SN 22.85 — With Yamaka

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Text

Linked Discourses 22.85

9. Senior Mendicants

With Yamaka

At one time Venerable Sāriputta was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery.

Now at that time a mendicant named Yamaka had the following harmful misconception: "As I understand the Buddha's teaching, a mendicant who has ended the defilements is annihilated and destroyed when their body breaks up, and doesn't exist after death."

Several mendicants heard this rumour. They went to Yamaka and exchanged greetings with him.

When the greetings and polite conversation were over, they sat down to one side and said to him, "Is it really true, Reverend Yamaka, that you have such a harmful misconception: 'As I understand the Buddha's teaching, a mendicant who has ended the defilements is annihilated and destroyed when their body breaks up, and doesn't exist after death'?"

"Yes, reverends, that's how I understand the Buddha's teaching."

"Don't say that, Yamaka! Don't misrepresent the Buddha, for misrepresentation of the Buddha is not good. And the Buddha would not say that." But even though admonished by those mendicants, Yamaka obstinately stuck to that misconception and insisted on stating it.

When those mendicants were unable to dissuade Yamaka from that misconception, they rose from their seats and went to see Venerable Sāriputta. They told him what had happened, and said, "May Venerable Sāriputta please go to the mendicant Yamaka out of sympathy." Sāriputta consented with silence.

Then in the late afternoon, Venerable Sāriputta came out of retreat, went to Venerable Yamaka and exchanged greetings with him. Seated to one side he said to Yamaka:

"Is it really true, Reverend Yamaka, that you have such a harmful misconception: 'As I understand the Buddha's teaching, a mendicant who has ended the defilements is annihilated and destroyed when their body breaks up, and doesn't exist after death'?"

"Yes, reverend, that's how I understand the Buddha's teaching."

“What do you think, Yamaka? Is form permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, reverend.”

“Is feeling …” … “… perception …” … “… choices …” … “… consciousness permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, reverend.”

“So you should truly see … Seeing this … They understand: ‘… there is nothing further for this place.’

What do you think, Reverend Yamaka? Do you consider that the label ‘realized one’ applies to form?”

“No, reverend.”

“Do you consider that the label ‘realized one’ applies to feeling?” … “… perception?” … “… choices?” … “ … consciousness?”

“No, reverend.”

“What do you think, Reverend Yamaka? Do you consider that the label ‘realized one’ applies in relation to form?”

“No, reverend.”

“Do you consider that the label ‘realized one’ applies apart from form?”

“No, reverend.”

“Do you consider that the label ‘realized one’ applies in relation to feeling?” … “… apart from feeling?” … “… in relation to perception?” … “… apart from perception?” … “… in relation to choices?” … “… apart from choices?” … “… in relation to consciousness?” …

“… apart from consciousness?”

“No, reverend.”

“What do you think, Yamaka? Do you consider that the label ‘realized one’ applies to one who has form?” … “… feeling?” … “… perception?” … “… choices?” … “… consciousness?”

“No, reverend.”

“What do you think, Yamaka? Do you consider that the label ‘realized one’ applies to that one who is without form?” … “… feeling?” … “… perception?” … “… choices?” … “… consciousness?”

“No, reverend.”

“In that case, Reverend Yamaka, since a realized one is not found by you as a genuine fact in this very life, is it cogent for you to declare: ‘As I understand the Buddha’s teaching, a mendicant who has ended the defilements is annihilated and destroyed when their body breaks up, and doesn’t exist after death’?”

“Reverend Sāriputta, in my ignorance, I used to have that misconception. But now that I’ve heard the teaching from Venerable Sāriputta, I’ve given up that misconception, and I’ve comprehended the teaching.”

“Reverend Yamaka, suppose they were to ask you: ‘When their body breaks up, after death, what happens to a perfected one, who has ended the defilements?’ How would you answer?”

“Reverend, if they were to ask this, I’d answer like this: ‘Reverend, form is impermanent. What’s impermanent is suffering. What’s suffering has ceased and disappeared.

Feeling … perception … choices … consciousness is impermanent. What’s impermanent is suffering. What’s suffering has ceased and disappeared.’ That’s how I’d answer such a question.”

“Good, good, Reverend Yamaka! Well then, I shall give you a simile to make the meaning even clearer. Suppose there was a householder or householder’s son who was rich, with a lot of money and great wealth, and a bodyguard for protection. Then along comes a person who wants to harm, injure, and threaten him, and take his life. They’d think: ‘This householder or householder’s son is rich, with a lot of money and great wealth, and a bodyguard for protection. It won’t be easy to take his life by force. Why don’t I get close to him, then take his life?’ So he goes up to that householder or householder’s son and says: ‘Sir, I would serve you.’ They would serve that householder or householder’s son. They’d get up before him and go to bed after him, and be obliging, behaving nicely and speaking politely. The householder or householder’s son would consider them as a friend and companion, and come to trust them. But when that person realizes that they’ve gained the trust of the householder or householder’s son, then, when they know he’s alone, they’d take his life with a sharp knife.

What do you think, Yamaka? When that person went to the householder or householder’s son and offered to serve him, weren’t they a killer then, though he didn’t know that this was his killer? And when they got up before him and went to bed after him, being obliging, behaving nicely and speaking politely, weren’t they a killer then, though he didn’t know that this was his killer? And when, knowing he was alone, they took his life with a sharp knife, weren’t they a killer then, though he didn’t know that this was his killer?”

“Yes, reverend.”

“In the same way, an unlearned ordinary person has not seen the noble ones, and is neither skilled nor trained in the teaching of the noble ones. They’ve not seen true persons, and are neither skilled nor trained in the teaching of the true persons. They regard form as self, self as having form, form in self, or self in form. They regard feeling … perception … choices … They regard consciousness as self, self as having consciousness, consciousness in self, or self in consciousness.

They don’t truly understand form—which is impermanent—as impermanent. They don’t truly understand feeling … perception … choices … consciousness—which is impermanent—as impermanent.

They don’t truly understand form—which is suffering—as suffering. They don’t truly understand feeling … perception … choices … consciousness—which is suffering—as suffering.

They don’t truly understand form—which is not-self—as not-self. They don’t truly understand feeling … perception … choices … consciousness—which is not-self—as not-self.

They don’t truly understand form—which is conditioned—as conditioned. They don’t truly understand feeling … perception … choices … consciousness—which is conditioned—as conditioned.

They don’t truly understand form—which is a killer—as a killer. They don’t truly understand feeling … perception … choices … consciousness—which is a killer—as a killer.

They’re attracted to form, grasp it, and fixate on the thought, ‘my self’. They’re attracted to feeling … perception … choices … consciousness, grasp it, and fixate on the thought, ‘my self’. And when you’ve gotten involved with and grasped these five grasping aggregates, they lead to your lasting harm and suffering.

A learned noble disciple has seen the noble ones, and is skilled and trained in the teaching of the noble ones. They’ve seen true persons, and are skilled and trained in the teaching of the true persons. They don’t regard form as self, self as having form, form in self, or self in form. They don’t regard feeling … perception … choices … consciousness as self, self as having consciousness, consciousness in self, or self in consciousness.

They truly understand form—which is impermanent—as impermanent. They truly understand feeling … perception … choices … consciousness—which is impermanent—as impermanent.

They truly understand form—which is suffering—as suffering. They truly understand feeling … perception … choices … consciousness—which is suffering—as suffering.

They truly understand form—which is not-self—as not-self. They truly understand feeling … perception … choices … consciousness—which is not-self—as not-self.

They truly understand form—which is conditioned—as conditioned. They truly understand feeling … perception … choices … consciousness—which is conditioned—as conditioned.

They truly understand form—which is a killer—as a killer. They truly understand feeling … perception … choices … consciousness—which is a killer—as a killer.

When it comes to form, they are not attracted, do not grasp, and do not fixate on the thought, ‘my self’. When it comes to feeling … When it comes to perception … When it comes to choices … When it comes to consciousness, they are not attracted, do not grasp, and do not fixate on the thought, ‘my self’. And when you’re not attracted to and don’t grasp these five grasping aggregates, they lead to your lasting welfare and happiness.”

“Reverend Sāriputta, this is how it is when you have such venerables as spiritual companions to advise and instruct you out of kindness and sympathy. And after hearing this teaching by Venerable Sāriputta, my mind is freed from the defilements by not

grasping.”