

Study and Discussion Questions for *Early Buddhist Discourses*

Chapter Five: The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving (*Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta*)

Study Questions

- 1) What pernicious view did *Sāti* hold?
- 2) How did *Sāti* explain his understanding of the Buddha's conception of consciousness? How did the Buddha react to *Sāti*'s representation of his views?
- 3) What, by contrast, is the Buddha's view of consciousness?
- 4) How are the various modes of consciousness to be reckoned?
- 5) Briefly summarize the analogy between the various kinds of fire and the various modes of consciousness.
- 6) What is the relationship between what "has come to be" and nutriment?
- 7) What are the four kinds of nutriment for the coming to be and maintenance of beings?
- 8) Lay out the full twelve-fold formula for dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) in forward (arising) order.
- 9) What are the four-line "general" formulas for dependent arising in both forward (arising) and reverse (ceasing) orders?
- 10) What sources of belief or knowledge does the Buddha recommend against?
- 11) What sources of belief or knowledge does the Buddha recommend to the *bhikkhus*?
- 12) How does the Buddha explain (human) conception? What are the stages between conception and maturity?
- 13) Outline the causal chain that leads to "this whole mass of suffering," starting with sensory experience.
- 14) What are the key attributes of a *Tathāgata*? What does a *Tathāgata* make known?
- 15) How does the Buddha describe the "going forth" of the householder? What are the moral activities and virtues of such a person? What is such a person content with?
- 16) How does the learned *bhikkhu* react to sense experiences? How is the learned *bhikkhu*'s reaction different from that of the normal person?
- 17) Describe the following key stages and achievements of the learned *bhikkhu*: a) purification from the five hindrances; b) the four *jhānas*, c) the abandonment of attachment to sensory modes of experience (leading to the destruction of craving).

Discussion Questions

- 1) Why is *Sāti*'s view considered "pernicious?" Why does the Buddha declare that such a pernicious view would be harmful to *Sāti* for a long time?
- 2) The Buddha taught a doctrine of rebirth. But, given that the Buddha denies there is a permanent Self or soul, how is rebirth possible? What is reborn?

- 3) What is the nature of consciousness? Is consciousness dependently arisen (as the Buddha declares) or is it an immaterial substance closely related to “mind” or “soul” (as taught by many philosophers—Plato and Descartes, for example—and most religions)?
- 4) Is consciousness a unified phenomenon or is consciousness best conceived pluralistically, as the Buddha describes it, in terms of the sense faculty (e.g., visual consciousness, auditory consciousness, etc.) from which it emerges?
- 5) The discourse contains the full twelfefold formula for dependent arising. See discussion questions 1, 2 and 4 keyed to Chapter Three.
- 6) The Buddha suggests that proper reasons for claiming something is true is to know it for oneself, to have seen it for oneself and to find out for oneself. Is this, in fact, the proper way to develop a system of beliefs? Would not such a method rule out most or all of the claims made by other religious traditions?
- 7) Are the Buddha’s statement’s regarding human conception and birth consistent with the modern biological view of the matter? What does the Buddha’s view of conception suggest about the beginning of life and “personhood?”
- 8) Are sensory experiences (both pleasing and unpleasing) really so dangerous as to lead regularly to “this whole mass of suffering,” as this discourse relates?
- 9) Is it necessary to leave the domestic or “householder” life for a monastic life to make religious progress? What obstacles to religious progress are inherent in domestic life? How do other religious traditions treat this issue?
- 10) Compare and contrast the description of the monastic practices of the Buddhist *bhikkhu* with the monastic practices in other religious traditions.
- 11) Is the *bhikkhu* supposed to remain aloof or segregated from society, given that the Buddha urges the *bhikkhu* to seek a secluded lodging? Or is seclusion merely *preparatory* for a life in which the *bhikkhu* is engaged in society? What does the Buddha’s own life suggest as an answer to this question?
- 12) Is the intense psychological training of the mind and sensory apparatus that aims at undermining the factors that lead to unwholesome states (and thus to suffering) viable? Is such training comparable to practices in other religious traditions?