Mil 3.1.8 — 8. Distinguishing Characteristic of Attention Question

English translation by John Kelly.
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Text

Milinda’s Questions

Great Chapter

8. Distinguishing Characteristic of Attention Question

The king asked: “Venerable Nāgasena, what is the distinguishing characteristic of attention, and what is the distinguishing characteristic of wisdom?” “Examination is the distinguishing characteristic of attention, and severing is the distinguishing characteristic of wisdom.”

“How does attention have the distinguishing characteristic of examination? And how does wisdom have the distinguishing characteristic of severing? Please give me an analogy.” “Do you know barley reapers, your majesty?” “Yes, venerable sir, I know them.” “How, your majesty, do barley reapers reap barley?” “Venerable sir, they take a sheaf of barley in the left hand, and take a sickle in the right hand, and they cut with the sickle.”

“Just as, your majesty, a barley reaper takes a sheaf of barley in the left hand, takes a sickle in the right hand, and cuts the barley, in the same way, your majesty, does the spiritual aspirant take hold of the mind with attention, and cut off the defilements with wisdom. Indeed thus, your majesty, examination is the distinguishing characteristic of attention, and severing is the distinguishing characteristic of wisdom.”

“You are clever, Venerable Nāgasena!”

Distinguishing Characteristic of Attention Question eighth