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Khemaka Sutta

The Khemaka Discourse | S 22.89/3:126-132

Theme: Overcoming self-notions

Translated by Piya Tan ©2004

1 Khemaka

This Sutta is remarkably unique in that the Dharma speaker (Khemaka) and his audience of some sixty elders all became arhats in the course of the teaching! On a more technical level, the Sutta shows that even a saint (except an arhat) still has self-notions but he does not identify with them, that is, he does not regard any or all of the five aggregates (form, feelings, perception, formations, and consciousness) or anything outside it as the self. The teaching is presented by way of an interesting, literally out of the way and somewhat humorous, three-way dialogue: a group of elder monks sends the monk Dāsaka as proxy to question the sick forest monk Khemaka. Nothing else seems to be known about Khemaka, except for this Sutta and the commentarial accounts.

The Commentary notes that Khemaka’s forest dwelling in the Jujube Park is located about a *gāvuta* (5.6 km = 3.5 miles) from Ghosita’s Park near Kosambi. As such, it says, **the monk Dāsaka** covers a distance of some 2 yojanas (22.5 km = 14 miles) travelling four times to and fro between Ghosita’s Park and Khemaka’s residence. The Commentary says that the elder monks send Dāsaka to and fro four times, covering some two yojanas, on the same day so that they can hear the Dharma from a skilled practitioner. They do not go themselves because his forest hut cannot hold some sixty monks. They do not ask Khemaka to come because of his sickness. They know, however, if they keep questioning him he will surely come in person—and Khemaka goes to them, knowing their secret wish (SA 2:316).

In answering the elders’ questions, Khemaka replies he does not see a self or anything belonging to a self amongst the five aggregates [§9], implying that he has attained at least the level of a streamwinner. The elders however do not realize that all the noble disciples have this understanding, and so assume that this realization is unique to arhathood. As such, they misunderstand Khemaka’s reply and insinuate that he has attained arhathood [§11].

Khemaka then goes on to explain, first to Dāsaka [§13] and then personally to the elders themselves [§20], that “although the notion ‘I am’ in regards to the five aggregates of clinging has come to me, I do not regard any of them as ‘This I am’” (*api ca me āvuso pañcasu upādāna-k,khandhesu asmî ti adhigataṃ ayam aham asmî ti ca na samanupassāmi ti*).

In other words, one may not regard the five aggregates as self (*attā*) or as belonging to self, but this does not mean that one is an arhat. This is because even after the destruction of the five lower fetters, there still remains a residue of the conceit “I am,” of the desire, “I am,” and of the latent tendency, “I am.” Only when one has totally uprooted the notion that “I am” the aggregates, that one becomes an arhat. We will discuss this in some detail in the following section.

2 *Adhigataṃ* or *avigataṃ*?

Bodhi,¹ in his translations of the Khemaka Sutta, points to what he thinks is an instructive problem in the reading of an important word in the key passage of the Sutta:

Api ca me āvuso pañcasu upādāna-k,khandhesu asmî ti adhigataṃ ayam aham asmî ti ca na samanupassāmi ti. [§§13, 20]

[Bodhi:] “Avuso, [the notion] ‘I am’ has not yet vanished (*avigataṃ*) in me in relation to these five aggregates subject to clinging, but I do not regard [anything among them] as ‘This I am.’” (2005:403)

¹ Bodhi, S:B 943 f, 1057 n61, & 2005:403, 455 n35.

[Piya:] “However, avuso, although the notion ‘I am’ in regards to the five aggregates of clinging has come (*adhigatam*) to me, I do not regard any of them as ‘This I am.’”

In his footnote, Bodhi says:

Although all three eds of the S that I consulted (Be, Ce, Ee 1998) and both eds of SA (Be & Ce) read *asmî ti adhigatam*, I suspect this is an archaic corruption that has gained currency. I propose reading *asmî ti avigatam*.

The passage clarifies an essential difference between the trainee (*sekha*) and the arahant. While the *sekha* has eliminated identity view and thus no longer identifies any of the five aggregates as a self, he has not yet eradicated ignorance, which sustains a residual conceit and desire, “I am” (*anusahagato asmî ti māno asmî ti chando*) in relation to the five aggregates. The arahant, in contrast, has eradicated ignorance, the root of all misconceptions, and thus no longer entertains any idea of “I” and “mine.”

The other elders apparently had not yet attained any stage of awakening and thus did not understand this difference, but the Venerable Khemaka must have been at least a stream-enterer (some commentators say he was a non-returner)² and thus knew that the elimination of identity view does not completely remove the sense of personal identity. Even for the non-returner, an “odor of subjectivity” based on the five aggregates still lingers over the experience.

(Bodhi 2005: 455 n35 refs normalized)

The Samanupassanā Sutta (S 22.47)³ has a similar passage and which reflects the same problem as the one mentioned here. After stating how an uninstructed worldly person identifies the each of five aggregates by way of the fourfold self-identity (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), goes on to say:

Iti ayam c’eva samanupassanā asmî ti c’assa adhigatam hoti. [§§13, 20]

[Piya:] “And thus this regarding that ‘I am’ has come (*adhigatam*) to him (*assa*).” [§§13, 20]

[Bodhi:] “Thus this way of regarding things and [the notion] ‘I am’ has not vanished (*avigatam*) in him.” (2005:403; also 1057 n61)

Here, Bodhi follows the Burmese (Be) and Sinhalese (Ce) readings, *asmî ti c’assa avigatam hoti*, and which he proposes should be the Khemaka Sutta reading, too. He goes on to quote as evidence **the (Nissāraṇīya, dhātu) Mettā Sutta** (A 6.13),⁴ on the six ways of escape, where the affirmative *asmî ti kho me vigatam* occurs [3]:

Idha pana bhikkhave bhikkhu evam vadeyya asmî ti kho me vigatam, ayam asmî ti ca na samanupassāmi, atha ca pana me vicikicchā, kathaṅkathā, sallaṃ cittaṃ pariyādāya tiṭṭhatī ti.

Then, monks, a monk here might say thus: “The notion ‘I am’ has been discarded (*vigatam*) in me and I do not regard that ‘I am this (aggregate).” Yet the dart of doubt and perplexity still invades my mind and remains there.

(A 6.13.7/3:292,16-17)

Bodhi’s reconstruction may well be right. However, if we render *adhigatam* literally as “has come,” instead of the more common figurative meaning of “have known, understood,” it makes quite good sense. Both translations clearly fit the context. However, if there is a need to choose, I am more in favour of keeping to the original reading of *adhigatam*, as this fits the context of the stream-winner better:

² According to Ṭikā on the Khemaka S, “some say that he is a non-returner; some, that he is a once-returner” (SAT CSCD 2:247). (Piya)

³ S 22.47/3:46 f.

⁴ On the 6 ways of escape (*nissaraṇa*), ie, from ill will, from cruelty, from discontent, from attachment, from all signs, and from doubt and perplexity.

“However, avuso, although the notion ‘I am’ in regards to the five aggregates of clinging has come (*adhigatam*) to me, I do not regard any of them as ‘This I am.’” [§§13, 20]

Here, what Khemaka (who is at least a stream-winner) is saying refers to his understanding of the working of the latent tendencies that constantly proliferates one with thoughts rooted in lust, repulsion and ignorance. None of these latent tendencies has been uprooted by the stream-winner or the once-re-turner. Even though the non-returner⁵ has overcome lust, he still has some repulsion (in the form of conceit), and ignorance.

In any case, the latent tendencies are still active even in such saints (short of the arhat), and Khemaka is simply describing what occurs in his own mind. Although the notion “I am” arises in him,⁶ observes Khemaka, he is not troubled by it and does not identify with any of the five aggregates. Of course, Bo-dhi’s translation, too, confirms the fact that Khemaka still experiences the “I am” notion since he is not yet an arhat.

3 The (Nissāraṇīya,dhātu) Mettā Sutta

The (Nissāraṇīya,dhātu) Mettā Sutta (A 6.13),⁷ speaks of the six ways of escape (*nissaraṇa*), that is, from ill will, from cruelty, from discontent, from attachment, from all signs, and from doubt and perplexity. The last of these escapes relates directly to the Khemaka Sutta, as the concluding passage of the (Nissāraṇīya,dhātu) Mettā Sutta says:

Then, monks, a monk here might say thus: “The notion ‘I am’ has been discarded (*vigatam*) in me and I do not regard that ‘I am this (aggregate).’” Yet the dart of doubt and perplexity still invades my mind and remains there.

He should be told:

“Not so! The venerable one should not speak thus. He should not misrepresent the Blessed One. For it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would certainly not speak in such a way. It is impossible and inconceivable that when the notion ‘I am’ has been discarded, and one does not regard that ‘I am this (aggregate),’ the dart of doubt and perplexity still invades my mind and remains there—this is not possible.

For this, avuso, is the escape from the dart of doubt and perplexity, that is to say, the uprooting of the conceit ‘I am’.” (A 6.13.7/3:292)

It is clear from this teaching that it concerns the nature of a stream-winner, namely, that it speaks of the overcoming of the notion “I am” and the overcoming of spiritual doubt. These latter two refer to the breaking of the first two of the three fetters, leading one to become a stream-winner.⁸

Furthermore, in this connection, the Commentary to **the Samanupassanā Sutta** (S 22.47)⁹ explains that “this regarding” (*ayaṃ...samanupassanā*) as regarding with views (*diṭṭhi,samanupassanā*) and the

⁵ According to Ṭikā on the Khemaka S, “some say that he is a non-returner; some, that he is a once-returner” (SAṬ CSCD 2:247).

⁶ Comy says *asmī ti adhigatan ti asmī ti evaṃ pavattā taṇhā,mānā adhigatā*, “when the notion ‘I am’ has come means that the ‘I am’ notion has occurred thus because conceit rooted in craving (*taṇhā,māna*) has come” (SA 2:318). The SA Ṭikā also uses the word *adhigata* throughout.

⁷ A 6.13/3:292-294.

⁸ There are **10 fetters** (*samyojana*), namely: (1) Self-identify view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no. 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram,bhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham,bhāgiya*).

notion “**I am**” (*asmî ti*) as the threefold proliferation (*papañca-t,taya*) of craving, of conceit, and of views. The two differ in that “regarding” is a conceptually formulated view, the notion “I am” a subtler manifestation of ignorance expressive of desire and conceit. The self-identity view is uprooted at stream-winning, but the notion “I am” is only fully destroyed by the path of arhathood. (SA 2:269 f)

4 Grounds for views

In the Khemaka Sutta, the monk Khemaka declares, “Of these five aggregates of clinging, I do not regard any of them as self or as belonging to self” [§9].¹⁰ This brief but important statement on rejecting self-identity is expanded in **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22), in the context of the six ground for wrong views:

15 Bhikshus, there are these SIX GROUNDS FOR VIEWS.¹¹ What are the six?

(1) Here, bhikshus, an ignorant ordinary person, who has no regard for noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma, who has no regard for the true individuals and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma regards **form** thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’

(2) He regards **feeling** thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’

(3) He regards **perception** thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’

(4) He regards **formations** thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’

(5) He regards what is **seen, heard, sensed, thought**,¹² found, sought, mentally pursued¹³ thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’

(6) And this ground for views, namely, ‘**The world is the self**; after death I¹⁴ will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same;¹⁵ I will endure as long as eternity’—this too he regards thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’¹⁶

16 Bhikshus, a well-taught noble disciple, who has regard for noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dharma, who has regard for true individuals and is skilled and disciplined in their Dharma regards **form** thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

He regards **feeling** thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

⁹ S 22.47/3:46 f = SD 26.12.

¹⁰ See also §§13 & 20.

¹¹ Comy says that this section is taught to prevent the renegade monk Ariṭṭha from further misrepresenting the Dharma, ie by introducing a self-view into the teaching. These grounds for views (*diṭṭhi-t,thāna*) are wrong views themselves as grounds for more elaborate wrong views, namely, the objects (*ārammaṇa*) of views (ie the five aggregates) and the conditions (*paccaya*) for views (ie ignorance, mental perversion, false ideas, etc.). The term *diṭṭhi-t,thāna* also appears in **Brahmajāla S** (D 1) and its Comy. Comys say that these grounds could arise through ignorance, sense-impression (*phassa*), perceptions, thoughts, unskillful attention, bad company, the word of others, etc. These 7 headed by the aggregates are given as “the 8 grounds for views” in **Paṭisambhidā,magga** (Pm 2:139/2.3).

¹² *Diṭṭham sutam mutam viññātam*. This series of terms refers to the aggregate of consciousness by way of its objects: the “seen” (*diṭṭha*) refers to the form-base (*rūp’āyatana*), the “heard” (*suta*) to sound-base (*sadd’āyatana*), the “sensed” (*muta*) to nose-object, tongue-object, and body-object, to the other respective three object-bases, and the “thought” or cognized (*viññāta*) to thought-base (*dhamm’āyatana*) and the remaining 6 internal sense-bases (*ajjhattika āyatana*): eye-base, etc.

¹³ Comy: “found,” ie whether sought after or not; “sought,” ie whether finding them or not; “mentally pursued” (or pondered), resorted to by consciousness, ie whether found or not without being sought after.

¹⁴ “After death I will be,” *so pecca bhavissāmi*. Comy *so = so aham*.

¹⁵ “Eternally the same” (*sassati,sama*), a term from Bṛhad Aranyaka Upaniṣad 5.10 (*sāsvatīh samāḥ*) (Nyanaponika 1974:42 n21).

¹⁶ This is the classic eternalist view, where the personality-view itself becomes an object of craving, conceit and false view of the self. Nyanaponika is of the opinion that this view expresses the identity of the self with the universe, but Bodhi thinks that this view is purely hypothetical “as the Pali is ambiguous and could just as well be pointing to a fundamental dualism of self and world along the lines of Saṅkhyā philosophy with its distinction between changeable nature (*prakṛti*) and changeless spirit (*puruṣa*). See M:ÑB 2001:1210 n259.

He regards **perception** thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

He regards **formations** thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

He regards what is **seen, heard, sensed, thought**, found, sought, mentally pursued thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

And this ground for views, namely, ‘That which is the self is the world; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same; I will endure as long as eternity’—this too he regards thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

(M 22.15-16/1:135 f)

The threefold graspings (*ti, vidha gāha*) mentioned here are the notions¹⁷

“This is mine” (*etam mama*) that arises through craving (*taṇhā, gāha*),

“This I am” (*eso ’ham asmi*) that arises through conceit (*māna, gāha*),

“This is my self” (*eso me attā*) that arises through wrong view (*diṭṭhi, gāha*).

These three are also known as the “latent tendencies to ‘I’-making, ‘mine’-making and conceit” (*ahaṇ, -kāra, mamaṇ, kāra, mānānusaya*).¹⁸ These threefold graspings are the main factors behind conception, that is, the arising of narrative thoughts (M 1), and mental proliferation, that is, the persistence and addiction to such thoughts (M 18). In short, such experiences are not “beliefs” but direct reactions to reality.¹⁹

5 Dāsaka

The Thera, gāthā Commentary relates that Dāsaka is born in Sāvattḥī and is appointed by Anāthapiṇḍika to look after the vihara. There, impressed by what he sees and hears, he joins the order. The seth, pleased with him, frees him so that he may become a monk. Some say that he is the son of a slave woman of Anāthapiṇḍika. It is said that in a past life he ordered an arhat to do some work for him, hence his birth as a slave. From the time he joins the order, he is slothful and fond of sleep. The Buddha then admonishes him and, moved by a troubled conscience, he makes an effort and attains arhathood. (ThaA 1:68 ff)

If the Dāsaka of this sutta is the same as that of **Thera, gāthā 17**, who, like Channa in the text following the Khemaka Sutta (S 22.90), is the son of a slave (as the name *dāsaka* suggests), then the elders, clearly showing a good-natured sense of humour, have a good reason to have him run such a physically exertive errand, that is, travelling a distance of two yojanas to and from Ghosita’s Park and the Jujube Park; for he is fat and lazy. **The Dāsaka Thera, gāthā** says:

When one is a great eater,
Rolling about even as he sleeps
Like a great hog fed on sacrificial offerings,
Again and again the fool comes to the womb. (Tha 17)

The existence of this Thera, gāthā clearly means that the elder Dāsaka is a fully awakened saint. Although the texts are silent on how his awakening comes about, it is evident from the Khemaka Sutta that he is one of the “some sixty elder monks” who are liberated as arhats at the end of the discourse [§31].

6 Recognizing a noble saint

There are records in the suttas of **Sāriputta**’s last meeting with the Buddha, at Nālandā, where he makes his lion-roar regarding the Buddha.²⁰

¹⁷ See also **Anattā, lakkhaṇa S**, S 3:68 = SD 1.3; also SA 2:269.

¹⁸ M 22.15, 72.15, 112.11 20, S 2:75, 3:236, 4:41, A 1:132, 133.

¹⁹ See Bodhi, 1980:8-11; Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f. See SD 3.13 Intro (4).

²⁰ **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.1.16-17/2:82 f); **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28/3:99-116) = (**Nālandā S**, S 47.12/5:159-161, but without the last para).

It is thus clear to me [Such is my faith],²¹ venerable sir, that there never has been, there will never be, and there is now no other recluse or brahmin who is better or wiser than the Blessed One, that is to say, as regards self-awakening! (D 2:82 f; D 28; S 5:159-161)²²

The Buddha goes on to ask Sāriputta, that to make such a statement, almost tongue in cheek, he must have known all the past Buddhas, that he will know all the future Buddhas, and that he knows the present Buddha. Sāriputta, of course, replies no, but adds that his lion-roar is in accordance with his mastery of the “Dharma-lineage” (*dhamm’ anvaya*, lit “the drift of the Dharma; the flow of the truth”), that is, the retrospective knowledge (*anvaye ñāṇam* or *paccavekkhaṇā ñāṇa*, S 2:58) that enables him to deduce the qualities of past Buddhas and future Buddhas. Here, Sāriputta, being an arhat (like the Buddha), knows what he is talking about, and not making any grandiose claims of an unawakened worldling.

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The Khemaka Discourse

S 22.89/3:126-132

Dāsaka questions Khemaka

1 At one time, a number of elder monks were dwelling in Ghosita’s Park [Ghosit’ārāma]²³ near Kosambī.

2 Now at that time, the venerable Khemaka was living in the Jujube Park [Badarik’ārāma],²⁴ sick, afflicted, gravely ill. [127]

3 Then, in the evening, the elder monks emerged from their retreat and addressed the venerable Dāsaka thus:

“Come, avuso Dāsaka, approach the monk Khemaka and say to him:

“The elders say to you, avuso Khemaka, thus: How are you, avuso. We hope you are bearing up, and getting better. We hope that your pains are abating, that their abating is evident, not their rising.”²⁵

4 “Yes, avuso,” the venerable Dāsaka replied, and he went up to the venerable Khemaka and said this to him:²⁶

“Avuso Khemaka, the elder monks say thus:

²¹ *Evam, pasanno.*

²² Cf Prasenajit’s remarks about arhats, S 3.11/177-79 = Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, ch 8 “The Thundering Silence” §14.

²³ The Ghosit’ārāma is built by Ghosaka (vl Ghosita), a seth (*setthī*, entrepreneur or banker) of Kosambī, when he becomes a stream-winner after listening to the Buddha’s teaching. See DPPN for details.

²⁴ The Badarik’ārāma, a forest retreat filled with the jujube tree (*Zizyphus jujuba*), is about a *gāvuta* (5.6 km = 3.5 miles) from Ghosit’ārāma near Kosambī. The Buddha, during his stay there, teaches **Tipallattha, miga Jātaka** (J 16/1:160) and **Tittira Jātaka** (J 319/3:64), regarding the young novice Rāhula, who spends a whole night in the Buddha’s toilet at Badarik’ārāma because he does not want to break the Vinaya rule that no novice should sleep in the same room as an ordained monk (V 4:16). The Buddha then amends the rule allowing a novice to sleep for only 2-3 nights in the same room as an ordained monk.

²⁵ *Kacci te avuso khamāṇīyaṃ kacci yāpaṇīyaṃ kacci dukkhā vedanā paṭikkamanti no abhikkhamanti, patikkamo sānam paññāyati no abhikkamo ti*, lit “Avuso, perhaps you are bearing it, perhaps you can keep going; that your pains are abating, not rising; that their abating is evident, not their rising.” This is stock. The underscored phrase lit tr “perhaps you are fit to keep going.” I have rendered this as “How are you?” and place it at the head of the sentence for the sake of acceptable English.

²⁶ On this and following passages, cf **Channa S** (M 144/3:263 = S 35.87/4:56) = SD 11.12.

‘How are you, avuso. We hope you are bearing up, and getting better. We hope that your pains are abating, that their abating is evident, not their rising.’”

5 [Khemaka:] “Avuso, I am not bearing up; I am not getting better; my pains are not abating, but rising; their rising is evident, not their abating.”

Khemaka does not identify with the aggregates

6 Then the venerable Dāsaka went up to the elder monks. Having gone up to the elder monks, he said this:

“Avuso, the monk Khemaka said this:

‘Avuso, I am not bearing up; I am not getting better; my pains are not abating, but rising; their rising is evident, not their abating.’”

7 “Come, avuso Dāsaka, approach the monk Khemaka and say this to him:

‘The elders say this to you, avuso Khemaka: These five aggregates of clinging, avuso, have been spoken of by the Blessed One, that is to say,

the 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.

Does the venerable Khemaka regard any of these five aggregate of clinging as self or as belonging to self?”

8 “Yes, avuso,” the venerable Dāsaka replied, and he went up to the venerable Khemaka and said this to him:

“Avuso Khemaka, the elder monks say thus:

‘These five aggregates of clinging, avuso, have been spoken of by the Blessed One, that is to say,
the 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.

Does the venerable Khemaka regard any of these five aggregate of clinging as self or as belonging to self?” [128]

9 [Khemaka:] “These five aggregates of clinging, avuso, have been spoken of by the Blessed One, that is to say,

the 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.

Of these five aggregates of clinging, I do not regard any of them as self or as belonging to self.”

The monks mistake Khemaka for an arhat

10 Then the venerable Dāsaka went up to the elder monks. Having gone up to the elder monks, he said this:

“Avuso, the monk Khemaka said this:

‘These five aggregates of clinging, avuso, have been spoken of by the Blessed One, that is to say,
the 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.

Of these five aggregates of clinging, I do not regard any of them as self or as belonging to self.”

11 “Come, avuso Dāsaka, approach the monk Khemaka and say this to him:

‘The elders say this to you, avuso Khemaka:

These five aggregates of clinging, avuso, have been spoken of by the Blessed One, that is to say,
 the 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.

If the venerable Khemaka does not regard any of them as self or as belonging to self, then he is an arhat, one whose influxes are destroyed.”²⁷

12 “Yes, avuso,” the venerable Dāsaka replied, and he went up to the venerable Khemaka and said this to him:

“Avuso Khemaka, the elder monks say thus:

‘These five aggregates of clinging, avuso, have been spoken of by the Blessed One, that is to say,
 the 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.

If the venerable Khemaka does not regard any of them as self or as belonging to self, then he is an arhat, one whose influxes are destroyed.”

13 [Khemaka:] “These five aggregates of clinging, avuso, have been spoken of by the Blessed One, that is to say,

the 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.

Of these five aggregates of clinging, I do not regard any of them as self or as belonging to self, yet I am not an arhat, one whose influxes are destroyed.

However, avuso, although the notion ‘I am’ in regards to the five aggregates of clinging has come to me, I do not regard any of them as ‘This I am.’”²⁸ [129]

The aggregates and the “I am” notion

14 Then the venerable Dāsaka went up to the elder monks. Having gone up to the elder monks, he said this:

“Avuso, the monk Khemaka said this:

‘These five aggregates of clinging, avuso, have been spoken of by the Blessed One, that is to say,
 the form aggregate of clinging,
 the feeling aggregate of clinging,
 the perception aggregate of clinging,
 the formations aggregate of clinging, and

²⁷ “One whose influxes are destroyed” (*khīṇāsava*): the arhats have overcome the 4 *āsavas*, ie, the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/ 2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). For details, see SD 9 Intro (10d) n.

²⁸ *Api ca me āvuso pañcasu upādāna-k,khandhesu asmî ti adhigatam̐ ayam aham asmî ti ca na samanupassāmî ti.* See Intro (1) for details.

the consciousness aggregate of clinging.

Of these five aggregates of clinging, I do not regard any of them as self or as belonging to self, yet I am not an arhat, one whose influxes are destroyed.

Avuso, (the notion) ‘I am’ has not yet vanished in me in connection with the five aggregates of clinging, but I do not regard (any of them) as ‘This I am.’”

15 “Come, avuso Dāsaka, approach the monk Khemaka and say this to him:

‘The elders say this to you, avuso Khemaka: “Avuso Khemaka, when you speak of this notion ‘I am,’ what is it that you speak of as ‘I am’?”

Do you say ‘I am’ <u>form</u> ,	or do you say ‘I am’ apart from form?
Do you say ‘I am’ <u>feelings</u> ,	or do you say ‘I am’ apart from feelings?
Do you say ‘I am’ <u>perception</u> ,	or do you say ‘I am’ apart from perception?
Do you say ‘I am’ <u>formations</u> ,	or do you say ‘I am’ apart from formations?
Do you say ‘I am’ <u>consciousness</u> ,	or do you say ‘I am’ apart from consciousness?

Avuso Khemaka, when you speak of this notion ‘I am,’ what is it that you speak of as ‘I am’?”

16 “Yes, avuso,” the venerable Dāsaka replied, and he went up to the venerable Khemaka and said this to him:

“Avuso Khemaka, the elder monks say thus:

‘Avuso Khemaka, when you speak of this notion “I am,” what is it that you speak of as “I am”?’

Do you say “I am” <u>form</u> ,	or do you say “I am” apart from form?
Do you say “I am” <u>feeling</u> ,	or do you say “I am” apart from feeling?
Do you say “I am” <u>perception</u> ,	or do you say “I am” apart from perception?
Do you say “I am” <u>formations</u> ,	or do you say “I am” apart from formations?
Do you say “I am” <u>consciousness</u> ,	or do you say “I am” apart from consciousness?

Avuso Khemaka, when you speak of this notion “I am,” what is it that you speak of as “I am”?’”

17 [Khemaka:] “Enough, avuso Dāsaka, of this running back and forth?²⁹ Bring me my staff, avuso. I will approach the elder monks myself.”

Khemaka still has the “I am” notion

18 Then the venerable Khemaka, leaning on his staff, went up to the elder monks and exchanged greetings with them. When this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, he sat down at one side.

[130]

19 When the venerable Khemaka was seated thus as one side, the elder monks said this to him:

“Avuso Khemaka, when you speak of this ‘I am,’ what is it that you speak of as this ‘I am’?³⁰

Do you say ‘I am’ <u>form</u> ,	or do you say ‘I am’ apart from form?
Do you say ‘I am’ <u>feelings</u> ,	or do you say ‘I am’ apart from feelings?
Do you say ‘I am’ <u>perception</u> ,	or do you say ‘I am’ apart from perception?
Do you say ‘I am’ <u>formations</u> ,	or do you say ‘I am’ apart from formations?
Do you say ‘I am’ <u>consciousness</u> ,	or do you say ‘I am’ apart from consciousness?

Avuso Khemaka, when you speak of this ‘I am,’ what is it that you speak of as this ‘I am’?”

20 [Khemaka:] “Avuso,

I do not say ‘I am’ <u>form</u> ,	nor do I say ‘I am’ apart from form.
I do not say ‘I am’ <u>feelings</u> ,	nor do I say ‘I am’ apart from feelings.
I do not say ‘I am’ <u>perception</u> ,	nor do I say ‘I am’ apart from perception.
I do not say ‘I am’ <u>formations</u> ,	nor do I say ‘I am’ apart from formations.
I do not say ‘I am’ <u>consciousness</u> ,	nor do I say ‘I am’ apart from consciousness.

²⁹ *Alaṃ āvuso dāsaka kiṃ imāya sandhāvanikāya*. The rare word, *sandhāvanikāya*, apparently appears only twice in the Suttas, once here, and the other in **Lok’āyatika Brāhmaṇa S** (A 9.38), where Comy glosses it as “by running on foot” (*padasā dhāvanena*, SA 4:201): see A 9.38.4f/4:431= SD 35.2.

³⁰ *Yam etam āvuso Khemaka asmī ti vadesi kiṃ etam asmī ti vadesi*, lit “Which ‘this I am,’ avuso Khemaka, do so speak of, when you speak of ‘this I am’?”

However, avuso, although the notion ‘I am’ in regards to the five aggregates of clinging has come to me, I do not regard any of them as ‘This I am.’³¹

Simile of the lotus scent

21 Avuso, it is just like the scent of a blue lotus, a red-white lotus, or a white lotus. Would one be speaking rightly if one were to say, ‘The scent belongs to the petals,’ or ‘The scent belongs to the stalk,’³² or ‘The scent belongs to the pistils’³³?”

“No, avuso.”

“And, how, avuso, should one answer rightly?”

“Avuso, one should answer rightly thus: ‘The scent belongs to the flower.’”

22 “Yes, avuso,

I do not say ‘I am’ <u>form</u> ,	nor do I say ‘I am’ apart from form.
I do not say ‘I am’ <u>feelings</u> ,	nor do I say ‘I am’ apart from feelings.
I do not say ‘I am’ <u>perception</u> ,	nor do I say ‘I am’ apart from perception.
I do not say ‘I am’ <u>formations</u> ,	nor do I say ‘I am’ apart from formations.
I do not say ‘I am’ <u>consciousness</u> ,	nor do I say ‘I am’ apart from consciousness.

However, avuso, although the notion ‘I am’ in regards to the five aggregates of clinging has come to me, I do not regard any of them as ‘This I am.’

23 Avuso, even though a noble disciple has abandoned the five lower fetters,³⁴ yet in regards to the five aggregates of clinging, there still lingers in him a residual³⁵ conceit ‘I am,’ a desire ‘I am,’ a latent tendency ‘I am’ that has not yet been uprooted.³⁶

THE PERCEPTION OF IMPERMANENCE. Some time later he dwells contemplating arising and passing away in the five aggregates of clinging:

such is <u>form</u> ,	such its arising, [131]	such its passing away;
such are <u>feelings</u> ,	such their arising,	such their passing away;
such is <u>perception</u> ,	such its arising,	such its passing away;
such are <u>formations</u> ,	such their arising,	such their passing away;
such is <u>consciousness</u> ,	such its arising,	such its passing away.

24 As he dwells contemplating arising and passing away in the five aggregates of clinging, this residual conceit ‘I am,’ this desire ‘I am,’ this latent tendency ‘I am,’ that has not yet been uprooted become uprooted.

³¹ As at §13 above, where see n.

³² Reading *vaṅṭassa*; vl *vaṅṇassa* (“to the colour”).

³³ “Pistil,” *kiṅjakkha*, the female part of a seed-plant flower (comprising the style and stigma) that receives the pollen. In a lotus, this is called a filament.

³⁴ “Fetters,” *saṃyojanā*, of which there are 10, that imprison one to the cyclic world of suffering. **The 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojanā*) are: (1) Self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*) [see **Antā S** (S 22.103) = SD 14.1], (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rituals (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*kāma, rāga*) is replaced by illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), so called because the lower realms, ie, the sense-worlds, and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*), so called because they bind one to the higher realms, ie, the form worlds and the formless worlds. On the sequence of the fetters broken by the saints, see **Kiṭāgiri S** (M 70) = SD 11.1 Intro (5) & **Ānāpānasati S**, M 118.8-12/3:80 f) = SD 7.13.

³⁵ “Residual,” *anusahagato*, which Comy glosses as *sukhumo*, “delicate,” ie fine or subtle (SA 2:315). This passage is qu at DhsA 244.

³⁶ *Kiṅcāpi āvuso ariya, sāvakassa pañc’orambhāgiyāni saññōjanāni pahīnāni bhavanti, atha khv-assa hoti yeva pañcasu upādāna-k, khandhesu anusahagato, asmīti māno asmīti chando asmīti anusayo asamūhato.*

Simile of the cloth

25 Avuso, it is just like a piece of cloth, when it has become soiled and stained, its owners would hand it to a washerman. The washerman would scrub it evenly with cleaning salt, lye or cow-dung, and rinse it in clean water.

26 Even though that cloth would become pure and clean, it would still have a residual smell of the cleaning salt, lye or cow-dung that had not yet dissipated.

The washerman would then return it to the owners. The owners would then put it in a fragrant casket, and the residual smell of cleaning salt, lye or cow-dung that had not yet dissipated would dissipate.³⁷

27 Yet, avuso, although a noble disciple has abandoned the five lower fetters, yet in regards to the five aggregates of clinging, there still lingers in him a residual conceit ‘I am,’ a desire ‘I am,’ a latent tendency ‘I am’ that has not yet been uprooted.

Some time later, he dwells contemplating arising and passing away in the five aggregates of clinging:

such is <u>form</u> ,	such its arising,	such its passing away;
such are <u>feelings</u> ,	such their arising,	such their passing away;
such is <u>perception</u> ,	such its arising,	such its passing away;
such are <u>formations</u> ,	such their arising,	such their passing away;
such is <u>consciousness</u> ,	such its arising,	such its passing away.

As he dwells contemplating arising and passing away in the five aggregates of clinging, this residual conceit ‘I am,’ this desire ‘I am,’ this latent tendency ‘I am,’ that has not yet been uprooted would be uprooted.”

The awakened monks

28 When this was said, the elder monks said this to the venerable Khemaka:

“We did not ask our questions to trouble the venerable Khemaka, [132] but we thought that the venerable Khemaka would explain, teach, proclaim, establish, disclose, analyze and clarify³⁸ the Blessed One’s teaching in detail.

29 And the venerable Khemaka has explained, taught, proclaimed, established, disclosed, analyzed and clarified the Blessed One’s teaching in detail.”

30 This is what the venerable Khemaka said. The monks joyfully approved of the venerable Khemaka’s word.

31 And while this exposition was being spoken, the minds of some sixty elder monks and of the venerable Khemaka were freed from the influxes by non-clinging.

— evaṃ —

³⁷ Comy: The worldling’s mental process is like the soiled cloth. The 3 contemplations (of impermanence, of suffering and of not-self) are like the three cleansers (cleaning salt, lye and cow-dung). The non-returned’s mental process is like the cloth that has been washed with the 3 cleansers. The defilements to be removed by the path of arhathood are like the residual smell of the cleansers. The knowledge of the path of arhathood is like the fragrant chest. The destruction of all defilements by the path is like the dissipation of the residual smell of the three cleansers from the cloth after it has been placed in the chest. (SA 2:317)

³⁸ “Would explain...clarify,” *ācikkhituṃ desetuṃ paññāpetuṃ vivarituṃ vibhajituṃ uttānikātuṃ*: Comys say that although these are syns, they differentiate their usages thus: as an indication (*uddesa*) they “say” (*ācikkhanti*); as a description (*niddesa*) they “teach” (*desenti*); as a restatement (*paṇiniddesa*) they “proclaim” (*paññāpenti*); by laying down the meaning in one way or other they “establish” (*paṭṭhapenti*); when showing the reason for a certain meaning they “reveal” (*vivaranti*); when showing the classification of a detail they “analyze” (*vibhajanti*); in order to do away with what is inverted or profound, or when creating a basis for their audience’s knowledge, they “clarify” (*uttānikaronti*); and when abolishing their audience’s ignorance and blindness in all these ways, they “make known [declare]” (*pakāseṃti*) (VbhA 371; briefly at SA 2:40). On the ability to “instruct, inspire, rouse and gladden” one’s audience, see SD 6.1 & SD 11.4 Intro (4).

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