SN 44.8 — Vacchagotta Sutta: With Vacchagotta

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Source revision: sha256:7c411108530c04aafcca0ac43267ed12227cbb2653320e8ae0bb686e566bb783

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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

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer 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, is the cosmos eternal?"

"That has not been declared by me, Vaccha: 'The cosmos is eternal.'"

"Well then, Master Gotama, is the cosmos not eternal?"

"Vaccha, that too has not been declared by me: 'The cosmos is not eternal.'"

"Then is the cosmos finite?"... "Is the cosmos infinite?"... "Is the body the same as the soul?"... "Is the body one thing, and the soul another?"... "Does the Tathagata exist after death?"... "Does the Tathagata not exist after death?"... "Does the Tathagata both exist and not exist after death?"... "Does the Tathagata neither exist nor not exist after death?"

"Vaccha, that too has not been declared by me: 'The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death."

"Now, Master Gotama, what is the cause, what is the reason why — when wanderers of other sects are asked in this way, they answer that 'The cosmos is eternal' or 'The cosmos is not eternal' or 'The cosmos is finite' or 'The cosmos is infinite' or 'The body is the same as the soul' or 'The body is one thing and the soul another' or 'The Tathagata exists after death' or 'The Tathagata does not exist after death' or 'The Tathagata both exists and does not exist after death" or 'The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death,' yet when Master Gotama is asked in this way, he does not answer that 'The cosmos is eternal' or 'The cosmos is not eternal' or 'The cosmos is finite' or 'The cosmos is infinite' or 'The body is the same as the soul' or 'The body is one thing and the soul another' or 'The Tathagata exists after death' or 'The Tathagata does not exist after death' or 'The Tathagata both exists and does not exist after death" or 'The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death'?"

"Vaccha, the members of other sects assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

"They assume feeling to be the self...

"They assume perception to be the self...

"They assume fabrications to be the self...

"They assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. That is why, when asked in this way, they answer that 'The cosmos is eternal'... or that 'The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death.'

"But the Tathagata, worthy and rightly self-awakened, does not assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

"He does not assume feeling to be the self...

"He does not assume perception to be the self...

"He does not assume fabrications to be the self...

"He does not assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. That is why, when asked in this way, he does not answer that 'The cosmos is eternal'... or that 'The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death.'"

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer, getting up from his seat, went to Ven. Maha Moggallana 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 [addressed the same questions to Ven. Maha Moggallana and received exactly the same explanation].

"Amazing, Master Moggallana! Astounding! How the meaning and phrasing of the teacher and disciple agree, coincide, and do not diverge from one another with regard to the supreme teaching! Just now, Master Moggallana, I went to Gotama the contemplative and, on arrival, asked him about this matter, and he answered me with the same words, the same phrasing, as Master Moggallana. Amazing, Master Moggallana! Astounding! How the meaning and phrasing of the teacher and disciple agree, coincide, and do not diverge from one another with regard to the supreme teaching!"

See also: other suttas in the Avyakata Samyutta (and the translator's Introduction); AN 4.42.