SN 41.6 — SN 41:6 With Kāmabhū (On the Cessation of Perception & Feeling) | Kāmabhū Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

Source: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/SN/SN41_6.html

Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

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Text

With Kāmabhū (On the Cessation of Perception & Feeling)

Kāmabhū Sutta (SN 41:6)

This discourse is a slightly expanded version of a discussion of the same topic given in MN 44.

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On one occasion Ven. Kāmabhū was staying near Macchikāsaṇḍa in the Wild Mango Grove. Then Citta the householder went to him and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Kāmabhū, “Venerable sir, how many

(types of) fabrications are there?"

"There are three fabrications, householder: bodily-fabrications, verbal fabrications, & mental fabrications."

"Very good, venerable sir." And, delighting in and approving of Ven. Kāmabhū's answer, Citta asked him a further question: "But what are bodily-fabrications? What are verbal fabrications? What are mental fabrications?"

"In-&-out breaths are bodily fabrications. Directed thought & evaluation are verbal fabrications. Perceptions & feelings are mental fabrications."

"Very good, venerable sir." And, delighting in and approving of Ven. Kāmabhū's answer, Citta asked him a further question: "But why are in-&-out breaths bodily fabrications? Why are directed thought & evaluation verbal fabrications? Why are perceptions & feelings mental fabrications?"

"In-&-out breaths are bodily; these are things tied up with the body. That's why in-&-out breaths are bodily fabrications. Having first directed one's thoughts and made an evaluation, one then breaks out into speech. That's why directed thought & evaluation are verbal fabrications. Perceptions & feelings are mental; these are things tied up with the mind. That's why perceptions & feelings are mental fabrications."

"Very good, venerable sir." And, delighting in and approving of Ven. Kāmabhū's answer, Citta asked him a further question: "Now, how does the attainment of the cessation of perception & feeling come about?"

"The thought does not occur to a monk as he is attaining the cessation of perception & feeling that 'I am about to attain the cessation of perception & feeling' or that 'I am attaining the cessation of perception & feeling' or that 'I have attained the cessation of perception & feeling.' Instead, the way his mind has previously been developed leads him to that state."

"Very good, venerable sir." And, delighting in and approving of Ven. Kāmabhū's answer, Citta asked him a further question: "When a monk is attaining the cessation of perception & feeling, which things cease first: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, or mental fabrications?"

"When a monk is attaining the cessation of perception & feeling, verbal fabrications cease first, then bodily fabrications, then mental fabrications."1

"Very good, venerable sir." And, delighting in and approving of Ven. Kāmabhū's answer, Citta asked him a further question: "What is the difference between a monk who has died & passed away and a monk who has attained the cessation of perception & feeling?"

“In the case of a monk who has died & passed away, his bodily fabrication has ceased & subsided, verbal fabrication has ceased & subsided, mental fabrication has ceased & subsided, his life force is totally ended, his heat is dissipated, and his faculties are shut down. But in the case of a monk who has attained the cessation of perception & feeling, his bodily fabrication has ceased & subsided, verbal fabrication has ceased & subsided, mental fabrication has ceased & subsided, his life force is not ended, his heat is not dissipated, and his faculties are bright & clear. This is the difference between a monk who has died & passed away and a monk who has attained the cessation of perception & feeling.”2

“Very good, venerable sir.” And, delighting in and approving of Ven. Kāmabhū’s answer, Citta asked him a further question: “Now, how does emergence from the cessation of perception & feeling come about?”

“The thought does not occur to a monk as he is emerging from the cessation of perception & feeling that ‘I am about to emerge from the cessation of perception & feeling’ or that ‘I am emerging from the cessation of perception & feeling’ or that ‘I have emerged from the cessation of perception & feeling.’ Instead, the way his mind has previously been developed leads him to that state.”

“Very good, venerable sir.” And, delighting in and approving of Ven. Kāmabhū’s answer, Citta asked him a further question: “When a monk is emerging from the cessation of perception & feeling, which things arise first: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, or mental fabrications?”

“When a monk is emerging from the cessation of perception & feeling, mental fabrications arise first, then bodily fabrications, then verbal fabrications.”

“Very good, venerable sir.” And, delighting in and approving of Ven. Kāmabhū’s answer, Citta asked him a further question: “When a monk has emerged from the cessation of perception & feeling, how many contacts make contact?”

“When a monk has emerged from the cessation of perception & feeling, three contacts make contact: contact with emptiness, contact with the themeless, & contact with the undirected.”3

“Very good, venerable sir.” And, delighting in and approving of Ven. Kāmabhū’s answer, Citta asked him a further question: “When a monk has emerged from the cessation of perception & feeling, to what does his mind lean, to what does it tend, to what does it incline?”

“When a monk has emerged from the cessation of perception & feeling, his mind leans to seclusion, tends to seclusion, inclines to seclusion.”4

“Very good, venerable sir.” And, delighting in and approving of Ven. Kāmabhū’s answer, Citta asked him a further question: “How many mental qualities are of great help in the attainment of the cessation of perception & feeling?”

“Actually, householder, you have asked last what should have been asked first. Nevertheless, I will answer you. Two qualities are of great help in the attainment of the cessation of perception & feeling: tranquility & insight.”5

Notes

1. According to SN 36:11, verbal fabrication grows still on attaining the second jhāna; bodily fabrication grows still on attaining the fourth jhāna; mental fabrication grows still on attaining the cessation of perception & feeling.

2. This question and answer are not included in MN 44.

3. Emptiness, the themeless, & the undirected are names for a state of concentration that lies on the threshold of unbinding. They differ only in how they are approached. According to the commentary, they color one’s first apprehension of unbinding: a meditator who has been focusing on the theme of inconstancy will first apprehend unbinding as themeless; one who has been focusing on the theme of stress will first apprehend it as undirected; one who has been focusing on the theme of not-self will first apprehend it as emptiness.

4. According to the commentary, “seclusion” here stands for unbinding. On emerging from the cessation of perception & feeling, and having had contact with emptiness/the themeless/the undirected, the mind inclines naturally to a direct experience of unbinding.

5. This question and answer are also not included in MN 44.