



Questions That Do Not Tend to Edify

The Buddha

Thus have I heard.

On a certain occasion The Blessed One was dwelling at Sâvatthi in Jetavana monastery in Anâthapindika's Park. Now it happened to the venerable Mâlunkyâputta, being in seclusion and plunged in meditation, that a consideration presented itself to his mind, as follows:—

“These theories which The Blessed One has left unelucidated, has set aside and rejected,—that the world is eternal, that the world is not eternal, that the world is finite, that the world is infinite, that the soul and the body are identical, that the soul is one thing and the body another, that the saint exists after death, that the saint does not exist after death, that the saint both exists and does not exist after death, that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death,—these The Blessed One does not elucidate to me. And the fact that The Blessed One does not elucidate them to me does not please me nor suit me. Therefore I will draw near to The Blessed One and inquire of him concerning this matter. If The Blessed One will elucidate to me, either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, or that the world is finite, or that the world is infinite, or that the soul and the body are identical, or that the soul is one thing and the body another, or that the saint exists after death, or that the saint does not exist after death, or that the saint both exists and does not exist after death, or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death, in that case will I lead the religious life under The Blessed One. If The Blessed One will not elucidate to me, either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, . . . or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death, in that case will I abandon religious training and return to the lower life of a layman.”

Then the venerable Mâlunkyâputta arose at eventide from his seclusion, and drew near to where The Blessed One was; and having drawn near and greeted The Blessed One, he sat down respectfully at one side. And seated respectfully at one side, the venerable Mâlunkyâputta spoke to The Blessed One as follows:—

“Reverend Sir, it happened to me, as I was just now in seclusion and plunged in meditation, that a consideration presented itself to my mind, as follows: ‘These theories which The Blessed One has left unelucidated, has set aside and rejected,—that the world is eternal, that the world is not eternal, . . . that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death,—these The Blessed One does not elucidate to me. And the fact that The Blessed One does not elucidate them to me does not please me nor suit me. I will draw near to The Blessed One and inquire of him concerning this matter. If The Blessed One will elucidate to me, either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, . . . or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death, in that case will I lead the religious life under The Blessed One. If The Blessed One will not elucidate to me, either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, . . . or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death, in that case will I abandon religious training and return to the lower life of a layman.’

“If The Blessed One knows that the world is eternal, let The Blessed One elucidate to

me that the world is eternal; if The Blessed One knows that the world is not eternal, let The Blessed One elucidate to me that the world is not eternal. If The Blessed One does not know either that the world is eternal or that the world is not eternal, the only upright thing for one who does not know, or who has not that insight, is to say, 'I do not know; I have not that insight.'

"If The Blessed One knows that the world is finite, . . . ?"

"If The Blessed One knows that the soul and body are identical, . . . ?"

"If The Blessed One knows that the saint exists after death, . . . ?"

"If The Blessed One knows that the saint both exists and does not exist after death, let The Blessed One elucidate to me that the saint both exists and does not exist after death; if The Blessed One knows that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death, let The Blessed One elucidate to me that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death. If The Blessed One does not know either that the saint both exists and does not exist after death, or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death, the only upright thing for one who does not know, or who has not that insight, is to say, 'I do not know; I have not that insight.'"

"Pray, Mâlunkyâputta, did I ever say to you, 'Come, Mâlunkyâputta, lead the religious life under me, and I will elucidate to you either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, . . . or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death'?"

"No, truly, Reverend Sir."

"Or did you ever say to me, 'Reverend Sir, I will lead the religious life under The Blessed One, on condition that The Blessed One elucidate to me either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, . . . or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death'?"

"No, truly, Reverend Sir."

"So you acknowledge, Mâlunkyâputta, that I have not said to you, 'Come, Mâlunkyâputta, lead the religious life under me and I will elucidate to you either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, . . . or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death;' and again that you have not said to me, 'Reverend Sir, I will lead the religious life under The Blessed One, on condition that The Blessed One elucidate to me either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, . . . or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death.' That being the case, vain man, whom are you so angrily denouncing?"

"Mâlunkyâputta any one who should say, 'I will not lead a religious life under the Blessed One until The Blessed One shall elucidate to me either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, . . . or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death;'—that person would die, Mâlunkyâputta, before The Tathâgata had ever elucidated this to him."

"It is as if, Mâlunkyâputta, a man had been wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his relatives and kinsfolk, were to procure for him a physician or surgeon; and the sick man were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the man who wounded me belonged to the warrior caste, or to the Brahman caste, or to the agricultural caste, or to the menial caste.'

"Or again he were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt the name of the man who wounded me, and to what clan he belongs.'

"Or again he were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the man who wounded me was tall, or short, or of the middle height.'

"Or again he were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the man who wounded me was black, or dusky, or of a yellow skin.'

"Or again he were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the man who wounded me was from this or that village, or town, or city.'

"Or again he were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether

the bow which wounded me was a câpa, or a kodannda.’

“Or again he were to say, ‘I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the bow-string which wounded me was made from swallow-wort, or bamboo, or sinew, or maruva, or from milk-weed.’

“Or again he were to say, ‘I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the shaft which wounded me was a kaccha or a ropima.’

“Or again he were to say, ‘I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the shaft which wounded me was feathered from the wings of a vulture, or of a heron, or of a falcon, or of a peacock, or of a sithilahanu.’

“Or again he were to say, ‘I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the shaft which wounded me was wound round with the sinews of an ox, or of a buffalo, or of a ruru deer, or of a monkey.’

“Or again he were to say, ‘I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the arrow which wounded me was an ordinary arrow, or a claw-headed arrow, or a vekanda, or an iron arrow, or a calf-tooth arrow, or a karavîrapatta.’ That Mâlunkyâputta, without ever having learnt this.

“In exactly the same way, Mâlunkyâputta, any one who should say, ‘I will not lead the religious life under The Blessed One until The Blessed One shall elucidate to me either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, . . . or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death;’—that person would die, Mâlunkyâputta, before The Tathâgata had ever elucidated this to him.

“The religious life, Mâlunkyâputta, does not depend on the dogma that the world is eternal; nor does the religious life, Mâlunkyâputta, depend on the dogma that the world is not eternal. Whether the dogma obtain, Mâlunkyâputta, that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, there still remain birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair, for the extinction of which in the present life I am prescribing.

“The religious life, Mâlunkyâputta, does not depend on the dogma that the world is finite;

“The religious life, Mâlunkyâputta, does not depend on the dogma that the soul and the body are identical; . . .

“The religious life, Mâlunkyâputta, does not depend on the dogma that the saint exists after death; . . .

“The religious life, Mâlunkyâputta, does not depend on the dogma that the saint both exists and does not exist after death; nor does the religious life, Mâlunkyâputta, depend on the dogma that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death. Whether the dogma obtain, Mâlunkyâputta, that the saint both exists and does not exist after death, or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death, there still remain birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair, for the extinction of which in the present life I am prescribing.

“Accordingly, Mâlunkyâputta, bear always in mind what it is that I have not elucidated, and what it is that I have elucidated. And what, Mâlunkyâputta, have I not elucidated? I have not elucidated, Mâlunkyâputta, that the world is eternal; I have not elucidated that the world is not eternal; I have not elucidated that the world is finite; I have not elucidated that the world is infinite; I have not elucidated that the soul and the body are identical; I have not elucidated that the soul is one thing and the body another; I have not elucidated that the saint exists after death; I have not elucidated that the saint does not exist after death; I have not elucidated that the saint both exists and does not exist after death; I have not elucidated that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death. And why, Mâlunkyâputta, have I not elucidated this? Because, Mâlunkyâputta, this profits not, nor has to do with the fundamentals of religion, nor tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence,

the supernatural faculties, supreme wisdom, and Nirvana; therefore have I not elucidated it.

“And what, Mâlunkyâputta, have I elucidated? Misery, Mâlunkyâputta, have I elucidated; the origin of misery have I elucidated; the cessation of misery have I elucidated; and the path leading to the cessation of misery have I elucidated. And why, Mâlunkyâputta, have I elucidated this? Because, Mâlunkyâputta, this does profit, has to do with the fundamentals of religion, and tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom, and Nirvana; therefore have I elucidated it. Accordingly, Mâlunkyâputta, bear always in mind what it is that I have not elucidated, and what it is that I have elucidated.”

Thus spoke The Blessed One; and, delighted, the venerable Mâlunkyâputta applauded the speech of The Blessed One.

Henry Clarke Warren, trans. from “The Lesser Mâlunkyâputta Sutta.” *Buddhism in Translation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1896.

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