) here where *dhmma* is used.

⁴⁷ *Sukhato*. Comy says that a noble disciple other than an arhat can still regard formations as pleasurable with a mind associated with wrong view, but he would not hold the view that any formation is pleasurable. Although perceptions and thoughts of formations as pleasurable arise in him, he knows reflectively that notions are mistaken. (MA 4:106)

⁴⁸ Here we see “thing” (*dhmma*) in place of “formation” in the prec two sections. Also not the tr is a conditional “any thing” and not the universal “anything.” Comy says that this change is made to include concepts, such as kasiṇa sign, etc, where the ordinary person is likely to identify as self (MA 4:106). However, notes M:ÑB (1325 n1086), as nirvana is said to be “imperishable” (*accuta*) and “bliss” (*sukha*), and is likely to be misconceived as self [see **Mūla, pariyāya S** (M 1,26/1:4), SD 11.8], the term *saṅkhāra* comprises only the conditioned, but *dhmma* includes both the conditioned and the unconditioned. M:ÑB, however, admits that this is not endorsed by Buddhaghosa. In fact, this interpretation of *Dhmma* here is incorrect and unattested: see **Dhmma, niyāma S** (A 3.134/1:285), SD 26.8.

13 RIGHT CONDUCT

(4) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, **would deprive his mother of life**—this is not possible.⁴⁹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(9) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that an individual attained to right view, **would declare another as Teacher**—this is not possible.⁵⁰

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

14 THE BUDDHA AND THE UNIVERSAL MONARCH

(10) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that **2 worthy fully self-awakened ones** (*arahatā sammā,sambuddhā*) would simultaneously⁵¹ arise in *the same world system*—this is not possible.⁵²

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

⁴⁹ This section distinguishes the wise individual from the false individual: the latter is capable of any of the 5 heinous acts with immediate negative results (*ānantarika-* or *ānantariya kamma*, V 2:193; A 5.129/3:146; MA 2:351; AA 2:7 = VbhA 427; UA 243; PmA 402 ad Pm 1:124; KvuA 141-143; PugA 185 ad Pug 13). Comy states that a noble disciple is incapable of intentionally depriving any living being of life. The contrast is made to stress the potential of the ordinary person in committing matricide and patricide, and the strength of the noble disciple (MA 4:106).

⁵⁰ That is, declare another being as the Buddha or highest spiritual teacher.

⁵¹ *Apubbaṃ acarimam*, lit “not before, not after” (D 2:225,5; A 1:28,1; Pug 13,26; Miln 40,30; DhA 1:12,17).

⁵² As in **Mahā Govinda S** (D 19,13/2:224), SD 63.4. Also **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28,19/3:114), SD 14.4, **Bahu,dhātu-ka S** (M 115,14/3:65), SD 29.1a; **Aṭṭhāna Vagga** (A 1.15,10/1:27 f); Vbh 335. Comy says that the arising of another Buddha is impossible from the time the Bodhisattva takes his final conception until his dispensation (*sāsana*) has completely disappeared (MA 4:113). For a discussion, see Miln 236-239. See also SD 52.13 (1.3.2.3).

(11) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that **2 universal monarchs** would simultaneously arise *in the same world system*—this is not possible. And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that only one universal monarch would arise *in the same world system*—this is possible.

15 PATRIARCHY IN POST-BUDDHA INDIA

(12) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that a woman would become **a worthy fully self-awakened one**—this is not possible.⁵³ And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that only a person⁵⁴ would become *a worthy fully self-awakened*—this is possible.

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

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

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

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

16 UNWHOLESOME KARMA

(17) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that a wished for, desired, *agreeable result* could arise from **bodily misconduct**—this is impossible. And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an unwished for, undesired, *disagreeable result* could arise from *bodily misconduct*—this is possible.

(18) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that a wished for, desired, *agreeable result* could arise from **verbal misconduct**—this is impossible. And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that an unwished for, undesired, *disagreeable result* could arise from *verbal misconduct*—this is possible.

⁵³ The fact is that so far only men have become Buddhas, but this does not deny that a woman today cannot become a Buddha in due course. However, by that time, he would be reborn as a man. See **Jina, kāla, māli** (Ratana, -paññā, 16th cent Siam), where it is said that our Buddha was a woman in a distant past life (Jink:J 1978: 3): see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004: §18.

⁵⁴ *Puriso*, “person, individual, man,” ie, someone who has attained at least the human state but no lower. This applies throughout this section (12-16).

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

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

17 WHOLESOME KARMA

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

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

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

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

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

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

18 BAD DESTINIES

(23) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that one engaging in **bodily misconduct**, [67] on that account, dependent on that,⁵⁵ after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a happy state, in a heaven world—this is impossible.

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

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

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

⁵⁵ "On that account, dependent on that" (*tan nidāna tap paccayā*): This conjunctive phrase is significant as, in **Mahā Kamma, vibhaṅga S** (M 136/3:207-214), the Buddha shows that a person who does evil may be reborn in a heavenly world, and a person who does good may fall into a lower world—in which cases, however, some karma other than his habitual ones predominates. From the Sutta we know there are 3 such predominant, viz, a fruit of a good karma done *before* such an evil karma, a fruit of a good karma done *after* such an evil karma, and the last thought process (M 136,18/3:214), SD 4.16.

(25) He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that one engaging in **mental misconduct**, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a happy state, in a heaven world—this is impossible. And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, that one engaging in *mental misconduct*, on that account, dependent on that, after death, with the body's breaking up, could arise in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell—this is possible.

19 GOOD DESTINIES

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

“In that case, Ānanda, this Dharma discourse—

remember it as the “many elements,” or
 remember it as the “4 cycles,”⁵⁶ or
 remember it as the “Dharma mirror,” or
 remember it as the “Dharma drum,” or
 remember it as the “supreme victory in battle.”⁵⁷

*bahu,dhātuka,
 catu,parivaṭṭa,
 dhamm’ādāsa,
 dhamma,duṇḍubhī,
 anuttara saṅgāma,vijaya*

The Blessed One said this. Satisfied, the venerable Ānanda rejoiced in the Blessed One’s word.

— evaṃ —

Bibliography

See under “On Women’s Inabilities” @ SD 29.1b

For other titles, see **the SD Guide**

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⁵⁶ The “4 cycles” are the elements, the sense-bases, dependent arising, and the possible and the impossible (MA 4:126).

⁵⁷ Cf **Brahmajāla S** (D 1), where 5 titles, too, are given, and the 5th is the same as here: *anuttaro saṅgāma,vijaya* (D 1,148/1:46), SD 25.