MN 140 — Dhatu-vibhanga Sutta: An Analysis of the Properties

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

I have heard that on one occasion, as the Blessed One was wandering among the Magadhans, he entered Rajagaha, went to the potter Bhaggava, and on arrival said to him, "If it is no inconvenience for you, Bhaggava, I will stay for one night in your shed."

"It's no inconvenience for me, lord, but there is a wanderer who has already taken up residence there. If he gives his permission, you may stay there as you like."

Now at that time a clansman named Pukkusati had left home and gone forth into homelessness through faith, out of dedication to the Blessed One. He was the one who had already taken up residence in the potter's shed. So the Blessed One approached Ven. Pukkusati and said to him, "If it is no inconvenience for you, monk, I will stay one night in the shed."

"The shed is roomy, my friend. Stay as you like."

So the Blessed One, entering the potter's shed and, setting out a spread of grass to one side, sat down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness

to the fore. He spent most of the night sitting [in meditation]. Ven. Pukkusati also spent most of the night sitting [in meditation]. The thought occurred to the Blessed One, "How inspiring is the way this clansman behaves! What if I were to question him?" So he said to Ven. Pukkusati, "Out of dedication to whom, monk, have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Of whose Dhamma do you approve?"

"There is, my friend, Gotama the contemplative, a son of the Sakyans, gone forth from a Sakyan clan. Now, this excellent report about the honorable Gotama has been spread about: 'Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge & conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the worlds, unexcelled as a trainer for those people fit to be tamed, the Teacher of divine & human beings, awakened, blessed.' I have gone forth out of dedication to that Blessed One. That Blessed One is my teacher. It is of that Blessed One's Dhamma that I approve."

"But where, monk, is that Blessed One — worthy & rightly self-awakened — staying now?"

"There is, my friend, a city in the northern lands named Savatthi. That is where the Blessed One — worthy & rightly self-awakened — is staying now."

"Have you ever seen that Blessed One before? On seeing him, would you recognize him?"

"No, my friend, I have never seen the Blessed One before, nor on seeing him would I recognize him."

Then the thought occurred to the Blessed One: "It is out of dedication to me that this clansman has gone forth. What if I were to teach him the Dhamma?" So he said to Ven. Pukkusati, "I will teach you the Dhamma, monk. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak."

"As you say, friend," replied Ven. Pukkusati.

The Blessed One said: "A person has six properties, six media of sensory contact, eighteen considerations, & four determinations. He has been stilled where the currents of construing do not flow. And when the currents of construing do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace. One should not be negligent of discernment, should guard the truth, be devoted to relinquishment, and train only for calm. This is the summary of the analysis of the six properties.

"'A person has six properties.' Thus was it said. In reference to what was it said? These are the six properties: the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, the wind property, the space property, the consciousness property. 'A person has six properties.' Thus was it said, and in reference to this was it said.

"'A person has six media of sensory contact.' Thus was it said. In reference to what was it said? These are the six media of sensory contact: the eye as a medium of sensory contact, the ear... the nose... the tongue... the body... the intellect as a medium of sensory contact. 'A person has six media of sensory contact.' Thus was it said, and in reference to

this was it said.

"'A person has eighteen considerations.' Thus was it said. In reference to what was it said? These are the eighteen considerations: On seeing a form with the eye, one considers a form that can act as a basis for joy, a form that can act as a basis for distress, or a form that can act as a basis for equanimity. On hearing a sound with the ear... On smelling an aroma with the nose... On tasting a flavor with the tongue... On feeling a tactile sensation with the body... On cognizing an idea with the intellect, one considers an idea that can act as a basis for joy, an idea that can act as a basis for distress, or an idea that can act as a basis for equanimity. Thus there are six considerations conducive to joy, six conducive to distress, & six conducive to equanimity. 'A person has eighteen considerations.' Thus was it said, and in reference to this was it said.

"'A person has four determinations.' Thus was it said. In reference to what was it said? These are the four determinations: the determination for discernment, the determination for truth, the determination for relinquishment, the determination for calm. 'A person has four determinations.' Thus was it said, and in reference to this was it said.

"'One should not be negligent of discernment, should guard the truth, be devoted to relinquishment, and train only for calm.' Thus was it said. In reference to what was it said? And how is one not negligent of discernment? These are the six properties: the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, the wind property, the space property, the consciousness property.

"And what is the earth property? The earth property can be either internal or external. What is the internal earth property? Anything internal, within oneself, that's hard, solid, & sustained [by craving]: head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's hard, solid, and sustained: This is called the internal earth property. Now both the internal earth property & the external earth property are simply earth property. And that should be seen as it actually is present with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is present with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the earth property and makes the earth property fade from the mind.

"And what is the liquid property? The liquid property may be either internal or external. What is the internal liquid property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's liquid, watery, & sustained: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, oil-of-the-joints, urine, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's liquid, watery, & sustained: This is called the internal liquid property. Now both the internal liquid property & the external liquid property are simply liquid property. And that should be seen as it actually is present with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is present with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the liquid property and makes the liquid property fade from the mind.

"And what is the fire property? The fire property may be either internal or external. What is the internal fire property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's fire, fiery, & sustained: that by which [the body] is warmed, aged, & consumed with fever; and that by which what is eaten, drunk, consumed & tasted gets properly digested; or anything else internal, within oneself, that's fire, fiery, & sustained: This is called the internal fire property. Now both the internal fire property & the external fire property are simply fire property. And that should be seen as it actually is present with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is present with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the fire property and makes the fire property fade from the mind.

"And what is the wind property? The wind property may be either internal or external. What is the internal wind property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's wind, windy, & sustained: up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the stomach, winds in the intestines, winds that course through the body, in-and-out breathing, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's wind, windy, & sustained: This is called the internal wind property. Now both the internal wind property & the external wind property are simply wind property. And that should be seen as it actually is present with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is present with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the wind property and makes the wind property fade from the mind.

"And what is the space property? The space property may be either internal or external. What is the internal space property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's space, spatial, & sustained: the holes of the ears, the nostrils, the mouth, the [passage] whereby what is eaten, drunk, consumed, & tasted gets swallowed, and where it collects, and whereby it is excreted from below, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's space, spatial, & sustained: This is called the internal space property. Now both the internal space property & the external space property are simply space property. And that should be seen as it actually is present with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is present with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the space property and makes the space property fade from the mind.

"There remains only consciousness: pure & bright. What does one cognize with that consciousness? One cognizes 'pleasure.' One cognizes 'pain.' One cognizes 'neither pleasure nor pain.' In dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as pleasure, there arises a feeling of pleasure. When sensing a feeling of pleasure, one discerns that 'I am sensing a feeling of pleasure.' One discerns that 'With the cessation of that very sensory contact that is to be felt as pleasure, the concomitant feeling — the feeling of pleasure that has arisen in dependence on the sensory contact that is to be felt as pleasure — ceases, is stilled.' In dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as pain... In dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as neither pleasure nor pain, there arises a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain. When sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one discerns that 'I am sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain.' One discerns that 'With the cessation of that very sensory contact that is to be felt as neither pleasure nor pain, the

concomitant feeling — the feeling of neither pleasure nor pain that has arisen in dependence on the sensory contact that is to be felt as neither pleasure nor pain — ceases, is stilled.'

"Just as when, from the friction & conjunction of two fire sticks, heat is born and fire appears, and from the separation & disjunction of those very same fire sticks, the concomitant heat ceases, is stilled; in the same way, in dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as pleasure, there arises a feeling of pleasure... In dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as pain... In dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as neither pleasure nor pain, there arises a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain... One discerns that 'With the cessation of that very sensory contact that is to be felt as neither pleasure nor pain, the concomitant feeling... ceases, is stilled.'

"There remains only equanimity: pure & bright, pliant, malleable, & luminous. Just as if a skilled goldsmith or goldsmith's apprentice were to prepare a furnace, heat up a crucible, and, taking gold with a pair of tongs, place it in the crucible: He would blow on it time & again, sprinkle water on it time & again, examine it time & again, so that the gold would become refined, well-refined, thoroughly refined, flawless, free from dross, pliant, malleable, & luminous. Then whatever sort of ornament he had in mind — whether a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain — it would serve his purpose. In the same way, there remains only equanimity: pure & bright, pliant, malleable, & luminous. One discerns that 'If I were to direct equanimity as pure & bright as this toward the dimension of the infinitude of space, I would develop the mind along those lines, and thus this equanimity of mine — thus supported, thus sustained — would last for a long time. One discerns that 'If I were to direct equanimity as pure and bright as this toward the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, I would develop the mind along those lines, and thus this equanimity of mine — thus supported, thus sustained — would last for a long time.'

"One discerns that 'If I were to direct equanimity as pure & bright as this towards the dimension of the infinitude of space and to develop the mind along those lines, that would be fabricated. One discerns that 'If I were to direct equanimity as pure and bright as this towards the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception and to develop the mind along those lines, that would be fabricated.' One neither fabricates nor mentally fashions for the sake of becoming or un-becoming. This being the case, one is not sustained by anything in the world (does not cling to anything in the world). Unsustained, one is not agitated. Unagitated, one is totally unbound right within. One discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'

"Sensing a feeling of pleasure, one discerns that it is fleeting, not grasped at, not relished. Sensing a feeling of pain... Sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one discerns that it is fleeting, not grasped at, not relished. Sensing a feeling of pleasure, one senses it disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of pain... Sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one senses it disjoined from it. When sensing a feeling limited to the body, one discerns that 'I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.' When sensing a feeling limited to life, one

discerns that 'I am sensing a feeling limited to life.' One discerns that 'With the break-up of the body, after the termination of life, all that is sensed, not being relished, will grow cold right here.'

"Just as an oil lamp burns in dependence on oil & wick; and from the termination of the oil & wick — and from not being provided any other sustenance — it goes out unnourished; even so, when sensing a feeling limited to the body, one discerns that 'I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.' When sensing a feeling limited to life, one discerns that 'I am sensing a feeling limited to life.' One discerns that 'With the break-up of the body, after the termination of life, all that is sensed, not being relished, will grow cold right here.'

"Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest determination for discernment, for this — the knowledge of the passing away of all suffering & stress — is the highest noble discernment.

"His release, being founded on truth, does not fluctuate, for whatever is deceptive is false; Unbinding — the undeceptive — is true. Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest determination for truth, for this — Unbinding, the undeceptive — is the highest noble truth.

"Whereas formerly he foolishly had taken on mental acquisitions and brought them to completion, he has now abandoned them, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest determination for relinquishment, for this — the renunciation of all mental acquisitions — is the highest noble relinquishment.

"Whereas formerly he foolishly had greed — as well as desire & infatuation — he has now abandoned them, their root destroyed made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Whereas formerly he foolishly had malice — as well as ill-will & hatred — he has now abandoned them... Whereas formerly he foolishly had ignorance — as well as delusion & confusion — he has now abandoned them, their root destroyed made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest determination for calm, for this — the calming of passions, aversions, & delusions — is the highest noble calm. 'One should not be negligent of discernment, should guard the truth, be devoted to relinquishment, and train only for calm.' Thus was it said, and in reference to this was it said.

"'He has been stilled where the currents of construing do not flow. And when the currents of construing do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace.' Thus was it said. With reference to what was it said? 'I am' is a construing. 'I am this' is a construing. 'I shall be' is a construing. 'I shall not be'... 'I shall be possessed of form'... 'I shall not be possessed of form'... 'I shall be percipient'... 'I shall not be percipient'... 'I shall be neither percipient nor non-percipient' is a construing. Construing is a disease, construing is a cancer, construing is an arrow. By going beyond all construing, he is said to be a sage at peace.

"Furthermore, a sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die, is unagitated, and is free from longing. He has nothing whereby he would be born. Not being born, will he age? Not aging, will he die? Not dying, will he be agitated? Not being agitated, for what will he long? It was in reference to this that it was said, 'He has been stilled where the currents of construing do not flow. And when the currents of construing do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace.' Now, monk, you should remember this, my brief analysis of the six properties."

Then the thought occurred to Ven. Pukkusati: "Surely, the Teacher has come to me! Surely, the One Well-gone has come to me! Surely, the Rightly Self-awakened One has come to me!" Getting up from his seat, arranging his upper robe over one shoulder, and bowing down with his head at the Blessed One's feet, he said, "A transgression has overcome me, lord, in that I was so foolish, so muddle-headed, and so unskilled as to assume that it was proper to address the Blessed One as 'friend.' May the Blessed One please accept this confession of my transgression as such, so that I may achieve restraint in the future."

"Yes, monk, a transgression overcame you in that you were so foolish, so muddle-headed, and so unskilled as to assume that it was proper to address me as 'friend.' But because you see your transgression as such and make amends in accordance with the Dhamma, we accept your confession. For it is a cause of growth in the Dhamma & Discipline of the noble ones when, seeing a transgression as such, one makes amends in accordance with the Dhamma and achieves restraint in the future."

"Lord, may I receive full acceptance (ordination as a monk) from the Blessed One?"

"And are your robes & bowl complete?"

"No, lord, my robes & bowl are not complete."

"Tathagatas do not give full acceptance to one whose robes & bowl are not complete."

Then Ven. Pukkusati, delighting & rejoicing in the Blessed One's words, got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One and, keeping him on his right, left in search of robes and a bowl. And while he was searching for robes & a bowl, a runaway cow killed him.

Then a large number of monks approached the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they said to the Blessed One, "Lord, the clansman Pukkusati, whom the Blessed One instructed with a brief instruction, has died. What is his destination? What is his future state?"

"Monks, the clansman Pukkusati was wise. He practiced the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma and did not pester me with issues related to the Dhamma. With the destruction of the first five fetters, he has arisen spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's words.

See also: MN 106.