SN 12.48 — SN 12:48 The Cosmologist | Lokāyatika 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

The Cosmologist

Lokāyatika Sutta (SN 12:48)

The Oneness of all being is sometimes taught as a basic Buddhist principle, but this discourse shows that the Buddha himself rejected the idea. It is simply one of the extremes that he avoided by teaching dependent co-arising.

* * *

Near Sāvatthī. Then a brahman cosmologist1 went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “Now,

then, Master Gotama, does everything2 exist?"

"'Everything exists' is the senior form of cosmology, brahman."

"Then, Master Gotama, does everything not exist?"

"'Everything does not exist' is the second form of cosmology, brahman."

"Then is everything a Oneness?"

"'Everything is a Oneness' is the third form of cosmology, brahman."

"Then is everything a plurality?"

"'Everything is a plurality is the fourth form of cosmology, brahman. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: 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."

"Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has Master Gotama—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha of monks. May Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life."

Notes

1. The cosmologist (lokāyata) schools of thought reasoned from what they saw as the basic principles of the physical cosmos in formulating their teachings on how life should be lived. In modern times, they would correspond to those who base their philosophies on principles drawn from the physical sciences, such as evolutionary biology or quantum physics. Although the cosmologists of India in the Buddha's time differed on first principles, they tended to be more unanimous in using their first principles—whatever they were—to argue for hedonism as the best approach to life.

2. On the meaning of "everything" (or "all"—sabba) here, see SN 35:23. For more on this topic, see The Mind Like Fire Unbound, Chapter 1.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 1; SN 12:15; SN 35:82