

Vakkali Sutta

Discourse on Vakkali

[Sexuality & sainthood]
S 22.87/3:119-124
Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

The story of Vakkali is found in the Vakkali Sutta (S 22.87), the Apadāna (Ap 2:465 f), the Aṅguttara Commentary (AA 1:248-251), the Dhammapada Commentary (DhA 25.11/4:118 f), the Thera, gāthā Commentary (ThaA 2:146-150), and the Visuddhi, magga (Vism 4.45/129). Unlike the Sāmyutta account and its commentary, the other Commentaries make no mention of Vakkali's killing himself with a knife.

The Sāmyutta episode of Vakkali's suicide is identical to that of the monk Godhika (**Godhika Sutta**, S 4.23/1:120-122), both occurring at Kāla, silā (Black Rock) on the side of Isigili (today, Sona Hill).¹ Godhika's reason for suicide, however, was his falling away (6-7 times) from temporary release of mind due to his sickness.² So when he attained release of mind, he committed suicide to gain liberation.³ Vakkali, however, apparently tried to kill himself out of his chronic depression. However, the Commentarial accounts do not say that he committed suicide (an account that could have spilled over from the Godhika story). The Commentaries only say he was merely contemplating suicide, when he leaped into the air out of faith and joy on seeing the Buddha (that is, his hologram) before him (see DhA account below).

The climax of the Vakkali Sutta is the Buddha's declaration, "One who sees the Dharma sees me; one who sees me, sees the Dharma" (*Yo kho Vakkali dhammaṃ passati so maṃ passati; yo maṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati*).⁴ The Sāmyutta Commentary explains: Here the Blessed One shows himself as the Dharma-body, as stated in the passage "The Tathāgata, the great king, is the Dharma-body" [untraced]. For the nine-fold supramundane Dharma [four paths, their fruits, Nirvana] is called the Tathāgata's body (SA 2:314). **Bhikkhu Bodhi** thinks that the Commentary has misquoted the reference to a statement in **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27)⁵ that says:

He whose faith⁶ in the Tathagata is firm, rooted, established, unshakeable by any recluse or brahmin, any deva or Māra or Brahmā or anyone in the world, can truly say: 'I am a son of the Blessed One, an offspring born from his mouth, born of the Dharma, created by the Dharma, heir to the Dharma.'

¹ On the location of these places, see S Dhammika, 1999:97 (map). This spot gives a panoramic view of the other hill crests: Vulture's Peak, Vebhāra, Paṇḍava and Vepulla (M 3:68 f).

² "Temporary release of mind," *sāmayika ceto, vimutti*, which SA explains as the mundane meditative attainments (*lokiya samāpatti*), ie the absorptions and formless attainments, so called because at the moment of absorption the mind is liberated from the opposing states and is resolved upon its object. He fell away from this liberation on account of illness, being disposed to chronic illness due to (humours of) wind, bile and phlegm (SA 1:183).

³ SA 1:183; DhA 1:431-433.

⁴ Cf **Saṅghāṭi, kaṇṇa S** (It 92/3.5.3/90-92) = SD 24.10a. See Harvey 1995a:231-234.

⁵ S:B 1081 n168.

⁶ "Faith," *saddhā*. There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) "rootless faith" (*amūlaka, saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) "faith with a good cause" (*ākāravati, saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320, 8 401, 23); also called *avecca-p, pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69): *avecca* (fr *aveti*, "he goes down to, understands"), "having understanding, penetrated) + *pasāda*, clear brightness, satisfaction, faith. "Wise faith" is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = "not seen, not heard, not suspected" (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). **Gethin** speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective (eg ERE: Faith & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387): "Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith is its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody... the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary." (Gethin 2001:207; my emphases).

Why is that?

Because, Vāseṭṭha (and Bhāradvāja), this designates the Tathagata: ‘The Body of the Dharma’⁷ or ‘the Body of Brahmā’⁸ or ‘One Who is Dharma’ or ‘One Who is Brahmā’.⁹

(D 27.9/3:84)

The close connection between these two passages centre around wise faith (*saddhā*) which is Vakkali’s strongest spiritual faculty. The Buddha in fact declared Vakkali to be the foremost amongst the monks who have faith (*etad-aggam saddhā’ dhimuttānam*, A 1:24; Sn 1146; also Divy 49; VbhA 276; Vism 1:129).

The conclusion of the sutta [39 f] is important in countering the wrong view that some form of “un-supported” consciousness remains after the passing away of an arhat (as proposed, for example, by Peter Harvey 1995a:208-210). As soon as Vakkali and Godhika¹⁰ die, Māra on both occasions looks for their rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi, citta*), but fails to do so, since they are “unestablished” or “unsupported” (*appatiṭṭhita*), that is, find no footing for a new life. It is clear here that the death consciousness (= rebirth-consciousness) does not survive in an “unestablished” or “unsupported” condition, since the texts (here and at S 1:122)¹¹ state that with the passing away of the arhat, consciousness, too, ceases.¹²

It is probable that Harvey arrived at his thesis from translating *appatiṭṭhita* as “unsupported” rather than “unestablished,” which would then not support his thesis. Here it helps to think in Pali, rather than in English.

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⁷ “The Body of the Dharma,” *dhmma, kāya*, a term that reflects such statements as “He who the Dharma sees me; he who me sees the Dharma” (S 3:120) and “seeing the recluses...this is the highest blessing” (Sn 16). The Buddha made the first statement to Vakkali who had joined the Order because he was physically attracted to the Buddha. Vakkali was “seeing” merely the external conditioned form of the Buddha. The true “seeing” is the understanding of the true nature of what the first seeing, ie the vision of the 4 noble truths or the 3 characteristics (DhsA 350). See S:B 1081 n168; Gombrich 1992a:165; Harrison 1992; Collins 1993a:356 n9.2.

⁸ “The Body of Brahmā,” *brahma, kāya* (D 3:84; J 1:95). Here *brahma* is an adjective commonly found in the early Suttas to mean “divine, perfect, excellent, supreme, holy,” as in *brahma, cakka*, “the divine wheel” (M 1:70; A 2:9); *brahma, cariya*, “the holy life” (D 1:84; sv PED); *brahma, jāla*, “the perfect net” (D 1); *brahma, daṇḍa*, “the supreme penalty” (V 2:290; D 2:154); *brahma, yāna*, “the way to the highest good; the best vehicle” (S 5:5; J 6:57); *brahma, vihāra*, “the divine abode” (D 2:196, 3:220; Tha 649; Dha 262; Vism 295 ff).

⁹ “One Who is Brahmā,” *brahma, bhūta*. See eg Sn 1065a.

¹⁰ S 4.23.19/1:122.

¹¹ See also **Parivīmaṃsana S** (S 12.51/2:80-84) = SD 115.

¹² See also S:B 421 n314 where Bodhi disagrees with Harvey’s view.

Vakkali Thera Vatthu

Story of the elder Vakkali

(DhA 25.11/4:118 f)

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It is said that, one day, after Vakkali, born of a brahmin family, had reached manhood, he saw the Teacher enter Sāvattihī for alms and was at once captivated by his physical perfection. Desiring to be near the Teacher so as to be able to constantly gaze at his beauty, Vakkali became a monk. Neglecting to recite the teachings or to meditate, he spent his whole time standing near the Teacher so that he could gaze at him.¹³ The Teacher remained silent waiting for Vakkali's wisdom to ripen.

When the Teacher knew that the elder Vakkali's wisdom had ripened,¹⁴ he admonished him thus, "Vakkali, what is there in looking upon this filthy body? Vakkali, **he who sees the Dharma sees me.**" [S 3:87]

But in spite of the Teacher's admonition, the elder Vakkali could not let the Teacher out of his sight. Finally, the Teacher thought,

"Unless this monk receives a shock,¹⁵ he will never come to understand."

Now the rains retreat was near and on the rains-entry day, the Teacher leaving for Rājagaha, dismissed the elder Vakkali with the words:

"Go back, Vakkali! Go back, Vakkali!" (*apehi Vakkali, apehi Vakkalī ti paṇāmesi*)

"Now for the period of three months, I'm unable to see the Teacher in his presence. What is the use of my living any longer? I will throw myself down from a cliff."

And with that thought, he climbed Mount Vulture Peak.

The Teacher, knowing that Vakkali was weary of the world, thought,

"If this monk receives no comforting from my presence, he will destroy his predisposition to the attainment of the path and the fruits."

Then he sent forth a radiant image of himself for Vakkali himself to see. The moment the monk saw the Teacher, the weight of sorrow that had oppressed him vanished. Then the Teacher, as though filling the dry bed of a lake with a flood of water, caused great zest and joy to arise in the monk, and pronounced the following stanza: [4:119]

Full of joy and faith in the Buddha's Teaching, the monk
Will reach the place of peace, the happiness of the stilling of the formations. (Dh 381)

Having pronounced this Stanza, the Teacher stretched forth his hand to the elder Vakkali and said,

Come, Vakkali! Fear not, look at the Tathāgata!
I will lift you up like (one lifting) an elephant sunk in the mire.
Come, Vakkali! Fear not, look at the Tathāgata!
I will free you just as the (eclipsed) sun is freed from Rāhu's maw.
Come, Vakkali! Fear not! Look at the Tathāgata!
I will free you just as the (eclipsed) moon is freed from Rāhu's maw.

The elder Vakkali thought,

¹³ According to the **Saññoga S** (A 7.48) lust arising through just such an action of contemplating on the physical features of another. (A 7.48/4:57-59) = SD 8.7

¹⁴ *Ñāṇa, paripākāṃ*. The Buddha, seeing Vakkali's predisposition, knows that in the ensuing events, he will change for the better.

¹⁵ "Shock," (*saṃvega*), usually tr as "a sense of spiritual urgency". I have borrowed Burlingame's tr (DhA:B 3:263).

“I have seen the One with the Ten Powers,¹⁶ and he speaks to me, saying, ‘Come!’”

He at once experienced profound joy. He thought, “How shall I go?”

And standing there on the cliff, on hearing the first line of the stanza, though he saw no path, he leaped up into the air before the One of Ten Powers. As he hovered in the air, pondering on the stanzas uttered by the Teacher, he completely suppressed his zest and attained arhathood together with the analytical knowledges (*pañisambhidā*). Then, praising the Tathagata, he descended to the ground and stood before the Teacher. On a subsequent occasion, the Teacher placed him as the foremost amongst those inclined to faith (*saddhā’dhimutta*).

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Discourse on Vakkali

(S 22.87/3:119-124)

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was staying at the Squirrels’ Feeding-ground in the Bamboo Grove near Rājagaha.

Vakkali is ill

2 Now at that time, the venerable Vakkali was dwelling in a potter’s shed,¹⁷ sick, suffering, gravely ill.¹⁸

3 Then the venerable Vakkali addressed his attendants:

“Come, brothers, go up to the Blessed One, pay homage to him in my name with your head at his feet, and say, ‘Venerable sir, the monk Vakkali is sick, suffering, 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 visit the monk Vakkali out of compassion.’”

4 “Yes, brother,” the monks replied, and they went up to the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down at one side.

5 Sitting thus at one side, those monks conveyed the venerable Vakkali’s message to the Blessed One. The Blessed One consented by his silence.

¹⁶ “The One with the Ten Powers,” *dasa,bala* or more fully *dasa,bala,ñāṇa*. The 10 powers are: (1) knowledge of the possible and the impossible (*thānāthāna ñāṇa*), such as in the analysis of karma (M 57, 135, 136), and the possibility regarding the realm, circumstances, time and effort, all of which would impede or reinforce the result; and also the cause of karma, etc; (2) knowledge of the result of karma (*kamma,vipāka ñāṇa*); (3) knowledge of the way leading to all destinies and goals (*sabbattha,gāmini,paṭipadā*); (4) knowledge of the world with its various elements (*nānā,dhātu ñāṇa*) (M 115.4-9/3:62 f); (5) knowledge of the different dispositions of beings (*nānādhimuttika ñāṇa*); (6) knowledge of the maturity level of beings in terms of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom (*indriya,paropariyatta ñāṇa*) (Vbh §§814-827); (7) knowledge of the defilements, cleansing and emergence in the cases of the meditations, liberations, concentrations and attainments (*jhān’ādi,saṅkiles’ādi ñāṇa*); (8) knowledge of the recollection of (his own) past lives (*pubbe,nivāsānussati ñāṇa*); (9) knowledge of the passing away and arising of beings (according to their karma) (*cutūpapāta ñāṇa*); (10) knowledge of the destruction of the mental defilements (*āsava-k,khaya ñāṇa*) (M 1:69; A 5:33; Vbh 336). See **Mahā Sīhanāda S** (M 12.9-20/1:69-71) for details.

¹⁷ “Potter’s shed,” *kumbhakāra,nivesana*, which Comy glosses as *kumbhakāra,sālā* (SA 2:313). *Nivesana* usually translates as “house,” sometimes as “settlement”.

¹⁸ Comy: After the Invitation ceremony (*pavāraṇā*) of the rains retreat, the elder Vakkali while on his way to see Blessed One fell seriously ill in the middle of the town. He could not walk, and had to be carried on a litter to a potter’s shed (SA 2:313). In his Thera,gāthā, however, he is said to be suffering from “colic” (a stomach ailment due to “wind”) (Tha 350), which ThaA says is caused by insufficient food (ThaA 2:148).

The Buddha visits Vakkali

6 Then the Blessed One, having dressed himself and taking robe and bowl, visited the venerable Vakkali. [120]

7 The venerable Vakkali saw the Blessed One coming in the distance and stirred on his bed.¹⁹

8 Then the Blessed One said this to him:

“Enough, Vakkali. do not stir on your bed. There are these seats spread and ready,²⁰ I will sit down there.” The Blessed One then sat down on the spread seat.

9 Seated thus, the Blessed One said this to the venerable Vakkali:

“I hope you are bearing it, Vakkali. I hope you are getting better, and your pains are abating, not rising; that their abating is evident, not their rising.”

“Venerable sir, I cannot bear it; I am not getting better, and my pains are not abating, but rising; their rising is evident, not their abating.”

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

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

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

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

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

“For a long time, venerable sir, I have wanted to come and see²¹ the Blessed One, but I do not have enough strength in my body to visit the Blessed One to see him.”

Seeing the Buddha

13 “Enough, Vakkali! What is there to see of this foul body? **One who sees the Dharma sees me; one who sees me, sees the Dharma.**²² For in seeing the Dharma, Vakkali, one sees me, and in seeing me, one sees the Dharma.

14 What do you think, Vakkali: is form permanent or impermanent?” [121]

“Impermanent, venerable sir.”

“Is the impermanent suffering or happiness?”

“Suffering, venerable sir.”

“Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self’?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“What do you think, bhikshus, is feeling permanent or impermanent?...

“What do you think, bhikshus, is perception permanent or impermanent?...

“What do you think, bhikshus, are mental formations permanent or impermanent?...

“What do you think, bhikshus, is consciousness permanent or impermanent?...

“Impermanent, venerable sir.”

¹⁹ “Stirred,” *samadhosi* = *samacopi* (from *sañcopati*, he moves, stirs). Some say that he was shaking from a violent fever but Comy says that he was showing respect by making a movement. It is said that even one who is very ill should show respect to a senior by a gesture of rising (SA 2:313).²⁰ Comy says that in the Buddha’s time, a seat was always ready in a monk’s quarters in case the Teacher visits (SA 2:314).

²¹ “Come and see the Blessed One,” *Bhagavantam dassanāya upasaṅkamitu, kāmo*. Evidently, the emphasis here is on the seeing of the Buddha in a physical sense.

²² *Yo kho Vakkali dhammam passati so maṃ passati; yo maṃ passati so dhammam passati*. The **Attha, sālinī** remarks that “seeing is not by the eye but by insight” (DhsA 350). SA: Here the Blessed One shows himself as the Dharma-body, as stated in the passage “The Tathāgata, the great king, is the Dharma-body” [untraced]. For the nine-fold supramundane Dharma [four paths, their fruits, Nirvana] is called the Tathāgata’s body. (SA 2:314) Bodhi thinks Comy misquoted the reference to a statement in **Aggañña S** (D 27) (S:B 1081 n168). See Intro above.

“Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?”

“Suffering, venerable sir.”

“Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self?’”

“No, venerable sir.”

15 “Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of form whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—one sees all form as it really is with right wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

Any kind of feeling whatsoever...thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

Any kind of perception whatsoever...thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

Any kind of mental formations whatsoever...thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

Any kind of consciousness whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—one sees all consciousness as it really is with right wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

16 Seeing thus, a well-taught noble disciple becomes revulsed with form, revulsed with feeling, revulsed with perception, revulsed with mental formations, revulsed with consciousness.

Being (thus) revulsed, (his lust) fades away. Through the fading away (of lust) [that is, dispassion], (his mind) is liberated.

When it is liberated, there comes the knowledge: ‘It is liberated.’ He directly knows: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more of this state of being.’”

Vakkali at Kālasilā

17 Then the Blessed One, having given this advice to the venerable Vakkali, rose from his seat and left for Vulture Peak Hill.

18 Then, not long after the Blessed One had left, the venerable Vakkali addressed his attendants thus:

“Come, brothers, lift me up on this bed and carry me to Kāla,silā [Black Rock] on the Isigili slope.²³ How can one think of dying among the houses?”

19 “Yes, brother,” the monks replied and, having lifted up the venerable Vakkali on the bed, they carried him to Kālasilā on the Isigili slope.

The two devatas

20 The Blessed One spent that night and the rest of the day on Vulture Peak Hill.

21 Then when the night was far spent, two devatas²⁴ of exceeding beauty, lighting up the whole of Vulture Peak Hill, went up to the Blessed One. Having gone up to the Blessed One, and after paying him homage, stood at one side.

22 Standing thus at one side, one of the devatas said this to the Blessed One,

“Venerable sir, the monk Vakkali is intent on liberation.”²⁵

23 The other devata said this to the Blessed One,

“Surely, venerable sir, he will be well liberated.”²⁶

²³ This is the place where the monk Godhika committed suicide, too (**Godhika S**, S 4.23/1:120-122). See Intro above.

²⁴ *devatā*. Here referring to a god of the Sense-world. It is a general term referring to divine beings, however, sometimes with a broader meaning. **Culla Niddesa** defines *devatā* as those who are commonly regarded (in the Buddha’s time) as being “worthy of gifts” (*devatā* as *ye yesam dakkhiṇeyyā te tesam devatā*), ie ascetics, domestic animals (elephants, horses, cows, cocks, crows), physical elements (fire, stone, etc), lower (earth-bound) gods and high (celestial) gods (Nc 308). The *Vimāna Vatthu Comy* simply defines it as a male god, a Brahma, or a female god (*devatā ti deva,putto pi Brahmā pi deva,dhitā pi vuccati*, VvA 21).

²⁵ “Intent on liberation,” *vimokkhāya ceteti*. On *vimutti* and *vimokkha*, rendered as “liberation” and “deliverance” respectively, see S:B 1081 n170.

24 This is what the devatas said to the Blessed One. Having said this, they paid homage to the Blessed One and, keeping him on their right, disappeared right there.

25 Then when the night has passed, the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“Come, bhikshus, go and visit the monk Vakkali and say to him: ‘Brother Vakkali, listen to the word of the Blessed One [122] and the two devatas. Last night, brother, when the night was far spent, two devatas of exceeding beauty went up to the Blessed One, lighting up the whole of Vulture Peak Hill. They went up to the Blessed One, and after paying him homage, stood at one side.

Standing thus at one side, one of the devatas said this to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, the monk Vakkali is intent on liberation.”

The other devata said this to the Blessed One: “Surely, venerable sir, he will be well liberated.” And the Blessed One says to you, brother Vakkali, “Fear not, Vakkali, fear not! Your death will not be a bad one. Your demise will not be a bad one.””

26 “Yes, venerable sir,” the monks replied, and they went up to the venerable Vakkali and said to him, “Brother Vakkali, listen to the word of the Blessed One and the two devatas...”

Vakkali’s suicide

27 Then the venerable Vakkali addressed his attendants:

“Come, brothers, 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.”²⁷

28 “Yes, brother,” the monks replied, and they lowered the venerable Vakkali from the bed.

29 “Last night, brother, two devatas of exceeding beauty went up to the Blessed One. One of the devatas said this to the Blessed One: ‘Venerable sir, the monk Vakkali is intent on liberation.’ The other devata said this to the Blessed One: ‘Surely, venerable sir, he will be well liberated.’ And the Blessed One says to you, brother Vakkali, ‘Fear not, Vakkali, fear not! Your death will not be a bad one. Your demise will not be a bad one.’”

30 “Well then, brothers, pay homage to the Blessed One in my name with your head at his feet and say, ‘Venerable sir, the monk Vakkali is sick, suffering, gravely ill. He pays homage to the Blessed One with his head at his feet.’ Then say, ‘Form is impermanent: I have no doubt 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 nor affection. [123]

Feeling is impermanent...

Perception is impermanent...

Mental formations are impermanent...

Consciousness is impermanent: I have no doubt 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 nor affection.”²⁸

31 “Yes, brother,” the monks replied, and then they left.

²⁶ “He will be well-liberated,” *svimutto vimuccissati*, lit “he will be liberated as one well liberated”. That is to say, he would attain the fruit of Arhathood (SA 2:313).

²⁷ Here is an interesting case where we see the Buddha being respected as the Dharma, or that the Dharma is regarded with the same respect as or higher than the Buddha.

²⁸ This sentence seems to imply that Vakkali thinks he is already an Arhat; cf my tr of **Chann’ovāda S**, M 144.7n = SD 11.12. Apparently, like Channa (M 144.12n tr Piya Tan), Vakkali felt great pain after cutting his throat. Comy: “The elder overestimated himself. As he had suppressed the defilements by concentration and insight, he did not see himself assailed by them and so thought that he was an arhat. Disgusted with his unhappy life, he cut his throat (*kaṇṭha, nāla*) with a sharp knife. Just then, great pain arose in him. Realizing he was still an ordinary person, he took up his main meditation object, examined it with knowledge (*ñāna*) and attained arhathood just as he died.” (SA 2:314). As such, he dies a “same-header” (*sama, sīsī*, cf SA 2:273; AA 4:6). Cf S:B 1082 n172 where Bodhi doubts Comy’s accuracy here. It is interesting to note here that while both Vakkali and Channa each cut their throat (*kaṇṭha, nāla*, SA 2:314; *kaṇṭha, nāli*, MA 5:82), Godhika was said to have cut his wind-pipe (*gala, nāli*) (SA 1:183). Bodhi however uses “jugular vein” throughout (eg S:B 1082 n172).

32 Then, not long after those monks had left, the venerable Vakkali used the knife.

Māra fails to find Vakkali's consciousness

33 Then the monks went up to the Blessed One *and related what had happened*.

34 The Blessed One then addressed the monks thus:

“Come, bhikshus, let us go to Kālasilā on the Isigili slope where the son of family Vakkali has used the knife.”

“Yes, venerable sir,” those monks replied.

35 Then the Blessed One, together with a number of monks, went to Kālasilā on the Isigili slope.

36 The Blessed One saw in the distance the venerable Vakkali lying on his bed with his shoulder turned.²⁹ [124]

37 Now on that occasion a mass of smoke and darkness was moving to the east, then to the west, to the north, to the south, upwards, downwards, and to the directions in between.³⁰

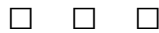
38 The Blessed One then addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus, do you see that mass of smoke and darkness moving to the east, then to the west, to the north, to the south, upwards, downwards, and to the directions in between?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

39 “That, bhikshus, is Māra the evil one seeking the consciousness of the son of family³¹ Vakkali, wondering, ‘Where now has the consciousness of the son of family Vakkali established itself [for rebirth]?’”

40 But, bhikshus, with consciousness unestablished, the son of family Vakkali has attained nirvana.³²



²⁹ “With his shoulder turned,” ie with twisted shoulder. He had been lying on his back when he took the knife, but because he was accustomed to lying of his right side, he had turned to his right and had so remained (SA 2:315).

³⁰ *Tena kho pana samayena dhumāyitattam timirāyitattam gacchat’eva purimam disam gacchati pacchiman disam gacchati uttaram disam gacchati dakkhinam disam gacchati uddham gacchati adho gacchati anudisani.* (S 1:122 = 3:124).

³¹ “Son of family,” *kula,putta*, alt trs “clansman, noble youth.” It is interesting that the Buddha refers to Vakkali posthumously as *kula,putta* instead of *bhikkhu*. It should be noted that only Buddhaghosa (the author of DhA) refers to Vakkali as *thera* (elder) throughout, but the Buddha often refers to young monk from good families as “son of family” (*kula,putta*). Vakkali was probably in his early 20s. Pukkusāti is similarly referred to as *kula,putta* in **Dhātu Vibhāṅga S** (M 140). See SD 18.2b Intro n on *kula,putta*.

³² “Consciousness unestablished.” Māra is looking for Vakkali’s rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi,cutta*), as he has elsewhere found in the case of dead people (**Brahma,nimantanika S**, M 49.5/1:327 = SD 11.7; cf S 4:38 f). But here he fails to find it, because it is unestablished (*appatīṭhita*), ie finds no footing for a new life. It is clear here that the death consciousness (= rebirth-consciousness) does not survive in an “unestablished” condition, since the texts (here and at S 1:122) state that with the passing away of the arhat, consciousness, too, ceases. See also **Parivīmaṇsana S** (S 12.51/2:80-84) = SD 11.5. See Intro above.

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