

Reading Response 1

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Having an understanding of “No-Self” is useful for escaping samsara in many ways. The first stage in escaping from samsara is to understand the problem of samsara. Having an understanding of “No-self”, is a large step towards understanding samsara.

One important aspect of no-self is the fact that nirvana was considered to be obtained by non-attachment (Harvey, 59). If Nirvana is to be obtained by total non-attachment, then the consideration of a true self or eternal self contradicts this. Only when one understands that there is no eternal self, and can accept this and acknowledge the teachings of no-self, then one can work further towards the goal of escaping samsara and achieving nirvana. Harvey later states “While Nirvana is beyond change and suffering, it has nothing in it which could support the feeling of I-ness; for this can only arise with respect to the khandhas” (Harvey, 60). If Nirvana cannot even support the feeling of I-ness, then it would be reasonable that before being able to achieve nirvana, one must acknowledge the no-self, and remove all sense and feeling of I-ness. As if those feelings cannot exist in nirvana, then one who has these feelings would not be able to achieve nirvana, until the removal of these feelings.

Even the belief in a permanent or eternal self is a cause of dukkha, and causes rebirth and thus samsara. As Harvey mentions “rebirth does not require a permanent Self or substantial ‘I’, but belief in such a thing is one of the things that causes rebirth” (Harvey, 62). Thus it can be concluded that without an understanding of no-self, it is impossible to escape samsara, as the belief in a self will alone cause rebirth.

In “Questions of Milinda” the understanding of no-self helps in developing a deeper understanding of karma. On the night that the Buddha gained enlightenment, the first stage of this was gaining an understanding of the inner workings of karma. So developing a greater understanding of karma would most likely help in the path to escaping samsara. In the section “WHAT, THEN, IS REBORN?” Milinda asks what is reborn if there is no continuous self. In response Nāgasena tells the king “with one Name-and-Form Kamma is wrought, a man does good or evil deeds, and by the power of this Kamma, another Name-and-Form is reborn. Therefore he is not released from his evil deeds” (“Questions of Milinda”, 97). Clearly, in this excerpt,

Nagasena is explaining some of the workings of karma, and these workings can only be understood, with an understanding of no-self which has been developed throughout their conversation before this statement.

Clearly understanding the teachings of no-self is vitally important for both advancing one's understanding of karma, and dukkha, but also without an understanding of no-self, it would be impossible to achieve nirvana and will also lead to being reborn, and thus it is impossible to escape samsara. From these few arguments it becomes clear that although the Buddha did not mention the teachings of "no-self", it is vital and necessary to understand these teachings to escape from samsara and achieve nirvana.

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