

The background of the image is a photograph of the interior of Antelope Canyon. The walls are made of smooth, undulating sandstone, illuminated by warm, golden light that creates a series of flowing, wave-like patterns. The perspective is looking down a narrow, winding passage, with the light filtering in from above, creating a dramatic play of light and shadow. The overall color palette is dominated by warm tones of orange, red, and brown.

A BURDEN
OFF
THE MIND

A Burden Off the Mind

A Study Guide

Compiled by

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Introduction

The Buddha's Awakening gave him, among other things, a new perspective on the uses and limitations of words. He had discovered a reality—the deathless—that no words could describe. At the same time, he discovered that the path to awakening could be described, although it involved a new way of seeing and conceptualizing the problem of suffering and stress. Because ordinary concepts were often poor tools for teaching the path, he had to invent new concepts and to stretch pre-existing words to encompass those concepts so that others could taste awakening themselves.

One of the new concepts most central to his teaching was that of the *khandhas*, usually translated into English as “aggregates.” Prior to the Buddha, the Pali word *khandha* had very ordinary meanings: A *khandha* could be a pile, a bundle, a heap, a mass. It could also be the trunk of a tree. In his first sermon, though, the Buddha gave it a new, psychological meaning, introducing the term “clinging-*khandhas*” to summarize his analysis of the truth of stress and suffering.

Throughout the remainder of his teaching career, he referred to these psychological *khandhas* time and again. Their importance in his teachings has thus been obvious to every generation of Buddhists ever since. Less obvious, though, has been the issue of how they are important: How should a meditator make use of the concept of the psychological *khandhas*? What questions are they meant to answer?

The most common response to these questions is best exemplified by two recent scholarly books devoted to the subject. Both treat the *khandhas* as the Buddha's answer to the question, “What is a person?” To quote from the jacket of the first:

“If Buddhism denies a permanent self, how does it perceive identity?... What we conventionally call a ‘person’ can be understood in terms of five aggregates, the sum of which must not be taken for a permanent entity, since beings are nothing but an amalgam of ever- changing phenomena.... [W]ithout a thorough understanding of the five aggregates, we cannot grasp

the liberation process at work within the individual, who is, after all, simply an amalgam of the five aggregates.”

From the introduction of the other:

“The third key teaching is given by the Buddha in contexts when he is asked about individual identity: when people want to know ‘what am I?’, ‘what is my real self?’. The Buddha says that individuality should be understood in terms of a combination of phenomena which appear to form the physical and mental continuum of an individual life. In such contexts, the human being is analysed into five constituents—the *pañcakkhandhā* [five aggregates].”

This understanding of the khandhas isn’t confined to scholars. Almost any modern Buddhist meditation teacher would explain the khandhas in a similar way. And it isn’t a modern innovation. It was first proposed at the beginning of the common era in the commentaries to the early Buddhist canons—both the Theravādin and the Sarvāstivādin, which formed the basis for Mahāyāna scholasticism.

However, once the commentaries used the khandhas to define what a person is, they spawned many of the controversies that have plagued Buddhist thinking ever since: “If a person is just khandhas, then what gets reborn?” “If a person is just khandhas, and the khandhas are annihilated on reaching total nibbāna, then isn’t total nibbāna the annihilation of the person?” “If a person is khandhas, and khandhas are interrelated with other khandhas, how can one person enter nibbāna without dragging everyone else along?”

A large part of the history of Buddhist thought has been the story of ingenious but unsuccessful attempts to settle these questions. It’s instructive to note, though, that the Pali canon never quotes the Buddha as trying to answer them. In fact, it never quotes him as trying to define what a person is at all. Instead, it quotes him as saying that to define yourself in any way is to limit yourself, and that the question, “What am I?” is best ignored. This suggests that he formulated the concept of the khandhas to answer other, different questions. If, as meditators, we want to make the best use of this

concept, we should look at what those original questions were, and determine how they apply to our practice.

The canon depicts the Buddha as saying that he taught only two topics: suffering and the end of suffering (§2). A survey of the Pali discourses shows him using the concept of the khandhas to answer the primary questions related to those topics: What is suffering? How is it caused? What can be done to bring those causes to an end?

The Buddha introduced the concept of the khandhas in his first sermon in response to the first of these questions. His short definition of suffering was “the five clinging-khandhas.” This fairly cryptic phrase can be fleshed out by drawing on other passages in the canon.

The five khandhas are bundles or piles of form, feeling, perception, fabrications, and consciousness. None of the texts explain why the Buddha used the word khandha to describe these things. The meaning of “tree trunk” may be relevant to the pervasive fire imagery in the canon—*nibbāna* being extinguishing of the fires of passion, aversion, and delusion—but none of the texts explicitly make this connection. The common and explicit image is of the khandhas as burdensome (§22). We can think of them as piles of bricks we carry on our shoulders. However, these piles are best understood, not as objects, but as activities, for an important passage §7 defines them in terms of their functions. Form—which covers physical phenomena of all sorts, both within and without the body—wears down or “de-forms.” Feeling feels pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain. Perception labels or identifies objects. Consciousness cognizes the six senses (counting the intellect as the sixth) along with their objects. Of the five khandhas, fabrication is the most complex. Passages in the canon define it as intention, but it includes a wide variety of activities, such as attention, evaluation §14, and all the active processes of the mind. It is also the most fundamental khandha, for its intentional activity underlies the experience of form, feeling, etc., in the present moment.

Thus intention is an integral part of our experience of all the khandhas—an important point, for this means that there is an element of intention in all suffering. This opens the possibility that

suffering can be ended by changing our intentions—or abandoning them entirely—which is precisely the point of the Buddha’s teachings.

To understand how this happens, we have to look more closely at how suffering arises—or, in other words, how khandhas become clinging-khandhas.

When khandhas are experienced, the process of fabrication normally doesn’t simply stop there. If attention focuses on the khandhas’ attractive features—beautiful forms, pleasant feelings, etc.—it can give rise to passion and delight (§36). This passion and delight can take many forms, but the most tenacious is the habitual act of fabricating a sense of me or mine, identifying with a particular khandha (or set of khandhas) or claiming possession of it.

This sense of me and mine is rarely static. It roams like an amoeba, changing its contours as it changes location. Sometimes expansive, sometimes contracted, it can view itself as identical with a khandha, as possessing a khandha, as existing within a khandha, or as having a khandha existing within itself (§24). At times feeling finite, at other times infinite §25, whatever shape it takes it’s always unstable and insecure, for the khandhas providing its food are simply activities and functions, inconstant and insubstantial. In the words of the canon, the khandhas are like foam, like a mirage, like the bubbles formed when rain falls on water §44. They’re heavy only because the iron grip of trying to cling to them is burdensome. As long as we’re addicted to passion and delight for these activities—as long as we cling to them—we’re bound to suffer.

The Buddhist approach to ending this clinging, however, is not simply to drop it. As with any addiction, the mind has to be gradually weaned away. Before we can reach the point of no intention, where we’re totally freed from the fabrication of khandhas, we have to change our intentions toward the khandhas so as to change their functions. Instead of using them for the purpose of constructing a self, we use them for the purpose of creating a path to the end of suffering. Instead of carrying piles of bricks on our shoulders, we take them off and lay them along the ground as pavement.

The first step in this process is to use the khandhas to construct the factors of the noble eightfold path. For example, right concentration:

Each of the four jhānas and the first three formless attainments, are called perception-attainments, for they are based on maintaining a steady perception of the object of meditation (§31). In the first jhāna, for instance, we maintain a steady perception focused on an aspect of form, such as the breath, and used directed thought and evaluation—which count as fabrications—to create feelings of pleasure and refreshment, which we spread through the body §29. In the beginning, it's normal that we experience passion and delight for these feelings, and that consciousness follows along in line with them. This helps get us absorbed in mastering the skills of concentration.

Once we've gained the sense of strength and well-being that comes from mastering these skills, we can proceed to the second step: attending to the drawbacks of even the refined khandhas we experience in concentration, so as to undercut the passion and delight we might feel for them:

“Suppose that an archer or archer's apprentice were to practice on a straw man or mound of clay, so that after a while he would become able to shoot long distances, to fire accurate shots in rapid succession, and to pierce great masses. In the same way, there is the case where a monk... enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, feeling, perceptions, fabrications, & consciousness, as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, a emptiness, not-self. [Similarly with the other levels of jhāna]” (§31).

The various ways of fostering dispassion are also khandhas, khandhas of perception. A standard list includes the following: the perception of inconstancy, the perception of not-self, the perception of unattractiveness, the perception of drawbacks (the diseases to which the body is subject), the perception of abandoning, the perception of distaste for every world, the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications (§32). One of the most important of these perceptions is that of not-self. When the Buddha first

introduced the concept of not-self in his second sermon ([SN 22:59](#) — see [§52](#)), he also introduced a way of strengthening its impact with a series of questions based around the khandhas. Taking each khandha in turn, he asked: “Is it constant or inconstant?” Inconstant. “And is what is inconstant stressful or pleasurable?” Stressful. “And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?” No.

These questions show the complex role the khandhas play in this second step of the path. The questions themselves are khandhas—of fabrication—and they use the concept of the khandhas to deconstruct any passion and delight that might center on the khandhas and create suffering. Thus, in this step, we use khandhas that point out the drawbacks of the khandhas.

If used unskillfully, though, these perceptions and fabrications can simply replace passion with its mirror image, aversion. This is why they have to be based on the first step—the well-being constructed in *jhāna*—and coupled with the third step, the perceptions of dispassion and cessation that incline the mind to the deathless: “This is peace, this is exquisite—the pacification of all fabrications; the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding” ([§31](#)). In effect, these are perception-khandhas that point the mind beyond all khandhas.

The texts say that this three-step process can lead to one of two results. If, after undercutting passion and delight for the khandhas, the mind contains any residual passion for the perception of the deathless, it will attain the third level of awakening, called non-return. If passion and delight are entirely eradicated, though, all clinging is entirely abandoned, the intentions that fabricate khandhas are dropped, and the mind totally released. The bricks of the pavement have turned into a runway, and the mind has taken off.

Into what? The authors of the discourses seem unwilling to say, even to the extent of describing it as a state of existence, non-existence, neither, or both ([§§49-51](#)). As one of the discourses states, the freedom lying beyond the khandhas also lies beyond the realm to which language properly applies ([§49](#); see also [AN 4:173](#)). There is also the very real practical problem that any preconceived notions of that

freedom, if clung to as a perception-khandha, could easily act as an obstacle to its attainment. Still, there is also the possibility that, if properly used, such a perception-khandha might act as an aid on the path. So the discourses provide hints in the form of similes, referring to total freedom as:

*The unfabricated, the unbent,
the effluent-free, the true, the beyond,
the subtle, the very-hard-to-see,
the ageless, permanence, the undecaying,
the surfaceless, non-objectification,
peace, the deathless,
the exquisite, bliss, rest,
the ending of craving,
the amazing, the astounding,
the secure, security,
unbinding,
the unafflicted, dispassion, purity,
release, attachment-free,
the island, shelter, harbor, refuge,

the ultimate.*

(SN 43:1-44)

Other passages mention a consciousness in this freedom —“without surface, without end, luminous all around”—lying outside of time and space, experienced when the six sense spheres stop functioning (§54). In this it differs from the consciousness-khandha, which depends on the six sense spheres and can be described in such terms as near or far, past, present, or future. One passage §20 describes consciousness without surface metaphorically as a light beam that lands nowhere, in that it doesn’t “land” on any of the nutriments that would allow for birth or the maintenance of being once born. This consciousness is thus the awareness of awakening.

And the freedom of this awareness carries over even when the awakened person returns to ordinary consciousness. As the Buddha said of himself:

“Freed, dissociated, & released from form, the Tathāgata dwells with unrestricted awareness. Freed, dissociated, & released from feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness... birth... aging... death... suffering & stress... defilement, the Tathāgata dwells with unrestricted awareness” (§56).

This shows again the importance of bringing the right questions to the teachings on the khandhas. If you use them to define what you are as a person, you tie yourself down to no purpose. The questions keep piling on. But if you use them to put an end to suffering, your questions fall away and you're free. You never again cling to the khandhas and no longer need to use them to end your self-created suffering. As long as you're still alive, you can employ the khandhas as needed for whatever skillful uses you see fit. After that, you're liberated from all uses and needs, including the need to find words to describe that freedom to yourself or to anyone else.

The Questions

§ 1. “There are some cases in which a person overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, grieves, mourns, laments, beats his breast, & becomes bewildered. Or one overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, comes to search outside, ‘Who knows a way or two to stop this pain?’ I tell you, monks, that stress results either in bewilderment or in search.” — [AN 6:63](#)

§ 2. Both formerly & now, it is only stress that I describe, and the cessation of stress.” — [SN 22:86](#)

§ 3. Ven. Sāriputta said: “Friends, in foreign lands there are wise nobles & brahmans, householders & contemplatives—for the people there are wise & discriminating—who will question a monk: ‘What is your teacher’s doctrine? What does he teach?’

“Thus asked, you should answer, ‘Our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire.’

“Having thus been answered, there may be wise nobles & brahmans, householders & contemplatives... who will question you further, ‘And your teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for what?’

“Thus asked, you should answer, ‘Our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for form... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications. Our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for consciousness.’

“Having thus been answered, there may be wise nobles & brahmans, householders & contemplatives... who will question you further, ‘And seeing what danger does your teacher teach the subduing of passion & desire for form... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications. Seeing what danger does your teacher teach the subduing of passion & desire for consciousness?’

“Thus asked, you should answer, ‘When one is not free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for form, then from any

change & alteration in that form, there arises sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, & despair. When one is not free from passion... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications... When one is not free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for consciousness, then from any change & alteration in that consciousness, there arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, & despair. Seeing this danger, our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for form... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications. Seeing this danger our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for consciousness.'

"Having thus been answered, there may be wise nobles & brahmans, householders & contemplatives... who will question you further, 'And seeing what benefit does your teacher teach the subduing of passion & desire for form... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications. Seeing what benefit does your teacher teach the subduing of passion & desire for consciousness?'

"Thus asked, you should answer, 'When one is free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for form, then with any change & alteration in that form, there does not arise any sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, or despair. When one is free from passion... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications... When one is free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for consciousness, then with any change & alteration in that consciousness, there does not arise any sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, or despair. Seeing this benefit, our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for form... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications. Seeing this benefit our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for consciousness.'" — [SN 22:2](#)

§ 4. "And what is the middle way realized by the Tathāgata that—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding? Precisely this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration." — [SN 56:11](#)

Constructing the Aggregates

§ 5. “Monks, from an inconceivable beginning comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident, although beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on.

“It’s just as when a dog is tied by a leash to a post or stake: If it walks, it walks right around that post or stake. If it stands, it stands right next to that post or stake. If it sits, it sits right next to that post or stake. If it lies down, it lies down right next to that post or stake.

“In the same way, an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person regards form as: ‘This is mine, this is my self, this is what I am.’ He regards feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness as: ‘This is mine, this is my self, this is what I am.’ If he walks, he walks right around these five clinging-aggregates. If he stands, he stands right next to these five clinging-aggregates. If he sits, he sits right next to these five clinging-aggregates. If he lies down, he lies down right next to these five clinging-aggregates. Thus one should reflect on one’s mind with every moment: ‘For a long time has this mind been defiled by passion, aversion, & delusion.’ From the defilement of the mind are beings defiled. From the purification of the mind are beings purified.

“Monks, have you ever seen a moving-picture show?”

“Yes, lord.”

“That moving-picture show was created by the mind. And this mind is even more variegated than a moving-picture show. Thus one should reflect on one’s mind with every moment: ‘For a long time has this mind been defiled by passion, aversion, & delusion.’ From the defilement of the mind are beings defiled. From the purification of the mind are beings purified.

“Monks, I can imagine no one group of beings more variegated than that of common animals. Common animals are created by mind. And the mind is even more variegated than common animals. Thus one should reflect on one’s mind with every moment: ‘For a long time has this mind been defiled by passion, aversion, & delusion.’ From the

defilement of the mind are beings defiled. From the purification of the mind are beings purified.

“It’s just as when—there being dye, lac, yellow orpiment, indigo, or crimson—a dyer or painter would paint the picture of a woman or a man, complete in all its parts, on a well-polished panel or wall, or on a piece of cloth; in the same way, an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person, when creating, creates nothing but form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness.” — [SN 22:100](#)

§ 6. At Sāvātthī. There the Blessed One said, “Monks, I will teach you the five aggregates & the five clinging-aggregates. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” the monks responded.

The Blessed One said, “Now what, monks, are the five aggregates?

“Whatever form is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: That is called the form aggregate.

“Whatever feeling is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: That is called the feeling aggregate.

“Whatever perception is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: That is called the perception aggregate.

“Whatever fabrications are past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: Those are called the fabrication aggregate.

“Whatever consciousness is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: That is called the consciousness aggregate.

“These are called the five aggregates.

“And what are the five clinging-aggregates?

“Whatever form—past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near—is clingable, offers sustenance, and is accompanied with (mental) effluents [*āśava*]: That is called the form clinging-aggregate.

“Whatever feeling—past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near—is clingable, offers sustenance, and is accompanied with (mental) effluent: That is called the feeling clinging-aggregate.

“Whatever perception—past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near—is clingable, offers sustenance, and is accompanied with (mental) effluents: That is called the perception clinging-aggregate.

“Whatever fabrications—past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near—are clingable, offer sustenance, and are accompanied with (mental) effluents: Those are called the fabrication clinging-aggregate.

“Whatever consciousness—past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near—is clingable, offers sustenance, and is accompanied with (mental) effluents: That is called the consciousness clinging-aggregate.

“These are called the five clinging-aggregates.” — [*SN 22:48*](#)

§ 7. “And why do you call it ‘form’ [*rūpa*]? Because it is afflicted [*ruppati*], thus it is called ‘form.’ Afflicted with what? With cold & heat & hunger & thirst, with the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, & reptiles. Because it is afflicted, it is called form.

“And why do you call it ‘feeling’? Because it feels, thus it is called ‘feeling.’ What does it feel? It feels pleasure, it feels pain, it feels neither-pleasure-nor-pain. Because it feels, it is called feeling.

“And why do you call it ‘perception’? Because it perceives, thus it is called ‘perception.’ What does it perceive? It perceives blue, it perceives yellow, it perceives red, it perceives white. Because it perceives, it is called perception.

“And why do you call them ‘fabrications’? Because they fabricate fabricated things, thus they are called ‘fabrications.’ What do they fabricate into a fabricated thing? For the sake of form-ness, they fabricate form as a fabricated thing. For the sake of feeling-ness, they fabricate feeling as a fabricated thing. For the sake of perception-hood... For the sake of fabrication-hood... For the sake of consciousness-hood, they fabricate consciousness as a fabricated

thing. Because they fabricate fabricated things, they are called fabrications. [See [§18](#).]

“And why do you call it ‘consciousness’? Because it cognizes, thus it is called consciousness. What does it cognize? It cognizes what is sour, bitter, pungent, sweet, alkaline, non-alkaline, salty, & unsalty. Because it cognizes, it is called consciousness.” — [SN 22:79](#)

§ 8. **Form.** [Ven. Sāriputta:] “And what, friends, is the form clinging-aggregate? The four great existents and the form derived from them. And what are the four great existents? They are the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, & the wind property.

“And what is the earth property? The earth property can be either internal or external. What is the internal earth property? Whatever internal, within oneself, is hard, solid, & sustained [by craving]: head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, or whatever else internal, within oneself, is hard, solid, & sustained: This is called the internal earth property...

“And what is the liquid property? The liquid property may be either internal or external. What is the internal liquid property? Whatever internal, belonging to oneself, is liquid, watery, & sustained: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine, or whatever else internal, within oneself, is liquid, watery, & sustained: This is called the internal liquid property...

“And what is the fire property? The fire property may be either internal or external. What is the internal fire property? Whatever internal, belonging to oneself, is fire, fiery, & sustained: that by which (the body) is warmed, aged, & consumed with fever; and that by which what is eaten, drunk, chewed, & savored gets properly digested, or whatever else internal, within oneself, is fire, fiery, & sustained: This is called the internal fire property...

“And what is the wind property? The wind property may be either internal or external. What is the internal wind property? Whatever internal, belonging to oneself, is wind, windy, & sustained: up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the stomach, winds in the

intestines, winds that course through the body, in-&-out breathing, or whatever else internal, within oneself, is wind, windy, & sustained: This is called the internal wind property.” — [MN 28](#)

§ 9. **Feeling.** “And what is feeling? These six bodies of feeling—feeling born of eye-contact, feeling born of ear-contact, feeling born of nose-contact, feeling born of tongue-contact, feeling born of body-contact, feeling born of intellect-contact: this is called feeling.” — [SN 22:57](#)

§ 10. [Sister Dhammadinnā:] There are three kinds of feeling: pleasant feeling, painful feeling, & neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling... Whatever is experienced physically or mentally as pleasant & gratifying is pleasant feeling. Whatever is experienced physically or mentally as painful & hurting is painful feeling. Whatever is experienced physically or mentally as neither gratifying nor hurting is neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling... Pleasant feeling is pleasant in remaining and painful in changing. Painful feeling is painful in remaining and pleasant in changing. Neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling is pleasant when conjoined with knowledge and painful when devoid of knowledge.” — [MN 44](#)

§ 11. **Perception.** “And what is perception? These six bodies of perception—perception of form, perception of sound, perception of smell, perception of taste, perception of tactile sensation, perception of ideas: this is called perception.” — [SN 22:57](#)

§ 12. **Fabrications.** “And what are fabrications? There are these six classes of intention: intention aimed at sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, & ideas. These are called fabrications.” — [SN 22:57](#)

§ 13. “Three kinds of fabrications: meritorious fabrications [ripening in pleasure], demeritorious fabrications [ripening in pain], & imperturbable fabrications [the formless jhānas].” — [DN 33](#)

§ 14. [Visākha:] “And what, lady, are bodily fabrications, what are verbal fabrications, what are mental fabrications?”

[Sister Dhammadinnā:] “In-&-out breathing is bodily, bound up with the body, therefore is it called a bodily fabrication. Having directed one’s thought and evaluated (the matter), one breaks into speech. Therefore directed thought & evaluation are called verbal fabrications. Perception & feeling are mental, bound up with the mind. Therefore perception & feeling are called mental fabrications.” — [MN 44](#)

§ 15. **Consciousness.** “And what is consciousness? These six bodies of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, intellect-consciousness. This is called consciousness.” — [SN 22:57](#)

§ 16. **Conditional Relations.** “From the origination of nutriment comes the origination of form. From the cessation of nutriment comes the cessation of form.... From the origination of contact comes the origination of feeling. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling.... From the origination of contact comes the origination of perception. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of perception.... From the origination of contact comes the origination of fabrications. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of fabrications.... From the origination of name-&-form comes the origination of consciousness. From the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of consciousness.” — [SN 22:57](#)

§ 17. [A certain monk:] “Lord, what is the cause, what the condition, for the delineation of the form aggregate? What is the cause, what the condition, for the delineation of the feeling aggregate... perception aggregate... fabrication aggregate... consciousness aggregate?”

[The Buddha:] “Monk, the four great existents [earth, water, fire, & wind] are the cause, the four great existents the condition, for the delineation of the form aggregate. Contact is the cause, contact the condition, for the delineation of the feeling aggregate. Contact is the cause, contact the condition, for the delineation of the perception aggregate. Contact is the cause, contact the condition, for the delineation of the fabrication aggregate. Name-&-form is the cause,

name-&-form the condition, for the delineation of the consciousness aggregate.” — [MN 109](#)

§ 18. From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.
From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.
From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.
From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.
From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.
From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.
From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/ sustenance.
From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.

From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.
From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering....

“And what is feeling? These six are classes of feeling: feeling born from eye-contact, feeling born from ear-contact, feeling born from nose-contact, feeling born from tongue-contact, feeling born from body-contact, feeling born from intellect-contact. This is called feeling.

“And what is contact? These six are classes of contact: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body- contact, intellect-contact. This is called contact.

“And what are the six sense media? These six are sense media: the eye-medium, the ear-medium, the nose-medium, the tongue-medium, the body-medium, the intellect-medium. These are called the six sense media.

“And what is name-&-form? Feeling, perception, intention, contact, & attention: This is called name. The four great elements and the form dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name & this form are called name-&-form.

“And what is consciousness? These six are classes of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, intellect-consciousness. This is called consciousness.

“And what are fabrications? These three are fabrications: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, mental fabrications. These are called fabrications. [See [§14](#).]

“And what is ignorance? Not knowing stress, not knowing the origination of stress, not knowing the cessation of stress, not knowing the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called ignorance.” — [SN 12:2](#)

§ 19. “From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form. If consciousness were not to descend into the mother’s womb, would name-&-form take shape in the womb?”

“No, lord.”

“If, after descending into the womb, consciousness were to depart, would name-&-form be produced for this world?”

“No, lord.”

“If the consciousness of the young boy or girl were to be cut off, would name-&-form ripen, grow, and reach maturity?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for name-&-form, i.e., consciousness.

“From name-&-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from name-&-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness. If consciousness were not to gain a foothold in name-&-form, would a coming-into-play of the origination of birth, aging, death, and stress in the future be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for consciousness, i.e., name-&-form.

“This is the extent to which there is birth, aging, death, passing away, and re-arising. This is the extent to which there are means of designation, expression, and delineation. This is the extent to which the dimension of discernment extends, the extent to which the cycle revolves for the manifesting [discernibility] of this world—i.e., name-&-form together with consciousness.” — [DN 15](#)

§ 20. “There are these four nutriments for the establishing of beings who have taken birth or for the support of those in search of a place to be born. Which four? Physical food, gross or refined; contact as the second, consciousness the third, and intellectual intention the fourth. These are the four nutriments for the establishing of beings or for the support of those in search of a place to be born.

“Where there is passion, delight, & craving for the nutriment of physical food, consciousness lands there and grows. Where consciousness lands and grows, name-&-form alights. Where name-&-form alights, there is the growth of fabrications. Where there is the growth of fabrications, there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is the production of renewed becoming in the future, there is future birth, aging, & death, together, I tell you, with sorrow, affliction, & despair.

“Just as—when there is dye, lac, yellow orpiment, indigo, or crimson—a dyer or painter would paint the picture of a woman or a man, complete in all its parts, on a well-polished panel or wall, or on a piece of cloth; in the same way, where there is passion, delight, & craving for the nutriment of physical food, consciousness lands there & grows... together, I tell you, with sorrow, affliction, & despair.

[Similarly with the other three kinds of nutriment.]

“Where there is no passion for the nutriment of physical food, where there is no delight, no craving, then consciousness does not land there or grow... Name-&-form does not alight... There is no growth of fabrications... There is no production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is no production of renewed becoming in the future, there is no future birth, aging, & death. That, I tell you, has no sorrow, affliction, or despair.

“Just as if there were a roofed house or a roofed hall having windows on the north, the south, or the east. When the sun rises, and a ray has entered by way of the window, where does it land?”

“On the western wall, lord.”

“And if there is no western wall...?”

“On the ground, lord.”

“And if there is no ground...?”

“On the water, lord.”

“And if there is no water...?”

“It does not land, lord.”

“In the same way, where there is no passion for the nutriment of physical food... consciousness does not land or grow... That, I tell you, has no sorrow, affliction, or despair.” [see §§53-54]

[Similarly with the other three kinds of nutriment.] — [SN 12:64](#)

§ 21. “Monks, there are these five means of propagation. Which five? Root-propagation, stem-propagation, joint-propagation, cutting-propagation, & seed-propagation as the fifth. And if these five means of propagation are not broken, not rotten, not damaged by wind & sun, mature, and well-buried, but there is no earth and no water, would they exhibit growth, increase, & proliferation?” —

“No, lord.”

“And if these five means of propagation are broken, rotten, damaged by wind & sun, immature, and poorly-buried, but there is earth & water, would they exhibit growth, increase, & proliferation?”

“No, lord.”

“And if these five means of propagation are not broken, not rotten, not damaged by wind & sun, mature, and well-buried, and there is earth & water, would they exhibit growth, increase, & proliferation?”

“Yes, lord.”

“Like the earth property, monks, is how the four standing-spots for consciousness should be seen. Like the liquid property is how delight & passion should be seen. Like the five means of propagation is how consciousness together with its nutriment should be seen.

“Should consciousness, when taking a stance, stand attached to form, supported by form (as its object), established on form, watered with delight, it would exhibit growth, increase, & proliferation.

“Should consciousness, when taking a stance, stand attached to feeling, supported by feeling (as its object), established on feeling, watered with delight, it would exhibit growth, increase, & proliferation.

“Should consciousness, when taking a stance, stand attached to perception, supported by perception (as its object), established on perception, watered with delight, it would exhibit growth, increase, & proliferation.

“Should consciousness, when taking a stance, stand attached to fabrications, supported by fabrications (as its object), established on fabrications, watered with delight, it would exhibit growth, increase, & proliferation.

“Were someone to say, ‘I will describe a coming, a going, a passing away, an arising, a growth, an increase, or a proliferation of consciousness apart from form, from feeling, from perception, from fabrications,’ that would be impossible.” — [SN 22:54](#)

Constructing a Self

§ 22. “Monks, I will teach you the burden, the carrier of the burden, the taking up of the burden, and the casting off of the burden. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” the monks responded.

The Blessed One said, “And which is the burden? ‘The five clinging-aggregates,’ it should be said. Which five? The form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: This, monks, is called the burden.

“And which is the carrier of the burden? ‘The person,’ it should be said. This venerable one with such a name, such a clan-name: This is called the carrier of the burden.

“And which is the taking up of the burden? The craving that makes for further becoming—accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there—i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming: This is called the taking up of the burden.

“And which is the casting off of the burden? The remainderless dispassion-cessation, renunciation, relinquishing, release, & letting go of that very craving: This is called the casting off of the burden.” — [SN 22:22](#)

§ 23. “Monks, there are four (modes of) clinging. Which four? Sensuality-clinging, view-clinging, habit-&-practice-clinging, and doctrines-of-the-self-clinging.” — [MN 11](#)

§ 24. “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.” — [SN 22:85](#)

§ 25. “To what extent, Ānanda, does one delineate when delineating a self? Either delineating a self possessed of form & finite, one delineates that ‘My self is possessed of form & finite.’ Or, delineating a self possessed of form & infinite, one delineates that ‘My self is possessed of form & infinite.’ Or, delineating a self formless & finite, one delineates that ‘My self is formless & finite.’ Or, delineating a self formless & infinite, one delineates that ‘My self is formless & infinite.’

“Now, the one who, when delineating a self, delineates it as possessed of form & finite, either delineates it as possessed of form & finite in the present, or of such a nature that it will [naturally] become possessed of form & finite [when asleep/ after death], or he believes that ‘Although it is not yet that way, I will convert it into being that way.’ This being the case, it is proper to say that a fixed view of a self possessed of form & finite obsesses him.”

[Similarly with the other three delineations.] — [DN 15](#)

§ 26. “If one stays obsessed with form, monk, that’s what one is measured by/limited by. Whatever one is measured by/limited by, that’s how one is classified.

“If one stays obsessed with feeling... perception... fabrications...

“If one stays obsessed with consciousness, that’s what one is measured by/limited by. Whatever one is measured by/limited by, that’s how one is classified.

“But if one doesn’t stay obsessed with form, monk, that’s not what one is measured by/limited by. Whatever one isn’t measured by/limited by, that’s not how one is classified.

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with feeling... perception... fabrications...

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with consciousness, that’s not what one is measured by/limited by. Whatever one isn’t measured by/limited by, that’s not how one is classified.” — [SN 22:36](#)

§ 27. [Ven. Rādhā:] “‘A being,’ lord. ‘A being,’ it’s said. To what extent is one said to be ‘a being’?”

[The Buddha:] “Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for form, Rādhā: when one is caught up [*satta*] there, tied up [*visatta*] there, one is said to be ‘a being [*satta*].’

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for feeling... perception... fabrications...

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for consciousness, Rādhā: when one is caught up there, tied up there, one is said to be ‘a being.’” — [SN 23:2](#)

§ 28. *Māra*:

“By whom was this being created?
Where is the living being’s maker?
Where has the living being originated?
Where does the living being
 cease?”

Sister Vajirā:

“What? Do you assume a ‘being,’ Māra?
Do you take a position?
This is purely a pile of fabrications.
 Here no living being
 can be pinned down.
Just as when, with an assemblage of parts,
 there’s the word,
 chariot,
even so when aggregates are present,
there’s the convention of
 a being.

For only stress is what comes to be;
stress, what remains & falls away.
Nothing but stress comes to be.
Nothing ceases but stress.”

Then Māra the Evil One—sad & dejected at realizing, “Vajirā the
nun knows me”— [*SN 5:10*](#)

Constructing the Path

§ 29. “Then, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful mental qualities, he enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. Just as if a skilled bathman or bathman’s apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again & again with water, so that his ball of bath powder—saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within & without—would nevertheless not drip; even so, the monk permeates... this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of seclusion....

“Then, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of concentration. Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from the east, west, north, or south, and with the skies supplying abundant showers time & again, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate & pervade, suffuse & fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters; even so, the monk permeates... this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of concentration. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of concentration....

“Then, with the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. Just as in a lotus pond, some of the lotuses, born & growing

in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated & pervaded, suffused & filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water; even so, the monk permeates... this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture....

“Then, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joys & distresses—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. Just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; even so, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness.” — *MN 119*

§ 30. “Quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, the monk enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. His earlier perception of sensuality ceases, and on that occasion there is a perception of a refined truth of rapture & pleasure born of seclusion.... And thus it is that with training one perception arises and with training another perception ceases.

“Then, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, the monk enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. His earlier perception of a refined truth of rapture & pleasure born of seclusion ceases, and on that occasion there is a perception of a refined truth of rapture & pleasure born of concentration.... And thus it is that with training one perception arises and with training another perception ceases.

“And then, with the fading of rapture, the monk remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ His earlier perception of a refined truth of rapture & pleasure born of

concentration ceases, and on that occasion there is a perception of a refined truth of equanimity.... And thus it is that with training one perception arises and with training another perception ceases.

“And then, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joys & distresses—the monk enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. His earlier perception of a refined truth of equanimity ceases, and on that occasion there is a perception of a refined truth of neither pleasure nor pain.... And thus it is that with training one perception arises and with training another perception ceases.

“And then, with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space,’ the monk enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. His earlier perception of a refined truth of neither pleasure nor pain ceases, and on that occasion there is a perception of a refined truth of the dimension of the infinitude of space.... And thus it is that with training one perception arises and with training another perception ceases.

“And then, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite consciousness,’ the monk enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. His earlier perception of a refined truth of the dimension of the infinitude of space ceases, and on that occasion there is a perception of a refined truth of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness.... And thus it is that with training one perception arises and with training another perception ceases.

“And then, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, thinking, ‘There is nothing,’ the monk enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. His earlier perception of a refined truth of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness ceases, and on that occasion there is a perception of a refined truth of the dimension of nothingness.... And thus it is that with training one perception arises and with training another perception ceases.” — [DN 9](#)

§ 31. “I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the first jhāna... the second jhāna... the third... the fourth... the dimension of the infinitude of space... the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness. I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.

“‘I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the first jhāna.’ Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said? There is the case where a monk, secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness, as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, an emptiness, not-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena, and having done so, inclines his mind to the property of deathlessness: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the pacification of all fabrications; the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding.’

“Suppose that an archer or archer’s apprentice were to practice on a straw man or mound of clay, so that after a while he would become able to shoot long distances, to fire accurate shots in rapid succession, and to pierce great masses. In the same way, there is the case where a monk... enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness, as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, an emptiness, not-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena, and having done so, inclines his mind to the property of deathlessness: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the pacification of all fabrications; the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding.’

“Staying right there, he reaches the ending of the (mental) effluents. Or, if not, then through this very Dhamma-passion, this Dhamma-delight, and through the total wasting away of the five

lower fetters [identity views, grasping at habits & practices, uncertainty, sensual passion, and irritation]—he is due to spontaneously reappear (in the Pure Abodes), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world. [See §47.]

“I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the first jhāna.’ Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.

[Similarly with the second, third, and fourth jhāna.]

“I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the dimension of the infinitude of space.’ Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said? There is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space,’ enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness, as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, an emptiness, not-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena, and having done so, inclines his mind to the property of deathlessness: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the pacification of all fabrications; the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding.’

“Suppose that an archer or archer’s apprentice were to practice on a straw man or mound of clay, so that after a while he would become able to shoot long distances, to fire accurate shots in rapid succession, and to pierce great masses. In the same way, there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space,’ enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness, as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, an emptiness, not-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena, and having done so, inclines his mind to the property of deathlessness: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the

pacification of all fabrications; the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding.’

“Staying right there, he reaches the ending of effluents. Or, if not, then—through this very Dhamma-passion, this very Dhamma-delight, and from the total wasting away of the first five of the fetters—he is due to spontaneously reappear (in the Pure Abodes), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

“‘I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the dimension of the infinitude of space.’ Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.

[Similarly with the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness and the dimension of nothingness.]

“Thus, as far as the perception-attainments go, that is as far as gnosis-penetration goes. As for these two dimensions—the attainment of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception & the attainment of the cessation of feeling & perception—I tell you that they are to be rightly explained by those monks who are meditators, skilled in attaining, skilled in attaining & emerging, who have attained & emerged in dependence on them.” — [AN 9:36](#)

§ 32. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī, in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. And on that occasion Ven. Girimānanda was diseased, in pain, severely ill. Then Ven. Ānanda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, “Lord, Ven. Girimānanda is diseased, in pain, severely ill. It would be good if the Blessed One would visit Ven. Girimānanda, out of sympathy for him.”

“Ānanda, if you go to the monk Girimānanda and tell him ten perceptions, it’s possible that when he hears the ten perceptions his disease may be allayed. Which ten? The perception of inconstancy, the perception of not-self, the perception of unattractiveness, the perception of drawbacks, the perception of abandoning, the perception of dispassion, the perception of cessation, the perception of distaste for every world, the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications, mindfulness of in-&-out breathing.

[1] “And what is the perception of inconstancy? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘Form is inconstant, feeling is inconstant, perception is inconstant, fabrications are inconstant, consciousness is inconstant.’ Thus he remains focused on inconstancy with regard to the five aggregates. This, Ānanda, is called the perception of inconstancy.

[2] “And what is the perception of not-self? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘The eye is not-self, forms are not-self; the ear is not-self, sounds are not-self; the nose is not-self, aromas are not-self; the tongue is not-self, flavors are not-self; the body is not-self, tactile sensations are not-self; the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self.’ Thus he remains focused on not-selfness with regard to the six inner & outer sense media. This is called the perception of not-self.

[3] “And what is the perception of unattractiveness? There is the case where a monk ponders this very body—from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin, filled with all sorts of unclean things: ‘There is in this body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, muscle, tendons, bones, bone marrow, spleen, heart, liver, membranes, kidneys, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, feces, gall, phlegm, lymph, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, oil in the joints, urine.’ Thus he remains focused on unattractiveness with regard to this very body. This is called the perception of unattractiveness.

[4] “And what is the perception of drawbacks? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling—reflects thus: ‘This body has many pains, many drawbacks. In this body many kinds of disease arise, such as: seeing-diseases, hearing-diseases, nose-diseases, tongue-diseases, body-diseases, head-diseases, ear-diseases, mouth-diseases, teeth-diseases, cough, asthma, catarrh, fever, aging, stomach-ache, fainting, dysentery, grippe, cholera, leprosy, boils, ringworm, tuberculosis, epilepsy, skin-diseases, itch, scab, psoriasis, scabies, jaundice, diabetes, hemorrhoids, fistulas, ulcers; diseases arising from bile,

from phlegm, from the wind-property, from combinations of bodily humors, from changes in the weather, from uneven care of the body, from attacks, from the result of kamma; cold, heat, hunger, thirst, defecation, urination.’ Thus he remains focused on drawbacks with regard to this body. This is called the perception of drawbacks.

[5] “And what is the perception of abandoning? There is the case where a monk does not tolerate an arisen thought of sensuality. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He does not tolerate an arisen thought of ill-will. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He does not tolerate an arisen thought of harmfulness. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He does not tolerate arisen evil, unskillful mental qualities. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, & wipes them out of existence. This is called the perception of abandoning.

[6] “And what is the perception of dispassion? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, dispassion, unbinding.’ This is called the perception of dispassion.

[7] “And what is the perception of cessation? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, cessation, unbinding.’ This is called the perception of cessation.

[8] “And what is the perception of distaste for every world? There is the case where a monk abandoning any attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions with regard to any world, refrains from them and does not get involved. This is called the perception of distaste for every world.

[9] “And what is the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications? There is the case where a monk feels horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with all fabrications. This is called the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications.

[10] “And what is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

“[i] Breathing in long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in long’; or breathing out long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out long.’ [ii] Or breathing in short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in short’; or breathing out short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out short.’ [iii] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.’ [iv] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.’

“[v] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.’ [vi] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.’ [vii] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.’ [viii] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.’

“[ix] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.’ [x] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in gladdening the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out gladdening the mind.’ [xi] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in steadying the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out steadying the mind.’ [xii] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in releasing the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out releasing the mind.’

“[xiii] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on inconstancy.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.’ [xiv] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on dispassion [*literally, fading*].’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.’ [xv] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on cessation.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on cessation.’ [xvi] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on relinquishment.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.’”

“This, Ānanda, is called mindfulness of in-&-out breathing.

“Now, Ānanda, if you go to the monk Girimānanda and tell him these ten perceptions, it’s possible that when he hears these ten perceptions his disease may be allayed.”

Then Ven. Ānanda, having learned these ten perceptions in the Blessed One’s presence, went to Ven. Girimānanda and told them to him. As Ven. Girimānanda heard these ten perceptions, his disease was allayed. And Ven. Girimānanda recovered from his disease. That was how Ven. Girimānanda’s disease was abandoned. — [AN 10:60](#)

Deconstruction

§ 33. “What do you think, monks: If a person were to gather or burn or do as he likes with the grass, twigs, branches & leaves here in Jeta’s Grove, would the thought occur to you, ‘It’s us that this person is gathering, burning, or doing with as he likes’?”

“No, lord. Why is that? Because those things are not our self, nor do they belong to our self.”

“Even so, monks, whatever isn’t yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare & happiness. And what isn’t yours? Form isn’t yours... Feeling isn’t yours... Perception... Fabrications... Consciousness isn’t yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare & happiness.” — [MN 22](#)

§ 34. “And just this noble eightfold path is the path of practice leading to the cessation of form, i.e., right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. The fact that pleasure & happiness arise in dependence on form: that is the allure of form. The fact that form is inconstant, stressful, subject to change: that is the drawback of form. The subduing of desire & passion for form, the abandoning of desire & passion for form: that is the escape from form.”

[Similarly with the other four aggregates.] — [SN 22:57](#)

§ 35. [Ven. Sāriputta:] “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, my 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 doesn’t discern fabricated form, as it actually is present, 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 actually is present, as ‘fabricated consciousness.’

“He doesn’t discern murderous form, as it actually is present, 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 actually is present, as ‘murderous consciousness.’

“He gets attached to form, clings to form, & determines it to be ‘my self.’ He gets attached to feeling... to perception... 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 harm & suffering.” — [SN 22:85](#)

§ 36. [Ven. Mahāli:] “And what, lord, is the cause, what the requisite condition, for the defilement of beings? How are beings defiled with cause, with requisite condition?”

[The Buddha:] “Mahāli, if form were exclusively stressful—followed by stress, infused with stress and not infused with pleasure—beings would not be infatuated with form. But because form is also pleasurable—followed by pleasure, infused with pleasure and not infused with stress—beings are infatuated with form. Through infatuation, they are captivated. Through captivation, they are defiled. This is the cause, this the requisite condition, for the defilement of beings. And this is how beings are defiled with cause, with requisite condition.

“If feeling were exclusively stressful....

“If perception were exclusively stressful....

“If fabrications were exclusively stressful....

“If consciousness were exclusively stressful—followed by stress, infused with stress and not infused with pleasure—beings would not be infatuated with consciousness. But because consciousness is also pleasurable—followed by pleasure, infused with pleasure and not infused with stress—beings are infatuated with consciousness.

Through infatuation, they are captivated. Through captivation, they are defiled. This is the cause, this the requisite condition, for the defilement of beings. And this is how beings are defiled with cause, with requisite condition.”

“And what, lord, is the cause, what the requisite condition, for the purification of beings? How are beings purified with cause, with requisite condition?”

“Mahāli, if form were exclusively pleasurable—followed by pleasure, infused with pleasure and not infused with stress—beings would not be disenchanted with form. But because form is also stressful—followed by stress, infused with stress and not infused with pleasure—beings are disenchanted with form. Through disenchantment, they grow dispassionate. Through dispassion, they are purified. This is the cause, this the requisite condition, for the purification of beings. And this is how beings are purified with cause, with requisite condition.

“If feeling were exclusively pleasurable....

“If perception were exclusively pleasurable....

“If fabrications were exclusively pleasurable....

“If consciousness were exclusively pleasurable—followed by pleasure, infused with pleasure and not infused with stress—beings would not be disenchanted with consciousness. But because consciousness is also stressful—followed by stress, infused with stress and not infused with pleasure—beings are disenchanted with consciousness. Through disenchantment, they grow dispassionate. Through dispassion, they are purified. This is the cause, this the requisite condition, for the purification of beings. And this is how beings are purified with cause, with requisite condition.” — [SN 22:60](#)

§ 37. “Monks, suppose there were a river, flowing down from the mountains, going far, its current swift, carrying everything with it, and—holding on to both banks—kāsa grasses, kusa grasses, reeds, biraṇa grasses, & trees were growing. Then a man swept away by the current would grab hold of the kāsa grasses, but they would tear away, and so from that cause he would come to disaster. He would grab hold of the kusa grasses... the reeds... the biraṇa grasses... the

trees, but they would tear away, and so from that cause he would come to disaster.

“In the same way, there is the case where 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. That form tears away from him, and so from that cause he would come to disaster.

“He assumes feeling... perception... 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. That consciousness tears away from him, and so from that cause he would come to disaster.” — [SN 22:93](#)

§ 38. “There is the case where 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 is obsessed with the idea that ‘I am form’ or ‘Form is mine.’ As he is obsessed with these ideas, his form changes & alters, and he falls into sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair over its change & alteration.

“He assumes feeling.... perception.... fabrications.... 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 is obsessed with the idea that ‘I am consciousness’ or ‘Consciousness is mine.’ As he is obsessed with these ideas, his consciousness changes & alters, and he falls into sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair over its change & alteration.

“This, householder, is how one is afflicted in body and afflicted in mind.

“And how is one afflicted in body but unafflicted in mind? There is the case where a 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 is not obsessed with the idea that 'I am form' or 'Form is mine.' As he is not obsessed with these ideas, his form changes & alters, but he does not fall into sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, or despair over its change & alteration.

"He doesn't assume feeling.... perception.... fabrications....

"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 is not obsessed with the idea that 'I am consciousness' or 'Consciousness is mine.' As he is not obsessed with these ideas, his consciousness changes & alters, but he does not fall into sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, or despair over its change & alteration.

"This, householder, is how one is afflicted in body but unafflicted in mind." — [SN 22:1](#)

§ 39. "Thus an instructed disciple of the noble ones reflects in this way: 'I am now being chewed up by form. But in the past I was also chewed up by form in the same way I am now being chewed up by present form. And if I delight in future form, then in the future I will be chewed up by form in the same way I am now being chewed up by present form.' Having reflected in this way, he becomes indifferent to past form, does not delight in future form, and is practicing for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to present form.

"(He reflects:) 'I am now being chewed up by feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. But in the past I was also chewed up by consciousness in the same way I am now being chewed up by present consciousness. And if I delight in future consciousness, then in the future I will be chewed up by consciousness in the same way I am now being chewed up by present consciousness.' Having reflected in this way, he becomes indifferent to past consciousness, does not delight in future consciousness, and is practicing for the sake of disenchantment,

dispassion, and cessation with regard to present consciousness.” — [SN 22:79](#)

§ 40. “For a monk practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, what accords with the Dhamma is this: that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to form, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to feeling, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to perception, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to fabrications, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to consciousness. As he keeps cultivating disenchantment with regard to form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. As he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he is totally released from form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. He is totally released from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is totally released, I tell you, from suffering & stress.” — [SN 22:39](#)

§ 41. “Monks, I will teach you the phenomena to be comprehended, as well as comprehension. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” the monks responded.

The Blessed One said, “And which are the phenomena to be comprehended? Form is a phenomenon to be comprehended. Feeling... Perception... Fabrications... Consciousness is a phenomenon to be comprehended. These are called phenomena to be comprehended.

“And which is comprehension? Any ending of passion, ending of aversion, ending of delusion. This is called comprehension.” — [SN 22:23](#)

§ 42. “I teach the Dhamma for the abandoning of the gross acquisition of a self... the mind-made acquisition of a self... the formless acquisition of a self such that, when you practice it, defiling mental qualities will be abandoned, bright mental qualities will grow, and you will enter & remain in the culmination & abundance of discernment, having known & realized it for yourself in the here &

now. If the thought should occur to you that, when defiling mental qualities are abandoned and bright mental qualities have grown, and one enters & remains in the culmination & abundance of discernment, having known & realized it for oneself in the here & now, one's abiding is stressful/painful, you should not see it in that way. When defiling mental qualities are abandoned and bright mental qualities have grown, and one enters & remains in the culmination & abundance of discernment, having known & realized it for oneself in the here & now, there is joy, rapture, serenity, mindfulness, alertness, and a pleasant/happy abiding." — [DN 9](#)

§ 43. "It's just as when boys or girls are playing with little sand castles [*literally*, dirt houses]. As long as they are not free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for those little sand castles, that's how long they have fun with those sand castles, enjoy them, treasure them, feel possessive of them. But when they become free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for those little sand castles, then they smash them, scatter them, demolish them with their hands or feet and make them unfit for play.

"In the same way, Rādhā, you too should smash, scatter, & demolish form, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for form.

"You should smash, scatter, & demolish feeling, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for feeling.

"You should smash, scatter, & demolish perception, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for perception.

"You should smash, scatter, & demolish fabrications, and make them unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for fabrications.

"You should smash, scatter, & demolish consciousness and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for consciousness—because the ending of craving, Rādhā, is unbinding." — [SN 23:2](#)

§ 44. On one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Ayojjhans on the banks of the Ganges River. There he addressed the monks: "Monks, suppose that a large glob of foam were floating down this Ganges River, and a man with good eyesight were to see it,

observe it, & appropriately examine it. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a glob of foam? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, & appropriately examines any form that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in form?

“Now suppose that in the autumn—when it’s raining in fat, heavy drops—a water bubble were to appear & disappear on the water, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, & appropriately examine it. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a water bubble? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, & appropriately examines any feeling that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in feeling?

“Now suppose that in the last month of the hot season a mirage were shimmering, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, & appropriately examine it. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a mirage? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, & appropriately examines any perception that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in perception?

“Now suppose that a man desiring heartwood, in quest of heartwood, seeking heartwood, were to go into a forest carrying a sharp ax. There he would see a large banana tree: straight, young, of enormous height. He would cut it at the root and, having cut it at the root, would chop off the top. Having chopped off the top, he would peel away the outer skin. Peeling away the outer skin, he wouldn’t

even find sapwood, to say nothing of heartwood. Then a man with good eyesight would see it, observe it, & appropriately examine it. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a banana tree? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, & appropriately examines any fabrications that are past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him—seeing them, observing them, & appropriately examining them—they would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in fabrications?

“Now suppose that a magician or magician’s apprentice were to display a magic trick at a major intersection, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, & appropriately examine it. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a magic trick? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, & appropriately examines any consciousness that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in consciousness?” — [SN 22:95](#)

§ 45. “And what is the development of concentration that... leads to the ending of the effluents? There is the case where a monk remains focused on arising & falling away with reference to the five clinging-aggregates: ‘Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such is feeling... Such is perception... Such are fabrications... Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.’ This is the development of concentration that... leads to the ending of the effluents.” — [AN 4:41](#)

§ 46. “Furthermore, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five clinging-aggregates. And how does he remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five clinging-aggregates? There is the case where a monk (discerns): ‘Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such is feeling... Such is perception... Such are

fabrications... Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.’

“In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or both internally & externally on mental qualities in & of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that ‘There are mental qualities’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five clinging-aggregates.” — [DN 22](#)

§ 47. Then Ven. Khemaka [a non-returner], leaning on his staff, went to the elder monks and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with them. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the elder monks said to him, “Friend Khemaka, this ‘I am’ of which you speak: what do you say ‘I am’? Do you say, ‘I am form,’ or do you say, ‘I am something other than form’? Do you say, ‘I am feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness,’ or do you say, ‘I am something other than consciousness’? This ‘I am’ of which you speak: what do you say ‘I am’?”

“Friends, it’s not that I say ‘I am form,’ nor do I say ‘I am something other than form.’ It’s not that I say, ‘I am feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness,’ nor do I say, ‘I am something other than consciousness.’ With regard to these five clinging-aggregates, ‘I am’ has not been overcome, although I don’t assume that ‘I am this.’

“It’s just like the scent of a blue, red, or white lotus: If someone were to call it the scent of a petal or the scent of the color or the scent of a filament, would he be speaking correctly?”

“No, friend.”

“Then how would he describe it if he were describing it correctly?”

“As the scent of the flower: That’s how he would describe it if he were describing it correctly.”

“In the same way, friends, it’s not that I say ‘I am form,’ nor do I say ‘I am other than form.’ It’s not that I say, ‘I am feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness,’ nor do I say, ‘I am something other than consciousness.’ With regard to these five clinging-aggregates, ‘I am’ has not been overcome, although I don’t assume that ‘I am this.’

“Friends, even though a noble disciple has abandoned the five lower fetters, he still has with regard to the five clinging-aggregates a lingering residual ‘I am’ conceit, an ‘I am’ desire, an ‘I am’ obsession. But at a later time he keeps focusing on the phenomena of arising & passing away with regard to the five clinging-aggregates: ‘Such is form, such its origin, such its disappearance. Such is feeling... Such is perception... Such are fabrications... Such is consciousness, such its origin, such its disappearance.’ As he keeps focusing on the arising & passing away of these five clinging-aggregates, the lingering residual ‘I am’ conceit, ‘I am’ desire, ‘I am’ obsession is fully obliterated.

“Just like a cloth, dirty & stained: Its owners give it over to a washerman, who scrubs it with salt earth or lye or cow-dung and then rinses it in clear water. Now even though the cloth is clean & spotless, it still has a lingering residual scent of salt earth or lye or cow-dung. The washerman gives it to the owners, the owners put it away in a scent-infused wicker hamper, and its lingering residual scent of salt earth, lye, or cow-dung is fully obliterated.

“In the same way, friends, even though a noble disciple has abandoned the five lower fetters, he still has with regard to the five clinging-aggregates a lingering residual ‘I am’ conceit, an ‘I am’ desire, an ‘I am’ obsession. [See §26, §38.] But at a later time he keeps focusing on the phenomena of arising & passing away with regard to the five clinging-aggregates: ‘Such is form, such its origin, such its disappearance. Such is feeling... Such is perception... Such are fabrications... Such is consciousness, such its origin, such its disappearance.’ As he keeps focusing on the arising & passing away of these five clinging-aggregates, the lingering residual ‘I am’ conceit, ‘I am’ desire, ‘I am’ obsession is fully obliterated.”

When this was said, the elder monks said to Ven. Khemaka, “We didn’t cross-examine Ven. Khemaka with the purpose of troubling him, just that (we thought) Ven. Khemaka is capable of declaring the Blessed One’s message, teaching it, describing it, setting it forth, revealing it, explaining it, making it plain—just as he has in fact declared it, taught it, described it, set it forth, revealed it, explained it, made it plain.”

That is what Ven. Khemaka said. Gratified, the elder monks delighted in his words. And while this explanation was being given, the minds of sixty-some monks, through no clinging, were fully released from effluents—as was Ven. Khemaka’s. — [SN 22:89](#)

§ 48. Suppose there were a king or king’s minister who had never heard the sound of a lute before. He might hear the sound of a lute and say, ‘What, my good men, is that sound—so delightful, so tantalizing, so intoxicating, so ravishing, so enthralling?’ They would say, ‘That, sire, is called a lute, whose sound is so delightful, so tantalizing, so intoxicating, so ravishing, so enthralling.’ Then he would say, ‘Go & fetch me that lute.’ They would fetch the lute and say, ‘Here, sire, is the lute whose sound is so delightful, so tantalizing, so intoxicating, so ravishing, so enthralling.’ He would say, ‘Enough of your lute. Fetch me just the sound.’ Then they would say, ‘This lute, sire, is made of numerous components, a great many components. It’s through the activity of numerous components that it sounds: that is, in dependence on the body, the skin, the neck, the frame, the strings, the bridge, and the appropriate human effort. Thus it is that this lute—made of numerous components, a great many components—sounds through the activity of numerous components.’

“Then the king would split the lute into ten pieces, a hundred pieces. Having split the lute into ten pieces, a hundred pieces, he would shave it to splinters. Having shaved it to splinters, he would burn it in a fire. Having burned it in a fire, he would reduce it to ashes. Having reduced it to ashes, he would winnow it before a high wind or let it be washed away by a swift-flowing stream. He would then say, ‘A sorry thing, this lute—whatever a lute may be—by which people have been so thoroughly tricked & deceived.’

“In the same way, a monk investigates form, however far form may go. He investigates feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, however far consciousness may go. As he is investigating form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, however far consciousness may go, any thoughts of ‘me’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’ do not occur to him.” — [SN 35:205](#)

§ 49. “To what extent, Ānanda, does one assume when assuming a self? Assuming feeling to be the self, one assumes that ‘Feeling is my self’ (or) ‘Feeling is not my self: My self is oblivious (to feeling)’ (or) ‘Neither is feeling my self, nor is my self oblivious to feeling, but rather my self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling.’

“Now, one who says, ‘Feeling is my self,’ should be addressed as follows: ‘There are these three feelings, my friend—feelings of pleasure, feelings of pain, and feelings of neither pleasure nor pain. Which of these three feelings do you assume to be the self? At a moment when a feeling of pleasure is sensed, no feeling of pain or of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed. Only a feeling of pleasure is sensed at that moment. At a moment when a feeling of pain is sensed, no feeling of pleasure or of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed. Only a feeling of pain is sensed at that moment. At a moment when a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed, no feeling of pleasure or of pain is sensed. Only a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed at that moment.

“Now, a feeling of pleasure is inconstant, fabricated, dependent on conditions, subject to passing away, dissolution, fading, and cessation. A feeling of pain is inconstant, fabricated, dependent on conditions, subject to passing away, dissolution, fading, and cessation. A feeling of neither pleasure nor pain is inconstant, fabricated, dependent on conditions, subject to passing away, dissolution, fading, and cessation. Having sensed a feeling of pleasure as ‘my self,’ then with the cessation of one’s very own feeling of pleasure, ‘my self’ has perished. Having sensed a feeling of pain as ‘my self,’ then with the cessation of one’s very own feeling of pain, ‘my self’ has perished. Having sensed a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain as ‘my self,’ then with the cessation of one’s very own feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, ‘my self’ has perished.

“Thus he assumes, assuming in the immediate present a self inconstant, entangled in pleasure and pain, subject to arising and passing away, he who says, ‘Feeling is my self.’ Thus in this manner, Ānanda, one does not see fit to assume feeling to be the self.

“As for the person who says, ‘Feeling is not the self: My self is oblivious (to feeling),’ he should be addressed as follows: ‘My friend, where nothing whatsoever is sensed [experienced] at all, would there be the thought, “I am”?’”

“No, lord.”

“Thus in this manner, Ānanda, one does not see fit to assume that ‘Feeling is not my self: My self is oblivious (to feeling).’

“As for the person who says, ‘Neither is feeling my self, nor is my self oblivious (to feeling), but rather my self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling,’ he should be addressed as follows: ‘My friend, should feelings altogether and every way stop without remainder, then with feeling completely not existing, owing to the cessation of feeling, would there be the thought, “I am”?’”

“No, lord.”

“Thus in this manner, Ānanda, one does not see fit to assume that ‘Neither is feeling my self, nor is my self oblivious (to feeling), but rather my self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling.’

“Now, Ānanda, in as far as a monk does not assume feeling to be the self, nor the self as oblivious, nor that ‘My self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling,’ then, not assuming in this way, he does not cling to anything in the world. Not clinging, he is not agitated. Unagitated, he is totally unbound right within. He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

“If anyone were to say with regard to a monk whose mind is thus released that ‘The Tathāgata exists after death,’ is his view, that would be mistaken; that ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’... that ‘The Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death’... that ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ is his view, that would be mistaken. Why? Having directly known the extent of designation and the extent of the objects of designation, the extent of

expression and the extent of the objects of expression, the extent of description and the extent of the objects of description, the extent of discernment and the extent of the objects of discernment, the extent to which the cycle revolves: Having directly known that, the monk is released. The view that, ‘Having directly known that, the monk released does not see, does not know,’ would be mistaken.” — [DN 15](#)

§ 50. Then Ven. Anurādha went to the Blessed One and on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: “Just now I was staying not far from the Blessed One in a wilderness hut. Then a large number of wandering sectarians came and... said to me, ‘Friend Anurādha, the Tathāgata—the supreme man, the superlative man, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described with (one of) these four positions: The Tathāgata exists after death, does not exist after death, both does & does not exist after death, neither exists nor does not exist after death.’

“When this was said, I said to them, ‘Friends, the Tathāgata—the supreme man, the superlative man, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described otherwise than with these four positions: The Tathāgata exists after death, does not exist after death, both does & does not exist after death, neither exists nor does not exist after death.’

“When this was said, the wandering sectarians said to me, ‘This monk is either a newcomer, not long gone forth, or else an elder who is foolish & inexperienced.’ So, addressing me as they would a newcomer or a fool, they got up from their seats and left. Then not long after they had left, this thought occurred to me: ‘If I am questioned again by those wandering sectarians, how will I answer in such a way that will I speak in line with what the Blessed One has said, will not misrepresent the Blessed One with what is unfactual, will answer in line with the Dhamma, and no one whose thinking is in line with the Dhamma will have grounds for criticizing me?’”

“What do you think, Anurādha: Is form constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

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

“Stressful, lord.”

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

“No, lord.”

“... Is feeling constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord”...

“... Is perception constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord”...

“... Are fabrications constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord”...

“What do you think, Anurādha: Is consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

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

“Stressful, lord.”

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

“No, lord.”

“What do you think, Anurādha: Do you regard form as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

“Do you regard feeling as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

“Do you regard perception as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

“Do you regard fabrications as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

“Do you regard consciousness as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

“What do you think, Anurādha: 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, lord.”

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

“No, lord.”

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

“No, lord.”

“And so, Anurādha—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, ‘Friends, the Tathāgata—the supreme man, the superlative man, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described otherwise than with these four positions: The Tathāgata exists after death, does not exist after death, both does & does not exist after death, neither exists nor does not exist after death?’”

“No, lord.”

“Very good, Anurādha. Very good. Both formerly & now, it’s only stress that I describe, and the cessation of stress.” — [SN 22:86](#)

§ 51. [After a similar set of questions and answers between Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Yamaka, Sāriputta says:]

“And so, my 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, my friend Sāriputta, I did foolishly hold that evil supposition. But now, having heard your explanation of the Dhamma, I have abandoned that evil supposition, 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.’ — SN 22:85

§ 52. Now at that moment this line of thinking appeared in the awareness of a certain monk: “So—form is not-self, feeling is not-self, perception is not-self, fabrications are not-self, consciousness is not-self. Then what self will be touched by the actions done by what is not-self?”

Then the Blessed One, realizing with his awareness the line of thinking in that monk’s awareness, addressed the monks: “It’s possible that a senseless person—immersed in ignorance, overcome with craving—might think that he could outsmart the Teacher’s message in this way: ‘So—form is not-self, feeling is not-self, perception is not-self, fabrications are not-self, consciousness is not-self. Then what self will be touched by the actions done by what is not-self?’ Now, monks, haven’t I trained you in counter-questioning with regard to this & that topic here & there? What do you think: Is form constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

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

“Stressful, lord.”

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

“No, lord.”

“... Is feeling constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord”...

“... Is perception constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord”...

“... Are fabrications constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord”...

“What do you think, monks: Is consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

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

“Stressful, lord.”

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

“No, lord.”

“Thus, monks, 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 actually is 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 actually is with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’

“Seeing thus, 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 fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, ‘Fully released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words. And while this explanation was being given, the minds of sixty monks, through no clinging, were fully released from effluents. — [MN 109](#)

§ 53. Consciousness without surface,
 without end,
 luminous all around:
Here water, earth, fire, & wind have no footing.
Here long & short
 coarse & fine

fair & foul
name & form
are, without remnant,
brought to an end.
From the cessation of (sensory) consciousness,
each is here brought to an end. — [DN 11](#)

§ 54. “Consciousness without surface, without end, luminous all around, is not experienced through the solidity of earth, the liquidity of water, the radiance of fire, the windiness of wind, the divinity of devas [and so on through a list of the various levels of godhood to] the allness of the All [[§20](#)].” — [MN 49](#)

§ 55. Where water, earth, fire, & wind
have no footing:
There the stars do not shine,
the sun is not visible,
the moon does not appear,
darkness is not found.

And when a sage, an honorable one,
through sagacity
has known (this) for himself,
then from form & formless,
from pleasure & pain,
he is freed. — [Ud 1:10](#)

§ 56. “Freed, dissociated, & released from ten things, Bāhuna, the Tathāgata dwells with unrestricted awareness. Which ten? Freed, dissociated, & released from form, the Tathāgata dwells with unrestricted awareness. Freed, dissociated, & released from feeling... from perception... from fabrications... from consciousness... from birth... from aging... from death... from suffering & stress... Freed, dissociated, & released from defilement, the Tathāgata dwells with unrestricted awareness.

“Just as a red, blue, or white lotus born in the water and growing in the water, rises up above the water and stands with no water adhering to it, in the same way the Tathāgata—freed, dissociated, & released from these ten things—dwells with unrestricted awareness.”
— [AN 10:81](#)

Glossary

Āsava: Effluent; fermentation. Four qualities—sensuality, views, becoming, and ignorance—that “flow out” of the mind and create the flood of the round of death and rebirth.

Deva (*devatā*): Literally, “shining one.” An inhabitant of terrestrial and celestial realms higher than the human.

Dhamma: (1) Event; action; (2) a phenomenon in and of itself; (3) mental quality; (4) doctrine, teaching; (5) nibbāna (although there are passages describing nibbāna as the abandoning of all dhammas). Sanskrit form: *Dharma*.

Jhāna: Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focused on a single sensation or mental notion. Sanskrit form: *Dhyāna*.

Kamma: (1) Intentional action; (2) the results of intentional actions. Sanskrit form: *Karma*.

Khandha: Aggregate; physical and mental phenomena as they are directly experienced: *rūpa*—physical form; *vedanā*—feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain; *saññā*—perception, mental label; *saṅkhāra*—fabrication, thought construct; and *viññāṇa*—sensory consciousness, the act of taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur. Sanskrit form: *Skandha*.

Māra: A deva who is the personification of temptation and all forces, within and without, that create obstacles to release from the round of death and rebirth.

Nibbāna: Literally, the “unbinding” of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the entire round of death and rebirth. As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. Sanskrit form: *Nirvāṇa*.

Tathāgata: Literally, one who has “become authentic (*tatha-āgata*)” or who is “truly gone (*tathā-gata*)”: an epithet used in ancient India for a person who has attained the highest religious goal. In

Buddhism, it usually denotes the Buddha, although occasionally it also denotes any of his fully awakened disciples.

Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
SN	Samyutta Nikāya
Ud	Udāna