Snp 5.4 — Sn 5:4 Mettagū’s Questions

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

5:4 Mettagū’s Questions

I ask you, Blessed One.

Please tell me.

I regard you as an attainer-of-knowledge,

developed in mind.

From what have the many

forms of stress

arisen in the world?

The Buddha:

You ask me
the source of stress.
I'll tell it to you
as one who discerns.
From acquisition1 as cause
the many forms of stress
come into being in the world.
Whoever, unknowing,
makes acquisitions
—the dullard—
comes to stress
again & again.
Therefore, discerning,
you shouldn't create acquisitions
as you stay focused on
the birth & origin of stress.2

Mettagū:

What we asked, you've expounded.
Now we ask something else.
Please tell us.
How do the enlightened
cross over the flood of
birth & aging,
lamentation & sorrow?
Please, sage, declare this to me
as this Dhamma has
been known by you.

The Buddha:

I will expound to you Dhamma
—here-&-now,
not quoted words—
knowing which, living mindfully,
you'll cross over beyond
entanglement in the world.

Mettagū:
And I relish, Great Seer,
that Dhamma supreme,
knowing which, living mindfully,
I'll cross over beyond
entanglement in the world.

The Buddha:
Whatever you're alert to,
above, below,
across, in between3:
Dispelling any delight,
any entrenchment
in those things,
consciousness should not take a stance
in becoming.4
The monk who dwells thus
—mindful, heedful—
letting go of his sense of mine,
knowing right here would abandon
birth & aging,
lamentation & sorrow,
stress.

Mettagū:

I relish, Gotama, the Great Seer's words
well-expounded, without acquisition,
for yes, Blessed One,
you've abandoned stress
as this Dhamma has
been known by you.
And they, too, would abandon stress
those whom you, sage,
would admonish unceasingly.
Having met you, I bow down to you,
Nāga.
Perhaps you will admonish me
unceasingly.

The Buddha:
Whoever you recognize
as a brahman, an attainer-of-knowledge
possessing nothing,
unentangled
in sensuality & becoming—
yes, he has crossed over this flood.
Having crossed to the far shore,
he's free from rigidity, free
from doubt.

And anyone who has realized,
who is an attainer-of-knowledge here,
having unentangled the bond
to becoming and non-,5
free of craving,
untroubled,

undesiring—he,

I tell you, has crossed over birth

& aging.

vv. 1049–1060

Notes

1. On the meaning of “acquisition,” see Sn 3:12, note 2.

2. This verse is identical with the second set of verses in Sn 3:12.

3. Nd II gives six different valid interpretations for ‘above, below, across, in between’:

a) above = the future; below = the past; across and in between = the present,

b) above = the deva world; below = hell; across and in between = the human world,

c) above = skillfulness; below = unskillfulness; across and in between = indeterminate mental qualities,

d) above = the property of formlessness; below = the property of sensuality; across and in between = the property of form,

e) above = feelings of pleasure; below = feelings of pain; across and in between = feelings of neither pleasure nor pain,

f) above = the body from the feet on up; below = the body from the crown of the head on down; across and in between = the middle of the body.

4. On unestablished consciousness, see SN 12:38, SN 12:63–64, SN 22:53–54, and 22:87. See also the discussion of this topic in The Paradox of Becoming, chapter 7.

5. Becoming and non-becoming (or dis-becoming) are the two most subtle objects of craving that lead on to continued existence—and suffering—in the round of birth and death. See Ud 3:10, Iti 49, and MN 49, note 10. See also, The Paradox of Becoming.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 35:197; AN 3:77–78