Mil 2 — 2. The Preliminary Training, Etc.

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Text

Milinda’s Questions

External Talk

2. The Preliminary Training, Etc.

“The preliminary training” refers to their previous kamma. In the past, it is said, when the dispensation of the Blessed One Kassapa was current, a great community of bhikkhus was living in a certain dwelling near the Ganges. There, bhikkhus endowed with virtue and conduct, rising early in the morning, taking long-handled brooms, reflecting on the qualities of the Buddha, swept the courtyard and made a heap of all the rubbish. Then a certain bhikkhu said to a novice: “Come, novice, throw away this rubbish.” But he went away as if not hearing. Even when addressed a second time… and a third time, he went on as if not hearing. Then that bhikkhu, angry, and thinking “this novice is indeed disobedient,” struck a blow with the broom-stick. After which that novice, weeping and fearfully throwing away the rubbish, thought: “Through this meritorious deed of throwing away rubbish, in whatever place I am successively reborn until I attain nibbāna, may I be of great power and great majesty like the midday sun.” Thus he made his first aspiration. After he had thrown away the rubbish, he went to the bank of the Ganges to bathe, seeing the force of the roaring waves on the Ganges, thinking: “In whatever place I am successively reborn until I attain nibbāna, may I have the power to say the right thing promptly and answer questions inexhaustibly like this force of waves.” Thus he made his second aspiration.

That bhikkhu too, having placed the broom in the broom-hall, going to the bank of the Ganges to bathe, hearing the novice’s aspiration, thought: “This one, even though merely instigated by me, aspires thus; why should mine not succeed?” Then thinking: “In whatever place I am successively reborn until I attain nibbāna, may I have inexhaustible wit like the force of these waves on the Ganges, and may I be able to unravel and disentangle every question asked.” Thus he made his aspiration.

Both of these two spent one Buddha-interval wandering among devas and humans. Then, just as the elder Tissa, Moggali’s son, was foretold by our Buddha, so too were these two when he said, “Five hundred years after my final nibbāna they will arise. That Dhamma and Vinaya which have been taught subtly by me, they will analyze, disentangling it and making it clear by means of asking questions and the use of similes.” Thus, it was foretold.

Out of these two, the novice became a king named Milinda in the city of Sāgala in Jambudīpa (India). He was wise, skilful, intelligent, and capable in the understanding,

application, and performance of affairs regarding the past, future, and present. He was one who acted thoughtfully at the time of action, and many arts had been learned by him. Namely, revealed tradition, secular convention, calculation, yoga, politics, Vaiśeṣika philosophy, mathematics, music, medicine, the four Vedas, ancient lore, history, astrology, magic, omens, counsel, warfare, prosody, and the Buddha's words—nineteen in all. He was a skilled debater, difficult to equal, difficult to overcome, he was the acclaimed chief among the leaders of many sects. In all of India there was no one equal to King Milinda in strength, speed, courage, and wisdom. He was rich, of great wealth and prosperity, with unlimited armed forces and vehicles.

Then one day King Milinda, having gone out from the city to see his army with its unlimited forces and vehicles in its fourfold array, and having inspected and reviewed the army divisions outside the city, that king—eloquent in speech, curious and eager for conversation with worldly sophists and debaters, confident, bold—looking at the sun, addressed his ministers: "Much of the day still remains. What should we do? Let us now enter the city. Is there any wise ascetic or brahmin, leader of a community, head of a group, teacher of a group, even one claiming to be an arahant, a Perfectly Enlightened One, who is able to converse with me and dispel my doubts? Having approached him, we shall ask questions and dispel doubt."

When this was said, the five hundred Bactrian Greeks said to King Milinda: "There are, your majesty, six teachers: Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta, Ajita Kesakambala, and Pakudha Kaccāyana. They are leaders of communities, heads of groups, teachers of groups, known, famous, founders of schools of thought, well-regarded by many people. Go, your majesty, ask them questions and dispel your doubts."

Then King Milinda, surrounded by the five hundred Bactrian Greeks, having mounted an excellent chariot with splendid equipage, approached Pūraṇa Kassapa and exchanged greetings with him. Then after this friendly and courteous conversation, King Milinda sat down to one side and said this to Pūraṇa Kassapa: "Who, Venerable Kassapa, protects the world?" "The earth, your majesty, protects the world." "If, Venerable Kassapa, the earth protects the world, then why do beings going to the Avīci hell go there having bypassed the earth?" When this was said, Pūraṇa Kassapa was neither able to swallow it nor vomit it out. He sat silent, dejected, with shoulders drooped, downcast, brooding.

Then King Milinda said this to Makkhali Gosāla: "Are there, Venerable Gosāla, wholesome and unwholesome actions? Is there fruit and result of well done and badly done deeds?" "There are not, your majesty, wholesome and unwholesome actions. There is no fruit and result of well done and badly done deeds. Those who are warrior nobles in this world, your majesty, having gone to the next world will again be warrior nobles. Those who are brahmins, merchants, workers, outcastes, and sweepers, having gone to the next world will again be brahmins, merchants, workers, outcastes, and sweepers. What use are wholesome and unwholesome actions?" "If, Venerable Gosāla, those who are brahmins, merchants, workers, outcastes, and sweepers, having gone to the next world will again be brahmins, merchants, workers, outcastes, and sweepers, there is nothing to be done with wholesome and unwholesome actions. Then, Venerable Gosāla, those who have had their

hands cut off in this world, having gone to the next world will again have cut-off hands. Those who have had their feet cut off will again have cut-off feet. Those who are who have had both their hands and feet cut off will again have cut-off hands and feet. Those who have had their ears cut off will again have cut-off ears. Those who have had their nose cut off will again have a cut-off nose. Those who have had their ears and nose cut off will again have cut-off ears and nose." When this was said, Gosāla was silent.

Then this occurred to King Milinda: "Jambudīpa is indeed empty, sirs; Jambudīpa is indeed mere prattle! There is no ascetic or brahmin who is able to converse with me to dispel my doubts."

Then King Milinda addressed his ministers: "Delightful indeed, sirs, is this moonlit night. What ascetic or brahmin might we approach today to ask questions? Who is able to converse with me and dispel my doubts?" When this was said, the ministers stood silent, gazing at the king's face.

Now at that time the city of Sāgala had been empty for twelve years of learned ascetics, brahmins, and householders. Wherever he heard that learned ascetics, brahmins, and householders were dwelling, the king would go there and ask them questions. All of them, being unable to please the king with their answers to questions, departed one way or another. Those who did not depart to another region all remained silent. But the bhikkhus mostly went to the Himalayas.

Now at that time a large uncountable number of arahants were dwelling on Rakkhita plateau in the Himalayan mountains. Then the Venerable Assagutta, having heard King Milinda's words with the divine ear element, assembled the community of bhikkhus on the summit of Yugandhara, and asked them: "Is there, friends, any bhikkhu capable of conversing with King Milinda and dispelling his doubts?"

When this was said, the large uncountable number of arahants were silent. Asked a second time… and a third time, they were silent. Then the Venerable Assagutta said this to the community of bhikkhus: "There is, friends, in the Tāvatiṃsa realm, east of Vejayanta palace, a mansion called Ketumatī. There dwells a young deva named Mahāsena. He is capable of conversing with that King Milinda and dispelling his doubts."

Then the large uncountable number of arahants, disappeared from Yugandhara mountain, and appeared in the Tāvatiṃsa realm. Sakka, lord of the devas, saw those bhikkhus coming from afar. Having seen them, he approached the Venerable Assagutta, paid respects to him, and stood to one side. Standing to one side, Sakka, lord of the devas, said this to the Venerable Assagutta: "A great community of bhikkhus has arrived, venerable sir. I am the monastery attendant for the community. What is their purpose? What should I do?"

Then the Venerable Assagutta said this to Sakka, lord of the devas: "There is, your majesty, in the city of Sāgala in Jambudīpa, this king named Milinda, a sophistic debater, difficult to equal, difficult to defeat, the acclaimed chief among the leaders of many sects. He approaches the bhikkhu community, asks questions with wrong views, and so harasses the bhikkhu community."

Then Sakka, lord of the devas, said this to the Venerable Assagutta: “This King Milinda, venerable sir, having passed away from here, was reborn among humans. This young deva named Mahāsena, venerable sir, dwells in the Ketumatī mansion. He is capable of conversing with that King Milinda and dispelling his doubts. We shall request that young deva to be reborn in the human world.”

Then Sakka, lord of the devas, having gone before the bhikkhu community, entered the Ketumatī mansion, embraced the young deva Mahāsena, and said: “The bhikkhu community requests you, dear sir, to be reborn in the human world.” “I have no desire, venerable sir, for the human world full of activity. The human world is harsh. Right here, venerable sir, in the deva world, being reborn in higher and higher realms, I shall attain final nibbāna.” Asked a second time… and a third time by Sakka, lord of the devas, the young deva Mahāsena said: “I have no desire, venerable sir, for the human world full of activity. The human world is harsh. Right here, venerable sir, in the deva world, being reborn in higher and higher realms, I shall attain final nibbāna.”

Then the Venerable Assagutta said this to the young deva Mahāsena: “We, dear sir, surveying the world with its devas, see no one else capable of refuting King Milinda’s argument and upholding the dispensation apart from you. The bhikkhu community entreats you, dear sir. It would be good, worthy one, if you would be reborn in the human world and uphold the dispensation of the Ten-Powered One.” When this was said, the young deva Mahāsena, joyful and elated, thinking “It seems I will be capable of refuting King Milinda’s argument and upholding the Buddha’s dispensation,” gave his promise: “Good, venerable sir, I shall arise in the human world.”

Then those bhikkhus, having accomplished that task in the deva world, disappeared from among the Tāvatiṃsa devas and reappeared on Rakkhita plateau in the Himalayan mountains.

Then the Venerable Assagutta said this to the bhikkhu community: “Is there, friends, any bhikkhu from this bhikkhu community who did not come to the assembly?” When this was said, a certain bhikkhu said this to the Venerable Assagutta: “There is, venerable sir, the Venerable Rohaṇa. Seven days ago he entered the Himalayan mountains and attained cessation. Send a messenger to him.” And the Venerable Rohaṇa, at that very moment, having emerged from cessation, thinking “The community is waiting for me,” disappeared from the Himalayan mountains and appeared before the large uncountable number of arahants on the Rakkhita plateau.

Then the Venerable Assagutta said this to the Venerable Rohaṇa: “Why, friend Rohaṇa, while the Buddha’s dispensation is breaking apart, do you not see the duties of the community?” “There was inattention on my part, venerable sir.”

“Then, friend Rohaṇa, perform a disciplinary action.” “What should I do, venerable sir?” “There is, friend Rohaṇa, at the foot of the Himalayan mountains a brahmin village called Gajaṅgala. There dwells a brahmin named Soṇuttara, and a son named Nāgasena will be born to him. Well then, friend Rohaṇa, for seven years and ten months, enter that family for alms, then lead forth the boy Nāgasena and ordain him. When he is ordained, you will be released from the disciplinary action.” And the Venerable Rohaṇa saying, “Good”

agreed.

And the young deva Mahāsena, having passed away from the deva world, took rebirth in the womb of the brahmin Soṇuttara's wife. With the conception, three wonderful and marvelous things happened: arms and weapons burst into flames, the tender new grain became ripe in a moment, and a great cloud rained down. And the Venerable Rohaṇa, from the time of that conception, for seven years and ten months, entering that family for alms, not even for one day did he receive even a spoonful of food or a ladleful of gruel, or a salutation, or an añjali, or a courteous action. Rather, he received only abuse and reproach. There was not even a speaker to say "Move on, venerable sir." But after seven years and ten months had passed, on one day he received just the words "Move on, venerable sir." On that very day, the brahmin, coming from work outside, seeing the elder on the path, said: "Did you go to our house, renunciant?" "Yes, brahmin, I went." "Did you receive anything?" "Yes, brahmin, I received something." He, displeased, went home and asked: "Did you give anything to that renunciant?" "We gave him nothing." On the following day the brahmin sat at his house door, thinking "Today I shall rebuke the renunciant for lying." On that very day the elder arrived at the brahmin's house door.

The brahmin, upon seeing the elder, said this: "Yesterday you said 'we received' at our house without receiving anything at all. Is it fitting that you should lie?" The elder said: "Brahmin, for seven years and ten months at your house, without receiving even the mere words 'move on,' yesterday we received those words 'move on,' so taking that verbal hospitality into account, we spoke thus."

The brahmin thought: "These mendicants praise even receiving mere verbal hospitality in the midst of people saying 'we received.' Why would they not praise receiving some other solid or soft food?" So, having gained faith, from the food prepared for himself he had a ladleful of alms given, along with the accompanying sauces. "You will receive this alms every day," he said.

On the following day, having seen the peacefulness of the elder as he was approaching, having gained even greater faith, he invited the elder to receive meals at his own house every day. The elder consented in silence. Each day, after he had eaten his meal, on leaving he would speak little by little on the Buddha's words. And that brahmin woman, after ten months had passed, gave birth to a son whom they called "Nāgasena." He, growing up in due course, came to be seven years old.

Then the father of the boy Nāgasena said this to him: "Dear Nāgasena, in this brahmin family you should learn the trainings." "What, father, are called the trainings in this brahmin family?" "The three Vedas, dear Nāgasena, are called the trainings; the remaining crafts are called craft." "Well then, father, I will train in them."

Then the brahmin Soṇuttara, paid a teacher's fee of a thousand [kahāpaṇas] to a brahmin teacher, had a couch arranged in one room within the inner chamber, and said this to the brahmin teacher: "Please teach this boy the mantras, brahmin." "Well then, dear boy, learn these mantras." The brahmin teacher recited them, and for the boy Nāgasena, with just one recitation, the three Vedas became learned by heart, mastered in recitation, well-grasped, well-established, and well-reflected upon. Vision arose in him in regard to

the three Vedas with their vocabularies and etymologies, with their phonetics and analysis, with legends as the fifth. He became fully versed in prosody, grammar, cosmology, and the marks of the Great Man.

Then the boy Nāgasena said this to his father: “Father, are there further things to be learned in this brahmin family beyond this, or is this the full extent?” “There are no further things to be learned in this brahmin family beyond this, dear Nāgasena; this is all there is to be learned.”

Then the boy Nāgasena, having passed the teacher’s examination, descended from the mansion. Stirred in heart by previous inclinations, having gone into solitude, withdrawn into seclusion, considering the beginning, middle, and end of his own craft, not seeing even the slightest essence in either the beginning, the middle, or the end, and thinking: “Empty indeed, sirs, are these Vedas; chaff indeed, sirs, are these Vedas—without essence, without core” he became remorseful and dissatisfied.

Now at that time the Venerable Rohaṇa, sitting in the Vattaniya monastery, having known by mind the thought process in the boy Nāgasena’s mind, dressed, took his bowl and robe, disappeared from the Vattaniya monastery, and appeared in front of the brahmin village of Gajaṅgala. The boy Nāgasena, standing at his own doorpost, saw the Venerable Rohaṇa coming from afar. When he saw him, he was joyful, elated, delighted, rapturous, and happy, thinking “Perhaps this renunciant might know some essence.” He approached the Venerable Rohaṇa and said this to him: “Who are you, sir, thus shaven-headed and dressed in ochre robes?” “I am called a renunciant, boy.” “Why, sir, are you called a renunciant?” “I am one who has expelled evil defilements, therefore, boy, I am called a renunciant.”

“For what reason, sir, is your hair not like others?” “Having seen these sixteen obstructions, boy, I have cut off my hair and beard, and gone forth.” “What sixteen?” “The obstruction of ornaments, the obstruction of decoration, the obstruction of oil application, the obstruction of washing, the obstruction of garlands, the obstruction of perfumes, the obstruction of scents, the obstruction of haritaka myrobalan, the obstruction of emblic myrobalan, the obstruction of dyes, the obstruction of binding hair, the obstruction of brushing hair, the obstruction of hairdressing, the obstruction of combing, the obstruction of lice. When hair is lost, people grieve, become weary, lament, beat their breasts crying, and fall into delusion. Entangled in these sixteen obstructions, boy, people lose all the most subtle skills.”

“Why, sir, are your clothes also not like others?” “Clothes are connected with sensual desire, boy; the householder’s ornamental articles are connected with sensual desire. Whatever fears arise from clothing, those do not exist for one wearing ochre robes. Therefore my clothes are also not like others.” “Do you know, sir, what are called crafts?” “Yes, boy, I know crafts, and I also know what is the supreme mantra in the world.” “Is it possible for you to give that to me also, sir?” “Yes, boy, it is possible.” “Well then, give it to me.” “It is not the right time, boy; we have entered among the houses for alms.”

Then the boy Nāgasena, took the bowl from the Venerable Rohaṇa’s hand, led him into the house, and having satisfied and served him with his own hands with excellent solid and soft food, said this to the Venerable Rohaṇa when he had finished eating and withdrawn

his hand from his bowl: “Give it to me now, sir, the mantra.” “When you, boy, are free from obstructions, and having obtained permission from your mother and father, have taken up the state of a renunciant that I have, then I will give it to you,” he said.

Then the boy Nāgasena approached his parents and said: “Mother and father, this renunciant says ‘I know the highest teaching in this world,’ yet he does not give it to one who has not gone forth in his presence. I will go forth in his presence and learn that highest teaching.” Then his parents gave permission, thinking “Let our son take up the teaching even by going forth; after he has taken it up, he will return again.” And they said, “Learn it, son.”

Then the Venerable Rohaṇa, taking the boy Nāgasena with him, approached Vattaniya monastery, went to Vijambhavatthu, and having spent one night in the monastery at Vijambhavatthu, went to Rakkhitatala. Having arrived there, he ordained the boy Nāgasena in the midst of a large uncountable number of arahants. And when he had gone forth, the Venerable Nāgasena said to the Venerable Rohaṇa: “I have taken your dress upon myself, venerable sir. Now give me the mantra.” Then the Venerable Rohaṇa thought, “In what should I first train Nāgasena—in the Discipline, the Discourses, or the Abhidhamma?” Having reflected, “This Nāgasena is wise; he can easily master the Abhidhamma,” he first trained him in the Abhidhamma.

The Venerable Nāgasena, mastered after a single recitation the entire Abhidhamma Piṭaka, that is the Dhammasaṅgaṇī adorned with triads and dyads beginning with wholesome states, unwholesome states, and indeterminate states; the Vibhaṅga adorned with eighteen analyses beginning with that on the aggregates; the Dhātukathā with its fourteen divisions beginning with inclusion, and non-inclusion; the Puggalapaññatti with its sixfold division beginning with expositions of the aggregates and sense-bases; the Kathāvatthu divided into one thousand topics combining five hundred points from our own speakers and five hundred from dissenting speakers; the Yamaka divided in ten ways beginning with the pair on roots and the pair on aggregates; and the Paṭṭhāna divided in twenty-four ways conditioned by cause and conditioned by objects, and he said: “Stop, venerable sir, do not propound the exposition again; I will repeat it with just this much.”

Then the Venerable Nāgasena approached the large uncountable number of arahants and said to them: “Venerable sirs, I will recite in detail the entire Abhidhamma Piṭaka, having arranged it all within these three parts: ‘wholesome states, unwholesome states, indeterminate states.’” “Good, Nāgasena, recite it.”

Then the Venerable Nāgasena recited the seven books in detail for seven months. The earth resounded, the deities cried out “Excellent!”, the Brahmās applauded, and divine sandalwood powder and divine coral tree flowers rained down.

Then the large uncountable number of arahants gave the full ordination to Venerable Nāgasena at Rakkhitatala now that he had attained twenty years of age. And fully ordained, the Venerable Nāgasena, after that night had passed, in the morning, dressed, took his bowl and robe, and entered the village for alms with his preceptor, where the following thought arose in him: “Truly my preceptor is empty, truly my preceptor is foolish, since setting aside the remainder of the Buddha’s words, he first trained me in the

Abhidhamma."

Then the Venerable Rohaṇa, knowing with his mind the thought in the mind of the Venerable Nāgasena, said to the Venerable Nāgasena: "You have thought an unsuitable thought, Nāgasena, and this is not befitting of you, Nāgasena."

Then it occurred to the Venerable Nāgasena: "Wonderful it is indeed, marvelous it is indeed, that my preceptor knows the thought in my mind with his mind. Truly my preceptor is wise. I should ask my preceptor for forgiveness." Then the Venerable Nāgasena said to the Venerable Rohaṇa: "Forgive me, venerable sir, I will not think such a thought again."

Then the Venerable Rohaṇa said to the Venerable Nāgasena: "I do not forgive you just for that much, Nāgasena. But there is, Nāgasena, a city called Sāgala and there a king named Milinda rules the kingdom. He irritates the saṅgha of bhikkhus by asking questions based on wrong view. If you go there and train that king and inspire faith in him in the Buddha's teaching, then I will forgive you."

"Never mind only King Milinda, venerable sir! If all the kings in the entire Jambudīpa were to come and ask me questions, and I would solve them all and satisfy them, would you then forgive me?" On receiving the reply "I do not forgive you," Nāgasena said, "Well then, venerable sir, where shall I stay for these three months of the rains?" "The Venerable Assagutta, Nāgasena, is dwelling in the Vattaniya monastery. Go, Nāgasena, approach the Venerable Assagutta, and bow your head at his feet in my name, and say to him: 'My preceptor, venerable sir, bows his head at your feet and inquires whether you are free from illness, free from affliction, buoyant, strong, and living at ease. My preceptor, venerable sir, has sent me to stay with you for these three months.' And when asked 'What is your preceptor's name?' you should say 'The elder Rohaṇa, venerable sir.' When asked 'What is my name?' you should say thus: 'My preceptor, venerable sir, knows your name.'" "Yes, sir," said the Venerable Nāgasena, and having paid homage to the Venerable Rohaṇa and circumambulated him keeping him on his right, taking his bowl and robe, and wandering on tour he gradually approached the Vattaniya monastery, where the Venerable Assagutta was. Having approached, he paid homage to the Venerable Assagutta and stood to one side. Standing to one side, the Venerable Nāgasena said to the Venerable Assagutta: "My preceptor, venerable sir, bows his head at your feet and inquires whether you are free from illness, free from affliction, buoyant, strong, and living at ease. My preceptor, sir, has sent me to stay with you for these three months."

Then the Venerable Assagutta said to the Venerable Nāgasena: "What is your name?" "I am called Nāgasena, venerable sir." "What is the name of your preceptor?" "My preceptor is called Rohaṇa, venerable sir." "What is my name?" "My preceptor, venerable sir, knows your name."

"Good, Nāgasena, put away your bowl and robe." "Yes, venerable sir," and having put away his bowl and robe, the next day after he had swept the dwelling he set out water for face-washing and a tooth-stick. The elder re-swept the swept place, threw away that water and brought other water, removed that tooth-stick and took another tooth-stick, and did not make conversation. Having done thus for seven days, on the seventh day when asked

again he replied the same way again, and then he gave permission for the rainy season residence.

Now at that time an important female lay follower had attended upon the Venerable Assagutta for about thirty years. At the end of the three months, she approached the Venerable Assagutta and said to him: “Is there, dear sir, another bhikkhu with you?” “There is, great lay follower, a bhikkhu named Nāgasena with me.” “Well then, dear Assagutta, consent to a meal tomorrow together with Nāgasena.” The Venerable Assagutta consented by silence.

Then the Venerable Assagutta, after that night had passed, dressed in the early morning, took his bowl and robe, and together with the Venerable Nāgasena as his attendant monk, approached the dwelling of the great female lay follower, and sat down on the prepared seat. Then that great female lay follower with her own hands satisfied and served the Venerables Assagutta and Nāgasena with delicious hard and soft food. Then the Venerable Assagutta, having eaten, withdrew his hand from his bowl, and said to the Venerable Nāgasena: “You, Nāgasena, give the benediction to the great lay follower.” Having said this, he rose from his seat and departed.

Then that great female lay follower said to the Venerable Nāgasena: “I am old, dear Nāgasena. Give me the benediction along with a profound Dhamma talk.” Then the Venerable Nāgasena gave the benediction to that great female lay follower with a profound, supramundane Dhamma talk connected with emptiness. Then for that great female lay follower, while sitting on that very seat, the dustless, stainless vision of the Dhamma arose: “Whatever is subject to arising, all that is subject to cessation.” And the Venerable Nāgasena, having given the benediction to that great female lay follower, reviewing the Dhamma he himself had taught, while sitting on that very seat, aroused insight and became established in the fruit of stream entry.

Then the Venerable Assagutta, sitting in the pavilion, knowing the attainment of the vision of the Dhamma by both, burst into applause: “Good, good, Nāgasena! With one arrow-strike, two great bodies have been pierced!” And various thousands of deities also applauded.

Then the Venerable Nāgasena rose from his seat and approached the Venerable Assagutta, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. There, the Venerable Assagutta said to the Venerable Nāgasena: “Go, Nāgasena, to Pāṭaliputta. The Venerable Dhammarakkhita is dwelling in the Asoka park in the town of Pāṭaliputta. Learn thoroughly the Buddha’s words in his presence.” “How far, venerable sir, is the town of Pāṭaliputta from here?” “A hundred yojanas, Nāgasena.” “The road is indeed long, venerable, sir, and on the way almsfood will be hard to obtain. How can I go?” “Go, Nāgasena. On the road you will obtain almsfood—fine rice without dark grains, with various curries and side dishes.” “Yes, venerable sir,” said the Venerable Nāgasena, and having paid homage to the Venerable Assagutta, he circumambulated him with his right side towards him, took his bowl and robe, and set out on tour towards Pāṭaliputta.

Now at that time a wealthy merchant from Pāṭaliputta was travelling the road to Pāṭaliputta with five hundred carts. This merchant from Pāṭaliputta saw the Venerable

Nāgasena coming from afar, and thus approached him, paid homage to him, and said: “Where are you going, dear sir?” “To Pāṭaliputta, householder.” “Good, dear sir, we too are going to Pāṭaliputta. Travel comfortably with us.”

Then the wealthy merchant from Pāṭaliputta, being pleased with the Venerable Nāgasena’s deportment, with his own hands satisfied and served the Venerable Nāgasena with delicious solid and soft food. When the Venerable Nāgasena had eaten and removed his hand from his bowl, the merchant took a certain low seat and sat down to one side. Sitting to one side, the merchant from Pāṭaliputta said to the Venerable Nāgasena: “What is your name, dear sir?” “I am called Nāgasena, householder.” “Do you know the Buddha’s words, dear sir?” “I know, householder, the Abhidhamma parts.” “It is a gain for us, dear sir, and well-gotten by us! I too, dear sir, am versed in Abhidhamma, and you are versed in Abhidhamma. Recite, dear sir, the parts of the Abhidhamma.” Then the Venerable Nāgasena taught the Abhidhamma to the merchant from Pāṭaliputta, and while he was teaching, the dustless, stainless vision of the Dhamma arose for the merchant from Pāṭaliputta: “Whatever is subject to arising, all that is subject to cessation.”

Then the merchant from Pāṭaliputta, having sent the five hundred carts ahead, staying behind himself, standing at a crossroads not far from Pāṭaliputta, said to the Venerable Nāgasena: “This, dear Nāgasena, is the road to Asoka monastery. This precious woollen blanket of ours is sixteen cubits in length and eight cubits in width. Please accept, dear sir, this precious blanket out of compassion.” The Venerable Nāgasena accepted that precious blanket out of compassion. Then the wealthy merchant from Pāṭaliputta, satisfied, elated, joyful, filled with happiness and delight, paid homage to the Venerable Nāgasena, circumambulated him, and departed.

Then the Venerable Nāgasena approached Asoka park, where the Venerable Dhammarakkhita was, and there paid homage to him and explained the reason for his coming. And in the presence of the Venerable Dhammarakkhita he mastered, by letter in three months with a single recitation, the three piṭakas of the Buddha’s words, and in another three months he applied his mind to the meaning. (…)

Then the Venerable Dhammarakkhita said to the Venerable Nāgasena: “Just as, Nāgasena, a cowherd guards the cows but others enjoy the dairy products, so too you, Nāgasena, though bearing the three piṭakas of the Buddha’s words, are not a partaker of the ascetic life.” “Let that be, venerable sir, this much suffices.” In that very day, in that very night, he attained arahantship together with the analytical knowledges, and with the penetration of truth all the deities applauded the Venerable Nāgasena, the earth quaked, the Brahmās applauded, and divine sandalwood powder and divine coral tree flowers rained down.

Now at that time the large uncountable number of arahants, having assembled at Rakkhitatala on the Himalaya mountain, sent a messenger to the Venerable Nāgasena: “Let Nāgasena come, we wish to see Nāgasena.” Then the Venerable Nāgasena, having heard the messenger’s words, disappeared from Asoka park and appeared before the large uncountable number of arahants at Rakkhitatala on the Himalaya mountain.

Then this large uncountable number of arahants said to the Venerable Nāgasena: “This King Milinda, Nāgasena, irritates the saṅgha of bhikkhus with disputation and questioning.

It would be good, Nāgasena, if you would go and tame King Milinda." "Never mind just one King Milinda, venerable sirs! If, venerable sirs, kings from the entire Jambudīpa were to come and ask me questions, I would solve them all and satisfy them. Go, venerable sirs, without fear to the city of Sāgala." Then the elder bhikkhus made Sāgala city radiant with ochre robes stirred by the breeze of seers.

Now at that time the Venerable Āyupāla was dwelling at the Saṅkheyya hermitage. Then King Milinda said to his ministers: "Delightful indeed, sirs, is this moonlit night! What recluse or brahmin should I approach today for conversation and questioning? Who is able to converse with me and resolve my doubts?" When this was said, the five hundred Bactrian Greeks said to King Milinda: "There is, your majesty, an elder named Āyupāla, master of the three piṭakas, learned and familiar with the tradition. He is now dwelling in Saṅkheyya hermitage. Go, your majesty, and ask questions of the Venerable Āyupāla." "Very well, good sirs, inform the venerable one."

Then an astrologer sent a messenger to the Venerable Āyupāla: "Venerable sir, King Milinda wishes to see the Venerable Āyupāla." And the Venerable Āyupāla responded: "Well then, let him come." Then King Milinda, surrounded by at least five hundred Bactrian Greeks, mounted an excellent chariot and approached the Saṅkheyya hermitage, where the Venerable Āyupāla was. There he exchanged greetings with the Venerable Āyupāla, and having exchanged courteous and friendly conversation, sat down to one side. Sitting to one side, King Milinda said to the Venerable Āyupāla: "For what purpose, Venerable Āyupāla, is your going forth, and what is your ultimate goal?" The elder said: "For the purpose of conducting oneself righteously and properly, your majesty, is the going forth. The fruit of the ascetic life is our ultimate goal." "But is there, venerable sir, any layperson who conducts themselves righteously and properly?" "Yes, your majesty, there are laypeople who conduct themselves righteously and properly. your majesty, when the Blessed One set in motion the wheel of Dhamma at Isipatana in the deer park at Bārāṇasī, eighteen million Brahmās penetrated the Dhamma, and the penetration of the Dhamma by deities exceeded calculation—all of them were laypeople, not gone forth.

Furthermore, your majesty, when the Blessed One was teaching the Mahāsamaya Sutta, the Mahāmaṅgala Sutta, the Samacittapariyāya Sutta, the Rāhulovāda Sutta, and the Parābhava Sutta, the penetration of the Dhamma by deities beyond calculation occurred—all of them were laypeople, not gone forth." "Well then, Venerable Āyupāla, your going forth is purposeless. The Sakyan ascetics go forth and undertake the austere practices as a result of evil kamma done previously. Those bhikkhus, Venerable Āyupāla, who eat only one meal a day, surely they were formerly thieves who stole others' wealth. Having seized others' wealth, as a result of that kamma they now eat only once a day, they cannot eat from time to time—they have no virtue, no ascetic practice, no holy life. And those bhikkhus, Venerable Āyupāla, who dwell in the open air, surely they were formerly thieves who destroyed villages. Having destroyed others' houses, as a result of that kamma they now dwell in the open air, they cannot enjoy lodgings—they have no virtue, no ascetic practice, no holy life. And those bhikkhus, Venerable Āyupāla, who never lie down, surely they were formerly highway robbers. Having seized travellers on the road, binding them and making them sit, as a result of that kamma they now never lie down, they cannot take rest lying down—they have no virtue, no ascetic practice, no holy life."

When this was said, the Venerable Āyupāla was silent and said nothing in reply. Then the five hundred Bactrian Greeks said to King Milinda: “The elder is wise, your majesty, but being unsure, he does not reply anything.”

Then King Milinda, seeing the Venerable Āyupāla silent, snapped his fingers, clapped his hands, and said to the Bactrian Greeks: “Jambudīpa is indeed empty, sirs; Jambudīpa is indeed mere prattle! There is no ascetic or brahmin who is able to converse with me to dispel my doubts.”

Then as King Milinda was looking around that entire assembly, seeing the Bactrian Greeks unafraid and undismayed, this occurred to him: “Without doubt there must be some other wise bhikkhu who is able to converse with me, since these Bactrian Greeks are not dismayed.” Then King Milinda said to them: “Is there, good sirs, any other wise bhikkhu who is able to converse with me and dispel my doubts?”

Now at that time the Venerable Nāgasena, surrounded by a community of ascetics, was the leader of a saṅgha of bhikkhus, a community leader and teacher, well known, famous, highly esteemed by many people, wise, skilful, intelligent, subtle, discriminating, capable of analysis, disciplined, confident, very learned, master of the three piṭakas, knower of the Vedas. He had a penetrating intellect, was heir to the tradition, having penetrated the analytical knowledges, he was expert in the nine scriptural divisions of the Teacher’s dispensation knowing them all by heart; he had attained to the perfections, and was skilled in the penetration into the essence of Dhamma in the Conqueror’s words; he was of inexhaustible and varied eloquence, a brilliant speaker, of beautiful speech, difficult to approach, difficult to overcome, unsurpassable, difficult to obstruct, difficult to turn back, imperturbable like the ocean, immovable like the king of mountains, conqueror in debate, dispeller of darkness, bearer of light, a great orator, confounder of opposing sectarians, trampler of other doctrines, honoured, respected, esteemed, venerated, revered by bhikkhus, bhikkhunīs, laymen, laywomen, kings, and king’s ministers, a recipient of robes, almsfood, lodgings, and requisites of medicine for the sick. He was attained to the highest gain and fame, demonstrating to the elders who are wise and endowed with attention the jewel of the nine-fold Conqueror’s dispensation, instructing in the way of Dhamma, bearing the light of Dhamma, raising up the pillar of Dhamma, performing the sacrifice of Dhamma, lifting high the banner of Dhamma, raising up the standard of Dhamma, blowing the conch of Dhamma, beating the drum of Dhamma, roaring the lion’s roar, thundering the thunder of Indra, with the great cloud of the nectar of Dhamma filled with the water of compassion, enveloped in the net of the lightning of excellent knowledge and sweet utterance, scorching the entire world. Wandering on tour through villages, towns, and royal capitals, gradually he arrived at Sāgala city. There the Venerable Nāgasena was living in Saṅkheyya hermitage together with eighty thousand bhikkhus. Hence the ancients said:

“Learned and skilled in eloquent speech,

Clever and confident;

Skilled in debate,

And expert in quick-witted response.

Those bhikkhus versed in the threefold Tipiṭaka,

and also those of the five collections;

And those of the four collections as well,

honoured Nāgasena as foremost.

Of profound wisdom and intelligence,

skilled in distinguishing the path from the wrong path;

Having attained the highest goal,

Nāgasena the confident one.

Surrounded by those bhikkhus,

skilful and speakers of truth;

Wandering through villages and towns,

he approached Sāgala.

At the Saṅkheyya hermitage,

Nāgasena then dwelt;

He teaches among people,

like a maned lion on a mountain."

Then Devamantiya said to King Milinda: "Wait, your majesty! There is, your majesty, an elder named Nāgasena—learned, skilled, intelligent, disciplined, confident, of great learning, eloquent in speech, of excellent wit, who has reached perfection in the analytical knowledges of meaning, doctrine, language, and eloquence. He is now residing at the Saṅkheyya hermitage. Go, your majesty, and ask the Venerable Nāgasena questions. He is able to converse with you and dispel your doubts." Then King Milinda, upon suddenly hearing the word "Nāgasena," experienced fear, astonishment, and a bristling of his hair. Then King Milinda said to Devamantiya: "Is the bhikkhu Nāgasena really able to converse with me?" "He is able, your majesty, even to converse with Indra, Yama, Varuṇa, Kuvera, Pajāpati, Suyāma, Santusita, the world-protectors, and even with the great Brahmā, the progenitor of all—how much more so with a mere human being!"

Then King Milinda said to Devamantiya: "Well then, Devamantiya, send a messenger to the venerable one." "Yes, lord," said Devamantiya, and he sent a messenger to the Venerable Nāgasena saying: "The king Milinda, venerable sir, desires to see you." And the Venerable Nāgasena replied: "Then let him come."

Then King Milinda, surrounded by about five hundred Bactrian Greeks, mounted an excellent chariot and with a great army approached the Saṅkheyya hermitage where the Venerable Nāgasena was. At that time, the Venerable Nāgasena was seated in the circular pavilion together with eighty thousand bhikkhus. King Milinda saw the assembly of the Venerable Nāgasena from afar, and having seen it, he said to Devamantiya: "Whose is this

great assembly, Devamantiya?" "It is the assembly of the Venerable Nāgasena, your majesty."

Then King Milinda, seeing the assembly of the Venerable Nāgasena from afar, experienced fear, astonishment, and a bristling of his hair. Then King Milinda felt like an elephant surrounded by rhinoceroses, like a serpent surrounded by eagles, like a little jackal surrounded by pythons, like a bear surrounded by buffaloes, like a frog pursued by a serpent, like a deer pursued by a leopard, like a snake encountering a snake-charmer, like a mouse encountering a cat, like a demon encountering an exorcist, like the moon seized by Rāhu, like a snake caught in a basket, like a bird entered into a cage, like a fish entered into a net, like a man entered into a forest of wild beasts, like a yakkha who has offended Vessavaṇa, like a deva whose life-span is exhausted—frightened, agitated, terrified, alarmed, with hair standing on end, dejected, dismayed, with confused mind and disturbed heart. Thinking "May this retinue not despise me," he established mindfulness and said to Devamantiya: "Do not, Devamantiya, point out the Venerable Nāgasena to me—I will recognize Nāgasena without being told." "Good, your majesty, recognize him yourself."

Now at that time, the Venerable Nāgasena was more junior than the forty thousand bhikkhus in front of him and more senior than the forty thousand bhikkhus behind him.

Then King Milinda, surveying the entire assembly of bhikkhus—front, back, and middle—saw the Venerable Nāgasena from afar, seated in the middle of the assembly of bhikkhus like a maned lion, free from fear and dread, free from hair-raising terror, free from timidity and trembling. Having seen him, he recognized him by his appearance alone, thinking "This one here must be Nāgasena."

Then King Milinda said to Devamantiya: "This one, Devamantiya, is the Venerable Nāgasena." "Yes, your majesty, this is Nāgasena. You have recognized Nāgasena well, your majesty." Then the king was pleased, thinking "Nāgasena was recognized by me without being pointed out." But then, upon seeing the Venerable Nāgasena, King Milinda experienced fear, astonishment, and a bristling of his hair.

Therefore, it was said:

"Seeing Nāgasena endowed with virtue,

well-tamed in supreme self-control;

the king

spoke these words:

'Many debates have I held,

many discussions have I witnessed;

Never was there such fear

as the dread I feel today.

Without doubt, defeat

will be mine today;

And victory will be Nāgasena’s,

for my mind is not settled.’”

External Talk is finished