

SN 12.12
Saṃyutta Nikāya
The Connected Discourses

Nidānavagga Saṃyutta
(Group of Connected Discourses on Causation)

Nidāna Saṃyutta
(Connected Discourses on Causation)

Āhāra Vagga
(Section on Nourishment)

Moḷiyaphagguna Sutta
“Discourse to the Venerable Moḷiyaphagguna”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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Once, while The Blessed One was staying in Sāvattṭhī, He addressed the Bhikkhus by saying:

“Bhikkhus, there are these four kinds of nourishment which are responsible for the sustenance of beings that are already reborn, and for those that are about to be reborn. What are these four?

“The nourishment of ingestible food one consumes, whether it is of a rough or refined quality. Secondly, there is contact. Then, there is intentional thinking as the third nourishment; that is, mental volition. And fourthly, there is consciousness.

“Now, Bhikkhus, these are the four kinds of nourishment which are responsible for the sustenance of beings that are already reborn, and for those that are about to be reborn.”

When this was stated, the Venerable Moḷiyaphagguna addressed The Blessed One by asking:

a. “But, Bhante, who is it that consumes the nourishment of consciousness?”

“That’s not a proper question to be asked,” replied The Blessed One, as He added:

“I do not teach you by saying: ‘there is someone who consumes...’

“But if I had been instructing you by saying: *‘there is someone who consumes...’*, then, your question would have been valid, where you would be appropriately inquiring by asking the question:

‘Bhante, who is it that consumes the nourishment of consciousness?’

“So, seeing that I do not declare nor ever taught you in this manner, your question is wrongly formulated!”

“However, if you were to ask me instead:

‘Bhante, what is it that consciousness nourishes? What is it that depends and relies on consciousness for its condition and sustenance?’

“Such a valid question, indeed, would be an appropriate one! For, it would then deserve its appropriate answer, which is:

“Consciousness is the nourishment that serves as the very condition which sustains future rebecomings. Thus, it is the responsible agent bringing forth renewed existence.

“Now, once rebecoming has already taken place, then there is the immediate manifestation of the six sense spheres.

“And as a result of the six sense spheres now being present, therein you have the very condition for contact to take place!”

Then, the Venerable Moliyaphagga asked:

b. “But Bhante, who is it that ‘makes contact’?”

“That’s not a proper question to be asked,” replied The Blessed One, as He added:

“I do not teach you by saying: *‘there is someone who makes contact...’*

“But if I had been instructing you by saying: *‘there is someone who makes contact...’*, then, your question would have been valid, where you would be appropriately inquiring by asking the question:

‘Bhante, who is it that makes contact?’

“So, seeing that I do not declare nor ever taught you in this manner, your question is wrongly formulated!”

“However, if you were to ask me instead:

‘Bhante, what is it that conditions and brings about contact? What is it upon which contact itself rests, as its sustenance?’

“Then such a valid question, indeed, would be an appropriate one! For, it would then deserve its appropriate answer, which is:

“The six sense spheres are the nourishment that serve as the very condition that sustains contact. Meanwhile, contact in turn, is the responsible agent, the very condition that brings about feeling.

Then, the Venerable Moliyaphaggunā asked:

c. “But Bhante, who is it that ‘feels?’”

“That’s not a proper question to be asked,” replied The Blessed One, as He added:

“I do not teach you by saying: *‘there is someone who feels...’*

“But if I had been instructing you by saying: *‘there is someone who feels...’*, then, your question would have been valid, where you would be appropriately inquiring by asking the question:

‘Bhante, who is it that feels?’

“So, seeing that I do not declare nor ever taught you in this manner, your question is wrongly formulated!”

“However, if you were to ask me instead:

‘Bhante, what is it that conditions and brings about feeling? What is it upon which feeling itself rests, as its sustenance?’

“Then such a valid question, indeed, would be an appropriate one! For it would then deserve its appropriate answer, which is:

“Contact is the nourishment, that serves as the very condition which sustains feeling. Meanwhile, feeling in turn, is the responsible agent, the very condition that brings about craving.

Then, the Venerable Moliyaphaggunā asked:

d. “But Bhante, who is it that ‘does the craving?’”

“That’s not a proper question to be asked,” replied The Blessed One, as He added:

“I do not teach you by saying: *‘there is someone who does the craving...’*”

“But if I had been instructing you by saying: *‘there is someone who does the craving...’*, then, your question would have been valid, where you would be appropriately inquiring by asking the question:

‘Bhante, who is it that does the craving?’

“So, seeing that I do not declare nor ever taught you in this manner, your question is wrongly formulated!”

“However, if you were to ask me instead:

‘Bhante, what is it that conditions and brings about craving? What is it upon which craving itself rests, as its sustenance?’

“Then such a valid question, indeed, would be an appropriate one! For, it would then deserve its appropriate answer, which is:

“Feeling is the nourishment, that serves as the very condition which sustains craving. Meanwhile, craving in turn, is the responsible agent, the very condition that brings about grabbing and holding on.

Then, the Venerable Moliyaphagga asked:

e. “But Bhante, who is it that ‘grabs and does the holding on?’”

“That’s not a proper question to be asked,” replied The Blessed One, as He added:

“I do not teach you by saying: *‘there is someone who grabs or does the holding on...’*”

“But if I had been instructing you by saying: *‘there is someone who grabs and does the holding on...’*, then, your question would have been valid, where you would be appropriately inquiring by asking the question:

‘Bhante, who is it that grabs or does the holding on?’

“So, seeing that I do not declare nor ever taught you in this manner, your question is wrongly formulated!”

“However, if you were to ask me instead:

‘Bhante, what is it that conditions and brings about grabbing and holding on? What is it upon which grabbing itself rests, as its sustenance?’

“Then such a valid question, indeed, would be an appropriate one! For it would then deserve its appropriate answer, which is:

“Craving is the nourishment, that serves as the very condition which sustains grabbing and holding on. Meanwhile, grabbing or holding on in turn, is the responsible agent, the very condition that brings about the desire for rebecoming.

“Furthermore, the desire for rebecoming is the nourishment that serves as the very condition which sustains birth. And with birth serving as the condition and nourishment, there manifests aging and getting old, falling sick, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, depression, and anguish. It is in this manner that the cycle of this whole mass of suffering continues on endlessly.

“However, Phagguṇa, if and when the six sense spheres are stopped in their tracks, without any opportunity for them to linger on or have an influence any further, then, as a result, contact itself comes to a full stop and ceases.

“And when contact ceases, then feeling itself comes to a full stop and ceases.

“Then, with feeling having ceased, craving naturally comes to a full stop and ceases.

“Once craving has ceased, then grabbing or holding on does not take place; hence, that too ceases.

“And when grabbing has ceased, the desire to rebecome is no more; so, it also ceases.

“And with rebecoming fully stopped, then rebirth is cut off and no more, for it too would have now ceased.

“And, with rebirth having come to a full stop and ceased, then, aging and getting old, falling sick, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, depression, and anguish, all these come to a full stop and cease as well.

“In this way, the cycle of this whole mass of suffering comes to a full stop and ceases, once and for all.”

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