

(Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhmaṇa Sutta 1

The First Discourse on Recluses and Brahmins

(On the Elements)

[Gratification, danger and escape regarding the elements]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 14.37/2:175 f)

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1 Assāda, ādīnava, nissaraṇa

The three terms—*assāda*, *ādīnava* and *nissaraṇa*—on which the (Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhmaṇa Sutta 1 is based, often appear as a set in the Nikāyas. The Commentaries relate them to the four noble truths, thus:

danger	(<i>ādīnava</i>)	the first truth, that is suffering;
gratification	(<i>assāda</i>)	the second truth, that is, the arising of suffering, craving; and
escape	(<i>nissaraṇa</i>)	the third truth, that is, the ending of suffering, nirvana.

(DA 2:512; MA 2:11)

It is interesting to see that the sequences of the first two terms (*assāda* and *ādīnava*) are reversed here. In fact, understandably, the “gratification” or *assāda* model is an experiential one, used to show suffering as *cause* or *condition* first: we seek various forms of gratification, and this leads to suffering.

The *sacca* model, on the other hand, is a sort of therapeutic list: the ailment, the cause, the cure, and the prescription. Although the fourth truth, that of the path, is not directly mentioned here, it is implied as the means of escape.¹

2 Related discourses

The three discourses---**the (Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhmaṇa Suttas 1-3** (S 14.37-39)—close **the Dhātu Saṃyutta** or “connected sayings on the elements” (S 14). They are simple summaries of teachings showing the importance understanding the four primary elements (*dhātu*), based on the “gratification” (*assāda*) model or paradigm—that is, the “gratification, danger and escape” (*assāda, ādīnava, nissaraṇa*)—regarding the four elements, thus,

(Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhmaṇa Sutta 1 (S 14.37)	gratification, danger, and escape;
(Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhmaṇa Sutta 2 (S 14.38)	arising, passing away, gratification, danger, escape;
(Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhmaṇa Sutta 3 (S 14.39)	the element, arising, ending, the way to the ending.

Although the terms, *assāda*, *ādīnava* and *nissaraṇa*, are not used in the third discourse, their senses are implicitly applied.

The (Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhmaṇa Sutta 1 (S 14.37) defines a spiritual person—a “recluse or brahmin” (*samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā*)—as one who understands “the gratification, the danger, and the escape in regard to these four elements.”²

The Aṅguttara Nikāya contains two consecutive suttas—**the Pubbe Sambodha Sutta** (A 3.101) and **the Assāda Sutta** (A 3.102)—build on the “gratification” formula to reflect on the world as a whole.³ These two discourses are elaborations of the three (Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhmaṇa Suttas, and should, as such, be studied together. Begin with the three (Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhmaṇa Suttas as they are very basic. Then go on to the Pubbe Sambodha Sutta, ending with the Assāda Sutta.

¹ For the “gratification, danger, escape” with regards to the 5 aggregates, see **Mahā Puṇṇama S** (M 109.12/-3:18).

² *Imāsaṃ catunnaṃ dhātūnaṃ assādaṃ ca ādīnavaṃ ca nissaraṇaṃ ca yathā, bhūtāṃ pajānanti.*

³ Respectively: A 3.101/1:258 f = SD 14.6; A 3.102/1:260 = SD 14.2. See Intros to both trs.

The related discourses are here listed in the sequence they are recommended to be studied:⁴

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| (1) (Saṅkhitta) Dhātu Sutta | (S 14.30) | the four elements (basic list). ⁵ |
| (2) (Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhm,ṇa S 1 | (S 14.37) | gratification, danger, and escape. |
| (3) (Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhm,ṇa S 2 | (S 14.38) | arising, passing away, gratification, danger, escape. |
| (4) (Dhātu) Samaṇa,brāhm,ṇa S 3 | (S 14.39) | elements, arising, ending, the way to the ending. |
| (5) (Assāda) Pubbe Sambodha S | (A 3.101) | the world can never satisfy us completely. ⁶ |
| (6) Assāda Sutta | (A 3.102) | escape from suffering is possible. ⁷ |
| (7) (Dhātu) Pubbe Sambodha Sutta | (S 14.31) | the elements have to be properly understood. ⁸ |
| (8) Acariṃ Sutta | (S 14.32) | the Buddha understands the four elements. ⁹ |

It is helpful to note that pairs of discourses (5)-(6) and (70)-(8) are each a sequential set. Either pair can be studied first followed by the other.

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⁴ For a fuller list of refs, see **Pubbe Sambodha S** (A 3.101) = SD 14.6 Intro (2).

⁵ S 14.30/4:169 = SD 29.15.

⁶ A 3.101/1:258 f = SD 14.6.

⁷ A 3.102/1:260 = SD 14.7.

⁸ S 14.31/4:170 f = SD 29.16.

⁹ S 14.32/4:171 f = SD 29.17.

The First Discourse on Recluses and Brahmins (On the Elements)

(S 14.37/2:175 f)

1 (The Blessed One was) residing at Sāvattṭhī.

The four elements

2 “Bhikshus, there are these four elements. What are the four?
The earth element, the water element, the fire element, the wind element.

Not understanding the four elements

3 Bhikshus, those recluses and brahmins who do not understand, according to reality, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in regard to these four elements—[176]
I do not regard them as recluses amongst recluses or brahmins amongst brahmins,
and these venerable ones do not, by realizing it for themselves with direct knowledge, attain and dwell, here and now, in the goal of recluseship or the goal of brahminhood.

Understanding the four elements

4 But, bhikshus, those recluses and brahmins who understand, according to reality, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in regard to these four elements—
I regard them as recluses amongst recluses or brahmins amongst brahmins,
and these venerable ones, by realizing it for themselves with direct knowledge, attain and dwell, here and now, in the goal of recluseship or the goal of brahminhood.

— evaṃ —

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