SN 22.85 — SN 22:85 To Yamaka | Yamaka Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

To Yamaka

Yamaka Sutta (SN 22:85)

I have heard that on one occasion Ven. Sāriputta was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Now, at that time this evil viewpoint [diṭṭhigata] had arisen to Ven. Yamaka: “As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.” A large number of monks heard, “They say that this evil viewpoint has arisen to Ven. Yamaka: ‘As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.’” So they went to Ven. Yamaka and on arrival exchanged courteous greetings. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, they sat to one side. As they were

sitting there, they said to Ven. Yamaka, "Is it true, friend Yamaka, that this evil viewpoint has arisen to you: 'As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.'

"Yes, friends. As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death."

"Don't say that, friend Yamaka. Don't misrepresent the Blessed One. It's not good to misrepresent the Blessed One, for the Blessed One would not say, 'A monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.'"

But even though Ven. Yamaka was thus rebuked by those monks, he—from stubbornness & attachment—maintained his adherence to that evil viewpoint: 'As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.'

When those monks could not pry Ven. Yamaka loose from his evil viewpoint, they got up from their seats and went to Ven. Sāriputta. On arrival they said to him: "Friend Sāriputta, this evil viewpoint has arisen to Ven. Yamaka: 'As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.' It would be good if you would go to Ven. Yamaka out of sympathy for his sake."

Ven. Sāriputta consented by remaining silent.

Then, having left his seclusion in the late afternoon, Ven. Sāriputta went to Ven. Yamaka and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Yamaka, "Is it true, friend Yamaka, that this evil viewpoint has arisen to you: 'As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.'

"Yes, friend Sāriputta. As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death."

"What do you think, friend Yamaka? Is form constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, my friend."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, my friend."

“And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, my friend.”

“… Is feeling constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, my friend.” …

“… Is perception constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, my friend.” …

“… Are fabrications constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, my friend.” …

“Is consciousness constant or inconstant?

“Inconstant, my friend.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, my friend.”

“And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, my friend.”

“Thus, friend Yamaka, any form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: Every form is to be seen as it has come to be with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’

“Any feeling whatsoever….

“Any perception whatsoever….

“Any fabrications whatsoever….

“Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: Every consciousness is to be seen as it has come to be with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’

“Seeing thus, friend Yamaka, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

“What do you think, friend Yamaka? Do you regard form as the Tathāgata?”

“No, my friend.”

“Do you regard feeling as the Tathāgata?”

“No, my friend.”

“Do you regard perception as the Tathāgata?”

“No, my friend.”

“Do you regard fabrications as the Tathāgata?”

“No, my friend.”

“Do you regard consciousness as the Tathāgata?”

“No, my friend.”

“What do you think? Do you regard the Tathāgata as being in form? … Elsewhere than form? … In feeling? … Elsewhere than feeling? … In perception? … Elsewhere than perception? … In fabrications? … Elsewhere than fabrications? … In consciousness?… Elsewhere than consciousness?”

“No, my friend.”

“What do you think? Do you regard the Tathāgata as form-feeling-perception-fabrications-consciousness?”

“No, my friend.”

“Do you regard the Tathāgata as that which is without form, without feeling, without perception, without fabrications, without consciousness?”

“No, my friend.”

“And so, friend Yamaka—when you can’t pin down the Tathāgata as a truth or reality even in the present life—is it proper for you to declare, ‘As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death’?”

“Previously, friend Sāriputta, I did foolishly hold that evil viewpoint. But now, having heard your explanation of the Dhamma, I have abandoned that evil viewpoint and have broken through to the Dhamma.”

“Then, friend Yamaka, how would you answer if you are thus asked: ‘A monk, a worthy one, with no more effluents: What is he on the break-up of the body, after death?’”

“Thus asked, I would answer, ‘Form is inconstant… Feeling… Perception… Fabrications… Consciousness is inconstant. That which is inconstant is stressful. That which is stressful has ceased and gone to its end.”

“Very good, friend Yamaka. Very good. In that case I will give you an analogy for the sake of making your understanding of this point even greater. Suppose there were a householder or householder’s son—rich, wealthy, with many possessions—who was thoroughly well-guarded. Then suppose there came along a certain man, desiring what was not his benefit, desiring what was not his welfare, desiring his loss of security, desiring to kill him. The thought would occur to this man: ‘It would not be easy to kill this person by force. What if I were to sneak in and then kill him?’

“So he would go to the householder or householder’s son and say, ‘May you take me on as a servant, lord.’ With that, the householder or householder’s son would take the man on as a servant.

“Having been taken on as a servant, the man would rise in the morning before his master, go to bed in the evening only after his master, doing whatever his master ordered, always acting to please him, speaking politely to him. Then the householder or householder’s son would come to regard him as a friend & companion, and would fall into his trust. When the man realizes, ‘This householder or householder’s son trusts me,’ then encountering him in a solitary place, he would kill him with a sharp knife.

“Now what do you think, friend Yamaka? When that man went to the householder or householder’s son and said, ‘May you take me on as a servant, lord’: wasn’t he even then a murderer? And yet although he was a murderer, the householder or householder’s son did not know him as ‘my murderer.’ And when, taken on as a servant, he would rise in the morning before his master, go to bed in the evening only after his master, doing whatever his master ordered, always acting to please him, speaking politely to him: wasn’t he even then a murderer? And yet although he was a murderer, the householder or householder’s son did not know him as ‘my murderer.’ And when he encountered him in a solitary place and killed him with a sharp knife: wasn’t he even then a murderer? And yet although he was a murderer, the householder or householder’s son did not know him as ‘my murderer.’”

“Yes, my friend.”

“In the same way, an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for people of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—assumes form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

“He assumes feeling to be the self….

“He assumes perception to be the self….

“He assumes fabrications to be the self….

“He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness.

“He does not discern inconstant form, as it has come to be, as ‘inconstant form.’ He does not discern inconstant feeling, as it has come to be, as ‘inconstant feeling.’ He does not discern inconstant perception…. He does not discern inconstant fabrications…. He does not discern inconstant consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘inconstant consciousness.’

“He does not discern stressful form, as it has come to be, as ‘stressful form.’ He does not discern stressful feeling…. He does not discern stressful perception…. He does not discern stressful fabrications…. He does not discern stressful consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘stressful consciousness.’

“He does not discern not-self form, as it has come to be, as ‘not-self form.’ He does not discern not-self feeling…. He does not discern not-self perception…. He does not discern not-self fabrications…. He does not discern not-self consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘not-self consciousness.’

“He does not discern fabricated form, as it has come to be, as ‘fabricated form.’ He does not discern fabricated feeling…. He does not discern fabricated perception…. He does not discern fabricated fabrications…. He does not discern fabricated consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘fabricated consciousness.’

“He does not discern murderous form, as it has come to be, as ‘murderous form.’ He does not discern murderous feeling…. He does not discern murderous perception…. He does not discern murderous fabrications…. He does not discern murderous consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘murderous consciousness.’

“He gets attached to form, clings to form, & determines it to be ‘my self.’ He gets attached to feeling…. He gets attached to perception…. He gets attached to fabrications…. He gets attached to consciousness, clings to consciousness, & determines it to be ‘my self.’ These five clinging-aggregates—attached to, clung to—lead to his long-term loss & suffering.

“Now, the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones—who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for people of integrity, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma—doesn’t assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

“He doesn’t assume feeling to be the self….

“He doesn’t assume perception to be the self….

“He doesn’t assume fabrications to be the self….

“He doesn’t assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness.

“He discerns inconstant form, as it has come to be, as ‘inconstant form.’ He discerns inconstant feeling…. He discerns inconstant perception…. He discerns inconstant fabrications…. He discerns inconstant consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘inconstant consciousness.’

“He discerns stressful form, as it has come to be, as ‘stressful form.’ He discerns stressful feeling…. He discerns stressful perception…. He discerns stressful fabrications…. He discerns stressful consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘stressful consciousness.’

“He discerns not-self form, as it has come to be, as ‘not-self form.’ He discerns not-self feeling…. He discerns not-self perception…. He discerns not-self fabrications…. He discerns not-self consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘not-self consciousness.’

“He discerns fabricated form, as it has come to be, as ‘fabricated form.’ He discerns fabricated feeling…. He discerns fabricated perception…. He discerns fabricated fabrications…. He discerns fabricated consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘fabricated consciousness.’

“He discerns murderous form, as it has come to be, as ‘murderous form.’ He discerns murderous feeling…. He discerns murderous perception…. He discerns murderous fabrications…. He discerns murderous consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘murderous consciousness.’

“He does not get attached to form, does not cling to form, does not determine it to be ‘my self.’ He does not get attached to feeling…. He does not get attached to perception…. He does not get attached to fabrications…. He does not get attached to consciousness, does not cling to consciousness, does not determine it to be ‘my self.’ These five clinging-aggregates—not attached to, not clung to—lead to his long-term happiness & well-being.”

“Even so, friend Sāriputta, are those who have people like you as their companions in the holy life, teaching them, admonishing them out of sympathy, desiring their welfare. For now that I have heard this explanation of the Dhamma from you, my mind—through lack of clinging/sustenance—has been released from effluents.”

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 63; MN 72; MN 109; AN 4:24; AN 6:103; AN 10:81; Ud 8:9; Iti 112; Sn 4:10; Sn 5:6