Mil 3.7.15 — 15. Question on the Distinction of Consciousness

English translation by John Kelly.
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Text

Milinda’s Questions

Analysis of Formless Dhammas Chapter

15. Question on the Distinction of Consciousness

The king asked, “Venerable Nāgasena, when it is said ‘consciousness’ or ‘wisdom’ or ‘the life principle in a being’, are these things distinct from each other in actuality, or only in name?” “Discrimination, your majesty, is a distinguishing characteristic of consciousness, discernment is a distinguishing characteristic of wisdom, and the life principle in a being cannot be found.” “If the life principle in a being cannot be found, then how is it that one sees a form with the eyes, hears a sound with the ears, smells an odour with the nose, tastes a flavour with the tongue, touches a tangible with the body, and knows a thought with the mind?” The elder said, “If the life principle sees form with the eyes, … and knows thought with the mind, then when the doors of the eyes are destroyed would not the life principle see form more clearly out there before it in the great space? When the ears, the nose, the tongue and the body are all destroyed, would it not hear a sound, smell an odour, taste a flavour, touch a tangible more clearly in the great space?” “Certainly not, venerable sir.” “Well then, your majesty, the life principle in a being cannot be found.”

“You are clever, Venerable Nāgasena!”

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