

(b) *Milindapañha*¹

Then drew near Milinda the king to where the venerable Nāgasena was; and having drawn near, he greeted the venerable Nāgasena; and having passed the compliments of friendship and civility, he sat down respectfully at one side. And the venerable Nāgasena returned the greeting; by which, verily, he won the heart of king Milinda.

And Milinda the king spoke to the venerable Nāgasena as follows:—

“How is your reverence called? *Bhante* [Lord], what is your name?”

“Your majesty, I am called Nāgasena; my fellow-priests, your majesty, address me as Nāgasena; but whether parents give one the name Nāgasena, or Sūrasena, or Virasena, or Sīhasena, it is, nevertheless, your majesty, but a way of counting, a term, an appellation, a convenient designation, a mere name, this Nāgasena; for there is no ego here to be found.”

And Milinda the king spoke to the venerable Nāgasena as follows:

“*Bhante* Nāgasena, if there is no ego to be found, who is it, then, furnishes you priests with the priestly requisites,—robes, food, bedding, and medicine, the reliance of the sick? Who is it makes use of the same? Who is it keeps the precepts? Who is it applies himself to meditation? Who is it realizes the Paths, the Fruits, and *nirvāṇa*? Who is it destroys life? Who is it takes what is not given him? Who is it commits immorality? Who is it tells lies? Who is it drinks

¹ 251 (or π.i.1), in H. C. Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, pp. 129–33.

intoxicating liquor? Who is it commits the five crimes that constitute "proximate *karma*"?¹ In that case, there is no merit; there is no demerit; there is no one who does or causes to be done meritorious or demeritorious deeds; neither good nor evil deeds can have any fruit or result. *Bhante* Nāgasena, neither is he a murderer who kills a priest, nor can you priests, *bhante* Nāgasena, have any teacher, preceptor, or ordination. When you say, 'My fellow-priests, your majesty, address me as Nāgasena,' what, then, is this Nāgasena? Pray, *bhante*, is the hair of the head Nāgasena"?

"Nay, verily, your majesty."

"Is the hair of the body Nāgasena"?

"Nay, verily, your majesty."

"Are nails . . . teeth . . . skin . . . flesh . . . sinews . . . bones . . . marrow of the bones . . . kidneys . . . heart . . . liver . . . pleura . . . spleen . . . lungs . . . intestines . . . mesentery . . . stomach . . . faeces . . . bile . . . phlegm . . . pus . . . blood . . . sweat . . . fat . . . tears . . . lymph . . . saliva . . . snot . . . synovial fluid . . . urine . . . brain of the head Nāgasena"?

"Nay, verily, your majesty."

"Is now, *bhante*, form Nāgasena"?

"Nay, verily, your majesty."

"Is sensation Nāgasena"?

"Nay, verily, your majesty."

"Is perception Nāgasena"?

"Nay, verily, your majesty."

"Are the predispositions Nāgasena"?

"Nay, verily, your majesty."

"Is consciousness Nāgasena?"

"Nay, verily, your majesty."

"Are, then, *bhante*, form, sensation, perception, the predispositions, and consciousness unitedly Nāgasena?"

"Nay, verily, your majesty."

"Is it, then, *bhante*, something besides form, sensation, perception, the predispositions, and consciousness which is Nāgasena?"

"Nay, verily, your majesty."

"*Bhante*, although I question you very closely, I fail to discover any Nāgasena. Verily, now, *bhante*, Nāgasena is a mere empty sound. What Nāgasena is there here? *Bhante*, you speak a falsehood, a lie: there is no Nāgasena."

¹ That is, *karma* that bears fruit in this life.

Then the venerable Nāgasena spoke to Milinda the king as follows:—

“Your majesty, you are a delicate prince, an exceedingly delicate prince; and if, your majesty, you walk in the middle of the day on hot sandy ground, and you tread on rough grit, gravel, and sand, your feet become sore, your body tired, the mind is oppressed, and the body-consciousness suffers. Pray, did you come afoot, or riding?”

“*Bhante*, I do not go afoot: I came in a chariot.”

“Your majesty, if you came in a chariot, declare to me the chariot. Pray, your majesty, is the pole the chariot?”

“Nay, verily, *bhante*.”

“Is the axle the chariot?”

“Nay, verily, *bhante*.”

“Are the wheels the chariot?”

“Nay, verily, *bhante*.”

“Is the chariot-body the chariot?”

“Nay, verily, *bhante*.”

“Is the banner-staff the chariot?”

“Nay, verily, *bhante*.”

“Is the yoke the chariot?”

“Nay, verily, *bhante*.”

“Are the reins the chariot?”

“Nay, verily, *bhante*.”

“Is the goading-stick the chariot?”

“Nay, verily, *bhante*.”

“Pray, your majesty, are pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body, banner-staff, yoke, reins, and goad unitedly the chariot?”

“Nay, verily, *bhante*.”

“Is it, then, your majesty, something else besides pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body, banner-staff, yoke, reins, and goad which is the chariot?”

“Nay, verily, *bhante*.”

“Your majesty, although I question you very closely, I fail to discover any chariot. Verily now, your majesty, the word chariot is a mere empty sound. What chariot is there here? Your majesty, you speak a falsehood, a lie: there is no chariot. Your majesty, you are the chief king in all the continent of India; of whom are you afraid that you speak a lie? Listen to me, my lords, ye five hundred Yonakas, and ye eighty thousand priests! Milinda the king here says thus: ‘I came in a chariot’; and being requested, ‘Your majesty,

if you came in a chariot, declare to me the chariot,' he fails to produce any chariot. Is it possible, pray, for me to assent to what he says?"

When he had thus spoken, the five hundred Yonakas applauded the venerable Nāgasena and spoke to Milinda the king as follows:—

“Now, your majesty, answer, if you can.”

Then Milinda the king spoke to the venerable Nāgasena as follows:—

“*Bhante* Nāgasena, I speak no lie: the word ‘chariot’ is but a way of counting, term, appellation, convenient designation, and name for pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body, and banner-staff.”

“Thoroughly well, your majesty, do you understand a chariot. In exactly the same way, your majesty, in respect of me, Nāgasena is but a way of counting, term, appellation, convenient designation, mere name for the hair of my head, hair of my body . . . brain of the head, form, sensation, perception, the predispositions, and consciousness. But in the absolute sense there is no ego here to be found. And the priestess Vajirā, your majesty, said as follows in the presence of the Blessed One:—

“‘Even as the word of “chariot” means
That members join to frame a whole;
So when the groups appear to view,
We use the phrase, “a living being.”’”

“It is wonderful, *bhante* Nāgasena! It is marvellous, *bhante* Nāgasena! Brilliant and prompt is the wit of your replies. If the Buddha were alive, he would applaud. Well done, well done, Nāgasena! Brilliant and prompt is the wit of your replies.”