

# MN 137: Saḷāyatanavibhaṅga Sutta

## *Analysis of the Six Sense-Domains*

Translated by Bhante Suddhāso

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatti, in Jeta's Grove, at Anāthapiṇḍika's park. There the Blessed One addressed the monks: "Monks!" "Auspicious sir," those monks replied to the Blessed One. The Blessed One said, "Monks, I will teach you an analysis of the six sense-domains. Listen to this and carefully pay attention; I will speak." "Yes, Bhante," those monks replied to the Blessed One. The Blessed One said this:

"The six internal sense-domains are to be known, the six external sense-domains are to be known, the six kinds of consciousness are to be known, the six kinds of contact are to be known, the eighteen kinds of mental exploration are to be known, the thirty-six modes of being are to be known. Depending on this, abandon that. There are three establishments of mindfulness which a noble being engages in which makes a teacher fit to instruct a group; of those who give instruction in practice, such a one is called an unsurpassable trainer of trainable people.' This is the summary of the analysis of the six sense-domains.

"The six internal sense-domains are to be known.' This is what was said. What does it refer to? 'Eye-domain, ear-domain, nose-domain, tongue-domain, body-domain, mind-domain - the six internal sense-domains are to be known.' This is what was said, and this is what it refers to.

"The six external sense-domains are to be known.' This is what was said. What does it refer to? 'Sight-domain, sound-domain, fragrance-domain, flavor-domain, tangible-domain, thought-domain - the six external sense-domains are to be known.' This is what was said, and this is what it refers to.

"The six kinds of consciousness are to be known.' This is what was said. What does it refer to? 'Eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, mind-consciousness - the six kinds of consciousness are to be known.' This is what was said, and this is what it refers to.

"The six kinds of contact are to be known.' This is what was said. What does it refer to? 'Eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, mind-contact - the six kinds of contact are to be known.' This is what was said, and this is what it refers to.

"The eighteen kinds of mental exploration are to be known.' This is what was said. What does it refer to? 'Having seen a sight with the eye, one explores a sight that is a basis for elation, one explores a sight that is a basis for depression, one explores a sight that is a basis for equanimity. Having heard a sound with the ear... smelled a fragrance with the nose... tasted a flavor with the tongue... touched a tangible with the body... discerned a thought with the mind, one explores a thought that is a basis for elation, one explores a thought that is a basis for depression, one explores a thought that is a basis for equanimity. In this way there are six explorations of elation, six explorations of

depression, and six explorations of equanimity; the eighteen kinds of mental exploration are to be known.' This is what was said, and this is what it refers to.

"The thirty-six modes of being are to be known.' This is what was said. What does it refer to? There are six kinds of householder elation, six kinds of renunciate elation, six kinds of householder depression, six kinds of renunciate depression, six kinds of householder equanimity, and six kinds of renunciate equanimity.

"In this case, what are the six kinds of householder elation? There are sights discernible by the eye that are desired, enjoyable, pleasing, mentally satisfying, and connected with the carnal world; when one acquires them, sees that one is acquiring them, or when one remembers what one has previously acquired in the past that has ceased or changed, then elation arises. This kind of elation is called 'householder elation.' There are sounds discernible by the ear... fragrances discernible by the nose... flavors discernible by the tongue... tangibles discernible by the body... thoughts discernible by the mind... These are the six kinds of householder elation.

"In this case, what are the six kinds of renunciate elation? Having known that sights are impermanent, changing, fading, and ceasing, when one accurately sees with right wisdom that 'All prior sights as well as all present sights are impermanent, unsatisfying, and of the nature to change,' elation arises. This kind of elation is called 'renunciate elation.' There are sounds discernible by the ear... fragrances discernible by the nose... flavors discernible by the tongue... tangibles discernible by the body... thoughts discernible by the mind... These are the six kinds of renunciate elation.

"In this case, what are the six kinds of householder depression? There are sights discernible by the eye that are desired, enjoyable, pleasing, mentally satisfying, and connected with the carnal world; when one does not acquire them, sees that one is not acquiring them, or when one remembers what one has not previously acquired in the past that has ceased or changed, then depression arises. This kind of depression is called 'householder depression.' There are sounds discernible by the ear... fragrances discernible by the nose... flavors discernible by the tongue... tangibles discernible by the body... thoughts discernible by the mind... These are the six kinds of householder depression.

"In this case, what are the six kinds of renunciate depression? Having known that sights are impermanent, changing, fading, and ceasing, when one accurately sees with right wisdom that 'All prior sights as well as all present sights are impermanent, unsatisfying, and of the nature to change,' one establishes this longing for unsurpassed liberation: 'When will I attain and remain in that dimension which the noble ones have attained and remain in?' When one establishes this longing for unsurpassed liberation, then because of that longing depression arises. This kind of depression is called 'renunciate depression.' There are sounds discernible by the ear... fragrances discernible by the nose... flavors discernible by the tongue... tangibles discernible by the body... thoughts discernible by the mind... These are the six kinds of renunciate depression.

"In this case, what are the six kinds of householder equanimity? Having seen a sight with the eye, there arises the equanimity of a fool, a delusional person, an ordinary person; of

an unlearned ordinary person who has not conquered their limitations and circumstances. This kind of equanimity does not transcend sight. Therefore it is called 'householder equanimity.' Having heard a sound with the ear... smelled a fragrance with the nose... tasted a flavor with the tongue... touched a tangible with the body... discerned a thought with the mind... These are the six kinds of householder equanimity.

"In this case, what are the six kinds of renunciate equanimity? Having known that sights are impermanent, changing, fading, and ceasing, when one accurately sees with right wisdom that 'All prior sights as well as all present sights are impermanent, unsatisfying, and of the nature to change,' equanimity arises. This kind of equanimity is called 'renunciate equanimity.' There are sounds discernible by the ear... fragrances discernible by the nose... flavors discernible by the tongue... tangibles discernible by the body... thoughts discernible by the mind... These are the six kinds of renunciate equanimity.

"The thirty-six modes of being are to be known.' This is what was said, and this is what it refers to.

"Depending on this, abandon that.' This is what was said. What does it refer to?

"In this case, monks, depending and relying on the six kinds of renunciate elation, abandon the six kinds of householder elation. In this way there is the abandoning of them, the transcendence of them.

"In this case, monks, depending and relying on the six kinds of renunciate depression, abandon the six kinds of householder depression. In this way there is the abandoning of them, the transcendence of them.

"In this case, monks, depending and relying on the six kinds of renunciate equanimity, abandon the six kinds of householder equanimity. In this way there is the abandoning of them, the transcendence of them.

"In this case, monks, depending and relying on the six kinds of renunciate elation, abandon the six kinds of renunciate depression. In this way there is the abandoning of them, the transcendence of them.

"In this case, monks, depending and relying on the six kinds of renunciate equanimity, abandon the six kinds of renunciate elation. In this way there is the abandoning of them, the transcendence of them.

"Monks, there is equanimity based on variety and equanimity based on unity. Monks, what is equanimity based on variety? Monks, there is equanimity regarding sights, sounds, fragrances, flavors, and tangibles - monks, this is equanimity based on variety. And, monks, what is equanimity based on unity? Monks, there is the equanimity dependent on the domain of infinite space, on the domain of infinite consciousness, on the domain of nothingness, and on the domain of neither perception nor non-perception - monks, this is equanimity based on unity.

“In this case, monks, depending and relying on the equanimity based on unity, abandon the equanimity based on variety. In this way there is the abandoning of that, the transcendence of that.

“Monks, depending and relying on non-identification, abandon the equanimity based on unity. In this way there is the abandoning of that, the transcendence of that.

“‘Depending on this, abandon that.’ This is what was said, and this is what it refers to.

“‘There are three establishments of mindfulness which a noble being engages in which makes a teacher fit to instruct a group.’ This is what was said. What does it refer to?

“Here, monks, the Teacher teaches the Dhamma to his disciples out compassion, seeking their welfare: ‘This is for your welfare, this is for your happiness.’ His disciples do not listen, do not pay attention, do not try to understand, and they act contrary to the teacher’s instructions. Monks, in this case the Tathāgata is not dissatisfied and does not experience dissatisfaction. He remains free of corruption, mindful, and clearly aware. Monks, this is the first establishment of mindfulness which a noble being engages in which makes a teacher fit to instruct a group.

“Again, monks, the Teacher teaches the Dhamma to his disciples out compassion, seeking their welfare: ‘This is for your welfare, this is for your happiness.’ Some of his disciples do not listen, do not pay attention, do not try to understand, and act contrary to the teacher’s instructions; and some disciples listen, pay attention, try to understand, and do not act contrary to the teacher’s instructions. Monks, in this case the Tathāgata is not dissatisfied and does not experience dissatisfaction, and he is not satisfied and does not experience satisfaction. Circumventing both dissatisfaction and satisfaction, he remains equanimous, mindful, and clearly aware. Monks, this is the second establishment of mindfulness which a noble being engages in which makes a teacher fit to instruct a group.

“Again, monks, the Teacher teaches the Dhamma to his disciples out compassion, seeking their welfare: ‘This is for your welfare, this is for your happiness.’ His disciples listen, pay attention, try to understand, and do not act contrary to the teacher’s instructions. Monks, in this case the Tathāgata is not satisfied and does not experience satisfaction. He remains free of corruption, mindful, and clearly aware. Monks, this is the third establishment of mindfulness which a noble being engages in which makes a teacher fit to instruct a group.

“‘There are three establishments of mindfulness which a noble being engages in which makes a teacher fit to instruct a group.’ This is what was said, and this is what it refers to.

“‘Of those who give instruction in practice, such a one is called an unsurpassable trainer of trainable people.’ This is what was said. What does it refer to? Monks, a trainable elephant is led by an elephant-trainer to run in just one direction – east or west, north or south. Monks, a trainable horse is led by a horse-trainer to run in just one direction – east or west, north or south. Monks, a trainable cow is led by a cow-trainer to run in just one direction – east or west, north or south. Monks, a trainable person is led by the Arahant, the Fully Self-Awakened One, to run in eight directions.

“Possessing form, one sees forms – this is one direction.

“Perceiving internal formlessness, one sees external forms – this is the second direction.

“One is resolved on beauty – this is the third direction.

“Completely transcending perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and with non-attention to perceptions of variety, [perceiving] ‘Infinite space,’ one attains and dwells in the domain of infinite space – this is the fourth direction.

“Completely transcending the domain of infinite space, [perceiving] ‘Infinite consciousness,’ one attains and dwells in the domain of infinite consciousness – this is the fifth direction.

“Completely transcending the domain of infinite consciousness, [perceiving] ‘There is nothing,’ one attains and dwells in the domain of nothingness – this is the sixth direction.

“Completely transcending the domain of nothingness, one attains and dwells in the domain of neither perception nor non-perception – this is the seventh direction.

“Completely transcending the domain of neither perception nor non-perception, one attains and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling – this is the eighth direction.

“Monks, a trainable person is led by the Arahant, the Fully Self-Awakened One, to run in these eight directions.’ Of those who give instruction in practice, such a one is called an unsurpassable trainer of trainable people.’ This is what was said, and this is what it refers to.”

This is what the Blessed One said. Satisfied, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s speech.