

# The Five Aggregates

## Part II



Sutta and the City

2020 - 2021



## 26. Gratification

At Sāvattthī. “Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, it occurred to me: ‘What is the gratification, what is the danger, what is the escape in the case of form? What is the gratification, what is the danger, what is the escape in the case of feeling ... perception ... volitional formations ... consciousness?’

“Then, bhikkhus, it occurred to me: ‘The pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on form: this is the gratification in form. That form is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change: this is the danger in form. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for form: this is the escape from form.

“‘The pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on feeling ... in dependence on perception ... in dependence on volitional formations ... in dependence on consciousness: this is the gratification in consciousness. That consciousness is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change: this is the danger in consciousness. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for consciousness: this is the escape from consciousness.’

“So long, bhikkhus, as I did not directly know as they really are the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of these five aggregates subject to clinging, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans. But when I directly knew all this as it really is, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with ... its devas and humans.

“The knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘Unshakable is my

liberation of mind; this is my last birth; now there is no more renewed existence.”

### 33. Not Yours

At Sāvattthī. “Bhikkhus, whatever is not yours, abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness.

And what is it, bhikkhus, that is not yours? Form is not yours: abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness. Feeling is not yours... Perception is not yours ... Volitional formations are not yours ... Consciousness is not yours: abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness.

“Suppose, bhikkhus, people were to carry off the grass, sticks, branches, and foliage in this Jeta’s Grove, or to burn them, or to do with them as they wish.

Would you think: ‘People are carrying us off, or burning us, or doing with us as they wish?’”

“No, venerable sir. For what reason? Because, venerable sir, that is neither our self nor what belongs to our self.”

“So too, bhikkhus, form is not yours ... consciousness is not yours: abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness.”

## 85. Yamaka

On one occasion the Venerable Sāriputta was dwelling at Sāvattḥī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. Now on that occasion the following pernicious view had arisen in a bhikkhu named Yamaka: "As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body and does not exist after death."

A number of bhikkhus heard that such a pernicious view had arisen in the bhikkhu Yamaka. Then they approached the Venerable Yamaka and exchanged greetings with him, after which they sat down to one side and said to him: "Is it true, friend Yamaka, that such a pernicious view as this has arisen in you:

'As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body and does not exist after death'?"

"Exactly so, friends. As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body and does not exist after death."

"Friend Yamaka, do not speak thus. Do not misrepresent the Blessed One. It is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would not speak thus: 'A bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body and does not exist after death.'"

Yet, although he was admonished by the bhikkhus in this way, the Venerable Yamaka still obstinately grasped that pernicious view, adhered to it, and declared: "As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed

One, a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body and does not exist after death.”

Since those bhikkhus were unable to detach the Venerable Yamaka from that pernicious view, they rose from their seats, approached the Venerable Sāriputta, and told him all that had occurred, adding: “It would be good if the Venerable Sāriputta would approach the bhikkhu Yamaka out of compassion for him.” The Venerable Sāriputta consented by silence.

Then, in the evening, the Venerable Sāriputta emerged from seclusion. He approached the Venerable Yamaka and exchanged greetings with him, after which he sat down to one side and said to him: “Is it true, friend Yamaka, that such a pernicious view as this has arisen in you: ‘As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body and does not exist after death’?”

“Exactly so, friend.”

“What do you think, friend Yamaka, is form permanent or impermanent?” - “Impermanent, friend.” ... - “Therefore ... Seeing thus ... He understands: ‘... there is no more for this state of being.

“What do you think, friend Yamaka, do you regard form as the Tathāgata?” - “No, friend.” - “Do you regard feeling ... perception ... volitional formations ... consciousness as the Tathāgata?” - “No, friend.”

“What do you think, friend Yamaka, do you regard the Tathāgata as in form?” - “No, friend.” - “Do you regard the Tathāgata as apart from form?” - “No, friend.” - “Do you regard the Tathāgata as in feeling? As apart from feeling? As in perception? As apart from perception? As in

volitional formations? As apart from volitional formations? As in consciousness? As apart from consciousness?” - “No, friend.”

“What do you think, friend Yamaka, do you regard form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness [taken together] as the Tathāgata?” - “No, friend.”

“What do you think, friend Yamaka, do you regard the Tathāgata as one who is without form, without feeling, without perception, without volitional formations, without consciousness?” - “No, friend.”

“But, friend, when the Tathāgata is not apprehended by you as real and actual here in this very life, is it fitting for you to declare: ‘As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body and does not exist after death?’”

“Formerly, friend Sāriputta, when I was ignorant, I did hold that pernicious view, but now that I have heard this Dhamma teaching of the Venerable Sāriputta I have abandoned that pernicious view and have made the breakthrough to the Dhamma.”

“If, friend Yamaka, they were to ask you: ‘Friend Yamaka, when a bhikkhu is an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed, what happens to him with the breakup of the body, after death?’—being asked thus, what would you answer?”

“If they were to ask me this, friend, I would answer thus: ‘Friends, form is impermanent; what is impermanent is suffering; what is suffering has ceased and passed away. Feeling ... Perception ... Volitional formations ... Consciousness is impermanent; what is impermanent is suffering; what

is suffering has ceased and passed away.’ Being asked thus, friend, I would answer in such a way.”

“Good, good, friend Yamaka! Now, friend Yamaka, I will make up a simile for you in order to convey this same meaning even more clearly. Suppose, friend Yamaka, there was a householder or a householder’s son, a rich man, with much wealth and property, protected by a bodyguard. Then some man would appear who wanted to ruin him, to harm him, to endanger him, to take his life. It would occur to that man: ‘This householder or householder’s son is a rich man, with much wealth and property, protected by a bodyguard. It won’t be easy to take his life by force. Let me get close to him and then take his life.’

“Then he would approach that householder or householder’s son and say to him: ‘I would serve you, sir.’ Then the householder or householder’s son would appoint him as a servant. The man would serve him, rising up before him, retiring after him, doing whatever he wants, agreeable in his conduct, endearing in his speech. The householder or householder’s son would consider him a friend, a bosom friend, and he would place trust in him. But when the man becomes aware that the householder or householder’s son has placed trust in him, then, finding him alone, he would take his life with a sharp knife.

“What do you think, friend Yamaka, when that man had approached that householder or householder’s son and said to him: ‘I would serve you, sir,’ wasn’t he a murderer even then, though the other did not recognize him as ‘my murderer’? And when the man was serving him, rising up before him, retiring after him, doing whatever he wants, agreeable in his conduct, endearing in his speech, wasn’t he a murderer then too, though the other did not recognize him as ‘my murderer’? And when the man came upon him while he was alone and took his life with a sharp knife,

wasn't he a murderer then too, though the other did not recognize him as 'my murderer'?"

"Yes, friend."

"So too, friend Yamaka, the uninstructed worldling, who is not a seer of the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who is not a seer of superior persons and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form.

"He regards feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness.

"He does not understand as it really is impermanent form as 'impermanent form' ... impermanent feeling as 'impermanent feeling' ... impermanent perception as 'impermanent perception' ... impermanent volitional formations as 'impermanent volitional formations' ... impermanent consciousness as 'impermanent consciousness.'

"He does not understand as it really is painful form as 'painful form' ... painful feeling as 'painful feeling' ... painful perception as 'painful perception' ... painful volitional formations as 'painful volitional formations' ... painful consciousness as 'painful consciousness.'

"He does not understand as it really is selfless form as 'selfless form' ... selfless feeling as 'selfless feeling' ... selfless perception as 'selfless perception' ... selfless volitional formations as 'selfless volitional formations' ... selfless consciousness as 'selfless consciousness.'

“He does not understand as it really is conditioned form as ‘conditioned form’ ... conditioned feeling as ‘conditioned feeling’ ... conditioned perception as ‘conditioned perception’ ... conditioned volitional formations as ‘conditioned volitional formations’ ... conditioned consciousness as ‘conditioned consciousness.’

“He does not understand as it really is murderous form as ‘murderous form’ ... murderous feeling as ‘murderous feeling’ ... murderous perception as ‘murderous perception’ ... murderous volitional formations as ‘murderous volitional formations’ ... murderous consciousness as ‘murderous consciousness.’

“He becomes engaged with form, clings to it, and takes a stand upon it as ‘my self.’

He becomes engaged with feeling ... with perception ... with volitional formations ... with consciousness, clings to it, and takes a stand upon it as ‘my self.’ These same five aggregates of clinging, to which he becomes engaged and to which he clings, lead to his harm and suffering for a long time.

“But, friend, the instructed noble disciple, who is a seer of the noble ones ... does not regard form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form.

“He does not regard feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness.

“He understands as it really is impermanent form as ‘impermanent form’ ... impermanent consciousness as ‘impermanent consciousness.’

“He understands as it really is painful form as ‘painful form’ ...

painful consciousness as ‘painful consciousness.’

“He understands as it really is selfless form as ‘selfless form’ ... selfless consciousness as ‘selfless consciousness.’

“He understands as it really is conditioned form as ‘conditioned form’ ... conditioned consciousness as ‘conditioned consciousness.’

“He understands as it really is murderous form as ‘murderous form’ ... murderous consciousness as ‘murderous consciousness.’

“He does not become engaged with form, cling to it, and take a stand upon it as ‘my self.’ He does not become engaged with feeling ... with perception ... with volitional formations ... with consciousness, cling to it, and take a stand upon it as ‘my self.’ These same five aggregates of clinging, to which he does not become engaged and to which he does not cling, lead to his welfare and happiness for a long time.”

“So it is, friend Sāriputta, for those venerable ones who have such compassionate and benevolent brothers in the holy life to admonish and instruct them. And now that I have heard this Dhamma teaching of the Venerable Sāriputta, my mind is liberated from the taints by nonclinging.”

This is what the Venerable Sāriputta said. Elated, the Venerable Yamaka delighted in the Venerable Sāriputta’s statement.

## 87. Vakkali

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrel Sanctuary. Now on that occasion the Venerable Vakkali was dwelling in a potter’s shed, sick, afflicted, gravely ill.

Then the Venerable Vakkali addressed his attendants:

“Come, friends, approach the Blessed One, pay homage to him in my

name with your head at his feet, and say: ‘Venerable sir, the bhikkhu Vakkali is sick, afflicted, gravely ill; he pays homage to the Blessed One with his head at his feet.’ Then say: ‘It would be good, venerable sir, if the Blessed One would approach the bhikkhu Vakkali out of compassion.’”

“Yes, friend,” those bhikkhus replied, and they approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and delivered their message. The Blessed One consented by silence.

Then the Blessed One dressed and, taking bowl and robe, approached the Venerable Vakkali. The Venerable Vakkali saw the Blessed One coming in the distance and stirred on his bed. The Blessed One said to him: “Enough, Vakkali, do not stir on your bed. There are these seats ready, I will sit down there.”

The Blessed One then sat down on the appointed seat and said to the Venerable Vakkali: “I hope you are bearing up, Vakkali, I hope you are getting better. I hope that your painful feelings are subsiding and not increasing, and that their subsiding, not their increase, is to be discerned.”

“Venerable sir, I am not bearing up, I am not getting better. Strong painful feelings are increasing in me, not subsiding, and their increase, not their subsiding, is to be discerned.”

“I hope then, Vakkali, that you are not troubled by remorse and regret.”

“Indeed, venerable sir, I have quite a lot of remorse and regret.”

“I hope, Vakkali, that you have nothing for which to reproach yourself in regard to virtue.”

“I have nothing, venerable sir, for which to reproach myself in regard to virtue.”

“Then, Vakkali, if you have nothing for which to reproach yourself in regard to virtue, why are you troubled by remorse and regret?”

“For a long time, venerable sir, I have wanted to come to see the Blessed One, but I haven’t been fit enough to do so.”

“Enough, Vakkali! Why do you want to see this foul body? One who sees the Dhamma sees me; one who sees me sees the Dhamma. For in seeing the Dhamma, Vakkali, one sees me; and in seeing me, one sees the Dhamma.

“What do you think, Vakkali, is form permanent or impermanent?” -

“Impermanent, venerable sir.” ... - “Therefore ... Seeing thus ... He understands: ‘... there is no more for this state of being.’”

Then the Blessed One, having given this exhortation to the Venerable Vakkali, rose from his seat and departed for Mount Vulture Peak. Then, not long after the Blessed One had left, the Venerable Vakkali addressed his attendants thus: “Come, friends, lift me up on this bed and carry me to the Black Rock on the Isigili Slope. How can one like me think of dying among the houses?”

“Yes, friend,” those bhikkhus replied and, having lifted up the Venerable Vakkali on the bed, they carried him to the Black Rock on the Isigili Slope. The Blessed One spent the rest of that day and night on Mount Vulture Peak.

Then, when the night was well advanced, two devatās of stunning beauty approached the Blessed One, illuminating the whole of Mount Vulture Peak.... Standing to one side, one devatā said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, the bhikkhu Vakkali is intent on deliverance.” The other devatā said: “Surely, venerable sir, he will be liberated as one well liberated.” This is what those devatās said. Having said this, they paid

homage to the Blessed One and, keeping him on their right, they disappeared right there.

Then, when the night had passed, the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Come, bhikkhus, approach the bhikkhu Vakkali and say to him: ‘Friend Vakkali, listen to the word of the Blessed One and two devatās. Last night, friend, when the night was well advanced, two devatās of stunning beauty approached the Blessed One. One devatā said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, the bhikkhu Vakkali is intent on deliverance.” The other devatā said: “Surely, venerable sir, he will be liberated as one well liberated.” And the Blessed One says to you, friend Vakkali: “Do not be afraid, Vakkali, do not be afraid! Your death will not be a bad one. Your demise will not be a bad one.”’”

“Yes, venerable sir,” those bhikkhus replied, and they approached the Venerable Vakkali and said to him: “Friend Vakkali, listen to the word of the Blessed One and two devatās.”

Then the Venerable Vakkali addressed his attendants: “Come, friends, lower me from the bed. How can one like me think of listening to the Blessed One’s teaching while seated on a high seat.”

“Yes, friend,” those bhikkhus replied, and they lowered the Venerable Vakkali from the bed.

“Last night, friend, two devatās of stunning beauty approached the Blessed One. One devatā said to the Blessed One: ‘Venerable sir, the bhikkhu Vakkali is intent on deliverance.’ The other devatā said: ‘Surely, venerable sir, he will be liberated as one well liberated.’ And the Blessed One says to you, friend Vakkali: ‘Do not be afraid, Vakkali, do not be afraid! Your death will not be a bad one. Your demise will not be a bad one.’”  
“Well then, friends, pay homage to the Blessed One in my name with your head at his feet and say: ‘Venerable sir, the bhikkhu Vakkali is sick,

afflicted, gravely ill; he pays homage to the Blessed One with his head at his feet.’ Then say: ‘Form is impermanent: I have no perplexity about this, venerable sir, I do not doubt that whatever is impermanent is suffering. I do not doubt that in regard to what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, I have no more desire, lust, or affection. Feeling is impermanent ... Perception is impermanent ... Volitional formations are impermanent ... Consciousness is impermanent: I have no perplexity about this, venerable sir, I do not doubt that whatever is impermanent is suffering. I do not doubt that in regard to what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, I have no more desire, lust, or affection.’”

“Yes, friend,” those bhikkhus replied, and then they departed. Then, not long after those bhikkhus had left, the Venerable Vakkali used the knife.

Then those bhikkhus approached the Blessed One ... and delivered their message. The Blessed One then addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Come, bhikkhus, let us go to the Black Rock on the Isigili Slope, where the clansman Vakkali has used the knife.”

“Yes, venerable sir,” those bhikkhus replied. Then the Blessed One, together with a number of bhikkhus, went to the Black Rock on the Isigili Slope. The Blessed One saw in the distance the Venerable Vakkali lying on the bed with his shoulder turned.

Now on that occasion a cloud of smoke, a swirl of darkness, was moving to the east, then to the west, to the north, to the south, upwards, downwards, and to the intermediate quarters. The Blessed One then addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Do you see, bhikkhus, that cloud of smoke, that swirl of darkness, moving to the east, then to the west, to the north, to the south, upwards, downwards, and to the intermediate quarters?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“That, bhikkhus, is Māra the Evil One searching for the consciousness of the clansman Vakkali, wondering: ‘Where now has the consciousness of the clansman Vakkali been established?’ However, bhikkhus, with consciousness unestablished, the clansman Vakkali has attained final Nibbāna.”

## 95. A Lump of Foam

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Ayojjhā on the bank of the river Ganges. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus:

“Bhikkhus, suppose that this river Ganges was carrying along a great lump of foam. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a lump of foam? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of form there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in form?

“Suppose, bhikkhus, that in the autumn, when it is raining and big rain drops are falling, a water bubble arises and bursts on the surface of the water. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a water bubble? So too, bhikkhus,

whatever kind of feeling there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in feeling?

“Suppose, bhikkhus, that in the last month of the hot season, at high noon, a shimmering mirage appears. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a mirage? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of perception there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in perception?

“Suppose, bhikkhus, that a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, would take a sharp axe and enter a forest. There he would see the trunk of a large plantain tree, straight, fresh, without a fruit-bud core. He would cut it down at the root, cut off the crown, and unroll the coil. As he unrolls the coil, he would not find even softwood, let alone heartwood. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in the trunk of a plantain tree? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of volitional formations there are, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects them, ponders them, and carefully investigates them. As he investigates them, they appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in volitional formations?

“Suppose, bhikkhus, that a magician or a magician’s apprentice would display a magical illusion at a crossroads. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a magical illusion? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of consciousness there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in consciousness?”

“Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple experiences revulsion towards form, revulsion towards feeling, revulsion towards perception, revulsion towards volitional formations, revulsion towards consciousness. Experiencing revulsion, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion [his mind] is liberated.

When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: ‘It’s liberated.’ He understands: ‘Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being.’”

This is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the Fortunate One, the Teacher, further said this:

“Form is like a lump of foam,  
Feeling like a water bubble;  
Perception is like a mirage,  
Volitions like a plantain trunk,  
And consciousness like an illusion,  
So explained the Kinsman of the Sun.

“However one may ponder it  
And carefully investigate it,  
It appears but hollow and void  
When one views it carefully.  
“With reference to this body  
The One of Broad Wisdom has taught  
That with the abandoning of three things  
One sees this form discarded.

“When vitality, heat, and consciousness  
Depart from this physical body,  
Then it lies there cast away:  
Food for others, without volition.

“Such is this continuum,  
This illusion, beguiler of fools.  
It is taught to be a murderer;  
Here no substance can be found.

“A bhikkhu with energy aroused  
Should look upon the aggregates thus,  
Whether by day or at night,  
Comprehending, ever mindful.

“He should discard all the fetters  
And make a refuge for himself;  
Let him fare as with head ablaze,  
Yearning for the imperishable state.”