

SN 22.89
Salāyatanavagga Saṃyutta (Collection on the Six Sense Bases)
Connected Discourses on the Aggregates
Thera Vagga

Khemaka Sutta
“With Khemaka”
Translated by Candana Bhikkhu

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At one time, a large number of elder Bhikkhus were living in Ghosita's Forest Monastery, in Kosambi.

It was during that time that the Venerable Khemaka, while residing in the Jujubee monastery, was stricken with a severe illness, as he experienced much bodily pain and suffering.

Then, when it was evening, by coming out from their seclusion, those elder Bhikkhus addressed the Venerable Dāsaka: “Friend Dāsaka, go and approach the Venerable Khemaka and inform him: ‘Friend Khemaka, the elder Bhikkhus like to inquire about your health as they pass on to you this message: ‘Friend, we hope that you are bearing up; we hope that you are getting better. We hope that your illness is becoming less severe, and your bodily pains and feelings of suffering are decreasing and not increasing; that their subsiding is what is evident, not their continued increase.’”

“Yes, Friends,” replied the Venerable Dāsaka in agreement, as he went to the Ven. Khemaka at the Jujubee Monastery, and having reached his hut, he approached the venerable Khemaka and relayed the message, by saying: ‘Friend Khemaka, the elder Bhikkhus like to inquire about your health as they pass on to you this message: ‘Friend, we hope that you are bearing up; we hope that you are getting better. We hope that your illness is becoming less severe, and your bodily pains and feelings of suffering are decreasing and not increasing; that their subsiding is what is evident, not their continued increase.’”

In replying to them, the Ven. Khemaka stated: “Friends, I am not bearing up well; I am not getting better. My illness is getting severe, and my bodily pains and feelings of suffering are increasing and not decreasing.”

Then, having received his reply, the Venerable Dāsaka went back to the elder Bhikkhus and informed them: ‘Friends, the Venerable Khemaka sends you the following response: “Friends, I am not bearing up well; I am not getting better. My illness is getting severe, and my bodily pains and feelings of suffering are increasing and not decreasing.”

Then, those Bhikkhus asked the Ven. Dāsaka to go back to the Venerable Khemaka and tell him that the elder monks say this: “Friend, the Blessed One has taught us about the five aggregates of clinging that are comprised of: clinging to the aggregate of form, clinging to the aggregate of feelings, clinging to the aggregate of notions/memories, clinging to the aggregate of mental constructions, and clinging to the aggregate of consciousness/sense awareness.’ Therefore, the elder Bhikkhus ask the Ven. Khemaka as to which of these five does he reflect and look upon as his self, or the parts that make up or belong to his self?”

And the Venerable Dāsaka, having consented to go back, set off and reached the Venerable Khemaka’s hut, as he relayed the message given to him, by saying: “Friend, the Blessed One has taught us about the five aggregates of clinging that are comprised of: clinging to the aggregate of form, clinging to the aggregate of feelings, clinging to the aggregate of notions/memories, clinging to the aggregate of mental constructions, and clinging to the aggregate of consciousness/sense awareness.’ Therefore, the elder Bhikkhus ask the Ven. Khemaka as to which of these five does he reflect and look upon as his self, or the parts that make up or belong to his self?”

To this, the Ven. Khemaka replied by saying: “Friends, the Blessed One has indeed taught us about the five aggregates of clinging that are comprised of: clinging to the aggregate of form, clinging to the aggregate of feelings, clinging to the aggregate of notions/memories, clinging to the aggregate of mental constructions, and clinging to the aggregate of consciousness/sense awareness.’ However, I do not reflect nor look upon any of these as myself, nor see them as parts making up or belonging to a self in me.”

And having received his reply, the Venerable Dāsaka went back to the elder Bhikkhus carrying the message: “Friends, the venerable Khemaka says: ‘the Blessed One has indeed taught us about the five aggregates of clinging that are comprised of: clinging to the aggregate of form, clinging to the aggregate of feelings, clinging to the aggregate of notions/memories, clinging to the aggregate of mental constructions, and clinging to the aggregate of consciousness/sense awareness.’ However, I do not reflect nor look upon any of these as myself, nor see them as parts making up or belonging to a self in me.”

Here, the elder Bhikkhus again asked the Ven. Dāsaka to go and tell the venerable Khemaka the following message: “Friend, the Blessed One has taught us about the five aggregates of clinging that are comprised of: clinging to the aggregate of form, clinging to the aggregate of feelings, clinging to the aggregate of notions/memories, clinging to the aggregate of mental constructions, and clinging to the aggregate of consciousness/sense awareness.’ With your response, that you ‘do not reflect nor look upon any of these as yourself, nor see them as parts making up or belonging to a self in you,’ then does that mean that the Ven. Khemaka has attained the Highest Goal of the Holy Life, having destroyed all the contaminants by attaining Arahantship?”

And the Venerable Dāsaka eagerly went back to the venerable Khemaka as he conveyed the elder Bhikkhus’ message by asking: “Friend, the Blessed One has taught us about the five aggregates of clinging that are comprised of: clinging to the aggregate of form, clinging to the aggregate of feelings, clinging to the aggregate of notions/memories, clinging to the aggregate of mental constructions, and clinging to the aggregate of consciousness/sense awareness.’ With

your response, that you ‘do not reflect nor look upon any of these as yourself, nor see them as parts making up or belonging to a self in you,’ then does that mean that the Ven. Khemaka has attained the Highest Goal of the Holy Life, having destroyed all the contaminants by attaining Arahantship?”

At this, the Ven Khemaka replied, “The Blessed One has indeed taught us about the five aggregates of clinging that are comprised of: clinging to the aggregate of form, clinging to the aggregate of feelings, clinging to the aggregate of notions/memories, clinging to the aggregate of mental constructions, and clinging to the aggregate of consciousness/sense awareness.’ But I do not reflect nor look upon any of these as myself, nor see them as parts making up or belonging to a self in me. Yet, I am *not* an Arahant, one whose contaminants have been utterly destroyed. For, when speaking of the five aggregates, I am still not rid of the conceit “I am,” even though I don’t find within me anything or anyone to be called or experienced as an “I am.”

Then, the venerable Dāsaka, having gone back to the elder Bhikkhus, reported to them the Ven. Khemaka’s response by saying: “‘The Blessed One has indeed taught us about the five aggregates of clinging that are comprised of: clinging to the aggregate of form, clinging to the aggregate of feelings, clinging to the aggregate of notions/memories, clinging to the aggregate of mental constructions, and clinging to the aggregate of consciousness/sense awareness.’ But, I do not reflect nor look upon any of these as myself, nor see them as parts making up or belonging to a self in me. Yet, I am *not* an Arahant, one whose contaminants have been utterly destroyed. For, when speaking of the five aggregates, I am still not rid of the conceit “I am,” even though I don’t find within me anything or anyone to be called or experienced as an “I am.”

Again, the elder Bhikkhus asked the Ven. Dāsaka if he could go back to the Jujubee Forest, and carry this message as they further inquired from the Ven. Khemaka: “Friend Khemaka, the elder Bhikkhus ask, ‘If Friend Khemaka is not an Arahant, then what can the Venerable Khemaka be referring to when he uses the term “I am?”’ Is it in reference to form/matter, or to feelings, or to memories/notions, or to mental constructions, or to consciousness/sense awareness? Or is it something completely apart from them? What exactly is this “I am” that the Ven. Khemaka is referring to?”

Having agreed to carry their message back, the Venerable Dāsaka yet again went to the Venerable Khemaka and told him: “Friend, the elder monks would like to ask you this further question: “Friend Khemaka, the elder Bhikkhus ask, ‘If Friend Khemaka is not an Arahant, then what can the Venerable Khemaka be referring to when he uses the term “I am?”’ Is it in reference to form/matter, or to feelings, or to memories/notions, or to mental constructions, or to consciousness/sense awareness? Or is it something completely apart from them? What exactly is this “I am” that the Ven. Khemaka is referring to?”

At that point, the Ven. Khemaka exclaimed to the Ven. Dāsaka: “Enough of this going back and forth, Friend Dāsaka! Please go and get me a walking stick, something I can lean onto, and *I* will go to the elder Bhikkhus and carry my *reply to them*.”

Then, by leaning on a walking stick, the venerable Khemaka walked all the way to the elder Bhikkhus in Kosambi, and after exchanging friendly greetings with them, sat to one side.

Then the elder Bhikkhus turned to the Venerable Khemaka, now seated among them, and said: “Friend Khemaka, when you say this term “I am,” what exactly do you mean? Is it with regard to the form, feelings, notions/memories, mental constructions, or consciousness/sense awareness, or is it something entirely different or separate from these? What is this “I am” that you still refer to?”

“Friends, I do not say that I am this form, nor do I say that I am entirely *separate* from this form; I do not say that I am feelings, nor do I say that I am entirely *separate* from feelings; I do not say that I am notions/memories, nor do I say that I am entirely *separate* from notions/memories; I do not say that I am mental construction, nor do I say that I am entirely separate from mental constructions; I do not say that I am consciousness/sense awareness, nor do I say that I am entirely separate from consciousness/sense awareness. In other words, although I use the term “I am” in reference to the five aggregates that hold things together, that does *not* mean, however, that I recognize them as “*I am this*,” for I am still not rid of the conceit “I am.”

“Friends, it is very much like the fragrance of a blue, a white, or a red lotus.

“If someone were to tell you that the fragrance of a blue, a white, or a red lotus was in its petals, or in its color, or in its stem, would you consider that to be accurate?”

“No, Friend, that would not be accurate,” replied the elder Bhikkhus.

“What then, Friends, would be an accurate way to describe as to where the fragrance of the lotus is emanating from?”

“Friend, it would be accurate to say that the fragrance of the lotus comes from the flower itself,” replied the elder Bhikkhus.

“Exactly Friends! In the same manner, I do not say that ‘I am this form, nor do I say that I am entirely separate from this form; I do not say that I am feelings, nor do I say that I am entirely separate from feelings; I do not say that I am notions/memories, nor do I say that I am entirely separate from notions/memories; I do not say that I am mental constructions, nor do I say that I am entirely separate from mental constructions; I do not say that I am consciousness/sense awareness, nor do I say that I am entirely separate from consciousness/sense awareness. In other words, although I use the term “I am” in reference to the five aggregates holding things together, that does not mean, however, that I recognize them as “*I am this*,” for I am still not rid of the conceit “I am.”

“Friends, although a Noble Disciple may have abandoned the five lower fetters that bind a person to the sensual world, there still remains some residue in the form of the conceit “I am,” the desire that is “I am,” and the latent tendency of “I am” that lingers, as a result of not having been uprooted yet. Sometime later, however, as he continues to observe the arising and vanishing of the five aggregates of clinging, he begins to see more and more clearly: “this is the arising of form/matter, this is the vanishing of form/matter; this is the arising of feelings, this is the vanishing of feelings; this is the arising of notions/memories, this is the vanishing of notions/memories; this is the arising of mental constructions, this is the vanishing of mental

constructions; this is the arising of consciousness/sense awareness, this is the vanishing of consciousness/sense awareness. And as he continues attending to the rise and fall of these five aggregates of clinging thus, the conceit “I am,” the desire that is “I am,” and the latent tendency of “I am,” all become uprooted.

“Friends, it is very much like the stained, dirty piece of cloth that is given to the washer to clean, who then would brush it with salt, lime, or cow dung and rinse it thoroughly in pure water.

But, as the washer returns the cloth to its owner clean and pure, the cloth would now still have with it the lingering smells of salt, lime, or cow dung, as these would not be removed from it. But when the owner puts it in a perfumed box, then the smells of salt, lime, or cow dung that were there earlier, would now be completely removed.

In the same way, Friends, although a Noble Disciple may have abandoned the five lower fetters that bind a person to the sensual world, there still remains some residue in the form of the conceit “I am,” the desire that is “I am,” and the latent tendency of “I am” that lingers, as a result of not having been uprooted yet. Sometime later, however, as he continues to observe the arising and vanishing of the five aggregates of clinging, he begins to see more and more clearly: “this is the arising of form/matter, this is the vanishing of form/matter; this is the arising of feelings, this is the vanishing of feelings; this is the arising of notions/memories, this is the vanishing of notions/memories; this is the arising of mental constructions, this is the vanishing of mental constructions; this is the arising of consciousness/sense awareness, this is the vanishing of consciousness/sense awareness. And as he continues attending to the rise and fall of these five aggregates of clinging thus, the conceit “I am,” the desire that is “I am,” and the latent tendency of “I am,” all become uprooted.”

When this was said, the elder Bhikkhus said to the Venerable Khemaka: “In asking our questions thus, surely we had no intentions of troubling the Ven. Khemaka. Our hope was that, in answering these questions, Ven. Khemaka would teach us, clarify and elaborate for us, revealing, elucidating, and establishing us in the Dhamma, by making us understand and see the Dispensation of the Blessed One in detail.

And truly, the Venerable Khemaka has taught us, clarified and elaborated for us, having revealed, elucidated, as well as established us in the Dhamma, by making us understand and see the Dispensation of the Blessed One in detail.

This is how the Venerable Khemaka responded to the elder Bhikkhus' questions, and the elder Bhikkhus were all delighted in the words of the Venerable Khemaka.

And while this exposition was taking place, the minds of about sixty elder Bhikkhus were utterly liberated from the contaminants, together, with the mind of the Venerable Khemaka.

Sadhu *Sadhu* *Sadhu*