SN 12.11 — SN 12:11 Nutriment | Āhāra Sutta

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

Nutriment

Āhāra Sutta (SN 12:11)

This discourse incorporates the teaching on the four nutriments (see SN 12:63–64) into the pattern for dependent co-arising, placing them in the position usually occupied by clinging: after craving and before becoming. Putting nutriment in this position highlights one of the connotations of the Pali word for clinging, upādāna, which can also mean “sustenance.” It also highlights one of the connotations of the Pali word for craving, taṇhā, which can also mean “thirst.”

The Commentary to this discourse tries to fit this teaching into the three-lifetime interpretation of dependent co-arising, emphasizing the role of the four nutriments in the

mechanics of death and rebirth, but there is no need to limit the teaching to this interpretation. The teachings both in this discourse and in the following one show the complex interactions and feedback loops among the different factors of dependent co-arising, both between lifetimes and within a single lifetime—even a single moment. Craving is what takes material form, contact, intention, and consciousness—all of which precede it in the chain of dependent co-arising—and turns them into food for further becoming: continued becoming in this lifetime, and future becoming in the next.

* * *

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. There he addressed the monks, "Monks, there are these four nutriments for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those in search of a place to be born. Which four? Physical food, gross or refined; contact as the second; intellectual intention the third; and consciousness the fourth. These are the four nutriments for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those in search of a place to be born.

"Now, these four nutriments have what as their cause, what as their origination, what as their source, what as that which brings them into play? These four nutriments have craving as their cause, craving as their origination, craving as their source, craving as that which brings them into play.

"And this craving has what as its cause, what as its origination, what as its source, what as that which brings it into play? … Feeling….

"And this feeling has what as its cause…? … Contact….

"And this contact has what as its cause…? … The six sense media….

"And these six sense media have what as their cause…? … Name-&-form….

"And this name-&-form has what as its cause…? … Consciousness….

"And this consciousness has what as its cause…? … Fabrication….

"And this fabrication has what as its cause, what as its origination, what as its source, what as that which brings it into play? Fabrication has ignorance as its cause, ignorance as its origination, ignorance as its source, ignorance as that which brings it into play.

"Thus, from ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

"From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

"From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.

"From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

“From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.

“From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.

“From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.

“From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.

“From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.

“From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

“From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications. From the cessation of fabrications comes the cessation of consciousness. From the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-&-form. From the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of the six sense media. From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance. From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.”

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 12:63–64