Mil 5.1.10 — 10. Question on the Display of Psychic Power

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Text

Milinda’s Questions

Questions on Dilemmas

Supernatural Powers Chapter

10. Question on the Display of Psychic Power

“Venerable Nāgasena, this was spoken by the Blessed One: ‘The four bases of psychic power, Ānanda, have been developed by the Tathāgata, made much of, made a vehicle, made a ground, established, consolidated, and well undertaken. If he wished, Ānanda, the Tathāgata could live for an aeon or for the remainder of an aeon.’ And again it was said: ‘At the end of three months from now the Tathāgata will attain final Nibbāna.’ If, venerable Nāgasena, the Blessed One said, ‘The four bases of psychic power, Ānanda, have been developed by the Tathāgata … or for the remainder of an aeon,’ then the fixing of the limit at three months is false. If, venerable sir, the Tathāgata said, ‘At the end of three months from now the Tathāgata will attain final Nibbāna,’ then the statement ‘The four bases of psychic power, Ānanda, have been developed … or for the remainder of an aeon’ is also false. There is no roaring (empty boasting) by the Tathāgatas about what is impossible. The Buddhas, the Blessed Ones, are of efficacious speech, of true speech, of speech without duplicity. This double-pronged dilemma is profound, very subtle, and hard to understand; it has now come to you. Break this net of views, set it down on one side, and shatter the doctrines of opponents.”

“Your majesty, this was spoken by the Blessed One: ‘The four bases of psychic power, Ānanda, have been developed … or for the remainder of an aeon,’ and the limit of three months was also stated. But that ‘aeon’ (kappa) is called the aeon of a life-span (āyukappa). The Blessed One, your majesty, did not speak thus in proclaiming his own strength; rather, in declaring the power of psychic ability, the Blessed One spoke thus: ‘The four bases of psychic power, Ānanda, have been developed … or for the remainder of an aeon.’

Suppose, your majesty, a king had a thoroughbred horse, swift in gait, with the speed of the wind. In declaring that horse’s strength of speed, in the midst of townspeople, country people, soldiers, brahmins, householders, and ministers, the king might say: ‘If I wished, sirs, this excellent horse could roam the earth bounded by the ocean’s waters and come back here in an instant.’ Yet he would not display that speed in that assembly, though the speed exists in the horse, and it is capable of roaming the earth bounded by the ocean in an instant. In the same way, your majesty, the Blessed One spoke thus in declaring his own

psychic power, and he said it while seated in the midst of arahants with the three knowledges and the six direct knowledges, stainless, their taints destroyed, and in the middle of devas and humans: ‘The four bases of psychic power, Ānanda, have been developed by the Tathāgata … If he wished, Ānanda, the Tathāgata could live for an aeon or for the remainder of an aeon.’ That psychic power, your majesty, does exist in the Blessed One, and the Blessed One is capable by psychic power of staying for an aeon or for the remainder of an aeon. But the Blessed One does not display that psychic power in that assembly, for the Blessed One, your majesty, has no need of any kind of existence, and all existence is condemned by the Tathāgata. This too was spoken by the Blessed One, your majesty: ‘Just as, bhikkhus, even a tiny bit of excrement stinks, in the same way, bhikkhus, I do not praise even a tiny bit of existence, even for as long as a finger-snap.’ Would the Blessed One, your majesty, seeing all existences, destinies, and modes of birth as like excrement, rely on psychic power and generate desire and lust for existences?” “Certainly not, venerable sir.” “Then, your majesty, in proclaiming his psychic power, the Blessed One gave voice to such a lion’s roar as of a Buddha.” “Very good, venerable Nāgasena. I accept it as you say.”

Question on the Display of Psychic Power tenth

Supernatural Powers Chapter first

In this chapter ten questions