SN 41.1 — Saṃyojana Sutta — Discourse on the Fetter

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Text

At one time, several senior Bhikkhus were staying near Migapathaka, at the Wild Mango Grove. It was during this time that one day, having returned from their alms round and having eaten their noon-day meal, these Bhikkhus sat together in the pavilion, whereby the following discussion developed among them:

“Friends, we use the term ‘fetter’ or ‘bond’ and all that gets ‘fettered’ or ‘bonded.’ Now, are these two one and the same thing or are they different in both meaning and phrasing? Or do they differ only in the phrasing?”

Some of these Bhikkhus began addressing this matter by saying: “Friends, in using the term ‘fetter’ or ‘bond’ and all that gets ‘fettered’ or ‘bonded,’ these things are different in both meaning and phrasing.”

While other Bhikkhus stated: “Friends, the term ‘fetter’ or ‘bond’ and all that gets ‘fettered’ or ‘bonded,’ are one and the same thing. So, they differ only in their phrasing.”

Meanwhile, the businessman Citta, a lay disciple of the Blessed One, had just arrived at Migapathaka to take care of some business. And being informed about what the Bhikkhus nearby had been discussing, sitting at the pavilion, he went up to them. After bowing respectfully to the Bhikkhus, Citta sat down to one side and then said to them: “Bhantes, I heard that you were engaged in a conversation as to whether the term ‘fetter’ or ‘bond’ and all that gets ‘fettered’ or ‘bonded,’ are one and the same thing, or whether they are different in both meaning and phrasing, or if they differ only in the phrasing.”

“That is correct, householder,” replied the Bhikkhus.

“Bhantes, the term ‘fetter’ or ‘bond’ and all that gets ‘fettered’ or ‘bonded,’ these things are different both in meaning and in phrasing.

I will share with you a simile to demonstrate what I mean, as it is through the use of similes that some wise people understand the full meaning of what is being said.

Consider two oxen: one white and one black, yoked together by a single harness or yoke. What do you suppose would be the correct way to describe their situation? The black ox is the yoke binding the white ox, or the white ox is the yoke binding the black ox?”

“No, householder. It would not be appropriate to describe it so, for neither the black ox is the yoke binding the white ox, nor is the white ox the yoke binding the black ox. The yoke

itself is the binding harness that is holding them to each other."

"In the same manner Bhantes, the eye cannot be considered to be the fetter for visual objects, nor are visual objects to be considered as the fetters binding the eye. It is the craving or lust that arises as a result of the eye and visual objects coming together that is the fetter.

The ear cannot be considered to be the fetter for auditory objects or sounds, nor are sounds the fetters binding the ear. It is the craving or lust that arises as a result of the ear and sounds coming together that is the fetter.

The nose cannot be considered to be the fetter for smells, nor are these smells the fetters binding the nose. It is the craving or lust that arises as a result of the nose and smells coming together that is the fetter.

The tongue cannot be considered to be the fetter for tastes or flavors, nor are these flavors the fetters binding the tongue. It is the craving or lust that arises as a result of the tongue and flavors coming together that is the fetter.

The body cannot be considered to be the fetter for tactile objects, nor are these tactile objects the fetters binding the body. It is the craving or lust that arises as a result of the body and tactile objects coming together that is the fetter.

The mind cannot be considered to be the fetter for thoughts or mental objects, nor are these mental objects the fetters binding the mind. It is the craving or lust that arises as a result of the mind and mental objects coming together that is the fetter.

"You're so fortunate, householder!" exclaimed the Bhikkhus. "It is such a great gain for you and for us, as you clearly possess the Eye of Wisdom with which you comprehend, and with such ease, the very depths of the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One."

Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu

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