Mil 3.4.6 — 6. Question on the Nature of Heat in the Fires of Hell

English translation by John Kelly.
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Text

Milinda’s Questions

Nibbāna Chapter

6. Question on the Nature of Heat in the Fires of Hell

The king said: “Venerable Nāgasena, you say that the heat of hell has a far greater intensity than that of a normal fire, and that a small stone placed in a normal fire cooking all day would not be dissolved, whereas a stone the size of a gabled house placed in the fire of hell would be dissolved in a moment. I do not believe this assertion. And then you say that those various beings who have arisen in hell, cooking in that hell for thousands of years are not dissolved. That assertion too I do not believe.”

The elder asked, “What do you think, your majesty, do those female sharks, crocodiles, turtles, pea-hens, and pigeons eat hard stones and gravel?” “Yes, venerable sir, they eat them.” “But then when those have gone down into their abdomens and stomachs are they dissolved?” “Yes, venerable sir, they are dissolved.” “But then is an embryo in their abdomens dissolved?” “Certainly not, venerable sir.” “For what reason?” “I think, venerable sir, due to the workings of kamma it would not dissolve.” “In the same way, your majesty, those various beings in hell, cooking in that hell for thousands of years are not dissolved. And this too was said, your majesty, by the Blessed One: ‘One does not complete one’s time until there is an end to one’s evil kamma.’”

“Give me another analogy.” “What do you think, your majesty, do female lions, tigers, panthers, and dogs eat hard bones and flesh?” “Yes, venerable sir, they eat them.” “But then when those have gone down into their abdomens and stomachs are they dissolved?” “Yes, venerable sir, they are dissolved.” “But then is an embryo in their abdomens dissolved?” “Certainly not, venerable sir.” “For what reason?” “I think, venerable sir, due to the workings of kamma it would not dissolve.” “In the same way, your majesty, those various beings in hell, cooking in that hell for thousands of years are not dissolved.”

“Give me another analogy.” “What do you think, your majesty, do those delicate Bactrian Greek women, noble women, brahmin women, and householder women eat hard cakes and meat?” “Yes, venerable sir, they eat them.” “But then when those have gone down into their abdomens and stomachs are they dissolved?” “Yes, venerable sir, they are dissolved.” “But then is an embryo in their abdomens dissolved?” “Certainly not, venerable sir.” “For what reason?” “I think, venerable sir, due to the workings of kamma it would not dissolve.” “In the same way, your majesty, those various beings in hell, cooking in that hell for

thousands of years are not dissolved. And this too was said, your majesty, by the Blessed One: ‘One does not complete one’s time until there is an end to one’s evil kamma.’”

“You are clever, Venerable Nāgasena!”

Question on the Nature of Heat in the Fires of Hell sixth