Mil 5.2.1 — 1. Question on the Lesser and Minor Rules

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Text

Milinda's Questions

Questions on Dilemmas

Chapter on the Inseparable

1. Question on the Lesser and Minor Rules

"Venerable Nāgasena, the Blessed One said: 'Bhikkhus, I teach the Dhamma having directly known it, not without direct knowledge.' But in the Vinaya regulations he also said: 'Ānanda, if the Saṅgha wishes, after my passing it may abolish the lesser and minor training rules.' Venerable Nāgasena, were the lesser and minor rules badly laid down? Or were they laid down without a proper basis, through ignorance, so that the Blessed One has them abolished after his passing? If, Venerable Nāgasena, the Blessed One said 'I teach the Dhamma having directly known it, not without direct knowledge,' then the statement 'Ānanda, if the Saṅgha wishes, after my passing it may abolish the lesser and minor rules' is false. And if the Tathāgata said that in the Vinaya regulations, 'Ānanda, if the Saṅgha wishes, after my passing it may abolish the lesser and minor rules', then the statement 'I teach the Dhamma having directly known it' is also false. This question is double-horned, subtle, refined, profound, very profound, and hard to make others understand. It has come to you; show here the power and reach of your wisdom."

"Your majesty, the Blessed One did say 'Bhikkhus, I teach the Dhamma having directly known it, not without direct knowledge,' and he also said in the Vinaya regulations: 'Ānanda, if the Saṅgha wishes, after my passing it may abolish the lesser and minor rules.' But the Tathāgata said this as a way of testing the bhikkhus, thinking: 'When I let them go, will my disciples, after my passing, cast off the lesser and minor rules, or will they take them up?'

Just as, your majesty, a wheel-turning monarch might say to his sons: 'My sons, this great realm reaches to the ocean in every direction. It is hard, my sons, to hold it with so little strength. After my passing, give up the border regions, one by one.' Now, your majesty, would those princes, after their father's death, release all the border regions of the realm that had come into their hands?" Certainly not, Venerable Sir. Princes are greedier than their king; out of greed for sovereignty they would seize a realm twice or three times larger. How could they let go of the realm already in their hands?" "In just the same way, your majesty, the Tathāgata, testing the bhikkhus, said: 'Ānanda, if the Saṅgha wishes, after my passing it may abolish the lesser and minor rules.' Out of a desire for release from suffering, your majesty, the Buddha's sons, with a greed for the Dhamma, would guard

even another hundred and fifty rules beyond these. How then would they let go of the rules laid down in the ordinary way?"

"Venerable Nāgasena, regarding what the Blessed One called 'lesser and minor rules,' people here are confused, doubtful, perplexed, and caught in uncertainty. Which are the lesser rules, and which are the minor rules?" "A wrongdoing (dukkaṭa), your majesty, is a lesser rule; a misspeaking (dubbhāsita) is a minor rule. These two are the 'lesser and minor rules.' Even the great elders of former times, your majesty, fell into doubt over this, and they did not reach agreement on it. The Blessed One explained this matter in the discourse on the establishment of the Dhamma." "Venerable Nāgasena, a secret of the Conqueror long concealed has today been opened and made plain in the world."

Question on the Lesser and Minor Rules first