SN 12.65 — SN 12:65 The City | Nagara Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

The City

Nagara Sutta (SN 12:65)

Near Sāvatthī. “Monks, before my awakening, when I was just an unawakened bodhisatta, the realization came to me: ‘How this world has fallen on difficulty! It is born, it ages, it dies, it falls away & rearises, but it does not discern the escape from this stress, from this aging-&-death. O when will it discern the escape from this stress, from this aging-&-death?’

“Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Aging-&-death exist when what exists? From what as a requisite condition come aging-&-death?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Aging-&-death exist when birth exists. From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&-death.’ Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Birth exists

when what exists? From what as a requisite condition comes birth?' From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: 'Birth exists when becoming exists. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth... 'Name-&-form exists when what exists? From what as a requisite condition is there name-&-form?' From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: 'Name-&-form exists when consciousness exists. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.' Then the thought occurred to me, 'Consciousness exists when what exists? From what as a requisite condition comes consciousness?' From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: 'Consciousness exists when name-&-form exists. From name-&-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness.'

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'This consciousness turns back at name-&-form, and goes no farther. It is to this extent that there is birth, aging, death, falling away, & re-arising, i.e., from name-&-form 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.... Thus is the origination of this entire mass of stress. Origination, origination.' Vision arose, clear knowing arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before.

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'Aging-&-death don't exist when what doesn't exist? From the cessation of what comes the cessation of aging-&-death?' From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: 'Aging-&-death don't exist when birth doesn't exist. From the cessation of birth comes the cessation of aging-&-death' .... 'Name-&-form doesn't exist when what doesn't exist? From the cessation of what comes the cessation of name-&-form?' From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: 'Name-&-form doesn't exist when consciousness doesn't exist. From the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-&-form.' Then the thought occurred to me, 'Consciousness doesn't exist when what doesn't exist? From the cessation of what comes the cessation of consciousness?' From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: 'Consciousness doesn't exist when name-&-form doesn't exist. From the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of consciousness.'

"The thought occurred to me, 'I have attained this path to awakening, i.e., from the cessation of name-&-form 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. Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of stress. Cessation, cessation.' Vision arose, clear knowing arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before.

“It’s just as if a man, traveling along a wilderness track, were to see an ancient path, an ancient road, traveled by people of former times. He would follow it. Following it, he would see an ancient city, an ancient capital inhabited by people of former times, complete with parks, groves, & ponds, walled, delightful. He would go to address the king or the king’s minister, saying, ‘Sire, you should know that while traveling along a wilderness track I saw an ancient path… I followed it… I saw an ancient city, an ancient capital… complete with parks, groves, & ponds, walled, delightful. Sire, rebuild that city!’ The king or king’s minister would rebuild the city, so that at a later date the city would become powerful, rich, & well-populated, fully grown & prosperous.

“In the same way I saw an ancient path, an ancient road, traveled by the Rightly Self-awakened Ones of former times. And what is that ancient path, that ancient road, traveled by the Rightly Self-awakened Ones of former times? Just this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. That is the ancient path, the ancient road, traveled by the Rightly Self-awakened Ones of former times. I followed that path. Following it, I came to direct knowledge of aging-&-death, direct knowledge of the origination of aging-&-death, direct knowledge of the cessation of aging-&-death, direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of aging-&-death. I followed that path. Following it, I came to direct knowledge of birth… becoming… clinging… craving… feeling… contact… the six sense media… name-&-form… consciousness, direct knowledge of the origination of consciousness, direct knowledge of the cessation of consciousness, direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of consciousness. I followed that path.

“Following it, I came to direct knowledge of fabrications, direct knowledge of the origination of fabrications, direct knowledge of the cessation of fabrications, direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of fabrications. Knowing that directly, I have revealed it to monks, nuns, male lay followers & female lay followers, so that this holy life has become powerful, rich, detailed, well-populated, wide-spread, proclaimed among devas & human beings.”

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 82; SN 12:10; SN 35:82