

Questions Put Aside: I

Given that the Buddha's primary focus as a teacher was on distinguishing whether actions are skillful or unskillful in leading to awakening, and given that the activities of asking and answering a question count as actions, it is only natural that he would have to focus on the issue of which questions are skillful to answer and which are not. With some questions, he concluded that it would be unskillful to answer them in certain situations, but not in others, largely for reasons of etiquette. With other questions, he concluded that it would be unskillful to answer them in any situation because they were inherently uncondusive to awakening.

The questions the Buddha put aside thus fall into two distinct categories. The first consists of questions that can have true and beneficial answers, but which the Buddha sometimes put aside out of considerations of time and place. The second category consists of questions for which there is no beneficial answer—in some cases, the issue is left open as to whether there even *is* a true or a false answer—so the Buddha put them aside regardless of time or place. We will discuss the first category in this chapter, and the second category in the next.

Only a few questions fall into this first category, and they cover two topics: the teachings and attainments of the teachers of other sects, and the results of unskillful forms of livelihood. These are sensitive matters, especially for a teacher who wants to avoid the harm that comes with disparaging others or exalting himself.

The correct categorical answers concerning these topics are actually quite clear. With regard to the first topic, we have already noted in Chapter Three the passage from SN 48:53 [§144] stating that one of the realizations following on the attainment of stream-entry, the first level of awakening, is this:

“Furthermore, the monk who is a learner [one who has attained any of the first three levels of awakening] reflects, ‘Is there outside of this [Dhamma & Vinaya] any contemplative or brahman who teaches the true, genuine, & accurate Dhamma like the Blessed One?’ And he discerns, ‘No, there is no contemplative or brahman outside of this [Dhamma & Vinaya] who teaches the true, genuine, & accurate Dhamma like the Blessed One.’”

This point is seconded in MN 48 [§143]:

“Furthermore, the disciple of the noble ones considers thus: ‘Is there, outside of this [Dhamma & Vinaya], any other contemplative or brahman endowed with the sort of view with which I am endowed?’

“He discerns that, ‘There is no other contemplative or brahman outside of this [Dhamma & Vinaya] endowed with the sort of view with which I am endowed.’ This is the third knowledge attained by him that is noble, transcendent, not held in common with run-of-the-mill people.”

This fact is not always stated in a general, impersonal form. Occasionally the Buddha, when speaking to monks, would single out a particular sectarian teacher for harsh criticism. As might be expected—given that the basic principle of his teaching concerns action and result—he reserved his harshest criticism for a teacher, Makkhali Gosāla, who taught that action bears no result.

We know Makkhali's doctrine primarily as reported by King Ajātasattu. The account of the king's report seems somewhat tongue-in-cheek, both because of

the bizarre nature of some of the details—the various kinds of dust-realms, jointed plants, precipices, and dreams—and because it is unlikely that the king would have actually remembered all of them. Nevertheless, it is the fullest account we have of Makkhali’s teachings.

[King Ajātasattu:] “Another time I approached Makkhali Gosāla and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, I sat to one side. As I was sitting there, I asked him, ‘Venerable Gosāla, there are these common craftsmen.... [see §5] They live off the fruits of their crafts, visible in the here and now.... Is it possible, venerable Gosāla, to point out a similar fruit of the contemplative life, visible in the here & now?’

“When this was said, Makkhali Gosāla said to me, ‘Great king, there is no cause, no requisite condition, for the defilement of beings. Beings are defiled without cause, without requisite condition. There is no cause, no requisite condition, for the purification of beings. Beings are purified without cause, without requisite condition. There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused. There is no strength, no persistence, no human energy, no human endeavor. All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls are powerless, devoid of strength, devoid of persistence. Subject to the changes of fate, serendipity, & nature, they are sensitive to pleasure & pain in the six great classes of birth.

“There are 1,406,600 principle modes of origin. There are 500 kinds of kamma, five kinds, & three kinds; full kamma and half kamma. There are 62 pathways, 62 sub-eons, six great classes of birth, eight classes of men, 4,900 modes of livelihood, 4,900 kinds of wanderers, 4,900 Nāga-abodes, 2,000 faculties, 3,000 hells, 36 dust-realms, seven spheres of percipient beings, seven spheres of non-percipient beings, seven kinds of jointed plants, seven kinds of deities, seven kinds of human beings, seven kinds of demons, seven great lakes, seven major knots, seven minor knots, 700 major precipices, 700 minor precipices, 700 major dreams, 700 minor dreams, 84,000 great eons. Having transmigrated & wandered on through these, the wise & the foolish alike will put an end to pain.

“Though one might think, ‘Through this habit, this practice, this austerity, or this holy life I will ripen unripened kamma and eliminate ripened kamma whenever touched by it’—that is impossible. Pleasure & pain being measured out, the wandering-on being fixed in its limits, there is no shortening or lengthening, no accelerating or decelerating. Just as a ball of string, when thrown, comes to its end simply by unwinding, in the same way, having transmigrated & wandered on, the wise & the foolish alike will put an end to pain.’

“Thus, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, Makkhali Gosāla answered with purification through wandering-on. Just as if a person, when asked about a mango, were to answer with a breadfruit; or, when asked about a breadfruit, were to answer with a mango; in the same way, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, Makkhali Gosāla answered with purification through wandering-on.” — *DN 2*

When speaking to his monks, the Buddha criticized Makkhali—and his teaching—in no uncertain terms.

“Monks, just as a hair blanket is judged to be the most miserable of woven cloths—a hair blanket cold in the cold, hot in the heat, bad-looking, bad-smelling, bad to the touch—in the same way, the teaching of

Makkhali is judged to be the most miserable of the teachings of run-of-the-mill contemplatives. The worthless man Makkhali has this teaching, this view: ‘There is no action. There is no activity. There is no persistence.’

“Those in the past who were worthy ones, rightly self-awakened: Those Blessed Ones were teachers of action, teachers of activity, teachers of persistence. But the worthless man Makkhali contradicts even them, (saying,) ‘There is no action. There is no activity. There is no persistence.’

“Those in the future who will be worthy ones, rightly self-awakened: Those Blessed Ones will be teachers of action, teachers of activity, teachers of persistence. But the worthless man Makkhali contradicts even them, (saying,) ‘There is no action. There is no activity. There is no persistence.’

“I in the present who am a worthy one, rightly self-awakened, am a teacher of action, a teacher of activity, a teacher of persistence. But the worthless man Makkhali contradicts even me, (saying,) ‘There is no action. There is no activity. There is no persistence.’

“Just as a trap would be strung up at the mouth of a river for the harm, pain, misfortune, & destruction of many fish; in the same way, the worthless man Makkhali has arisen in the world as a trap, as it were, for human beings, for the harm, pain, misfortune, & destruction of many beings.” — *AN 3:138*

Thus it is clear that, from the Buddha’s point of view, there are no awakened teachers outside of his dispensation, and many of the other teachers outside of his dispensation teach doctrines that are clearly harmful.

As for the topic of unskillful livelihood, the general principle is also clear: Any occupation that entails killing others or exciting greed, aversion, and delusion in oneself or others leads to unfortunate results, including undesirable destinations after death [§§145-146]. Even if the occupation doesn’t inherently involve unskillful activity, if one pursues it in a dishonest way, it can lead to the same undesirable results [§111]. Similarly, if an ascetic practice entails developing unskillful habits or views it leads to a bad destination [§147]; even if it doesn’t, but one pursues it in a dishonest way, the result can be the same [§148].

But even though the general principles underlying both topics are clear, the questions based on them can quickly become personal, leading some listeners to resent frank answers. If a teacher, when addressing people who are not committed to his teaching, speaks disparagingly of the attainments of other teachers, his motives are suspect. If he criticizes those who follow a particular occupation, he risks setting himself up as a judge, condemning other people who did not ask for his opinion. In this way, he can alienate large numbers of potential listeners even before they have had a chance to listen to the Dhamma.

Thus the Buddha’s policy in cases like this was to answer these questions only in contexts where his answers were likely to be well received. In other instances, he would put them aside. The discourses show two situations in which a teacher might be confident of the listener’s receptivity. In §§145-147, this receptivity is shown by the fact that the listener repeats his question three times—a sign of sincerity in India at the Buddha’s time. In §111, it’s gauged by the fact that Ven. Sāriputta is already on familiar terms with Dhanañjāni, the person he’s teaching. Even though Dhanañjāni doesn’t ask for Ven. Sāriputta’s advice on how he makes his livelihood, Ven. Sāriputta assumes—rightly—that Dhanañjāni will regard his advice as an act of kindness and respond to it well.

Of the two topics covered by the questions listed in this chapter, the Buddha’s treatment of the topic of livelihood is the simpler and easier to describe—even though right livelihood, of all the factors of the noble eightfold path, is defined in the vaguest terms.

“And what, monks, is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his/her life going with right livelihood: This, monks, is called right livelihood.” — *SN 45:8*

MN 117 expands on this definition slightly by defining wrong livelihood for monks.

“And what is wrong livelihood? Scheming, persuading, hinting, belittling, & pursuing gain with gain.”

DN 2 expands further on this passage with a long list of occupations that monks should avoid. Yet, given the even wider range of occupations followed by laypeople, it's surprising that the Canon gives only one brief list of undesirable lay occupations, and even that is not phrased as a universal condemnation. It simply states that a Buddhist lay follower should avoid these forms of business.

“Monks, a lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, business in living beings [this would include selling slaves], business in meat, business in intoxicants, & business in poison.” — *AN 5:177*

One of the reasons for the Buddha's general reticence on this topic is suggested by passages §§145-147: People can react unfavorably when told that their occupation or practice is inherently unskillful and conducive to a bad rebirth. The Buddha's approach in these cases was simple. He would not condemn a person's occupation to the person's face unless that person had shown his/her sincerity in asking for the Buddha's opinion on the matter by repeating the question up to three times. Even then the Buddha would not simply condemn the occupation—soldiering and acting are the examples given in the discourses—but would also explain why it was inherently unskillful. He followed the same approach when asked about ascetic practices.

The skill of the Buddha's approach here is shown by the fact that, with one exception, all of his interlocutors in these cases take refuge in the Triple Gem. The one exception is Seniya, the dog-practice ascetic, who goes even further: He abandons his dog-practice, ordains, and becomes an arahant.

As for occasions when people who were not committed followers of the Buddha would question him on the teachings and attainments of the teachers of other sects, the examples collected in this chapter show the variety of ways in which, having set the question aside, the Buddha might address his listeners' underlying question in other ways.

One of his primary approaches was to put aside a question framed in personal terms, and then pose his own question touching on the same topic but framed in more general principles. This strategy is similar to giving an analytical answer to the original question, in that it replaces one mode of analysis with another, but the fact that the Buddha puts the original question aside shows that he is doing more than simply answering the question from a different angle; he is teaching his listeners general principles whose range of application goes far beyond the original question. For example, in AN 3:66 [§149], when the Kālāmas—depicted as a group of skeptics—ask him about other teachers who have taught them in the past, the Buddha puts the question aside and then, by cross-questioning them, teaches them how to apply the principle of kamma to the issue of judging a teaching: The verdict is reached pragmatically by gauging the results that come when putting the teaching into action. This principle—the same principle the Buddha used in his own quest for awakening—can then be

applied to other areas of life where the Kālāmas need to gain assurance. The Kālāmas all respond to this teaching by taking refuge in the Triple Gem.

In AN 9:38 [§156], two brahman cosmologists come to the Buddha with a quandary: Two sectarian teachers, Pūraṇa Kassapa and Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, both claim to have omniscient knowledge of the cosmos, but the first claims that the cosmos is finite, whereas the second claims that it's infinite. Which of the two is telling the truth? The Buddha puts the question aside and then gives a twofold response. First he notes that it isn't physically possible to reach the end of the material cosmos, but then he goes on to redefine *cosmos* as the five strings of sensuality, saying that a more meaningful quest would be to reach the end of the cosmos in this sense through the attainment of the nine meditative attainments. The discourse does not record how the two brahmans respond to this teaching.

In MN 30 [§150], the brahman Piṅgalakoccha names some of the leading teachers of the day, asking the Buddha whether all of them are awakened, only some of them, or none of them at all. The Buddha's response, after setting the question aside, is to describe step-by-step how a person would attain awakening by practicing the Dhamma. The discourse gives no indication of Piṅgalakoccha's motive for asking his question, but he responds to the Buddha's reply by taking refuge in the Triple Gem.

In DN 16 [§151], the Buddha on his deathbed is asked the same question by Subhadda the wanderer. Again the Buddha puts the question framed in personal terms aside and answers it with a general principle: Awakened people are to be found only in a teaching containing the noble eightfold path. Then, however, having established this general principle, the Buddha answers Subhadda's original question, saying that there are no awakened people outside of the Dhamma and Vinaya—his term for his teaching. Perhaps the Buddha sensed that Subhadda's motivation was different from that of the Kālāmas—he was seeking a teacher under whom to study—and that the Buddha's first answer was so inspiring that Subhadda was ready to hear the straight answer to his question. Or the Buddha may have seen that—after identifying the path to awakening in impersonal rather than personal terms—he was in a position to point out the obvious: that no other teaching contains the necessary path. In any event, this strategy was so successful that Subhadda asked for ordination and, soon after their conversation, became an arahant.

Perhaps the most inspiring aspect of these responses is that, even though the questions would appear to give the Buddha an opening to lambast his opponents or people of a particular occupation, he does not take advantage of the opening. Instead, he uses the questions as an opportunity to teach the Dhamma in terms of general principles. In so doing he works for the true benefit of his listeners—another example of the responsible and compassionate nature of his teaching approach.

READINGS

LIVELIHOOD

§ 145. As he was sitting there, Tālapuṭa, the head of an acting troupe, said to the Blessed One, "Venerable sir, I have heard that it has been passed down by the ancient teaching lineage of actors that 'When an actor on the stage, in the midst of a festival, makes people laugh & gives them delight with his imitation of reality, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas.' What does the Blessed One have to say about

that?"

"Enough, headman. Put that aside. Don't ask me that."

A second time... A third time Tālapuṭa, the head of an acting troupe, said to the Blessed One, "Venerable sir, I have heard that it has been passed down by the ancient teaching lineage of actors that 'When an actor on the stage, in the midst of a festival, makes people laugh & gives them delight with his imitation of reality, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas.' What does the Blessed One have to say with regard to that?"

"Apparently, headman, I don't get leave from you [to avoid the matter by saying], 'Enough, headman. Put that aside. Don't ask me that.' So I will simply answer you. Any beings who are not devoid of passion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of passion, focus with even more passion on things inspiring passion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Any beings who are not devoid of aversion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of aversion, focus with even more aversion on things inspiring aversion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Any beings who are not devoid of delusion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of delusion, focus with even more delusion on things inspiring delusion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Thus the actor—himself intoxicated & heedless, having made others intoxicated & heedless—with the breakup of the body, after death, is reborn in what is called the hell of laughter. But if he holds such a view as this: 'When an actor on the stage, in the midst of a festival, makes people laugh & gives them delight with his imitation of reality, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas,' that is his wrong view. Now, there are two destinations for a person with wrong view, I tell you: either hell or the animal womb."

When this was said, Tālapuṭa, the head of an acting troupe, sobbed & burst into tears. [The Blessed One said,] "That was what I didn't get leave from you [to avoid the matter by saying], 'Enough, headman. Put that aside. Don't ask me that.'"

"I'm not crying, venerable sir, because of what the Blessed One said to me, but simply because I have been deceived, cheated, & fooled for a long time by that ancient teaching lineage of actors who said, 'When an actor on the stage, in the midst of a festival, makes people laugh & gives them delight with his imitation of reality, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas.'" — SN 42:2

§ 146. As he was sitting there, Yodhājīva [Professional Warrior] the headman said to the Blessed One, "Venerable sir, I have heard that it has been passed down by the ancient teaching lineage of professional warriors that 'When a professional warrior strives & exerts himself in battle, if others then strike him down & slay him while he is striving & exerting himself in battle, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of devas slain in battle.' What does the Blessed One have to say with regard to that?"

"Enough, headman. Put that aside. Don't ask me that."

A second time... A third time Yodhājīva the headman said to the Blessed One, "Venerable sir, I have heard that it has been passed down by the ancient teaching lineage of professional warriors that 'When a professional warrior strives & exerts himself in battle, if others strike him down & slay him while he is striving & exerting himself in battle, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of devas slain in battle.' What does the Blessed One have to say about that?"

“Apparently, headman, I don’t get leave from you [to avoid the matter by saying], ‘Enough, headman. Put that aside. Don’t ask me that.’ So I will simply answer you. When a professional warrior strives & exerts himself in battle, his mind is already seized, debased, & misdirected by the thought, ‘May these beings be struck down or slaughtered or annihilated or destroyed. May they not exist.’ If others then strike him down & slay him while he is thus striving & exerting himself in battle, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the hell called the realm of those slain in battle. But if he holds such a view as this: ‘When a professional warrior strives & exerts himself in battle, if others then strike him down & slay him while he is striving & exerting himself in battle, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of devas slain in battle,’ that is his wrong view. Now, there are two destinations for a person with wrong view, I tell you: either hell or the animal womb.”

When this was said, Yodhājiva the headman sobbed & burst into tears. [The Blessed One said,] “That was what I didn’t get leave from you [to avoid the matter by saying], ‘Enough, headman. Put that aside. Don’t ask me that.’”

“I’m not crying, venerable sir, because of what the Blessed One said to me, but simply because I have been deceived, cheated, & fooled for a long time by that ancient teaching lineage of professional warriors who said, ‘When a professional warrior strives & exerts himself in battle, if others then strike him down & slay him while he is striving & exerting himself in battle, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of devas slain in battle.’” — SN 42:3 [*Similarly in SN 42:4 & SN 42:5, although the warriors there are an elephant warrior and a cavalry warrior*]

§ 147. Then Puṇṇa Koliyaputta, an ox-practice ascetic, and Seniya, a naked dog-practice ascetic, went to the Blessed One. On arrival, Puṇṇa Koliyaputta the ox-practice ascetic bowed down to the Blessed One and sat to one side, whereas Seniya, the naked dog-practice ascetic, exchanged courteous greetings with the Blessed One and, after an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, sat down to one side, hunched up like a dog.

As they were sitting there, Puṇṇa Koliyaputta the ox-practice ascetic said to the Blessed One, “This Seniya, a naked dog-practice ascetic, does what is hard to do. He eats food thrown on the ground. He has for a long time undertaken and perfectly conformed to that dog-practice. What is his destination? What his future course?”

“Enough, Puṇṇa. Put that aside. Don’t ask me that.”

A second time... A third time Puṇṇa Koliyaputta the ox-practice ascetic said to the Blessed One, “This Seniya, a naked dog-practice ascetic, does what is hard to do. He eats food thrown on the ground. He has undertaken and perfectly conformed to that dog-practice. What is his destination? What his future course?”

“Apparently, Puṇṇa, I don’t get leave from you [to avoid the matter by saying], ‘Enough, Puṇṇa. Put that aside. Don’t ask me that.’ So I will simply answer you. There is the case where a certain person develops the dog-practice fully and without lapse, develops the dog-habit fully and without lapse, develops the dog-mind fully and without lapse, develops dog-behavior fully and without lapse. Having developed the dog-practice fully and without lapse, the dog-habit fully and without lapse, the dog-mind fully and without lapse, dog-behavior fully and without lapse, he—on the breakup of the body, after death—reappears in the company of dogs. But if he is of a view such as this: ‘By this habit or practice or asceticism or holy life I will become one deva or another,’ that is his wrong view. For a person of wrong view, Puṇṇa, there is one of two destinations, I tell

you: hell or the animal womb. Thus when succeeding, Puṇṇa, the dog-practice leads to the animal womb; when failing, to hell.”

When this was said, Seniya, the naked dog-practice ascetic, sobbed & burst into tears. So the Blessed One said to Puṇṇa Koliyaputta, the ox-practice ascetic, “That was what I didn’t get leave from you, Puṇṇa [to avoid the matter by saying], ‘Enough, Puṇṇa. Put that aside. Don’t ask me that.’”

“I’m not crying, venerable sir, because of what the Blessed One said to me, but simply because I have for a long time undertaken and perfectly conformed to this dog-practice.” — *MN 57*

§ 148. An ochre robe tied ’round their necks,
many with evil qualities
—unrestrained, evil—
rearise, because of their evil acts,
in hell.

Better to eat an iron ball
—glowing, aflame—
than that, unprincipled &
unrestrained,
you should eat the alms of the country. — *Dhp 307-308*

OTHER TEACHERS

§ 149. The Kālāmas of Kesaputta said to the Blessed One, “Lord, there are some contemplatives & brahmans who come to Kesaputta. They expound & glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, disparage them, show contempt for them, & pull them to pieces. And then other contemplatives & brahmans come to Kesaputta. They expound & glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, disparage them, show contempt for them, & pull them to pieces. They leave us absolutely uncertain & in doubt: Which of these venerable contemplatives & brahmans are speaking the truth, and which ones are lying?”

“Of course you are uncertain, Kālāmas. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kālāmas, don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, ‘This contemplative is our teacher.’ When you know for yourselves that, ‘These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering’—then you should abandon them.

“What do you think, Kālāmas? When greed arises in a person, does it arise for benefit or for harm?”

“For harm, lord.”

“And this greedy person, overcome by greed, his mind possessed by greed, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person’s wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm & suffering.”

“Yes, lord.”

“Now, what do you think, Kālāmas? When aversion arises in a person, does it arise for benefit or for harm?”

“For harm, lord.”

“And this aversive person, overcome by aversion, his mind possessed by

aversion, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person's wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm & suffering."

"Yes, lord."

"Now, what do you think, Kālāmas? When delusion arises in a person, does it arise for benefit or for harm?"

"For harm, lord."

"And this deluded person, overcome by delusion, his mind possessed by delusion, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person's wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm & suffering."

"Yes, lord."

"So what do you think, Kālāmas? Are these qualities skillful or unskillful?"

"Unskillful, lord."

"Blameworthy or blameless?"

"Blameworthy, lord."

"Criticized by the wise or praised by the wise?"

"Criticized by the wise, lord."

"When adopted & carried out, do they lead to harm & to suffering, or not?"

"When adopted & carried out, they lead to harm & to suffering. That is how it appears to us."

"So, as I said, Kālāmas: 'Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, "This contemplative is our teacher." When you know for yourselves that, "These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering"—then you should abandon them.' Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

"Now, Kālāmas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to benefit & to happiness'—then you should enter & remain in them.

"What do you think, Kālāmas? When lack of greed arises in a person, does it arise for benefit or for harm?"

"For benefit, lord."

"And this ungreedy person, not overcome by greed, his mind not possessed by greed, doesn't kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person's wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term benefit & happiness."

"Yes, lord."

"What do you think, Kālāmas? When lack of aversion arises in a person, does it arise for benefit or for harm?"

"For benefit, lord."

"And this unaversive person, not overcome by aversion, his mind not possessed by aversion, doesn't kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person's wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term benefit & happiness."

"Yes, lord."

"What do you think, Kālāmas? When lack of delusion arises in a person, does it arise for benefit or for harm?"

“For benefit, lord.”

“And this undeluded person, not overcome by delusion, his mind not possessed by delusion, doesn’t kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person’s wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term benefit & happiness.”

“Yes, lord.”

“So what do you think, Kālāmas? Are these qualities skillful or unskillful?”

“Skillful, lord.”

“Blameworthy or blameless?”

“Blameless, lord.”

“Criticized by the wise or praised by the wise?”

“Praised by the wise, lord.”

“When adopted & carried out, do they lead to benefit & to happiness, or not?”

“When adopted & carried out, they lead to benefit & to happiness. That is how it appears to us.”

“So, as I said, Kālāmas: ‘Don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, “This contemplative is our teacher.” When you know for yourselves that, “These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to benefit & to happiness”—then you should enter & remain in them.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

“Now, Kālāmas, one who is a disciple of the noble ones—thus devoid of greed, devoid of ill will, undeluded, alert, & resolute—keeps pervading the first direction [the east]—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with good will. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

“He keeps pervading the first direction—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with compassion... empathetic joy... equanimity. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with equanimity: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

“Now, Kālāmas, one who is a disciple of the noble ones—his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, & pure—acquires four assurances in the here & now:

“‘If there is a world after death, if there is the fruit of actions rightly & wrongly done, then this is the basis by which, with the breakup of the body, after death, I will reappear in a good destination, the heavenly world.’ This is the first assurance he acquires.

“‘But if there is no world after death, if there is no fruit of actions rightly & wrongly done, then here in the present life I look after myself with ease—free from hostility, free from ill will, free from trouble.’ This is the second assurance he acquires.

“‘If evil is done through acting, still I have willed no evil for anyone. Having done no evil action, from where will suffering touch me?’ This is the third assurance he acquires.

“‘But if no evil is done through acting, then I can assume myself pure in both respects.’ This is the fourth assurance he acquires.

“One who is a disciple of the noble ones—his mind thus free from hostility,

free from ill will, undefiled, & pure—acquires these four assurances in the here & now.”

“So it is, Blessed One. So it is, O One Well-gone. One who is a disciple of the noble ones—his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, & pure—acquires [these] four assurances in the here & now...”

“Magnificent, lord! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has the Blessed One—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. We go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Community of monks. May the Blessed One remember us as lay followers who have gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life.” — AN 3:66

§ 150. As he was seated to one side, the brahman Piṅgalakoccha said to the Blessed One, “Master Gotama, these contemplatives & brahmins, each with his group, each with his community, each the teacher of his group, an honored leader, well-regarded by people at large—i.e., Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambalin, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Velaṭṭhaputta, & the Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta: Do they all have direct knowledge as they themselves claim, or do they all not have direct knowledge, or do some of them have direct knowledge and some of them not?”

“Enough, brahman. Put this question aside. I will teach you the Dhamma. Listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“Yes, sir,” the brahman Piṅgalakoccha responded to the Blessed One, and the Blessed One said, [here the Buddha gives the similes of the men seeking heartwood who come to a tree possessing heartwood. One of them goes home taking the branches & leaves, another the outer bark, another the inner bark, another the sapwood, and only one of them takes the heartwood. The Buddha then compares these people respectively, with those who, in search of the end of suffering, content themselves with gain, offerings, & fame; with consummation of virtue; with consummation of concentration; with consummation of knowledge & vision; and the person who rests content with none of those, but strives for qualities that are higher & more sublime.]

“And which, brahman, are the qualities that are higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision?”

“There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. This is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“Furthermore, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“Furthermore, with the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“Furthermore, with the abandoning of pleasure & stress—as with the earlier disappearance of joys & distresses—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“Furthermore, with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding

perceptions of diversity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space,’ he enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite consciousness,’ he enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) ‘There is nothing,’ he enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, he enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, he enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And, having seen [that] with discernment, his fermentations are completely ended. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“These are the qualities higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“I tell you, brahman, that this person is like the man who, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, goes in search of heartwood and comes to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, cuts away just the heartwood and returns taking it with him, knowing that it is heartwood. Whatever purpose he had for heartwood, that purpose will be served.

“Brahman, this holy life doesn’t have as its reward gain, offerings, & fame, doesn’t have as its reward consummation of virtue, doesn’t have as its reward consummation of concentration, doesn’t have as its reward consummation of knowledge & vision, but the unprovoked awareness-release: That is the purpose of this holy life, that is its heartwood, that its final end.” — *MN 30*

§ 151. Subhadda the wanderer went to Upavattana, the Mallans’ sal-grove, and on arrival said to Ven. Ānanda, “I have heard the elder wanderers, teachers of teachers, saying that only once in a long, long time do Tathāgatas—arahants, rightly self-awakened—appear in the world. Tonight, in the last watch of the night, the total unbinding of Gotama the contemplative will occur. Now there is a doubt that has arisen in me, but I have faith that he could teach me the Dhamma in such a way that I might abandon that doubt. It would be good, Ven. Ānanda, if you would let me see him.”

When this was said, Ven. Ānanda said to him, “Enough, friend Subhadda. Don’t bother the Blessed One. The Blessed One is tired.”

For a second time... For a third time, Subhadda the wanderer said to Ven. Ānanda, “...It would be good, Ven. Ānanda, if you would let me see him.”

For a third time, Ven. Ānanda said to him, “Enough, friend Subhadda. Don’t bother the Blessed One. The Blessed One is tired.”

Now, the Blessed One heard the exchange between Ven. Ānanda & Subhadda the wanderer, and so he said to Ven. Ānanda, “Enough, Ānanda. Don’t stand in his way. Let him see the Tathāgata. Whatever he asks me will all be for the sake of knowledge, and not to be bothersome. And whatever I answer when asked, he will quickly understand.”

So Ven. Ānanda said to Subhadda the wanderer, “Go ahead, friend Subhadda. The Blessed One gives you his leave.”

Then Subhadda went to the Blessed One and 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, “Venerable sir, these contemplatives & brahmans, each with his group, each with his community, each the teacher of his group, an honored leader, well-regarded by people at large— i.e., Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambalin, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Velaṭṭhaputta, & the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta: Do they all have direct knowledge as they themselves claim, or do they all not have direct knowledge, or do some of them have direct knowledge and some of them not?”

“Enough, Subhadda. Put this question aside. I will teach you the Dhamma. Listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“Yes, lord,” Subhadda responded to the Blessed One, and the Blessed One said, “In any Dhamma & Vinaya where the noble eightfold path is not found, no contemplative of the first... second... third... fourth order [stream-winner, once-returner, non-returner, or arahant] is found. But in any Dhamma & Vinaya where the noble eightfold path *is* found, contemplatives of the first... second... third... fourth order *are* found. The noble eightfold path is found in this Dhamma & Vinaya, and right here there are contemplatives of the first... second... third... fourth order. Other teachings are empty of knowledgeable contemplatives. And if the monks dwell rightly, this world will not be empty of arahants.” — DN 16

Questions Put Aside: II

When a person consistently puts a question aside as a matter of principle, it may arouse suspicion that he is ignorant of or embarrassed by the answer. To maintain the questioner's respect and trust, he has to provide a convincing case that the lack of answer is not a failing on his part. If he is asked for information or an opinion, he has to show why the question is not worth answering. If he is presenting a system of thought based on first principles, he has to show why his refusal to answer the question is not simply an attempt to mask a gap or inconsistency in the system.

As we have seen, the Buddha was not attempting to build a system of thought, so he was not caught in the latter dilemma. The consistency in his teaching was teleological, in that all the issues he discussed were aimed at a single end. As he repeatedly stated, all he taught was stress and the end of stress [§192]. Thus he was free to put questions aside on the grounds that they did not lead to that end. And, as we shall see, this was his primary reason for putting a wide variety of questions aside.

However, there were still instances in which he was accused of betraying his ignorance by refusing to answer a question. To this accusation he and his disciples responded strongly that he was actually acting from knowledge and vision. *Precisely because* he knew and saw, he knew that the question was best not answered. But this knowledge too was teleological, framed primarily in terms of cause and effect. It focused either on the kammic effects, present or future, of answering the question; or—in what amounts to the same thing—on the fact that the mental states giving rise to the question blocked the path to the end of stress.

For someone who had asked a question concerning action and its results, an answer framed in these terms might be immediately satisfying. But for a person who had asked a question about the existence or nature of such entities as the cosmos or the self, the Buddha's claim to knowledge might still seem like a strategy of avoidance. This, however, is to miss the point. The Buddha wanted to focus attention on the kammic process of creating a perception of *self* or *cosmos*, for to view these processes as actions was to enter the path to the end of stress through the framework of the four noble truths. This, for him, was the most important knowledge one could have on these topics.

As we noted in the preceding chapter, when the Buddha put a question aside for reasons of etiquette he would often take the opportunity to teach the Dhamma in different, more beneficial terms. Here the same strategy is almost always at work. When he explains the drawbacks of asking and answering these questions in terms of the unskillful kamma involved, he is giving an important lesson in how to view experience in a framework conducive to right effort on the path.

This point is underlined by the two passages where the Buddha simply remained silent and did *not* immediately explain his reasons for refusing to answer a question. In SN 44:10 [§162], when he remained silent after Vacchagotta asked him whether there is or is not a self, Vacchagotta got up and left, apparently dissatisfied. Fortunately, Vacchagotta later returned to the Buddha to ask further questions, and subsequently—as the result of a later conversation—took refuge in the Triple Gem [§190]. Ultimately (MN 73), he ordained and became an arahant. Perhaps the Buddha foresaw this sequence of events, which was why he allowed Vacchagotta to depart dissatisfied in SN 44:10; or perhaps

he wanted to explain his silence, but Vacchagotta—in leaving so quickly—didn't give him the chance. In either event, it's noteworthy that Vacchagotta's act of taking refuge occurred after he had asked the Buddha another set of questions that the Buddha refused to answer, but on that occasion Vacchagotta *did* ask the Buddha's reasons for refusing to answer the questions, and the Buddha explained why [§190]. The explanation is what led Vacchagotta to take refuge. This fact demonstrates two points: the collaborative nature of the act of teaching—Vacchagotta benefited more when he asked the Buddha to explain himself—and the fact that explained silence can have a more precise and telling effect on the mind than unexplained.

As for those of us in later generations reading SN 44:10, we are fortunate that, after Vacchagotta's departure, Ven. Ananda approached the Buddha, asking for the reasons behind his silence. The Buddha responded with three categorical answers and a cross-question, stating that his refusal to answer Vacchagotta's questions was based primarily on impersonal standards: To say that there is no self would involve siding with the extreme wrong view of annihilationism; to say that there is a self would side with the extreme wrong view of eternalism and would get in the way of giving rise to the knowledge that all phenomena are not-self. (See Appendix Three.) Only partly was his silence based on Vacchagotta's personal inability to understand one of the possible responses: Vacchagotta would have been bewildered if told that there is no self. And because Vacchagotta's questions derived ultimately from four questions that MN 2 [§25] lists as unworthy of attention—"Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I?"—we can conclude that questions about the existence or non-existence of the self should be put aside across the board.

The other case of the Buddha's remaining silent is in AN 10:95 [§163], where he responded with silence when Uttiya the wanderer asked him what portion of the cosmos would gain release. In this instance, Ven. Ananda—fearing Uttiya would react negatively to the Buddha's silence—took matters into his own hands. After using the analogy of the fortress gatekeeper to explain the nature of the Buddha's knowledge of the way to awakening, Ven. Ananda pointed out that Uttiya's question was assuming an answer to a question the Buddha had previously put aside. In other words, to ask what portion of the cosmos will gain release is to ask, in different terms, what portion of the cosmos will come to an end. This question, in turn, is a different way of asking whether the cosmos is eternal, not-eternal, or partially eternal and partially not. As we will see, this question is one that the Buddha refused to answer across the board.

In addition to these two passages, there is another important passage in which the Buddha put a question aside without stating any reasons for why he was doing so. This is MN 109 [§142], which we discussed in Chapter Six—the case where a monk in the Buddha's presence asked himself: "So—form is not-self, feeling is not-self, perception is not-self, fabrications are not-self, consciousness is not-self. Then what self will be touched by the actions done by what is not-self?" The Buddha announced to the assembled monks that "It's possible that a senseless person—immersed in ignorance, overcome with craving—might think that he could outsmart the Teacher's message in this way," and then quoted the question to them without explaining why it was senseless. However, in this case he did not simply remain silent and leave the issue hanging. Instead, he immediately plunged into the line of cross-questioning introduced in SN 22:59 [§140], with the result that sixty monks gained total release. Thus, even though the Buddha didn't *state* his reasons for putting the question aside, his successful use of cross-questioning *showed* why he put it aside: There is a better way to use the perception of not-self. Instead of drawing metaphysical conclusions from that perception, one would do better to use it to question the skillfulness of the act of

I-making and my-making, so that those actions can be dropped and liberation attained.

Thus the simple act of putting a question aside is not, in and of itself, a sufficient teaching strategy. As this chapter will show, the Buddha's most fruitful approach when putting a question aside was, when given the opportunity, to teach the Dhamma in other terms, offering another way of viewing experience: in the framework of skillful and unskillful action.

We have already seen, in Chapter One, that this framework underlies his categorical answers; and in Chapter Six, that it underlies the process of self cross-examination. Here, in the lessons the Buddha teaches when putting a question aside, he is offering further insights into this framework. In some cases, by explaining his reasons for putting a question aside, he is illustrating the teaching of kamma by showing that the question just asked is an example of unskillful kamma. In this way, he brings the teaching into the immediate present, pointing to the kamma the person asking the question is engaging in here and now. In other cases, he demonstrates the difference between skillful and unskillful kamma—again in the here and now—by posing a different, more skillful, question, and proceeding to answer it. Or he may propose an alternative way of looking at experience in general.

In particular—as we will see in this chapter—the Buddha often uses the context of putting a question aside to introduce a further refinement in the teaching on skillful and unskillful action, expressed in terms of dependent co-arising. In fact, this is one of his prime contexts for showing how these terms can be most effectively applied to problems in the immediate present. When analyzing the drawbacks of an unskillful question, or showing how best to avoid the traps of unskillful questions, he utilizes the terms of dependent co-arising in a way that demonstrates how pragmatic knowledge and mastery of these terms is one of the most skillful means to release. And in doing so, he drives home the point that the knowledge through which he sees that the question does not deserve answering is much more beneficial than any knowledge that could have come from answering it.

The Buddha's emphasis on knowledge in this context shows that, in general, when he was putting a question aside he was not making a case for agnosticism. Particularly with regard to the categorical issue of which actions are skillful and not, he was an advocate of clear and detailed knowledge [§20, §§26-29], for knowledge of this topic is central to any program for putting an end to stress. Without this knowledge, clinging and attachment cannot be overcome. Although some people might imagine agnosticism to be a way of avoiding attachment to views, the Buddha saw clearly that it's a fabrication born of craving and ignorance [§153]. It too can be an object of attachment—and it's an attachment that leads nowhere. When applied to issues of skillful and unskillful action, agnosticism undercuts any desire to develop the skillful strategies that actually lead to release [§152]. For these reasons, such agnosticism has to be abandoned through knowledge if one wants to make progress on the path.

Still, the Buddha left open the question of what sorts of things he knew above and beyond the express purpose of his teachings. In a famous simile (SN 56:31, Chapter One), he stated that the knowledge he had gained in his awakening was like the leaves in the forest; what he had taught—the four noble truths in all their various permutations—was like a mere handful of leaves. He hadn't taught the leaves in the forest because they didn't lead to unbinding. Thus, by implication, any question about the full range of a Buddha's knowledge should be put aside.

In fact, he said as much in AN 4:77 [§154], where he listed four inconceivables—topics that lay beyond the range of an ordinary person even to

speculate about in a healthy way. In the words of the passage, these topics “would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about them.” They are:

- the Buddha-range of the Buddhas
- the jhāna-range of a person in jhāna
- the results of kamma
- conjecture about the cosmos.

The inclusion of the first two items in the list serves notice that the Buddha was not putting himself in the position of an ordinary person speculating about these things. There was much that he knew through direct knowledge—through mastering jhāna and becoming a Buddha—that he did not have to speculate about. Thus, although the entire list lies beyond the range of healthy speculation, it tells us that we cannot know the range of the Buddha’s own knowledge of these things.

The inclusion of the third item in the list, the results of kamma, may come as a surprise, given the care with which the Buddha explained the results of kamma in many discourses. However, its inclusion here points to the fact, discussed in MN 136 [§66], that the workings of kamma are complex—more complex, in fact, than is indicated in that discourse. Their complexities would have posed a challenge for the Buddha if he had wanted to construct an explanation of stress and its end based on first principles, for a theory of kamma would have been a logical place to start. Thus he would have been required to give a full explanation of how and why kamma is complex. But because his teaching was teleological, aimed at actually putting an end to stress, he needed to explain only what was necessary toward that end: the ways in which past and present kamma shape experience. Although past kamma can influence the conditions on one’s sensory experience, the actual stress or lack of stress experienced by the mind is the direct result of present kamma—the act of following or abandoning clinging and craving. For the purpose of putting an end to stress, all that needs to be known is how to create skillful kamma and then—once that skill is mastered—how to create the kamma that puts an end to kamma [§31]. Thus there is no need to account for all the complex interactions of kammic results. A knowledge of general principles is enough.

And the general principles of kamma are simple. There is the potential for choice in every action. An action based on right views and skillful intentions leads to pleasant results; an action based on wrong views and unskillful intentions, to unpleasant results. But even though these principles are simple, the interactions of a person’s many actions in the course of a day, to say nothing of a lifetime, combined with the state of mind at the time when those results bear fruit, mean that the precise lines connecting actions to their results are too complex for an ordinary person to trace.

The irony here is that, although the Buddha discouraged any further speculation on the topic of kammic results, this sort of speculation has fired a great deal of scholastic Buddhist philosophy over the centuries. Many of the major concepts of that philosophy—the storehouse consciousness, the reality realm of the Buddhas, the Tathāgata-embryo, the reversal of the basis—grew from speculations about such issues as the mechanism by which the impulse of an action gets carried through time until it yields its results, or the way in which awakening can be achieved despite the kammic residue of one’s past ignorant actions. Had Buddhist thinkers followed the Buddha’s advice, the course of Buddhist thought would have been very different.

As for conjecture about the cosmos (or world, *loka*), the Buddha simply noted that no beginning point in time could be discerned [§155], and that the cosmos

was so large that its limits could never be reached [§§156-157]. He was unwilling to encourage conjecture about what lay beyond ordinary human powers to measure in space and time. Instead, he encouraged people to view the cosmos simply as the basic sensory information from which the concept or perception of *world* or *cosmos* is derived. Focusing here, they could see how the process of becoming, leading to stress, was created through the creation of those concepts, thus framing their attention appropriately in terms of the four noble truths. But as for the limits of the cosmos "out there," the Buddha advised that the issue be put aside.

Thus the four inconceivables are areas in which the Buddha *did* encourage an attitude of agnosticism among his followers, so as to focus their attention on the question of which actions are skillful and which are not—questions where knowledge is beneficial for purposes of release.

By and large, the same purpose underlies the many instances in which he put specific questions aside. A survey of these specific questions, however, yields many other insights into the Buddha's reasons for not answering them.

For the sake of analysis, these questions can be classified by topic or context. In terms of topic, there are—in broad terms—three: questions about the metaphysics of the cosmos, questions about the nature and existence (or non-existence) of the self, and questions about whether an awakened person exists or doesn't exist after death (see Appendix Four). This last category, however, is actually an extension of the second, for questions on this topic usually boil down to a concern for what will ultimately happen to the self if the Buddha's path is pursued.

When grouped by topic, the questions put aside in the discourses are these (the meaning of the asterisks will become clear in the following discussion):

The cosmos/world:

"Your question should not be phrased in this way: 'Where do these four great elements—the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property—cease without remainder?' Instead, it should be phrased like this: 'Where do water, earth, fire, & wind have no footing? Where are long & short, coarse & fine, fair & foul, name & form brought to an end?'" — DN 11

"And, Master Gotama, when having directly known it, you teach the Dhamma to your disciples for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, for the disappearance of pain & distress, for the attainment of the right method, & for the realization of unbinding, will all the cosmos be led to release, or a half of it, or a third?" — AN 10:95

"Now, then, Master Gotama, does everything exist?" "Then, Master Gotama, does everything not exist?" "Then is everything a Oneness?" "Then is everything a plurality?" — SN 12:48*

"Master Gotama, is it the case that 'The cosmos is eternal: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?'"**

"Very well then, Master Gotama, is it the case that: 'The cosmos is not eternal: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?'"**

"Very well then, Master Gotama, is it the case that 'The cosmos is finite: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?'"**

"Very well then, Master Gotama, is it the case that 'The cosmos is infinite: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?'"** — AN 10:95

An existent being/self:

“Now then, Venerable Gotama, is there a self?” “Then is there no self?” — *SN 44:10*

“By whom was this being created? Where is the being’s maker? Where has the being originated? Where does the being cease?” — *SN 5:10*

“So—form is not-self, feeling is not-self, perception is not-self, fabrications are not-self, consciousness is not-self. Then what self will be touched by the actions done by what is not-self?” — *MN 109*

“Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past?” “Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?” “Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?” — *SN 12:20****

“Now, then, Master Gotama, is pain self-made?” “Then is pain other-made?” “Then is pain self-made & other-made?” — *SN 12:17**

“Now, then, Master Gotama, are pleasure & pain self-made?” “Then are pleasure & pain other-made?” “Then are pleasure & pain self-made & other-made?” — *SN 12:18**

“Now, then, Master Gotama: Is the one who acts the same one who experiences [the results of the act]?” “Then, Master Gotama, is the one who acts someone other than the one who experiences?” — *SN 12:46**

“Now tell me, Sāriputta my friend: Is aging-&-death self-made or other-made or both self-made & other-made?” [etc., with regard to factors of dependent co-arising] — *SN 12:67**

“Lord, who feeds on the consciousness-nutriments?” “Lord, who makes contact?” [etc., with regard to factors of dependent co-arising] — *SN 12:12**

“Which is the aging-&-death, lord, and whose is the aging-&-death?” [etc., with regard to the factors of dependent co-arising] — *SN 12:35**

“Master Gotama, is it the case that ‘The soul is the same thing as the body: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?’” — *AN 10:95*

“Very well then, Master Gotama, is it the case that: ‘The soul is one thing and the body another: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?’” — *AN 10:95*

Existence after awakening:

“But, Master Gotama, the monk whose mind is thus released: Where does he reappear?” “Very well then, Master Gotama, does he not reappear?” “... does he both reappear & not reappear?” “... does he neither reappear nor not reappear?” — *MN 72*

“With the remainderless cessation & fading of the six contact-media [vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, & intellection], is it the case that there is anything else?” “With the remainderless cessation & fading of the six contact-media, is it the case that there is not anything else?” “... is it the case that there both is & is not anything else?” “... is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?” — *AN 4:173*

“He who has reached the end: Does he not exist, or is he for eternity free from dis-ease? Please, sage, declare this to me as this phenomenon has been known by you.” — *Sn 5:6*

“Master Gotama, is it the case that ‘After death a Tathāgata exists: Only

this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?'"**

"Very well then, Master Gotama, is it the case that: 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?'"**

"Very well then, Master Gotama, is it the case that 'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?'"**

"Very well then, Master Gotama, is it the case that 'After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?'"** — AN 10:95

From this list of topics, two points immediately stand out. The first is that all the questions deal in the terms most basic to the process of becoming: one's sense of self in a particular world or cosmos of experience. Because becoming is intimately tied up with the first noble truth of suffering and stress, the appropriate duty for dealing with its underlying concepts is to comprehend them to the point of dispassion, so as to gain release from them. But these questions provoke passion for these concepts by giving substance and reality to them. Thus they run counter to the duties of the path.

Directly related to this first point is the second one: All these questions are products of *papañca*, or objectification. As we noted in Chapter Three, this sort of thinking derives its classifications from the basic thought, "I am the thinker." Having objectified the "I am," one has created an agent of actions, and an experiencer of pleasure and pain. At the same time, one has created a nucleus of categories around which many questions can coalesce: self/not-self, existence/non-existence, thinker/thought, agent/object. For example, once the conceit "I am" becomes a meaningful statement, the question "Am I not?" becomes meaningful as well. Given the many roles played by a thinker—constantly changing, arising only to disappear—one has implicitly raised questions about whether these identities do or do not really exist. One has also created questions of *how* they exist, for as a being, the thinker needs to keep consuming physical and mental nourishment. This leads to questions about the existence of the world or cosmos from which one expects to draw that nourishment: To what extent can it be controlled? Does it offer a finite or infinite amount of food? Will it supply food forever, or will it come to an end? Will total awakening put an end to the thinker, or will it supply the thinker with an unending source of food?

The primary danger of this sort of questioning is that it treats mental processes—the *perception* of self, the *perception* of cosmos—as objects rather than processes. Thus it interferes with the radical self cross-examination discussed in Chapter Six, by which these processes are viewed as forms of unskillful action and thus abandoned so as to lead to the deathless.

But objectification presents other drawbacks as well, which can be seen most clearly if we group the questions the Buddha put aside, not according to topic, but according to the general contexts in which they are found in the discourses. This way of grouping the questions also has the advantage of highlighting the Buddha's specific strategy for dismantling questions framed in terms of objectification by using those framed in the terms of appropriate attention.

Aside from a few miscellaneous situations scattered randomly in the texts, there are four major contexts in which the Buddha puts questions aside, with the fourth context a subset of the first. The contexts are these: the ten undeclared issues; the questions of inappropriate attention; questions applied to dependent co-arising; and the last four of the undeclared issues—the tetralemma, or set of four unacceptable alternatives, on the Tathāgata after death—discussed as a

separate set. The way in which the Buddha treats the questions in these contexts reveals a great deal about where the line between objectification and appropriate attention lies, and how appropriate attention can be used to deconstruct objectification and its attendant problems.

1) *The ten undeclared issues* are the questions marked with a double asterisk in the above list of questions put aside. These were apparently a standard questionnaire used by philosophical debaters in the Buddha's time to map where they and their opponents stood on the vital issues of the day. And, of course, these questions—and the views derived to answer them—were not peculiar to India or to the time of the Buddha. Plato, for one, offered answers to all of them, and his answers to the questions about the nature of the soul and its fate after death were central to his thought. In the *Timaeus* he postulated a cosmos partly eternal, partly not, partly finite and partly not. In the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* he insisted that the soul is distinct from the body and that, after death, the philosopher's soul will exist for eternity in rapturous contemplation of the eternal forms. This, as he saw it, is the aim of all philosophy. Later Western philosophers and theologians argued over Plato's answers to these questions, but the vast majority of them agreed that the questions were worthy of answer. In fact, a long and interesting study could be made of the variety of answers that Western thought has provided for these questions, all of which the Buddha labeled as deserving to be put aside.

The ten undeclared issues are discussed as a set in a large number of discourses, among them §§176-183. A few of the views that the Buddha's contemporaries offered as answers to these questions are presented in DN 1 [§184]. The discourses discussing these ten questions focus initially on explaining why the Buddha puts them aside, after which they often propose various ways of replacing these questions with the framework of appropriate attention.

In the various explanations for why the Buddha put these questions aside, the term *objectification* appears in only one discourse [§178], but objectification is clearly the underlying issue in all the explanations, for the drawbacks they attribute to the questions put aside are identical to the drawbacks of objectification. It's because the Buddha knows and sees these drawbacks that he can assert that, in refusing to answer these questions, he is acting not from ignorance, but from knowledge.

What does he know? In general terms, he sees the extent of view-standpoints, the cause of views, and the uprooting of views [§178]. In more particular terms, he sees the origins of these questions and views, their immediate kammic effect, their long-term kammic effect, and the advantages of letting them go.

Thus his reasons for putting them aside are primarily *pragmatic*. Instead of stating whether the questions can or cannot be answered, he puts them aside because he sees that the act of asking and answering them can lead to short-term and long-term harm.

This point is vividly illustrated by the famous simile of the arrow, in MN 63 [§176]:

“It's just as if a man were wounded with an arrow thickly smeared with poison. His friends & companions, kinsmen & relatives would provide him with a surgeon, and the man would say, ‘I won't have this arrow removed until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble warrior, a brahman, a merchant, or a worker.’ He would say, ‘I won't have this arrow removed until I know the given name & clan name of the man who wounded me... until I know whether he was tall, medium, or short... until I know whether he was dark, ruddy-brown, or

golden-colored... until I know his home village, town, or city... until I know whether the bow with which I was wounded was a long bow or a crossbow... until I know whether the bowstring with which I was wounded was fiber, bamboo threads, sinew, hemp, or bark... until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was wild or cultivated... until I know whether the feathers of the shaft with which I was wounded were those of a vulture, a stork, a hawk, a peacock, or another bird... until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was bound with the sinew of an ox, a water buffalo, a langur, or a monkey.' He would say, 'I won't have this arrow removed until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was that of a common arrow, a curved arrow, a barbed, a calf-toothed, or an oleander arrow.' The man would die and those things would still remain unknown to him."

Because the information requested by the wounded man is theoretically knowable, it's possible to read this simile as suggesting that there could be answers to the ten questions, but that the Buddha wanted to avoid giving them because they were a waste of valuable time. After all, as we have noted, knowledge of the limits of the physical cosmos might possibly have been in the Buddha's range. But, in terms of his general standards for what he would teach—that it had to be true *and* beneficial *and* timely—the simple pragmatic fact that these questions were unbeneficial was reason enough not to answer them.

The Buddha's various lists of pragmatic reasons for not answering the ten questions fall into two main sorts:

a) In what might be called his *basic list* of pragmatic reasons—the one most commonly cited in the discourses—he simply notes that the questions are irrelevant to the goal of his teaching:

"[This] does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation; to calm, direct knowledge, self-awakening, unbinding." — MN 63

MN 63 further states that, "It's not the case that when there is the view, 'the cosmos is eternal' that there is the living of the holy life (*Sassato lokoti... ditthiyā sati brahma-cariya-vāso abhavissāti: evaṃ no*)." This discourse then applies the same verdict to the nine other views. In other words, these views do not constitute the practice, and they distract attention from the practice, but there is nothing in MN 63 to indicate that they are antithetical to the practice.

b) However, in what might be called the *strong lists* of pragmatic reasons, the Buddha notes that these questions derive from unskillful states of mind that actually foster the causes of suffering rather than trying to abandon them. To try to answer these questions is thus not simply to stray aimlessly from the duties of the path; it's to go against those duties in the opposite direction. This point is highlighted by SN 12:35 [§167], which goes considerably further than MN 63 in stating that:

"When there is the view that the soul is the same as the body, there is no leading the holy life. And when there is the view that the soul is one thing and the body another, there is no leading the holy life. (*Taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ vā... ditthiyā sati brahma-cariya-vāso na hoti; aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ vā... ditthiyā sati brahma-cariya-vāso na hoti*)." — SN 12:35

In other words, instead of simply being an irrelevant waste of time, the act of holding to any of these views makes the practice of the holy life impossible.

This point is illustrated by the ways the Buddha, in connection with the strong list of pragmatic reasons, discusses his knowledge of the *origin* of these ten questions. For example, he sees that they derive from a misunderstanding of and

attachment to the aggregates and sense media [§178, §181]. As Ven. Isidatta adds in §179, these questions are also the result of self-identity views related to the aggregates. In other words, they arise because one holds to a sense of self both as object of some of the views and as thinker/holder of views: the “I am” in “I am the thinker.” In DN 1 [§184], the Buddha notes that attempts to answer these questions are based on logical deductions either from first principles or from limited meditative experiences, both of which are inadequate grounds for proof, in that each can be used to reach contradictory conclusions.

With regard to the *immediate consequences* of holding to any views derived from these questions, the Buddha sees that they are entangling—“a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views... accompanied by suffering, distress, despair, & fever” [§183]—and an expression of anguish [§178]. In holding to them, one is holding on to agitation and vacillation [§184], to suffering and stress [§182]. This anguish and agitation can involve the mental unrest that comes from getting entangled in arguments over such views, the internal agitation that comes from holding on to uncertain knowledge, as well as the basic suffering that comes from holding fast to the basic terms of becoming: one’s sense of self and of the world. As long as one objectifies the issues of world and self, one cannot engage in the self cross-examination that treats the perceptions of world and self as a form of kamma. And again, one is fostering the causes for suffering rather than abandoning them.

The *long-term consequences* of all this, as stated in the strong lists, is that some of these views lead to bad states of rebirth; and that, in pursuing these questions, one does not reach unbinding.

Taken together, the Buddha’s two ways of stating the pragmatic drawbacks of answering these ten questions—in the basic list and the strong lists—highlight two important points. The first is that the motivation behind these questions is not always innocent ignorance. When based on attachment, these questions can be a strategy for avoiding the hard work of abandoning unskillful actions and developing skillful ones in their place. This point is dramatized in MN 63, where the monk Māluṅkyaputta refuses to practice until the Buddha has answered these ten questions to his satisfaction. Thus if, in the course of the practice, the mind finds itself attached to these questions, it needs to see what important issues it is avoiding and why.

The second important point related to the Buddha’s pragmatic reasons for leaving the undeclared issues undeclared is that his analysis of the present impact of holding to these views—immersing one in a “thicket,” a “writhing,” a “contortion”—parallels his discussion of the conflicts arising from objectification. We have already noted, in Chapter Three, five ways in which the categories of objectification give rise to various forms of conflict: (1) They deal in abstract uncertainties, rather than the certainties of action and result; (2) one’s identity as a being, once created by these categories, gets drawn into the issues created by those categories; (3) such an act of self-definition is an act of self-limitation; (4) one gets inevitably drawn into conflict with the categories and issues created by other people as they define themselves and others—and try to impose these definitions on others—each doing this on his or her own terms; and (5), in defining oneself, one becomes a being with a need to feed off the world, with the attendant uncertainties that come from an insecure food source, as well as the dangers posed by others who might want to take that food source—or oneself—as food for themselves.

Thus the conflict caused by objectification is both internal and external: internal in the limitations and agitation that come from unskillful desire; external in the quarrels, disputes, rivalry, and hostility that can occur when one’s views

and desires come into conflict with those of others. In refusing to declare an answer to any of the ten undeclared issues, the Buddha was avoiding both the internal suffering of conflictive thoughts and the external suffering of needless quarrels and debates.

It's important to emphasize the word *needless* here, for—as we have seen—the Buddha didn't try to avoid conflict by simply putting all questions aside. When questions of skillful and unskillful action were at stake, he was prepared strongly to argue his case. In this way, he showed the attitude of a skillful warrior. Unlike the sectarians of AN 10:93 [§182], he knew which battles were worth fighting and which best left aside. Unlike the agnostics of DN 1 [§152], who were afraid to advance any ideas about skillful and unskillful action for fear of being bested in argument, he knew how to win the important battles.

In fact, once the Buddha had explained his reasons for putting the ten undeclared issues aside—which, as we have already noted, is an implicit way of shifting attention to the important battles of skillful and unskillful action—he would often shift attention to these battles in an explicit way, stating that the framework of objectification should be replaced with that of appropriate attention. His primary explicit tactic in this approach was to show how objectification is caused by unskillful actions. In other words, he placed objectification *as an action* in maps showing chains of unskillful actions, making the point that the frameworks supplied by objectification are actually subsumed under the framework of appropriate attention.

Here he was repeating in a more extended way one of the tactics he used in a cursory way when explaining why the ten undeclared issues should be put aside—briefly citing their origins in unskillful mental states—but the explicit maps have the advantage of explaining further why the framework of appropriate attention is such an important replacement for objectification—in other words, why the battles of appropriate attention are the important ones to win. At the same time, they show why these battles are ultimately won within the mind, and why these inner battles have to take a few strategic turns.

A useful set of maps to begin with are those detailing the causal chain of actions by which the categories of objectification arise and lead to needless conflict. These maps are found in MN 18 [§50], DN 21 [§4], and Sn 4:11. Because the Buddhist analysis of causality is generally non-linear, with plenty of room for feedback loops, the maps vary in the order of some of their factors.

In MN 18, as we have already seen in Chapter Three, the map is this:

contact → feeling → perception → thinking → being assailed by the perceptions & categories of objectification

In DN 21, the map reads like this:

the perceptions & categories of objectification → thinking → desire → dear-&-not-dear → envy & stinginess → rivalry & hostility

In Sn 4:11, the map falls into two parts, which can be diagrammed like this:

perception → the categories of objectification

perception → name & form → contact → appealing & unappealing → desire → dear-&-not-dear → stinginess/divisiveness/quarrels/disputes

These maps teach several important lessons about the conditions determining the Buddha's strategy in replacing objectification with the framework of appropriate attention. The first lesson lies in their common feature: They all cite

perception—the act of labeling thoughts, feelings, and sensations—as the primary culprit. This means that any attempt to dismantle objectification will require dismantling perception. However, the fact that perception is listed on two levels—as perception in general and as the particular perceptions of objectification—reflects the two tiers in the Buddha’s strategy for overcoming attachment to perceptions: using the perceptions of appropriate attention to dismantle the perceptions of objectification, and then turning the perceptions of appropriate attention on themselves—as actions—to dismantle attachment to themselves as well, leaving no attachment to any perceptions at all.

The two tiers in this strategy are reflected in one of the main differences among these maps, a difference we have already noted in Chapter One: In DN 21, *thinking* results from the perceptions and categories of objectification, whereas in MN 18 it precedes them. The apparent explanation for this difference is that in MN 18 the term *objectification* covers only thought dealing in the categories of becoming and inappropriate attention. This meaning of the term is useful in the first tier of the strategy—corresponding to the standard definition of right view [§33]—where the perceptions of appropriate attention are used to undercut the perceptions of inappropriate attention. In DN 21, however, *objectification* includes the categories framing the questions of appropriate attention as well. This is the meaning of the term useful in the level of the strategy—corresponding to the more advanced definition of right view in SN 12:15 [§172]—where even the categories of appropriate attention are dismantled and dropped.

The maps also indicate how the framework of skillful and unskillful action underlies both tiers of this strategy. In fact, the maps themselves are an expression of this framework. All three portray perceptions not in terms of their content or relationship to underlying entities, but in terms of their function as actions: the roles they play in a causal chain of activities. This portrayal helps not only to depersonalize the process of perception-fabrication—setting aside the issue of any possible self involved in the process—but also to set aside the issue of whether these perceptions provide true information about the world “out there” or “in here.” The act of setting these issues aside is crucial to the Buddha’s strategy, for as long as the mind still sees perception as a means for attaining truth, it can stir up the passion needed to keep fabricating perceptions for that purpose [§38]. But when perception can be viewed simply as an unskillful action leading to unnecessary stress, a sense of disenchantment for the process of perception-fabrication develops, undermining the passion fueling that process. This allows the process simply to stop. In terms of kamma, this strategy is the kamma that puts an end to kamma [§31], leading through disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation to release.

The detailed steps in this strategy are portrayed in the discourses where the Buddha goes beyond simply describing the drawbacks of the ten undeclared issues and discusses the viewpoint from which any view based on them can be transcended. To begin with, there is the analysis offered at the end of DN 1 [§184], in which he states that the vacillation and agitation inherent in asserting any of the possible views concerning the eternity and infinity of the cosmos is a product of craving. Craving, in turn, is based on contact at the six sense media.

This analysis places the act of holding these views into the map of dependent co-arising [§19, §41], a teaching that itemizes in the most extended form the details of the first three noble truths, tracing the origination of suffering and stress to ignorance of the four noble truths. When—through the ending of ignorance—one discerns the origination, ending, allure, drawbacks of, and emancipation from the six sense media, one discerns the release that is higher than any of these conditioned things.

The advantage of this strategy, as we will see below, is that dependent co-arising is a mode of perception that avoids the dichotomies of existence/non-existence, self/not-self underlying the categories of objectification. More than that: This mode of analysis not only avoids these dichotomies; it also deconstructs them. In focusing attention on levels of feeling and perception prior to objectification, it fosters an ability to view objectification not as a source of true or false information about realities but simply as a process of mental events and actions leading to stress. This causes any passion fueling the process to fade away.

AN 10:93 [§182] extends this strategy from the cosmological issues mentioned in DN 1 to include all ten of the undeclared issues. To take the first view as an example:

“As for the venerable one who says, ‘The cosmos is eternal. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless. This is the sort of view I have,’ his view arises from his own inappropriate attention or in dependence on the words of another. Now this view has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen. Whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stress. This venerable one thus adheres to that very stress, submits himself to that very stress.”

In response to the retort that the act of holding to this analysis too would entail adhering to and submitting to stress, Anāthapiṇḍika the householder replies,

“Venerable sirs, whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stressful. Whatever is stressful is not me, is not what I am, is not my self. Having seen this well with right discernment as it has come to be, I also discern the higher escape from it as it has come to be.”

In other words, this form of analysis is superior to other views in that it contains a perspective that can be used to effect not only their transcendence, but also its own. Having reduced every other view to an instance of clinging, it has placed those views into the context of dependent co-arising, which gives guidance as to how that clinging can be abandoned. Then, in the second tier of the strategy, the terms of this analysis can be turned on themselves, viewing them too as processes. This undercuts any clinging to them and leads to the higher escape: total release.

This point is reflected in the fact that, in the cessation mode of dependent co-arising, *all* perceptions (as a sub-factor of fabrications and name-&-form) cease, and not just unskillful ones. In fact, all experience of the six senses ceases as well [§50]. This, however, does not mean that awakening is the end of all sensory experience. Ud 3:10 (Chapter One) indicates that after experiencing the bliss of release, one can emerge from that state and perceive the world of the six senses once more. But, as the image of the flayed cow in MN 146 [§77] indicates, one’s relationship to the senses has now changed. One experiences the senses as if disjointed from them—a point seconded by §201. As for perceptions and classifications, now that one has fully understood them, one can continue using them without being subject to them [§196]. In the words of MN 18 [§50], one is no longer assailed by them. Freed from their limitations, one’s awareness has no restrictions at all [§201].

2) *The questions of inappropriate attention*, marked with a triple asterisk in the above list, appear in three different discourses. The broad outlines of their

treatment in the Canon parallel that of the ten undeclared issues. In other words, the discourses listing them discuss the drawbacks of holding any view based on these questions, the pragmatic reasons for putting them aside, and the strategy for overcoming any interest in these questions by viewing them in terms of dependent co-arising and the four noble truths. However, a few of the details in the treatment differ in this case, the most important being that the questions of inappropriate attention go deeper than the ten undeclared issues, for they deal directly with the terms and perceptions that underlie all possible positions taken on the ten undeclared issues.

MN 2—which we discussed in Chapter Three—first states the pragmatic reasons for putting these questions aside, using a phrase commonly applied to the ten undeclared issues: Any answers to these questions form “a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views.” It then adds, “Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, & death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from stress.” The discussion then offers a practical alternative to these questions by directing the meditator to attend instead to identifying stress, its origination, its cessation, and the path to its cessation as they are directly experienced. In other words, a first step in the practice is to put aside the questions of inappropriate attention and to replace them with an alternative set of perceptions based on the framework of the four noble truths.

The other two references to these questions, SN 12:20 [§164] and MN 38 [§165], point to a later stage in the practice: Once the meditator has seen dependent co-arising, he/she will no longer be tempted to chase after these questions. In other words, it’s not the case that these questions are put aside as irrelevancies simply for the duration of the practice, after which one may return to them as one likes. The experience of the practice removes any and all interest in pursuing them ever again.

This point is supported by a passage in MN 140, in which the Buddha described various “conceivings” stilled in a sage at peace: “I am” ... “I am this” ... “I shall be” ... “I shall not be” ... “I shall be possessed of form” ... “I shall not be possessed of form” ... “I shall be percipient” ... “I shall not be percipient” ... “I shall be neither percipient nor non-percipient.” These are obviously answers to some of the questions of inappropriate attention: “Am I?” “Am I not?” “What am I?” “Shall I be?” “What shall I be?” Once these questions are put aside for good, the corresponding currents of conceiving no longer flow.

Thus these four passages, taken together, describe three stages in the practice: consciously abandoning the questions of inappropriate attention so as to focus on the four noble truths; contemplating the four noble truths until one sees events in terms of dependent co-arising; and finally, as a result, no longer being tempted to pursue the questions of inappropriate attention. These passages, however, don’t go into any detail about how the application of dependent co-arising connects the second to the third stage in this progression. For that, we need to look at how the Buddha treats the questions in the next category.

3) *Questions applied to dependent co-arising.* The passages in this category—all marked with a single asterisk in the above list—fall into two sub-categories.

a) Those in the primary sub-category [§§166-173] present dependent co-arising as an alternative mode of perception that avoids many of the questions springing from the either/or dichotomies posited by the perceptions and categories of becoming, such as existence/non-existence, self/other, or agent/object: Does everything exist? Does everything not exist? Are pleasure

and pain self-made? Other-made? Both? Neither? Is the one who acts the same as the one who experiences the act? Is the one who acts different from the one who experiences the act? Is the one who experiences feeling the same as the feeling, or something different? In every case where the Buddha is presented with these questions, he puts them aside and advises his listeners to look at experience in terms of dependent co-arising as a way of avoiding the entanglements of trying to answer these questions.

Among the either/or questions avoided by dependent co-arising, perhaps the most interesting dichotomy is given in SN 12:48 [§171]—Is everything a Oneness? Is everything a plurality?—for the Buddha has frequently and erroneously been depicted as saying Yes to both questions. On the one hand, in medieval India, Mahāyāna scholastic philosophers criticized what they saw as the pluralistic world-view of the Buddha's "Hīnayāna" teachings, whereas they themselves adhered to the belief that, on what they called the ultimate level of truth, everything is a Oneness. On the other hand, at present, many people assume that the Buddha taught dependent co-arising as an expression of universal interconnectedness, which they further interpret as a teaching on universal Oneness. Although the Buddha did recognize that there are states of meditation yielding an experience of non-duality—with the highest such experience the non-duality of consciousness (AN 10:29)—he noted that even these experiences are conditioned and subject to change. He did not interpret them as conveying or constituting metaphysical truths. Instead, he taught dependent co-arising as a way to avoid taking a position on the objectifying question of whether everything is a Oneness or a plurality, focusing instead directly on the processes of how stress is brought into being and how it can be brought to an end.

For this is precisely how dependent co-arising avoids all of these objectifying dichotomies and modes of thinking: It regards experience simply in terms of processes—events arising and passing away in dependence on other events. No reference is made to the existence or non-existence of any agents creating these events, observers experiencing them, thinkers thinking about them, or an outside world or cosmos underlying them. Thus, instead of viewing events in light of the perceptions and categories of becoming—self-identity and world-views—dependent co-arising perceives them in the Buddha's categorical mode, simply as actions and results in a complex causal sequence.

The pragmatic reasons for adopting this mode of perception are explicit in the formula of dependent co-arising itself: Ignorance—lack of skill in applying the teaching of dependent co-arising—leads to suffering and stress in all their aspects; knowledge—skill in applying this teaching—brings all aspects of suffering and stress to an end.

b) The difficulty of developing and maintaining this mode of perception without slipping back into the perceptions of becoming is indicated by the passages in the second sub-category [§170, §§174-175], where the Buddha declares invalid all questions that attempt to confirm or deny the existence of an agent, owner, or underlying substance framing the factors of dependent co-arising. In each of these cases, he is fending off attempts to place dependent co-arising within the framework of becoming; and in each case he reiterates that the only framework worth focusing on concerns the relationships among the factors of dependent co-arising in and of themselves.

This is why the Buddha so often stresses the need to develop the perception of not-self, for it counteracts any habitual tendency that—by assuming an agent causing the events, or a subject experiencing them—would interfere with the act of viewing experience in terms of dependent co-arising. At the same time—and this is where the effectiveness of dependent co-arising as a strategy is most

explicitly explained—he reduces questions of “self” to the *perception* of “self,” thus placing it *within* the sequence of dependent co-arising, rather than *framing* that sequence. As a perception, “self” functions as a sub-factor under fabrication and name-&-form. As a topic of inappropriate questions, it also functions as the sub-factor of attention under name-&-form. When expanded into a theory about the existence or non-existence of a self, the perception of self functions as an object or mode of clinging. Because all of these factors lead to suffering, the Buddha’s strategy of placing “self” in this context and applying the perception of “not-self” to every object of clinging induces a sense of dispassion toward all forms of self-identification.

To counteract questions about a “world” or “cosmos” lying behind dependent co-arising, the Buddha employs a similar strategy, even though he does not advocate the use of a parallel “non-world” perception. He first reduces the world/cosmos to a set of psychological factors, the six sense media, which function both as a factor of dependent co-arising and as old kamma [§32, §159; also SN 35:115]. Thus the world, instead of lying *behind* or *around* the sequence of dependent co-arising, is reduced to a factor *within* the sequence. Then the Buddha shows how the world, thus perceived, ends with the ending of craving. By reducing the world to the means by which the perception of “world” is formed, and showing how such a world—instead of being substantial—is synonymous with suffering, he induces a perception of distaste for being reborn in any world at all.

“And what is the perception of distaste for every world? There is the case where a monk abandoning any attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions with regard to any world, refrains from them and does not get involved. This is called the perception of distaste for every world.” — *AN 10:60*

SN 12:15 [§172] gives a more detailed picture of how this perception of distaste is developed. There the meditator is encouraged to observe the origination and cessation of the world—the six sense media—as it actually occurs. To do this, one needs to have put aside notions of agent and experiencer in order to see these events in and of themselves, and not as a potential world of food for the self. As the mind remains in this mode of perception, watching the repeated origination of the world, the concept of “non-existence” with regard to the world simply does not occur. As it watches the repeated cessation of the world, the concept of “existence” with regard to the world also doesn’t occur. In other words, the mind has not mounted a full rejection of these concepts with regard to the world. It has simply entered a mode of perception where they are irrelevant and so do not arise. The only perception retaining any relevancy is that of stress arising, stress passing away. This perception then leads through disenchantment—distaste for any desire to continue feeding on this stress—to dispassion, and through dispassion to release.

When release is gained, it tends to be expressed in terms of the factors of dependent co-arising as the end of becoming and birth.

“Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.” — *SN 56:11*

“Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this-ness [an idiomatic expression meaning, ‘this world’].” — *SN 22:59*

Although this passage from SN 56:11 still contains the term “my,” and although arahants frequently use the terms “I” and “mine” in everyday

discourse, there is no longer the conceit, “I am.” This is an important distinction. While “I” and “my” are useful designations for functioning in the realm of the six senses, when awakening is reached there is no longer any desire to turn them into an “I am” framing that realm. This is because one of the prominent descriptions for release is that it is free from hunger (*nicchāta*) of every sort. With no hunger, there is no need to assume an agent to find food or a subject needing to be fed. Thus the questions of inappropriate attention—particularly “Am I? Am I not? What am I?”—no longer address a felt need. This is why an awakened person no longer runs after them.

The question remains, though—at least for those contemplating whether awakening is a desirable goal to pursue—as to how to describe such a person. We have already seen, under the ten undeclared issues, some of the pragmatic reasons for why the Buddha refuses to answer questions about the existence of an awakened person after death, reasons that these questions hold in common with the other undeclared issues. But it turns out that there are additional reasons, peculiar to these questions, for putting them aside. This is why the discourses occasionally give them separate treatment.

4) *The tetralemma on the Tathāgata after death.* Several passages in the Canon treat this list of four questions separately from their more frequent context in the list of ten undeclared issues. Two such passages—DN 29 [§185] and SN 16:12—give the basic list of pragmatic reasons for putting these four questions aside. But a few passages [§§186-189] hint at other reasons for not answering these questions, stating simply, with little further explanation, that these questions would not occur to one who has gained awakening. This is because such a person knows the aggregates and their cessation as they have come to be—i.e., as they appear to experience without being objectified into states of becoming—and so has abandoned any passion or fondness for the aggregates, becoming, clinging, and craving.

It’s possible to view this list of reasons as an extension of the stronger list of pragmatic reasons for putting these questions aside. In other words, these questions wouldn’t occur to a person who has abandoned unskillful mental states, because such a person has seen that these questions—and the terms in which they are framed—serve no skillful purpose. But it’s also possible to read these reasons as indicating that such questions don’t occur to a person who has actually become a Tathāgata because the four alternatives don’t do justice to that attainment. In fact, DN 15 [§195] affirms that this too is the case, and states explicitly why this is so: In gaining release, the arahant has gained a sense of exactly how far expression, designation, and description—i.e., language—can go. Having gained this knowledge, the arahant is released from those limitations. This point is further supported by passages [§§197-198] stating that the experience of this attainment lies beyond even the range of the word, “all”; and still further supported by passages [§§190-191] stating that the Tathāgata is freed from anything by which one might describe him—or, what amounts to the same thing—that the means by which a Tathāgata might be described have been abandoned and totally cease [§§190-194, §202].

These points are related to the way in which the Canon defines and classifies a “being.”

Then Ven. Rādha went to the Blessed One and on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One: “‘A being,’ lord. ‘A being,’ it’s said. To what extent is one said to be ‘a being’?”

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for form, Rādha: When one is caught up [*satta*] there, tied up [*visatta*] there, one is said to be ‘a being

[*satta*].’

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, Rādhā: When one is caught up there, tied up there, one is said to be ‘a being.’” — SN 23:2

“If one stays obsessed with form, that’s what one is measured/limited by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

“If one stays obsessed with feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, that’s what one is measured/limited by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with form, monk, that’s not what one is measured/limited by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, that’s not what one is measured/limited by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.” — SN 22:36

Thus an arahant, in abandoning passion, craving, and obsession for the aggregates, can no longer be classified as a being. Free from this classification, he/she cannot be defined, and so cannot be described in any of the four ways proposed by the tetralemma.

This is where the questions of the tetralemma differ radically from the other six undeclared issues. Questions about beings and the cosmos, whether pragmatic or not, are still meaningful and potentially answerable because their terms can be defined [§159; §199]. But because the Tathāgata cannot be defined, the four questions of the tetralemma are *meaningless* and so cannot be answered at all.

This point is so important that the Buddha and his disciples expand on it through cross-questioning. In SN 22:85 [§193], where Ven. Yamaka has insisted that the Tathāgata after death does not exist, Ven. Sāriputta takes him to task and subjects him to a questionnaire, asking how he would identify the Tathāgata in the present life. After running through a long list of the various ways one might identify the Tathāgata with regard to the aggregates, and getting Yamaka to admit that none of them apply to the Tathāgata, Ven. Sāriputta then gets him to admit that if he can’t pin down—define—what the Tathāgata is in the present life, there is no way he can legitimately say that the Tathāgata doesn’t exist after death. This aggressive cross-questioning, however, does more than convince Yamaka that his previous answer was wrong. It actually leads him to break through to the Dhamma, i.e., to gain stream-entry. Ven. Sāriputta thus asks him,

“Then, friend Yamaka, how would you answer if you are asked, ‘A monk, an arahant, with no more fermentations: What is he on the breakup of the body, after death?’”

“Thus asked, my friend, I would answer, ‘Form is inconstant... Feeling... Perception... Fabrications... Consciousness is inconstant. That which is inconstant is stressful. That which is stressful has ceased and gone to its end.’”

This answer gains Ven. Sāriputta’s approval, in that it limits itself to what can be defined and described.

SN 44:2 [§192] contains the same questionnaire, given by the Buddha to Ven. Anurādhā, who had insisted that the Tathāgata after death could be described in a way outside of the four alternatives of the tetralemma. The conclusion here, however, is somewhat different. After getting Anurādhā to admit that he could not describe the Tathāgata in the present life, much less after death, the Buddha

ends simply by saying that all he teaches is stress and the end of stress. This, in effect, returns to one of his reasons for not answering any of the ten undeclared issues: They are irrelevant to his program as a teacher in showing people how to gain release.

SN 44:1 and MN 72 [§§190-191] employ another type of cross-questioning—the exploration of an analogy—to give a sense of why the Tathāgata after death cannot be described. In SN 44:1, the bhikkhuni Khemā gets King Pasenadi, who presumably employed many expert accountants and mathematicians to keep track of his palace inventories, to admit that even he had no mathematician capable of calculating the number of sand grains in the river Ganges or the number of buckets of water in the ocean. In the same way, she then tells him, the Tathāgata—freed from the classifications of the aggregates—is “deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the ocean.”

The same phrase is mentioned in MN 72, but the analogy explored through cross-questioning is a different one: When a fire has gone out, in which direction has it gone? East? West? North? Or south? Just as these questions cannot be answered because none of the possible directions applies to an extinguished fire, the Buddha says, one cannot say that the arahant after death reappears, doesn't reappear, both, or neither, because none of these alternatives apply. Although the image of the extinguished fire, to a modern mind, might give a very different impression from that of the ocean—the nothingness of the extinguished fire *vs.* the vastness of the ocean—in the Buddha's time the two images were more congruent. The Buddha's questioner in this passage, Vacchagotta, was a brahman. The brahmins in his time held a view that fire, when extinguished, is not annihilated. Instead, it goes into a diffuse state, latent and omnipresent throughout all the elements of the cosmos—even in water. The Buddha himself did not adopt all the particulars of this view, but when talking to Vacchagotta he used some of its implications to suggest to Vacchagotta's mind that the arahant after death is so boundless that he/she cannot be confined to the range of what can be described.

This covers the four main contexts in which the Canon lists the questions the Buddha put aside. As for the few questions falling outside of these contexts, it's easy to see in each case that they can be equated with or related to questions falling within them.

When we survey the main contexts in which the Buddha discusses questions to be put aside, we gain further insight into the way in which questions deserving appropriate attention differ from those derived from the categories and perceptions of blatant objectification (i.e., objectification on the level described in MN 18, rather than the subtler and more inclusive level described in DN 21). We have noted above that these two classes of questions differ in the perceptions they employ. Even more importantly, they differ in the framework they provide for those perceptions, a point illustrated by §170 and §§174-175. In blatant objectification, perceptions of self/other, self/world, agent/object, existence/non-existence, taken as realities, form the framework in which meaning is assigned to the processes of the six senses. Thus the meaning of these processes is determined by measuring them against the framework of realities assumed to underlie them.

In the questions of appropriate attention, however, the roles are reversed. The processes of dependent co-arising—events arising and passing away in dependence on other events—form the framework for such perceptions as self and cosmos. In this framework, these perceptions are measured, not so much for their truth-value in representing assumed realities, as for their role as mental events in either engendering stress or putting it to an end. When questioned

from this perspective, issues of agent/object, existence/non-existence can be comprehended as elements of becoming, and thus as inherently perpetuating stress. When dismantled and viewed simply as instances of stress arising and passing away, their terms become totally irrelevant—even antithetical—to the project of putting an end to stress.

As we noted above, all the various maps showing how objectification leads to conflict assign a central role to perception. Thus, by rendering irrelevant the reality usually assigned to the perceptions of blatant objectification, the perceptions of dependent co-arising effectively dismantle the power of that level of objectification over the mind. In this way, these perceptions are not simply an *alternative* to the perceptions of blatant objectification. They act as the *cure* for blatant objectification. And because they can then be turned on any attachment even to appropriate attention, they cure objectification on both levels of subtlety to which the term applies. This helps to explain why, in §19, the Buddha's breakthrough to the deathless came from cross-questioning himself using the terms of dependent co-arising, for he wasn't simply replacing one set of perceptions with another. He was using these perceptions to free himself from attachment to perception of every sort.

Thus the distinction between the framework of inappropriate attention, expressed in terms of blatant objectification, and the framework of appropriate attention, expressed in terms of dependent co-arising, is that questions framed in terms of the former generally tend to keep one trapped in the framework, leading to continued conflict and stress, whereas questions framed in terms of the latter ultimately lead to a knowing (*añña*) free not only from stress, but also from mental frameworks of every sort. This knowing is so liberating that even after one emerges from it and returns to the world of the six senses, one is able to use mental frameworks without ever being bound by them. Because the pragmatic effects of appropriate attention and inappropriate attention differ so radically, it should come as no surprise that the distinction between these two frameworks is apparently the primary consideration at work when the Buddha decides whether to put a question aside. However, our analysis has shown that at least two other considerations might also be at work. The first derives from the fact we noted in Chapter Three, that some questions appropriate for one level of right view have to be put aside when developing a higher level of right view. The second consideration derives from the general limitations of linguistic description when trying to discuss a person who has no desire or obsessions by which he/she could be defined. Thus—when issues of etiquette are not at stake—these three considerations seem to be the primary factors at play when the Buddha is deciding whether to answer a question or put it aside:

- the distinction between blatant objectification and appropriate attention;
- the level of right view appropriate for the listener;
- the limitations of language.

This summary can be supported by examining pairs of questions that, on the surface, seem quite similar, but to which the Buddha responded in different ways: answering in one case, and putting aside in another. In some instances, the questions are explicitly stated; in others, they lie implicit behind declarative statements. For us, the important point lies in trying to discern the patterns in the Buddha's choice of a response, to see why one question was considered skillful and its similar pairing was not. And the three considerations summarized above provide a convenient framework for discerning these patterns and the reasons behind them.

- First, some instances in which the distinction between questions that are not

answered and those that are, is based on the difference between blatant objectification and appropriate attention:

In DN 11 [§161], the Buddha chides a monk for asking, “Where do these four great elements—the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property—cease without remainder?” and then tells him that the question should be phrased like this: “Where do water, earth, fire, & wind have no footing? Where are long & short, coarse & fine, fair & foul, name & form brought to an end?” The four properties listed here are equivalent to the physical cosmos as a whole. Thus the first question is concerned with the physical extent of the cosmos “out there.” The second question, however, treats the properties as an instance of name and form, a factor conditioned by consciousness directly experienced “right here” in the context of dependent co-arising. The answer then tells of a type of consciousness that provides no footing for the experience of name and form: consciousness without surface, without end, luminous all around. Aside from a passage in MN 49 [§205], which states that this consciousness is not experienced through the six sense media (the cosmos as defined in [§159]), the Buddha offers no further explanation of it, a fact to which we will return below. But his treatment of this point in DN 11 helps to illustrate a point made in §§156-158, that the physical end of the cosmos is not to be reached by traveling, but the end of the experience of the cosmos is to be found within this body—i.e., by viewing the cosmos as an instance of name and form in the context of dependent co-arising.

In SN 5:10 [§203], Sister Vajirā puts aside four questions posed by Māra: “By whom was this being created? Where is the being’s maker? Where has the being originated? Where does the being cease?” Her reasoning is that it is wrong to assume a “being.” However, as we have noted above, when the Buddha is asked by Ven. Rādha in SN 23:2 [§199], “To what extent is one said to be ‘a being’?” the Buddha answers, “Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for form [or any of the remaining aggregates], Rādha: When one is caught up [*satta*] there, tied up [*visatta*] there, one is said to be ‘a being [*satta*].” The distinction here is that Māra treats the concept of “a being” from the perspective of blatant objectification, whereas the Buddha’s answer shows that it can be more usefully defined—and its origination understood—in terms that would fit into dependent co-arising.

In fact, Sister Vajirā, after rejecting Māra’s questions, makes the same point in discussing how the assumption of a being arises—through the presence of the aggregates—and how it is found to be empty when the aggregates are taken apart—i.e., when all craving and clinging for them is removed [§199].

In MN 72 [§190], the Buddha refuses to tell Vacchagotta whether, after death, the arahant reappears, doesn’t reappear, both, or neither. However—as we saw above, in SN 56:11 and SN 22:59—he describes part of the realization of full awakening as, “this is the last birth... birth is ended... there is now no further becoming.” [See also §18, §68, §79, §112, §§138-139, §§141-142, §195, §200.] In the first case, Vacchagotta’s question is phrased in terms of blatant objectification—looking for the existence, non-existence, etc., of the arahant, conceived to be a being—whereas the realizations of awakening are phrased in terms borrowed from dependent co-arising.

- As for an example of a question answered on one level of right view, only to be put aside on another:

The topic of kamma is treated differently on the preliminary and transcendent levels of right view. The standard description of the Buddha’s second knowledge on the night of his awakening, phrased in terms of the preliminary level, indicates that beings experience pleasure and pain in dependence on their own actions.

“I saw—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with actions: “These beings—who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, & mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the breakup of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the breakup of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.” — MN 19

This point is seconded in the analytical answer the Buddha gives in MN 136 [§66]:

“Having intentionally done—with body, with speech, or with mind—an action that is to be experienced as pleasure, one experiences pleasure. Having intentionally done—with body, with speech, or with mind—an action that is to be experienced as pain, one experiences pain. Having intentionally done—with body, with speech, or with mind—an action that is to be experienced as neither-pleasure-nor-pain, one experiences neither-pleasure-nor-pain.”

In fact, the principle that beings experience the results of their actions is so important that the Buddha recommends that all people contemplate it on a daily basis:

“It’s not the case only for me that I am the owner of actions, heir to actions, born of actions, related through actions, and have actions as my arbitrator; that—whatever I do, for good or for evil—to that will I fall heir. To the extent that there are beings—past & future, passing away & re-arising—all beings are the owners of actions, heir to actions, born of actions, related through actions, and have actions as their arbitrator. Whatever they do, for good or for evil, to that will they fall heir.” — AN 5:57

As we noted in our discussion of MN 136 in Chapter Three, the assumption that one will receive the results of one’s own actions is essential for developing skillful mental states and abandoning unskillful ones. This assumption underlies the preliminary level of right view.

However, in SN 12:17 [§166], the Buddha declares that knowledge of dependent co-arising helps to avoid the eternalistic leanings of the view that pain is self-made, and the annihilationistic leanings of the view that pain is other-made. (See Appendix Three.) In SN 12:18 [§167] he makes a similar statement about views concerning the self-made or other-made origins of both pleasure and pain. It’s important to note, though, that he explains the meaning of *self-made* and *other-made* differently in the two discourses. In SN 12:17, *self-made* means that the agent is the same person as the experiencer: “With the one who acts being the same as the one who experiences, existing from the beginning, pleasure & pain are self-made.” *Other-made* in this discourse means that the agent is something or someone else aside from the one who experiences: “With the one who acts being one thing, and the one who experiences being another, existing as the one struck by the feeling.” In SN 12:18, however, *self-made* refers to an identity, not between the agent and the experiencer, but between the feeling and

the experiencer of the feeling, whereas *other-made* means that feeling is one thing, and the experiencer something else.

In addition to refusing to say that pleasure and pain are self-made or other-made, the Buddha in SN 12:17 and 12:18 also refuses to say that they are both. Had these questions followed the pattern of the tetralemma, he would have then gone on to refuse to say, without qualification, that pleasure and pain are neither self-made nor other-made. However, he qualifies this alternative, denying that they are neither self-made nor other-made in the sense of being spontaneously arisen—i.e., arising without a cause—but affirming that they *can* be described as neither self-made nor other-made in the sense that they are dependently co-arisen. Thus the alternative of being spontaneously arisen does not count as a question put aside, for that alternative is decisively rejected in favor of explaining pleasure and pain in other terms.

The question of pleasure and pain's being self-made, other-made, or both, however, is definitely put aside. And regardless of how the terms are defined, the important point is that the ideas underlying the terms *self-made* and *other-made* parallel the two issues in the ten undeclared issues that refer to the identity or difference between the soul and the body. Thus they are a form of blatant objectification, which is put aside through right view as defined in terms of the four noble truths and dependent co-arising.

This means that the difference between these passages and those above is that they deal in the different assumptions required to develop different levels of skill on the path. MN 19, MN 136, and AN 5:57 deal with the mental framework of truths beneficial and timely as one embarks on the path of skillful action; SN 12:17 and 12:18, with the mental framework of truths beneficial and timely as one works to avoid objectification. Note that this does not mean that SN 12:17 and 12:18 deal in absolute or ultimate truths, whereas MN 19, MN 136, and AN 5:57 deal only in conventional truths. It's just that the two levels of right view are appropriate for different levels of skill, both of which—although their underlying assumptions may be different—lead ultimately to the same goal, upon which both are dropped.

- And as for some examples of the ambiguities that arise due to the limitations of language:

As we noted above, the Buddha in MN 72 [§190] refuses to tell Vacchagotta whether, after death, the arahant reappears, doesn't reappear, both, or neither. In MN 140, however, he states:

“Furthermore, a sage at peace doesn't take birth, doesn't age, doesn't die, is unagitated, and is free from longing. He has nothing whereby he would take birth. Not taking birth, will he age? Not aging, will he die? Not dying, will he be agitated? Not being agitated, for what will he long?”

And in SN 44:9 [§204], he states:

“Just as a fire burns with clinging/sustenance and not without clinging/sustenance, even so I designate the rebirth of one who has clinging/sustenance and not of one without clinging/sustenance.”

Unlike the passages from SN 22:59 and SN 56:11, these passages do not deal purely in the framework of dependent co-arising. Thus the difference between blatant objectification and dependent co-arising cannot account for the difference between the Buddha's response-strategy in MN 72 on the one hand, and in MN 140 and SN 44:9 on the other, for all the questions involved treat the arahant as a person, a being.

A similar ambiguity marks some of the discussions of whether anything is

left in the experience of total unbinding. AN 4:173 [§208], for example, declares that the act of asking whether, with the cessation of the six sense media, there is anything left, nothing left, both, or neither, is a form of objectification. This is apparently due to the fact that the questions of inappropriate attention—a form of objectification—deal not only in terms of self/other, and existence/non-existence, but also in terms of past, present, and future [§25]. The cessation of the six sense media, however, lies outside of time, so to deal in terms of anything or nothing else leftover afterward would be to impose a sense of time on what lies outside of time. This is why AN 4:173—seconding the discussion in MN 18 [§50]—states that the *possibility* of objectification as an action ceases with the cessation of the six sense media; and goes further to say that the range of *what can be talked about* in terms of objectification ceases with the cessation of the six sense media as well.

Nevertheless, other passages seem to imply either something or nothing existing in the experience of unbinding. For example, as we have noted above, DN 11 [§161] and MN 49 [§205] refer to a type of consciousness—“without surface, without end, luminous all around”—that, to the unawakened mind, sounds like a something. Ud 8:1 [§206] also refers to what seems to be a something—the existence of a dimension that constitutes the end of stress, a dimension that SN 35:117 [§198] says should be experienced—whereas Ud 8:2 [§207] suggests more of a nothing: “It’s hard to see the unaffected, for the truth is not easily seen. Craving is pierced in one who knows; for one who sees, there is nothing.” Even DN 11’s discussion of consciousness without surface deals in ambiguous terms: “Here water, earth, fire, & wind have no footing. Here long & short... name & form are all brought to an end. With the cessation of consciousness, each is here brought to an end.” The repeated *here* in this passage would seem to refer to consciousness without surface, but the phrase “the cessation of consciousness” creates an ambiguity. Is this phrase referring to the cessation of consciousness without surface as well, or solely to the cessation of the consciousness-aggregate? Was the Buddha being sloppy in his phrasing here, or deliberately ambiguous?

If we reflect on the fact, mentioned several times in this book, that his teaching is meant not only to be true but also beneficial and timely, that its coherence lies not in the consistent application of first principles but in the consistent focus of its teleology; if we also reflect on the Buddha’s occasional use of blatant objectification in explaining his teachings; and if we reflect on his general attitude toward language—that it cannot encompass the goal, but can be used strategically as part of the practice leading to the goal—then the Buddha’s ambiguities in his descriptions of the arahant after death and his descriptions of unbinding would appear to be deliberate. In these various dialogues, he is dealing with people who come to him with different levels of understanding. He teaches them not a general picture of reality—which would be a useless form of objectification—but tools of understanding, forms of right view, that will help them generate the desire to develop right effort leading to the goal of total release. As their questions touch on the goal, they are bound to find different aspects of it intriguing or puzzling—not that unbinding is multifaceted; simply that a mind of multifarious cravings, clingings, and sufferings can become curious about it in multiple ways.

So when the Buddha refuses to say whether the arahant reappears or not, he is emphasizing the fact that, in taking on no identity, the awakened person is boundless. When he says that the arahant is not reborn, he is emphasizing the fact that, when there is freedom from birth, there is freedom from suffering and stress. When he treats unbinding as a something—a dimension, a consciousness without surface—he is making the point that unbinding is not a form of

annihilation; when he treats it as a nothing, he is making the point that consciousness without surface, unlike even the infinitude of consciousness experienced in *jhāna*, has no object at all. When he leaves unexplained this paradox of something and nothing, or the question of how consciousness without surface relates to the cessation of consciousness, his apparent intent is not to get his listeners to abandon all effort at thought. Instead, it's to pique their curiosity, to stir within them a desire to develop right view and to use that right view as part of the complete path leading to a direct, personal experience of the goal. That's where they'll untangle the paradoxes for themselves.

This point is supported by a fact already noted: that the Buddha's most effective use of the strategy of putting a question aside is not when he simply remains silent, but when he follows up with an alternative way of viewing experience, an alternative mode of perception, that is more beneficial in leading to release.

After all, there are dangers in simply trying to force the mind not to think, for that approach can easily lead to the dead-end state without perception mentioned in DN 1 [§184]. And there are no instances in the discourses where a listener gains release simply on learning that awakening or an awakened one cannot properly be described. The closest examples are those of Ven. Yamaka [§193] and Upasiva [§202], but even in their cases they learn more specifically what has to be abandoned before reaching the point where language—including even the subtle objectification of right view—breaks down.

As we have noted with regard to SN 12:15 [§172], language is transcended not simply by trying to block it out, but by focusing on the issue of stress arising and passing away to the point where even such basic terms as existence and non-existence simply don't come to mind.

This is why the Buddha said that he taught only stress and the ending of stress, for if his listeners focus full attention on these questions, that takes care of everything else.

READINGS

AGNOSTICISM

§ 152. "Monks, there are some contemplatives & brahmins who, being asked questions regarding this or that, resort to verbal contortions, to eel-like wriggling, on four grounds.... There is the case of a certain contemplative or brahmin who does not discern as it actually is that 'This is skillful,' or that 'This is unskillful.' The thought occurs to him, 'I don't discern as it actually is that "This is skillful," or that "This is unskillful." If I... were to declare that "This is skillful," or that "This is unskillful," desire, passion, aversion, or irritation would occur to me; that would be a falsehood for me. Whatever would be a falsehood for me would be a distress for me. Whatever would be a distress for me would be an obstacle for me.' So, out of fear of falsehood, a loathing for falsehood, he does not declare that 'This is skillful,' or that 'This is unskillful.' Being asked questions regarding this or that, he resorts to verbal contortions, to eel-like wriggling: 'I don't think so. I don't think in that way. I don't think otherwise. I don't think not. I don't think not not.'

[The second case is virtually identical with the first, substituting 'clinging' for 'falsehood.']

[The third case:] “There is the case of a certain contemplative or brahman who does not discern as it actually is that ‘This is skillful,’ or that ‘This is unskillful’.... ‘If I, not discerning as it actually is that “This is skillful,” or that “This is unskillful,” were to declare that “This is skillful,” or that “This is unskillful”— There are contemplatives & brahmans who are pundits, subtle, skilled in debate, who prowl about like hair-splitting marksmen, as it were, shooting (philosophical) view-standpoints to pieces with their dialectic. They might cross-question me, press me for reasons, rebuke me. I might not be able to stand my ground; that would be a distress for me... an obstacle for me.’ So, out of a fear for questioning, a loathing for questioning... he resorts to verbal contortions, to eel-like wriggling....

[The fourth case:] “There is the case of a certain contemplative or brahman who is dull & exceedingly stupid. Out of dullness & exceeding stupidity, he— being asked questions regarding this or that—resorts to verbal contortions, to eel-like wriggling: ‘If you ask me if there exists another world [after death], if I thought that there exists another world, would I declare that to you? I don’t think so. I don’t think in that way. I don’t think otherwise. I don’t think not. I don’t think not not. If you asked me if there isn’t another world... both is & isn’t... neither is nor isn’t... if there are beings who transmigrate... if there aren’t... both are & aren’t... neither are nor aren’t... if the Tathāgata exists after death... doesn’t... both... neither... I don’t think so. I don’t think in that way. I don’t think otherwise. I don’t think not. I don’t think not not.’” — DN 1

§ 153. “Well then—knowing in what way, seeing in what way, does one without delay put an end to fermentations? There is the case where an ordinary uninstructed person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—assumes form to be the self. That assumption is a fabrication. Now, what is the cause, what is the origination, what is the birth, what is the coming-into-existence of that fabrication? To an ordinary uninstructed person, touched by that which is felt born of contact with ignorance, craving arises. That fabrication is born of that. And that fabrication is inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen. That craving.... That feeling.... That contact... That ignorance is inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen. It’s by knowing & seeing in this way that one without delay puts an end to fermentations.

[The same analysis is then applied to a wide range of views about the existence & non-existence of the self, down to:]

“He doesn’t assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form, or feeling to be the self, or the self as possessing feeling, or feeling as in the self, or the self as in feeling, or perception to be the self, or the self as possessing perception, or perception as in the self, or the self as in perception, or fabrications to be the self, or the self as possessing fabrications, or fabrications as in the self, or the self as in fabrications, or consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness, nor does he have the [eternalist] view, ‘This self is the same as the cosmos. This I will be after death, constant, lasting, eternal, not subject to change,’ nor does he have the [annihilationist] view, ‘I would not be, neither would there be what is mine. I will not be, neither will there be what is mine,’ *but he is doubtful & uncertain, having*

come to no conclusion with regard to the true Dhamma. That doubt, uncertainty, & coming-to-no-conclusion is a fabrication. [Italics added.]

“What is the cause, what is the origination, what is the birth, what is the coming-into-existence of that fabrication? To an ordinary uninstructed person, touched by that which is felt born of contact with ignorance, craving arises. That fabrication is born of that. And that fabrication is inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen. That craving.... That feeling.... That contact.... That ignorance is inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen. It’s by knowing & seeing in this way that one without delay puts an end to fermentations.” — SN 22:81

INCONCEIVABLES: KAMMA & THE WORLD

§ 154. “There are these four inconceivables that are not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about them. Which four?

“The Buddha-range of the Buddhas [i.e., the range of powers a Buddha develops as a result of becoming a Buddha] is an inconceivable that is not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about it.

“The jhāna-range of a person in jhāna [i.e., the range of powers that one may obtain while absorbed in jhāna]....

“The [precise working out of the] results of kamma....

“Conjecture about [the origin, extent, etc., of] the cosmos is an inconceivable that is not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about it.

“These are the four inconceivables that are not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about them.” — AN 4:77

§ 155. “From an inconceivable beginning comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on. What do you think, monks? Which is greater, the tears you have shed while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time—crying & weeping from being joined with what is displeasing, being separated from what is pleasing—or the water in the four great oceans?”

“As we understand the Dhamma taught to us by the Blessed One, this is the greater: the tears we have shed while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time—crying & weeping from being joined with what is displeasing, being separated from what is pleasing—not the water in the four great oceans.”

“Excellent, monks. Excellent. It is excellent that you thus understand the Dhamma taught by me.

“This is the greater: the tears you have shed while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time—crying & weeping from being joined with what is displeasing, being separated from what is pleasing—not the water in the four great oceans.

“Long have you (repeatedly) experienced the death of a mother. The tears you have shed over the death of a mother while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time—crying & weeping from being joined with what is displeasing, being separated from what is pleasing—are greater than the water in the four great oceans.

“Long have you (repeatedly) experienced the death of a father... the death of

a brother... the death of a sister... the death of a son... the death of a daughter... loss with regard to relatives... loss with regard to wealth... loss with regard to disease. The tears you have shed over loss with regard to disease while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time—crying & weeping from being joined with what is displeasing, being separated from what is pleasing—are greater than the water in the four great oceans.

“Why is that? From an inconceivable beginning comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on. Long have you thus experienced stress, experienced pain, experienced loss, swelling the cemeteries—enough to become disenchanted with all fabricated things, enough to become dispassionate, enough to be released.” — *SN 15:3*

§ 156. Then two brahman cosmologists went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, they sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they said to the Blessed One, “Master Gotama, Pūraṇa Kassapa—all-knowing, all-seeing—claims exhaustive knowledge & vision: ‘Whether I am standing or walking, awake or asleep, continual, unflagging knowledge & vision is established within me.’ He says, ‘I dwell with infinite knowledge, knowing & seeing the finite cosmos.’ Yet Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta—all-knowing, all-seeing—also claims exhaustive knowledge & vision: ‘Whether I am standing or walking, awake or asleep, continual, unflagging knowledge & vision is established within me.’ He says, ‘I dwell with infinite knowledge, knowing & seeing the infinite cosmos.’ Of these two speakers of knowledge, these two who contradict each other, which is telling the truth, and which is lying?”

“Enough, brahmans. Put this question aside. I will teach you the Dhamma. Listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“Yes, sir,” the brahmans responded to the Blessed One, and the Blessed One said, “Suppose that there were four men standing at the four directions, endowed with supreme speed & stride. Like that of a strong archer—well-trained, a practiced hand, a practiced sharp-shooter—shooting a light arrow across the shadow of a palm tree: Such would be the speed with which they were endowed. As far as the east sea is from the west: Such would be the stride with which they were endowed. Then the man standing at the eastern direction would say, ‘I, by walking, will reach the end of the cosmos.’ He—with a one-hundred year life, a one-hundred year span—would spend one hundred years traveling—apart from the time spent on eating, drinking, chewing & tasting, urinating & defecating, and sleeping to fight off weariness—but without reaching the end of the cosmos he would die along the way. [Similarly with the men standing at the western, southern, & northern directions.] Why is that? I tell you, it isn’t through that sort of traveling that the end of the cosmos is known, seen, or reached. But at the same time, I tell you that there is no making an end of suffering & stress without reaching the end of the cosmos.

“These five strings of sensuality are, in the Vinaya of the noble ones, called the cosmos. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing; sounds cognizable via the ear... aromas cognizable via the nose... flavors cognizable via the tongue... tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. These are the five strings of sensuality that, in the Vinaya of the noble ones, are called the cosmos.

“There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure

born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. This is called a monk who, coming to the end of the cosmos, remains at the end of the cosmos. Others say of him, 'He is encompassed in the cosmos; he has not escaped from the cosmos.' And I too say of him, 'He is encompassed in the cosmos; he has not escaped from the cosmos.'

[Similarly with the second, third, & fourth jhānas, and with the attainment of the dimensions of the infinitude of space, the infinitude of consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception [§150].]

"Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, he enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And, having seen [that] with discernment, his fermentations are completely ended. This is called a monk who, coming to the end of the cosmos, remains at the end of the cosmos, having crossed over attachment in the cosmos." — AN 9:38 [See also §79]

§ 157. On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattḥi, in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Then Rohitassa, the son of a deva, in the far extreme of the night, his extreme radiance lighting up the entirety of Jeta's Grove, went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, he stood to one side. As he was standing there he said to the Blessed One: "Is it possible, lord, by traveling, to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one doesn't take birth, age, die, pass away or reappear?"

"I tell you, friend, that it isn't possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one doesn't take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear."

"How amazing, lord! How astounding!—how well that has been said by the Blessed One: 'I tell you, friend, that it isn't possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one doesn't take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear.' Once I was a seer named Rohitassa, a student of Bhoja, a powerful sky-walker. My speed was as fast as that of a strong archer—well-trained, a practiced hand, a practiced sharp-shooter—shooting a light arrow across the shadow of a palm tree. My stride stretched as far as the east sea is from the west. To me, endowed with such speed, such a stride, there came the desire: 'I will go traveling to the end of the cosmos.' I—with a one-hundred year life, a one-hundred year span—spent one hundred years traveling—apart from the time spent on eating, drinking, chewing & tasting, urinating & defecating, and sleeping to fight off weariness—but without reaching the end of the cosmos I died along the way. So it's amazing, lord; it's astounding—how well that has been said by the Blessed One: 'I tell you, friend, that it isn't possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one doesn't take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear.'"

[When this was said, the Blessed One responded:] "I tell you, friend, that it isn't possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one doesn't take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear. But at the same time, I tell you that there is no making an end of suffering & stress without reaching the end of the cosmos. Yet it is just within this fathom-long body, with its perception & intellect, that I declare that there is the cosmos, the origination of the cosmos, the cessation of the cosmos, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the cosmos." — AN 4:45

§ 158. [Ven. Ānanda:] "Concerning the brief statement made by the Blessed One, after which he entered his dwelling without expounding the detailed meaning—i.e., 'I don't say that the end of the cosmos is to be known, seen, &

reached by traveling. But neither do I say that there is a making an end of stress without having reached the end of the cosmos’—I understand the detailed meaning of this statement to be this:

“That by means of which one has a perception of cosmos, a concept of cosmos with regard to the cosmos: That, in the Vinaya of a noble one, is called the ‘cosmos.’ Now, by means of what does one have a perception of cosmos, a concept of cosmos with regard to the cosmos? By means of the eye... the ear... the nose... the tongue... the body... the intellect one has a perception of cosmos, a concept of cosmos with regard to the cosmos.” — *SN 35:116*

§ 159. Then a certain monk went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One: “The cosmos, the cosmos [*loka*],’ it is said. In what respect does the word ‘cosmos’ apply?

“Insofar as it disintegrates [*lujjati*], monk, it is called the ‘cosmos.’ Now, what disintegrates? The eye disintegrates. Forms disintegrate. Consciousness at the eye disintegrates. Contact at the eye disintegrates. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the eye—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too disintegrates.

“The ear disintegrates. Sounds disintegrate....

“The nose disintegrates. Aromas disintegrate....

“The tongue disintegrates. Tastes disintegrate....

“The body disintegrates. Tactile sensations disintegrate....

“The intellect disintegrates. Ideas disintegrate. Consciousness at the intellect consciousness disintegrates. Contact at the intellect disintegrates. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the intellect—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too disintegrates.

“Insofar as it disintegrates, it is called the ‘cosmos.’” — *SN 35:82*

§ 160. At Sāvattṭhi. There the Blessed One addressed the monks: “I will teach you the origination of the cosmos & the ending of the cosmos. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” the monks responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said, “And what is the origination of the cosmos? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises eye-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. This is the origination of the cosmos.

“Dependent on the ear & sounds there arises ear-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact.... Dependent on the nose & aromas there arises nose-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact.... Dependent on the tongue & flavors there arises tongue-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact.... Dependent on the body & tactile sensations there arises body-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact.... Dependent on the intellect & qualities there arises intellect-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair

come into play. This is the origination of the cosmos.

“And what is the ending of the cosmos? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises eye-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. Now, from the remainderless cessation & fading away of that very 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. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering. This is the ending of the cosmos.

“Dependent on the ear & sounds there arises ear-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact.... Dependent on the nose & aromas there arises nose-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact.... Dependent on the tongue & flavors there arises tongue-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact.... Dependent on the body & tactile sensations there arises body-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact.... Dependent on the intellect & qualities there arises intellect-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. Now, from the remainderless cessation & fading away of that very 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. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering. This is the ending of the cosmos.” — *SN 12:44*

§ 161. “Then the monk attained to such a state of concentration that the way leading to the gods of Brahmā’s retinue appeared in his centered mind. So he approached the gods of Brahmā’s retinue and, on arrival, asked them, ‘Friends, where do these four great elements—the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property—cease without remainder?’

“When this was said, the gods of Brahmā’s retinue said to the monk, ‘We also don’t know where the four great elements—the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property—cease without remainder. But there is Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, the All-Seeing, Wielder of Power, Sovereign Lord, Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. He is higher and more sublime than we. He should know where the four great elements... cease without remainder.’

“‘But where, friends, is the Great Brahmā now?’

“‘Monk, we also don’t know where Brahmā is or in what way Brahmā is. But when signs appear, light shines forth, and a radiance appears, Brahmā will appear. For these are the portents of Brahmā’s appearance: light shines forth and a radiance appears.’

“Then it was not long before the Great Brahmā appeared.

“So the monk approached the Great Brahmā and, on arrival, said, ‘Friend, where do these four great elements—the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property—cease without remainder?’

“When this was said, the Great Brahmā said to the monk, ‘I, monk, am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, the All-Seeing, Wielder of Power, Sovereign Lord, Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be.’

“A second time, the monk said to the Great Brahmā, ‘Friend, I didn’t ask you if you were Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, the All-Seeing, Wielder of Power, Sovereign Lord, Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. I asked you where these four great elements... cease without remainder.’

“A second time, the Great Brahmā said to the monk, ‘I, monk, am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, the All-Seeing, Wielder of Power, Sovereign Lord, Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be.’

“A third time, the monk said to the Great Brahmā, ‘Friend, I didn’t ask you if you were Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, the All-Seeing, Wielder of Power, Sovereign Lord, Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. I asked you where these four great elements... cease without remainder.’

“Then the Great Brahmā, taking the monk by the arm and leading him off to one side, said to him, ‘These gods of Brahmā’s retinue believe, “There is nothing that the Great Brahmā does not know. There is nothing that the Great Brahmā does not see. There is nothing of which the Great Brahmā is unaware. There is nothing that the Great Brahmā has not realized.” That is why I did not say in their presence that I too don’t know where the four great elements... cease without remainder. So you have acted wrongly, acted incorrectly, in bypassing the Blessed One in search of an answer to this question elsewhere. Go right back to the Blessed One and, on arrival, ask him this question. However he answers it, you should take it to heart.’

“Then—just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm—the monk disappeared from the Brahmā world and immediately appeared in front of me. Having bowed down to me, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to me, ‘Venerable sir, where do these four great elements—the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property—cease without remainder?’

“When this was said, I said to him, ‘Once, monk, some sea-faring merchants took a shore-sighting bird and set sail in their ship. When they could not see the shore, they released the shore-sighting bird. It flew to the east, south, west, north, straight up, and to all the intermediate points of the compass. If it saw the shore in any direction, it flew there. If it did not see the shore in any direction, it returned right back to the ship. In the same way, monk, having gone as far as the Brahmā world in search of an answer to your question, you have come right back to my presence.

“Your question should not be phrased in this way: ‘Where do these four great elements—the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property—cease without remainder?’ Instead, it should be phrased like this:

“Where do water, earth, fire, & wind
have no footing?
Where are long & short,
coarse & fine,
fair & foul,
name & form
brought to an end?

“And the answer to that is:

“Consciousness without surface,¹
without end,

luminous all around:
 Here water, earth, fire, & wind
 have no footing.
 Here long & short
 coarse & fine
 fair & foul
 name & form
 are all brought to an end.
 With the cessation of consciousness
 each is here brought to an end.'" — DN 11

NOTE: 1. For a discussion of this term, see §205, note 4.

THE BUDDHA'S SILENCE

§ 162. 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 down to one side. As he was sitting there, he asked the Blessed One: "Now then, Venerable Gotama, is there a self?"

When this was said, the Blessed One was silent.

"Then is there no self?"

A second time, the Blessed One was silent.

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer got up from his seat and left.

Then, not long after Vacchagotta the wanderer had left, Ven. Ānanda said to the Blessed One, "Why, lord, did the Blessed One not answer when asked a question by Vacchagotta the wanderer?"

"Ānanda, if I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self—were to answer that there is a self, that would be in company with those contemplatives & brahmins who are exponents of eternalism [see Appendix Two]. If I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self—were to answer that there is no self, that would be in company with those contemplatives & brahmins who are exponents of annihilationism. If I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self—were to answer that there is a self, would that be in keeping with the arising of knowledge that all phenomena are not-self?"

"No, lord."

"And if I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self—were to answer that there is no self, the bewildered Vacchagotta would become even more bewildered: 'Does the self I used to have now not exist?'" — SN 44:10

§ 163. Then Uttiya 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,

"Master Gotama, is it the case that '*The cosmos is eternal: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless*'?"

"Uttiya, I haven't declared that '*The cosmos is eternal: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless*.'"

"Very well then, Master Gotama, is it the case that: '*The cosmos is not eternal: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless*'?"

"Uttiya, I haven't declared that '*The cosmos is not eternal: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless*.'"

"Very well then, Master Gotama, is it the case that *'The cosmos is finite... ' ... 'The cosmos is infinite... ' ... 'The soul is the same thing as the body... ' ... 'The soul is one thing and the body another... ' ... 'After death a Tathāgata exists... ' ... 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist... ' ... 'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist... ' ... 'After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless?'*"

"Uttiya, I haven't declared that *'After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless.'*"

"But, Master Gotama, on being asked, *'Is it the case that "The cosmos is eternal: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless"?' you inform me, 'Uttiya, I haven't declared that "The cosmos is eternal: Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless."* On being asked, *'Is it the case that "The cosmos is not eternal... " ... "The cosmos is finite... " ... "The cosmos is infinite... " ... "The soul is the same thing as the body... " ... "The soul is one thing and the body another... " ... "After death a Tathāgata exists... " ... "After death a Tathāgata does not exist... " ... "After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist... " ... "After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless"?' you inform me, 'Uttiya, I haven't declared that "After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless."* Now is there anything you have declared?"

"Uttiya, having directly known it, I teach the Dhamma to my disciples for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, for the disappearance of pain & distress, for the attainment of the right method, & for the realization of unbinding."

"And, Master Gotama, when having directly known it, you teach the Dhamma to your disciples for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, for the disappearance of pain & distress, for the attainment of the right method, & for the realization of unbinding, will all the cosmos be led (to release), or a half of it, or a third?"

When this was said, the Blessed One was silent.

Then the thought occurred to Ven. Ānanda: "Don't let Uttiya the wanderer acquire the evil view-standpoint that, 'When I asked him an all-encompassing question, Gotama the contemplative faltered and didn't reply. Perhaps he was unable to.' That would be for his long-term harm & suffering." So he said to Uttiya, "Very well then, my friend, I will give you an analogy, for there are cases where it is through the use of analogy that intelligent people can understand the meaning of what is being said.

"Suppose that there were a royal frontier city with strong ramparts, strong walls & arches, and a single gate. In it would be a wise, competent, & knowledgeable gatekeeper to keep out those he didn't know and to let in those he did. Walking along the path encircling the city, he wouldn't see a crack or an opening in the walls big enough for even a cat to slip through. Although he wouldn't know that 'So-and-so many creatures enter or leave the city,' he would know this: 'Whatever large creatures enter or leave the city all enter or leave it through this gate.'

"In the same way, the Tathāgata isn't concerned with whether all the cosmos or half of it or a third of it will be led (to release) by means of that (Dhamma). But he does know this: 'All those who have been led, are being led, or will be led (to release) from the cosmos have done so, are doing so, or will do so after having abandoned the five hindrances—those defilements of awareness that weaken discernment—having well-established their minds in the four frames of reference, and having developed, as they have come to be, the seven factors for awakening. When you asked the Blessed One this question, you had already asked it in another way. That's why he didn't respond.'" — AN 10:95

QUESTIONS OF INAPPROPRIATE ATTENTION

§ 164. “Monks, I will teach you dependent co-arising & dependently co-arisen phenomena. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak....

“Now, what is dependent co-arising? From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&-death. Whether or not there is the arising of Tathāgatas, this property stands—this regularity of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma, this this/that conditionality. The Tathāgata directly awakens to that, breaks through to that. Directly awakening & breaking through to that, he declares it, teaches it, describes it, sets it forth. He reveals it, explains it, makes it plain, & says, ‘Look.’ From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&-death.

[Similarly down through the causal stream to:]

“From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. Whether or not there is the arising of Tathāgatas, this property stands—this regularity of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma, this this/that conditionality. The Tathāgata directly awakens to that, breaks through to that. Directly awakening & breaking through to that, he declares it, teaches it, describes it, sets it forth. He reveals it, explains it, makes it plain, & says, ‘Look.’ From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. What’s there in this way is a reality, not an unreality, not other than what it seems, conditioned by this/that. This is called dependent co-arising.

“And what are dependently co-arisen phenomena? Aging-&-death is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon: inconstant, compounded, dependently co-arisen, subject to ending, subject to passing away, subject to fading, subject to cessation.

[Similarly down through the causal stream to:]

“Ignorance is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon: inconstant, compounded, dependently co-arisen, subject to ending, subject to passing away, subject to fading, subject to cessation. These are called dependently co-arisen phenomena.

“When a disciple of the noble ones has seen well with right discernment this dependent co-arising & these dependently co-arisen phenomena as they have come to be, it is not possible that he would run after the past, thinking, ‘*Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past?*’ or that he would run after the future, thinking, ‘*Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?*’ or that he would be inwardly perplexed about the immediate present, thinking, ‘*Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?*’

“Such a thing is not possible. Why is that? Because the disciple of the noble ones has seen well with right discernment this dependent co-arising & these dependently co-arisen phenomena as they have come to be.” — SN 12:20

§ 165. “Good, monks. Just as you say that, so do I: When this isn’t, that isn’t. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that. In other words, from the cessation of ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications. From the cessation of fabrications 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. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

"Now, knowing thus and seeing thus, would you run after the past, thinking, 'Were we in the past? Were we not in the past? What were we in the past? How were we in the past? Having been what, what were we in the past?'"

"No, lord."

"Knowing thus and seeing thus, would you run after the future, thinking, 'Shall we be in the future? Shall we not be in the future? What shall we be in the future? How shall we be in the future? Having been what, what shall we be in the future?'"

"No, lord."

"Knowing thus and seeing thus, would you be inwardly perplexed about the immediate present, thinking, 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?'"

"No, lord."

"Knowing thus and seeing thus, would you say, 'The Teacher is our respected mentor. We speak thus out of respect for the Teacher?'"

"No, lord."

"Knowing thus and seeing thus, would you say, 'The Contemplative says this. We speak thus in line with the Contemplative's words?'"

"No, lord."

"Knowing thus and seeing thus, would you dedicate yourselves another teacher?"

"No, lord."

"Knowing thus and seeing thus, would you return to the observances, grand ceremonies, & auspicious rites of common contemplatives & brahmans as having any essence?"

"No, lord."

"Is it the case that you speak simply in line with what you have known, seen, & understood for yourselves?"

"Yes, lord."

"Good, monks. You have been guided by me in this Dhamma which is to be seen here & now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be realized by the observant for themselves. For it has been said, 'This Dhamma is to be seen here & now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be by the observant for themselves,' and it was in reference to this that it was said." — MN 38

DEPENDENT CO-ARISING: EXTREMES AVOIDED

§ 166. [Kassapa the cloth-less ascetic:] "Now, then, Master Gotama, is pain self-made?"

"Don't say that, Kassapa," the Blessed One said.

"Then is pain other-made?"

"Don't say that, Kassapa," the Blessed One said.

"Then is pain self-made & other-made?"

"Don't say that, Kassapa," the Blessed One said.

"Then is pain, without self-making or other-making, spontaneously arisen?"

"Don't say that, Kassapa," the Blessed One said.

"Then is there no pain?"

"It's not the case that there is no pain, Kassapa. There is pain."

“Then in that case, Master Gotama doesn’t know, doesn’t see pain.”

“It’s not the case that I don’t know, don’t see pain, Kassapa. I do know pain. I do see pain.” ...

“Then tell me about pain, Master Gotama. Teach me about pain.”

“Kassapa, the statement, ‘With the one who acts being the same as the one who experiences, existing from the beginning, pleasure & pain are self-made’: This circles around eternalism [see Appendix Two]. And the statement, ‘With the one who acts being one thing, and the one who experiences being another, existing as the one struck by the feeling’: This circles around annihilationism. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.... From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications.... From the cessation of birth, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.” — *SN 12:17*

§ 167. As he was sitting there, Timbarukkha the wanderer said to the Blessed One, “Now, then, Master Gotama, are pleasure & pain self-made?”

“Don’t say that, Timbarukkha,” the Blessed One said.

“Then are pleasure & pain other-made?”

“Don’t say that, Timbarukkha,” the Blessed One said.

“Then are pleasure & pain self-made & other-made?”

“Don’t say that, Timbarukkha,” the Blessed One said.

“Then are pleasure & pain, without self-making or other-making, spontaneously arisen?”

“Don’t say that, Timbarukkha,” the Blessed One said.

“Then is there no pleasure & pain?”

“It’s not the case that there is no pleasure & pain, Timbarukkha. There is pleasure & pain.”

“Then in that case, Master Gotama doesn’t know, doesn’t see, pleasure & pain.”

“It’s not the case that I don’t know, don’t see, pleasure & pain, Timbarukkha. I do know pleasure & pain. I do see pleasure & pain.” ...

“Then tell me about pleasure & pain, Master Gotama. Teach me about pleasure & pain.”

“Timbarukkha, I don’t say that—with the feeling being the same as the one who feels, existing from the beginning—pleasure & pain are self-made. And I don’t say that—with feeling being one thing and the one who feels another, existing as the one struck by the feeling—pleasure & pain are other-made. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.... From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications.... From the cessation of birth, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.” — *SN 12:18*

§ 168. “Whatever contemplatives & brahmins—teachers of kamma who

declare that pleasure & pain are self-made: Even that is dependent on contact. Whatever contemplatives & brahmins—teachers of kamma who declare that pleasure & pain are other-made... self-made & other-made... without self-making or other-making, spontaneously arisen: Even that is from contact as a requisite condition.

“That any contemplatives & brahmins—teachers of kamma who declare that pleasure & pain are self-made—would be sensitive to pleasure & pain other than through contact: That isn’t possible. That any contemplatives & brahmins—teachers of kamma who declare that pleasure & pain are other-made... self-made & other-made... without self-making or other-making, spontaneously arisen—would be sensitive to pleasure & pain other than through contact: That isn’t possible. [Compare the final analysis in DN 1, §184]

“When there is a body, pleasure & pain arise internally with bodily intention as the cause; or when there is speech, pleasure & pain arise internally with verbal intention as the cause; or when there is intellect, pleasure & pain arise internally with intellectual intention as the cause.

“From ignorance as a requisite condition, then either of one’s own accord one fabricates the bodily fabrication on account of which that pleasure & pain arise internally, or because of others one fabricates the bodily fabrication on account of which that pleasure & pain arise internally. Either alert one fabricates the bodily fabrication on account of which that pleasure & pain arise internally, or unalert one fabricates the bodily fabrication on account of which that pleasure & pain arise internally. [Similarly with verbal & intellectual fabrications.]

“Now, ignorance is bound up in these things. From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance, there no longer exists (the sense of) the body on account of which that pleasure & pain internally arise. There no longer exists the speech... the intellect on account of which that pleasure & pain internally arise. There no longer exists the field, the site, the dimension, or the issue on account of which that pleasure & pain internally arise.” — *SN 12:25*

§ 169. A certain brahman said to the Blessed One: “Now, then, Master Gotama: Is the one who acts the same one who experiences [the results of the act]?”

“[To say,] brahman, ‘The one who acts is the same one who experiences,’ is one extreme.”

“Then, Master Gotama, is the one who acts someone other than the one who experiences?”

“[To say,] brahman, ‘The one who acts is someone other than the one who experiences,’ is the second extreme. Avoiding both of these extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.... From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-& death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications.... From the cessation of birth, then aging-& death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.” — *SN 12:46*

§ 170. [Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “Now tell me, Sāriputta my friend: Is aging-& death self-made or other-made or both self-made & other-made, or—without self-making or other-making—spontaneously arisen?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “It’s not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that aging-& death is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made & other-made, or that—

without self-making or other-making—it's spontaneously arisen. However, from birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&death."

"Now tell me, friend Sāriputta: Is birth.... Is becoming.... Is clinging/sustenance... Is craving.... Is feeling.... Is contact.... Are the six sense media self-made or other-made or both self-made & other-made, or—without self-making or other-making—spontaneously arisen?"

"It's not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that the six sense media are self-made, that they are other-made, that they are both self-made & other-made, or that—without self-making or other-making—they're spontaneously arisen. However, from name-&form as a requisite condition come the six sense media."

"Now tell me, friend Sāriputta: Is name-&form self-made or other-made or both self-made & other-made, or—without self-making or other-making—spontaneously arisen?"

"It's not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that name-&form is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made & other-made, or that—without self-making or other-making—it's spontaneously arisen. However, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&form."

"Now tell me, friend Sāriputta: Is consciousness self-made or other-made or both self-made & other-made, or—without self-making or other-making—spontaneously arisen?"

"It's not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that consciousness is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made & other-made, or that—without self-making or other-making—it's spontaneously arisen. However, from name-&form as a requisite condition comes consciousness."

"Just now, friend Sāriputta, I understood your statement as, 'It's not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that name-&form is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made & other-made, or that—without self-making or other-making—it's spontaneously arisen. However, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&form.' But then I understood your statement as, 'It's not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that consciousness is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made & other-made, or that—without self-making or other-making—it's spontaneously arisen. However, from name-&form as a requisite condition comes consciousness.' Now how is the meaning of these statements to be understood?"

Ven. Sāriputta: "Very well then, Koṭṭhita my friend, I will give you an analogy; for there are cases where it is through the use of an analogy that intelligent people can understand the meaning of what is being said. It is as if two sheaves of reeds were to stand leaning against one another. In the same way, 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. From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering & stress.

"If one were to pull away one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall; if one were to pull away the other, the first one would fall. In the same way, 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. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering & stress." — *SN 12:67*

§ 171. Then a brahman cosmologist 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, does everything exist?"

"‘Everything exists’ is the senior form of cosmology, brahman."

"Then, Master Gotama, does everything not exist?"

"‘Everything does not exist’ is the second form of cosmology, brahman."

"Then is everything a Oneness?"

"‘Everything is a Oneness’ is the third form of cosmology, brahman."

"Then is everything a plurality?"

"‘Everything is a plurality is the fourth form of cosmology, brahman."

Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.... From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

"Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications.... From the cessation of birth, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering." — *SN 12:48*

§ 172. Then Ven. Kaccāyana Gotta approached the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One: "Lord, ‘Right view, right view,’ it is said. To what extent is there right view?"

"By & large, Kaccāyana, this world is supported by [takes as its object] a polarity, that of existence & non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world [cosmos] as it has come to be with right discernment, ‘non-existence’ with reference to the world doesn’t occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world as it has come to be with right discernment, ‘existence’ with reference to the world doesn’t occur to one.

"By & large, Kaccāyana, this world is in bondage to attachments, clingings [sustenance], & biases. But one such as this does not get involved with or cling to these attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions; nor is he resolved on ‘my self.’ He has no doubt or uncertainty that mere stress, when arising, is arising; stress, when passing away, is passing away. In this, his knowledge is independent of others. It’s to this extent, Kaccāyana, that there is right view.

"‘Everything exists’: That is one extreme. ‘Everything doesn’t exist’: That is a second extreme. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications...." — *SN 12:15*

§ 173. Then Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth, hurriedly leaving Jeta’s Grove and

entering Sāvatti, saw the Blessed One going for alms in Sāvatti—calm, calming, his senses at peace, his mind at peace, tranquil & poised in the ultimate sense, accomplished, trained, guarded, his senses restrained, a Great One [*nāga*]. Seeing him, he approached the Blessed One and, on reaching him, threw himself down, with his head at the Blessed One's feet, and said, "Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term benefit & happiness."

When this was said, the Blessed One said to him, "This is not the time, Bāhiya. We have entered the town for alms."

A second time, Bāhiya said to the Blessed One: "But it is hard to know for sure what dangers there may be for the Blessed One's life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term benefit & happiness."

A second time, the Blessed One said to him, "This is not the time, Bāhiya. We have entered the town for alms."

A third time, Bāhiya said to the Blessed One: "But it is hard to know for sure what dangers there may be for the Blessed One's life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term benefit & happiness."

"Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress."

Through hearing this brief explanation of the Dhamma from the Blessed One, the mind of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth right then and there was released from fermentations through lack of clinging/sustenance. Having exhorted Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth with this brief explanation of the Dhamma, the Blessed One left. — *Ud 1:10*

DEPENDENT CO-ARISING: INVALID QUESTIONS

§ 174. "Monks, there are these four nutriments for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those in search of a place to be born. Which four? Physical food, gross or refined; contact as the second; intellectual intention the third; and consciousness the fourth. These are the four nutriments for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those in search of a place to be born."

When this was said, Ven. Moliya Phagguna said to the Blessed One, "Lord, who feeds on the consciousness-nutrient?"

"Not a valid question," the Blessed One said. "I don't say 'feeds.' If I were to say 'feeds,' then 'Who feeds on the consciousness-nutrient?' would be a valid question. But I don't say that. When I don't say that, the valid question is, 'Consciousness-nutrient for what?' And the valid answer is, 'Consciousness-nutrient for the production of future coming-into-being. When that has come into being and exists, then the six sense media. From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.'"

"Lord, who makes contact?"

"Not a valid question," the Blessed One said. "I don't say 'makes contact.' If I

were to say ‘makes contact,’ then ‘Who makes contact?’ would be a valid question. But I don’t say that. When I don’t say that, the valid question is, ‘From what as a requisite condition comes contact?’ And the valid answer is, ‘From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.’”

“Lord, who feels?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “I don’t say ‘feels.’ If I were to say ‘feels,’ then ‘Who feels?’ would be a valid question. But I don’t say that. When I don’t say that, the valid question is, ‘From what as a requisite condition comes feeling?’ And the valid answer is, ‘From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.’”

“Lord, who craves?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “I don’t say ‘craves.’ If I were to say ‘craves,’ then ‘Who craves?’ would be a valid question. But I don’t say that. When I don’t say that, the valid question is, ‘From what as a requisite condition comes craving?’ And the valid answer is, ‘From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.’”

“Lord, who clings?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “I don’t say ‘clings.’ If I were to say ‘clings,’ then ‘Who clings?’ would be a valid question. But I don’t say that. When I don’t say that, the valid question is, ‘From what as a requisite condition comes clinging?’ And the valid answer is, ‘From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging. From clinging as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.’¹

“Now from the remainderless fading & 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. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.” — SN 12:12

NOTE: 1. An alternative translation for this exchange—and one that, in light of the topic of nutriment, might actually be more apt—is:

“Lord, who takes sustenance?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “I don’t say ‘takes sustenance.’ If I were to say ‘takes sustenance,’ then ‘Who takes sustenance?’ would be a valid question. But I don’t say that. When I don’t say that, the valid question is, ‘From what as a requisite condition comes sustenance?’ And the valid answer is, ‘From craving as a requisite condition comes sustenance. From sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.’”

2. This refers to the moment of awakening, when the six sense media are transcended. See §198 and §208, and the discussion of “consciousness without surface” in *The Mind Like Fire Unbound*, chapter 1.

§ 175. The Blessed One said, “From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.... From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.”

When this was said, a certain monk said to the Blessed One: “Which is the aging-&death, lord, and whose is the aging-&death?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “If one were to ask, ‘Which is the aging-&death, and whose is the aging-&death?’ and if one were to say, ‘Aging-&death is one thing, and the aging-&death is something/someone else’s,’ both of them would have the same meaning, even though their words would differ. When there is the view that the soul is the same as the body, there is no leading the holy life. And when there is the view that the soul is one thing and the body another, there is no leading the holy life. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&death.”

“Which is the birth, lord, and whose is the birth?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.”

“Which is the becoming, lord, and whose is the becoming?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From clinging as a requisite condition comes becoming.”

“Which is the clinging, lord, and whose is the clinging?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging.”

“Which is the craving, lord, and whose is the craving?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.”

“Which is the feeling, lord, and whose is the feeling?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.”

“Which is the contact, lord, and whose is the contact?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.”

“Which are the six sense media, lord, and whose are the six sense media?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From name-&form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.”

“Which is the name-&form, lord, and whose is the name-&form?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&form.”

“Which is the consciousness, lord, and whose is the consciousness?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.”

“Which are the fabrications, lord, and whose are the fabrications?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “If one were to ask, ‘Which are the fabrications, and whose are the fabrications?’ and if one were to say, ‘Fabrications are one thing, and these fabrications are something/someone else’s,’ both of them would have the same meaning, even though their words would differ. When there is the view that the soul is the same as the body, there is no leading the holy life. And when there is the view that the soul is one thing and the body another, there is no leading the holy life. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

“Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance, every one of these writhings & wriggings & wiggings—‘Which aging-&death, and whose aging-&death?’ or ‘Aging-&death is one thing, and this aging-&death is something/someone else’s’ or ‘The soul is the same as the body,’ or ‘The soul is one thing and the body another’—are abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not

destined for future arising.

“From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance, every one of these writhings & wriggings & wiggings—‘Which is the birth.... Which is the becoming.... Which is the clinging.... Which is the craving.... Which is the feeling.... Which is the contact.... Which are the six sense media.... Which is the name-&-form.... Which is the consciousness.... Which are the fabrications, and whose are the fabrications?’ or ‘Fabrications are one thing, and these fabrications are something/someone else’s’ or ‘The soul is the same as the body,’ or ‘The soul is one thing and the body another’—are abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising.” — SN 12:35

THE TEN UNDECLARED ISSUES

§ 176. Then, when it was evening, Ven. Māluṅkyaputta arose from seclusion and went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “Lord, just now, as I was alone in seclusion, this train of thought arose in my awareness: ‘These view-standpoints that are undeclared, set aside, discarded by the Blessed One... I don’t approve, I don’t accept that the Blessed One has not declared them to me. I’ll go ask the Blessed One about this matter. If he declares to me that “*The cosmos is eternal,*” or “*The cosmos is not eternal,*” or “*The cosmos is finite,*” or “*The cosmos is infinite,*” or “*The soul is the same thing as the body,*” or “*The soul is one thing and the body another,*” or “*After death a Tathāgata exists,*” or “*After death a Tathāgata does not exist,*” or “*After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,*” or that “*After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,*” then I will live the holy life under him. If he doesn’t declare to me that “*The cosmos is eternal,*”... or that “*After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,*” then I will renounce the training and return to the lower life.’

“Lord, if the Blessed One knows that ‘*The cosmos is eternal,*’ then may he declare to me that ‘*The cosmos is eternal.*’ If he knows that ‘*The cosmos is not eternal,*’ then may he declare to me that ‘*The cosmos is not eternal.*’ But if he doesn’t know or see whether the cosmos is eternal or not eternal, then, in one who is unknowing & unseeing, the straightforward thing is to admit, ‘I don’t know. I don’t see.’ If he doesn’t know or see whether ‘*After death a Tathāgata exists... does not exist... both exists & does not exist... neither exists nor does not exist,*’ then, in one who is unknowing & unseeing, the straightforward thing is to admit, ‘I don’t know. I don’t see.’”

“Māluṅkyaputta, did I ever say to you, ‘Come, Māluṅkyaputta, live the holy life under me, and I will declare to you that ‘*The cosmos is eternal,*’ or ‘*The cosmos is not eternal,*’ or ‘*The cosmos is finite,*’ or ‘*The cosmos is infinite,*’ or ‘*The soul is the same thing as the body,*’ or ‘*The soul is one thing and the body another,*’ or ‘*After death a Tathāgata exists,*’ or ‘*After death a Tathāgata does not exist,*’ or ‘*After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,*’ or ‘*After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist?*’”

“No, lord.”

“And did you ever say to me, ‘Lord, I will live the holy life under the Blessed One and [in return] he will declare to me that ‘*The cosmos is eternal,*’ or ‘*The cosmos is not eternal,*’ or ‘*The cosmos is finite,*’ or ‘*The cosmos is infinite,*’ or ‘*The soul is the same thing as the body,*’ or ‘*The soul is one thing and the body another,*’ or ‘*After death a Tathāgata exists,*’ or ‘*After death a Tathāgata does not exist,*’ or ‘*After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,*’ or ‘*After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist?*’”

“No, lord.”

“Then that being the case, foolish man, who are you to be claiming grievances?”

“Māluṅkyaputta, if anyone were to say, ‘I won’t live the holy life under the Blessed One as long as he does not declare to me that *“The cosmos is eternal,”* ... or that *“After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,”*’ the man would die and those things would still remain undeclared by the Tathāgata.

“It’s just as if a man were wounded with an arrow thickly smeared with poison. His friends & companions, kinsmen & relatives would provide him with a surgeon, and the man would say, ‘I won’t have this arrow removed until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble warrior, a brahman, a merchant, or a worker.’ He would say, ‘I won’t have this arrow removed until I know the given name & clan name of the man who wounded me... until I know whether he was tall, medium, or short... until I know whether he was dark, ruddy-brown, or golden-colored... until I know his home village, town, or city... until I know whether the bow with which I was wounded was a long bow or a crossbow... until I know whether the bowstring with which I was wounded was fiber, bamboo threads, sinew, hemp, or bark... until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was wild or cultivated... until I know whether the feathers of the shaft with which I was wounded were those of a vulture, a stork, a hawk, a peacock, or another bird... until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was bound with the sinew of an ox, a water buffalo, a langur, or a monkey.’ He would say, ‘I won’t have this arrow removed until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was that of a common arrow, a curved arrow, a barbed, a calf-toothed, or an oleander arrow.’ The man would die and those things would still remain unknown to him.

“In the same way, if anyone were to say, ‘I won’t live the holy life under the Blessed One as long as he does not declare to me that *“The cosmos is eternal,”* ... or that *“After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,”*’ the man would die and those things would still remain undeclared by the Tathāgata.

“Māluṅkyaputta, it’s not the case that when there is the view, *‘The cosmos is eternal,’* there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, *‘The cosmos is not eternal,’* there is the living of the holy life. When there is the view, *‘The cosmos is eternal,’* and when there is the view, *‘The cosmos is not eternal,’* there is still the birth, there is the aging, there is the death, there is the sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, & distress whose destruction I make known right in the here & now.

“It’s not the case that when there is the view, *‘The cosmos is finite,’* there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, *‘The cosmos is infinite,’* there is the living of the holy life. When there is the view, *‘The cosmos is finite,’* and when there is the view, *‘The cosmos is infinite,’* there is still the birth, there is the aging, there is the death, there is the sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, & distress whose destruction I make known right in the here & now.

“It’s not the case that when there is the view, *‘The soul is the same thing as the body,’* there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, *‘The soul is one thing and the body another,’* there is the living of the holy life. When there is the view, *‘The soul is the same thing as the body,’* and when there is the view, *‘The soul is one thing and the body another,’* there is still the birth, there is the aging, there is the death, there is the sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, & distress whose destruction I make known right in the here & now.

“It’s not the case that when there is the view, *‘After death a Tathāgata exists,’* there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, *‘After death a Tathāgata does not exist,’* there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, *‘After death a Tathāgata both exists &*

does not exist,' there is the living of the holy life. And it's not the case that when there is the view, 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist' there is the living of the holy life. When there is the view, 'After death a Tathāgata exists'... 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist'... 'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist'... 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' there is still the birth, there is the aging, there is the death, there is the sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, & distress whose destruction I make known right in the here & now.

"So, Māluṅkyaputta, remember what is undeclared by me as undeclared, and what is declared by me as declared. And what is undeclared by me? 'The cosmos is eternal,' is undeclared by me. 'The cosmos is not eternal,' is undeclared by me. 'The cosmos is finite'... 'The cosmos is infinite'... 'The soul is the same thing as the body'... 'The soul is one thing and the body another'... 'After death a Tathāgata exists'... 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist'... 'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist'... 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' is undeclared by me.

"And why are they undeclared by me? Because they are not connected with the goal, are not fundamental to the holy life. They do not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening, unbinding. That's why they are undeclared by me.

"And what is declared by me? 'This is stress,' is declared by me. 'This is the origination of stress,' is declared by me. 'This is the cessation of stress,' is declared by me. 'This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress,' is declared by me. And why are they declared by me? Because they are connected with the goal, are fundamental to the holy life. They lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening, unbinding. That's why they are declared by me.

"So, Māluṅkyaputta, remember what is undeclared by me as undeclared, and what is declared by me as declared."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Māluṅkyaputta delighted in the Blessed One's words. — MN 63

§ 177. On one occasion Ven. Ānanda was staying near Rājagaha, at Tapoda monastery. Then, as night was ending, he got up & went to the Tapoda Hot Springs to bathe his limbs. Having bathed his limbs and having gotten out of the springs, he stood wearing only his lower robe, drying his limbs. Kokanuda the wanderer, as night was ending, also got up & went to the Tapoda Hot Springs to bathe his limbs. He saw Ven. Ananda from afar, and on seeing him said to him, "Who are you, my friend?"

"I am a monk, my friend."

"Which kind of monk?"

"A son-of-the-Sakyan contemplative."

"I would like to ask you about a certain point, if you would give me leave to pose a question."

"Go ahead and ask. Having heard [your question], I'll inform you."

"How is it, my friend: 'The cosmos is eternal. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless.' Is this the sort of view you have?"

"No, my friend, I don't have that sort of view."

"Very well then: 'The cosmos is not eternal. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless.' Is this the sort of view you have?"

"No, my friend, I don't have that sort of view."

"Very well then: 'The cosmos is finite... '... 'The cosmos is infinite... '... 'The soul is the same thing as the body... '... 'The soul is one thing and the body another... '... 'After death a Tathāgata exists... '... 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist... '... 'After

death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist... ' ... 'After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless.' Is this the sort of view you have?"

"No, my friend, I don't have that sort of view."

"Then in that case, do you not know or see?"

"No, my friend. It's not the case that I don't know, I don't see. I do know. I do see."

"But on being asked, 'How is it, my friend: "The cosmos is eternal. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless." Is this the sort of view you have?' you inform me, 'No, my friend, I don't have that sort of view.' On being asked, 'Very well then: "The cosmos is not eternal... " ... "The cosmos is finite... " ... "The cosmos is infinite... " ... "The soul is the same thing as the body... " ... "The soul is one thing and the body another... " ... "After death a Tathāgata exists... " ... "After death a Tathāgata does not exist... " ... "After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist... " ... "After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless." Is this the sort of view you have?' you inform me, 'No, my friend, I don't have that sort of view.' But on being asked, 'Then in that case, do you not know or see?' you inform me, 'No, my friend. It's not the case that I don't know or see. I do know. I do see.' Now, how is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

"*"The cosmos is eternal. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless,"* is a view-standpoint. *"The cosmos is not eternal..."* ... *"The cosmos is finite..."* ... *"The cosmos is infinite..."* ... *"The soul is the same thing as the body..."* ... *"The soul is one thing and the body another..."* ... *"After death a Tathāgata exists..."* ... *"After death a Tathāgata does not exist..."* ... *"After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist..."* ... *"After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless,"* is a view-standpoint. The extent to which there are view-standpoints, view-stances, the taking up of views, obsessions with views, the cause of views, & the uprooting of views: that's what I know. That's what I see. Knowing that, I say 'I know.' Seeing that, I say 'I see.' Why should I say 'I don't know, I don't see'? I do know. I do see."

"What is your name, my friend? What do your fellows in the holy life call you?"

"My name is Ānanda, my friend, and that's what my fellows in the holy life call me."

"What? Have I been talking with the great teacher without realizing that he was Ven. Ānanda? Had I recognized that he was Ven. Ānanda, I would not have cross-examined him so much. May Ven. Ānanda please forgive me." — AN 10:96

§ 178. Then a certain monk went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, "Lord, what is the cause, what is the reason, why uncertainty doesn't arise in an instructed disciple of the noble ones over the undeclared issues?"

"Because of the cessation of views, monk, uncertainty doesn't arise in an instructed disciple of the noble ones over the undeclared issues. The view-standpoint, 'After death a Tathāgata exists,' the view-standpoint, 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,' the view-standpoint, 'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,' the view-standpoint, 'After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist': The uninstructed run-of-the-mill person doesn't discern view, doesn't discern the origination of view, doesn't discern the cessation of view, doesn't discern the path of practice leading to the cessation of view, and so for him that view grows. He is not freed from birth, aging, & death; from sorrows,

lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. He is not freed, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

“But the instructed disciple of the noble ones discerns view, discerns the origination of view, discerns the cessation of view, discerns the path of practice leading to the cessation of view, and so for him that view ceases. He is freed from birth, aging, & death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. He is freed, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

“Thus knowing, thus seeing, the instructed disciple of the noble ones doesn’t declare that ‘*After death a Tathāgata exists,*’ doesn’t declare that ‘*After death a Tathāgata does not exist,*’ doesn’t declare that ‘*After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,*’ doesn’t declare that ‘*After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist.*’ Thus knowing, thus seeing, he is thus of a nature not to declare the undeclared issues. Thus knowing, thus seeing, he isn’t paralyzed, doesn’t quake, doesn’t shiver or shake over the undeclared issues.

“‘*After death a Tathāgata exists*’—this craving-standpoint, this perception-standpoint, this product of conceiving, this product of objectification, this clinging-standpoint: That’s [an expression of] anguish.¹ ‘*After death a Tathāgata doesn’t exist*’: That’s anguish. ‘*After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist*’: That’s anguish. ‘*After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist*’: That’s anguish.

“The uninstructed run-of-the-mill person doesn’t discern anguish, doesn’t discern the origination of anguish, doesn’t discern the cessation of anguish, doesn’t discern the path of practice leading to the cessation of anguish, and so for him that anguish grows. He is not freed from birth, aging, & death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. He is not freed, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

“But the instructed disciple of the noble ones discerns anguish, discerns the origination of anguish, discerns the cessation of anguish, discerns the path of practice leading to the cessation of anguish, and so for him that anguish ceases. He is freed from birth, aging, & death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. He is freed, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

“Thus knowing, thus seeing, the instructed disciple of the noble ones doesn’t declare that ‘*After death a Tathāgata exists,*’ doesn’t declare that ‘*After death a Tathāgata does not exist,*’ doesn’t declare that ‘*After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,*’ doesn’t declare that ‘*After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist.*’ Thus knowing, thus seeing, he is thus of a nature not to declare the undeclared issues. Thus knowing, thus seeing, he isn’t paralyzed, doesn’t quake, doesn’t shiver or shake over the undeclared issues.” — AN 7:51

NOTE: 1. “Anguish” here translates *vippaṭisāra*, which is usually rendered into English as “remorse” or “regret.” Here, however, the feeling of *vippaṭisāra* relates to concerns about the future, rather than the past, and so neither remorse nor regret are appropriate to the context. The anguish alluded to in this passage is based either on the fear that awakening would entail an end to existence or on the contrary fear that it wouldn’t.

§ 179. When the night had passed, the senior monks put on their robes in the early morning and—taking their bowls & outer robes—went to Citta’s residence. There they sat down on the appointed seats. Citta the householder went to them and, having bowed down to them, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the most senior monk:

“Venerable sir, concerning the various views that arise in the world: ‘*The cosmos is eternal,*’ or ‘*The cosmos is not eternal,*’ or ‘*The cosmos is finite,*’ or ‘*The cosmos is infinite,*’ or ‘*The soul is the same thing as the body,*’ or ‘*The soul is one thing and the body another,*’ or ‘*After death a Tathāgata exists,*’ or ‘*After death a Tathāgata*

does not exist, or *'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist';* these along with the sixty-two views mentioned in the Brahmajāla [DN 1: §152, §184]—when what is present do these views come into being, and when what is absent do they not come into being?"

When this was said, the senior monk was silent. A second time... A third time Citta the householder asked, "Concerning the various views that arise in the world... when what is present do they come into being, and what is absent do they not come into being?" A third time the senior monk was silent.

Now on that occasion Ven. Isidatta was the most junior of all the monks in that Community. Then he said to the senior monk, "Allow me, venerable sir, to answer Citta the householder's question."

"Go ahead & answer it, friend Isidatta."

"Now, householder, are you asking this: 'Concerning the various views that arise in the world... when what is present do they come into being, and what is absent do they not come into being?'"

"Yes, venerable sir."

"Concerning the various views that arise in the world, householder... when self-identity view is present, these views come into being; when self-identity view is absent, they don't come into being."

"But, venerable sir, how does self-identity view come into being?"

"There is the case, householder, where an ordinary uninstructed person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—assumes form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form. He assumes feeling to be the self, or the self as possessing feeling, or feeling as in the self, or the self as in feeling. He assumes perception to be the self, or the self as possessing perception, or perception as in the self, or the self as in perception. He assumes fabrications to be the self, or the self as possessing fabrications, or fabrications as in the self, or the self as in fabrications. He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. This is how self-identity view comes into being."

"And, venerable sir, how does self-identity view not come into being?"

"There is the case, householder, where a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones—who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for men of integrity, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma—doesn't 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 doesn't assume feeling to be the self.... He doesn't assume perception to be the self.... He doesn't assume fabrications to be the self.... He doesn't assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. This is how self-identity view doesn't come into being." — SN 41:3

§ 180. [Vacchagotta the wanderer:] "Now, Master Moggallāna, 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 soul is the same thing as the body,'* or *'The soul is one thing and the body another,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata exists,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,'* yet when Gotama the contemplative 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 soul is the same thing as the body,'* or *'The soul is one thing and the body another,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata exists,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist?'*"

[Ven. MahāMoggallāna:] "Vaccha, the members of other sects assume of the eye that *'This is mine, this is my self, this is what I am.'* They assume of the ear... the nose... the tongue... the body... the intellect that *'This is mine, this is my self, this is what I am.'* That is why, when asked in this way, they answer that *'The cosmos is eternal'*... or that *'After death Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.'* But the Tathāgata, worthy and rightly self-awakened, doesn't assume of the eye that *'This is mine, this is my self, this is what I am.'* He doesn't assume of the ear... the nose... the tongue... the body... the intellect that *'This is mine, this is my self, this is what I am.'* That is why, when asked in this way, he does not answer that *'The cosmos is eternal'*... or that *'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.'*"

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer, getting up from his seat, 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 [addressed the same questions to the Blessed One and received exactly the same explanation].

"How amazing, Master Gotama! How 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 Gotama, I went to Moggallāna the contemplative and, on arrival, asked him about this matter, and he answered me with the same words, the same phrasing, as Master Gotama. How amazing, Master Gotama! How 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!" — SN 44:7

§ 181. [Vacchagotta the wanderer:] "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 soul is the same thing as the body,'* or *'The soul is one thing and the body another,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata exists,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,'* 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 soul is the same thing as the body,'* or *'The soul is one thing and the body another,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata exists,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,'* or *'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,'?*"

"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 *'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.'*

"But the Tathāgata, worthy and rightly self-awakened, doesn't 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 doesn’t assume feeling to be the self....

“He doesn’t assume perception to be the self....

“He doesn’t assume fabrications to be the self....

“He doesn’t 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 *‘After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.’*”

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer, getting up from his seat, went to Ven. MahāMoggallāna 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. MahāMoggallāna and received exactly the same explanation].

“How amazing, Master Moggallāna! How 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 Moggallāna, 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 Moggallāna. How amazing, Master Moggallāna! How 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!” — SN 44:8

§ 182. Then Anāthapiṇḍika the householder went to the wanderers of other sects. On arrival he greeted them courteously. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the wanderers said to him, “Tell us, householder, what views Gotama the contemplative has.”

“Venerable sirs, I don’t know entirely what views the Blessed One has.”

“Well, well. So you don’t know entirely what views Gotama the contemplative has. Then tell us what views the monks have.”

“I don’t even know entirely what views the monks have.”

“So you don’t know entirely what views Gotama the contemplative has or even that the monks have. Then tell us what views you have.”

“It wouldn’t be difficult for me to expound to you what views I have. But please let the venerable ones expound each in line with his view-standpoint, and then it won’t be difficult for me to expound to you what views I have.”

When this had been said, one of the wanderers said to Anāthapiṇḍika the householder, “*The cosmos is eternal. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless.* This is the sort of view I have.”

Another wanderer said to Anāthapiṇḍika, “*The cosmos is not eternal. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless.* This is the sort of view I have.”

Another wanderer said, “*The cosmos is finite...*...*“The cosmos is infinite...*...*“The soul is the same thing as the body...*...*“The soul is one thing and the body another...*...*“After death a Tathāgata exists...*...*“After death a Tathāgata does not exist...*...*“After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist...*...*“After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless.* This is the sort of view I have.”

When this had been said, Anāthapiṇḍika the householder said to the wanderers, “As for the venerable one who says, *‘The cosmos is eternal. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless.* This is the sort of view I have,’ his view arises from his own inappropriate attention or in dependence on the words of another. Now this view has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen. Whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stressful. This venerable

one thus adheres to that very stress, submits himself to that very stress.”
[Similarly for the other view-standpoints.]

When this had been said, the wanderers said to Anāthapiṇḍika the householder, “We have each & every one expounded to you in line with our own view-standpoints. Now tell us what views you have.”

“Whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stressful. Whatever is stressful is not me, is not what I am, is not my self. This is the sort of view I have.”

“So, householder, whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stressful. You thus adhere to that very stress, submit yourself to that very stress.”

“Venerable sirs, whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stressful. Whatever is stressful is not me, is not what I am, is not my self. Having seen this well with right discernment as it has come to be, I also discern the higher escape from it as it has come to be.”

When this was said, the wanderers fell silent, abashed, sitting with their shoulders drooping, their heads down, brooding, at a loss for words. Anāthapiṇḍika the householder, sensing that the wanderers were silent, abashed... at a loss for words, got up & went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he told the Blessed One the entirety of his discussion with the wanderers.

[The Blessed One said,] “Well done, householder. Well done. That is how you should periodically & righteously refute those foolish men.” Then he instructed, urged, roused, and encouraged Anāthapiṇḍika the householder with a talk on Dhamma. When Anāthapiṇḍika the householder had been instructed, urged, roused, and encouraged by the Blessed One with a talk on Dhamma, he got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One and—keeping him to his right—departed. Not long afterward, the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Monks, even a monk who has long penetrated the Dhamma in this Dhamma & Vinaya would do well, periodically & righteously, to refute the wanderers of other sects in just the way Anāthapiṇḍika the householder has done.” — AN 10:93

§ 183. 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 asked the Blessed One, “How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view, ‘The cosmos is eternal: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless’?”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view, ‘The cosmos is not eternal: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless’?”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view, ‘The cosmos is finite: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless’?”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view, ‘The cosmos is infinite: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless’?”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view, ‘The soul is the same thing as the body: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless’?”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view, ‘The soul is one thing and the body another: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless’?”

"... no..."

"Then does Master Gotama hold the view, 'After death a Tathāgata exists: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless'?"

"... no..."

"Then does Master Gotama hold the view, 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless'?"

"... no..."

"Then does Master Gotama hold the view, 'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless'?"

"... no..."

"Then does Master Gotama hold the view, 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless'?"

"... no..."

"How is it, Master Gotama, when Master Gotama is asked if he holds the view, 'The cosmos is eternal...' 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless,' he says '... no...' in each case. Seeing what drawback, then, is Master Gotama thus entirely dissociated from each of these ten view-standpoints?"

"Vaccha, the view-standpoint that 'the cosmos is eternal' is a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. It is accompanied by suffering, distress, despair, & fever, and does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation; to calm, direct knowledge, self-awakening, unbinding.

"The view-standpoint that 'the cosmos is not eternal' ...

"... 'the cosmos is finite' ...

"... 'the cosmos is infinite' ...

"... 'the soul is the same thing as the body' ...

"... 'the soul is one thing and the body another' ...

"... 'after death a Tathāgata exists' ...

"... 'after death a Tathāgata does not exist' ...

"... 'after death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist' ...

"... 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist' ... does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation; to calm, direct knowledge, self-awakening, unbinding."

"Does Master Gotama have any view-standpoint at all?"

"A 'view-standpoint,' Vaccha, is something that a Tathāgata has done away with. What a Tathāgata sees is this: 'Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance; such is feeling, such its origination, such its disappearance; such is perception... such are fabrications... such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.' Because of this, I say, a Tathāgata—with the ending, fading, cessation, renunciation, & relinquishment of all conceivings, all excogitations, all I-making & mine-making & obsessions with conceit—is, through lack of clinging/sustenance, released." — MN 72

VIEW-STANDPOINTS FROM DN 1

§ 184. *A categorical Yes to the eternity of the cosmos:* "There is the case where a certain contemplative or brahman—as a result of ardency, exertion, commitment, heedfulness, & right attention—attains the sort of awareness-concentration whereby he recollects his manifold past lives, i.e., ten eons of cosmic contraction & expansion, twenty... thirty... forty eons of cosmic contraction & expansion, (recollecting,) 'There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of

pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-rose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-rose here.' Thus he recollects his manifold past lives in their modes & details. He says, "The self & the cosmos are barren, stable as a mountain-peak, standing firm like a pillar. And even though beings roam, wander, fall [die], & reappear, it will stay just like that as long as eternity. Why is that? Because I... recollect my manifold past lives in their modes & details. By means of that, I know that the self & the cosmos are barren, stable as a mountain-peak, standing firm like a pillar. And even though beings roam, wander, fall [die], & reappear, there is just that which will be like that as long as eternity."

Another categorical Yes: "There is the case where a certain contemplative or brahman is a logician, an inquirer. He states his own imagining, hammered out by logic, deduced from his inquiries: 'The self & the cosmos are barren, stable as a mountain-peak, standing firm like a pillar. And even though beings roam, wander, fall [die], & reappear, there is just that which will be like that as long as eternity.'"

An analytical answer to the eternity/non-eternity of the cosmos: "There ultimately comes a time when, with the passing of a long stretch of time, this cosmos devolves. When the cosmos is devolving, beings for the most part head toward the Radiant (brahmās). There they stay: mind-made, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, coursing through the air, established in beauty for a long stretch of time. Then there ultimately comes a time when, with the passing of a long stretch of time, this cosmos evolves. When the cosmos is evolving, an empty Brahmā palace appears. Then a certain being—from the exhaustion of his life span or the exhaustion of his merit—falls from the company of the Radiant and re-arises in the empty Brahmā palace. And there he still stays mind-made, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, coursing through the air, established in beauty for a long stretch of time.

"After dwelling there alone for a long time, he experiences displeasure & agitation: 'O, if only other beings would come to this world!'

"Then other beings, through the ending of their life span or the ending of their merit, fall from the company of the Radiant and reappear in the Brahmā palace, in the company of that being. And there they still stay mind-made, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, coursing through the air, established in beauty for a long stretch of time.

"Then the thought occurs to the being who reappeared first: 'I am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, All-Powerful, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. These beings were created by me. Why is that? First the thought occurred to me, "O, if only other beings would come to this world!" And thus my direction of will brought these beings to this world.' As for the beings who reappeared later, this thought occurs to them: 'This is Brahmā... Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. We were created by this Brahmā. Why is that? We saw that he appeared here before, while we appeared after.' The being who reappeared first is of longer life span, more beautiful, & more influential, while the beings who reappeared later are of shorter life span, less beautiful, & less influential.

"Now, there is the possibility, monks, that a certain being, having fallen from that company, comes to this world. Having come to this world, he goes forth from the home life into homelessness. Having gone forth from the home life

into homelessness, he—as a result of ardency, exertion, commitment, heedfulness, & right attention—attains the sort of awareness-concentration whereby he recollects that former life, but nothing beyond that. He says, ‘We were created by Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, All-Powerful, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. He is constant, permanent, eternal, not subject to change, and will stay just like that as long as eternity. But we who have been created by him—inconstant, impermanent, short-lived, subject to falling—have come to this world.’”

Another analytical answer: “There is the case where a certain contemplative or brahman is a logician, an inquirer. He states his own imagining, hammered out by logic, deduced from his inquiries: ‘That which is called “eye” & “ear” & “nose” & “tongue” & “body”’: That self is inconstant, impermanent, non-eternal, subject to change. But that which is called “mind” or “intellect” or “consciousness”’: That self is constant, permanent, eternal, not subject to change, and will stay just like that as long as eternity.’”

A categorical No to the eternity of the cosmos: “There are Devas called Beings without Perception. But, with the arising of perception, they fall from that company. Now, there is the possibility, monks, that a certain being, having fallen from that company, comes to this world. Having come to this world, he goes forth from the home life into homelessness. Having gone forth from the home life into homelessness, he—as a result of ardency, exertion, commitment, heedfulness, & right attention—attains the sort of awareness-concentration whereby he recollects the arising of perception, but nothing beyond that. He says, ‘The self & the cosmos are spontaneously arisen. Why is that? Because before I wasn’t, now I am. Not having been, I sprang into being.’”

Theories on the finitude/infinitude of the cosmos: “There is the case where a certain contemplative or brahman—as a result of ardency, exertion, commitment, heedfulness, & right attention—attains the sort of awareness-concentration whereby he remains with the perception of ‘finite’ with regard to the cosmos. He says, ‘This cosmos is finite, encircled. Why is that? Because I... have attained the sort of awareness-concentration whereby I remain with the perception of “finite” with regard to the cosmos. By means of that, I know that the cosmos is finite, encircled....’

“There is the case where a certain contemplative or brahman... attains the sort of awareness-concentration whereby he remains with the perception of ‘infinite’ with regard to the cosmos. He says, ‘This cosmos is infinite, unencircled. Those contemplatives & brahmans who say that this cosmos is finite, encircled, are lying. This cosmos is infinite, unencircled. Why is that? Because I... have attained the sort of awareness-concentration whereby I remain with the perception of “infinite” with regard to the cosmos. By means of that, I know that the cosmos is infinite, unencircled....’

“There is the case where a certain contemplative or brahman... attains the sort of awareness-concentration whereby he remains with the perception of ‘finite’ with regard to the cosmos above & below, but with the perception of ‘infinite’ all around. He says, ‘This cosmos is finite & infinite. Those contemplatives & brahmans who say that this cosmos is finite, encircled, are lying. Those contemplatives & brahmans who say that this cosmos is infinite, unencircled, are lying. This cosmos is finite & infinite. Why is that? Because I... have attained the sort of awareness-concentration whereby I remain with the perception of “finite” with regard to the cosmos above & below, but with the

perception of “infinite” all around. By means of that, I know that the cosmos is finite & infinite....’

“There is the case where a certain contemplative or brahman is a logician, an inquirer. He states his own imagining, hammered out by logic, deduced from his inquiries: ‘The cosmos is neither finite nor infinite. Those contemplatives & brahmans who say that this cosmos is finite, encircled, are lying. Those contemplatives & brahmans who say that this cosmos is infinite, unencircled, are lying. Those contemplatives & brahmans who say that this cosmos is finite & infinite are lying. The cosmos is neither finite nor infinite.’”

Refrain: “This, monks, the Tathāgata discerns. And he discerns that these standpoints, thus seized, thus grasped at, lead to such & such a destination, to such & such a state in the world beyond. And he discerns what is higher than this. And yet discerning that, he does not grasp at that act of discerning. And as he is not grasping at it, unbinding [*nibbuti*] is experienced right within. Knowing, as they have come to be, the origination, ending, allure, & drawbacks of feelings, along with the emancipation from feelings, the Tathāgata, monks—through lack of clinging/sustenance—is released.”

Final analysis: “When those contemplatives & brahmans assert various types of theories... on 62 grounds, that is an agitation & vacillation to be felt by those contemplatives & brahmans who, not knowing, not seeing, are immersed in craving.... That comes from contact as a requisite condition.... That they would experience that other than through contact: That isn’t possible.... [Compare §168] They all experience that through repeated contact at the six sense media. For them, from feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“But when a monk discerns the origination, ending, allure, drawbacks of, & emancipation from the six sense media, he discerns what is higher than all of this.” — *DN 1*

THE TETRALEMMA

§ 185. “Cunda, whatever in this world—with its deva, Māras, & Brahmās, its generations with their contemplatives & brahmans, their royalty & common people—is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect, that has been fully awakened to by the Tathāgata [§46]. Thus he is called the Tathāgata.

“From the night the Tathāgata fully awakens to the unsurpassed Right Self-awakening until the night he is totally unbound in the unbinding property with no fuel remaining, whatever the Tathāgata has said, spoken, explained is just so (*tatha*) and not otherwise. Thus he is called the Tathāgata.

“The Tathāgata is one who does in line with (*tatha*) what he teaches, one who teaches in line with what he does. Thus he is called the Tathāgata.

“In this world with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, its generations with their contemplatives & brahmans, their royalty & common people, the Tathāgata is the unconquered conqueror, all-seeing, the wielder of power. Thus he is called the Tathāgata.

“It’s possible, Cunda, that wanderers of other sects might say, ‘How is it,

friends? Is it the case that *“after death a Tathāgata exists: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless”*?’ The wanderers of other sects who say this should be told, ‘Friends, it is undeclared by the Tathāgata that *“after death a Tathāgata exists: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless.”*’

‘It’s possible that wanderers of other sects might say, ‘How is it, friends? Is it the case that *“after death a Tathāgata does not exist...”* ... *“both exists & does not exist...”* ... *“neither does nor doesn’t exist: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless”*?’ The wanderers of other sects who say this should be told, ‘Friends, it is undeclared by the Tathāgata that *“after death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist: Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless.”*’

‘It’s possible that wanderers of other sects might say, ‘But why, friends, is this undeclared by Gotama the contemplative?’ The wanderers of other sects who say this should be told, ‘Friends, it isn’t connected with the goal, isn’t connected with the Dhamma, isn’t fundamental to the holy life. It doesn’t lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening, unbinding. That’s why it’s undeclared by the Blessed One.’

‘It’s possible that wanderers of other sects might say, ‘But what, friends, is declared by Gotama the contemplative?’ The wanderers of other sects who say this should be told, *“This is stress,”* is declared by the Blessed One. *“This is the origination of stress,”* is declared by the Blessed One. *“This is the cessation of stress,”* is declared by the Blessed One. *“This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress,”* is declared by the Blessed One.’

‘It’s possible that wanderers of other sects might say, ‘And why, friends, is this declared by Gotama the contemplative?’ The wanderers of other sects who say this should be told, ‘This is connected with the goal, is connected with the Dhamma, is fundamental to the holy life. It leads to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening, unbinding. That’s why it’s declared by the Blessed One.’” — DN 29

§ 186. [Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “Now, friend Sāriputta, when asked if the Tathāgata exists after death, you say, ‘That has not been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata exists after death.”’ When asked if the Tathāgata does not exist after death... both exists & does not exist after death... neither exists nor does not exist after death, you say, ‘That too has not been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.”’ Now, what is the cause, what is the reason, why that has not been declared by the Blessed One?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ is [a view] immersed in form. ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ is immersed in form. ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ is immersed in form. ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ is immersed in form.

“‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ is immersed in feeling....

“‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ is immersed in perception....

“‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ is immersed in fabrication....

“‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ is immersed in consciousness. ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ is immersed in consciousness. ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ is immersed in consciousness. ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist death’ is immersed in consciousness.

“This is the cause, this is the reason, why that has not been declared by the Blessed One.” — SN 44:3

§ 187. [Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “Now, friend Sāriputta, when asked if the

Tathāgata exists after death, you say, ‘That hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata exists after death.”’ When asked if the Tathāgata does not exist after death... both exists & does not exist after death... neither exists nor does not exist after death, you say, ‘That too hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.”’ Now, what is the cause, what is the reason, why that hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One?’

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “For one who doesn’t know & see form as it has come to be, who does not know & see the origination of form... the cessation of form... the path of practice leading to the cessation of form as it has come to be, there occurs the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.’

“For one who doesn’t know & see feeling as it has come to be....

“For one who doesn’t know & see perception as it has come to be....

“For one who doesn’t know & see fabrications as they have come to be....

“For one who doesn’t know & see consciousness as it has come to be, who does not know & see the origination of consciousness... the cessation of consciousness... the path of practice leading to the cessation of consciousness as it has come to be, there occurs the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.’

“But for one who knows & sees form as it has come to be, who knows & sees the origination of form... the cessation of form... the path of practice leading to the cessation of form as it has come to be, the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ doesn’t occur.

“For one who knows & sees feeling as it has come to be....

“For one who knows & sees perception as it has come to be....

“For one who knows & sees fabrications as they have come to be....

“For one who knows & sees consciousness as it has come to be, who knows & sees the origination of consciousness... the cessation of consciousness... the path of practice leading to the cessation of consciousness as it has come to be, the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ doesn’t occur.

“This is the cause, this is the reason, why that hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One.” — *SN 44:4*

§ 188. [Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “Now, friend Sāriputta, when asked if the Tathāgata exists after death, you say, ‘That hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata exists after death.”’ When asked if the Tathāgata does not exist after death... both exists & does not exist after death... neither exists nor does not exist after death, you say, ‘That too hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.”’ Now, what is the cause, what is the reason, why that hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One?’

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “For one whose passion for form has not been removed, whose desire... affection... thirst... fever... craving for form has not been removed, there occurs the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not

exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.'

"For one whose passion for feeling has not been removed....

"For one whose passion for perception has not been removed....

"For one whose passion for fabrication has not been removed....

"For one whose passion for consciousness has not been removed, whose desire... affection... thirst... fever... craving for consciousness has not been removed, there occurs the thought, 'The Tathāgata exists after death' or 'The Tathāgata does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.'

"But for one whose passion for form has been removed, whose desire... affection... thirst... fever... craving for form has been removed, the thought, 'The Tathāgata exists after death' or 'The Tathāgata does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death' doesn't occur.

"For one whose passion for feeling has been removed....

"For one whose passion for perception has been removed....

"For one whose passion for fabrication has been removed....

"For one whose passion for consciousness has been removed, whose desire... affection... thirst... fever... craving for consciousness has been removed, the thought, 'The Tathāgata exists after death' or 'The Tathāgata does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death' doesn't occur.

"This is the cause, this is the reason, why that hasn't been declared by the Blessed One." — *SN 44:5*

§ 189. [Ven. Sāriputta:] "Now, friend Koṭṭhita, when asked if the Tathāgata exists after death, you say, 'That hasn't been declared by the Blessed One: "The Tathāgata exists after death."' When asked if the Tathāgata does not exist after death... both exists & does not exist after death... neither exists nor does not exist after death, you say, 'That too hasn't been declared by the Blessed One: "The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death."' Now, what is the cause, what is the reason, why that hasn't been declared by the Blessed One?"

[Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] "For one who loves form, who is fond of form, who cherishes form, who does not know or see, as it has come to be, the cessation of form, there occurs the thought, 'The Tathāgata exists after death' or 'The Tathāgata does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.'

"For one who loves feeling....

"For one who loves perception....

"For one who loves fabrication....

"For one who loves consciousness, who is fond of consciousness, who cherishes consciousness, who does not know or see, as it has come to be, the cessation of consciousness, there occurs the thought, 'The Tathāgata exists after death' or 'The Tathāgata does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.'

"But for one who doesn't love form, who isn't fond of form, who doesn't cherish form, who knows & sees, as it has come to be, the cessation of form, the thought, 'The Tathāgata exists after death' or 'The Tathāgata does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death' or 'The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death' doesn't occur.

"For one who doesn't love feeling....

"For one who doesn't love perception....

“For one who doesn’t love fabrication....

“For one who doesn’t love consciousness, who isn’t fond of consciousness, who doesn’t cherish consciousness, who knows & sees, as it has come to be, the cessation of consciousness, the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ doesn’t occur.

“This is the cause, this is the reason, why that hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One.”

“But, my friend, would there another line of reasoning, in line with which that hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One?”

“There would, my friend. For one who loves becoming, who is fond of becoming, who cherishes becoming, who does not know or see, as it has come to be, the cessation of becoming, there occurs the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.’

“But for one who doesn’t love becoming, who isn’t fond of becoming, who doesn’t cherish becoming, who knows & sees, as it has come to be, the cessation of becoming, the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ doesn’t occur.

“This too is a line of reasoning in line with which that hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One.”

“But, my friend, would there another line of reasoning, in line with which that hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One?”

“There would, my friend. For one who loves clinging/sustenance, who is fond of clinging/sustenance, who cherishes clinging/sustenance, who does not know or see, as it has come to be, the cessation of clinging/sustenance, there occurs the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.’

“But for one who doesn’t love clinging/sustenance, who isn’t fond of clinging/sustenance, who doesn’t cherish clinging/sustenance, who knows & sees, as it has come to be, the cessation of clinging/sustenance, the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ doesn’t occur.

“This too is a line of reasoning in line with which that hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One.”

“But, my friend, would there another line of reasoning, in line with which that hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One?”

“There would, my friend. For one who loves craving, who is fond of craving, who cherishes craving, who does not know or see, as it has come to be, the cessation of craving, there occurs the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.’

“But for one who doesn’t love craving, who isn’t fond of craving, who doesn’t cherish craving, who knows & sees, as it has come to be, the cessation of craving, the thought, ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ or ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ doesn’t occur.

"This too is a line of reasoning in line with which that hasn't been declared by the Blessed One."

"But, my friend, would there another line of reasoning, in line with which that hasn't been declared by the Blessed One?"

"Now, what more do you want, friend Sāriputta? When a monk has been freed from the classification of craving, there exists no cycle for describing him."
— SN 44:6

THE TETRALEMMA DECLARED MEANINGLESS

§ 190. [Vacchagotta the wanderer:] "Does Master Gotama have any view-standpoint at all?"

"A 'view-standpoint,' Vaccha, is something that a Tathāgata has done away with. What a Tathāgata sees is this: 'Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance; such is feeling, such its origination, such its disappearance; such is perception... such are fabrications... such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.' Because of this, I say, a Tathāgata—with the ending, fading, cessation, renunciation, & relinquishment of all conceivings, all excogitations, all I-making & mine-making & obsessions with conceit—is, through lack of clinging/sustenance, released."

"But, Master Gotama, the monk whose mind is thus released:¹ Where does he reappear?"

"Reappear,' Vaccha, doesn't apply."

"Very well then, Master Gotama, does he not reappear?"

"Does not reappear,' Vaccha, doesn't apply."

"Very well then, Master Gotama, does he both reappear & not reappear?"

"Both reappears & does not reappear,' Vaccha, doesn't apply."

"Very well then, Master Gotama, does he neither reappear nor not reappear?"

"Neither reappears nor does not reappear,' Vaccha, doesn't apply."

"How is it, Master Gotama, when Master Gotama is asked if the monk reappears... does not reappear... both does & does not reappear... neither does nor does not reappear, he says, '... doesn't apply' in each case? At this point, Master Gotama, I am befuddled; at this point, confused. The modicum of clarity coming to me from your earlier discussion is now obscured."

"Of course you're befuddled, Vaccha. Of course you're confused. Deep, Vaccha, is this phenomenon, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. For those with other views, other practices, other satisfactions, other aims, other teachers, it is difficult to know. That being the case, I will counter-question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think, Vaccha? If a fire were burning in front of you, would you know that 'This fire is burning in front of me'?"

"... yes..."

"And if someone were to ask you, Vaccha, 'This fire burning in front of you: Dependent on what is it burning?' Thus asked, how would you reply?"

"... I would reply, 'This fire burning in front of me is burning dependent on grass & timber as its sustenance.'"

"If the fire burning in front of you were to go out, would you know that 'This fire burning in front of me has gone out'?"

"... yes..."

"And if someone were to ask you, 'This fire that has gone out in front of you: In which direction from here has it gone? East? West? North? Or south?' Thus asked, how would you reply?"

“That doesn’t apply, Master Gotama. Any fire burning dependent on a sustenance of grass & timber, being unnourished—from having consumed (that sustenance) and not being offered any other—is classified simply as ‘out’ [unbound].”

“In the same way, Vaccha, any form by which one describing the Tathāgata would describe him: That form the Tathāgata has abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of form, Vaccha, the Tathāgata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the ocean. ‘Reappears’ doesn’t apply. ‘Does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Both does & does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Neither reappears nor does not reappear’ doesn’t apply.

“Any feeling.... Any perception.... Any fabrication....

“Any consciousness by which one describing the Tathāgata would describe him: That consciousness the Tathāgata has abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of consciousness, Vaccha, the Tathāgata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the ocean. ‘Reappears’ doesn’t apply. ‘Does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Both does & does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Neither reappears nor does not reappear’ doesn’t apply.” — MN 72

NOTE: 1. The fact that the terminology here switches from the Tathāgata to a monk whose mind is released shows that, in this context at least, the two terms are interchangeable. This is one of the few passages in the Canon where the term Tathāgata has this meaning. (For another, see §193.)

§ 191. On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattī at Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. And on that occasion the bhikkhuni Khemā, wandering on tour among the Kosalans, had taken up residence between Sāvattī and Sāketa at Torāṇavatthu. Then King Pasenadi Kosala, while traveling from Sāketa to Sāvattī, took up a one-night residence between Sāvattī and Sāketa at Torāṇavatthu. Then he addressed a certain man, “Come, now, my good man. Find out if in Torāṇavatthu there’s the sort of contemplative or brahman I might visit today.”

“As you say, sire,” the man replied to the king, but having roamed all over Torāṇavatthu he did not see the sort of contemplative or brahman the king might visit. But he did see the bhikkhuni Khemā residing in Torāṇavatthu. On seeing her, he went to King Pasenadi Kosala and on arrival said to him, “Sire, in Torāṇavatthu there is no contemplative or brahman of the sort your majesty might visit. But there is a bhikkhuni named Khemā, a disciple of the Blessed One, worthy and rightly self-awakened. And of this lady, this admirable report has spread about: ‘She is wise, competent, intelligent, learned, a fluent speaker, admirable in her ingenuity.’ Let your majesty visit her.”

Then King Pasenadi Kosala went to the bhikkhuni Khemā and, on arrival, having bowed down to her, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to her, “Now then, lady, does the Tathāgata exist after death?”

“That, great king, hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: ‘The Tathāgata exists after death.’”

“Well then, lady, does the Tathāgata not exist after death?”

“Great king, that too hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death.’”

“Then does the Tathāgata both exist and not exist after death?”

“That hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death.’”

“Well then, does the Tathāgata neither exist nor not exist after death?”

“That too hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.’”

“Now, lady, when asked if the Tathāgata exists after death, you say, ‘That hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata exists after death.”’ When asked if the Tathāgata does not exist after death... both exists & does not exist after death... neither exists nor does not exist after death, you say, ‘That too hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.”’ Now, what is the cause, what is the reason, why that hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One?”

“Very well then, great king, I will cross-question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think, great king? Do you have an accountant or calculator or mathematician who can count the grains of sand in the river Ganges as ‘so many grains of sand’ or ‘so many hundreds of grains of sand’ or ‘so many thousands of grains of sand’ or ‘so many hundreds of thousands of grains of sand’?”

“No, lady.”

“Then do you have an accountant or calculator or mathematician who can count the water in the great ocean as ‘so many buckets of water’ or ‘so many hundreds of buckets of water’ or ‘so many thousands of buckets of water’ or ‘so many hundreds of thousands of buckets of water’?”

“No, lady. Why is that? The great ocean is deep, boundless, hard to fathom.”

“Even so, great king, any form by which one describing the Tathāgata would describe him: That form the Tathāgata has abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of form, great king, the Tathāgata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the ocean. ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ doesn’t apply. ‘The Tathāgata doesn’t exist after death’ doesn’t apply. ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ doesn’t apply. ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ doesn’t apply.

“Any feeling.... Any perception.... Any fabrication....

“Any consciousness by which one describing the Tathāgata would describe him: That consciousness the Tathāgata has abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of consciousness, great king, the Tathāgata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the ocean. ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ doesn’t apply. ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’ doesn’t apply. ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ doesn’t apply. ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ doesn’t apply.”¹

Then King Pasenadi Kosala, delighting in & approving of the bhikkhuni Khemā’s words, got up from his seat, bowed down to her and—keeping her to his right—departed.

Then at another time he went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, [he asked the Blessed One the same questions he had asked the bhikkhuni Khemā, and received precisely the same responses and analogies. Then he exclaimed:]

“How amazing, lord! How 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! Recently, lord, I went to the bhikkhuni Khemā and, on arrival, asked her about this matter, and she answered me with the same words, the same phrasing, as the Blessed One. How amazing, lord! How 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!

“Now, lord, we must go. Many are our duties, many our responsibilities.”

“Then do, great king, what you think it is now time to do.”

So King Pasenadi Kosala, delighting in and approving of the Blessed One’s words, got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One and—keeping him to his right—departed. — *SN 44:1*

§ 192. Then Ven. Anurādha went to the Blessed One and on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “Just now I was staying not far from the Blessed One in a wilderness hut. Then a large number of wandering sectarians came and.... said to me, ‘Friend Anurādha, the Tathāgata—the supreme person, the superlative person, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described with [one of] these four positions: After death the Tathāgata exists; after death he does not exist; after death he both exists & does not exist; after death he neither exists nor does not exist.’

“When this was said, I said to them, ‘Friends, the Tathāgata—the supreme person, the superlative person, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described otherwise than with these four positions: After death the Tathāgata exists; after death he does not exist; after death he both exists & does not exist; after death he neither exists nor does not exist.’

“When this was said, the wandering sectarians said to me, ‘This monk is either a newcomer, not long gone forth, or else an elder who is foolish & inexperienced.’ So, addressing me as they would a newcomer or a fool, they got up from their seats and left.

“Then not long after the wandering sectarians had left, this thought occurred to me, ‘If I am questioned again by those wandering sectarians, how will I answer in such a way that will I speak in line with what the Blessed One has said, will not misrepresent the Blessed One with what is unfactual, will answer in line with the Dhamma, so that the legitimate implications of what I say give no grounds for criticism?’”

“What do you think, Anurādha? Is form constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, lord.”

“And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, lord.”

“Is feeling constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord”....

“Is perception constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord”....

“Are fabrications constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord”....

“Is consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, lord.”

“And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, lord.”

“Now, what do you think, Anurādha? Do you regard form as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

“Do you regard feeling as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

“Do you regard perception as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

“Do you regard fabrications as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

“Do you regard consciousness as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

“Now, what do you think, Anurādha? Do you regard the Tathāgata as being in form?... Elsewhere than form?... In feeling?... Elsewhere than feeling?... In perception?... Elsewhere than perception?... In fabrications?... Elsewhere than fabrications?... In consciousness?... Elsewhere than consciousness?”

“No, lord.”

“What do you think, Anurādha? Do you regard the Tathāgata as form-feeling-perception-fabrications-consciousness?”

“No, lord.”

“What do you think, Anurādha? Do you regard the Tathāgata as that which is without form, without feeling, without perception, without fabrications, without consciousness?”

“No, lord.”

“And so, Anurādha—when you can’t pin down the Tathāgata as a truth or reality even in the present life—is it proper for you to declare, ‘Friends, the Tathāgata—the supreme person, the superlative person, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described otherwise than with these four positions: After death the Tathāgata exists; after death he does not exist; after death he both exists & does not exist; after death he neither exists nor does not exist?’”

“No, lord.”

“Very good, Anurādha. Very good. Both formerly & now, it is only stress that I describe, and the cessation of stress.” — *SN 44:2*

§ 193. Then in the evening Ven. Sāriputta left his seclusion, went to Ven. Yamaka, and on arrival exchanged courteous greetings. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Yamaka, “Is it true, my friend Yamaka, that this evil supposition has arisen to you: ‘As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more fermentations, on the breakup of the body, is annihilated, destroyed, & does not exist after death.’”

“Yes, my friend. As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more fermentations, on the breakup of the body, is annihilated, destroyed, & does not exist after death.”

“Now, what do you think, my friend Yamaka? Is form constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, my friend.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, my friend.”

“And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, my friend.”

“Is feeling constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, my friend”....

“Is perception constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, my friend”....

“Are fabrications constant or inconstant?”
 “Inconstant, my friend”....
 “Is consciousness constant or inconstant?”
 “Inconstant, my friend.”
 “And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”
 “Stressful, my friend.”
 “And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as:
 ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”
 “No, my friend.”
 “Now, what do you think? Do you regard form as the Tathāgata?”¹
 “No, my friend.”
 “Do you regard feeling as the Tathāgata?”
 “No, my friend.”
 “Do you regard perception as the Tathāgata?”
 “No, my friend.”
 “Do you regard fabrications as the Tathāgata?”
 “No, my friend.”
 “Do you regard consciousness as the Tathāgata?”
 “No, my friend.”
 “Now, what do you think? Do you regard the Tathāgata as being in form?...
 Elsewhere than form?... In feeling?... Elsewhere than feeling?... In perception?...
 Elsewhere than perception?... In fabrications?... Elsewhere than fabrications?...
 In consciousness?... Elsewhere than consciousness?”
 “No, my friend.”
 “What do you think? Do you regard the Tathāgata as form-feeling-
 perception-fabrications-consciousness?”
 “No, my friend.”
 “What do you think? Do you regard the Tathāgata as that which is without
 form, without feeling, without perception, without fabrications, without
 consciousness?”
 “No, my friend.”
 “And so, my friend Yamaka—when you can’t pin down the Tathāgata as a
 truth or reality even in the present life—is it proper for you to declare, ‘As I
 understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more
 fermentations, on the breakup of the body, is annihilated, destroyed, & does not
 exist after death’?”
 “Previously, my friend Sāriputta, I did foolishly hold that evil supposition. But
 now, having heard your explanation of the Dhamma, I have abandoned that evil
 supposition and have broken through to the Dhamma.”
 “Then, friend Yamaka, how would you answer if you are asked, ‘A monk, a
 worthy one, with no more fermentations: What is he on the breakup of the
 body, after death?’”
 “Thus asked, my friend, I would answer, ‘Form is inconstant... Feeling...
 Perception... Fabrications... Consciousness is inconstant. That which is
 inconstant is stressful. That which is stressful has ceased and gone to its end.’”
 “Very good, my friend Yamaka. Very good.” — SN 22:85

NOTE: 1. The fact that the terminology here switches from the monk whose mind is released to the Tathāgata shows that, in this context at least, the two terms are interchangeable. This is one of the few passages in the Canon where the term Tathāgata has this meaning. (For another, see §190.)

§ 194. [Vacchagotta the wanderer:] “Now, Master Kaccāyana, when asked if the Tathāgata exists after death, you say, ‘That hasn’t been declared by the

Blessed One: “The Tathāgata exists after death.” When asked if the Tathāgata does not exist after death, you say, “That too hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata does not exist after death.” When asked if the Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death, you say, “That hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death.” When asked if the Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death, you say, “That too hasn’t been declared by the Blessed One: “The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.” Now, what is the cause, what is the reason, why that hasn’t been declared by Gotama the contemplative?”

[Ven. Sabhiya Kaccāyana:] “Vaccha, whatever cause, whatever reason there would be for describing him as ‘possessed of form’ or ‘formless’ or ‘percipient’ or ‘non-percipient’ or ‘neither percipient nor non-percipient’: If that cause, that reason, were to cease totally everywhere, totally in every way without remainder, then describing him by what means would one describe him as ‘possessed of form’ or ‘formless’ or ‘percipient’ or ‘non-percipient’ or ‘neither percipient nor non-percipient’?”

“How long has it been since you went forth, Master Kaccāyana?”

“Not long, my friend. Three years.”

“Whoever has gained just this much in this much time has gained a great deal, my friend—to say nothing of what he has thus gone beyond.” — SN 44:11

§ 195. “Now, Ānanda, insofar as a monk doesn’t assume feeling to be the self, nor the self as oblivious, nor that ‘My self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling,’ then, not assuming in this way, he is not sustained by anything [does not cling to anything] in the world. Unsustained, he is not agitated. Unagitated, he is totally unbound right within. He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

“If anyone were to say with regard to a monk whose mind is thus released that ‘The Tathāgata exists after death,’ is his view, that would be mistaken; that ‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death’... that ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’... that ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ is his view, that would be mistaken. Why? Having directly known the extent of designation and the extent of the objects of designation, the extent of expression and the extent of the objects of expression, the extent of description and the extent of the objects of description, the extent of discernment and the extent of the objects of discernment, the extent to which the cycle revolves: Having directly known that, the monk is released. The view that, ‘Having directly known that, the monk released does not see, does not know’: That would be mistaken.”¹ — DN 15

NOTE: 1. The various readings for this sentence all seem corrupt. The sense of the paragraph, read in light of AN 10:96 [§177], demands that the view expressed in the last sentence be *about* the monk released, unlike the four earlier views, which are wrongly *attributed* to the monk released. In other words, the monk released has no opinion on the question of whether the Tathāgata does, doesn’t, etc., exist after death. This might lead to the supposition that his lack of opinion comes from a lack of knowledge or vision. The description of what he comes to know in the course of gaining release shows that this supposition is inappropriate. He does know, he does see, and what he knows and sees about the limitations of language and concepts shows him that the question of the existence of the Tathāgata after death should be set aside.

Thus I would reconstruct the Pali of the final sentence in this paragraph as: *Tad-abhiññā vimutto bhikkhu na jānāti na passati iti sā diṭṭhi tad-akallam.*

§ 196. *This was said by the Blessed One, said by the Arahant, so I have heard:* “There are these three times. Which three? Past time, future time, & present

time. These are the three times.”

Perceiving in terms of signs, beings
take a stand on signs.
Not fully comprehending signs, they
come into the bonds
of death.
But fully comprehending signs, one
doesn't construe a signifier.
Touching liberation with the heart,
the state of peace unsurpassed,
consummate in terms of signs,
peaceful,
enjoying the peaceful state,
judicious,
an attainer-of-wisdom
makes use of classifications
but can't be classified.¹ — *Iti 63*

NOTE: 1. At first glance, the verses here don't bear much relationship to the prose introduction. However, when viewed in the context of MN 2 [§25], their relationship becomes clear: The person who applies appropriate attention to the notion of past, present, and future time does not define him or herself in those terms, and so does not cling to any sense of self in those terms. Without clinging, one is liberated from birth and death.

This verse is almost identical with one in SN 1:20:

Perceiving in terms of signs, beings
take a stand on signs.
Not fully comprehending signs, they
come into the bonds
of death.
But fully comprehending signs, one
doesn't construe
a signifier.
Yet nothing exists for him
by which one would say,
'To him no thought occurs.'

The point of this version of the verse is that the mind of the awakened one is so unknowable that one cannot say whether he or she thinks or not. See AN 11:10.

§ 197. “Monks, I will teach you the all. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” the monks responded.

The Blessed One said, “What is the all? Simply the eye & forms, ear & sounds, nose & aromas, tongue & flavors, body & tactile sensations, intellect & ideas. This, monks, is called the all.¹ Anyone who would say, ‘Repudiating this all, I will describe another,’ if questioned on what exactly might be the grounds for his statement, would be unable to explain, and furthermore, would be put to grief. Why? Because it lies beyond range.” — *SN 35:23*

NOTE: 1. The Commentary's treatment of this discourse is very peculiar. To begin with, it delineates three additional “all's,” one of them supposedly larger in scope than the one defined here: the allness of the Buddha's omniscience (literally, All-knowingness). This, despite the fact that the discourse says that the description of such an all lies beyond the range of explanation.

Secondly, the Commentary includes nibbāna (unbinding) within the scope of the all described here—as a dhamma, or object of the intellect—even though many other

discourses in the Canon specifically state that nibbāna lies beyond the range of the six senses and their objects. Sn 5:6 [§202], for instance, indicates that a person who has attained nibbāna has gone beyond all phenomena (*sabbe dhammā*), and therefore cannot be described. MN 49 [§204] discusses a “consciousness without surface” (*viññānaṃ anidassanaṃ*) that does not partake of the “allness of the all.” AN 9:36 [§139] states that full awakening occurs only when passion and delight for the dhamma of deathlessness—i.e., the perception of the deathless as a dhamma—is abandoned. Furthermore, SN 35:24 says that the “all” is to be abandoned. At no point does the Canon say that nibbāna is to be abandoned. Nibbāna follows on cessation (*nirodha*), which is to be realized. Once nibbāna is realized, there are no further tasks to be done.

Thus a better interpretation would be to read this discourse’s discussion of “all” as intended to limit the use of the word “all” throughout the Buddha’s teachings to the six sense spheres and their objects. As SN 35:24 and SN 35:28 both show, this would also include the consciousness, contact, and feelings connected with the sense spheres and their objects. Nibbāna would lie outside of the word, “all.” This interpretation coincides with another point made several times in the Canon: that dispassion is the highest of all dhammas (Iti 90), while the arahant has gone beyond even dispassion (Sn 4:6; Sn 4:10).

This raises the question, if the word “all” does not include nibbāna, does that mean that one may infer from the statement, “all phenomena are not-self” that nibbāna is self? The answer is No. As AN 4:173 [§208] states, even to ask if there is anything remaining or not remaining (or both, or neither) after the cessation of the six sense spheres is to objectify what is by nature not objectified. The range of objectification goes only as far as the “all.” Perceptions of self or no self, which would count as objectification, would not apply beyond the “all.” When the cessation of the “all” is experienced, all objectification is allayed.

§ 198. “Monks, that dimension should be experienced where the eye ceases and the perception of form fades. That dimension is to be experienced where the ear ceases and the perception of sound fades... where the nose ceases and the perception of aroma fades... where the tongue ceases and the perception of flavor fades... where the body ceases and the perception of tactile sensation fades... where the intellect ceases and the perception of idea/phenomenon fades: That dimension should be experienced.” — SN 35:117

§ 199. As he was sitting there, Ven. Rādhā said to the Blessed One: “‘A being,’ lord. ‘A being,’ it’s said. To what extent is one said to be ‘a being’?”

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for form, Rādhā: When one is caught up [*satta*] there, tied up [*visatta*] there, one is said to be ‘a being [*satta*].’

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for feeling... perception... fabrications...”

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for consciousness, Rādhā: When one is caught up there, tied up there, one is said to be ‘a being.’

“Just as when boys or girls are playing with little sand castles [lit: dirt houses]: As long as they are not free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for those little sand castles, that’s how long they have fun with those sand castles, enjoy them, treasure them, feel possessive of them. But when they become free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for those little sand castles, then they smash them, scatter them, demolish them with their hands or feet and make them unfit for play.

“In the same way, Rādhā, you too should smash, scatter, demolish form, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for form.

“You should smash, scatter, demolish feeling, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for feeling.

“You should smash, scatter, demolish perception, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for perception.

“You should smash, scatter, demolish fabrications, and make them unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for fabrications.

“You should smash, scatter, demolish consciousness, and make it unfit for

play. Practice for the ending of craving for consciousness—because the ending of craving, Rādha, is unbinding.” — SN 23:2

§ 200. Then a certain monk went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One: “It would be good, lord, if the Blessed One would teach me the Dhamma in brief such that, having heard the Dhamma from the Blessed One, I might dwell alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute.”

“Monk, whatever one stays obsessed with, that’s what one is measured by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified. Whatever one doesn’t stay obsessed with, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.”

“I understand, O Blessed One! I understand, O One Well-gone!”

“And how, monk, do you understand the detailed meaning of what I have said in brief?”

“If one stays obsessed with form, lord, that’s what one is measured by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

“If one stays obsessed with feeling....

“If one stays obsessed with perception....

“If one stays obsessed with fabrications....

“If one stays obsessed with consciousness, that’s what one is measured by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

“But if one doesn’t stay obsessed with form, lord, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with feeling....

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with perception....

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with fabrications....

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with consciousness, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.

“Lord, this is how I understand the detailed meaning of what you have said in brief.”

“Good, monk. Very good. It’s good that this is how you understand the detailed meaning of what I have said in brief.

“If one stays obsessed with form, monk, that’s what one is measured by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

“If one stays obsessed with feeling....

“If one stays obsessed with perception....

“If one stays obsessed with fabrications....

“If one stays obsessed with consciousness, that’s what one is measured by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

“But if one doesn’t stay obsessed with form, monk, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with feeling....

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with perception....

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with fabrications....

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with consciousness, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.

“This is how the detailed meaning of what I have said in brief should be seen.”

Then the monk, delighting in and approving of the Blessed One’s words, got up from his seat and bowed down to the Blessed One, circled around him, keeping the Blessed One to his right, and departed. Then, dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute, he in no long time reached & remained in

the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now. He knew, “Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world.” And thus he became another one of the arahants. — *SN 22:36*

§ 201. “Freed, disjoined, & released from ten things, Bāhuna, the Tathāgata dwells with unrestricted awareness. Which ten? Freed, disjoined, & released from form, the Tathāgata dwells with unrestricted awareness. Freed, disjoined, & released from feeling... Freed, disjoined, & released from perception... Freed, disjoined, & released from fabrications... Freed, disjoined, & released from consciousness... Freed, disjoined, & released from birth... Freed, disjoined, & released from aging... Freed, disjoined, & released from death... Freed, disjoined, & released from stress... Freed, disjoined, & released from defilement, the Tathāgata dwells with unrestricted awareness.

“Just as a red, blue, or white lotus born in the water and growing in the water, rises up above the water and stands with no water adhering to it, in the same way the Tathāgata—freed, disjoined, & released from these ten things—dwells with unrestricted awareness.” — *AN 10:81*

§ 202. *Upasīva:*

One free from passion
for all sensual pleasures
relying on nothingness, letting go of all else,
released in the highest emancipation of perception:
Does he stay there unaffected?

The Buddha:

One free from passion
for all sensual pleasures
relying on nothingness, letting go of all else,
released in the highest emancipation of perception:
He stays there unaffected.

Upasīva:

If he stays there, O All-around Eye,
unaffected for many years,
right there
would he be cooled & released?
Would his consciousness be like that?

The Buddha:

As a flame overthrown by the force of the wind
goes to an end
that cannot be classified,
so the sage free from naming activity
goes to an end
that cannot be classified.

Upasīva:

He who has reached the end:
 Does he not exist,
 or is he for eternity
 free from dis-ease?
 Please, sage, declare this to me
 as this phenomenon [*dhamma*]
 has been known by you.

The Buddha:

One who has reached the end
 has no criterion
 by which anyone would say that—
 for him it doesn't exist.
 When all phenomena are done away with,
 all means of speaking
 are done away with as well. — *Sn 5:6*

DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO SIMILAR QUESTIONS

§ 203. *Māra:*

“By whom was this being created?
 Where is the being's maker?
 Where has the being originated?
 Where does the being cease?”

Sister Vajirā:

“What? Do you assume a ‘being,’ Māra?
 Have you gone to a view-standpoint?
 This is purely a pile of fabrications.
 Here no being
 can be pinned down.
 Just as when, with an assemblage of parts,
 there's the word,
 chariot,
 even so when aggregates are present,
 there's the convention of
 a being.
 For only stress is what comes to be;
 stress, what remains & falls away.
 Nothing but stress comes to be.
 Nothing ceases but stress.”

Then Māra the Evil One—sad & dejected at realizing, “Vajirā the bhikkhuni knows me”—vanished right there. — *SN 5:10*

§ 204. 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, “Master Gotama, a few days ago a large number of contemplatives, brahmans, & wanderers of various sects were sitting together in the Debating Hall when this discussion arose among them: ‘This Pūraṇa Kassapa—the leader

of a community, the leader of a group, the teacher of a group, honored and famous, esteemed as holy by the mass of people—describes a disciple who has died and passed on in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.” Even when the disciple is a supreme person, a superlative person, attained to the superlative attainment, Pūraṇa Kassapa describes him, when he has died and passed on, in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.”

“This Makkhali Gosāla... This Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta... This Sañjaya Velaṭṭhaputta... This Pakudha Kaccāyana... This Ajita Kesakambalin—the leader of a community, the leader of a group, the teacher of a group, honored and famous, esteemed as holy by the mass of people—describes a disciple who has died and passed on in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.” Even when the disciple is a supreme person, a superlative person, attained to the superlative attainment, Ajita Kesakambalin describes him, when he has died and passed on, in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.”

“This contemplative Gotama—the leader of a community, the leader of a group, the teacher of a group, honored and famous, esteemed as holy by the mass of people—describes a disciple who has died and passed on in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.” But when the disciple is a supreme person, a superlative person, attained to the superlative attainment, Gotama the contemplative does not describe him, when he has died and passed on, in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.” Instead, he describes him thus: “He has cut through craving, severed the fetter, and by rightly breaking through conceit has made an end of suffering & stress.”

“So I was simply befuddled. I was uncertain: How is the teaching of Gotama the contemplative to be understood?”

“Of course you’re befuddled, Vaccha. Of course you’re uncertain. When there is a reason for befuddlement in you, uncertainty arises. I designate the rebirth of one who has clinging/sustenance, Vaccha, and not of one without clinging/sustenance. Just as a fire burns with clinging/sustenance and not without clinging/sustenance, even so I designate the rebirth of one who has clinging/sustenance and not of one without clinging/sustenance.”

“But, Master Gotama, at the moment a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, what do you designate as its clinging/sustenance then?”

“Vaccha, when a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, I designate it as wind-sustained, for the wind is its clinging/sustenance at that time.”

“And at the moment when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, what do you designate as its clinging/sustenance then?”

“Vaccha, when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, I designate it as craving-sustained, for craving is its clinging/sustenance at that time.” — SN 44:9

§ 205. “[Baka Brahmā:] ‘Well, monk, how do you discern my sphere, how do you discern my splendor: “Baka Brahmā has this much great power. Baka Brahmā has this much great might. Baka Brahmā has this much great influence”?’

“[The Buddha:] ‘As far as suns & moons revolve,
shining, illuminating the directions,
over a thousand-fold world
your control holds sway.

There you know those above & below,
 those with lust & those without,
 the state of what is as it is,
 the state of what becomes otherwise,
 the coming & going of beings.

“That, brahmā, is how I discern your sphere, that is how I discern your splendor: “Baka Brahmā has this much great power. Baka Brahmā has this much great might. Baka Brahmā has this much great influence.” There are, brahmā, groups other than yours that you don’t know, don’t see, but that I know, I see. There is, brahmā, the group named Ābhassara [Radiant/Luminous] from which you fell away & reappeared here. From your having lived here so long, your memory of that has become muddled. That is why you don’t know it, don’t see it, but I know it, I see it. Thus I am not your mere equal in terms of direct knowing, so how could I be inferior? I am actually superior to you.

“There is, brahmā, the group named Subhakiṇha [Beautiful Black/Refulgent Glory]... the group named Vehapphala [Sky-fruit/Great Fruit], {...the group named Abhibhū [Conqueror]}¹ which you don’t know, don’t see, but that I know, I see. Thus I am not your mere equal in terms of direct knowing, so how could I be your inferior? I am actually superior to you.

“Having directly known earth as earth, and having directly known the extent of what has not been experienced through the earthness of earth,² I wasn’t earth, I wasn’t in earth, I wasn’t coming from earth, I wasn’t “Earth is mine.” I didn’t affirm earth.³ Thus I am not your mere equal in terms of direct knowing, so how could I be inferior? I am actually superior to you.

“Having directly known liquid as liquid... fire as fire... wind as wind... beings as beings... devas as devas... Pajāpati as Pajāpati... brahmā as brahmā... the radiant as radiant... the beautiful black as the beautiful black... the sky-fruit as the sky-fruit... the conqueror as the conqueror...

“Having directly known the all as the all, and having directly known the extent of what has not been experienced through the allness of the all, I wasn’t the all, I wasn’t in the all, I wasn’t coming forth from the all, I wasn’t “The all is mine.” I didn’t affirm the all. Thus I am not your mere equal in terms of direct knowing, so how could I be inferior? I am actually superior to you.’

“If, good sir, you have directly known the extent of what has not been experienced through the allness of the all, may it not turn out to be actually vain and void for you.’

“Consciousness without surface,
 without end, luminous all around,

has not been experienced through the earthness of earth... the liquidity of liquid... the fieriness of fire... the windiness of wind... the allness of the all.⁴

“Well then, good sir, I will disappear from you.’

“Well then, brahmā, disappear from me if you can.’

“Then Baka Brahmā, (thinking,) ‘I will disappear from Gotama the contemplative. I will disappear from Gotama the contemplative,’ was not able to disappear from me. When this was said, I said to Baka Brahmā, ‘Well then, brahmā, I will disappear from you.’

“Well then, good sir, disappear from me if you can.’

“So then, monks, I fabricated a fabrication of psychic power to the extent that Brahmā, the Brahma-assembly, and the attendants of the Brahma-assembly heard my voice but did not see me. Having disappeared, I recited this verse:

‘Having seen
 danger

right in becoming,
and becoming
searching for non-becoming,
I didn't affirm
any kind of becoming,
or cling to any delight.'

"Then in Brahmā, the Brahma-assembly, and the attendants of the Brahma-assembly there arose a sense of amazement & astonishment: 'How amazing! How astounding!—the great power, the great might of Gotama the contemplative! Never before have we seen or heard of any other contemplative or brahman of such great power, such great might as that of this Gotama the contemplative, who went forth from a Sakyan clan! Living in a generation that so delights in becoming, so rejoices in becoming, is so fond of becoming, he has pulled out becoming by the root!'" — MN 49

NOTES

1. The phrase in braces is from the Burmese edition of the Canon.
2. What is not experienced through the earthness of earth (and so on through the list of categories up through the allness of the all) is nibbāna, or unbinding. It is described in these terms because it is directly known, without intermediary of any sort.
3. These statements can be read in two ways. The first way is to regard them in light of the standard definition of self-identity view [S179] in which one defines self either as identical with an aggregate, as possessing an aggregate, as being contained in an aggregate, or as containing an aggregate within it. The second way is to regard the statements in light of the parallel passage from MN 1, in which one engages in metaphysical speculation as to whether one's being is identical with something, lies within something, or comes from something. For more on this topic, see the introduction to the Mūlapariyāya Sutta (MN 1) in *Handful of Leaves*, volume one.
4. Consciousness without surface (*viññānaṃ anidassanaṃ*): This term appears to be related to the following image from SN 12:64:

"Just as if there were a roofed house or a roofed hall having windows on the north, the south, or the east. When the sun rises, and a ray has entered by way of the window, where does it land?"

"On the western wall, lord."

"And if there is no western wall, where does it land?"

"On the ground, lord."

"And if there is no ground, where does it land?"

"On the water, lord."

"And if there is no water, where does it land?"

"It doesn't land, lord."

"In the same way, where there is no passion for the nutriment of physical food... contact... intellectual intention... consciousness, where there is no delight, no craving, then consciousness does not land there or grow. Where consciousness does not land or grow, name-&-form does not alight. Where name-&-form does not alight, there is no growth of fabrications. Where there is no growth of fabrications, there is no production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is no production of renewed becoming in the future, there is no future birth, aging, & death. That, I tell you, has no sorrow, affliction, or despair."

In other words, normal sensory consciousness is experienced because it has a "surface" against which it lands: the sense organs and their objects, which constitute the "all." For instance, one experiences visual consciousness because of the eye and forms of which one is conscious. Consciousness without surface, however, is directly known, without intermediary, free from any dependence on conditions at all. In terms of the above image, it is a paradoxical luminosity that does not reflect off of anything at all.

This consciousness thus differs from the consciousness factor in dependent co-arising, which is defined in terms of the six sense media. Lying outside of time and space, it would also not come under the consciousness-aggregate, which covers all consciousness near and far; past, present, and future. And, as SN 35:23 [S197] notes, the word "all" in the Buddha's teaching covers only the six sense media, which is another reason for not including this

consciousness under the aggregates. However, the fact that it is outside of time and space—in a dimension where there is no here, there, or in between [§173], no coming, no going, or staying [§206]—means that it cannot be described as permanent or omnipresent, terms that have meaning only within space and time.

Some have objected to the equation of this consciousness with *nibbāna*, on the grounds that *nibbāna* is nowhere else in the Canon described as a form of consciousness. Thus they have proposed that consciousness without surface be regarded as an arahant's consciousness of *nibbāna* in meditative experience, and not *nibbāna* itself. This argument, however, contains two flaws: (1) The term *viññāṇam anidassanam* also occurs in DN 11 [§161], where it is described as "where name & form are brought to an end": surely a synonym for *nibbāna*. (2) If *nibbāna* is an object of mental consciousness (as a *dhamma*), it would come under the all, as an object of the intellect. There are passages in the Canon [§139] that describe meditators experiencing *nibbāna* as a *dhamma*, but these passages seem to indicate that this description applies up through the level of non-returning. Other passages, however, describe *nibbāna* as the ending of all *dhammas*. For instance, Sn 5:6 [§202] quotes the Buddha as calling the attainment of the goal the transcending of all *dhammas*. Sn 4:6 and Sn 4:10 state that the arahant has transcended dispassion, said to be the highest *dhamma*. Thus, for the arahant, *nibbāna* is not an object of consciousness. Instead it is directly known without mediation. Because consciousness without surface is directly known without mediation, there seems good reason to equate the two.

§ 206. Now at that time the Blessed One was instructing, urging, rousing, & encouraging the monks with Dhamma-talk concerned with unbinding. The monks—receptive, attentive, focusing their entire awareness, lending ear—listened to the Dhamma.

Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion exclaimed:

"There is that dimension where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; neither dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor staying; neither passing away nor arising; unestablished, unevolving, without support [mental object]. This, just this, is the end of stress." — *Ud 8:1*

§ 207. It's hard to see the unaffected,
for the truth is not easily seen.
Craving is pierced
 in one who knows;
 for one who sees,
there is nothing. — *Ud 8:2*

§ 208. Then Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita went to Ven. Sāriputta 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 Ven. Sāriputta, "With the remainderless cessation & fading of the six contact-media [vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, & intellection], is it the case that there is anything else?"

[Ven. Sāriputta:] "Don't say that, my friend."

[Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] "With the remainderless cessation & fading of the six contact-media, is it the case that there is not anything else?"

[Ven. Sāriputta:] "Don't say that, my friend."

[Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] "...is it the case that there both is & is not anything else?"

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “Don’t say that, my friend.”

[Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “...is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “Don’t say that, my friend.”

[Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “Being asked if, with the remainderless cessation & fading of the six contact-media, there is anything else, you say, ‘Don’t say that, my friend.’ Being asked if... there is not anything else... there both is & is not anything else... there neither is nor is not anything else, you say, ‘Don’t say that, my friend.’ Now, how is the meaning of your words to be understood?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “The statement, ‘With the remainderless cessation & fading of the six contact-media is it the case that there is anything else?’ objectifies the non-objectified. The statement, ‘... is it the case that there is not anything else... is it the case that there both is & is not anything else... is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?’ objectifies the non-objectified. However far the six contact-media go, that is how far objectification goes. However far objectification goes, that is how far the six contact media go. With the remainderless fading & cessation of the six contact-media, there comes to be the cessation, the allaying of objectification.” — *AN 4:173*

CHAPTER NINE

A Path of Questions

In the course of this book we have frequently noted the close connection between the *how* and the *what* in the Buddha's teaching. *How* he taught was shaped by *what* he taught, and what he taught was shaped by how. The reason this connection is so close is because what he taught *was* a how: a path of practice, a set of skills aimed at a very particular goal. Even the views that explain the path and form its first factor were chosen for their beneficial, pragmatic value in helping make progress on the path. These truths are thus instrumental and teleological—to be used as means to the goal of putting an end to suffering and stress.

The Buddha's conception of his act of teaching these truths was thus also teleological: His primary concern was with the effect that his words would have on his listeners. In this way, his approach was rhetorical rather than dialectical. Instead of seeing words as primarily descriptive—*talking about* things—he saw them as performative: *doing* things, having an effect on their listeners. And like any rhetorician, he found it most effective to teach not only by word but also by example. Thus he was careful to teach in a way that illustrated what he was trying to teach.

This was especially true in the way he handled questions. As we noted in the Introduction, a practical question expresses a desire for knowledge that fits a certain shape and function: the shape determined by what makes sense in terms of what we already know or control, the function by what we want the knowledge to do. The fact that questions provide a shape for the knowledge connects directly with the role of right view on the path, which is to act as a frame for experience—not only providing knowledge *about* the issues of skillful and unskillful action, together with the truths of stress, its origination, its cessation, and the path to cessation; but also showing how to view experience *in terms of* these categories. This means that the ability to frame questions in terms of right view is an essential part of the path. The fact that questions express desires connects both with the truth of the origination of stress—the three forms of craving that lead to further becoming—and with the factor of right effort in the truth of the path, which includes the act of generating desire to abandon unskillful qualities and to develop skillful ones in their place. This means that skill in questions has to be mastered in order to encourage appropriate forms of the desire for knowledge, leading to the end of suffering, and to avoid inappropriate forms that would lead in the other direction.

This is why the Buddha emphasized the ability to respond skillfully to questions as an important measure of wisdom and discernment. To illustrate this principle, he not only described four strategies for responding to questions but also employed all four in the course of his teaching career. These response-strategies play an important role in establishing and clarifying the frame of right view. Categorical responses show that the questions they address are already framed in appropriate terms; analytical responses show which factors have to be added to questions inadequately framed in order to bring them into line; cross-questioning responses show how unexpected subtleties in the frame of right view can be understood through comparison with skills and activities with which the listener is already familiar; and the response of putting a question aside shows that the question is so improperly framed that it needs to be totally abandoned before one can start over with the proper frame.

However, in addition to establishing the frame of right view, the Buddha's skill in questions also taught how to test that frame and its application through

the subset of cross-questioning that we have termed self cross-examination. This, in fact, is the approach that determines whether the answers provided by the frame of right view actually perform the desired function of putting an end to suffering and stress.

To understand the interaction among these various response-strategies, it's useful to look at them in the larger context of the Buddha's approach to questions, taken as a whole, in the various forms we have encountered in this book. This enables us to see the broader outlines of his rhetorical strategy in demonstrating not only the discernment needed skillfully to employ the categories of right view and skillful questioning, but also the qualities of heart and mind needed to respond wisely to those questions and thus bring the entire path to fruition.

Taking this perspective, we can see that there were at least seven types of questions that played a role in the Buddha's discovery and teaching of the path.

- 1) The primary question to which the path is a response.
- 2) The bodhisatta's own questions in which he asked himself why he was acting in a particular way.
- 3) The questions with which he proposed another course of action.
- 4) The questions that established the frame of right view and appropriate attention.
- 5) The questions that refined that frame.
- 6) The questions that tested that frame by applying it to specific actions, and tested specific actions against the frame.
- 7) The questions that induced the right attitudes and mental qualities needed to keep one on the path.

Many lessons about the path can be learned—and many mistaken notions corrected—by looking in more detail at these seven types of questions. These lessons cover not only the content of the right views the Buddha was trying to communicate, but also the qualities of the heart that need to be developed as an essential part of the practice.

1) As AN 6:63 (Chapter One) notes, one of the primary responses to stress is a question that expresses a search: "Who knows a way or two to stop this stress?" Although this question doesn't necessarily call for a path to practice—it may simply indicate a desire for someone or something else to solve the problem of stress from outside—the fact that the Buddha's teaching is a response to this question establishes several important facts about the path he taught.

To begin with, it establishes the path's obvious focus on putting an end to stress. This in turn establishes the teleological nature of the path: Its every aspect is aimed at a particular goal. In the simple fact of responding to this question, the Buddha indicated that the desire to know a way out of stress is something to be encouraged. He didn't want people simply to accept things as they are, or to resign themselves to the thought, "That's just the way it is." He wanted them to recognize that something is wrong and to develop the conviction that it can be corrected—thus the role played by conviction not only as the first of the five faculties (SN 48:10), but also as the important turning point in the extended formula of dependent co-arising (SN 12:23) that treats the experience of stress as a motivating factor for developing the path to release.

The searching question cited in AN 6:63 also suggests that it's possible to look to others for advice on what to do to put an end to stress. In fact, that is what the bodhisatta did at the beginning of his quest for awakening. Only when he came to the conclusion that no one at the time had the knowledge he was seeking did he try to find the path on his own. But even though he ultimately gained the

knowledge he was seeking through his own efforts, he did not conclude that the search for someone who knows is totally misguided. Having gained the knowledge of how to go beyond stress, he was in a position to share it with others, at least to the extent of telling them what they needed to do to gain release from stress through their own efforts. In fact, as he later told Ven. Ānanda (SN 45:2), if it weren't for him as an admirable friend, the beings of the world wouldn't even know the path, much less be able to follow it. Thus the ability to judge who is and isn't an admirable friend is an essential skill in pursuing the path.

2) When the Buddha described his quest for awakening as a series of responses to questions of the form, "Why am I doing this?" he was indicating the point at which the search for a way out of stress turns inward: the realization that stress may be caused by one's own actions. He was also indicating that an important part of the path consists of the realization that one's habits—and in particular, one's intentions—are not to be blindly accepted or taken for granted. They should be called into question and subjected to honest scrutiny. However, he also was indicating that not everything is to be questioned—in particular, conviction in the efficacy of action should be maintained as a working hypothesis all the way to release.

3) When the Buddha told how he followed the question, "Why am I doing this?" with the question, "What if I were to do something else?" he was indicating the point where the notion of a path of practice actually begins to take shape: the realization that one can act in different ways and that, perhaps by changing one's ways of acting, one can put an end to suffering and stress. This question also emphasizes the mind's freedom to think of alternatives, to use imagination in proposing new ways of acting. The assumption of freedom of choice is what makes a holy life dedicated to the end of stress a genuine possibility.

4) The questions that establish the frame of right view are the ones with which we move from the story of the bodhisatta's quest to the example set by the Buddha as a teacher. Establishing this frame is a primary function of three of the Buddha's four response-strategies. Categorical answers do so simply by answering questions that are already properly framed; analytical answers, by adding whatever variables are necessary to approach the issue at hand from the proper frame; questions put aside (followed by different questions to establish the frame), by drawing a clear line between what does and what doesn't correspond to the frame. In particular, in the course of employing this last strategy, the Buddha focuses on how the mental processes of objectification (*papañca*) encourage the terms of becoming—selves operating in worlds—and how questions derived from these terms get in the way of the path.

In contrast, the actual frame of right view and appropriate attention builds on the assumptions underlying the questions in categories (2) and (3) by looking at experience, not in terms of things, but in terms of actions and results. We noted above that the Buddha's words are not simply descriptive, *talking about* things; it's also true that teachings based on the frame of right view and appropriate attention are not talking about *things*. They talk about action and result, focusing attention on identifying which ways of acting are unskillful—leading to suffering and stress—and which are skillful, leading to the end of suffering and stress. When the Buddha's responses to questions establish this frame, they also establish right view as an important element in the path—as a type of action needed for other skillful actions. They also establish the role of that frame as a set of instrumental truths used to analyze experience so as to determine the skillful

response.

The fact that action—kamma—plays the primary role in establishing the frame of right view shows how important this teaching is in providing the context for understanding all aspects of what the Buddha taught. This is especially crucial in understanding the teaching on not-self, for often the connection between not-self and kamma is approached by taking not-self as the frame, and kamma as a teaching that doesn't fit into the frame: If all things are not-self, who performs an action and who will receive the results of the action? Actually, the relationship between these two teachings goes the other way. *Kamma is the frame, and not-self the teaching that fits into the frame*: When is it a skillful action to employ the perception of self? When is it a skillful action to employ the perception of not-self?

To view the teaching on not-self within the framework of kamma helps to clear up many of the issues that have developed around this teaching over the centuries. Buddhist philosophers, ignoring the message of SN 44:10 [§162] and MN 2 [§25] that questions about the existence and non-existence of the self should be put aside, have often tried to provide analytical answers to these questions—stating, for instance, that Yes, the self has conventional existence but No, not ultimate existence; that Yes, the self defined as impersonal phenomena, i.e., the five aggregates, does exist, but No, the self defined as a person doesn't; or that No, there is no self, but Yes, there is an empirical personality and personal continuity after death. More modern philosophers have offered analytical answers of their own, introducing the variables of individual self *vs.* cosmic self, stating either that individual self does exist, whereas the cosmic self doesn't; or—the exact opposite—that the individual self doesn't exist whereas the cosmic self does.

All of these analytical answers, however, ignore the fact that the Buddha could have given an analytical answer to these questions had he wanted to—but he didn't. They also all deal in terms of inappropriate attention and blatant objectification: categories of existence and non-existence, questions of how to define the “I” in “I am the thinker” over the course of the past, present, and future. As the discussions in Chapters Three and Eight have shown, the act of blatant objectification is a form of unskillful kamma that moves in the opposite direction from the duties of the four noble truths. Thus a more useful approach is to view the perceptions of self and not-self as actions in the context of dependent co-arising, to see how they *do* promote the duties of the four noble truths, and to put the analytical answers of the philosophers aside. In fact, this principle applies to all the perceptions and categories of blatant objectification: self/not-self; existence/non-existence. When questions of skillful kamma are framed on their most subtle level, in terms of dependent co-arising, they provide the framework by which these categories can be comprehended both as instances of stress and as causes of stress. This allows for their abandoning. Then the terms of dependent co-arising, having performed their function, can be abandoned as well.

Thus, by using the teaching of kamma as the primary frame of understanding, it's possible to gain important insights into the Buddha's teachings on not-self and into other topics as well. For instance, on the issue of judging people: Given that the primal question in category (1) focuses on looking to others for help in the end of suffering, the Buddha regarded as an essential duty the ability to judge who might be a reliable guide on the path. Instead of viewing the act of judging others as inappropriate and inhumane, he saw it as absolutely central to the path. But because people tend to use inappropriate categories in judging others, he used analytical answers to show that other people are to be judged primarily, not as to their ultimate worth, but simply as

to their helpfulness in one's own search for skillfulness. At the same time, they are to be judged not by their status, race, or occupation, but by the skillfulness of their actions. And to be able accurately to judge the integrity of others, one has to develop one's own integrity as well.

The Buddha's lessons on kamma appear not only in the content of his responses to questions, but also in the values he taught by the way he responded. The simple fact that he answered questions indicates that the principle of action is such that the act of asking others for advice can be a helpful part of the path. He expanded on this point in the several discourses where he suggested going to experienced people to gain advice on how to act [§§43-44, §131]. However, the nature of the advice he gave—and that he said should be expected from others—shows that a teacher cannot get rid of stress and suffering for another person, that each person also has to cooperate by acting on that advice. This utilizes one of the windows of opportunity provided by the Buddha's teaching on kamma: Even though one's experience is shaped primarily by one's own actions, this does not preclude one's benefiting from the help of others. The proper use of this opportunity lies in approaching the act of teaching and learning the path to the end of stress as a cooperative effort.

The Buddha's care in responding to questions in these ways shows some of the qualities needed in this cooperative effort. By teaching only truths that are beneficial, and by taking care to ensure that his responses were appropriate to his listeners, he showed that compassion is needed for teaching and learning to succeed. He also showed compassion in observing the etiquette of not harming himself or others—not exalting himself or disparaging others by name—in the course of his teaching. By giving displeasing answers when they were timely, he showed that compassion has to be responsible: It's not a matter of giving the listeners what they want or making them feel good. Instead, it requires keeping their long-term benefit foremost in mind.

The Buddha's general openness to being cross-questioned on his teachings was also an object lesson in the compassionate sense of responsibility he brought to the act of teaching. As we have noted, a teacher not open to cross-questioning is guilty of objectifying himself and his audience. A teacher who welcomes cross-questioning is concerned less with his status as a teacher—and his teaching as a finished product—and more with the communication of something useful and clear. Thus the act of teaching is part of a process leading to a goal, rather than an exposition of the goal itself. In honoring his listeners' freedom to question in the course of this process, the Buddha opened the discussion to their subjective experience of doubt. He also honored their desire to know about the skills needed to end that doubt and to attain release from their subjective experience of suffering and stress. At the same time, he avoided many of the conflicts implicit in blatant objectification by offering his teachings less as a set body of knowledge about people and the world to be imposed on those people and their worlds, than as an array of tools that his listeners were free to take or leave as they pleased.

5) The questions that refine the frame of right view include those that, asking for details about the terms of right view and appropriate attention, deserve categorical responses; those that deserve analytical responses showing how even categorical teachings have to be applied differently to listeners with different levels of skill; and those that deserve to be cross-questioned with reference to hypothetical analogies and examples to show how the frame of skillful and unskillful action should be called to mind and applied to areas where the listeners don't understand how to do so on their own. The frame of right view is also refined by the questions of self cross-examination that the Buddha

recommended be applied to one's specific actions, all the way to the action of assuming a sense of self and other subtle forms of clinging.

The extent to which the Buddha had to explain and refine the frame of skillful and unskillful kamma—especially through analytical responses and cross-questioning about hypotheticals dealing with actions and skills—shows that his listeners had trouble understanding the implications of his concept of kamma. This in turn suggests that it was new to them. In other words, even though the word *kamma* was something the Buddha picked up from his environment, his understanding of kamma was not. This point is underlined by the fact that he went out of his way to refute the teachings of those who taught a deterministic version of the doctrine of kamma. In doing so, he revealed a second window of opportunity in the principle of kamma: that even though actions have consequences, sometimes imposing severe limitations on the choices available at any given moment, one is always free within those limitations to follow the skillful path toward the end of stress and suffering through one's choice of what to do in the present.

The Buddha's responses to these questions also demonstrated in action the extra levels of refinement in the compassion and sense of responsibility that he brought to the act of teaching—and that he expected his listeners to bring to the act of learning. In particular, the way he used hypotheticals in cross-questioning his listeners was an object lesson in the need for truthfulness and mutual respect. By recognizing the special skills and knowledge his listeners brought with them, he induced an attitude of respect in return.

The way he engaged in arguments also taught many lessons in respect. To begin with, he was willing to enter into discussion only with people whom he trusted and respected to have a sincere desire for the truth. His purpose in engaging in debates was not to score points but to clear up his opponent's misunderstandings. In fact, the way he used hypotheticals in cross-questioning his opponents—a strategy he used elsewhere to clarify difficult points of doctrine—showed that debate, for him, was principally a matter of clarification.

The aggressiveness with which he pursued his points, however, showed that respect was not necessarily a matter of honoring other people's points of view. Instead, when combined with compassion and a sense of responsibility, true respect means the desire not to leave one's opponent mired in wrong views, for views of that sort can have dire consequences. In the same way that he saw strict enforcement of the rules of the Vinaya as an expression of compassion, he saw the rigorous uprooting of wrong view in his opponents as an act both of kindness and respect.

6) The questions of self cross-examination test the frame of right view in action—to see if it really does aid in eliminating stress—at the same time testing actions against the frame of right view, to see if they actually follow the path. In this process one cross-questions oneself about one's actions to see how they fit against the frame, from the common level of words and deeds to the subtlest levels within the mind: testing acts of perception, such as perceptions of self and cosmos. Self cross-examination also checks one's progress on the path, both as a means of testing the path and as a means of gauging one's skill in following it.

This process helps to develop the analysis of qualities as a factor of awakening (*dhamma-vicaya-sambojjhaṅga*). At the same time, it starves the hindrance of uncertainty, and in doing so responds to the bewilderment that is often the result of suffering and stress. The fact that doubt is overcome and conviction established by exploring and testing—and not by simply denying doubt or waiting for it to go away on its own—shows the confidence the Buddha had in his teachings: that they would withstand any sincere test. It also shows the

active role of discernment, not as a set of propositions to be simply accepted or cloned, but as an active faculty to be developed through skillful inquiry.

Self cross-examination succeeds in producing insights—and, in some cases, precipitating total release—by helping one to look at familiar events in a new frame. The fact that one is able to choose one's frame of understanding, and not simply take it for granted, is another expression of freedom. And the fact that total freedom comes from applying appropriate attention to one's actions makes an important point about the focus of the practice: that the freedom of total release is to be found by exploring—through exercising—one's moment-to-moment freedom to choose to act skillfully.

In testing one's actions, the questions of self cross-examination set the bar for gauging one's skillfulness progressively higher and higher. They start with the simple aim of not harming oneself and others, progress through the aim of bringing the mind to a point where it is ready to face death at any moment, and finally aim at erasing craving and clinging of every sort. The more basic levels of these questions deal in terms of "I" and "mine," while the more advanced are aimed at dismantling any need for those perceptions. These questions thus establish the fact that the path goes through many stages, and that concepts and perceptions useful at one stage of the path may need to be abandoned later. Thus the consistency of the path lies, not in an adherence to a consistent vocabulary or set of first principles, but in the common goal to which all of its stages are aimed.

7) The questions that induce the right attitudes and mental qualities needed to keep one on the path are another subset of the questions of self cross-examination. On a preliminary level, these questions encourage a healthy type of conceit and craving needed to get one started on the path to mastery. When that mastery has reached the point where conceit and craving are no longer needed to stay on the path, a more advanced level of cross-questioning focuses on uprooting any remaining conceit and craving that would block further progress.

The most basic attitudes encouraged by this type of cross-questioning are compassion, integrity, and truthfulness. Compassion is needed in that the goal of putting an end to stress and suffering, and to find a happiness without blame, is essentially a compassionate quest aimed at one's own well-being and that of all others. Integrity and truthfulness are needed to stick with the skillful path because defilements can easily disguise themselves under the cloak of delusion and denial, and the habit of denying any unskillful elements in one's actions and intentions is delusion in its most pernicious and tenacious form. There are times when the frames of objectification aid in this denial and become a form of avoidance, acting as a cover for attachment. Thus truthfulness is needed to dig out and expose that attachment for what it is.

Self cross-examination also works together with the cross-questioning of hypotheticals to encourage mindfulness and alertness: mindfulness in calling to mind useful frameworks of thinking and understanding; alertness in applying these standards to examining one's actions—physical, verbal, and mental—in the present moment.

Finally, the most crucial attitude fostered by the questions of self cross-examination is that of heedfulness. As the Buddha pointed out, all skillfulness—including the skill of questions—is rooted in heedfulness. People become skillful not through any innate goodness of the mind, but by clearly realizing—and taking to heart—the danger of unskillful action and the benefits of skillful action. The questions of self cross-examination are meant to keep this realization firmly in mind and to bring it to bear in all one's activities. When heedfulness is combined with the understanding of right view, as encouraged by the

framework of skillful questioning, it gives rise to right effort. When combined with the mindfulness and alertness encouraged by skillful cross-questioning, right effort—in the form of ardency—completes the set of qualities needed to bring right mindfulness and right concentration to the culmination of their development.

Right mindfulness and right concentration, in turn, allow the mind to become more sensitive to even its subtlest actions. As the principle of heedfulness continues to inform the process of self cross-examination into these actions, it first strips away any attachment to activities that lie outside of the path. Then it helps to root out any traces of unskillfulness, any remnants of I-making or my-making, that may still hover around the mastery of the path factors themselves. This is what ultimately frees the mind from all the activities of objectification and attachment, even in their subtlest forms.

In these ways, skill in questions helps to foster a cluster of skillful mental qualities that, acting in concert, form a path leading to the primary aim of the Buddha's act of teaching: a dimension beyond action, total release.

Buddhaghosa on the four categories of questions

Writing in the fifth century C.E., Buddhaghosa—the primary commentator of the Theravada tradition—explained the Buddha’s four categories of questions in terms of the formal or logical structure of the question.

“If asked, ‘Is the eye inconstant?’ one should answer categorically, ‘Yes, it’s inconstant.’ This pattern [holds] with regard to the ear, etc. This is the categorical question. If asked, ‘Does inconstant mean eye?’ one should answer analyzing, ‘Not just the eye; the ear is also inconstant, the nose is also inconstant.’ This is an analytical question. If asked, for example, ‘Is the eye like the ear? Is the ear like the eye?’ and one cross-questions, ‘In what sense are you asking?’ then if told, ‘I am asking in the sense of seeing,’ one should answer, ‘No.’ If told, ‘I am asking in the sense of inconstancy,’ one should answer, ‘Yes.’ This is a cross-questioning question. When asked, for example, ‘Is the soul the same thing as the body?’ one should put it aside, (saying,) ‘This is unanswered by the Blessed One.’ This question is not to be answered. This is a question to be put aside. *Thus the form in which the question is presented is the measure of the four ways of answering questions.* It is under the guidance of these [categories] that a question should be answered.” — *Commentary to DN 33* [emphasis added]

From this perspective, a question deserving a categorical answer is one that, in formal terms, reads, “*Is all A, B?*” (“Are all tigers striped animals?”) This type of question can be clearly answered Yes or No.

The next two categories of questions are those that could lead the answerer to being trapped in a logical fallacy, and so must be treated analytically or with a cross-question to avoid the trap. The question deserving an analytical answer is one that—after establishing that all A is B—asks, “*Is all B, A?*” (“Are all striped animals tigers?”) The trap here would be, “*If all A is B, then all B is A*” (e.g., “If all tigers are striped animals, then all striped animals are tigers;” “If the eye is inconstant, then all inconstant things are the eye”). Thus an analytical answer would show that inconstancy covers other things beside the eye as well: “*All A is B, but not all B is A.*”

The question deserving cross-questioning is one that has to be clarified before it can be answered. Thus the cross-question is simply, “What do you mean?” Buddhaghosa’s example is of a question that could lead to the trap, “*If all A is B, and all C is B, then if all A is also D, all C is also D*” (e.g., “If all tigers are striped animals and all zebras are striped animals, then if all tigers are cats, all zebras are cats;” “If the eye is inconstant and the ear is inconstant, then if the eye sees, the ear sees”). The cross-question is necessary to clarify the sense of the question and to make the point that even though the eye and ear are similar in some ways, that does not mean that they are similar in all ways: “*All A is B and all C is B; all A is also D, but it is not the case that all C is also D.*”

Unlike his handling of the second and third categories, Buddhaghosa illustrates the fourth category with an example from the Canon—one of the ten “undeclared issues” (*avyākata-dhamma*)—but this leads him to an inconsistency. Although he says that the form of the question is what determines the response-strategy it deserves, there is nothing about the formal structure of this question to indicate why it falls into a separate category. He simply notes that because the Buddha put it aside it should stay there.

However, in terms of the first three categories, it is obvious that Buddhaghosa—and the tradition he draws from—is thinking in terms of the questions and logical traps encountered in formal debate, especially of the sort that shaped the way the commentarial tradition evolved. Thus these categories are determined strictly by their logical form. The difficulty in accepting Buddhaghosa's interpretation here is that the Buddha never engaged in formal debates of this sort, and there is no record in the Pali Canon of his ever encountering the types of question that Buddhaghosa uses to explain the second and third categories. Also, Buddhaghosa's example of a cross-questioning question comes nowhere near to doing full justice to the many ways in which the Buddha used and encouraged cross-questioning in the discourses. Thus it is unlikely that Buddhaghosa's examples—and the definitions determining their classification—correspond to what the Buddha had in mind when formulating his four response-strategies, and they certainly don't reflect the use of these strategies in the Buddha's hands.

APPENDIX TWO

Mnemonic Questions

In the culture of the Buddha's time, writing was used for calculating, accounting, and other business and government transactions, but not for recording spiritual teachings. Perhaps it was considered too lowly for this purpose or too unreliable: Scribal errors could easily creep into a teaching and not be recognized as such. A great deal of effort was thus put into finding mnemonic devices to help students memorize large bodies of spiritual teachings—in particular, the traditions of the Vedas. At the same time, groups of students were taught to memorize together as a way of compensating for the vagaries of each individual memory. Thus by the Buddha's time, Indian culture had developed a sophisticated tradition for training people to develop the mental skills needed to maintain spiritual teachings accurately from one generation to the next.

Working within this culture, the Buddha presented his teachings so that they would be easy both to memorize and to understand. His use of questions was geared to help accomplish both of these aims. In this book, we have focused on questions framed primarily for the sake of understanding, and secondarily for memorization, but the Buddha also employed questions in which these priorities were reversed: either as a way of introducing basic topics for new students to memorize, or as a mnemonic aid for those who had already come to understand the teachings but needed help in trying to remember them. Strictly speaking, these questions all fall under the category of categorical questions, but because of their special purpose and the special issues surrounding them, I am treating them separately in this appendix.

The primary mnemonic device in these questions is the use of numbers. In this, these questions are obviously connected to a common opening question-format in the Buddha's discourses: "Nandaka, a disciple of the noble ones endowed with four qualities is a stream-winner... Which four?" "Monks, there are these five faculties. Which five?" These numerical introductions clearly serve a mnemonic function, but the discourses they introduce differ from purely mnemonic ones in that the factors in their lists of four, five, etc., are organically related.

In the mnemonic discourses, however, the relationship among the factors is purely numerical, with one factor bearing little if any relationship to its neighbors aside from the fact that they share the same number of sub-factors or fall into a numerical sequence. For this reason, these discourses do not follow the Buddha's instructions in §8, that a Dhamma teacher should speak explaining the sequence, but perhaps these discourses were not considered Dhamma talks. As DN 33 suggests, they may have been designed for the monks to chant together, as a way of providing successive generations with short compendia of the major teachings.

On the shorter end of the spectrum, these mnemonic discourses consist of brief riddles—or riddles implicit in cryptic statements:

Having killed mother & father,
two learned kings,
& fifth, a tiger—
the brahman, untroubled, travels on. — *Dhp* 295
Cut through five,

let go of five,
 & develop five above all.
 A monk gone past five attachments
 is said to have crossed the flood. — *Dhp* 370

On the longer end of the spectrum, mnemonic discourses are arranged around architectonic questionnaires that organize large bodies of disparate materials in a numerical way. The prime examples here are DN 33 & 34, both of which are attributed to Ven. Sāriputta.

The questions framing mnemonic discourses fall into two broad categories: those that do not provide a framework for understanding the answer, and those that do. DN 33, for example, falls into the first category, in that the basic framework of its organizing questions is purely numerical.

“There are [set(s) of] x thing(s) rightly proclaimed by the Blessed One—who knows, who sees, worthy, & rightly self-awakened—that we should all recite together, without quarreling, so that this holy life might endure and last for a long time, for the welfare of the many, the happiness of the many, out of sympathy for the world, for the welfare & happiness of human & divine beings. Which [set(s) of] x thing(s)?”

Each of these questions—in which x ranges from one to ten—is then followed by a list of lists, with little if anything in the framework of the discourse to indicate how the individual lists are to be used in the practice.

However, in DN 34 the framework questions call for a rudimentary understanding of the lists given in response, in that they are organized not only by number but also by function.

“Which x thing(s) is/are very helpful? ... Which x thing(s) should be developed? ... Which x thing(s) should be comprehended? ... Which x thing(s) should be abandoned? ... Which x thing(s) is/are on the side of decline? ... Which x thing(s) is/are on the side of distinction? ... Which x thing(s) is/are hard to penetrate? ... Which x thing(s) should be made to arise? ... Which x thing(s) should be directly known? ... Which x thing(s) should be realized?”

Here again, in each set of questions, x ranges from one through ten. And even though the answers in each set of x are related only by number, the fact that the lists are sorted by function gives more coherence to the discourse and makes it more useful in practice.

This distinction between mnemonic questions that are purely numerical and those that provide a context in addition to number occurs in other discourses as well. Perhaps the most interesting examples of this distinction occur in the three discourses that discuss in detail a set of ten questions that apparently served as a sort of catechism in the early Buddhist Saṅgha.

The simplest statement of this catechism is *Khp* 4, The Novice’s Questions:

What is one? All animals subsist on nutriment.
 What is two? Name & form.
 What is three? Three types of feeling.
 What is four? Four noble truths.
 What is five? Five clinging-aggregates.
 What is six? Six internal sense media.
 What is seven? Seven factors for awakening.
 What is eight? The noble eightfold path.
 What is nine? The nine abodes for beings.

What is ten? Endowed with ten qualities, one is called an arahant.

In this version of the catechism, the questions are purely numerical, functioning simply to test one's memory of basic Buddhist terms, without providing a framework for understanding what those terms mean and how to use them in practice. Apparently this version of the catechism would be employed in a situation where the teacher could then provide this understanding, drawing on other discourses to explain the answers. For example, to explain the nine abodes of beings, the teacher could quote from DN 15:

"There are beings with diversity of body and diversity of perception, such as human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms. This is the first station of consciousness.

"There are beings with diversity of body and singularity of perception, such as the devas of the Brahmā hosts generated by the first [jhāna]. This is the second station of consciousness.

"There are beings with singularity of body and diversity of perception, such as the Radiant Devas. This is the third station of consciousness.

"There are beings with singularity of body and singularity of perception, such as the Beautiful Black Devas. This is the fourth station of consciousness.

"There are beings who, with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, (perceiving,) 'Infinite space,' arrive at the dimension of the infinitude of space. This is the fifth station of consciousness.

"There are beings who, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) 'Infinite consciousness,' arrive at the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. This is the sixth station of consciousness.

"There are beings who, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) 'There is nothing,' arrive at the dimension of nothingness. This is the seventh station of consciousness.

"The dimension of non-percipient beings and, second, the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. These are the two dimensions."

To explain the ten qualities of the arahant, the teacher could quote from AN 10:112:

"Monks, there are these ten qualities of one beyond training. Which ten? the right view of one beyond training, the right resolve of one beyond training, the right speech of one beyond training, the right action of one beyond training, the right livelihood of one beyond training, the right effort of one beyond training, the right mindfulness of one beyond training, the right concentration of one beyond training, the right knowledge of one beyond training, the right release of one beyond training."

Thus the questions of the Novice's Questions require a teaching context before they can provide understanding. On their own, they simply provide aids in memorizing basic Buddhist vocabulary.

SN 41:8 contains what is apparently a reference to the ten Novice's Questions. In that discourse, Citta the householder—after a brief but fruitless conversation with Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta—states that Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta and his following

would be fit to engage with him in discussion only when they learn the meaning of these ten questions. However, Citta's reference to the questions provides no context for understanding their answers. In fact, he doesn't even state what the questions or answers are.

[Citta:] "These ten righteous questions have come up, venerable sir. When you learn their meaning, then you—together with your Nigaṇṭha company—can argue with me.

"One question, one synopsis, one answer. Two questions, two synopses, two answers. Three questions... Four questions... Five... Six... Seven... Eight... Nine... Ten questions, ten synopses, ten answers."

Then having entrusted [*āpucchitvā*] these ten questions to Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, Citta the householder got up from his seat and left.

Citta's reference to the questions is not only cryptic, but—if he really is referring to the Novice's Questions—a little misleading. He seems to indicate that each set contains an ever-increasing number of questions, synopses, and answers, whereas in fact each set contains only a single question, etc., about topics that have increasing numbers in their answers.

The fact that he is referring to these questions is supported by AN 10:27 and AN 10:28, which provide two alternative ways of explaining Citta's reference by following a form similar to that of the Novice's Questions. Their major difference from the Novice's Questions is that their framing questions actually provide a context for understanding the meaning and purpose of the answers. Scholars have noted that the answers to the questions in these two discourses are the same in some cases and not in others; and that the answers in both contain similarities and differences with those in the Novice's Questions. What they have failed to note is that, in the cases where the answers differ, it's because the questions do.

Neither discourse explicitly explains Citta's threefold analysis—question, synopsis, and answer—but they both show it in the way they organize each set. This organization can be illustrated by one of the sets they have in common, the first:

"'One question, one synopsis, one answer.' Thus was it said. With reference to what was it said? Rightly being disenchanted, rightly being dispassioned, rightly released, rightly seeing the total end, rightly breaking through with regard to one thing, a monk is one who puts an end to stress. With regard to which one thing?"

That much is the question.

"All animals subsist on nutriment."

That is the synopsis.

"Rightly disenchanted, rightly dispassioned, rightly released, rightly seeing the total end, rightly breaking through with regard to this one thing, a monk is one who puts an end to stress."

That is the answer—although it might be better to say that the synopsis is part of the answer as well.

In AN 10:27, the Buddha is the speaker giving the explanation, and in every case the question takes the same form:

"Rightly disenchanted, rightly dispassioned, rightly released, rightly seeing the total end, rightly breaking through with regard to x thing(s), a monk is one who puts an end to stress. With regard to which x thing(s)?"

The synopses in the answers are these:

- One: All animals subsist on nutriment.
- Two: Name and form.
- Three: Three feelings.
- Four: Four nutriments.
- Five: Five clinging-aggregates.
- Six: Six internal sense media.
- Seven: Seven stations of consciousness.
- Eight: Eight worldly conditions.
- Nine: Nine abodes of beings.
- Ten: Ten unskillful action-paths.

Of these sets, only the fourth and the eighth are not explained in this book. The fourth set is explained in SN 12:64:

“There are these four nutriments for the establishing of beings who have taken birth or for the support of those in search of a place to be born. Which four? Physical nutriment, gross or refined; contact as the second, intellectual intention the third, and consciousness the fourth.”

The eighth set is explained in AN 8:6:

“Monks, these eight worldly conditions spin after the world, and the world spins after these eight worldly conditions. Which eight? Gain, loss, status, disgrace, censure, praise, pleasure, & pain.” [See §55.]

The ten unskillful action-paths are the same as the ten unskillful types of action listed in §28.

From the perspective of the discussion in Chapter Three, what’s noteworthy about the questions in this version of the catechism is that their framework calls for answers that fall under the duties to be followed with regard to the first and second noble truths. In other words, these are all things to be comprehended to the point of dispassion, after which they can be abandoned. As for the answers, they are all expressed in terms of different levels of appropriate attention. One, four, and seven through ten are expressed in terms of mundane right view, dealing with beings, skillful and unskillful actions, the factors that can motivate unskillful action (eight), and the results—in this life and the next—to which the various levels of skill can lead (seven through ten). Two, three, five, and six are expressed in terms of the factors of dependent co-arising.

In AN 10:28, a group of householders in Kajaṅgalā ask a bhikkhuni identified only as “the Kajaṅgalā bhikkhuni” about the catechism, and she—stating that she has never had the chance to hear this teaching directly from the Buddha—gives an explanation of her own. She frames the questions for the numbers one, two, three, and nine in exactly the same way as the Buddha does in AN 10:27:

“Rightly disenchanted, rightly dispassioned, rightly released, rightly seeing the total end, rightly breaking through with regard to x thing(s), a monk is one who puts an end to stress. With regard to which x thing(s)?”

Her answers to these questions are thus the same as his. However, for the numbers four, five, six, seven, eight, and ten, she frames the questions differently:

“With a mind rightly developed, rightly seeing the total end, rightly breaking through with regard to x thing(s), a monk is one who puts an end to stress. With regard to which x thing(s)?”

In terms of the four noble truths, this framework calls for answers that fit

under the truth of the path—as something to be developed—and these are the answers the Kajaṅgalā bhikkhukunī provides:

Four: the four establishings of mindfulness.

Five: the five faculties.

Six: the six properties leading to escape.

Seven: the seven factors for awakening.

Eight: the noble eightfold path.

Ten: the ten skillful action-paths.

Of these answers, only the sixth set is not explained in this book. DN 33 explains it as follows:

“This is the escape from ill will, i.e., the good-will awareness release... This is the escape from harmfulness, i.e., the compassion awareness release... This is the escape from resentment, i.e., the empathetic-joy awareness release... This is the escape from passion, i.e., the equanimity awareness release... This is the escape from themes [of concentration], i.e., the themeless awareness release... This is the escape from the arrow of uncertainty & perplexity, i.e., the destruction of the conceit ‘I am.’”

As for the five faculties, they are listed in the footnote to §112.

After learning the Kajaṅgalā bhikkhukunī’s explanation of the catechism, the householders of Kajaṅgalā go to the Buddha and report what she said. The Buddha praises her discernment, and states that he would have given the same explanation as she.

Thus in all three versions of the catechism, the answers are given in terms that derive from appropriate attention. And despite their differences, the answers are all “right.” Their differences can be attributed to the fact that some of the individual questions are framed in different ways, with the special difference being that in Khp 4, the questions are purely numerical, providing no framework for understanding, whereas in AN 10:27 and AN 10:28, the questions do provide such a framework, at least in rudimentary terms. And it can be argued that that element of understanding could also function as a memory aid, in that something you understand is easier to memorize than something you don’t.

All three versions of the catechism are obviously useful for passing information on to future generations, in that they present some of the Buddha’s most central teachings in a short, easy to memorize form. But that is not their only function. Given that mindfulness—the ability to keep something in mind—is a crucial factor of the path, these versions of the catechism are also useful as teachings to be kept in mind while practicing. This point is supported by the fact that many of the answers to the catechism, in its various versions, are included as topics of contemplation in The Greater Establishing of Mindfulness Discourse (DN 22—§33): the three types of feeling, the four noble truths, the four establishings of mindfulness, the five clinging-aggregates, the six internal sense media, the seven factors for awakening, and the noble eightfold path.

APPENDIX THREE

Eternalism & Annihilationism

There are two passages in the discourses where the Buddha puts aside a question because answering it would involve “circling around” or “being in company with” proponents of either eternalism or annihilationism [§162, §166]. Although he obviously regards these two viewpoints as extreme forms of wrong view, nowhere does he give a formal definition of what they are. Instead, he cites various examples of these views at scattered places in the discourses. Thus the best way to get a sense of what these viewpoints entail is to start by gathering the examples that the Canon explicitly identifies as eternalism and annihilationism into one place.

Examples of eternalism:

“The self & the cosmos are barren, stable as a mountain-peak, standing firm like a pillar. And even though beings roam, wander, fall [die], & reappear, there is just that which will be like that as long as eternity.” — DN 1

“This self is the same as the cosmos. This I will be after death, constant, lasting, eternal, not subject to change.” — SN 22:81

Examples of partial eternalism:

“We were created by Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, All-Powerful, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. He is constant, permanent, eternal, not subject to change, and will stay just like that as long as eternity. But we who have been created by him—inconstant, impermanent, short-lived, subject to falling—have come to this world.” — DN 1

“Those honorable devas who are not corrupted by play don’t spend an excessive amount of time indulging in the delights of laughter & play. Because they don’t spend an excessive amount of time indulging in the delights of laughter & play, their mindfulness doesn’t become muddled. Because of unmuddled mindfulness, they don’t fall from that company. They are constant, permanent, eternal, not subject to change, and will stay just like that as long as eternity. But those of us who were corrupted by play spent an excessive amount of time indulging in the delights of laughter & play. Because we spent an excessive amount of time indulging in the delights of laughter & play, our mindfulness became muddled. Because of muddled mindfulness, we fell from that company and—inconstant, impermanent, short-lived, subject to falling—have come to this world.” — DN 1

“Those honorable devas who are not corrupted in mind don’t spend an excessive amount of time staring at one another with lust. Because they don’t spend an excessive amount of time staring at one another with lust, their minds don’t become corrupted toward one another. Because they are uncorrupted in mind toward one another, they don’t grow exhausted in body or exhausted in mind. They don’t fall from that company. They are constant, permanent, eternal, not subject to change, and will stay just like that as long as eternity. But those of us who were corrupted in mind

spent an excessive amount of time staring at one another with lust. Because we spent an excessive amount of time staring at one another with lust, our minds became corrupted toward one another. Because we were corrupted in mind toward one another, we grew exhausted in body & exhausted in mind. We fell from that company and—inconstant, impermanent, short-lived, subject to falling—have come to this world.”
— DN 1

“That which is called “eye” & “ear” & “nose” & “tongue” & “body”: That self is inconstant, impermanent, non-eternal, subject to change. But that which is called “mind” or “intellect” or “consciousness”: That self is constant, permanent, eternal, not subject to change, and will stay just like that as long as eternity.” — DN 1

Examples of annihilationism:

“There are, monks, some contemplatives & brahmans who are annihilationists, and who on [one of] seven grounds declare the annihilation, destruction, & non-becoming of an existing being [*sant satta*: see Appendix Four]....

“When the self that is possessed of form, made of the four great elements, engendered by mother & father, is—with the breakup of the body—annihilated, destroyed, & does not exist after death, it’s to this extent that the self is completely exterminated.’ ...

“There is another self—divine, possessed of form, on the sensual level, feeding on material food.... When this self—with the breakup of the body—is annihilated, destroyed, & does not exist after death, it’s to this extent that the self is completely exterminated.’ ...

“There is another self—divine, possessed of form, mind-made, complete in all its limbs, not destitute of any faculties.... When this self—with the breakup of the body—is annihilated, destroyed, & does not exist after death, it’s to this extent that the self is completely exterminated.’ ...

“There is another self where—with the complete transcending of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space’—one enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space.... When this self—with the breakup of the body—is annihilated, destroyed, & does not exist after death, it’s to this extent that the self is completely exterminated.’ ...

“There is another self where—with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite consciousness’—one enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness.... When this self—with the breakup of the body—is annihilated, destroyed, & does not exist after death, it’s to this extent that the self is completely exterminated.’ ...

“There is another self where—with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) ‘There is nothing’—one enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness.... When this self—with the breakup of the body—is annihilated, destroyed, & does not exist after death, it’s to this extent that the self is completely exterminated.’ ...

“There is another self where—with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness—one enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.... When this self—with the breakup of the body—is annihilated, destroyed, & does not exist after death, it’s to this extent that the self is completely exterminated.’ — *DN 1*

[King Ajātasattu:] “Ajita Kesakambalin said to me, ‘Great king, there is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no contemplatives or brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known and realized it for themselves. A person is a composite of four primary elements. At death, the earth [in the body] returns to and merges with the [external] earth-substance. The fire returns to and merges with the fire-substance. The liquid returns to and merges with the liquid-substance. The wind returns to and merges with the wind-substance. The sense-faculties scatter into space. Four men, with the bier as the fifth, carry the corpse. Its eulogies are sounded only as far as the charnel ground. The bones turn pigeon-colored. The offerings end in ashes. Generosity is taught by idiots. The words of those who speak of existence [after death] are false, vain, empty chatter. With the breakup of the body, the wise & the foolish alike are annihilated, destroyed, & do not exist after death.’” — *DN 2*

“I would not be, neither would there be what is mine. I will not be, neither will there be what is mine.” — *SN 22:81*

To generalize from these examples, eternalism is a view that both the self and the cosmos are eternal and unchanging, existing throughout time. Partial eternalism is a view that some beings are eternal and unchanging whereas others are not, or that some parts of the self are eternal and unchanging whereas others are not. Annihilationism is a view that a person—regardless of whether it is defined as a “self”—will be annihilated at death.

However, the views that the Buddha rejects because they encircle either eternalism or annihilationism do not constitute the full-blown forms of these views. Instead, they are forms of objectification that simply tend in their direction.

“Kassapa, the statement, ‘With the one who acts being the same as the one who experiences, existing from the beginning, pleasure & pain are self-made’: This circles around eternalism. And the statement, ‘With the one who acts being one thing, and the one who experiences being another, existing as the one struck by the feeling’: This circles around annihilationism.” — *SN 12:17*

“Ānanda, if I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self—were to answer that there is a self, that would be in company with those contemplatives & brahmans who are exponents of eternalism. If I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self—were to answer that there is no self, that would be in company with those contemplatives & brahmans who are exponents of annihilationism.” — *SN 44:10*

In the first case, the assumption that the self exists long enough to experience the results of the acts of which it is the agent is enough to circle around eternalism. The assumption that the agent doesn’t exist long enough to experience the results of its actions is enough to circle around annihilationism.

In the second case, the assumption that there is any kind of self at all is enough to put oneself in the same company as eternalists. The assumption that there is no self—this would come close to the annihilationist view given in DN 2—is enough to put oneself in the same company as annihilationists.

Even though these assumptions do not constitute full-blown eternalism or annihilationism, they are similar to eternalism and annihilationism in that they place importance on questions of what does or does not underlie the phenomena of experience, lasting from one moment to the next. Thus they encourage the perceptions of objectification that get in the way of seeing the phenomena of experience directly as they occur in terms of dependent co-arising. At the same time—as *Iti 49* shows—the ways of thinking exemplified by assumptions tending either toward eternalism or annihilationism provide food for craving for becoming and craving for non-becoming, both of which are causes for continued becoming and its inherent suffering and stress.

“Overcome by two viewpoints, some human & divine beings adhere, other human & divine beings slip right past, while those with vision see.

“And how do some adhere? Human & divine beings delight in becoming, enjoy becoming, are satisfied with becoming. When the Dhamma is being taught for the sake of the cessation of becoming, their minds do not take to it, are not calmed by it, do not settle on it, or become resolved on it. This is how some adhere.

“And how do some slip right past? Some, feeling horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with that very becoming, delight in non-becoming: ‘When this self, at the breakup of the body, after death, is annihilated, destroyed, and does not exist after death, that is peaceful, that is exquisite, that is sufficiency!’ This is how some slip right past.

“And how do those with vision see? There is the case where a monk sees what’s come to be as what’s come to be. Seeing this, he practices for disenchantment with what’s come to be, dispassion for what’s come to be, and the cessation of what’s come to be. This is how those with vision see.

— *Iti 49*

As the Buddha states in the refrain to DN 1 [§184], he rejects eternalism and annihilationism because “he discerns that these standpoints, thus seized, thus grasped at, lead to such & such a destination, to such & such a state in the world beyond. And he discerns what is higher than this. And yet discerning that, he does not grasp at that act of discerning. And as he is not grasping at it, unbinding (*nibbuti*) is experienced right within.” A similar statement could be made about assumptions that circle around these two extreme forms of wrong view: When they are abandoned, when the mind no longer thinks in terms of the questions on which they are based—Am I? Am I not? What am I?—one is in a better position to develop the vision that allows one to see simply in terms of what has come to be, as dependently co-arisen events, and to practice in a way that leads through dispassion and cessation to release.

APPENDIX FOUR

On the meaning of tathāgata in the tetralemma

The primary use of the word *tathāgata* in the discourses is as an epithet of the Buddha. Iti 112 gives an extended discussion of why this epithet is appropriate to him:

This was said by the Blessed One, said by the Arahant, so I have heard: “The cosmos [§159] has been fully awakened to by the Tathāgata. From the cosmos, the Tathāgata is disjoined. The origination of the cosmos has been fully awakened to by the Tathāgata. The origination of the cosmos has, by the Tathāgata, been abandoned. The cessation of the cosmos has been fully awakened to by the Tathāgata. The cessation of the cosmos has, by the Tathāgata, been realized. The path leading to the cessation of the cosmos has been fully awakened to by the Tathāgata. The path leading to the cessation of the cosmos has, by the Tathāgata, been developed.

“Whatever in this cosmos—with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, its generations with their contemplatives & brahmans, their royalty & common people—is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect, that has been fully awakened to by the Tathāgata [§46]. Thus he is called the Tathāgata.

*“From the night the Tathāgata fully awakens to the unsurpassed Right Self-awakening until the night he is totally unbound in the unbinding property with no fuel remaining, whatever the Tathāgata has said, spoken, explained is just so (*tatha*) and not otherwise. Thus he is called the Tathāgata.*

*“The Tathāgata is one who does in line with (*tathā*) what he teaches, one who teaches in line with what he does. Thus he is called the Tathāgata.*

*“In this cosmos with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, its generations with their contemplatives & brahmans, their royalty & common people, the Tathāgata is the unconquered conqueror, all-seeing, the wielder of power [these are epithets usually associated with the Great Brahmā]. Thus he is called the Tathāgata.” *This is the meaning of what the Blessed One said. — Iti 112**

Many of the attributes listed in this discourse apply solely to the Buddha, but a few passages in the discourses—at MN 22 (see below), MN 72 [§190], and SN 22:85 [§183]—use the term *tathāgata* to denote any person fully released, whether a Buddha or an arahant disciple. In either case, the word, as used in the discourses, has a high and exalted meaning.

In general, the Commentary follows this understanding of the term *tathāgata* in its explanations of the discourses. In fact, whenever the term first appears in each of the major nikāyas, the Commentary to that nikāya expands on the list given in Iti 112 to provide even more reasons for why the Buddha is termed the Tathāgata, and why this is a term of exalted status. However, when treating the tetralemma—the four unacceptable ways of describing the Tathāgata after death—the Commentary gives two different definitions for the term *tathāgata*. When discussing the tetralemma in SN 44:1 [§191], it defines *tathāgata* in the standard way, as meaning the Buddha (“the all-knowing Tathāgata”); but in five places—when discussing the tetralemma as it appears in DN 29 [§185], MN 63 [§176], SN 16:12, SN 22:85 [§193], and AN 7:51 [§178]—it defines *tathāgata* as *satta*, or being. According to this latter explanation, the question of the existence, non-existence, etc., of *any* being after death is one that the Buddha would put aside.

The Commentary does not define the term *tathāgata* in this way in any other

context, provides no reason for why it does so in these locations, and makes no note of the fact that it defines the term differently even though the context—the tetralemma—is the same. And as the Commentary to SN 44:1 points out, it is precisely because the Tathāgata cannot be classified as a being that the four alternatives in the tetralemma do not apply to him:

“Deep”: Deep through the depth of his disposition & through the depth of his qualities. Given that the all-knowing Tathāgata is so deep in his qualities, and through the non-existence of that in dependence on which there is the description, “The Tathāgata is classed as a being,” for one who sees the non-existence of that description, the statement, “The Tathāgata, classed as a being, exists after death,” isn’t fitting, doesn’t apply. The statement, “The Tathāgata doesn’t exist after death,” etc., isn’t fitting, doesn’t apply. — *Commentary to SN 44:1*

For these reasons, many scholars have called into question the Commentary’s definition of *tathāgata* as *satta* in its other explanations of the tetralemma. Recently, however, a justification for the Commentary’s usage has been proposed: The tetralemma actually functions in two contexts, with the term *tathāgata* carrying different meanings in each. When the tetralemma appears as part of the ten undeclared questions, it concerns the post-mortem fate of any being; when it appears on its own, it concerns the post-mortem fate of a fully awakened person.

To evaluate this proposal, we have to address three questions:

- 1) Does the Commentary itself observe this distinction between the two contexts?
- 2) Is there any evidence that the Canon recognizes a distinction between the meaning of the tetralemmas in the two contexts?
- 3) Is there any reason to accept the Commentary’s proposal that the Buddha would have put aside the question of whether an ordinary being exists, doesn’t exist, both, or neither after death?

1) The answer to the first question is a simple No. The Commentary to DN 29 [§185] and to SN 16:12 both equate *tathāgata* with *satta*, and yet the tetralemma discussed in those discourses appears on its own, and not in the context of the ten undeclared questions.

2) As for whether the Canon itself recognizes a distinction between the meaning of the tetralemmas in the two contexts, the major arguments for saying Yes are these:

a) In MN 72 [§183], Vacchagotta the wanderer asks why the Buddha doesn’t take a stand on any of the ten undeclared questions, and the Buddha responds by saying that each of these ten positions is “a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. It is accompanied by suffering, distress, despair, & fever, and it does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation; to calm, direct knowledge, self-awakening, unbinding.” In other words, he gives the basic list of pragmatic reasons for not taking a stand on these views. This answer apparently satisfies Vacchagotta. Later in the same discourse [§190], however, Vacchagotta questions the Buddha about the post-mortem fate of a monk whose mind is released. This, according to the argument, shows that when Vacchagotta had asked the Buddha about the tetralemma earlier in the discourse, he intended the term *tathāgata* to mean any being in general, for if he had intended it to mean an awakened being in that context, he wouldn’t have repeated his question about the fate of the monk whose mind was released.

b) The Canon, when explaining the reasons for rejecting the tetralemma in

the context of the ten undeclared questions, uses what we have identified as the basic list of pragmatic reasons, but when explaining the reasons for rejecting the tetralemma on its own, it never uses this list, but instead uses other sets of reasons: that the questions derive from unskillful mind states (what we have identified as part of the strong list pragmatic reasons), or that the terms of the questions simply do not apply (the argument based on the meaninglessness of the questions). At the same time, the fact that the questions of the tetralemma derive from unskillful mind states shows that, from the Buddhist point of view, they are meaningless. Thus the reasons for putting aside the questions of the tetralemma on their own are of a different order: The argument from meaninglessness is always used, and the argument from pragmatic reasons, never.

c) The tetralemma in the context of the ten undeclared questions is part of a general questionnaire of issues discussed among the many competing philosophical groups of the time. Because some of those groups denied the existence of awakened beings, this would not have been a topic they would have addressed. Also, there is no evidence that any other schools used the term *tathāgata* to mean an awakened being in their teachings, and so that meaning would not have been part of the general questionnaire.

When the tetralemma is addressed on its own, however, it is always in the context where a person has just heard the Buddha's teachings, and so it deals with the post-mortem fate of the *tathāgata* as understood in those teachings: i.e., as a fully awakened being.

In response to these arguments, we can cite the following points:

a) As we noted in Chapter Eight, the pragmatic reasons for rejecting the ten undeclared questions leave open the issue of whether or not they could be answered. Thus, in MN 72, when Vacchagotta hears these reasons, he could easily assume that the Buddha might have had private answers to these questions, but for pragmatic reasons refused to divulge them publicly. After the Buddha again brings up the topic of the released mind, Vacchagotta might have seen his chance to gain access to those private answers. What confuses him is the new set of reasons that the Buddha gives for not answering the tetralemma: that the various alternatives are meaningless and so do not apply. Thus the argument in point (a), above, is inconclusive.

b) Without going into the issue of whether the reasons in the strong list should be classed as pragmatic or dealing with meaninglessness, we can simply note that DN 29 [§185] and SN 16:12, when discussing the tetralemma on its own, *do* use the basic list of pragmatic reasons for explaining why the Buddha puts these questions aside. In fact, these are the only reasons these discourses list. This in itself is enough to disprove the argument in point (b), that the Canon never uses the basic list of pragmatic reasons when discussing the tetralemma on its own.

c) The lack of evidence for how other philosophical groups addressed the questionnaire of ten questions to one another, and the lack of evidence for how they used the word *tathāgata* among themselves, cuts both ways. When reading the discourses, we must remember that we are reading how other sectarians addressed the questionnaire to the Buddha or to his followers, and it might be that those sectarians phrased their questions in terms that the Buddhists would have found familiar. Either that, or the Buddhists—when recording their conversations with other sectarians—did so using their own Buddhist terms. Whichever is the case, SN 44:2 [§192] portrays other sectarians addressing a Buddhist monk and using the term *tathāgata* in the sense of a person who has reached the highest goal:

On that occasion, Ven. Anurādha was staying not far from the Blessed One in a wilderness hut. Then a large number of wandering sectarians went to him and... said, "Friend Anurādha, the Tathāgata—the supreme person, the superlative person, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described with [one of] these four positions: After death the Tathāgata exists; after death he does not exist; after death he both exists & does not exist; after death he neither exists nor does not exist."

Although it is true that we have no evidence that other philosophical schools used the word *tathāgata* to mean an awakened being when talking among themselves, we also have no evidence of their using it to mean *satta* when talking among themselves. In fact, there is good reason to think that they would *not* have used it to mean *satta*, for if it had such an ordinary meaning among the sects of the time, why would the Buddha have adopted it as his primary epithet to express his exalted status and that of his fully awakened students?

And as for groups that did not believe in awakening—and these tended to believe that death was annihilation—they could have easily answered the questionnaire sarcastically by saying that regardless of how "awakened" you were, you were no different from anyone else: Death would be the end of you.

Thus there is no conclusive evidence that the Canon recognized a distinction between the meaning of the tetralemma in the context of the ten undeclared issues and that of the tetralemma when discussed on its own. In fact, the evidence strongly suggests that this was not the case.

3) As for the question of whether there is any basis in the Canon for assuming that the Buddha would have put aside the question of the existence, non-existence, etc., of an ordinary being after death: The evidence clearly indicates that the Buddha would have treated this question as one deserving an analytical response. In other words, he would have given an answer after introducing an extra variable or two.

The variable he would have introduced here would have been his definition of "being" (*satta*) as passion, delight, obsession, or craving for any of the aggregates [§§199-200]. In this sense, a "being" in the Buddha's terms is defined—measured—as an ongoing psychological process of attachment and obsession. Having given a definition in this way, he can then talk of the object of the definition as existing, not existing, both, or neither.

But before addressing the issue of that being's existence after death, we have to add an important variable, noting that the Buddha's definition of a being as a *process* differs from that of a being as a *discrete metaphysical entity*. This latter sort of definition is apparently what the Buddha meant by the phrase "existing being (*sant satta*)" in the following passage.

"And when the devas, together with their Indras, Brahmās, & Pajāpatīs, search for the monk whose mind is thus released, they cannot find that 'The consciousness of the Tathāgata is dependent on this.' Why is that? The Tathāgata is untraceable even in the here & now. [§§192-193]

"Speaking in this way, teaching in this way, I have been erroneously, vainly, falsely, unfactually misrepresented by some contemplatives & brahmans (who say,) 'Gotama the contemplative is one who misleads. He declares the annihilation, destruction, extermination of the existing being [*sant satta*].' But as I am not that, as I do not say that, so I have been erroneously, vainly, falsely, unfactually misrepresented by those venerable contemplatives & brahmans (who say,) 'Gotama the contemplative is one who misleads. He declares the annihilation,

destruction, extermination of the existing being.” — MN 22

Having introduced these two ways of talking about a being—as a metaphysical entity, which he does not adopt; and as a psychological process of self-definition through attachment and obsession, which he does—the Buddha would then be able to give an analytical answer to the question of whether such a being exists after death. From the perspective of mundane right view, the being as psychological process does exist after death as long as the process is supported by craving. And this, in fact, is how the Buddha often describes what beings do after death, most notably in the standard description of the “divine eye” given repeatedly throughout the discourses:

“When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of the passing away & reappearance of beings. I saw—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with action: ‘These beings—who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, & mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the breakup of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the breakup of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.’” — MN 19

“But, Master Gotama, at the moment a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, what do you designate as its clinging/sustenance then?”

“Vaccha, when a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, I designate it as wind-sustained, for the wind is its clinging/sustenance at that time.”

“And at the moment when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, what do you designate as its clinging/sustenance then?”

“Vaccha, when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, I designate it as craving-sustained, for craving is its clinging/sustenance at that time.” — SN 44:9

However, when the mind has no more attachments and obsessions, then—as noted by the passage from MN 22—there is no longer any basis for locating or defining the person fully released.

“But if one doesn’t stay obsessed with form, monk, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.” — SN 22:36

“Having shed classifications,
gone beyond conceit,

he has here
 cut
 through craving
 for name
 & form:
 This one—
 his bonds cut through,
 free from trouble,
 from longing—
 though they search they can't find him,
 human & heavenly beings,
 here & beyond,
 in heaven
 or any abode. — *SN 1:20*

When one cannot be defined or located, one cannot be described either in this life or after death.

Just as the destination of a glowing fire
 struck with a [blacksmith's] iron hammer,
 gradually growing calm,
 isn't known:

Even so, there's no destination to describe
 for those who are rightly released
 —having crossed over the flood
 of sensuality's bond—
 for those who've attained
 unwavering ease. — *Ud 8:10*

"I designate the rebirth of one who has clinging/sustenance, Vaccha, and not of one without clinging/sustenance. Just as a fire burns with clinging/sustenance and not without clinging/sustenance, even so I designate the rebirth of one who has clinging/sustenance and not of one without clinging/sustenance." — *SN 44:9*

"And so, Anurādha—when you can't pin down the Tathāgata as a truth or reality even in the present life—is it proper for you to declare, 'Friends, the Tathāgata—the supreme person, the superlative person, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described otherwise than with these four positions: After death the Tathāgata exists; after death he does not exist; after death he both exists & does not exist; after death he neither exists nor does not exist?'"

"No, lord."

"Very good, Anurādha. Very good. Both formerly & now, it is only stress that I describe, and the cessation of stress." — *SN 44:2*

Thus the Buddha would discuss the post-mortem fate of the being-as-process, because such a being could be defined; but he would not discuss the post-mortem fate of the awakened person, because such a person cannot be defined. In other words, questions about the Tathāgata's post-mortem fate are in a category apart precisely because he/she *cannot* be defined as a *satta*. For these reasons, it appears that the word *tathāgata*—as used in the tetralemma wherever it is found in the discourses—has only one meaning: a person so fully released that he/she cannot be defined. And the Commentary's equation of *tathāgata* with

satta is clearly mistaken.

4) This, of course, leads to a further question: Why did the Commentary propose this equation to begin with? This is a matter of conjecture, but the following passage from the Commentary to SN 22:85 [§193] helps to throw some light on the matter. Here the Commentary is explaining what is wrong with Ven. Yamaka's original position that "A monk with no more fermentations, on the breakup of the body, is annihilated, destroyed, & does not exist after death."

If this thought had occurred to him, "Fabrications both arise & cease. There is the non-occurrence of the mere occurrence of fabrications," that would not be called a view-standpoint (*ditṭhigata*). It would be knowledge in accordance with the Teaching. But because the thought occurred to him, "A being is annihilated, is destroyed," what is called a view-standpoint was born....

The Commentary then goes on to explain Ven. Yamaka's answer after he has realized his mistake:

"That which is stressful has ceased": What is stressful, only that has ceased. There is no being aside from that to cease. — *Commentary to SN 22:85*

In making this explanation, the Commentary is calling on the tradition that developed after the Abhidhamma (and is discussed above in the Chapter Nine) that there is no self (*attā*) or being (*satta*) in the ultimate sense of the term, that the terms *self* and *being* are simply conventional designations for what, in ultimate terms, is simply an occurrence of fabrications in the form of the five aggregates.

However, in taking this stand the Commentary is unwittingly providing an analytical answer to the tetralemma by adding the variables of conventional *vs.* ultimate existence: Yes, a being with craving and clinging exists after death in the conventional sense, but No, it does not exist in the ultimate sense. In other words, the *tathāgata* (defined as *satta*) both exists and does not exist after death.

Thus, because both the Canon and the Commentary give (different) analytical answers to the question of an ordinary being's existence after death, we can safely stick with the conclusion given above, that *tathāgata* has only one meaning wherever it occurs in the tetralemma or in the Canon as a whole: a person so fully released that he/she cannot be defined either in this life or after death.

Glossary

Abhidhamma: The third division of the Pāli Canon, composed of texts that elaborate on lists of terms and categories drawn from the discourses.

Arahant: A “worthy one” or “pure one;” a person whose mind is free of defilement and thus not destined for further rebirth. A title for the Buddha and the highest level of his noble disciples.

Asura: A member of a race of heavenly beings that—much like the Titans in Greek mythology—fought with the devas for control of heaven and lost.

Āsava: Fermentation; effluent. Four qualities—sensuality, views, becoming, and ignorance—that “flow out” of the mind and create the flood (*ogha*) of the round of death & rebirth.

Bhava: Becoming. A sense of identity within a particular world of experience. The three levels of becoming are on the level of sensuality, form, and formlessness.

Bodhisatta: “A being (striving) for Awakening;” the term used to describe the Buddha before he actually became Buddha, from his first aspiration to Buddhahood until the time of his full Awakening. Sanskrit form: *Bodhisattva*.

Brahmā: An inhabitant of the higher heavenly realms of form or formlessness.

Brahman: A member of the priestly caste, which claimed to be the highest caste in India, based on birth. In a specifically Buddhist usage, “brahman” can also mean an arahant, conveying the point that excellence is based not on birth or race, but on the qualities attained in the mind.

Deva (devatā): Literally, “shining one.” A being on the subtle level of form, living either in terrestrial or heavenly realms.

Dhamma: (1) Event; action; (2) a phenomenon in and of itself; (3) mental quality; (4) doctrine, teaching; (5) nibbāna (although there are passages describing nibbāna as the abandoning of all dhammas). Sanskrit form: *Dharma*.

Gotama: The Buddha’s clan name.

Indra: King of a deva realm. Sakka is the indra of the heaven of the Thirty-three, one of the sensual heavenly realms.

Jhāna: Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focused on a single sensation or mental notion.

Kamma: (1) Intentional action; (2) the results of intentional actions. Sanskrit form: *Karma*.

Khandha: Aggregate; physical and mental phenomena as they are directly experienced; the raw material for a sense of self: *rūpa*—physical form; *vedanā*—feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain; *saññā*—perception, mental label; *saṅkhāra*—fabrication, thought construct; and *viññāna*—sensory consciousness, the act of taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur. Sanskrit form: *Skandha*.

Māra: The personification of temptation and all forces, within and without, that create obstacles to release from the round of death and rebirth.

Nāga: A term commonly used to refer to strong, stately, and heroic animals, such as elephants and magical serpents. In Buddhism, it is also used to refer to those who have attained the goal.

Nibbāna: Literally, the “unbinding” of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the entire round of death and rebirth. As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. Sanskrit form: *Nirvāṇa*.

Pajāpati: A high-ranking deva, second in command to the Indra of his particular deva realm.

Pāli: The language of the oldest extant Canon of the Buddha’s teachings.

Papañca: Objectification. Other possible translations for this term include complication, differentiation, elaboration, and proliferation.

Pāṭimokkha: The basic code of monastic discipline, composed of 227 rules for monks and 311 for nuns.

Sakyan: An inhabitant of the Sakyan republic, the Buddha’s home territory.

Saṃyojana: Fetter. The ten fetters that bind the mind to the round of death and rebirth are (1) identity views, (2) uncertainty, (3) grasping at habits and practices, (4) sensual passion, (5) irritation, (6) passion for form, (7) passion for formlessness, (8) conceit, (9) restlessness, and (10) ignorance.

Saṅgha: 1) On the conventional (*sammatti*) level, this term denotes the communities of Buddhist monks and nuns; 2) on the ideal (*ariya*) level, it denotes those followers of the Buddha, lay or ordained, who have attained at least stream-entry.

Tathāgata: Literally, one who has “become authentic (*tatha-āgata*)” or who is “truly gone (*tathā-gata*)”: an epithet used in ancient India for a person who has attained the highest religious goal. In Buddhism, it usually denotes the Buddha, although occasionally it also denotes any of his arahant disciples.

Uposatha: Observance day, coinciding with the full moon, new moon, and half moons. Lay Buddhists often observe the eight precepts on this day. Monks recite the Pāṭimokkha, the monastic code, on the full moon and new moon uposathas.

Vinaya: The monastic discipline, whose rules and traditions comprise six volumes in printed text. The Buddha’s own term for the religion he taught was, “This Dhamma-Vinaya.”

Yakkha: Spirit. A lower level of deva—sometimes friendly to human beings, sometimes not—often dwelling in trees or other wild places.