6. Meditation on Elements

MN 28 (4 elements), MN 62 (5 elements), MN 140 (6 elements)

**Contemplating 4 Elements in D22 and M10**

“Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu reviews this same body, however it is placed, however disposed, by way of elements thus: ‘In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.’ Just as though a skilled butcher or his apprentice had killed a cow and was seated at the crossroads with it cut up into pieces; so too, a bhikkhu reviews this same body...by way of elements thus: ‘In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.’

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, externally, and both internally and externally...And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.

**Summary of the Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta**

The Four Noble Truths --> Wholesome states --> the Five aggregates affected by cling are suffering--> Material form aggregate affected by clinging--> The Four Great elements (mahābhūtamahābhūta) and the material form derived from the four great elements.

*mahābhūta* = the earth, the water, the fire and the air.

The Earth elements = internal or external are not mine, impermanent. Why should I cling if they last a while?

Feelings dependent on contact. Contact is impermanent, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness are impermanent.

If analyzing the elements does not help the meditator entering equanimity, one should recollects the Buddha to arouse equanimity, the wholesome state.

This sutta is taught by Sāriputta. The four elements are expanded as dhammas in the Abhidhamma. This sutta can be considered as discerning the dhamma in Abhidhamma.

**MN 28, Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta**

The Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant’s Footprint

1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park. There the venerable Sāriputta addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Friends, bhikkhus.”—“Friend,” they replied. The venerable Sāriputta said this:

2. “Friends, just as the footprint of any living being that walks can be placed within an elephant’s footprint, and so the elephant’s footprint is declared the chief of them because of its great size; so too, all wholesome states can be included in the Four Noble Truths. In what four? In the noble truth of
suffering, in the noble truth of the origin of suffering, in the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and in the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

3. “And what is the noble truth of suffering? Birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; not to obtain what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering.

4. “And what are the five aggregates affected by clinging? They are: the material form aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling aggregate affected by clinging, the perception aggregate affected by clinging, the formations aggregate affected by clinging, and the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging.

5. “And what is the material form aggregate affected by clinging? It is the four great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements. And what are the four great elements? They are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.

**THE EARTH ELEMENT**

6. “What, friends, is the earth element? 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, intestines, mesentery, 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 the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply earth element. And that should be seen as it 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 toward the earth element.

7. “Now there comes a time when the water element is disturbed and then the external earth element vanishes. When even this external earth element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance, and change, what of this body, which is clung to by craving and lasts but a while? There can be no considering that as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am.’

8. “So then, if others abuse, revile, scold, and harass a bhikkhu [who has seen this element as it actually is], he understands thus: ‘This painful feeling born of ear-contact has arisen in me. That is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? [186] Dependent on contact.’ Then he sees that contact is impermanent, that feeling is impermanent, that perception is impermanent, that formations are impermanent, and that consciousness is impermanent. And his mind, having made an element its objective support, enters into [that new objective support] and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution.

9. “Now, if others attack that bhikkhu in ways that are unwished for, undesired, and disagreeable, by contact with fists, clods, sticks, or knives, he understands thus: ‘This body is of such a nature that contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail it. But this has been said by the Blessed One in his ‘advice on the simile of the saw’: ‘Bhikkhus, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb
with a two-handled saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching.”  

So tireless energy shall be aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness established, my body shall be tranquil and untroubled, my mind concentrated and unified. And now let contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail this body; for this teaching of the Buddhas is being practised (by me).

10. “When that bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he arouses a sense of urgency thus: ‘It is a loss for me, it is no gain for me, it is bad for me, it is no good for me, that when I thus recollect the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in me.’ Just as when a daughter-in-law sees her father-in-law, she arouses a sense of urgency [to please him], so too, when that bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he arouses a sense of urgency. But if, when he recollects the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, equanimity supported by the wholesome becomes established in him, [187] then he is satisfied with it. At that point, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

(\textbf{THE WATER ELEMENT})

11. “What, friends, is the water element? The water element may be either internal or external. What is the internal water element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is water, watery, and clung-to; that is, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil-of-the-joints, urine, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is water, watery, and clung-to: this is called the internal water element. Now both the internal water element and the external water element are simply water element. And that should be seen as it 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 water element and makes the mind dispassionate toward the water element.

12. “Now there comes a time when the external water element is disturbed. It carries away villages, towns, cities, districts, and countries. There comes a time when the waters in the great ocean sink down a hundred leagues, two hundred leagues, three hundred leagues, four hundred leagues, five hundred leagues, six hundred leagues, seven hundred leagues. There comes a time when the waters in the great ocean stand seven palms deep, six palms deep…two palms deep, only a palm deep. There comes a time when the waters in the great ocean stand seven fathoms deep, six fathoms deep…two fathoms deep, only a fathom deep. There comes a time when the waters in the great ocean stand half a fathom deep, only waist deep, only knee deep, only ankle deep. There comes a time when the waters in the great ocean are not enough to wet even the joint of a finger. When even this external water element, great as it is, [188] is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance, and change, what of this body, which is clung to by craving and lasts but a while? There can be no considering that as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am.’

13-15. “So then, if others abuse, revile, scold, and harass a bhikkhu [who has seen this element as it actually is], he understands thus:…(repeat §§8—10)…At that point too, friends, much has been done
by that bhikkhu.

**THE FIRE ELEMENT**

16. “What, friends, is the fire element? The fire element may be either internal or external. What is the internal fire element? **Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is fire, fiery, and clung-to; that is, that by which one is warmed, ages, and is consumed, and that by which what is eaten, drunk, consumed, and tasted gets completely digested, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is fire, fiery, and clung-to; this is called the internal fire element.** Now both the internal fire element and the external fire element are simply fire element. And that should be seen as it 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 fire element and makes the mind dispassionate toward the fire element.

17. “Now there comes a time when the **external** fire element is disturbed. It burns up villages, towns, cities, districts, and countries. It goes out due to lack of fuel only when it comes to green grass, or to a road, or to a rock, or to water, or to a fair open space. There comes a time when they seek to make a fire even with a cock’s feather or a hide-paring. When even this external fire element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance, and change, what of this body, which is clung to by craving and lasts but a while? There can be no considering that as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am.’

18–20. “So then, if others abuse, revile, scold, and harass a bhikkhu [who has seen this element as it actually is], he understands thus:… *(repeat §§8—10)* …At that point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

**THE AIR ELEMENT**

21. “What, friends, is the air element? The air element may be either internal or external. What is the internal air element? **Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is air, airy, and clung-to; that is, up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the bowels, winds that course through the limbs, in-breath and out-breath, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is air, airy, and clung-to; this is called the internal air element.** Now both the internal air element and the external air element are simply air element. And that should be seen as it 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 air element and makes the mind dispassionate toward the air element.

22. “Now there comes a time when the external air element is disturbed. It sweeps away villages, towns, cities, districts, and countries. There comes a time in the last month of the hot season when they seek wind by means of a fan or bellows and even the strands of straw in the drip-fringe of the thatch do not stir. When even this external air element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance, and change, what of this body, which is clung to by craving and lasts but a while? There can be no considering that as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am.’
23–25. “So then, if others abuse, revile, scold, and harass a bhikkhu [who has seen this element as it actually is], he understands thus:…[190] (repeat §§8—10)…At that point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

26. “Friends, just as when a space is enclosed by timber and creepers, grass, and clay, it comes to be termed just ‘house,’ so too, when a space is enclosed by bones and sinews, flesh and skin, it comes to be termed just ‘material form.’

27. “If, friends, internally the eye is intact but no external forms come into its range, and there is no corresponding [conscious] engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding section of consciousness. If internally the eye is intact and external forms come into its range, but there is no corresponding [conscious] engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding section of consciousness. But when internally the eye is intact and external forms come into its range and there is the corresponding [conscious] engagement, then there is the manifestation of the corresponding section of consciousness.

28. “The material form in what has thus come to be is included in the material form aggregate affected by clinging. The feeling in what has thus come to be is included in the feeling aggregate affected by clinging. The perception in what has thus come to be is included in the perception aggregate affected by clinging. The formations in what has thus come to be are included in the formations aggregate affected by clinging. The consciousness in what has thus come to be is included in the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. He understands thus: ‘This, indeed, is how there comes to be the inclusion, gathering, and amassing of things into these five aggregates affected by clinging. Now this has been said by the Blessed One: ‘One who sees [191] dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination.’ And these five aggregates affected by clinging are dependently arisen. The desire, indulgence, inclination, and holding based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is the origin of suffering. The removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of desire and lust for these five aggregates affected by clinging is the cessation of suffering.’ At that point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

29–30. “If, friends, internally the ear is intact but no external sounds come into its range…(as in §§27—28)…At that point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

31–32. “If, friends, internally the nose is intact but no external smells come into its range…At that point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

33–34. “If, friends, internally the tongue is intact but no external flavours come into its range…At that point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

35–36. “If, friends, internally the body is intact but no external tangibles come into its range…At that point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

37. “If, friends, internally the mind is intact but no external mind-objects come into its range, and there is no corresponding [conscious] engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding section of consciousness. If internally the mind is intact and external mind-objects come into its
range, but there is no corresponding [conscious] engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding section of consciousness. But when internally the mind is intact and external mind-objects come into its range and there is the corresponding [conscious] engagement, then there is the manifestation of the corresponding section of consciousness.

38. “The material form in what has thus come to be is included in the material form aggregate affected by clinging. The feeling in what has thus come to be is included in the feeling aggregate affected by clinging. The perception in what has thus come to be is included in the perception aggregate affected by clinging. The formations in what has thus come to be are included in the formations aggregate affected by clinging. The consciousness in what has thus come to be is included in the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. He understands thus: ‘This, indeed, is how there comes to be the inclusion, gathering, and amassing of things into these five aggregates affected by clinging. Now this has been said by the Blessed One: “One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination.” And these five aggregates affected by clinging are dependently arisen. The desire, indulgence, inclination, and holding based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is the origin of suffering. The removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of desire and lust for these five aggregates affected by clinging is the cessation of suffering.’ At that point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.”

That is what the venerable Sāriputta said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the venerable Sāriputta’s words.
MN 62: Mahārāhulovāda Sutta

(The sutta add space element, together 5 elements)

The Greater Discourse of Advice to Rāhula

1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park.

2. Then, when it was morning, the Blessed One dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, went into Sāvatthī for alms. The venerable Rāhula also dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, followed close behind the Blessed One.

3. Then the Blessed One looked back and addressed the venerable Rāhula thus: “Rāhula, 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.’”

“How is mindfulness of breathing developed and cultivated, so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?”

4. Then the venerable Rāhula 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.

5. The venerable Sāriputta saw him sitting there and addressed him thus: “Rāhula, develop mindfulness of breathing. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit.”

6. Then, when it was evening, the venerable Rāhula 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:

7. “Venerable sir, how is mindfulness of breathing developed and cultivated, so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?”

(THE FOUR GREAT ELEMENTS)

8. “Rāhula, 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 the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply earth element.
And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ [422] 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.

9. “What, Rāhula, is the water element? The water element may be either internal or external. What is the internal water element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is water, watery, and clung-to, that is, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil-of-the-joints, urine, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is water, watery, and clung-to: this is called the internal water element. Now both the internal water element and the external water element are simply water element. And that should be seen as it 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 water element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the water element.

10. “What, Rāhula, is the fire element? The fire element may be either internal or external. What is the internal fire element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is fire, fiery, and clung-to, that is, that by which one is warmed, ages, and is consumed, and that by which what is eaten, drunk, consumed, and tasted gets completely digested, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is fire, fiery, and clung-to: this is called the internal fire element. Now both the internal fire element and the external fire element are simply fire element. And that should be seen as it 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 fire element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the fire element.

11. “What, Rāhula, is the air element? The air element may be either internal or external. What is the internal air element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is air, airy, and clung-to, that is, up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the bowels, winds that course through the limbs, in-breath and out-breath, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is air, airy, and clung-to: this is called the internal air element. Now both the internal air element and the external air element are simply air element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ [423] When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the air element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the air element.

12. “What, Rāhula, is the space element? The space element may be either internal or external. What is the internal space element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is space, spatial, and clung-to, that is, the holes of the ears, the nostrils, the door of the mouth, and that [aperture] whereby what is eaten, drunk, consumed, and tasted gets swallowed, and where it collects, and whereby it is excreted from below, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is space, spatial, and clung-to: this is called the internal space element. Now both the internal space element and the external space element are simply space element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ [644] When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the space element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the space element.
13. “Rāhula, develop meditation that is like the earth; for when you develop meditation that is like the earth, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain. Just as people throw clean things and dirty things, excrement, urine, spittle, pus, and blood on the earth, and the earth is not repelled, humiliated, and disgusted because of that, so too, Rāhula, develop meditation that is like the earth; for when you develop meditation that is like the earth, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain.

14. “Rāhula, develop meditation that is like water; for when you develop meditation that is like water, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain. Just as people wash clean things and dirty things, excrement, urine, spittle, pus, and blood in water, and the water is not repelled, humiliated, and disgusted because of that, so too, Rāhula, develop meditation that is like water; for when you develop meditation that is like water, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain.

15. “Rāhula, develop meditation that is like fire; for when you develop meditation that is like fire, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain. Just as people burn clean things and dirty things, excrement, urine, spittle, pus, and blood in fire, and the fire is not repelled, humiliated, and disgusted because of that, so too, Rāhula, develop meditation that is like fire; for when you develop meditation that is like fire, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain.

16. “Rāhula, develop meditation that is like air; for when you develop meditation that is like air, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain. Just as the air blows on clean things and dirty things, on excrement, urine, spittle, pus, and blood, and the air is not repelled, humiliated, and disgusted because of that, so too, Rāhula, develop meditation that is like air; for when you develop meditation that is like air, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain.

17. “Rāhula, develop meditation that is like space; for when you develop meditation that is like space, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain. Just as space is not established anywhere, so too, Rāhula, develop meditation that is like space; for when you develop meditation that is like space, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain.

18. “Rāhula, develop meditation on loving-kindness; for when you develop meditation on loving-kindness, any ill will will be abandoned.

19. “Rāhula, develop meditation on compassion; for when you develop meditation on compassion, any cruelty will be abandoned.

20. “Rāhula, develop meditation on altruistic joy; for when you develop meditation on altruistic joy, any discontent will be abandoned.

21. “Rāhula, develop meditation on equanimity; for when you develop meditation on equanimity, any aversion will be abandoned.
22. “Rāhula, develop meditation on foulness; for when you develop meditation on foulness, any lust will be abandoned.

23. “Rāhula, develop meditation on the perception of impermanence; [425] for when you develop meditation on the perception of impermanence, the conceit ‘I am’ will be abandoned.

[mindfulness of breathing: 16 modes of practice]

24. “Rāhula, develop meditation on mindfulness of breathing. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit. And how is mindfulness of breathing developed and cultivated, so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?

25. “Here, Rāhula, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out.646


30. “Rāhula, that is how mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, so that it is of great fruit and great benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated in this way, [426] even the final in-breaths and out-breaths are known as they cease, not unknown.”647
That is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Rāhula was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.
MN 140: Dhātuvibhanga Sutta: The Exposition of the Elements
(This sutta explains six elements: the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the air element, the space element, and the consciousness element.)

1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was wandering in the Magadhan country and eventually arrived at Rājagaha. There he went to the potter Bhaggava and said to him:

2. “If it is not inconvenient for you, Bhaggava, I will stay one night in your workshop.”

“It is not inconvenient for me, venerable sir, but there is a homeless one already staying there. If he agrees, then stay as long as you like, venerable sir.” [238]

3. Now there was a clansman named Pukkusāti who had gone forth from the home life into homelessness out of faith in the Blessed One, and on that occasion he was already staying in the potter’s workshop. Then the Blessed One went to the venerable Pukkusāti and said to him: “If it is not inconvenient for you, bhikkhu, I will stay one night in the workshop.”

“The potter’s workshop is large enough, friend. Let the venerable one stay as long as he likes.” [239]

4. Then the Blessed One entered the potter’s workshop, prepared a spread of grass at one end, and sat down, folding his legs crosswise, setting his body erect, and establishing mindfulness in front of him. Then the Blessed One spent most of the night seated [in meditation], and the venerable Pukkusāti also spent most of the night seated [in meditation]. Then the Blessed One thought: “This clansman conducts himself in a way that inspires confidence. Suppose I were to question him.” So he asked the venerable Pukkusāti:

5. “Under whom have you gone forth, bhikkhu? Who is your teacher? Whose Dhamma do you profess?”

“Friend, there is the recluse Gotama, the son of the Sakyans who went forth from a Sakyan clan. Now a good report of that Blessed Gotama has been spread to this effect: ‘That Blessed One is accomplished, fully enlightened, perfect in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of worlds, incomparable leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of gods and humans, enlightened, blessed.’ I have gone forth under that Blessed One; that Blessed One is my teacher; I profess the Dhamma of that Blessed One.”

“But, bhikkhu, where is that Blessed One, accomplished and fully enlightened, now living?”

“There is, friend, a city in the northern country named Sāvatthī. The Blessed One, accomplished and fully enlightened, is now living there.”

“But, bhikkhu, have you ever seen that Blessed One before? Would you recognise him if you saw him?” [239]
“No, friend, I have never seen that Blessed One before, nor would I recognise him if I saw him.”

6. Then the Blessed One thought: “This clansman has gone forth from the home life into homelessness under me. Suppose I were to teach him the Dhamma.” So the Blessed One addressed the venerable Pukkusāti thus: “Bhikkhu, I will teach you the Dhamma. Listen and attend closely to what I shall say.”—“Yes, friend,” the venerable Pukkusāti replied. The Blessed One said this:

7. “Bhikkhu, this person consists of six elements, six bases of contact, and eighteen kinds of mental exploration, and he has four foundations. The tides of conceiving do not sweep over one who stands upon these [foundations], and when the tides of conceiving no longer sweep over him he is called a sage at peace. One should not neglect wisdom, should preserve truth, should cultivate relinquishment, and should train for peace. This is the summary of the exposition of the six elements.

8. “Bhikkhu, this person consists of six elements.” So it was said. And with reference to what was this said? There are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the air element, the space element, and the consciousness element. So it was with reference to this that it was said: ‘Bhikkhu, this person consists of six elements.’

9. “Bhikkhu, this person consists of six bases of contact.” So it was said. And with reference to what was this said? There are the base of eye-contact, the base of ear-contact, the base of nose-contact, the base of tongue-contact, the base of body-contact, and the base of mind-contact. So it was with reference to this that it was said: ‘Bhikkhu, this person consists of six bases of contact.’

10. “Bhikkhu, this person consists of eighteen kinds of mental exploration.” So it was said. And with reference to what was this said? On seeing a form with the eye, one explores a form productive of joy, one explores a form productive of grief, one explores a form productive of equanimity. On hearing a sound with the ear…[240] On smelling an odour with the nose…On tasting a flavour with the tongue…On touching a tangible with the body…On cognizing a mind-object with the mind, one explores a mind-object productive of joy, one explores a mind-object productive of grief, one explores a mind-object productive of equanimity. So it was with reference to this that it was said: ‘Bhikkhu, this person consists of eighteen kinds of mental exploration.’

11. “Bhikkhu, this person has four foundations.” So it was said. And with reference to what was this said? There are the foundation of wisdom, the foundation of truth, the foundation of relinquishment, and the foundation of peace. So it was with reference to this that it was said: ‘Bhikkhu, this person has four foundations.’

12. “One should not neglect wisdom, should preserve truth, should cultivate relinquishment, and should train for peace.” So it was said. And with reference to what was this said?

13. “How, bhikkhu, does one not neglect wisdom? There are these six elements: the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the air element, the space element, and the consciousness element.

14. “What, bhikkhu, is the earth element? 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, intestines, mesentery, 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 the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply earth element. And that should be seen as it 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.

15. “What, bhikkhu, is the water element? The water element may be either internal or external. What is the internal water element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is water, watery, and clung-to, that is, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil-of-the-joints, urine, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is water, watery, and clung-to: this is called the internal water element. Now both the internal water element and the external water element are simply water element. And that should be seen as it 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 water element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the water element.

16. “What, bhikkhu, is the fire element? The fire element may be either internal or external. What is the internal fire element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is fire, fiery, and clung-to, that is, that by which one is warmed, ages, and is consumed, and that by which what is eaten, drunk, consumed, and tasted gets completely digested, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is fire, fiery, and clung-to: this is called the internal fire element. Now both the internal fire element and the external fire element are simply fire element. And that should be seen as it 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 fire element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the fire element.

17. “What, bhikkhu, is the air element? The air element may be either internal or external. What is the internal air element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is air, airy, and clung-to, that is, up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the bowels, winds that course through the limbs, in-breath and out-breath, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is air, airy, and clung-to: this is called the internal air element. Now both the internal air element and the external air element are simply air element. And that should be seen as it 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 air element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the air element.

18. “What, bhikkhu, is the space element? The space element may be either internal or external. What is the internal space element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is space, spatial, and clung-to, that is, the holes of the ears, the nostrils, the door of the mouth, and that [aperture] whereby what is eaten, drunk, consumed, and tasted gets swallowed, and where it collects, and whereby it is excreted from below, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is space, spatial, and clung-to: this is called the internal space element. Now both the internal space element and the external space element are simply space element. And that should be seen as it 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 air element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the air element.
wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the space element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the space element.

19. “Then there remains only consciousness, purified and bright. What does one cognize with that consciousness? One cognizes: ‘[This is] pleasant’; one cognizes: ‘[This is] painful’; one cognizes: ‘[This is] neither-painful-nor-pleasant.’ In dependence on a contact to be felt as pleasant there arises a pleasant feeling. When one feels a pleasant feeling, one understands: ‘I feel a pleasant feeling.’ One understands: ‘With the cessation of that same contact to be felt as pleasant, its corresponding feeling—the pleasant feeling that arose in dependence on that contact to be felt as pleasant—ceases and subsides.’ In dependence on a contact to be felt as painful there arises a painful feeling. When one feels a painful feeling, one understands: ‘I feel a painful feeling.’ One understands: ‘With the cessation of that same contact to be felt as painful, its corresponding feeling—the painful feeling that arose in dependence on that contact to be felt as painful—ceases and subsides.’ In dependence on a contact to be felt as neither-painful-nor-pleasant there arises a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling. When one feels a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, one understands: ‘I feel a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.’ One understands: ‘With the cessation of that same contact to be felt as neither-painful-nor-pleasant, its corresponding feeling—the neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling that arose in dependence on that contact to be felt as neither-painful-nor-pleasant—ceases and subsides.’ Bhikkhu, just as from the contact and friction of two fire-sticks heat is generated and fire is produced, and with the separation and disjunction of those two fire-sticks the corresponding heat ceases and subsides; so too, in dependence on a contact to be felt as pleasant…to be felt as painful…to be felt as neither-painful-nor-pleasant there arises a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling… One understands: ‘With the cessation of that same contact to be felt as neither-painful-nor-pleasant, its corresponding feeling…ceases and subsides.’

20. “Then there remains only equanimity, purified and bright, malleable, wieldy, and radiant. Suppose, bhikkhu, a skilled goldsmith or his apprentice were to prepare a furnace, heat up the crucible, take some gold with tongs, and put it into the crucible. From time to time he would blow on it, from time to time he would sprinkle water over it, and from time to time he would just look on. That gold would become refined, well refined, completely refined, faultless, rid of dross, malleable, wieldy, and radiant. Then whatever kind of ornament he wished to make from it, whether a golden chain or earrings or a necklace or a golden garland, it would serve his purpose. So too, bhikkhu, then there remains only equanimity, purified and bright, malleable, wieldy, and radiant.

21. “He understands thus: ‘If I were to direct this equanimity, so purified and bright, to the base of infinite space and to develop my mind accordingly, this would be conditioned. If I were to direct this equanimity, so purified and bright, to the base of infinite consciousness…[244]…to the base of nothingness…to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and to develop my mind accordingly, this would be conditioned.’

22. “He understands thus: ‘If I were to direct this equanimity, so purified and bright, to the base of infinite space and to develop my mind accordingly, this would be conditioned. If I were to direct
this equanimity, so purified and bright, to the base of infinite consciousness…to the base of nothingness…to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and to develop my mind accordingly, this would be conditioned.’ He does not form any condition or generate any volition tending towards either being or non-being. Since he does not form any condition or generate any volition tending towards either being or non-being, he does not cling to anything in this world. When he does not cling, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he personally attains Nibbāna. He understands thus: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.’

23. ‘If he feels a pleasant feeling, he understands: ‘It is impermanent; there is no holding to it; there is no delight in it.’ If he feels a painful feeling, he understands: ‘It is impermanent; there is no holding to it; there is no delight in it.’ If he feels a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he understands: ‘It is impermanent; there is no holding to it; there is no delight in it.’

24. ‘If he feels a pleasant feeling, he feels it detached; if he feels a painful feeling, he feels it detached; if he feels a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he feels it detached. When he feels a feeling terminating with the body, he understands: ‘I feel a feeling terminating with the body.’ When he feels a feeling terminating with life, he understands: ‘I feel a feeling terminating with life.’ He understands: ‘On the dissolution of the body, with the ending of life, all that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cool right here.’

25. ‘Therefore a bhikkhu possessing [this wisdom] possesses the supreme foundation of wisdom. For this, bhikkhu, is the supreme noble wisdom, namely, the knowledge of the destruction of all suffering.

26. ‘His deliverance, being founded upon truth, is unshakeable. For that is false, bhikkhu, which has a deceptive nature, and that is true which has an undeceptive nature—Nibbāna. Therefore a bhikkhu possessing [this truth] possesses the supreme foundation of truth. For this, bhikkhu, is the supreme noble truth, namely, Nibbāna, which has an undeceptive nature.

27. ‘Formerly, when he was ignorant, he undertook and accepted acquisitions; now he has abandoned them, cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, done away with them so that they are no longer subject to future arising. Therefore a bhikkhu possessing [this relinquishment] possesses the supreme foundation of relinquishment. For this, bhikkhu, is the supreme noble relinquishment, namely, the relinquishing of all acquisitions.

28. ‘Formerly, when he was ignorant, he experienced covetousness, desire, and lust; now he has abandoned them, cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, done away with them so that they are no longer subject to future arising. Formerly, when he was ignorant, he experienced anger, ill will, and hate; now he has abandoned them, cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump,
done away with them so that they are no longer subject to future arising. Formerly, when he was ignorant, he experienced ignorance and delusion; now he has abandoned them, cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, done away with them so that they are no longer subject to future arising. Therefore a bhikkhu possessing [this peace] possesses the supreme foundation of peace. For this, bhikkhu, is the supreme noble peace, namely, the pacification of lust, hate, and delusion.

29. “So it was with reference to this that it was said: ‘One should not neglect wisdom, should preserve truth, should cultivate relinquishment, and should train for peace.’

30. ‘The tides of conceiving do not sweep over one who stands upon these [foundations], and when the tides of conceiving no longer sweep over him he is called a sage at peace.’

31. ‘Bhikkhu, ‘I am’ is a conceiving; ‘I am this’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall not be’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be possessed of form’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be formless’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be percipient’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be non-percipient’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be neither-percipient-nor-non-percipient’ is a conceiving. Conceiving is a disease, conceiving is a tumour, conceiving is a dart. By overcoming all conceivings, bhikkhu, one is called a sage at peace. And the sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die; he is not shaken and does not yearn. For there is nothing present in him by which he might be born. Not being born, how could he age? Not ageing, how could he die? Not dying, how could he be shaken? Not being shaken, why should he yearn?

32. “So it was with reference to this that it was said: ‘The tides of conceiving do not sweep over one who stands upon these [foundations], and when the tides of conceiving no longer sweep over him he is called a sage at peace.’ Bhikkhu, bear in mind this brief exposition of the six elements.”

33. Thereupon the venerable Pukkusāti thought: “Indeed, the Teacher has come to me! The Sublime One has come to me! The Fully Enlightened One has come to me!” Then he rose from his seat, arranged his upper robe over one shoulder, and prostrating himself with his head at the Blessed One’s feet, he said: “Venerable sir, a transgression overcame me, in that like a fool, confused and blundering, I presumed to address the Blessed One as ‘friend.’ Venerable sir, may the Blessed One forgive my transgression seen as such for the sake of restraint in the future.”

“Surely, bhikkhu, a transgression overcame you, in that like a fool, confused and blundering, you presumed to address me as ‘friend.’ But since you see your transgression as such and make amends in accordance with the Dhamma, we forgive you. For it is growth in the Noble One’s Discipline when one sees one’s transgression as such, makes amends in accordance with the Dhamma, and undertakes restraint in the future.”

34. “Venerable sir, I would receive the full admission under the Blessed One.”

“But are your bowl and robes complete, bhikkhu?”

“Venerable sir, my bowl and robes are not complete.”

“Bhikkhu, Tathāgatas do not give the full admission to anyone whose bowl and robes are not
35. Then the venerable 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 the venerable Pukkusāti was searching for a bowl and robes, a stray cow killed him.

36. Then a number of 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?”

“Bhikkhus, the clansman Pukkusāti was wise. He practised 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 will attain final Nibbāna there without ever returning from that world.”

That is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.