

Chapter - IV

DISCUSSIONS OF ULTIMATE REALITIES (DHĀTU) FROM SUTTAS AND PRACTICAL POINT OF VIEW

4.1.1 The Great Element Meditation and *Mahā Rāhulovāda Sutta*¹

Suttanta and *Abhidhamma* cannot be separated. These two are like a coconut fruit. *Abhidhamma* is like the kernel and *Suttanta* is like the nut. According to a proverb, that is, “he who eats the kernel must crack the nut,” if someone hears or thinks about a discourse, he can feel the nut. If he hears or studies *Abhidhamma*, after cracking the *Sutta*-nut he can feel the kernel or essence. So concerning the element, to support clear comprehension, some discourses should be illustrated.

Rāhulovāda Sutta is an example. In the first *samgāyana* (Buddhist council), the most Venerable *Ānanda* addressed his proposal starting with this word: “Thus have I heard? On one occasion the Buddha was living at *Sāvattthi Jeta`’s Grove*.”

¹ Bhikkhu, Bodhi. *The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha (M.L.D.B)*, p. 527.

When it was morning, the Enlightened One dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, went into *Sāvatti* for alms. The venerable *Rāhulā* also dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, followed closely behind the Blessed One.

The Buddha looked back and addressed the Venerable *Rāhula* thus, “*Rāhulā*, any kind of material form whatever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all material form should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.”

The Venerable *Rāhulā* considered thus: “Who would go into the town for alms today when personally admonished by the Blessed One?” Thus he turned back and sat down at the root of a tree, folding his legs crosswise, setting his body erect, and establishing mindfulness in front of him. Venerable *Sāriputta* saw him sitting there and addressed him thus: “*Rāhulā* develop mindfulness of breathing. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit.”

When it was evening, Venerable *Rāhulā* rose from meditation and went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and asked the Blessed One. The Blessed One answered in detail and instructed to develop meditation that is like the earth, water, fire, air, space, on loving-kindness, on compassion, on appreciative joy, on equanimity, on foulness, on the perception of impermanence, on mindfulness of breathing.

Venerable *Rāhulā* was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One`s words.

4.1.2 Element-Meditation and *Anāthapindika Sutta*²

According to ‘Advice to *Anāthapindika* discourse’ Venerable *Sāruputta* gave advice to *Anāthapindika* as follow: “Householder, you should train thus: ‘I will not cling to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, forms, sounds, odours, flavours, tangibles, mind-objects, eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, mind-consciousness, eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, mind-contact, feeling born of eye-contact, feeling born of ear-contact, feeling born of nose-contact, feeling born of tongue-contact, feeling

² Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. Uparipannāpāli (MN.III), p. 301.

born of mind-contact, earth element, water element, fire element, air element, space element, consciousness element, material form, feeling, perception, formation, consciousness, the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, the base of nothingness, the base of neither-perception nor non-perception, this world, the world beyonded, what is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, encountered, sought after, examined by the mind, and my consciousness will not be depended on them respectively.’ Thus you should train.”

When this word was said, the householder *Anāthapindika* wept and shed tears. Then *Ānandā* asked him: “Are you foundering, householder, are you sinking?” And then the rich *Anāthapindika* gave response that he was not foundering and sinking. He asked for to preach this doctrine to lay people. And then he died and reappeared in the *Tusitā* celestial world.

4.1.3 King *Pukkusāti* and Element Meditation³

In his final life, *Pukkusāti* was reborn in a royal family and later became the king in the country of *Taxila*. It is situated in the southern part of *Peshwar* Township which lies within *punjab*, the province in the extreme North-Western part of India. King *pukkusāti*

³ Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. MN.III, p. 281.

had donned the yellow robe after his attainment of *jhāna* through the practice of *ānāpāna* which he had exercised, realizing the glorious attributes of the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha* on the strength of the informatory letter received from the king *Bimbisāra* of *Rājagaha*. After becoming a priest, he left his own native place to pay obeisance to the Blessed One. He reached *Rājagaha* where the Buddha was residing. There, while he was staying at the house of a potter, the Blessed One visited that potter's house. The Blessed One, then, delivered a Discourse on *Dhātuvihaṅga*, (elements).

These are six elements, six base of contact and eighteen kinds of mental exploration. Six elements are earth element, water element, fire element, air element, space element and consciousness element. In order to be clear, I would like to show originally as follows:

The earth element may be either internal or external. What is the internal earth element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and clung-to, that is, head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small

intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and clung-to: This is called the internal earth element. Now both are simple earth element. And that should be seen as it is actually is with proper wisdom thus: “This is not mine; this I am not, this is not my self.” When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the earth element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the earth element. In the same way, the Buddha preached about water element, fire element, air element, space element, consciousness element.

At the end of preaching, he asked for as a monk (*bhikkhu*): “Venerable sir, I would receive the full admission under the Blessed One. He asked “But are your bowl and robes complete, *Bhikkhu*?” *Pukkusāti* gave response “Venerable sir, my bowl and robes are not complete.” The blessed One said again “*Bhikkhu*, *Tathāgata*’s do not give the full admission to anyone whose bowl and robes are not complete.” Then *pukkusāti*, having delighted and rejoiced in the blessed One’s words, rose from his seat, and after paying homage to the Blessed One, keeping him on his right, he departed in order to

search for a bowl and robes. Then, while *pukkusāti* was searching a bowl and robes, a stray cow killed him.

Then a number of monks (*bhikkhus*) went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, they sat down at one side and told him: “Venerable sir, the clansman *pukkusāti*, who was given brief instruction by the Blessed One, has died. What is his destination? What is his future course? “Monks, the clansman *pukkusāti* was wise. He practiced in accordance with the *Dhamma* and did not trouble me in the interpretation of the *Dhamma*. With the destruction of the five lower fetters, the clansman *pukkusāti* has reappeared spontaneously [in the pure Abodes] and attain final *Nibbāna* there without ever returning from that world.” That is what the Blessed One said. The Monks (*bhikkhus*) were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

4.1.4 Discourse given to the rich man Ghosita⁴

For ordinary people, these element meditation subjects are applicable just like the rich person: *Ghosita*. On one occasion, Venerable *Ānandā* was residing at the *Ghositārāma* monastery in Kosambi. During that time the householder *Ghosita* approached

⁴ Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. Samyutta Nikāya Māvaggasamyutta Pāli (SIII), p.174.

Venerable *Ānandā* and exchanged greetings with him. After saying courteous and meaningful words of greeting he sat in a suitable place. Having sat in a suitable place, the householder addressed Venerable *Ānandā* in these words: “Venerable *Ānandā*, it is often said, ‘a variety of element,’ a variety of elements. Venerable sir, in what way has the *Bhagavā* explained ‘the variety of elements’?”

“Householder, there are the eye element, visible objects that are pleasing and eye-consciousness, pleasant sensation arises dependent on contact, which is the cause of pleasant sensation. Householder, there are the eye element, visible objects that are not pleasing and eye-consciousness, unpleasant sensation arises dependent on contact which is the cause of unpleasant sensation. Householder, there are the eye element, visible objects that are pleasing [*Manāpā*: the occurrence of this term at this point, we feel, is an oversight, considering that the term does not occur in the text in the case of ‘tongue’ and ‘mind’] that cause the arising of neutral sensation and eye-consciousness; neither pleasant nor unpleasant sensation arises dependent on contact which is the cause of neither pleasant nor unpleasant sensation, householder, there are the tongue element, tastes that are pleasing and tongue-consciousness;

pleasant sensation arises dependent on contact which is the cause of pleasing and tongue-consciousness; unpleasant sensation arises dependent on contact which is the cause of unpleasant sensation. Householder, there are the tongue-element, tastes that cause the arising of neutral sensation, and tongue-consciousness neither pleasant nor unpleasant sensation arises depended on contact which is the cause neither pleasant nor unpleasant sensation.

The rest of the elements should be understood in the same way. Householder, the *Buddha* has taught to this extent on the variety of elements.

In *suttanta-bhājanīya* of the *vibhanga* the Buddha stated the *ākāśadhātu* as the first sestet into twofold: internal and external. Internal space element means that which is personal, self-referable, space, spatial, void, voidness, and interstice, interstitial, not in contact with flesh or blood, internal, grasped. For example: aural passage, nasal passage, mouth-door; that by which the eaten, the drunk, the chewed, the tasted, is swallowed; that in which the eaten, the drunk, the chewed, the tasted rests; that by which the eaten, the

drunk, the chewed, the tasted passes out lower down; or whatever else there is.

External space element means that which is external, space, spatial, void, voidness, interstice, interstitial. Not in contact with the four great elements, external, not grasped.

As for the *Ākāsa*, there are four types of *ākāsa* from general point of view. They are:

1. *Ajatākāsa*, sky, heaven
2. *Paricchinnākāsa*, limited space
3. *Kasiṇugghāṭimākāsa*, the space that is obtained by removing *kasina* and
4. *Rūpaparicchēdākāsa*, the space which is limited by material groups.

4.1.5 The Enlightenment Factor of Investigation⁵

In order to enlighten, for those who are interested in education or intellectual case, one of seven factors of investigation should be practiced. There are seven things which lead to the arising of the enlightenment factor of investigation as follow:

⁵ Bhaddanta, Buddhaghosa. Abhi. II A, p. 263.

- 1) Frequent questioning,
- 2) Cleansing of the physical bases,
- 3) Balancing the controlling faculties,
- 4) Avoiding persons without understanding,
- 5) Associating with persons with understanding,
- 6) Reflecting on the field for the exercise of profound knowledge and
- 7) Being resolute to cultivate wisdom.

The frequent questioning, here, means repeated questioning about the meaning of aggregates, elements, bases, faculties, powers, enlightenment factors, path factors, *jhāna* factors, tranquillity and insight.

4.1.6. Practical Point of View

a. Primary Work⁶

What is pointed out by this? Bring to mind of the elements. But what is to be done by one who desires to reach the highest good, namely, Arahantship, by establishing insight through working on the bringing to mind of the elements? Virtue of the fourfold purity is to be purified. After establishing virtue, the ten preliminary obstacles

⁶ Bhaddanta, Buddhaghosa. Abhi.II A, p. 53.

must be cut off by one whose virtue is purified. In this work we should know ten obstacles in the following:

*“A dwelling, family, and gain,
A class, and building too as fifth,
And travel, kin, affliction, books,
And supernormal power: ten”,⁷*

Skill in learning in seven ways are verbally, mentally, as to colour, as to shape, as to direction, as to location, as to delimitation.⁸

Skill in bringing to mind in ten ways are as to following the order, not too quickly, not too slowly, as warding off distraction, as to surmounting the concept, as to successive leaving, as to absorption, as to the three *suttanta*.

b. Development of the determination of the four elements

This determination of the four elements is treated in two ways: 1) Briefly, 2) At length

Briefly in *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta* it is stated that “as a skillful butcher or his apprentice, having slaughtered a cow and divided into portions, were sitting at the junction of four highways, just so

⁷ Ven, Buddhaghosa. Vis. P. 86.

⁸ Bhaddanta, Buddhaghosa. Abhi. IIA, p. 53.

monks, a monk reflects upon this very body just as it is placed or disposed, with regard to its primary elements: there are in this body the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.”⁹ The commentator explains that it is stated briefly in it for the sake of one whom, being sharp of intellect, meditates on the elements.

In the *Mahāhatthipadopama sutta* it is said at length for the sake of them who, being not too sharp of intellect, meditate on the elements: “Friends, which is the earth element, water element, fire element, air element that is personal? Everything personal and referable to an individual which is hard, solid, or derived there from... such as the hairs of the head having the two *koti* and four hundred million or the hairs of the body having the ninety nine thousand, which grow on the inner skin that envelops the body, nails having twenty, which grow at the tips of the fingers and toes, teeth having thirty two, which grow in the jaw-bones, skin having two, which is to be found covering the whole body, and so on altogether 32 parts of body as the earth element, together with anything else that, which is water, watery or derived there from —

⁹ Ven, Sīlānanda; *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (F.F.M)*. p.12.

such as bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, solid fat, tears, liquid fat (serum or grease), saliva (spittle), mucus, synovial fluid (oil of the joints), urine together with anything else that, which is fire, fiery, or derived.

Rāhulovāda and *Dhātuvibhāga suttas* refer to the force such as whatever heats, consumes, or burns up, or whatever wholly transmutes food and drink in digestion; which is air, or derived there from such as wind discharged upwards or downwards, wind in the stomach or abdomen, vapors that traverse the several members, inhaling and exhaling of breath, together with anything else that.”¹⁰

c. Reflection on the Material Elements

The Buddha uttered the *catudhātuvavatthāna* meditation, reflection on the material elements for *Samatha yānika* as well as *Vipassanānika* in *Satipatthāna sutta* and *Mahāttthipadopama sutta* and so on thus: “and again, *bhikkhus*, a bhikkhu reflects upon this very body just as it is placed or disposed, with regard to its primary elements: There are in this body the earth elements, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.

¹⁰ Ledi, Sayadaw, *The New Treatises of Element Meditation* (N.T.E.M). p.59.

Actually in-and-out breathing is also a kind of *vāyo dhātu*. For *samathayānika* it is a particular object of meditation. It is the easiest meditation object for meditators. Many meditation teachers usually instruct the yogis to begin the retreat with mindfulness of breathing. There are many ways of meditation practice. But the method commonly used in Myanmar is the mindfulness on in-and-out breathing, the one and only *dhamma*, which is practiced by every Buddha-to-be to attain his supreme enlightenment.

Every individual can avail himself of this simple practice, for breathing is the most obvious thing to one and all. The nose is a prominent part of the body. The in-and-out breath is ever touching the nostrils. Though there is constant breathing yet he cannot get the advantageous benefits from it only because he does not understand that this very breathing meditation can offer him genuine peace and real happiness. From the *Theravāda* Buddhist point of view, any method that can lead towards the final emancipation from the rounds of *samsāra* is regarded as good and appropriate. So, the systematic way of practice with its main aim of final liberation is most important in taking up meditation.

The purpose of sitting strait and comfortably either cross-legged or on a straight-backed chair is to stop the Yogi from falling asleep and to keep his mind clear and alert. So, choose the one which is easiest to maintain, either cross-legged, or on a chair, or Myanmar style, or Indian style, or Japanese style.

The next step is to fix one's awareness on the in-and-out breathing as they occur at the tip of the nose. Just let the breath do as it is in abnormal way. Sometimes, it will be strong, sometimes weak, short or long. The important thing is to be aware and mindful of how it is now, or just at the present moment. It is not a breathing exercise, but a method of developing mindfulness.

We have constantly to note the sensation of touch of the breath at the nose tip as much as we can. But our breath should neither be too strong nor too soft, but just moderate. Try to prevent the mind wandering into thoughts, dreams, and discursive thinking. Do not force the mind to stop doing these things. Let it function as normally and regularly as possible. At the time of sitting, just return the mind and give our awareness to the breath at the nose tip. The moment we give attention to the breath, the distractions will

disappear. The more we think about idea, etc., the more distractions we create.

So, keep returning the awareness only to the breath. Try to follow each breath one at a time being aware of the beginning, middle and end. At first you will not be able to know the whole truth of breath, but after some time of practice, you will gain concentration and it will become easier.

In the *Vinaya* Commentary commentator defined that out-breath is *assāsa*, in-breath is *passāsa* whereas in the discourse commentaries the commentator said that in-breath is *assāsa*, out-breath is *passāsa*. For those who were born from mother`s womb, as soon as they were born, inner-air comes out. After that outer-air, carrying the gentle dust particle enters. It ceases, touching the hard palate. Therefore infant must do the sneezing. Thus, as soon as they were born, being the out-breath first, at the beginning inhaling by means of conception is called *assāsa*.¹¹

The next exhaling is *passāsa*.¹² Thus, *Vinaya* commentator said, noting the process of rebirth. During the life time when someone is

¹¹ Bhaddanta, Buddhaghosa. *Vinayapitaka, Pārājikandatthakathā* (Vin. IIA), p.12.

taking the meditation, he or she must inhale first. Later on must be exhaled. Therefore at the beginning in-breath of by means of the process of happing is *assāsa*. *Samantapāsādikā* explains that out-breathing towards is *assāsa*.¹³ The next out-breathing is *passāsa*. Thus the new commentator said, noting the process of arising in *Suttantas*. In that commentary he said in-breath is *passāsa*.¹⁴

d. Element meditation for Sukkha Vipassanānika

When the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body respectively comes into contact with a visible object, a sound, an odour, a flavour, a tangible object, both of them being physical phenomena, the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongues, the body-consciousness that arises from their contact is a mental phenomenon. This is how mind and matter arises at the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body base.

With regard to the elements responsible for sensitivity and consciousness, the eye-base, the ear-base, the nose-base, the tongue-base is the element of eye-sensitivity, ear-sensitivity, nose-sensitivity, tongue-sensitivity, body-sensitivity respectively. The eye,

¹² Bhaddanta, Buddhaghosa. Vinayapitaka, Pārājikandatthakathā (Vin. IIA), p.13.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.14.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.14.

the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body-consciousness is the element of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body-consciousness. The visible object, sound, odour, taste object, tangible object; and thus these three Elements arise at the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body.

When the heart-base comes into contact with a mind object, the two being physical phenomena, the mind-consciousness that arises from their contact is a mental phenomenon. This is how mind-and-matter arises at the heart base.

Regarding the elements, the mind-consciousness is the element of mind-consciousness. The mind-object which has become the element of apprehension is the element of mind-consciousness. The sixteen types of subtle corporeality and the relevant mental concomitants are the *dhammadhātu*, the element of mind-object. Thus there arise the three elements at the Heart-base. Among these opinions *Suttanta* opinion is better than other due to agreement to “*assāsādi majjha pariyosānam... anjitā ca phanditā ca*”, the process of the life time is needed for those who are practicing the meditation. This is *Sārattha* sub-commentary`s remark and decision.

A Myanmar *Sayadaw* (Buddhist monk) explains that there are 720 in-breath and out-breath in one hour. In one day there is 60 hours in Myanmar, in universal time 24 hour. Thus in universal time one hour has 900 out-breaths and 900 in-breaths. If we combine them, we can get 1800. One day there is 43200 total in-and-out breathing. In one minute there are 30 in-and-out breaths. In two second there is one set of in-and-out breathing. The modern scientists said that in ordinary for one person, he or she used to breathe 16 times in one minute.¹⁵

Here, we should try to know about *Bāhiya Dāruciya*. On order to be clear I would like to illustrate with it. It is a very interesting story about a householder, called *Bāhiya*, who received an extraordinary opportunity of attaining *Arahattaship* on the spot as soon as the Buddha`s teaching, had ended.

He was born in a family of the clan of *Bāhiya*, hence his name was so-called and he was engaged in trade, travelling on a ship. Seven times he sailed down the Indus and across the sea and returned safely home. On the eighth occasion, while on his way to

¹⁵ Ven, Kumāra. Yamaka Pankone (Ypk II), p. 219.

Suvṇṇabhūmi, his ship was wrecked, he fortunately floated towards the shore on a plank, reaching the land near *Suppāraka*.

Having lost all his clothes, he put on a garment made of bark and went about with a bowl in his hand for alms in *Suppāraka*. People, seeing his garment and impressed with his demeanor, paid him great honor. Though they offered costly robes and many other luxuries he refused them all and thus his fame increased. Because of his bark-garment, he was known as *Dāruciriya*. In due course, he imagined that he had attained Arahata-ship. But a celestial being reading his thoughts and wishing him to be on the right path, pointed out his error to him and advised him to seek the Buddha at *Sāvṭṭhi*.

By the power of the celestial being, *Bāhiya* reached *Sāvṭṭhi* in one night, a distance of 120 leagues and was told that the Buddha was in the city begging for alms. *Bāhira* then followed Him there and begged to think something for his salvation. Twice he asked and twice the Buddha refused saying that it was not the hour for teaching. But *Bāhiya* insisted saying that life was uncertain and so the *Bāhiya* might die at any time. The Buddha, then, guided him the

proper method of mindfulness on all sense experiences, namely, only on the sensory experiences and no more, i.e. “Be aware or mindful of just the seen in what is seen¹⁶; just the heard in what is heard; just the touch or tangibility in what is touched; smell, taste, touch; and just the thought in what is thought”.

Even while *Bāhiya* was listening he became an *Arahanta*. The Holiest Noble One and the Buddha left him. Shortly after *Bāhiya* was gored to death by a cow with a calf, the Buddha seeing his body lying on the dung heap, asked the monks to remove it and to have it burnt and to erect a pagoda over the remains. In the *Saṅgha* assembly the Buddha declared *Bāhiya* to be the foremost among those who instantly comprehended the Noble Truths with a speedy super-knowledge. The Buddha, knowing about this, uttered the paean of joy as follows: “There is no existence of earth, water, fire, air in *Nibbāna*, nor shining of the stars, nor the sun, nor the moon, yet nor darkness, either.” The Worthy One (*Arahanta*), after realization of *Nibbāna* by himself, has been emancipated from mind, matter and suffering.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. Theragāthā (Khu. III), p. 85.

¹⁷ Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. Khu., p. 127.

e. Exhortation of Nandaka

Venerable *Nandaka* told the *bhikkhuni*s (Female monks) as follow: "Sister, this talk will be in the form of questions. When you understand you should say: "We understand, when you do not understand you say: "we do not understand, when you are doubtful or perplexed you should ask me, 'how is this, Venerable sir? What is the meaning of this?'"

"Venerable sir, we are satisfied and pleased with the Master *Nandaka* for inviting us in this way."

"Sister, what do you think? Is the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, the mind, what do you think? Are forms, sounds, odours, flavours, tangibles, mind-objects, and what do you think? Is eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, and body-consciousness, mind-consciousness permanent or impermanent? "Impermanent Venerable sir." "what is impermanent, suffering or happiness?" Suffering Venerable sir." "What is impermanent suffering and, subject to change fit to be regarded thus: "this is mine, this I am, and this is my self?" "No,

Venerable sir. Why is that? Because, Venerable sir, we have already seen this well as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: These six internal bases six external bases, these six classes of consciousness are impermanent.”

“Good, good, sister! So it is with a noble disciple who sees this as it actually is with proper wisdom.”

“Sister, suppose oil-lamp is burning: its oil is impermanent and subject to change. Its wick is impermanent and subject to change, its flame is impermanent and subject to change, and its radiance is impermanence and subject to change. Now would anyone be speaking rightly who spoke thus: “While this oil-lamp is burning, its oil, wick, and flame are impermanent and subject to change, but its radiance is permanent, everlasting, and eternal, not subject to change?” “No, Venerable sir, Why is that? Because, Venerable sir, while that oil-lamp is burning, its oil, wick, and flame are impermanent and subject to change, so its radiance must be impermanent and subject to change.”

“So too, sisters, would anyone be speaking rightly who spoke thus: “These six internal bases are impermanent and subject to

change, but the pleasant, painful, or neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling that one experiences in dependence upon the six internal bases is impermanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change’?

“No, Venerable sir,” “Why is that? Because each feeling arises in dependence upon its corresponding condition, and with the cessation of its corresponding condition, the feeling ceases.”

“Good, good, sisters! So it is with a noble disciple who sees this as it actually is with proper wisdom.”

At last, just as the moon is clearly full, so too, those *bhikkhunīs* were satisfied with *Nandaka*’s teaching of the *dhamma* and their intention were fulfilled.¹⁸

As a practical way, we should know like this. Usually we think that everything is permanent. In fact, all are impermanent. What we see today tomorrow we cannot see. We can see in day time, but at night it can be lost, we may not see. Actually that is nature. Because of ignorance, craving, conceit, wrong-view and so forth, we cannot see as it really is. Whatever element arise, we can contemplate or watch them to understand with insight meditation.

¹⁸ Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. MN.III, p. 214.

At first, we should practice the four primary elements as the tranquillity meditation and then we can watch the elements as the insight meditation. We should note that there are three types of meditators such as *samathayānika*, *vipassanāyānika* and *yuganaddha*. We can go through one after another. By practicing this way, we can get path, fruition and *Nibbānic* Bliss with six psychic power and four analytical insights.

If we neglect meditation, we will be burned by greed, hatred and ignorance in our daily life. Regarding this burning, the Buddha showed it in the fire sermon,¹⁹ "...just like, *bhikkhus*, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind is burning, visible forms, sounds, odours, flavours, tangible things, mental objects are burning, visual consciousness, auditory consciousness, olfactory consciousness, gustative consciousness, tactile consciousness, mental consciousness is burning respectively, also whatever sensation, pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant, arises on account of the mental impression, that too is burning.

These all are burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hate and with fire delusion. I say it is burning with birth, aging and

¹⁹ Walpola, Rāhulā; What the Buddha Taught (W.B. T), p. 95.

death, with sorrows, with lamentation, with pains, with grieves, with despairs. '*Bhikkhus*, a learned and noble disciple, who sees (things) thus, becomes dispassionate with regard to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, visual forms, sounds, odours, flavours, tangible things, mental objects (idea, etc.), visual consciousness, auditory consciousness, olfactory consciousness, gustative consciousness, tactile consciousness, mental consciousness, the visual impression, auditory impression, olfactory impression, gustative impression, tactile impression, mental impression, also whatever sensation, pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant, arises on account of mental impression, with regard to that too he becomes dispassionate. Being dispassionate, he becomes detached, and through detachment he is liberated. When liberated there is knowledge that he is liberated. And he knows: Birth is exhausted, the holy life has been lived, what has to be done is done, there is no more left to be done on this account.'

This the Blessed One said. The *bhikkhus* were glad, and they rejoiced at his words. While this exposition was being delivered, the

minds of those thousand *bhikkhus* were liberated from impurities, without attachment.

By seeing these events, we should try to get rid of greed and so on. We should try to practice element meditation in order to avoid all impurities. If we sum up all elements, we can get two types that are mind and body. We all are hustle and bustle from morning to night in daily life. Finally, we may practice insight meditation on One's own mind and body in brief, for example, these five aggregates of mind and body are impermanent due to the nature of passing away, suffering due to the nature of fearfulness and insubstantial due to the nature of voidness.²⁰

4.1.7 Dhātu in Samyutta Nikāya

a. Fire Sermon

In *Āditta pariyāya sutta* in *Samyutta-nikāya* the Buddha points out to a thousand *bhikkhus* that the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, visible form, sounds, odours, flavours, tangible things, mental objects (idea, etc.) visual consciousness, auditory consciousness, olfactory consciousness, gustative consciousness, tactile consciousness, mental consciousness are burning. Visual impression,

²⁰ Nārada thera, MOBA, p2

auditory impression, olfactory impression, gustative impression, tactile impression, mental impression are burning, also whatever sensation, pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant, arises on account of mental impression, that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with fire of lust, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion, this is an answer.

The Buddha said that, going on, it is burning with birth, aging and death, with sorrow, with lamentation, with pain, with grieves, with despairs.

A learned and noble disciple, who sees thing thus, becomes dispassionate with regard to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, visual forms, sounds, odours, flavours, tangible things, mental object (ideas, etc), visual consciousness, auditory consciousness, olfactory consciousness, gustative consciousness, tactile consciousness, mental consciousness, the visual impression, auditory impression and so on. Finally whatever sensation, pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant, arises on account of mental impression, with regard to that too he becomes dispassionate.

As a consequence, the Buddha showed thus, being dispassionate, he becomes detached; through detachment he is liberated. When liberated there is knowledge that he is liberated.²¹

b. Perspective of *Dhātu Samyutta*

Regarding the *Dhātu* (element) the Buddha expounded *dhātusamyutta* in *Nidānavagga samyutta* dividing into four groups (*vagga*); *nānatta vagga*, *dutiya vagge*, *kamma patha vagga* and *catuttha vagga*.

In the first group ten discourses are as follows:

1. *Dhātunānatta sutta*= discourse on the diversity in elements,
2. *Phassanānatta sutta*= discourse on the diversity of contact,
3. *Noohassanānatta sutta*= discourse on the no-diversity of contact,
4. *Vedanānānatta sutta*= discourse on diversity of feeling,
5. *Dutiya vedanā nānatta sutta*= second discourse on diversity of feeling,
6. *Bāhiradhātunānatta sutta*= discourse on the diversity in external elements,

²¹ Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. SN, I, p. 28.

7. *Sannānānatta sutta*= discourse on the diversity of perception,
8. *Nopariyesanā nānatta sutta*= discourse on the diversity of in the non-inverse of order,
9. *Bāhiraphassa nānatta sutta*= discourse on the diversity of external contact,
10. *Dutiya bāhira nānatta sutta*= second discourse on the diversity of external contact.

In the second group, there are twelve discourses. These are:

1. *Sattadhātu sutta*= discourse on these seven elements,
2. *Sanidāna sutta*= discourse on with causal basis,
3. *Giñjakāvāsatha sutta*= discourse on brick hall,
4. *Hīnādhimuttika sutta*= discourse on low tastes,
5. *Cankama sutta*= discourse on conduct,
6. *Sagāthā sutta*= discourse on with verses,
7. *Asaddhasamsandana sutta*= discourse on unbelievers,
8. *Asaddhamulaka sutta*= discourse on based on unbelievers,
9. *Ahīrikamūlakasutta*= discourse on the unconsciousness,
10. *Anottappamūlaka sutta*= discourse on the indiscreet,
11. *Appasutamūlaka sutta*= discourse on the uneducated,
12. *Kusītamūlaka sutta*= discourse on the lazy.

In the third group of *kamma*patha (courses of action), there are seven *suttas*. These are:

1. *Asamāhita sutta*= discourse on the unconcentrated,
2. *Dussīla sutta*= discourse on the vicious,
3. *Pañca sikkhāpada sutta*= discourse on the five moral precepts,
4. *Satta kamma*patha *sutta*= discourse on the seven causes of action,
5. *Dasakamma*patha *sutta*= discourse on ten causes of action,
6. *Aṭṭhangika sutta*= discourse on the eightfold
7. *Dasaṅga sutta*= discourse on ten factors

In the fourth group, there are ten discourses. They are:

1. *Catudhātu sutta*= discourse on four elements,
2. *Pubbesambodha sutta*= discourse on “before-enlightenment”,
3. *Acarim sutta*= discourse on “I walked”,
4. *Nocedam sutta*= discourse on “if they were not this”,
5. *Ekanta dikkha sutta*= discourse on “entire-pain”,
6. *Abhinanda sutta*= discourse on “taking delight in”,
7. *Uppāda sutta*= discourse on “uprising”,

8. *Samāṇa brahmaṇa sutta*= discourse on “recluses and Brahmins”,
9. *Dutiya samāṇabrahmaṇa sutta*= Second discourse on “recluses and Brahmins”,
10. *Tatiya samāṇabrahmaṇa sutta*= Third discourse on “recluses and Brahmins.

All the discourses were delivered in *Sāvatti*, the capital city of *Kosalla*. These all are interesting to study and to comprehend.

Discourse on Seven Elements²² is included in this *Dhātu samyutta*. This *sutta*'s main points are that there are seven elements:

1. Radiance element
2. Beauty element
3. Sphere-of-boundless-space element
4. Sphere-of-boundless-consciousness element
5. Sphere-of-nothingness element
6. Sphere-of-neither-perception-nor-non-perception element
7. Cessation-of-perception-and-feeling element

In this *sutta* a certain monk said, “Venerable Sir, depending on what do these elements appear?” The Buddha gave response:

²² Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. SN, II, p. 358.

- “Depending on bewilderment, this radiance element appears,
- Depending on disgusting, beauty element appears,
- Depending on matter, sphere-of-infinite space element appears,
- Depending on the base of infinite space, sphere-of-infinite consciousness element appears,
- Depending on the base of infinite consciousness, sphere-of-nothing element appears,
- Depending on the base of infinite consciousness, sphere-of-neither-perception-nor-non-perception element appears,
- Depending on cessation, cessation-of-perception-and-feeling element appears.”

4.2. SOME NOTABEL ASPECTS OF ULTIMATE REALITIES OF ELEMENTS

4.2.1 Discourse on Elements

Discourse on elements is the second treatise of *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, in name, *Dhātukathā*. Here from aggregate to Arana *dhammas* named *dhātu* are expounded. Although this is called *dhātukathā*, in this treaty the Buddha preached not only the *dhātu* but

also *khandhā* and *āyatana*. But also these three, *dhātus* are greater than others. Being of the great sphere, by remarking it, all the parts are called *dhātukathā*.

This discourse is said to be very difficult to learn. There is one saying among Buddhist monks that the great book, *Patthāna*; the small book, *Chanda*; the middle book, *Dhātukathā* are most difficult to learn and to teach in Buddhist *pāli* literature.

We can see the interrelation among the *Khandha*, *Āyatana*, *Dhātu* and in the following table.

Table 4.2.1 : Classification aggregate, base and elements

4 Ultimate Realities	28 Matter	52 Mental Factors	89 Citias	Nibbāna
5 Aggregates	Materiality	Feeling Perception Formation	Consciousness	None
12 Sense bases	10 Internal and External bases	Mental object base (Subtle matter, mental factors, Nibbāna)	Mind-base	
18 Elements	10 internal and external elements	Mental object base (Subtle matter, mental factors, Nibbāna)	5-sense consciousness element, Mind Elements, Mind Consciousness elements	

4.2.2 Elements and Medicine

According to *Bhesajjanaya*, there are seven *sarira* elements such as *rasadhātu*, blood *dhātu*, meat *dhātu*, fat *dhātu*, bone *dhātu*, marrow *dhātu*, and semen *dhātu*. Rasa element performs to develop and increase. Blood element functions longevity. Meat element performs the lotion. Fat element functions sticky and attached. Bone element functions standing. Marrow element acts as being stout, semen element function to make pregnancy. Others say that the last one is one kind of matter. In fact, the material quality of collocation is taken with the element of cohesion.²³

Meditation masters say that one of the reasons why a person becomes sick is the imbalance or disturbances of elements. Practicing of four elements meditation enables one to balance the four elements in the body. One may at some time get sick because of the four elements are out of balance.

There are many types of afflictions. Some afflictions are produced by previous *kamma*, such as the Buddha's back pain. Some

²³ Pe, Maung Tin. Exp. p. 442,

afflictions are due to unbalanced four elements. Those afflictions produced by *kamma* cannot be cured by only balancing its four elements. But some affliction that occurs because of unbalanced four elements may disappear when the meditator tries to balance those elements.²⁴

4.2.3 Attraction of Elements

There is one English proverb; “birds of a feather flock together”. A. Johnson explains in his “Common English Proverbs” that people of similar tastes and habits like to associate with one another. Birds of the same kind collect in flocks.²⁵

If elements are the same, they can combine with each other easily. According to *Dhātusamsandana Sutta, Samyutta and Itivuttaka Khuddaka Nikāya*, beings can be friends or can associate with each other, when their elements are the same. If not, they cannot. So the Buddha expounded, “*Bhikkhus!* Beings associate and accompany by being by means of nature (element).”²⁶

²⁴ Ven, Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw, *Knowing and Seeing*, p. 96.

²⁵ John, A; *Common English Proverb (C.E.P)*, p. 88.

²⁶ Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. SN, I, p. 370.

If we live together with a foolish person, there are chances that foolishness will gradually transfer to us. In the same way, a person may become wise by living with a wise person.

4.2.4 Dream and Elements

Four kinds of dream are given in the scriptures²⁷

1. *Pubbanimitta*; prognostic
2. *Anubbūta*; reflection on past experience
3. *Devatā upsamhāra*; teasing by the deities
4. *Dhatukkhobha*; agitation due to element.

4.2.5 Elements and Science

As we have shown above, a lot of elements are enumerated in Buddhism. Nevertheless, Buddhism does not necessarily claim to have proposed the complete list. Chemical Science also tries to find and explain various elements which are, of course, different from what are explained in Buddhism. According to Chemistry, elements are substances that cannot be separated into simpler substances by chemical methods. The explanation of Buddhism is ultimately for the purpose of liberation. As for Chemistry it is not so. Buddhism

²⁷ Arahanat, Upatissa; On the Path of Freedom (POF), p. 323.

asks us to find those elements by our own wisdom whereas Chemistry uses instruments to find them.

In Chemistry, the modern chemists state that there are 100 chemical elements, in according with Oxford Advanced Learner`s Dictionary.²⁸ In the Chambers 21st Century Dictionary,²⁹ 105 chemical elements such as hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and so on are mentioned. Yet scientists are still searching for newer elements. They say that all matters in the world are made up of elements. Oxygen, for example, is the most common element on earth.

However, scientists can use nuclear reactions or radioactive decay to produce new elements. The goal is to find new material phenomenon and new ways to study chemistry. Russian and American scientists recently announced the discovery of two new chemical elements. Their findings appear in the magazine 'physical Review C'. Each element has a different number of protons in its nucleus. The two new elements have been named Ununtrium (Uut) and Ununpentium (Uup).³⁰ In the Chemical Elements; we might

²⁸ Oxford Advanced Learner`s Dictionary (OALD), p. 390.

²⁹ Chamber`s 21st Century Dictionary (CCD), p. 426.

³⁰ American Mosaic (A.M), p. 6.

understand element, symbol, atomic number, periodic table, bonds, equations, equilibrium, etc.

Actually, these elements and '*satta*', '*jiva*', in the sense of 'soul' of current metaphysic, are only names or concepts (*paññatti*).³¹ If we study the chemical elements, we need to study equations, periodic table of the elements, bonds, etc. these are merely names and concepts that create more names and concepts in us. But the elements found in Buddhist text cannot be distinguished easily. It needs a lot of practice in meditation to be able to know them in detail. In fact, all of them cannot be actually comprehended by a normal meditator. They are said to be the field of *Buddha* and *Arahants* like *Sāriputta*. For in *Milinda Pañhā* Ven. *Nāgasena* said to King *Milinda* that they cannot be easily distinguished.³²

4.2.6 Concept, Nature and Characteristic

There is a saying in Myanmar regarding the element. '*Panyat thwar yar dhat thet pa*'. It means, in general, where ever conception goes to, life of element comes along with it. But in rendering this, a professor suggests, according to conception, element may be (come).

³¹ U Shwe Zan Aung. Compendium of philosophy (C.p). p. 255.

³² Davids, Rhys T.W. Question of Milinda (Mpa). P. 97.

Here Venerable *Setthila*'s explanation on realities should be noted. According to the *Abhidhamma* philosophy there are two kinds of realities, relative and ultimate. Relative reality is conventional truth in which things are dealt with in an ordinary sense, while ultimate reality is abstract truth which exists as the irreducible, immutable, fundamental qualities of phenomena.

Of the two, relative reality is expressed in ordinary conventional terms such as 'cups exist', 'plates exist', and so on. This expression is true, but only in the ordinary conventional sense; in an ultimate sense no cups or plates actually exist, only the essential elements which exist in the ultimate sense are fourfold element.

He explained the conventional and ultimate in detail that these four great elements are inseparable and interrelated. The essence of Buddha *Abhidhamma* also mentions it by giving the example like that: Fire in Water, and Water in fire. Now a dust particle or the whole earth is made up of *avinibbhogarūpas*. So, the earth must contain all the eight *rupas-viz.*, *pathavi*, *āpo*, *tejo*, *vāyou*, *vaṇṇa*, *gandha*, *rasa* and *ojā*, of these *pathavi* is predominant. Similarly, water must also contain all the eight *avinibbhogarūpas*, but here *āpo* is

predominant. As water contains *tejo* the element of fire, we may say there is fire in water. In the same way, fire must contain all the eight *avinibbhogarūpas*, *tejo* being predominant. As fire contains *āpo* — the element of water, we may say that fire contains water.

All forms of matter are composed of them. Every material object is a combination of these elements in one proportion or another, but as soon as the same matter is changed into different forms, the composite things is held to be mere conceptions presented to the mind by the particular appearance, shape or form. Take a piece of clay, for example. It may be called a cup, plate, pot, jar and so on, according to the several shapes it assumes in succession, but these objects cannot be analyzed and reduced to fundamental elements which alone exist in the ultimate sense.

The term cup, plate and so on, are mere conceptions which have no separate essential substance other than the elements. In spite of the existence of these four elements in an ultimate sense they are subject to the law of change, but their distinctive characteristic are identical in whatever shape they are found, whether as a cup, plate, pot, jar and so on.

Relative reality includes such ideas as land, mountain, and the like, being derived from some mode of physical changes in nature. House, train, boat, etc., are derived from the combination of materials. Man dog, cat etc., are derived from the fivefold set of aggregates. Locality (i.e., the location of east, west, etc., in relation to the sun), time, etc., are derived from the revolutions of the moon and so forth.

The categories of ultimate reality are four: consciousness, mental properties (mental concomitants), matter and Nibbāna.³³ Although the primary aim of Buddha is to show the ultimate reality, He preached in many places through conventional terms. Although they are not true in the ultimate sense, it is true in the way of convention, not false. Therefore a commentator says:

*“Dve saccāni akkhāsi. Sambuddho vadatam varo.
Sammutim paramatthañca. Tatiyam nūpalabhati”³⁴*

This verse means that Buddha, who is the noblest of those who are eloquent, uttered two truths: conventional and ultimate. The third type of truth does not exist.

³³ Ashin, Thittila. Essential themes of Buddhist Lecture (ETBL), p. 114.

³⁴ Ven, Buddhaghosa. Silakkhandhavaggaṭṭhakathā (S.V.A). p. 316.

4.2.7 Conditioned and Unconditioned elements

We read in the element *sutta*, *Itivuttaka*³⁵: “These three, monks are elements. Which are these? The element consisting of form, the element consisting of formless, the element consisting of cessation ... having fully understood the element consisting of form, and not standing firm in those that are formless-these folk who, in cessation, are liberated leave death behind.”

These are concerning with two elements: the element of the conditioned (*sankhata-dhātu*) and the element of unconditioned (*Asankhata-dhātu*). Conditioned element means the name of things, ‘material or immaterial,’ produced by causes or conditions.³⁶ The unconditioned element means *Nibbāna*, in *pāli*, in Sanskrit *nirvāna* which is eternal (*dhuva*), desirable (*subha*), and happy (*sukha*), not produced by any cause. *Nibbāna*, the last ultimate reality is unconditioned element. The remaining ultimate realities are conditioned elements. The Oxford Advanced Learner`s Dictionary defines that Nirvana means the state of perfect bliss in which the individual becomes absorbed into the supreme spirit in both the

³⁵ Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. Itivuttaka (Iti). P. 51.

³⁶ Ven, Buddhaghosa, Vis II, p. 249.

Buddhism and Hinduism.³⁷ It is true in the case of the former. It may or may not be true for the latter.

The Buddha expounded the three characteristics of *Saṅkhata* and *Asaṅkhata* in *Āṅguttaranikāya*.³⁸ “These three are the feature of all conditioned things:-arising (*uppāda*), cessation (*vaya*), and change of state (*thitassa aññathattam*)”.

The three features of *Nibbāna* are as follows:

- (1) Arising does not appear in *Nibbāna*
- (2) Cessation does not appear in *Nibbāna*
- (3) Change of state does not appear in *Nibbāna*.

Regarding the unconditioned element called *Nibbāna*, the Buddha elucidates seven types of *Nibbāna* in the *Itivuttaka*:

- 1) *Diṭṭhadhamma Nibbāna*, *Nibbāna* belongings to the present existence,
- 2) *Samparāyika Nibbāna*, *Nibbāna* belongings to a future state,
- 3) *Saupādisesa Nibbāna*, the element of *Nibbāna* with the residue remaining,

³⁷ OALD. p. 836.

³⁸ Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar. AN.I. p. 150.

- 4) *Anupādisesa Nibbāna*, the element of *Nibbāna* without the residue remaining,
- 5) *Suññata Nibbāna*, void-*Nibbāna*,
- 6) *Animitta Nibbāna*, signless-*Nibbāna*, and
- 7) *Appaṇihita Nibbāna*, desireless-*Nibbāna*.

The characteristics of *Nibbāna* have been shown in Chapter II, here we should know the attributes of *Asaṅkhatadhātu*. These are an objective state which is deathless, absolutely endless, non-conditioned, and incomparable. Regarding uncaused," Compendium of Philosophy" states that this word is explained in the Ceylon commentaries by *paccayehi asaṅkhatattā*, (so-called) because of not being subject to further causation and conditioning. *Ledi Sayadaw* writes *sankharanākkiccarahitattā* (so called) because it is devoid of the function of causing, or conditioning well.³⁹

Etymologically, *Nibbāna* is derived from *ni + √vu*, to weave, means non-craving or non-attachment, or departure from craving. Strictly speaking, *Nibbāna* is that *dhamma* which is gained by the complete destruction of all forms of craving. It is also derived from *ni+√vā*, to blow. In that case *Nibbāna* means the blowing out, the

³⁹ U Shwe Zan Aung. C.p p.169.

extinction or the annihilation of the flames of lust, hatred, and delusion. In *Udāna* we read that, in *Nibbāna*, there is no earth, water, fire, wind and so on.

These elements play a vital important role in Buddhism as an object of meditation. They can be penetrative and understood only when the Buddha appears in this world.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ven, Buddhaghosa. *Anguttara-nikāyapāli* (A.N.A), p. 93.