Mil 5.1.6 — 6. Question on Conception

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Text

Milinda’s Questions

Questions on Dilemmas

Supernatural Powers Chapter

6. Question on Conception

“Venerable Nāgasena, this too was said by the Blessed One: ‘Bhikkhus, conception in the womb occurs through the union of three things. Here, the mother and father come together, the mother is in season, and the saṃsāric entity seeking rebirth is present. Bhikkhus, through the union of these three things, conception in the womb occurs.’ This is a complete statement, a statement without remainder, a statement without exception, a statement of an arahant, spoken while seated in the midst of gods and humans. But conception in the womb is seen to occur through the union of only two things: When the ascetic Dukūla touched the navel of the ascetic woman Pārikā with his right thumb during her fertile period, from that touching of the navel, the boy Sāma was born. Also, when the sage Mātaṅga touched the navel of a brahmin girl with his right thumb during her fertile period, from that touching of the navel, a brahmin youth named Maṇḍabya was born. If, Venerable Nāgasena, the Blessed One said ‘Bhikkhus, conception in the womb occurs through the union of three things,’ then the statement that ‘both the boy Sāma and the brahmin youth Maṇḍabya were born from the touching of the navel’ is false. If, venerable sir, the Tathāgata said ‘the boy Sāma and the brahmin youth Maṇḍabya were born from the touching of the navel,’ then the statement ‘Bhikkhus, conception in the womb occurs through the union of three things’ is also false. This is a double-horned dilemma, profound and subtle, a domain for the wise. It has come to you now. Cut through the path of doubt, bear aloft the excellent lamp of wisdom!”

“It was indeed said by the Blessed One, your majesty: ‘Bhikkhus, conception in the womb occurs through the union of three things. Here, the mother and father come together, the mother is in season, and the saṃsāric entity seeking rebirth is present. Thus, through the union of these three things, conception in the womb occurs.’ And it was also said: ‘The boy Sāma and the brahmin youth Maṇḍabya were born from the touching of the navel.’” “Then, Venerable Nāgasena, explain to me in such a way that the question is well resolved.”

“Have you heard before, your majesty, about the boy Saṅkicca, the ascetic Isisiṅga, and the elder Kumārakassapa, and how they were born?” “Yes, venerable sir, I have heard that. Their births were extraordinary. Two does during their fertile period came to the urination place of two ascetics and drank urine mixed with semen. From that urine containing

semen, the boy Saṅkicca and the ascetic Isisiṅga were born. As for the elder Udāyi, when he had gone to the bhikkhunīs' residence, with a lustful mind contemplating a bhikkhunī's genitals, semen was released on his robe. Then the Venerable Udāyi said to that bhikkhunī: 'Go, sister, bring water, I will wash the undergarment.' She said 'bring it here, I myself will wash it.' Then that nun, who was in her fertile period, took some of that semen into her mouth and placed some on her genitals. From that, the elder Kumārakassapa was born—so people say."

"Do you, your majesty, believe that account?" "Yes, venerable sir, we find a strong reason there, by which reason we believe they were born in this way." "But what is the reason for this, your majesty?" "Venerable sir, when the seed falls into a well-prepared embryonic fluid, it quickly germinates." "Yes, your majesty." "In the same way, venerable sir, that bhikkhunī, being in her fertile period, with the embryonic fluid ready, the blood settled, and the element [of conception] established, she took that semen and placed it in that embryonic fluid. By that, her womb was prepared. Thus we understand the reason for their births." "This is so, your majesty. I accept it thus: that the embryo develops through entrance into the womb. But do you accept, your majesty, the conception in the womb of the elder Kumārakassapa?" "Yes, venerable sir." "Good, your majesty! You have returned to my position, for in one way, you will be following me when speaking of conception. Now, as for those two does who obtained conception by drinking urine, do you believe in their conception in the womb?" "Yes, venerable sir. Whatever is eaten, drunk, chewed, or licked, all that flows down to the embryonic fluid and, reaching that destination, attains growth. Just as, Venerable Nāgasena, whatever rivers there are, all of them flow down to the great ocean and, reaching their destination, attain growth. In the same way, Venerable Nāgasena, whatever is eaten, drunk, chewed, or licked, all that flows down to the embryonic fluid and, reaching that destination, attains growth. It is because of this that I believe that conception in the womb can occur even through the mouth." "Good, your majesty! You have more strongly returned to my position. By drinking through the mouth too, there is a union of two things. Do you accept, your majesty, the conception in the womb of the boy Saṅkicca, the ascetic Isisiṅga, and the elder Kumārakassapa?" "Yes, venerable sir, there was a joining that descended to the womb."

"The boy Sāma and the brahmin youth Maṇḍabya are also, your majesty, included within the three unions, identical in essence with the former cases. I will explain the reason there. The ascetic Dukūla and the ascetic woman Pārikā, your majesty, were both forest-dwellers, devoted to seclusion, seekers of the highest goal. By the power of their asceticism, they radiated heat all the way up to the Brahma world. Sakka, lord of the gods, came to attend upon them morning and evening. He, honouring them with reverence and affection, and considering their situation, saw that in the future both of them would lose their eyesight. Having seen this, he said to them: 'Good people, do one thing for me and it would be good as a son would be born to you who would be your attendant and your support.' 'Enough, Kosiya, do not speak thus.' They did not agree to do what he said. Sakka, lord of the devas, compassionate and wishing their welfare, [spoke] a second time... and a third time he said to them: 'Good people, do one thing for me and it would be good as a son would be born to you who would be your attendant and your support.' A third time they said: 'Enough, Kosiya! Do not incite us to do what is not beneficial. How should this body not break up? This body will break up as it is subject to breaking. Even if the earth were to split, even if

mountain peaks were to topple down, even if the sun and moon were to fall from the sky, we will not mix ourselves with worldly affairs. Do not come into our presence. There is little trust in your coming since you seem to be a doer of harm!'

Then Sakka, lord of the devas, not obtaining their consent, but honouring them, with joined palms, asked again: 'If you are unable to do what I ask, when the ascetic woman is in season and fertile, then you, venerable sir, should touch her navel with your right thumb. By that she will obtain conception. This too is a union for conception in the womb.' 'I am able to do that, Kosiya. Our asceticism is not broken by so much. Let it be so', and they consented. Now at that time in the deva realm, there was a young deva of abundant wholesome roots, whose life-span was exhausted, who had reached the end of his life, able to take rebirth wherever he wished, even in a wheel-turning monarch's family. Then Sakka, lord of the devas, approached that young deva and said thus: 'Come, dear sir! Auspicious is your day; success has come to you. I have come to attend upon you. You will have a dwelling in a delightful place, rebirth will occur in a suitable family, you will be raised by beautiful parents. Come, do as I ask!' A second time... and a third time he requested, with joined palms at his head.

Then that young deva said thus: 'Which family is that, dear sir, which you constantly praise again and again?' 'The ascetic Dukūla and the ascetic woman Pārikā.' Hearing his words, he was pleased and consented: 'Good, dear sir! May it be as you wish. I desire, dear sir, to be born in the family you have chosen. In which [mode of birth] will I be born—egg-born, moisture-born, womb-born, or spontaneously born?' 'You will be born, dear sir, in the womb-born mode.'

Then Sakka, lord of the devas, having calculated the day of arising, informed the ascetic Dukūla: 'On such and such a day the ascetic woman will be in season and fertile. Then, venerable sir, you should touch her navel with your right thumb.' On that day, your majesty, the ascetic woman was in season and fertile, the young deva had gone there and was present, and the ascetic touched the ascetic woman's navel with his right thumb. Thus there were the three unions. By the touching of the navel, passion arose in the ascetic woman. But do not think that her passion dependent on the touching of the navel was merely external intercourse. Reflection too is union, thinking too is union, contemplation too is union. Because passion is a preliminary state, union arises through touching for the arising of passion, and from union there is descent [into the womb].

Even without intercourse, your majesty, conception in the womb occurs through touching. Just as, your majesty, fire when blazing, even without touching one who has come near, dispels the cold; in the same way, your majesty, even without intercourse, conception in the womb occurs through touching.

In four ways, your majesty, conception in the womb occurs for beings: through the power of kamma, through the power of the mode of birth, through the power of family lineage, and through the power of invitation. And yet all these beings are born of kamma, arisen from kamma.

How, your majesty, does conception in the womb occur for beings through the power of kamma? Beings of abundant wholesome roots, your majesty, are born wherever they

wish—in a great warrior family, in a great brahmin family, in a great householder family, among the devas, in the egg-born mode, in the womb-born mode, in the moisture-born mode, or in the spontaneously-born mode. Just as, your majesty, a man who is wealthy, of great wealth, of great resources, with abundant gold and silver, with abundant possessions and goods, with abundant grain and wealth, with abundant relatives and kin, buys a slave woman or slave man, a field or property, a village or town or country—whatever he desires in his mind—giving wealth twofold or threefold at will and purchasing it; in the same way, your majesty, beings of abundant wholesome roots are born wherever they wish—in a great warrior family, in a great brahmin family, in a great householder family, among the devas, in the egg-born mode, in the womb-born mode, in the moisture-born mode, or in the spontaneously-born mode. Thus conception in the womb occurs for beings through the power of kamma.

How does conception in the womb occur for beings through the power of the mode of birth? For hens, your majesty, conception occurs through the wind. For cranes, conception occurs through the sound of thunder. All devas are non-womb-lying beings; for them conception occurs through various manners. Just as, your majesty, humans move about on earth with various appearances—some covering themselves in front, some covering themselves behind, some are naked, some are wanderers wearing white robes, some have shaven heads, some are wanderers wearing ochre robes, some wear ochre robes and have shaven heads, some are matted-hair ascetics wearing bark garments, some wear leather garments, some wear cord belts—all these humans move about on earth with various appearances; in the same way, your majesty, all these are beings, and for them conception occurs through various appearances. Thus conception in the womb occurs for beings through the power of the mode of birth.

How does conception in the womb occur for beings through the power of family lineage? Family, your majesty, means the four families: egg-born, womb-born, moisture-born, and spontaneously-born. If a gandhabba coming from anywhere is born in an egg-born family, he becomes egg-born there… in a womb-born family… in a moisture-born family… in a spontaneously-born family, he becomes spontaneously-born there. In those respective families, beings of such nature are born. Just as, your majesty, whatever animals and birds approach Mount Neru in the Himalayas, all of them, abandoning their own colour, become golden in colour; in the same way, your majesty, whatever gandhabba coming from anywhere, approaching the egg-born mode, abandoning his natural appearance, becomes egg-born… [approaching] the womb-born… the moisture-born… the spontaneously-born mode, abandoning his natural appearance, becomes spontaneously-born. Thus conception in the womb occurs for beings through the power of family lineage.

How does conception in the womb occur for beings through the power of invitation? Here, your majesty, there is a family that is without a son, of great wealth, faithful, devoted, virtuous, of good character, devoted to asceticism, and there is a young deva of abundant wholesome roots subject to passing away. Then Sakka, lord of the devas, out of compassion for that family, invites that young deva: ‘Aspire, dear sir, to the womb of the great lady of such-and-such a family.’ Due to that invitation, he aspires to that family. Just as, your majesty, humans who desire merit invite a revered ascetic and bring him to their home, [thinking] ‘This one, having come, will be a bringer of happiness to the whole

family’; in the same way, your majesty, Sakka, lord of the devas, having invited that young deva, brings him to that family. Thus conception in the womb occurs for beings through the power of invitation.

The boy Sāma, your majesty, was invited by Sakka, lord of the devas, and descended into the womb of the ascetic woman Pārikā. The boy Sāma, your majesty, was one who had made merit; the mother and father were virtuous and of good character; the inviter was Sakka. Through the mental aspiration of these three, the boy Sāma was born. Here, your majesty, [suppose] a skilful man were to plant seed in well-prepared, irrigated land—would there be any obstacle to its growth if he avoided obstacles to that seed?” “Certainly not, venerable sir, the seed, free from impediments, would quickly germinate.” “In the same way, your majesty, the boy Sāma, freed from arisen obstacles, was born through the mental aspiration of three.

But have you heard before, your majesty, that through the mental anger of seers, a prosperous, thriving great country with its people was utterly destroyed?” “Yes, venerable sir, I have heard that. On earth, the Daṇḍaka forest, the Majjha forest, the Kāliṅga forest, the Mātaṅga forest—all that became forest, wilderness. All these regions came to destruction through the mental anger of seers.” “If, your majesty, through their mental anger well-prospering regions are destroyed, could anything not be produced through their mental goodwill?” “Yes, venerable sir.” “Then, your majesty, the boy Sāma was born through the mental goodwill of three powerful ones—created by seers, created by devas, created by merit. Thus, your majesty, bear this in mind.

These three, your majesty, are young devas invited by Sakka, lord of the devas, and born in families. Which three? The boy Sāma, Mahāpanāda, and King Kusa. These three are bodhisattas.” “Well explained, Venerable Nāgasena, is conception in the womb! Well stated is the reason! Darkness has been made into light, the tangle has been disentangled, the opposing doctrines have been purified. This is so; thus I accept it.”

Question on Conception sixth