Mil 5.1.9 — 9. Question on What Remains to Be Done

English translation by John Kelly.
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Text

Milinda’s Questions

Questions on Dilemmas

Supernatural Powers Chapter

9. Question on What Remains to Be Done

“Venerable Nāgasena, you say: ‘Whatever had to be done by the Tathāgata, all of that was completed at the very foot of the Bodhi tree. There is nothing further for the Tathāgata to do, nor any accumulation of what has been done.’ And yet this three-month seclusion is observed. If, Venerable Nāgasena, whatever had to be done by the Tathāgata was all completed at the foot of the Bodhi tree, with nothing further to do and no accumulation of what is done, then the statement that ‘he was in seclusion for three months’ is false. If he was in seclusion for three months, then the statement that ‘whatever had to be done by the Tathāgata was all completed at the foot of the Bodhi tree’ is also false. For one who has done what was to be done, there is no seclusion. Seclusion belongs only to one who still has something to do. Just as only one who is sick has need of medicine (what use is medicine to one who is not sick?), and only one who is hungry has need of food (what use is food to one who is not hungry?), in the same way, Venerable Nāgasena, there is no seclusion for one who has done what was to be done; seclusion is only for one who still has something to do. This two-horned dilemma has now come to you, and it must be resolved by you.”

“Your majesty, whatever had to be done by the Tathāgata was all completed at the very foot of the Bodhi tree. There is nothing further for the Tathāgata to do, nor any accumulation of what has been done. And the Blessed One was in seclusion for three months. Seclusion, your majesty, has many benefits. All the Tathāgatas attained omniscience after being in seclusion, and, remembering that well-done benefit, they resort to seclusion. Just as, your majesty, a man who has received a boon from the king and obtained wealth, remembering that good deed, keeps going back to attend upon the king, in the same way all the Tathāgatas, having attained omniscience through seclusion, resort to seclusion remembering its benefit.

Or again, your majesty, just as a man who was ill, suffering, and gravely sick, and who attained safety by resorting to a physician, keeps going back to the physician remembering that benefit, in the same way all the Tathāgatas, having attained omniscience through seclusion, resort to seclusion remembering its benefit.

There are, your majesty, twenty-eight qualities of seclusion, and it is in remembrance of these that the Tathāgatas resort to it. Which twenty-eight? Here, your majesty, seclusion, when practiced, protects oneself, increases life, gives strength, covers over faults, removes disrepute, brings good repute, dispels discontent, brings delight, removes fear, produces confidence, removes laziness, arouses energy, removes lust, removes hatred, removes delusion, destroys conceit, shatters (wandering) thoughts, makes the mind one-pointed, softens the heart, produces gladness, makes one weighty (dignified), brings gain, makes one worthy of homage, leads to joy, produces gladdening delight, shows the true nature of formations, opens up (breaks) rebirth-linking in existence, gives everything that belongs to the ascetic life. These, your majesty, are the twenty-eight qualities of seclusion, and remembering them the Tathāgatas resort to it.

Moreover, your majesty, the Tathāgatas, whose resolves are fulfilled, resort to seclusion wishing to experience peaceful happiness and the delight of attainments. The Tathāgatas resort to seclusion for four reasons. Which four? The Tathāgatas resort to seclusion for a comfortable dwelling; for its abundance of blameless qualities; because it belongs to the entire noble way; and because it is praised, extolled, described, and commended by all the Buddhas. For these four reasons, your majesty, the Tathāgatas resort to seclusion. Thus, your majesty, the Tathāgatas resort to seclusion not because they still have something to do, nor for the accumulation of what has been done, but because they see its special excellence." "Very good, Venerable Nāgasena. I accept it as you say."

Question on What Remains to Be Done ninth