

## Seeing whole, becoming whole (2 of 2)

Source: *SD 60.1f Handbook of Meditation in Society 6: A psychopathology of Mindfulness*

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**5.4.10.4** The story of Vakkali relates how the Buddha resolves the emotional state of a monk who is physically attracted to him (the Buddha) by judiciously staying within a safe distance of Vakkali to help him free himself from lust. Once free from lust, Vakkali is able to attain dhyana, emerge from it to reflect on the 3 characteristics and attain arhathood. The exact process is not mentioned, but we get the impression that Vakkali is able to do this very rapidly, but has been held back by his negative emotions.

The Commentarial account dramatizes Vakkali's awakening process. When the Buddha disallowed Vakkali from following him for the rains retreat, Vakkali despaired at not being able to see the Buddha for 3 long months. He became suicidal and contemplated leaping to his death from the heights of Vulture Peak. Just as Vakkali was leaping off the cliff, the Buddha appeared to him in a radiant vision.

The moment the monk saw the Teacher, the weight of sorrow that had oppressed him vanished.

Then the Teacher, as though filling the dry bed of a lake with a flood of water, caused great zest and joy to arise in the monk, and pronounced the following stanza:

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

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

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

The elder Vakkali thought:

“I have seen the one with the 10 powers,<sup>1</sup> and he speaks to me, saying, “Come!”  
He at once experienced profound joy. He thought, “How shall I go?”

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<sup>1</sup> “The one with the 10 powers,” *dasa, bala* or more fully *dasa, bala, ñāṇa*. The 10 powers are: (1) knowledge of the possible and the impossible (*thānāthāna, ñāṇa*), such as in the analysis of karma (M 57, 135, 136), and the possibility regarding the realm, circumstances, time and effort, all of which would impede or reinforce the result; and also the cause of karma, etc; (2) knowledge of the result of karma (*kamma, vipāka ñāṇa*); (3) knowledge of the way leading to all destinies and goals (*sabbattha, gāminī, paṭipadā*); (4) knowledge of the world with its various elements (*nānā, dhātu ñāṇa*) (M 115, 4-9/3:62 f); (5) knowledge of the different dispositions of beings (*nānādhimuttika ñāṇa*); (6) knowledge of the maturity level of beings in terms of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom (*indriya, paropariyatta ñāṇa*) (Vbh §§814-827); (7) knowledge of the defilements, cleansing and emergence in the cases of the meditations, liberations, concentrations and attainments (*jhān'ādi, saṅkiles'ādi ñāṇa*); (8) knowledge of the recollection of (his own) past lives (*pubbe, nivāsānussati ñāṇa*); (9) knowledge of the passing away and arising of beings (according to their karma) (*cutūpapāta, ñāṇa*); (10) knowledge of the destruction of the mental defilements (*āsava-k, khaya ñāṇa*) (M 1:69; A 5:33; Vbh 336). See **Mahā Sīhanāda S** (M 12, 9-20/1:69-71) for details.

And standing there on the cliff, on hearing the first line of the stanza, though he saw no path, he leaped into the air before the one with the 10 powers.

As he hovered in the air, pondering on the stanzas uttered by the Teacher, he completely suppressed his zest and attained arhathood together with the analytical knowledges (*paṭisambhidā*).<sup>2</sup>

Then, praising the Tathagata, he descended to the ground and stood before the Teacher. On a subsequent occasion, the teacher placed him as the foremost amongst those inclined to faith (*saddhā'dhimutta*). (From DhA 25.1)<sup>3</sup>

This is a rare and beautiful account of a monk's epiphany and awakening through a vision of the Buddha who seems to intercede on the monk's behalf. The language is mythical and contemplative, descriptive of the attaining of dhyana, psychic powers, and the monk emerging from it in rapid sequence. Getting out of the profound samadhi of dhyana, the monk directs his super-focused mind to insight and gains arhathood.

**5.4.10.5** One of the most remarkably dramatic epiphanies connected with the Buddha is how he converts the serial killer, the bandit **Aṅguli,māla** (né Ahimsaka, “nonviolent”). His nickname means “finger-garland,” from the string of shrivelled fingers, one each severed from his victims, which he wears around his neck. His murderous career reaches a climax when he needs only the last, thousandth, finger. His killing instinct reaches such a feverish pitch that he is ready to kill his own mother who goes into the forest to warn him of the king and his soldiers who have come to hunt him down.

At this crucial point—killing his own mother or seeing his own wholeness—that the Buddha intercedes. Seeing the Buddha, Aṅguli,māla runs up to him from behind. Yet, although the Buddha is walking in his characteristic mindful monkly gait, Aṅguli,māla, running full speed, is unable to catch up to the Buddha. The running exhausts Aṅgulimāla, and he stops, unable to go on.

Aṅguli,māla then calls out to the Buddha to *stop* “running.” The Buddha declares:

**6.2** “I stand still,<sup>4</sup> Aṅgulimāla, all the time.  
To all beings, I've laid down the rod;  
but you're unrestrained towards living beings.  
Therefore, *I stand still* but you stand *not* still.”

(Aṅguli.māla:)

**6.3** “Long have I revered the recluse, the mighty sage,  
the truth speaker, who has entered the great forest;  
therefore, having heard your Dharma-woven stanza,  
I will live, having renounced evil, a thousand evils.”

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<sup>2</sup> There are the 4 analytic knowledges (or insights) (*paṭisambhidā*), those regarding: (1) meanings (and purpose) (*attha,paṭisambhidā*), (2) teachings or truths (*dhamma,paṭisambhidā*), (3) language (*nirutti,paṭisambhidā*) and (4) ready wit (*paṭibhāga,paṭisambhidā*): [SD 28.4 \(4\)](#); [SD 41.6 \(2.2\)](#); [SD 58.1 \(5.4.2.13\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> **Vakkali Thera Vatthu** (DhA 25.1 @ Dh 381), SD 8.8(1). Cf **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:119-124), [SD 8.8](#).

<sup>4</sup> While Aṅguli,māla's question [prec verse] speaks on a worldly level, the Buddha's answer here brings him up to the Dharma level, where “still” (*thito*, lit “standing”) means his mind has been stilled and no more creates new karma. But since Aṅguli,māla has been killing, he is not still in the Dharma sense. For a study on religious language, see Intro (2.3) & **Dh 97: Religious language**, [SD 10.6](#).

It should be noted that at this point, Aṅgulimāla attains streamwinning, represented by the word **thito**, “standing” [§6.2] applied to Aṅgulimāla. This is further confirmed by the Buddha’s accepting him as a monk of the noble sangha.

While **Kisā Gotamī**, carrying her dead infant, walking from house to house in the village seeking a handful of mustard seeds to revive the child, sees true reality and her own wholeness, Aṅgulimāla gains his wholeness by running. The running marks the transforming process in Aṅgulimāla that is preceded by the Buddha’s presence and interaction with Aṅgulimāla. The Buddha’s presence and interaction with Aṅgulimāla is compassion while the Buddha’s words represent wisdom, both working for Aṅgulimāla’s benefit.<sup>5</sup>

**5.4.10.6** The Buddha’s **compassion** is still present with us in the meditation that he has taught us; his **wisdom** arises in us when we see our wholeness through our meditation. We begin this process of gaining wholeness by doing some suitable meditation or being constantly mindful of *what* we really are at the moment, to manage ourself wholesomely. In this way, we not only correct or purify the effects of unconscious conditionings, but we also extend our wholesome mind and heart to others within reach. This is wholesome social and ecological engagement, seeing others and our environment as extensions of ourself. This is our compassion in action.

**The 6 existential states**<sup>6</sup> [5.4.9] represents when and how we lack wholeness on account of being overtaken by an unwholesome consciousness, or even a wholesome consciousness (human or divine) that holds us back in samsara. Hence, with a familiarity with these 6 existential types, we can thus better identify the state that we have fallen into, and so minimize its harm, and free ourself from it at once or through some effective reflection; or better, prevent ourselves from falling into a subhuman state. We are also more wholesomely primed to extend our being (mind and heart) to others, even beyond time and space, even beyond Buddhism itself, to others who are seeking spiritual life and awakening.

In fact, one vital way that Buddhism can bring some semblance of a heaven on Earth here and now is to engage with others in interreligious dialogue. This is an exciting area of study since it also has to do with the Buddhist concept of the extended mind. But before that, we must look at the theory of “paradigm shift” to understand the historical developments of the Western Christian religions leading up to our own time.

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<sup>5</sup> Aṅgulimāla S (M 86,4-6/2:98-100), [SD 5.11](#).

<sup>6</sup> R826-828: <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/weekly-reflections/inspirations-by-piya-tan>