SN 12.12: Moḷiyaphagguna Sutta
The Discourse to Moḷiyaphagguna
Translated by Bhante Suddhāso

At Sāvatthi. "Monks, these are the four kinds of food[1], which maintain beings that have come into existence and support those who are seeking existence. What four? Edible food, whether coarse or subtle; sense-contact is the second; mental volition is the third; consciousness is the fourth. Monks, these are the four kinds of food which maintain beings that have come into existence and support those who are seeking existence."

When this was said, Venerable Moḷiyaphagguna said to the Blessed One, "Bhante, who feeds on consciousness-food?"

"That is not a valid question," the Blessed One said. "I do not say 'One feeds.' If I said, 'One feeds,' then this would be a valid question: 'Bhante, who feeds on consciousness-food?' But I do not say that. Since I do not say that, if someone asked, 'Bhante, what is consciousness food for?' then that would be a valid question. And the proper explanation would be, 'Consciousness is the food based on which there is the production of further existence in the future; and when that has come to be, then there are the six senses; and based on the six senses there is sense-contact.'"

"Bhante, who contacts?"

"That is not a valid question," the Blessed One said. "I do not say 'One contacts.' If I said, 'One contacts,' then this would be a valid question: 'Bhante, who contacts?' But I do not say that. Since I do not say that, if someone asked, 'Bhante, what is the condition for sense-contact?' then that would be a valid question. And the proper explanation would be, 'Based on the six senses there is sense-contact, and based on sense-contact there are feelings.'"

"Bhante, who feels?"

"That is not a valid question," the Blessed One said. "I do not say 'One feels.' If I said, 'One feels,' then this would be a valid question: 'Bhante, who feels?' But I do not say that. Since I do not say that, if someone asked, 'Bhante, what is the condition for feeling?' then that would be a valid question. And the proper explanation would be, 'Based on sense-contact there are feelings, and based on feelings there is craving.'"

"Bhante, who craves?"

"That is not a valid question," the Blessed One said. "I do not say 'One craves.' If I said, 'One craves,' then this would be a valid question: 'Bhante, who craves?' But I do not say that. Since I do not say that, if someone asked, 'Bhante, what is the condition for craving?' then that would be a valid question. And the proper explanation would be, 'Based on feeling there is craving, and based on craving there is grasping."

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1   *Āhāra.* Lit. "intake." This is often translated as "nutriment," "sustenance," "fuel," etc.

"Bhante, who grasps?"

"That is not a valid question," the Blessed One said. "I do not say 'One grasps.' If I said, 'One grasps,' then this would be a valid question: 'Bhante, who grasps?' But I do not say that. Since I do not say that, if someone asked, 'Bhante, what is the condition for grasping?' then that would be a valid question. And the proper explanation would be, 'Based on craving there is grasping, and based on grasping there is existence.'[2] ...this is how the entire mass of suffering arises.

"However, Phagguna, when through dispassion the six senses completely cease, then sense-contact ceases; when sense-contact ceases, feeling ceases; when feeling ceases, craving ceases; when craving ceases, grasping ceases; when grasping ceases, existence ceases; when existence ceases, birth ceases; when birth ceases, decay, dying, sorrow, lamentation, pain, depression, and anguish cease. This is how the entire mass of suffering ceases."

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2   At this point the text contains an elision marker, but it is not clear what exactly has been elided. Most likely the text originally also contained the statements *bhavapaccayā jāti* (based on existence there is birth) and *jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṁ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassūpāyāsā uppajjanti* (based on birth there is decay, dying, sorrow, lamentation, pain, depression, and anguish).