

THE QUESTIONS  
OF  
KING MILINDA

SACRED BOOKS OF THE EAST SERIES  
IN 50 VOLUMES

- Vols.
- 1, 15. THE UPANIŠADS : in 2 vols. : F. Max Müller.
  - 2, 14. THE SACRED LAWS OF THE ĀRYAS : in 2 vols. : Georg Bühler.
  - 3, 16, 27, 28, 39, 40. THE SACRED BOOKS OF CHINA : in 6 vols. : James Legge.
  - 4, 23, 31. THE ZEND-AVESTA : in 3 vols. : James Darmesteter & L. H. Mills.
  - 5-18, 24, 37, 47. PAHIAVI TEXTS : in 5 vols. : E. W. West.
  - 6, 9. THE QUR'ĀN : in 2 vols. : E. H. Palmer.
  7. THE INSTITUTES OF VIŠṆU : Julius Jolly.
  8. THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ with the Sanatsujātiya and the Anugītā : Kāshināth Trimbak Telang.
  10. THE DHAMMAPADA : F. Max Müller ; SUTTA-NIPĀTA : V. Fausböll.
  11. BUDDHIST SUTTAS : T. W. Rhys Davids.
  - 12, 26, 41, 43, 44. THE SATAPATHA-BRAHMAṆA : in 5 vols. : Julius Eggeling.
  - 13, 17, 20. VINAYA TEXTS : in 3 vols. : T. W. Rhys Davids & Hermann Oldenberg.
  19. THE FO-SHO-HING-TSAN-KING : Samuel Beal.
  21. THE SADDHARMA-PUNĀRIKA or The Lotus of the True Law : H. Kern.
  - 22, 45. JAINA SŪTRAS : in 2 vols. : Hermann Jacobi.
  25. MANU : Georg Bühler.
  - 29, 30. THE GRIHYA-SŪTRAS : in 2 vols. : Hermann Oldenberg & F. Max Müller.
  - 32, 46. VEDIC HYMNS : in 2 vols. : F. Max Müller & H. Oldenberg.
  33. THE MINOR LAW-BOOKS : Julius Jolly.
  - 34, 38. THE VEDĀNTA-SŪTRAS : in 2 vols. : with Śaṅkarācārya's Commentary : G. Thibaut.
  - 35, 36. THE QUESTIONS OF KING MILINDA : in 2 vols. : T. W. Rhys Davids.
  42. HYMNS OF THE ATHARVA-VEDA : M. Bloomfield.
  48. THE VEDĀNTA-SŪTRAS with Rāmānuja's Śrībhāṣya : G. Thibaut.
  49. BUDDHIST MAHĀYĀNA TEXTS : E. B. Cowell, F. Max Müller & J. Takakusu.
  50. INDEX : M. Winternitz.

TRANSLATED FROM PĀLI  
BY  
T. W. RHYS DAVIDS

MOTILAL BANARSIDASS  
Delhi :: Varanasi :: Patna

## BOOK II.

## LAKKHANA PAÑHA.

## THE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHICAL QUALITIES.

## CHAPTER I.

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> There is a free translation of the Sinhalese version of the following dialogues (down to the end of our § 4) in Spence Hardy's 'Manual of Buddhism', pp. 424-429. But it is very unreliable as a reproduction of either the Sinhalese or the Pāli, and slurs over the doubtful passages.

<sup>2</sup> Na puggalo upalabbhati. This thesis, that 'there is no individual', is discussed at the opening of the Kathā Vaithu (leaf ka of my MS.) Put into modern philosophical phraseology it amounts to saying that there is no permanent subject underlying the temporary phenomena visible in a man's individuality. But

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

I doubt whether, even in our author's time, the conception 'subject' was common ground, or that the word puggala had acquired that special connotation.

<sup>1</sup> Pañkânantariya-kammam karoti. See my note on *Kullavagga* VII, 3, 9 ('Vinaya Texts', vol. iii, p. 246, in the Sacred Books of the East).

<sup>2</sup> This is no doubt said in these words with allusion to the opinion ascribed in the *Sāmañña Phala* (D. II, 17) to Pūraṇa Kassapa.

<sup>3</sup> This is the opinion ascribed in identical words in the *Sāmañña Phala* (D. II, 23) to Agita of the garment of hair.

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

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

'Or the hairs on the body, perhaps?'

'Certainly not.'

'Or is it the nails, the teeth, the skin, the flesh, the nerves, the bones, the marrow, the kidneys, the heart, the liver, the abdomen, the spleen, the lungs, the larger intestines, the lower intestines, the stomach, the faeces, the bile, the phlegm, the pus, the blood, the sweat, the fat, the tears, the serum, the saliva, the mucus, the oil that lubricates the joints, the urine, or the brain, or any or all of these, that is Nāgasena<sup>2</sup>?'  
And to each of these he answered no.

'Is it the outward form then (Rūpa) that is Nāgasena, or the sensations (Vedanā), or the ideas (Saññā), or the confections (the constituent elements of character, Saṃkhārā), or the consciousness (Viññāna), that is Nāgasena<sup>3</sup>?'  
And to each of these also he answered no.

<sup>1</sup> This is practically the same opinion as is ascribed in the *Sāmañña Phala* (D. II, 26) to Pakudha Kakāyana.

<sup>2</sup> This list of the thirty-two forms (âkâras) of organic matter in the human body occurs already in the *Khuddaka Pâṭha*, § 3. It is the standard list always used in similar connections; and is, no doubt, supposed to be exhaustive. There are sixteen (half as many) âkâras of the mind according to *Dīpavamsa* I, 42.

<sup>3</sup> These are the five Skandhas, which include in them the whole bodily and mental constituents of any being. See p. 80.

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

'No! great king.'

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

And still he answered no.

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

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

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

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

'I did not say that.'

'Is it the axle that is the chariot?'

'Certainly not.'

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

And to all these he still answered no.

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

'No, Sir.'

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

And still he answered no.

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

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

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

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

For it was said, Sire, by our Sister Vagirá in the presence of the Blessed One:

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

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

## BOOK II. CHAPTER 2.

1. [40] The king said: 'He who is born, Nāgasena, does he remain the same or become another?'

'Neither the same nor another.'

'Give me an illustration.'

'Now what do you think, O king? You were once a baby, a tender thing, and small in size, lying flat on your back. Was that the same as you who are now grown up?'

'No. That child was one, I am another.'

'If you are not that child, it will follow that you have had neither mother nor father, no! nor teacher. You cannot have been taught either learning, or behaviour, or wisdom. What, great king! is the mother of the embryo in the first stage different from the mother of the embryo in the second stage, or the third, or the fourth<sup>1</sup>? Is the mother of the baby a different person from the mother of the grown-up man? Is the person who goes to school one, and the same when he has finished his schooling another? Is it one who commits a crime, another who is punished by having his hands or feet cut off<sup>2</sup>?'

'Certainly not. But what would you, Sir, say to that?'

The Elder replied: 'I should say that I am the same person, now I am grown up, as I was when I was a tender tiny baby, flat on my back. For all these states are included in one by means of this body.'

'Give me an illustration.'

<sup>1</sup> On these four stages see *Gātaka IV*, 496, and *Samyutta X*, 1, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Hardy makes sad nonsense of all this.

'Suppose a man, O king, were to light a lamp, would it burn the night through?'

'Yes, it might do so.'

'Now, is it the same flame that burns in the first watch of the night, Sir, and in the second?'

'No.'

'Or the same that burns in the second watch and in the third?'

'No.'

'Then is there one lamp in the first watch, and another in the second, and another in the third?'

'No. The light comes from the same lamp all the night through.'

'Just so, O king, is the continuity of a person or thing maintained. One comes into being, another passes away; and the rebirth is, as it were, simultaneous. Thus neither as the same nor as another does a man go on to the last phase of his self-consciousness<sup>1</sup>.

'Give me a further illustration.'

<sup>1</sup> Hardy (p. 429) renders this as follows: 'In the same way, great king, one being is conceived, another is born, another dies; when comprehended by the mind, it is like a thing that has no before, and no after; no preceding, no succeeding existence. Thus the being who is born does not continue the same, nor does he become another; the last *vināna*, or consciousness, is thus united with the rest.' (!) He confesses himself in doubt as to the last few words, but is quite unconscious of having completely misinterpreted the whole paragraph.

The meaning is really quite plain in both the Pāli and the Sinhalese. A man, at any one moment, is precisely all that he is then conscious of. The phase of his self-consciousness, the totality of that of which he is conscious, is always changing; and is so different at death from what it was at birth that, in a certain sense, he is not the same at the one time as he was at the other. But there is a continuity in the whole series;—a continuity dependent

'It is like milk, [41] which when once taken from the cow, turns, after a lapse of time, first to curds, and then from curds to butter, and then from butter to ghee. Now would it be right to say that the milk was the same thing as the curds, or the butter, or the ghee?'

'Certainly not; but they are produced out of it.'  
'Just so, O king, is the continuity of a person or thing maintained. One comes into being, another passes away; and the rebirth is, as it were, simultaneous. Thus neither as the same nor as another does a man go on to the last phase of his self-consciousness.'

'Well put, Nāgasena!'

on the whole body. And this fits the simile, in which the lamp is the body, and the flame the changing self-consciousness; whereas it is impossible to make the simile fit the conclusion as rendered by Hardy.

On the phrase *apubbam aḥariyam* see Dr. Morris's note at p. 101 of the Pāli Text Society's Journal, 1887, and the passages he there quotes.

<sup>1</sup> Omitted in Hardy. The correlative question is discussed below, III, 5, 8, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> That is to say, *Taṇhā* and *Upādāna*.

6. The king said: 'Is there, Nāgasena, such a thing as the soul?'

'What is this, O king, the soul (Vedagū)?'

'The living principle within<sup>1</sup> which sees forms through the eye, hears sounds through the ear, experiences tastes through the tongue, smells odours through the nose, feels touch through the body, and discerns things (conditions, "dhammā") through the mind—just as we, sitting here in the palace, can look out of any window out of which we wish to look, the east window or the west, or the north or the south.'

The Elder replied: 'I will tell you about the five

<sup>1</sup> Vedagū, see below, III, 5, 6, p. 111, not found in this meaning in the Piṭakas.

<sup>2</sup> Abbhantare gīvo, also not found in this sense in the Piṭakas. Attā, rendered just above 'image' or 'reflection,' is the word used in them for soul. Hīnañ-kumburē renders this here by prāna gīva, 'breath-soul.' See below, III, 7, 15, p. 132; and above, II, 4, p. 48; and II, 2, 6, p. 71.

doors', great king. Listen, and give heed attentively. If the living principle within sees forms through the eye in the manner that you mention, [55] choosing its window as it likes, can it not then see forms not only through the eye, but also through each of the other five organs of sense? And in like manner can it not then as well hear sounds, and experience taste, and smell odours, and feel touch, and discern conditions through each of the other five organs of sense, besides the one you have in each case specified?

'No, Sir.'

'Then these powers are not united one to another indiscriminately, the latter sense to the former organ, and so on. Now we, as we are seated here in the palace, with these windows all thrown open, and in full daylight, if we only stretch forth our heads, see all kinds of objects plainly. Can the living principle do the same when the doors of the eyes are thrown open? When the doors of the ear are thrown open, can it do so? Can it then not only hear sounds, but see sights, experience tastes, smell odours, feel touch, and discern conditions? And so with each of its windows?'

'No, Sir.'

[56] 'Then these powers are not united one to another indiscriminately. Now again, great king, if Dinna here were to go outside and stand in the gateway, would you be aware that he had done so?'

'Yes, I should know it.'

'And if the same Dinna were to come back again, and stand before you, would you be aware of his having done so?'

<sup>1</sup> It is odd he does not say six.

'Yes, I should know it.'

'Well, great king, would the living principle within discern, in like manner, if anything possessing flavour were laid upon the tongue, its sourness, or its saltiness, or its acidity, or its pungency, or its astringency, or its sweetness 1?'

'Yes, it would know it.'

'But when the flavour had passed into the stomach would it still discern these things?'

'Certainly not.'

'Then these powers are not united one to the other indiscriminately. Now suppose, O king, a man were to have a hundred vessels of honey brought and poured into one trough, and then, having had another man's mouth closed over and tied up, were to have him cast into the trough full of honey. Would he know whether that into which he had been thrown was sweet or whether it was not?'

'No, Sir.'

'But why not?'

'Because the honey could not get into his mouth.'

'Then, great king, these powers are not united one to another indiscriminately 2.'

'I am not capable of discussing with such a reasoner. Be pleased, Sir, to explain to me how the matter stands.'

Then the Elder convinced Milinda the king with discourse drawn from the Abhidhamma, saying: 'It is by reason, O king, of the eye and of forms that sight arises, and those other conditions—contact,

<sup>1</sup> This list recurs below, II, 4, 1.

<sup>2</sup> That is: 'Your "living principle within" cannot make use of whichever of its windows it pleases. And the simile of a man inside a house does not hold good of the soul.' See the end of II, 3, 16.

sensation, idea, thought, abstraction, sense of vitality, and attention 1—arise each simultaneously with its predecessor. And a similar succession of cause and effect arises when each of the other five organs of sense is brought into play. [57] And so herein there is no such thing as soul (Vedagu) 2.'

<sup>1</sup> The last four are *ketanâ*, *ekaggatâ*, *g'vītindriyam*, and *manasikâro*; and in the Sinhalese are simply repeated in their Sinhalese form.

<sup>2</sup> This conclusion is all wrong in Hardy, pp. 47, 458.

<sup>3</sup> *Mano-viññānam*. <sup>4</sup> *Kakkhu-viññānam*.

<sup>5</sup> *Kinnattâ*, which Hīnañ-kumburē renders *purudu bōwin*.

<sup>6</sup> *Deve vassante*: 'when the god rains.'