

THE QUESTIONS OF KING MILINDA

BOOK II.

LAKKHANA PAÑHA.

THE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHICAL QUALITIES.

CHAPTER 1.

1. [25] Now Milinda the king went up to where the venerable Nâgasena was, and addressed him with the greetings and compliments of friendship and courtesy, and took his seat respectfully apart. And Nâgasena reciprocated his courtesy, so that the heart of the king was propitiated.

And Milinda began by asking, 1'How is your Reverence known, and what, Sir, is your name?'

'I am known as Nâgasena, O king, and it is by that name that my brethren in the faith address me. But although parents, O king, give such a name as Nâgasena, or Sûrasena, or Virasena, or Sîhasena, yet this, Sire,--Nâgasena and so on--is only a generally understood term, a designation in common use. For there is no permanent individuality (no soul) involved in the matter 2.'

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Then Milinda called upon the Yonakas and the brethren to witness: 'This Nâgasena says there is no permanent individuality (no soul) implied in his name. Is it now even possible to approve him in that?' And turning to Nâgasena, he said: 'If, most reverend Nâgasena, there be no permanent individuality (no soul) involved in the matter, who is it, pray, who gives to you members of the Order your robes and food and lodging and necessaries for the sick? Who is it who enjoys such things when given? Who is it who lives a life of righteousness? Who is it who devotes himself to meditation? Who is it who attains to the goal of the Excellent Way, to the Nirvâna of Arahatship? And who is it who destroys living creatures? who is it who takes what is not his own? who is it who lives an evil life of worldly lusts, who speaks lies, who drinks strong drink, who (in a word) commits any one of the five sins which work out their bitter fruit even in this life 1? If that be so there is neither merit nor demerit; there is neither doer nor causer of good or evil deeds 2; there is neither fruit nor result of good or evil Karma 3. [26]--If, most reverend Nâgasena, we are to think that were a man

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to kill you there would be no murder 1, then it follows that there are no real masters or teachers in your Order, and that your ordinations are void.--You tell me that your brethren in the Order are in the habit of addressing you as Nâgasena. Now what is that Nâgasena? Do you mean to say that the hair is Nâgasena?'

'I don't say that, great king.'

'Or the hairs on the body, perhaps?'

'Certainly not.'

'Or is it the nails, the teeth, the skin, the flesh, the nerves, the bones, the marrow, the kidneys, the heart, the liver, the abdomen, the spleen, the lungs, the larger intestines, the lower intestines, the stomach, the fæces, the bile, the phlegm, the pus, the blood, the sweat, the fat, the tears, the serum, the saliva, the mucus, the oil that lubricates the joints, the urine, or the brain, or any or all of these, that is Nâgasena [2](#)?''

And to each of these he answered no.

'Is it the outward form then (Rûpa) that is Nâgasena, or the sensations (Vedanâ), or the ideas (Saññâ), or the confections (the constituent elements of character, Samkhârâ), or the consciousness (Vigñâna), that is Nâgasena [3](#)?''

And to each of these also he answered no.

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'Then is it all these Skandhas combined that are Nâgasena?'

'No! great king.'

'But is there anything outside the five Skandhas that is Nâgasena?'

And still he answered no.

'Then thus, ask as I may, I can discover no Nâgasena. Nâgasena is a mere empty sound. Who then is the Nâgasena that we see before us? It is a falsehood that your reverence has spoken, an untruth!'

And the venerable Nâgasena said to Milinda the king: 'You, Sire, have been brought up in great luxury, as beseems your noble birth. If you were to walk this dry weather on the hot and sandy ground, trampling under foot the gritty, gravelly grains of the hard sand, your feet would hurt you. And as your body would be in pain, your mind would be disturbed, and you would experience a sense of bodily suffering. How then did you come, on foot, or in a chariot?'

'I did not come, Sir, on foot [27]. I came in a carriage.'

'Then if you came, Sire, in a carriage, explain to me what that is. Is it the pole that is the chariot?'

'I did not say that.'

'Is it the axle that is the chariot?'

'Certainly not.'

'Is it the wheels, or the framework, or the ropes, or the yoke, or the spokes of the wheels, or the goad, that are the chariot?'

And to all these he still answered no.

'Then is it all these parts of it that are the chariot?'

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'No, Sir.'

'But is there anything outside them that is the chariot?'

And still he answered no.

'Then thus, ask as I may, I can discover no chariot. Chariot is a mere empty sound. What then is the chariot you say you came in? It is a falsehood that your Majesty has spoken, an untruth! There is no such thing as a chariot! You are king over all India, a mighty monarch. Of whom then are you afraid that you speak untruth? And he called upon the Yonakas and the brethren to witness, saying: 'Milinda the king here has said that he came by carriage. But when asked in that case to explain what the carriage was, he is unable to establish what he averred. Is it, forsooth, possible to approve him in that?'

When he had thus spoken the five hundred Yonakas shouted their applause, and said to the king: Now let your Majesty get out of that if you can?'

And Milinda the king replied to Nâgasena, and said: 'I have spoken no untruth, reverend Sir. It is on account of its having all these things--the pole, and the axle, the wheels, and the framework, the ropes, the yoke, the spokes, and the goad--that it comes under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of "chariot."'

'Very good! Your Majesty has rightly grasped the meaning of "chariot." And just even so it is on account of all those things you questioned me about--[28] the thirty-two kinds of organic matter in a human body, and the five constituent elements of being--that I come under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of "Nâgasena."'

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[paragraph continues] For it was said, Sire, by our Sister Vagirâ in the presence of the Blessed One:

'''Just as it is by the condition precedent of the co-existence of its various parts that the word 'chariot' is used, just so is it that when the Skandhas are there we talk of a 'being 1.''''

'Most wonderful, Nâgasena, and most strange. Well has the puzzle put to you, most difficult though it was, been solved. Were the Buddha himself here he would approve your answer. Well done, well done, Nâgasena!'

