

Study and Discussion Questions for *Early Buddhist Discourses*

Chapter Six: Discourse of the Honeyball (*Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*)

Study Questions

- 1) What does the Buddha say is his “teaching” (his “view”), in reply to Daṇḍapāṇi? How did Daṇḍapāṇi react?
- 2) How does the Buddha explain to the *bhikkhus* the stopping of evil states without remainder? (Refer to the chain of “propensities.”)
- 3) How does Mahākaccāna, elaborating on the Buddha’s statement, relate the modes of sensory consciousness to the arising of mentally proliferated perceptions and (obsessive) notions that assail a person?
- 4) How does Mahākaccāna explain the tripartite pattern of sensory experience as regards the arising of contact (*phassa*)? (Note that none of the components of sense experience—neither the sense faculty, nor the object of sense, nor the mode of sensory consciousness is a self-subsistent thing—each exists *as such* only in relationship with the other factors. Hence the explanation is a “functional” account that attempts to avoid giving any component in sensory experience an ontologically independent status—as such a status would contradict the Buddha’s doctrine of dependent arising.)
- 5) What is the situation when any of the three components of sensory experience is absent?
- 6) Why is the discourse named after a honeyball?

Discussion Questions

- 1) In this discourse, the Buddha explains that sensory experience is the root of craving and other forms of moral corruption. Is the Buddha suggesting that a person should avoid sensory experiences altogether or just certain types of sensory experience?
- 2) Is the Buddha’s functionalist account of experience in this discourse consistent with his doctrine of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*)? Is it consistent with his view that there is no permanent Self (*attā*)?
- 3) Historically, many philosophers have explained experience dualistically as an affair comprised of ontologically distinct subjects (minds) and objects. The Buddha’s functionalist approach to experience appears to abandon such ontological distinctions. What philosophical problems is the Buddha trying to avoid? Is such an account of experience tenable?
- 4) Does the Buddha’s account of how obsessive and unwholesome states arise in a person seem plausible? Who might object? Why?