Mil 3.7.16 — 16. Question on the Difficulty of Distinguishing Formless Dhammas

English translation by John Kelly.
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Text

Milinda’s Questions

Analysis of Formless Dhammas Chapter

16. Question on the Difficulty of Distinguishing Formless Dhammas

The king asked: “Venerable Nāgasena, did the Blessed One accomplish something difficult?” The elder said, “The Blessed One accomplished something difficult, your majesty.” “But what difficult thing, Venerable Nāgasena, did the Blessed One accomplish?” “The Blessed One accomplished something difficult, your majesty, in that he explained the distinction of these formless mental dhammas that occur with a single object, declaring: ‘This is contact, this is feeling, this is perception, this is volition, this is consciousness.’”

“Please give me an analogy.” “Suppose, your majesty, some man were to go out onto the great ocean in a boat, take up water in the hollow of his hand, taste it with his tongue—would that man be able to know: ‘This is water from the Ganges, this is water from the Yamunā, this is water from the Aciravatī, this is water from the Sarabhū, this is water from the Mahī?” “It would be difficult to know, venerable sir.” “More difficult than that, your majesty, is what the Blessed One accomplished in explaining the distinction of these formless phenomena that occur with a single object, declaring: ‘This is contact, this is feeling, this is perception, this is volition, this is consciousness.’” “Very good, venerable sir,” said the king in approval.

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Analysis of Formless Dhammas Chapter seventh

In this chapter sixteen questions