SN 12.12 — Phagguna of the Top-Knot

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
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Text

Linked Discourses 12.12

2. Fuel

Phagguna of the Top-Knot

At Sāvatthī.

“Mendicants, these four fuels maintain sentient beings that have been born and help those about to be born. What four? Edible food, whether solid or subtle; contact is the second, mental intention the third, and consciousness the fourth. These are the four fuels that maintain sentient beings that have been born and help those that are about to be born.”

When he said this, Venerable Phagguna of the Top-Knot said to the Buddha, “But sir, who consumes consciousness as fuel?”

“That’s not a cogent question,” said the Buddha.

“I don’t speak of one who consumes. If I were to speak of one who consumes, then it would be cogent to ask who consumes. But I don’t speak like that. Hence it would be cogent to ask: ‘For what is consciousness the fuel?’ And a cogent answer to this would be: ‘Consciousness as fuel is a requirement for regeneration into a new state of existence in the future. When the being is present, there are the six sense fields. The six sense fields are requirements for contact.’”

“But sir, who contacts?”

“That’s not a cogent question,” said the Buddha.

“I don’t speak of one who contacts. If I were to speak of one who contacts, then it would be cogent to ask who contacts. But I don’t speak like that. Hence it would be cogent to ask: ‘What is a requirement for contact?’ And a cogent answer to this would be: ‘The six sense fields are requirements for contact. Contact is a requirement for feeling.’”

“But sir, who feels?”

“That’s not a cogent question,” said the Buddha.

“I don’t speak of one who feels. If I were to speak of one who feels, then it would be cogent to ask who feels. But I don’t speak like that. Hence it would be cogent to ask: ‘What is a requirement for feeling?’ And a cogent answer to this would be: ‘Contact is a requirement for feeling. Feeling is a requirement for craving.’”

“But sir, who craves?”

“That’s not a cogent question,” said the Buddha.

“I don’t speak of one who craves. If I were to speak of one who craves, then it would be cogent to ask who craves. But I don’t speak like that. Hence it would be cogent to ask: ‘What is a requirement for craving?’ And a cogent answer to this would be: ‘Feeling is a requirement for craving. Craving is a requirement for grasping.’”

“But sir, who grasps?”

“That’s not a cogent question,” said the Buddha.

“I don’t speak of one who grasps. If I were to speak of one who grasps, then it would be cogent to ask who grasps. But I don’t speak like that. Hence it would be cogent to ask: ‘What is a requirement for grasping?’ And a cogent answer to this would be: ‘Craving is a requirement for grasping. Grasping is a requirement for continued existence.’ … That is how this entire mass of suffering originates.

When the six fields of contact fade away and cease with no residue left behind, contact ceases. When contact ceases, feeling ceases. When feeling ceases, craving ceases. When craving ceases, grasping ceases. When grasping ceases, continued existence ceases. When continued existence ceases, rebirth ceases. When rebirth ceases, old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress cease. That is how this entire mass of suffering ceases.”