

# The Arahant and the Four Truths in Early Buddhist Discourse

by Bhikkhu Anālayo

## lecture 8

### **MĀ 30 – Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint** (Parallel to the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta*, MN 28/ MN I 184)

"Venerable friends, whatever countless wholesome states there are can all be subsumed under the four noble truths; they are all included in the four noble truths; the four noble truths are declared to be the foremost of all teachings. Why? Because they encompass all wholesome states.

"Venerable friends, it is just as the elephant's footprint is foremost among the footprints of all animals, because it is the greatest, the largest.

"So too, venerable friends, the countless wholesome states are all subsumed under the four noble truths; they are all included in the four noble truths; the four noble truths are declared to be the foremost of all teachings."

"What are the four? They are:

- the noble truth of *dukkha*,
- [the noble truth of] the arising of *dukkha*,
- [the noble truth of] the cessation of *dukkha*,
- and the noble truth of the path [leading to] the cessation of *dukkha*.

"What, venerable friends, is the noble truth of *dukkha*? It is this: birth is *dukkha*, old age is *dukkha*, disease is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*, association with what is disliked is *dukkha*, separation from

what is loved is *dukkha*, being unable to get what one wishes is *dukkha*; in short, the five aggregates of clinging are *dukkha*.

"What, venerable friends, are the five aggregates of clinging, [which are] *dukkha*? They are: the material form aggregate of clinging; the feeling [aggregate of clinging]; the perception [aggregate of clinging]; the formations [aggregate of clinging]; and the consciousness aggregate of clinging.

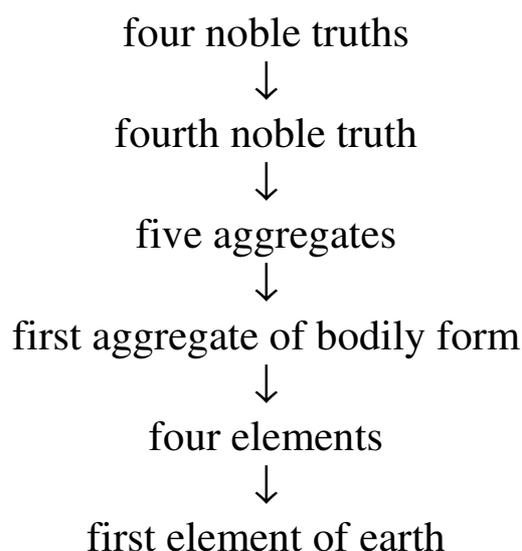
"What, venerable friends, is the material form aggregate of clinging? It is whatever is corporeal, the four great elements and whatever is derived from the four great elements.

"What, venerable friends, are the four great elements? They are the earth element, the water [element], the fire [element], and the wind element.

"What, venerable friends, is the earth element? There are, venerable friends, two kinds of earth element: there is the internal earth element and the external earth element.

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pattern of exposition:



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## MĀ 30

"What, venerable friends, is the internal earth element? Whatever internally, being inside the body, is solid and solidified, whatever is internally clung to. And what is that?

"It is: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, coarse and fine skin, flesh, sinews, bones, heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, spleen, intestines, stomach, feces, or whatever else that exists in this body, is found inside it, that is solid, solidified, and is internally clung to. Venerable friends, this is called the internal earth element.

"Venerable friends, as for the external earth element — great though it is, pure though it is, beyond reproach though it is — [yet], venerable friends, at times there is an inundation, and then the external earth element disappears.

"Venerable friends, this external earth element — great though it is, pure though it is, beyond reproach though it is — is impermanent by nature, of a nature to be extinguished, of a nature to decay, changing by nature. How much more so this short-lived body that is clung to with craving!

"[Yet] the unlearned, deluded worldling thinks: 'This is me,' 'this is mine,' 'I belong to this.'

"[On the other hand,] a learned noble disciple does not think: 'This is me,' 'this is mine,' 'I belong to this.' How could he have such a thought?

"If people curse him, beat him, and become angry with him, he thinks: 'This pain that I am experiencing is born of causes and conditions; it is not without causes and conditions. What are the conditions? It is dependent on contact [to be experienced as] painful.'

"He contemplates this contact as impermanent; and he contemplates feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness as impermanent. Through [contemplation of] the elements, his mind remains still, one-pointed, concentrated, and imperturbable"

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dynamics of reflection:

earth element is impermanent, be it external or internal



"my" body is impermanent



unpleasant experiences are also impermanent



mind remains imperturbable

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MĀ 30

"If, on a later occasion, other people come and address him with gentle phrases and soft words, he thinks: 'This pleasure that I am experiencing is born of causes and conditions, it is not without causes and conditions. What are the conditions? It is dependent on contact [to be experienced as] pleasant.'

"He contemplates this contact as impermanent, and he contemplates feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness as impermanent. Through [contemplation of] the elements, his mind remains still, one-pointed, concentrated, and imperturbable."

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the positive case is not taken into account in MN 28

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## MĀ 30

"If, on a later occasion, some people, young, middle-aged, or old, come and subject him to various objectionable acts — perhaps punching him, stoning him, or harming him with blade or cudgel— then he thinks:

"This body that I cling to is of a coarse material substance, derived from the four great elements, born of father and mother, maintained by food and drink, always requiring to be clothed, needing to sit or lie down, to be massaged and bathed, and to endure the worst. [This body is] subject to breaking up, extinction, and dissolution.

"It is because of this body that I am susceptible to being punched, stoned, and harmed with blade or cudgel.'

"[Thinking] thus, [the noble disciple] exerts himself energetically without idleness, with upright body and right mindfulness, without forgetfulness and without delusion, his mind becoming one-pointed and concentrated.

"He thinks: 'I will not be neglectful. I will exert myself energetically without idleness, with upright body and right mindfulness, without forgetfulness and without delusion, my mind having become one-pointed and concentrated. This body to which I cling, let it be punched, stoned, and harmed by blade or cudgel, yet I shall energetically train in the teaching of the Blessed One.'

"Venerable friends, the Blessed One has given this teaching: Suppose that bandits have come and are cutting your body limb from limb with a sharp saw. If, while those bandits are cutting your body limb from limb with a sharp saw, you were to have some change in your mind-state, or even utter evil words, then you would be failing and regressing [in your practice].

"You should think thus: 'If a bandit comes and cuts my body limb from limb with a sharp saw, there will not, because of that, be any change in my mind-state, and I will not even utter evil words. I will arouse compassion toward the person who is cutting my body limb from limb.

"For his sake I shall imbue my mind with loving-kindness and dwell [mentally] pervading one direction [with loving-kindness], likewise the second, the third, and the fourth direction, and also the four intermediate directions and also above and below, all around, everywhere. With a mind imbued with loving-kindness, free from fetters or resentment, without ill-will or quarrel, I shall dwell pervading the entire world [with a mind] boundless, exalted, immeasurable and well-cultivated.'

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simile of the saw

stems from *Kakacūpama-sutta*, MN 21,  
found similarly in its parallel

another example for patience:  
*Puṇṇovāda-sutta*, MN 145:

- be abused
- receive a blow,
- have a clod thrown at him,
- be hit with a stick,
- be attacked with a knife,
- be deprived of life.

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dynamics of reflection in MĀ 30 and MN 28:

patient forbearing with what others may do



develop *mettā*

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### MĀ 30

"Venerable friends, if that monk does not, through [recollecting] the Buddha, the Dharma, and the monastic community, dwell in equanimity that is in harmony with what is wholesome, then this monk should feel embarrassed and ashamed, [thinking]:

"As for benefits, I am without them; as for virtuous qualities, I am without them; for I do not dwell in equanimity that is in harmony with what is wholesome through [recollecting] the Buddha, the Dharma, and the monastic community.'

"Venerable friends, just as a newly wedded wife feels embarrassed and ashamed when she sees her in-laws or sees her husband, know that this monk is like that; he should feel embarrassed and ashamed [thinking]:

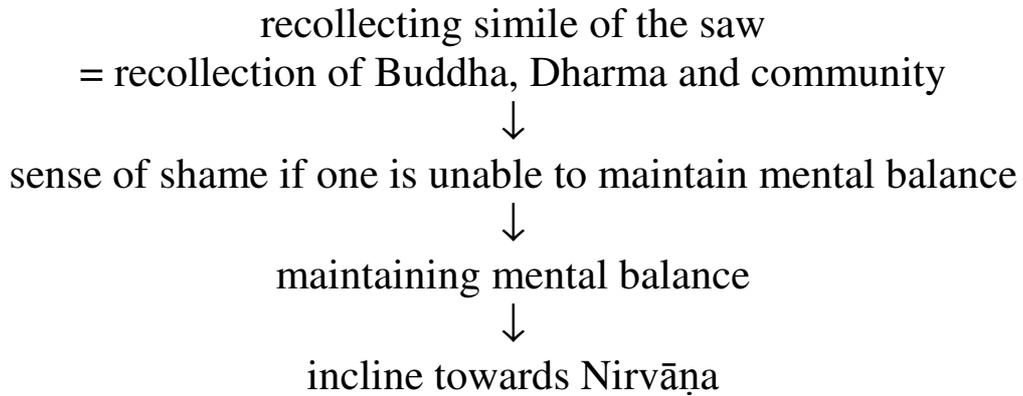
"As for benefits, I am without them; as for virtuous qualities, I am without them, for I do not dwell in equanimity that is in harmony with what is wholesome through [recollecting] the Buddha, the Dharma, and the monastic community.'

"If, however, as a result of feeling embarrassed and ashamed, he [is then able to] dwell in equanimity that is in harmony with what is wholesome, [thinking]:

"This is excellent and peaceful, namely, the casting aside of becoming, the abandoning of craving, dispassion, and complete cessation without remainder,' then, venerable friends, this monk is reckoned to have trained fully and abundantly."

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dynamics of reflection:



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### MĀ 30

[the same procedure is then applied to the water, fire and wind elements]

"What, venerable friends, is the internal water element? Whatever internally, inside the body, is watery, moistening, and is internally clung to; that is to say, brain, brain stem, tears, sweat, snot, phlegm, pus, blood, fat, marrow, spittle, bile, urine, or whatever else exists internally, inside the body, that is watery, moistening, and is internally clung to – this, venerable friends, is called the internal water element.

"Venerable friends, as for the external water element — great though it is, pure though it is, beyond reproach though it is — [yet], venerable friends, at times there is a conflagration, and then the external water element disappears.

[followed by whole meditative dynamics as above, then]

"What, venerable friends, is the internal fire element? Whatever internally, inside the body, is fiery, warming, and is internally clung to; that is to say, that by which the body is kept warm, that by which one becomes feverish, that by which one becomes hot and sweaty, that

which gives strength, that by which food and drink are digested, or whatever else exists internally, inside the body, that is fiery, warming, and is internally clung to – this, venerable friends, is called the internal fire element.

"Venerable friends, as for the external fire element — great though it is, pure though it is, beyond reproach though it is — [yet] there is a time when the external fire element arises and, having arisen, burns villages, towns, mountain forests, and wilderness; and having burnt these, it reaches a road or reaches water, and becomes extinguished for lack of fuel. [Yet,] venerable friends, after such conflagration, people seek to make fire, by means of drilling wood or bamboo, or by striking flint.

[followed by whole meditative dynamics as above, then]

"What, venerable friends, is the internal wind element? Whatever internally, inside the body, is airy, moving, and is internally clung to; that is to say, up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the bowels, coursing winds, pulling and contracting winds, stabbing winds, pushing winds, circulating winds, winds in the limbs, out-breath, in-breath, or whatever else internally, inside the body, is airy, moving, and is internally clung to – this, venerable friends, is called the internal wind element.

"Venerable friends, as for the external wind element — great though it is, pure though it is, beyond reproach though it is — [yet] there are times when the external wind element arises and having arisen, knocks over houses, uproots trees, and causes landslides. When it encounters a mountain or the face of a cliff, it stops and becomes still. [Yet,] friends, when the external wind element becomes still, people seek to make wind by using a fan, a palm frond, or a cloth."

[followed by whole meditative dynamics as above, then]

"Venerable friends, just as when a space is enclosed by timber, clay, and reeds, it comes to be termed a 'house,' so too, venerable friends,

it is with this body: know that when a space is enclosed by sinews, bones, skin, flesh, and blood, it comes to be termed a 'body.'

"Venerable friends, if internally the eye sense-base is not intact, [and if] external forms are not illuminated by light, so that no awareness occurs, then eye consciousness does not come to arise.

"Venerable friends, if [however,] internally the eye sense-base is intact, [and if] external forms are illuminated by light, so that awareness occurs, then eye consciousness comes to arise.

"Venerable friends, the internal eye sense-base and forms – [that is,] the external forms cognized by eye-consciousness – belong to the material form aggregate. Any feeling [that thus] comes to be belongs to the feeling aggregate. Any perception [that thus] comes to be belongs to the perception aggregate. Any volitional formation [that thus] comes to be belongs to the volitional formations aggregate. Any consciousness [that thus] comes to be belongs to the consciousness aggregate. This is how one contemplates the conjunction of the aggregates.

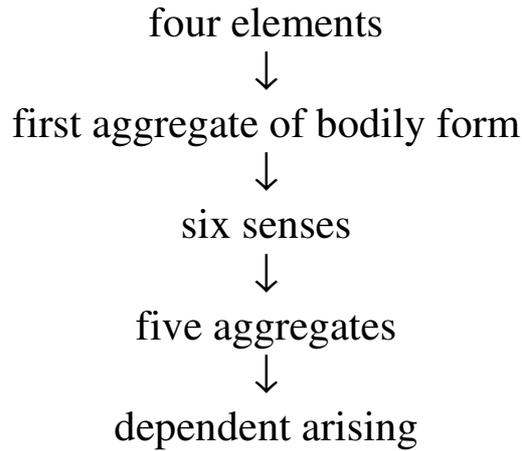
"Venerable friends, the Blessed One has also given this teaching: 'If one sees dependent arising, one sees the Dharma; if one sees the Dharma, one sees dependent arising.' Why is that?

"Venerable friends, the Blessed One teaches that the five aggregates of clinging — the material form aggregate of clinging, the feeling [aggregate of clinging], the perception [aggregate of clinging], the formations [aggregate of clinging], and the consciousness aggregate of clinging – arise from causes and conditions.

[same is then applied to the other sense-doors]

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pattern of exposition:



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MĀ 30

"[One who contemplates this] becomes disenchanted with past, future, and present [manifestations of the] five aggregates of clinging. Being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion he becomes liberated. Being liberated, he knows he is liberated, he knows as it really is: 'Birth is ended, the holy life has been established, what was to be done has been done. There will not be another existence.'

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MN 28

instead relates the exposition back to the four noble truths:

"these five aggregates of clinging are dependently arisen. The desire, indulgence, inclination, and holding based on these five aggregates of clinging is the origin of suffering. The removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of desire and lust for these five aggregates of clinging is the cessation of suffering"

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main point:

## four noble truths practically applied

dynamics of reflection:

