

**This electronic version is published under the terms of the Creative Commons**

**Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 licence (CC BY-NC 3.0)**

**<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>**

**All copyright is owned by the Pali Text Society  
[www.palitext.com](http://www.palitext.com)**

**For non-commercial use only.**

Scanned by [www.abhidhamma.ru](http://www.abhidhamma.ru)

Pali Text Society  
TRANSLATION SERIES NO. 34

# DISCOURSE ON ELEMENTS

(DHĀTUKATHĀ)

THE THIRD BOOK OF THE ABHIDHAMMA-PIṬAKA

A Translation  
with  
Charts and Explanation

by

U NĀRADA

MŪLA PAṬṬHĀNA SAYADAW

(of Rangoon, Burma)

ORIGINATOR OF ABHIDHAMMA CHARTS

Assisted by

THEIN NYUN

Published by  
The Pali Text Society  
Lancaster  
2007

First published	1962
Reprinted	1977
Reprinted	1995
Reprinted	1999
Reprinted	2007

© Pali Text Society 1962, 2007

ISBN 0 86013 025 8  
EAN 9780 86013 025 3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the Pali Text Society, c/o Gazelle, White Cross Mills, Hightown, Lancaster LA1 4XS, U.K.

Printed in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire

# CONTENTS

Foreword by Miss I.B. Horner	vii
Preface by Thein Nyun	ix
Introduction by U Nārada	xxxi
The Treatment of the Text	xlvii
 CHAPTER	
I. Classification and Unclassification	
1. Aggregates	1
2. Bases	3
3. Elements	5
4. Truths	7
5. Faculties	8
6. Dependent Origination and so on	10
7. Triplets 22	12
8. Couplets 100	17
The Classification Chart of Aggregates, Bases and Elements.	
Method of Chapter I (see p. 157)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter I	26
Internal Tables ( <i>Abbhantara mātikā</i> )	31
External Tables ( <i>Bāhira mātikā</i> )	35
II. Classified and Unclassified	
8 Questions and Answers	54
Chart : Method of Chapter II (see p. 158)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter II	55
III. Unclassified and Classified	
12 Questions and Answers	61
Chart : Method of Chapter III (see p. 159)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter III	63
IV. Classified and classified	
2 Questions and Answers	67
Chart : Method of Chapter IV (see p. 160)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter III	68
V. Unclassified and Unclassified	
35 Questions and Answers	71
Chart : Method of Chapter V (see p. 161)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter V	79
VI. Association and dissociation	
78 Questions and Answers	83
* 1. Aggregates	83
2. Bases	83
3. Elements	83
4. Truths and so on	84
5. Triplets	87
6. Couplets	90

Chart : Method of Chapter VI (see p. 162)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter VI	95
VII. Associated and Dissociated	
11 Questions and Answers	105
Chart : Method of Chapter VII (see p. 163)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter VII	107
VIII. Dissociated and Associated	
2 Questions and Answers	110
Chart : Method of Chapters VIII and XIV (see p. 164)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapters VIII and XIV	110
IX. Associated and Associated	
34 Questions and Answers	113
Chart : Method of Chapters IX and XII (see p. 165)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter IX	117
X. Dissociated and Dissociated	
56 Questions and Answers	119
Chart : Method of Chapter X (see p. 166)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter X	127
XI. Associated with, and Dissociated from, the Classified	
8 Questions and Answers	129
Chart : Method of Chapter XI (see p. 167)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter XI	131
XII. Classified and Unclassified Concerning the Associated	
31 Questions and Answers	133
Chart : Method of Chapter XII (see p. 165)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter XII	137
XIII. Associated with, and Dissociated from, the Unclassified	
8 Questions and Answers	139
Chart : Method of Chapter XIII (see p. 167)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter XII	142
XIV. Classified and Unclassified Concerning the Dissociated	
63 Questions and Answers	144
Chart : Method of Chapter XIV (see p. 164)	
Explanation of the Method and Chart of Chapter XIV	112

#### Errata

*Preface* : p. xvi, line 28, to read 4 : (6) investigating consciousness; (7) determining consciousness; (8) seven successive wholesome. *Line 29 change (8) to (9).* *Introduction* : p. xxvii, line 6 : change 37 to 35.

## FOREWORD

During recent years non-Pali readers anxious to study Early Buddhism have taken an interest, which is still growing, in the Theravāda Abhidhamma tradition. But requests for works of this nature have been impossible to meet adequately. In the first place Mrs. Rhys Davids's very valuable *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics (Dhammasaṅgani)*, published under the patronage of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1st ed. 1900, 2nd ed. 1923, with S. Z. Aung, *Points of Controversy*, 1915 (PTS), reprinted 1961, and B. C. Law's *Designation of Human Types (Puggalapaññatti)*, 1922 (PTS), had all long been out of print. In any case these two latter hardly present the core of the Abhidhamma teaching, which is a systematic arrangement and treatment, with elaborate classifications, of the physical and mental elements and processes it analyses and regards as "real" in the highest or absolute sense. Secondly, if one excepts the *Abhidhammatthasangaha*, translated as *Compendium of Philosophy*, 1910, reprinted 1956 (PTS), these are, as far as I know, the only Pali Abhidhamma works to have been rendered into English in their entirety.

Therefore it was a pleasant surprise when a learned Sayadaw wrote from Rangoon offering the PTS a translation of the *Dhātukathā*, the third book of the Abhidhamma-Piṭaka. I accepted this timely proposal with gratitude and confidence, both because the desirability of adding a translation of an essentially Abhidhamma work to the PTS's list of publications was obvious, and because I was already aware of the Sayadaw's reputation for erudition and scholarship in this particular field of studies of which Burma has been the home and centre for centuries.

In translating the present comparatively short but important work and clarifying its highly compressed classifications by the use of charts and explanations accompanying the charts U Nārada, Mūla Paṭṭhāna Sayadaw (Originator of the Abhidhamma Charts) has been assisted by U Thein Nyun of Rangoon. Thus they have, as Mrs. Rhys Davids wrote of another contributor in her Introductory Note to *Buddhadatta's Manuals*, "rendered a service of no slight value to the study of that Abhidhamma tradition which has survived, in Theravāda Buddhism, to the present day."

I. B. HORNER.

London, 1961.

## NOTE

Translations of Abhidhamma works published by PTS since 1961:

Conditional Relations (*Paṭṭhāna*) by U. Nārada, 1969

The Book of Analysis (*Vibhaṅga*) by U. Thittila, 1969

A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics (*Dhammasaṅgani*) by

Mrs. Rhys Davids, 3rd. edn., 1974

I.B.H.

London 1976

## PREFACE

It is extremely difficult for one to become a Supremely Enlightened Buddha. First of all one must have qualified oneself to receive the prediction from a living Buddha. This, too, is difficult because the following eight conditions have to be satisfied :—

1. That one is a human being. (It is not possible for a Deva or a Brahma to become a Buddha.)
2. That one is a man. (It is not possible for a woman, a hermaphrodite and so on who do not possess the 32 bodily signs of a great man.)
3. That the inherent qualities of Arahatsip have already been acquired in the existence when the prediction was made.
4. That one meets with a living Enlightened Buddha. (The wish cannot be fulfilled if it is made to an Enlightened Buddha who has passed away, to a Silent Buddha, to an Arahats or at a pagoda.)
5. That one is a Bhikkhu or, if a hermit, one who has perfect confidence in Kamma. (The wish to become an Enlightened Buddha made by an ordinary person will not be fulfilled.)
6. That one has acquired the 8 attainments and 5 supernormal powers. (One who has not acquired these attainments and powers is not able to examine and select the perfections to be practised.)
7. That one is ready to give up one's life to the Enlightened Buddha.
8. That one has the dominant desire to practise and attain the perfections which are necessary for becoming an Enlightened Buddha.

With regard to the last condition, the nature of that desire can be understood from the following examples :—

If it is heard that one can become an Enlightened Buddha by :—

- (a) Swimming from one end to another of a world system filled with water, or
- (b) walking from one end to another of a world system filled with live coals, or
- (c) walking from one end to another of a world system filled with spears that pierce through the feet, or



- (d) going from one end to another of a world system of a thick and entangled forest of bamboo groves and creepers of thorns, or
- (e) suffering torment in hell for 4 incalculable aeons and 100,000 world periods,

there will be no thought of the immensity of the task or the extreme hardship but only the desire to undertake the feat without a moment's hesitation.

After the prediction, the Buddha-to-be has to practise and attain the ten perfections of charity, virtue and so on for the minimum period of 4 incalculable aeons and 100,000 world periods in order to become the Enlightened Buddha. He has to undergo all kinds of hardship in practising them for the purification of his mind, passing innumerable times from one existence to another and from one world to another. As a result he acquires perfect knowledge of both matter and mind.

\* \* \*

#### BUDDHA'S PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF THE MATERIAL WORLD

It is abundantly clear from the expositions concerning matter in the Abhidhamma and the Suttas that the Buddha had perfect knowledge of the material world which, out of His boundless compassion for all beings, He expounded for their welfare and prosperity.

In the Nāṇa-Vibhaṅga of the Abhidhamma the Buddha revealed his profound knowledge of the nature of all kinds of elements. Here are a few extracts concerning inanimate things. When the Buddha saw a tree He could tell what predominant elements caused (1) the trunk to be white, black or uniform in colour ; (2) the bark to be thick or thin ; (3) the flowers to be red, yellow, brown or white in colour and their scent to be good or bad ; (4) the fruits to be small, big, long or round in shape ; their interior good, fine or coarse ; their odour good or bad and their taste sweet, sour, hot or astringent ; (5) the thorns to be sharp, blunt, straight or crooked and red, black, brown or white and so on in colour. The Piṭakas also speak of the Buddha's perfect knowledge of matter.

\* \* \*

## BUDDHA'S PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF THE MIND

There are numerous accounts in the Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma Piṭakas of the Buddha's perfect knowledge of the mind. The sole purpose of His teaching was to reveal the methods for the destruction of unwholesome states such as greed, hatred and delusion and the overcoming of the five hindrances so that beings would become purified in mind and thereby attain release from the suffering due to existence.

\* \* \*

## THE ABHIDHAMMA WAS EXPOUNDED BY THE BUDDHA

The Abhidhamma is so abstruse, profound and subtle that only Enlightened Buddhas are able to give a complete exposition of it because of their Omniscience in three respects :—

- (1) Perfect knowledge of all the things knowable which are (a) conditioned ; (b) subject to change ; (c) characteristics or qualities of things ; (d) Nibbāna, and (e) concepts.
- (2) Perfect knowledge of the various kinds of expositions for teaching the above in detail.
- (3) Perfect knowledge of all beings who are worthy or unworthy of instruction for deliverance, i.e. :—
  - (a) The nature of the minds in past existences. The Buddha knew who held the eternalist and annihilationist views or who held right views and practised to attain insight-knowledge ;
  - (b) the predominant nature of the minds in past existences. The Buddha knew that it was because of the predominance of greed, anger or delusion in the past that a particular being is greedy, easily roused to anger or dull and distracted in his present existence. Similarly for those who are non-greedy, amiable or intelligent ;
  - (c) the unwholesome tendencies that lie dormant in beings. The Buddha knew which of the following seven tendencies were predominant in a being : (1) sensual craving ; (2) anger ; (3) conceit ; (4) wrong views ; (5) doubt ; (6) craving for higher existence, and (7) ignorance ;

- (d) the delight of the mind to dwell on objects boldly and freely. This delight is similar to that of deer to roam the forest or fish to live in water. The Buddha knew who delights in which particular sense object ;
- (e) the traits inherited as the result of repetition in past existences. The Buddha knew who had the traits of lust, harsh speech and so on, and the appropriate teaching to be expounded. Although the Arahats have destroyed the defilements they cannot overcome their traits. It is only the Buddha who destroys the traits together with the defilements ;
- (f) the habits formed in the present existence. These habits may be acquired from parents and companions just like contagious diseases. Environment plays a great part in the formation of habits. They are of six types : (1) lust ; (2) anger ; (3) delusion ; (4) applied thought ; (5) faith ; (6) intelligence. The Buddha knew the particular type of habit of a being and the proper teaching and meditation to be given ;
- (g) the good deeds that were performed in past existences. The Buddha knew the kinds of good deeds performed by a being and the right kind of teaching to be given for deliverance ;
- (h) the deeds done in past existences with the sole purpose of attaining release from suffering. These consist of the 10 perfections. The Buddha knew the level a being had attained in regard to them.

\*       \*       \*

#### METHODS OF TEACHING

There are the Sutta and Abhidhamma methods of Teaching. In the Sutta method, the inclinations and mental status of the audience are considered by the Buddha. Will this person quickly realize the Four Noble Truths by an exposition of the Teaching on the aggregates, or the bases or the elements ? If it is to be on the aggregates, will it be necessary to give the exposition briefly or at length ? When this has been decided, the mental disposition of the being in past existences is taken into account and the appropriate Teaching

expounded. This Sutta method on the aggregates, bases and elements is to be found in the Saṃyutta Nikāya. In this method the Buddha does not have the opportunity to display His Enlightened Knowledge.

In the Abhidhamma method, no attention is paid to the individual but only to the facts about the nature of the ultimate truths as fully comprehended by Enlightened Knowledge. And even then only the Paṭṭhāna gives the widest and fullest scope for this.

The Abhidhamma is presented in technical language where the philosophical terms, denoting ultimate truths, are defined and explained. The Suttas are presented in conventional language though philosophical terms are included. So a good knowledge of the Abhidhamma is essential for grasping the true significance of the Teaching of the Suttas. Therefore it must be studied before the latter so that a deeper and clearer knowledge of them may be gained.

#### THE ABHIDHAMMA WAS EXPOUNDED IN THE DEVA WORLD

In the Abhidhamma the triplets and couplets, which precede the exposition of the Dhammasaṅgani, form its framework for analytical and relational treatment in a systematic manner. At the very beginning the Dhammasaṅgani deals with the first triplets, "States which are wholesome, unwholesome and indeterminate," but the exposition about them is completed only in Paṭṭhāna, the end of the Abhidhamma. Therefore, in order to give a complete picture of Abhidhamma it has to be expounded from the beginning to the end to the same audience at one sitting lasting for three months. Only Devas and Brahmas are capable of remaining in one posture for that length of time and this is why the Buddha expounded the Abhidhamma in Tāvātimsa, the abode of the 33 devas.

\* \* \*

#### THE ABHIDHAMMA IS ABSTRUSE, PROFOUND AND SUBTLE

The Abhidhamma Teaching, revealed by Enlightened Knowledge is abstruse, profound and subtle. The first chapter on the "Risings of Consciousness" in the Dhammasaṅgani, which was expounded first, states :—

"Whenever a wholesome consciousness belonging to the sensuous plane has arisen, which is accompanied by joy and associated with

knowledge and has as its object, sight, sound, smell, taste, tangible object, cognizable object or whatever, on that occasion there is :—

- |                              |                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Contact                   |                             |
| 2. Feeling                   |                             |
| 3. Perception                | The contact group of 5      |
| 4. Volition                  | (phassa-pañcaka)            |
| (5) Consciousness            |                             |
| 6. Applied Thought           | Factors of Jhāna            |
| 7. Sustained Thought         | (jhānaṅga)                  |
| 8. Rapture                   |                             |
| 9. Bliss                     |                             |
| (10) One-pointedness of mind |                             |
| 11. Faculty of Faith         | Faculties                   |
| 12. Faculty of Energy        | (indriya)                   |
| 13. Faculty of Mindfulness   |                             |
| 14. Faculty of Concentration |                             |
| 15. Faculty of Wisdom        |                             |
| 16. Faculty of Mind          |                             |
| 17. Faculty of Mental Joy    |                             |
| (18) Faculty of Vitality     |                             |
| 19. Right Understanding      | Path factors                |
| 20. Right Thought            | (maggāṅga)                  |
| 21. Right Effort             |                             |
| 22. Right Mindfulness        |                             |
| (23) Right Concentration     |                             |
| 24. Power of Faith           | Strengths                   |
| 25. Power of Energy          | (bala)                      |
| 26. Power of Mindfulness     |                             |
| 27. Power of Concentration   |                             |
| 28. Power of Wisdom          |                             |
| 29. Power of Shame           |                             |
| (30) Power of Fear           |                             |
| 31. Non-greed                | Wholesome Roots             |
| 32. Non-hatred               | (kusala-mūla)               |
| (33) Non-delusion            |                             |
| 34. Non-avarice              | Wholesome action            |
| 35. Non-illwill              | (Kammapatha ways of action) |
| (36) Right Understanding     | (kusala-kammapatha)         |
| 37. Shame                    | The guardians of the world  |
| (38) Fear                    | (lokapāla)                  |

39. Tranquillity of Mental factors	The Six Pairs
40. Tranquillity of Consciousness	(Yugaḷaka)
41. Agility of Mental factors	
42. Agility of Consciousness	
43. Pliancy of Mental factors	
44. Pliancy of Consciousness	
45. Adaptability of Mental factors	
46. Adaptability of Consciousness	
47. Proficiency of Mental factors	
48. Proficiency of Consciousness	
49. Uprightness of Mental factors	
(50) Uprightness of Consciousness	
51. Mindfulness	The Helpers (Upakāraka)
(52) Clear Comprehension	
53. Tranquillity	The Pairwise Combination
(54) Insight	(Yuganandha)
55. Determination	The Last Dyad
(56) Undistractedness	(Piṭṭhi-duka)

According to this, the mental factors arise together with consciousness at the moment when one of the six objects, say visible object, is taken. Although they arise together each exhibits its own characteristic and carries out its own function. For instance, consciousness exhibits its characteristic of being aware of an object, contact that of touch and feeling that of experiencing the object. These mental factors always

- (1) arise together with consciousness,
- (2) cease together with consciousness,
- (3) take the same object as consciousness,
- (4) have the same base as consciousness.

These are their four characteristics of association with consciousness as mentioned in the Explanation to Chapter VI of the Dhātukathā.

This will now be explained further. First of all, since consciousness must be aware of an object, it cannot arise without an object. This is in accordance with the object-condition of the Paṭṭhāna. In the case when consciousness does not arise as in sleep there is the

arising and ceasing of the mental life-continuum which takes as object either a good or evil action (kamma), a sign of good or evil volition (kamma-nimitta) or a sign of destiny (gati-nimitta). It is the object that was taken at the time of death in the previous existence. There are many accounts of this mental life-continuum such as “*Bhavaṅgaṃ āvajjanāya*” and so on in the *Paṭṭhāna*. So when wholesome consciousness arises as the result of taking a visible object, the statement given above :—

(1) The mental factors arise together with that consciousness is in accordance with the co-nascence, mutuality, support, association, presence and non-disappearance conditions of the *Paṭṭhāna* where it is stated that “The four mental aggregates are related to one another by way of co-nascence condition” and so on.

(2) The mental factors cease together with consciousness. Consciousness lasts for 3 momentary phases, nascent, static and ceasing. So the mental factors, which arise together with consciousness, also last for the same time and cease together with it. Only when one group of consciousness and mental factors ceases can another arise. It is stated in the Truth, Mental Formation, States and Faculty chapters of the *Yamaka* and in the proximity condition of *Paṭṭhāna* that a process of arisings and ceasings of these mental groups take place which is in accordance with their nature. Therefore, the wholesome consciousness together with the mental factors which arise as the result of taking a visible object is only a part of this mental process. The complete process consists of (1) vibrating of the life-continuum ; (2) arrest of the life-continuum ; (3) 5 sense-door advertence ; (4) eye consciousness ; (5) recipient consciousness ; (6) investigating consciousness ; (7) seven successive wholesome impulsions, and (8) two successive moments of registering consciousness. The first wholesome impulsion of the seven in the process is related to the second by way of proximity, contiguity, decisive support, frequency, absence, disappearance conditions of the *Paṭṭhāna*. Thus the first impulsion of the consciousness and mental factors brings about the conditions for the second impulsion to arise. When this happens, the first impulsion has ceased and the second is present. It is the same with the remaining impulsions.

Except in the non-percepted plane of existence and at the time of the Attainment of Cessation while alive (*Nirodhasamāpatti*), i.e. on those occasions when there is suspension of consciousness and mental factors, the groups of consciousness and mental factors in

the remaining 30 planes of existence are always arising and ceasing and immediately following one another by way of proximity and other conditions. This goes on from one existence to another, from one world to another. At the end of one existence the ceasing of the death-consciousness is immediately followed by the arising of rebirth-consciousness without any intervening period of time. And in the new existence the groups of consciousness and mental factors which arise as the result of taking different objects, succeed one another so long as the round of rebirths is not ended. This also holds true even in the case of the living Arahāt who has not attained final extinction (*parinibbāna*). It is only with death-consciousness of the Arahāt that the proximity condition no longer functions ; for since no new mental group will ever arise again, there is no more rebirth in any plane of existence, i.e. materiality and mentality will never manifest themselves again.

(3) The mental factors take the same object as consciousness. The visible object taken by consciousness is taken also by the mental factors which arise together with that consciousness. This is the same for all the other five objects. A detailed account of these objects is given in the object-condition of the *Paṭṭhāna*.

(4) The mental factors have the same base as consciousness. In the 4 immaterial existences and the non-percepted existence rebirth can be avoided by the practice of mental culture ; but in the remaining 26 planes of existence the consciousness and mental factors cannot arise without a physical base. For example, eye-consciousness is dependent on the eye-base, ear-consciousness on the ear-base and so on for the other sense-consciousnesses. Thus, excluding the 4 types of immaterial resultant consciousness, the mind element and the remaining 72 types of mind-consciousness can only arise in dependence on the heart-base. The fact that consciousness and mental factors arise dependent on the six bases is to be found in the *Paṭṭhāna* under support, pre-nascence, faculty, dissociation, presence and non-disappearance conditions. There it is stated that “ the eye-base is related to eye-consciousness, ear-base is related to ear-consciousness . . . bodily consciousness, physical base is related to wholesome states, physical base is related to unwholesome states, physical base is related to resultant indeterminate, inoperative indeterminate states ” by way of the above conditions.



### THE BASE SPECIFIED AS HEART-BASE IN THE COMMENTARIES

The physical base mentioned above in the support condition and others of the *Paṭṭhāna* is not specified as heart-base. There is no dispute about the locations of eye-base, ear-base, etc., but only about the location of the physical base on which the mind-element and mind-consciousness are dependent. Does it reside in the brain, lung, heart or anywhere else in the human system? The commentaries state that in the centre of the heart there is a cavity the size of the hollow of a punnaga seed (the Alexandrian laurel tree) which is filled with blood spread throughout which is the physical base. Its specific locality, therefore, is designated as the heart base.

\* \* \*

### THE BASE IS NOT EXPOUNDED IN THE DHAMMASAṄGANĪ

Why was this physical base of mind-consciousness which was expounded by the Buddha in the *Paṭṭhāna* not expounded in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*? The reason is that the symmetry of the twofold classification of object-couplets would not be upheld. In the materiality section of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, where the table of contents is laid down by means of unitary, twofold and so on up to elevenfold classification, it is stated in the twofold classification on base-couplets that "There is materiality (eye-base) which is the base of eye-consciousness. There is materiality (all materiality except eye-base) which is not the base of eye-consciousness". Similar statements are also made for the remaining 4 bases of ear-consciousness and so on up to bodily-consciousness. But there is no mention of the twofold classification of the sixth base which would have to be stated as follows:—

"There is materiality which is the base of mind-consciousness. There is materiality which is not the base of mind-consciousness." If this had been done, the physical base, specified as heart-base in the commentaries, would be inferred.

With regard to the object-couplet, which comes after the base-couplet, similar statements are also made. "There is materiality (visible-object) which is the object of eye-consciousness. There is materiality (all materiality except visible-object) which is not the object of eye-consciousness and so on up to bodily-consciousness. But the twofold classification that "There is materiality (all

materiality) which is the object of mind-consciousness. There is materiality which is not the object of mind-consciousness" is not included, because since all materiality, without exception, is the object of mind-consciousness, the second part is not admissible. Hence this sixth twofold classification of object-couplets is excluded, or there would have been 6 twofold classifications for base-couplets and 5 for object-couplets. The symmetry would have been lost and those who were being instructed confused. Therefore, the sixth twofold classification of base-couplets was left out, but not because there is no physical base of mind element and mind-consciousness.

The above gives an idea of the perfect knowledge of the general characteristics of consciousness and mental factors and of their individual characteristics, functions and so on which is realized only by the Enlightened Buddha. The Elder Nāgasena in the *Milindapañha* (p. 133) gives an illustration to point out how extremely difficult it is to attain such knowledge.

The Elder : "A hard thing there is, O King, which the Blessed One has done."

Milinda : "And what is that ?"

The Elder : "The fixing of all those mental groups which depend on one organ of sense, telling us that such is contact, such is feeling, and such perception, and such volition and such consciousness."

Milinda : "Give me an illustration."

The Elder : "Suppose, O King, a man were to wade down into the ocean and, taking some water in the palm of his hand, were to taste it with his tongue. Could he distinguish whether it were water from the Ganges, Yamunā, Aciravatī, Sarabhū or from the Mahī ?"

Milinda : "Impossible ! Sir."

The Elder : "More difficult than that, great King, is it to have distinguished between the mental groups which follow on the exercise of any one of the organs of sense."

\* \* \*

#### THE METHODS OF EXPOSITION OF THE ABHIDHAMMA

The Abhidhamma cannot be understood without knowing the methods of the exposition. In expounding it the Buddha provided

these wherever necessary. For instance, in the *Dhammasaṅgani* each type of consciousness is classified, e.g. "Now, on that occasion, the aggregates are four, the bases are two and the elements are two". This method is then applied to the classification of states under aggregates, bases and elements in the first chapter of the *Dhātu-kathā* and the four subsequent chapters are based on the method of this chapter. In this manner the Buddha provided methods right up to *Paṭṭhāna*. Here the subject is treated in numerous ways but the methods are always given. Therefore, the *Abhidhamma*, unlike the *Sutta* and *Vinaya*, must be studied under a teacher who is conversant with the methods. The translator of this text was the first to devise charts of the *Abhidhamma* for easy understanding. In fact the *Paṭṭhāna*, in the form of charts, is being easily studied at present in different parts of Burma. In this connection the author suggests that the Pāli Text Society publish Charts of its "Compendium of Philosophy" as an aid to the proper understanding of this text. It is believed that by doing so it will become a much more popular publication.

\* \* \*

#### DISCOURSES ON THE ELEMENTS

The Buddha's discourses on the elements, besides being found in the *Dhātu-kathā*, occur also in other Texts of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* such as the *Dhātu-Vibhaṅga* and *Dhātu-Yamaka* of the *Vibhaṅga* and *Yamaka* Texts respectively. They are also contained in such *Sutta Piṭaka* passages as *Dhātu-Manasikāra* in the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha* and *Majjhima Nikāyas*; in the *Mahā-Hatthipadopama*, *Dhātu-Vibhaṅga* and *Rāhulovāda Suttas* of the *Majjhima* and in the *Dhātu-Saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta*. The treatment of the elements in each of these discourses is briefly as follows :—

##### 1. *Dhātu-Vibhaṅga* of *Abhidhamma Vibhaṅga*.

This chapter consists of the *Sutta*, *Abhidhamma* and *Catechism* Sections.

- (a) The *Sutta* Section deals with three sets of 6 elements making a total of 18. They are (1) earth, wind, heat, water, space and consciousness; (2) pleasant feeling, painful feeling, mental joy, grief, indifferent feeling and ignorance; (3) lust, ill-will, cruelty, renunciation, non-ill-will, non-cruelty.

- (b) The Abhidhamma Section deals with the kind and nature of the 18 elements.
- (c) The Catechism Section deals, in detail, with questions and answers on the elements that are wholesome, unwholesome and indeterminate and so on in accordance with the classifications of the 22 triplets and 100 couplets.

## 2. Dhātu-Yamaka of Abhidhamma Yamaka.

This chapter consists of Sections on Terms, Process and Penetration.

- (a) *Terms* : The 18 elements are dealt with in this section in the following form of question and answer :—

- (i) Is that which is called eye also called eye-element ?  
The Divine Eye and the Eye of Wisdom are called eye but they are not called eye-element. The eye-element is called eye as well as eye-element.

- (ii) Is that which is called eye-element also called eye ?  
That which is called eye-element is also called eye.

- (b) *Process* : 11 elements (excluding sound-element, eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind element of the present existence) which arise at birth and death are dealt with in the following form of question to which the answer is provided.

When the eye-element arises in a person, does the ear-element also arise ? This is with reference not only to the person as above but also to existence and both person and existence at six periods of time, the present, past, future, present and past, present and future, past and future.

- (c) *Penetration* : The 18 elements are dealt with in the following form of question to which the answer is provided. “ Does the person who penetrates the eye-element, also penetrate the ear-element ? Does the person who penetrates the ear-element also penetrate the eye-element ? ” This is with regard to the six periods of time as above.

## 3. Dīgha and Majjhima Nikāyas.

The four elements, earth, heat, water and wind, are dealt with under the contemplation of body in the Mahā-Satipatṭhāna Suttas of these two Nikāyas.

#### 4. Majjhima Nikāya.

The four elements, earth, heat, water and wind, which are internal and external, are dealt with in detail in the Mahā-Hatthipadopama and Mahā-Rāhulovāda Suttas; and six elements, earth, heat, water, wind, space and consciousness are dealt with in Dhātu-Vibhaṅga Sutta.

#### 5. Saṃyutta Nikāya.

The 18 elements in groups of three such as eye, visible object, eye-consciousness; ear, sound, ear-consciousness, etc. are dealt with to show their diverse natures and as a result of which diverse results are produced. The following is an example taken from the translation by Mrs. Rhys Davids, *Kindred Sayings*, ii, pp. 101, 103 :—

The Exalted One said this : “ What, brethren, is the diversity in elements ? The elements of eye, of visible object, of eye-consciousness ; the elements of ear, of sound, of ear-consciousness . . . the elements of mind, of cognizable objects, of mind-consciousness ; this, brethren, is called diversity in elements.

Because of the diversity in elements, brethren, arises diversity in perceptions ; because of diversity in perceptions arises diversity in intentions (aims) ; because of diversity in intentions (aims) arises diversity in desires ; because of diversity in desires arises diversity in distress (yearnings) ; because of diversity in distress (yearnings) arises diversity in quests.”

Besides these, there are many other discourses on the radiant elements, the lustre elements, the elements of infinity of space, infinity of consciousness, nothingness, neither perception nor non-perception, attainment of cessation and so on.

The Dhātu-kathā, however, deals with the classification and non-classification, etc. divided into 14 chapters, of the 22 triplets and 100 couplets, already expounded in the Dhammasaṅgani, and of the aggregates, bases and elements, etc. already expounded in the Vibhaṅga.

\* \* \*

### THE ELEMENTS

An element is defined as that which bears its own intrinsic nature. It cannot be split up or transformed into another. The elements are abstract qualities and as such are empty and void of substance, self, soul, I, being, person and life. Except for Nibbāna, which is

permanent and unconditioned, the rest of the elements are the ultimate constituents of all things which are said to be animate and inanimate. These latter elements will be briefly dealt with here. For when one has really grasped their true natures in a practical way for oneself, they will be realized as suffering and given up. Only then will Nibbāna be attained.

\* \* \*

### THE CONDITIONED NATURE OF ELEMENTS

The elements are not permanently present. They arise to exhibit their own characteristic natures and perform their own characteristic functions when the proper conditions are satisfied, and they cease after their span of duration. Thus no being has any control over the arising and ceasing of the elements and they are not at his mercy or will however mighty and powerful he may be. In other words, the elements have no regard for anyone, show no favour to anyone and do not accede to the wishes of anyone. They are entirely dependent on conditions.

For example, when the four conditions : a visible object, the sense of sight, light and attention, are present, the eye-consciousness element arises. No power can prevent this element from arising when these conditions are present or cause it to arise when one of them is absent.

\* \* \*

### ELEMENTS ARE THE ULTIMATE CONSTITUENTS OF THINGS

What is conventionally known as a piece of wood consists of eight material elements, earth, heat, wind, water, visibility, odour, taste and nutriment. The sense of touch reveals (1) that it is hard which is the characteristic of the earth \* element ; (2) that it is cold which is the characteristic of the heat element ; (3) that it is resistant to the touch which is the characteristic of the wind \* element. The cohesion of the above three elements is the characteristic of the water \* element. The sense of sight reveals that it is visible which

\* The elements are termed earth, wind and water according to popular Abhidhammic usage but they are not to be taken in their literal senses of solid earth, gaseous wind and liquid water.

is the characteristic of the visible object element. The sense of odour reveals that it has some odour which is the characteristic of the odour element. The sense of taste reveals that it has a slight taste which is the characteristic of the taste element. And since it has some nutritive value it has the characteristic of the nutriment element. This piece of wood may be split up into its ultimate components such as protons, electrons, etc., but these still consist of the eight elements.

All things said to be inanimate invariably consist of groups of these eight inseparable material elements. Each carries out its own function but does not assist the other elements in carrying out their own functions. However, they are dependent upon one another for their arising in accordance with the co-nascence, mutuality, support, presence and non-disappearance conditions of the Paṭṭhāna. For example, dependent upon the earth element, the remaining three primary elements, heat, wind and water arise ; dependent on the three primary elements, earth, heat and wind, the water element arises ; dependent on two primary elements, the remaining two primary elements arise. Again, dependent on the four primary elements, there arise visibility, odour, taste and nutriment, which belong to the twenty-four derived elements of matter aggregate, in accordance with the co-nascence, support, presence and non-disappearance conditions of the Paṭṭhāna.

All things said to be animate consist of material and mental elements comprising (1) 28 material qualities such as the eight inseparable elements given above, the five senses, masculinity, femininity, bodily and verbal intimations ; (2) 52 mental factors such as feeling, perception, intention, attention, applied thought, sustained thought, decision, greed, wrong views, conceit, anger, envy, stinginess, worry, restlessness, delusion, shame, fear, faith, mindfulness, non-greed, amity, knowledge, sympathy, and (3) consciousness. Only the appropriate material and mental elements arise together on each occasion. As said before, only an Enlightened Buddha perceives each one of them at the same time. Others, who know how to observe them practically, perceive only the predominant element. For example, when greed arises in one's continuity other material and mental elements also arise but only greed is observed. It is possible to observe another mental element accompanying greed when it is looked for in succeeding mental groups of greed. When greed, anger or mental joy is predominantly manifested in

another person it is conventionally said that he is greedy, angry or happy. The details about these elements cannot be given here but are to be found in the Abhidhamma.

\* \* \*

### THE ELEMENTS ARE VOID OF SUBSTANCE

The elements, being abstract qualities, are empty and void of substance. Since only these elements really exist, no solid, substantial things are to be found outside them. So, in the ultimate sense, there are no such things but only the abstract elements. But in conventional language it has to be said that inanimate things are made up of eight material elements. Most people, ignorant of the nature of elements, interpret this to mean that substantial inanimate things exist built up of the eight elements. This belief has come about partly owing to a lack of proper knowledge of the consciousness elements.

The 5 sense-consciousness elements and the mind element are conscious of sense objects which are material elements. Mind-consciousness element, however, is conscious of objects of thought which are either of the past, present or future, material or mental, real or imaginary. All these consciousness elements occur in mental processes. A mental process of sense-consciousness element is followed by several mental processes of mind-consciousness element. For example, after the mental process of eye-consciousness element, which can only have a visible object element as object, several mental processes of mind-consciousness element follow : the objects taken separately and in succession are (1) the past visible object element that was taken in parts by eye-consciousness element ; (2) the visible object element taken as a whole ; (3) the form and associated solid object ; (4) the name of the object. The first and second objects are the true, abstract elements but the third and fourth objects are just concepts and terms respectively. It has to be remembered that visible object element simply carries out its characteristic function of visibility. It does not carry out the function (which is that of mind-consciousness element) of collecting together to give form and solidity. Nor do the elements carry out the function of naming. Therefore only mind-consciousness element is conscious of the concepts of form, solidity and terms which do not really exist. For, according to Abhidhamma, there are no solid substances



but only these elements carrying out their characteristic functions. But since they occur in varying degrees and quantities, distinctions are made between the various solid form concepts taken as objects by mind-consciousness element and given names such as tree, mountain, sun, moon, star, etc. The explanation has been unavoidably brief but it should give an idea of how this belief in the existence of a world of inanimate things has come to be accepted. Similarly, living beings, persons, men and women and their names are concepts taken up as objects of mind-consciousness element as the result of the manifestations of material and mental elements that are mere qualities.

\* \* \*

### THE ELEMENTS ARE VOID OF ATTĀ

When the proper conditions are present, the elements arise and carry out their respective functions. There is no attā, i.e. no ego-entity, soul, self, or I, that is independent of these elements and controlling them. The Brahmajāla Sutta describes how this belief in attā came about ; it then goes on to say that later some heretics took the view that when Mahā-Brahmā created beings he put a part of himself, which they called attā, into their bodies ; that it was this attā which has the characteristic of (1) "doer" because it performs all actions and causes happiness and suffering ; (2) "controller" because the physical and mental elements in beings have to accede to its wishes ; (3) "independence" because it does not follow the dictates of the physical and mental elements in beings ; (4) "ruler" because it governs the physical and mental elements in beings ; (5) "lord" because it is the master ; (6) "substantiality" because it cannot be destroyed by any means. This view of attā, held by heretics, is opposed to the view that elements are empty and void of attā.

\* \* \*

### TWO KINDS OF ATTĀ

1. The Buddha, in the light of right understanding, did not reject the conventional mode of speech. He explained that attā (or self) is a conventional term used to denote the combination of

the five khandhā or aggregates. It is used in this sense in the *Atta-vagga* of *Dhammapada*.

The Buddha, in the light of heretical views, rejected the *attā* (or self) view held by heretics.

\* \* \*

### THE ELEMENTS ARE VOID OF BEINGS

The elements do not possess the characteristic functions of living beings. They arise and cease within an exceedingly short period of time. In the wink of an eye or a flash of lightning, which lasts for a microsecond ( $10^{-6}$  second), the mental elements arise and cease a trillion ( $10^{12}$ ) times. This is just an estimate. The subcommentary takes the higher figure of  $10^{15}$ . Thus the mental elements arise and cease  $10^{15} \times 10^6 = 10^{21}$  times per second. Their extremely short duration is also mentioned in the *Anguttara Nikāya*. As regards the material elements, since they endure for 17 thought-moments, they arise and cease  $\frac{10^{21}}{17}$  (app = 58,823,530,000,000,000) times

per second. But because the functions of the elements give rise to the concepts of continuity, collection and form the ideas arise of (1) the initial effort that has to be exerted when a deed is about to be performed and (2) the care that has to be taken while the deed is being performed to its completion. And this leads to the subsequent ideas (3) "I can perform" and (4) "I can feel". Thus these 4 imaginary characteristic functions of being have brought about a deep-rooted belief in their existence. But the elements have not the time or span of duration to carry out such functions.

\* \* \*

### THE ELEMENTS ARE VOID OF LIFE

The elements arise and cease without any movement taking place. The life characteristics of the elements are physical life, psychical life, heat produced by kamma and mental life-continuum. These arise and cease as stated above. When they cease and do not arise again in the present existence this is known as death. But because the concepts of walking, speaking, breathing and other physical actions can be performed without assistance, it is imagined

that there is life. So it is conventionally said that a being lives for 7 days, 8 months, 10 years, 50 years, etc. The heretics hold several views of life, such as life is the being, the being is life or the being has both life and body. Such views relate to the life of the attā.

\* \* \*

### THE ILLUSORY NATURE OF THE WORLD

The material and mental elements may be compared to the shadows on the cinema screen, which appear and disappear in rapid succession. The mind-consciousness element (of what is conventionally said to be the spectator) takes the actors, actresses, rivers, mountains, etc., as objects, and a drama is built up from them. This is due to a perverted belief that the actors, etc., exist, and the shadows serve as stimuli for imagining them. Similarly the material and mental elements arise and cease in rapid succession and the mind-consciousness element takes men, women, trees, mountains, etc., as objects, and a drama of a world of animate and inanimate things is built up from them. This is due to the perverted belief in the existence of a living world of persons and things and the elements serve as stimuli for imagining them. Here the difference from the cinema is that there are no spectators as the mind-consciousness element is also like the shadow on the screen, i.e. it is always arising and ceasing. If the mind-consciousness element is not seen in this manner according to reality it will be believed that it permanently resides in the body and that it is the same mind-consciousness element that (1) seeks and takes objects ; (2) is present throughout the day ; (3) was present yesterday, is present now and will be present tomorrow—in other words, that from birth to death the mind-consciousness element is the same and is conscious of all daily actions, speech and thoughts.

\* \* \*

### CONCLUSION

The Dhātu-kathā was expounded by the Buddha in order to dispel wrong views of attā, i.e. of substantiality, ego-entity, self, soul, I, being, person, man, woman, and life. It deals with the states (dhammā), which are the only things to be found, under the

categories of aggregates, bases and elements which are all anattā, i.e. not attā. Therefore there is no attā but only the arising and ceasing of states that are either aggregates, bases or elements. Being, person, self, I, etc. are mere concepts expressed in conventional terms which the vast majority believe correspond with reality. As there will be no great attachment to concepts, a deeper practical study will be made of the aggregates, bases and elements. If it is realized that these are impermanent, and therefore unsatisfactory, burdensome, and, in short, are suffering, they will be given up and release from suffering, Nibbāna, attained. And this is the sole purpose of the Buddha's Teaching.

THEIN NYUN.



## INTRODUCTION

The Buddha is said to have expounded the Abhidhamma in Tāvātimsā, the abode of the 33 devas. Dhātu-kathā was the subject of discourse following Vibhaṅga. Therefore, its contents form the third book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. Dhātu (element) is defined as that which bears its own nature. Thus all the states of enquiry of the text beginning with the aggregates and ending with the couplet on lamentation come under the elements. This also implies that elements are not living beings and are not concerned with them. Dhātu-kathā (Discourse on Elements) deals with the classification, unclassification, association and dissociation of the above states of enquiry with reference to the three categories of 5 aggregates, 12 bases and 18 elements. Although these elements are expounded in the Dhammasaṅgani and Vibhaṅga, they are not treated exclusively and in detail there as they are in this text.

A literal translation of the Dhātu-kathā is simple enough but unless the readers have mastered the relevant portions of the first two Abhidhamma texts, the Dhammasaṅgani and Vibhaṅga, they will not be able to understand it by themselves. So, in order to help them, charts and explanations are provided at the end of each chapter. First of all, the reader must know the analytical units of the states of enquiry of the text and the general system of classification of these units under the aggregates, bases and elements. This information is provided after the translation of Chapter I by the Chart and the Internal and External Tables. In the latter tables, the analytical units are given so as to show why a state is classified and unclassified under the given aggregates, bases and elements. Unless a proper study is made of this Chapter, it will be of no use to proceed further with the text. Then in the following four chapters, where the states of enquiry are compared with other states, it is necessary to know what "these states" and "those states" stand for. This is the most difficult part of the text. The Charts and Explanations show the methods, give reasons why certain states of enquiry are dealt with in a particular chapter, and reveal what "these states" and "those states" stand for. This is also done for the association of states with and dissociation of states from the aggregates, bases and elements in Chapters VI to X and for the remaining four chapters which are combinations of classification, unclassification, association and dissociation.