Nāgasena

Buddhist Monk and Teacher

Buddhist Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are Nāgasena, a Buddhist monk who debates King Milinda (Menander) in the later Questions of King Milinda. At court around 150 BCE, you use the chariot analogy to examine not-self, responsibility, and the good life.

Biographical Notes

- You believe philosophical questions matter because confused beliefs help sustain suffering. You enjoy careful argument, but your task is to help people live differently. An impressive explanation that changes no one's conduct has accomplished little.
- You will speak with Menander as a fellow inquirer. Royal power cannot settle whether an argument is sound. You welcome difficult questions and expect the freedom to acknowledge a difficulty without treating it as disloyalty.
- Menander fears that death will erase his achievements. You see a deeper problem: he seeks lasting security in a kingdom, reputation, and body that cannot remain unchanged. You want to question this search without dismissing his concern for his people.
- Sumanā brings your teaching into practice; Nandā insists that grief deserves patient attention; Vijaya asks what the teaching requires of rulers. You rely on them to make your arguments useful. Your challenge is to keep philosophical debate connected to the court's actual suffering.

Your Philosophical Commitments

Life involves suffering and instability. Craving and ignorance sustain suffering; the Noble Eightfold Path trains conduct, attention, and understanding toward its cessation. Body and mind change: no permanent, independent self owns or controls them. Intentional actions have consequences, including across rebirth. Nibbāna is liberation from greed, hatred, and delusion. Compassion and ethical responsibility remain essential even without an unchanging self.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Buddhism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote.
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the Buddhist school one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Nāgasena continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare a brief exercise: use or adapt one from the handout, or create another grounded in your school's philosophy and sources. Anyone may guide it. Participation may be silent or observational, with no personal disclosure required.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Powers and Limits

You may argue, advise, and negotiate recommendations. You cannot direct colleagues' speeches, bind the court, or cast an allegiance vote. Defend your school's commitments while remaining willing to revise their application. The king's conversion is not predetermined.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

Not-self: What does the chariot analogy explain about a person? How can changing processes support responsibility without a permanent owner?

Craving: Would more glory give Menander lasting security? What practical response follows from your diagnosis of his suffering?

Evidence: What supports rebirth and the possibility of liberation? Distinguish those claims from benefits someone might notice during a brief exercise.

Source Suggestions

Use SN 56.11, SN 22.59, the Milindapañha chariot dialogue, and AN 3.65 as assigned. These texts reached their surviving forms through later compilation; today's debate is not already recorded in a book.

Sumanā

Buddhist Nun

Buddhist Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are a Buddhist nun visiting Menander's court around 150 BCE. Your experience of communal practice, teaching, and caring for the sick informs your advice. Early Buddhist literature also preserves the voices of women seeking liberation.

Biographical Notes

- Before entering the monastic community, you helped run your family's workshop. You were proud of your skill and impatient with anyone who worked slowly. Years of practice have made you more attentive to the judgments beneath that impatience.
- Your hands now become stiff, especially in the morning. You sometimes feel embarrassed when a younger nun carries something for you. You teach impermanence, yet still catch yourself measuring your worth by what your body can accomplish.
- Caring for an older member of your community taught you that attention and practical assistance belong together. Meditation did not replace food, rest, or help with daily tasks. You want Mālatī to hear this clearly.
- Nāgasena values your experience of Buddhist practice. Nandā reminds you that exercises can feel demanding when someone is grieving. Vijaya wants a practice that busy householders can use. You worry that the court will mistake a brief demonstration for an instant cure.

Your Philosophical Commitments

Painful feelings arise through conditions; training can change how we respond. Fear, resentment, and clinging may add distress to bodily pain. Mindfulness notices these reactions without making them a reason for self-hatred. Ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom support one another. Buddhist practice aims at liberation, not merely a calmer afternoon. Compassion includes accepting help and caring for people whose pain persists.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Buddhism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote.
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the Buddhist school one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Sumanā continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare a brief exercise: use or adapt one from the handout, or create another grounded in your school's philosophy and sources. Anyone may guide it. Participation may be silent or observational, with no personal disclosure required.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Powers and Limits

You may explain ideas, guide a practice, question speakers, and advise any court member as your faction agrees. You cannot require participation, promise relief, or decide what another person must feel. You have no allegiance vote.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

Practice: Compare "Mindfulness and insight" and "Extend loving kindness beyond the court" in the handout. How does each connect to the Buddhist path?

Illness: What practical care should accompany advice about clinging? How could Mālatī accept help without treating dependence as worthlessness?

Limits: Does continued distress mean someone has practiced badly? What can observing change suggest about not-self, and what does it leave unproved?

Source Suggestions

Use the handout's practice sources: MN 10, MN 118, SN 22.59, and Sutta Nipāta 1.8. SN 36.6 and the sick-monk account in Vinaya, Mahāvagga 8.26, can inform discussion of suffering and care.

Nandā

Buddhist Lay Follower

Buddhist Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are a Buddhist laywoman invited to Menander's court around 150 BCE. You support a local monastic community and help families facing illness and bereavement. These experiences shape how you understand compassion and nonattachment.

Biographical Notes

- Your husband died several years ago. You still remember his voice and miss the ordinary life you shared. Buddhist teaching has helped you continue caring for others without requiring you to regard that love as a mistake.
- After his death, you tried to keep your younger sister close and became angry when she made independent plans. You eventually recognized that fear was turning your concern into control. Agathocleia's protectiveness toward her surviving son feels painfully familiar.
- You help arrange meals and visits for people who are ill. You have learned to ask what someone needs before explaining what they ought to understand. You distrust consoling speeches that leave suffering people alone afterward.
- Nāgasena helps you examine difficult beliefs; Sumanā offers practices you can use at home. Vijaya sometimes wants to move quickly toward public solutions. Your own weakness is the opposite: sympathy can make you hesitate to confront someone who has harmed others.

Your Philosophical Commitments

Love can become entangled with the demand that another person remain safe, unchanged, and close to us. Buddhist practice loosens that demand while cultivating goodwill and compassion. Grief deserves patient attention; insight is not a command to stop feeling. Intentional wrongdoing requires acknowledgment, restraint, and changed conduct. People can change, but change does not erase consequences or oblige victims to forgive.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Buddhism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote.
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the Buddhist school one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Nandā continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare a brief exercise: use or adapt one from the handout, or create another grounded in your school's philosophy and sources. Anyone may guide it. Participation may be silent or observational, with no personal disclosure required.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Powers and Limits

You may question, advise, and suggest actions. You cannot absolve Philon, compel forgiveness, or decide what the queen must feel. You have no separate vote. Defend Buddhism while allowing disagreement about how its commitments apply.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

Love: How could Agathocleia care deeply for Demetrios while allowing him independence? Can goodwill extend beyond her family without making particular people unimportant?

Wrongdoing: What should Philon acknowledge, repair, and change? Why would moral transformation leave responsibility for earlier harm intact?

Compassion: How can you offer comfort without overlooking injustice? What would make philosophical advice useful when grief continues?

Source Suggestions

Use Ubbirī's verses, Therīgāthā 51–53; Sutta Nipāta 1.8; and MN 86 on Aṅgulimāla, as assigned. These are sources for reflection, not promises of an immediate resolution to grief or guilt.

Vijaya

Buddhist Householder and Former Official

Buddhist Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are a former revenue official and Buddhist householder visiting Menander's court around 150 BCE. Your arguments draw on early Buddhist teachings about conduct and government, as well as the edicts of the earlier emperor Aśoka.

Biographical Notes

- You once believed that an official's duty was simply to carry out lawful orders. While collecting grain after a poor harvest, you saw families surrender food they needed. Although you had met your target, you began to question what counted as successful service.
- You left that post and now manage a modest trading business. You support relatives, employees, and a Buddhist community. Household responsibilities make you impatient with any suggestion that serious practice is possible only after leaving ordinary life.
- You also understand the attraction of renunciation. You sometimes imagine withdrawing from obligations and beginning again. Demetrios's wish to leave court therefore raises a question you cannot dismiss: when is departure a serious commitment, and when is it avoidance?
- You hope royal patronage will support teaching, care, and less harmful government. Nāgasena worries about dependence on power. Sumanā asks whether practical care receives enough attention, and Nandā insists that people harmed by policy must be heard. You fear compromising your principles to win the king's support.

Your Philosophical Commitments

The Buddhist path joins ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom. Laypeople can practice generosity, restraint, and understanding while fulfilling responsibilities. Intentions matter, but a good intention does not excuse careless harm. Craving for power can intensify suffering; non-harming and compassion should guide public action. Renunciation deserves respect, yet neither a royal title nor monastic clothing guarantees a wise decision.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Buddhism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote.
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the Buddhist school one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Vijaya continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare a brief exercise: use or adapt one from the handout, or create another grounded in your school's philosophy and sources. Anyone may guide it. Participation may be silent or observational, with no personal disclosure required.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Powers and Limits

You advocate and negotiate recommendations through discussion. You cannot promise funds, settle the succession, or secure anyone's conversion. You have no separate vote. Defend Buddhism throughout the game; disagreeing with a colleague's practical recommendation is allowed.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

Renunciation: How could Demetrios distinguish a serious commitment from avoidance? What obligations remain whether he stays or leaves?

Government: How should non-harming and compassion shape Menander's response to danger? Where might protection and restraint conflict?

Patronage: How could support reach people harmed by policy while preserving the community's independence? What distinguishes your reasoning from Stoic duty or Epicurean security?

Source Suggestions

Use AN 6.63, DN 5, DN 26, and Aśoka's Major Rock Edict XIII as assigned. These sources raise questions about intention, government, and remorse rather than supplying a policy for every emergency.

Rakkhita

Former Soldier and Buddhist Lay Follower

Buddhist Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are a former frontier soldier who now follows Buddhist teachings. You accompany the Buddhist delegation to Menander's court at Sāgala around 150 BCE, seeking guidance on non-harming, responsibility, and the legacy of war.

Biographical Notes

- During a frontier campaign, you obeyed an order to destroy grain stores thought to supply an enemy. Families lost food they needed. You did not attack anyone directly, yet you knew civilians would suffer. You still find yourself calling this the unavoidable price of security.
- Later you met people who had lost their homes in that campaign. You brought them supplies anonymously, but you have never acknowledged your part in the destruction. Sometimes you use your remorse as an excuse to avoid the harder work of making amends.
- A Buddhist teacher urged you to recognize that people across the frontier fear injury and death just as you do. You adopted the precept against killing. Yet when armed raiders threaten a village, you worry that refusing violence might abandon those who need protection.
- Menander's wish for conquest and Philon's past wrongdoing both unsettle you. Nāgasena asks for careful reasons; Sumanā offers practices for noticing anger; Nandā reminds you to listen to victims; Vijaya examines the responsibilities of government; Kusumā asks what repair needs in practice. You still mistake a quick, forceful decision for a courageous one.

Your Philosophical Commitments

Craving, fear, and hatred can distort our decisions and deepen suffering. Buddhist ethics emphasizes non-harming, compassion, and restraint. Intentions matter, but a sincere intention does not erase foreseeable harm. Past actions have consequences; admitting wrongdoing and changing one's conduct matter more than finding a comforting explanation. Practice can loosen anger without relieving us of duties to protect others.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Buddhism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote.
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the Buddhist school one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Rakkhita continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare a brief exercise: use or adapt one from the handout, or create another grounded in your school's philosophy and sources. Anyone may guide it. Participation may be silent or observational, with no personal disclosure required.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Powers and Limits

You may explain Buddhist non-harming, examine arguments about force, and advise the court on responsibility. You cannot command soldiers, grant forgiveness on behalf of victims, promise safety, or cast an allegiance vote. You are not required to claim that every hard political choice has an obvious Buddhist answer.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

War and protection: If an invasion may make Menander's frontier safer, what does Buddhist non-harming require him to consider? When, if ever, might force protect rather than merely create suffering?

Responsibility: What should Philon do after harming civilians? Why is remorse insufficient, and how could he make amends without expecting forgiveness?

Practice and judgment: Could compassion for an enemy improve a commander's decisions? How would you answer a Stoic who says virtue is sufficient for happiness despite the suffering war brings?

Source Suggestions

Use AN 6.63 on intention, Sutta Nipāta 1.8 on extending goodwill, and Aśoka's Major Rock Edict XIII on the human costs of conquest. These sources inform your arguments without supplying a simple rule for every use of force.

Kusumā

Lay Benefactor and Steward of Community Gifts

Buddhist Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are a Buddhist laywoman who organizes gifts of food and medicine near Sāgala around 150 BCE. You have come to Menander's court to argue that generosity must address real needs without becoming dependent on royal favor.

Biographical Notes

- Your family owns grain stores and has enough to live comfortably. You help distribute food and medicine to people in need and provide supplies to a local Buddhist community. You value the work, but you also enjoy being publicly thanked as a generous person.
- During a shortage, you insisted on conducting a gift ceremony before allowing supplies to be distributed. Families waited while dignitaries praised you. You later realized how easily a wish for recognition can attach itself to a supposedly selfless act.
- You hope Menander will offer the Buddhist community royal patronage. It could sustain teachers, food distribution, and care for the sick. But you fear that a grateful community might stop criticizing the king's policies or treat his generosity as proof that his conquests are just.
- Mālatī needs practical help, not merely inspiring words; Demetrios wonders whether he should leave public duties for a quieter life. Nāgasena challenges your ideas about the self; Sumanā reminds you that practice is daily work; Nandā insists that recipients be heard; Vijaya asks about just institutions; Rakkhita reminds you how war creates needs that charity cannot fully repair.

Your Philosophical Commitments

Generosity (dāna) is a Buddhist practice that can weaken greed and cultivate concern for others. Gifts should answer real needs, not simply purchase admiration or influence. A good intention matters, but it does not guarantee good consequences. Wealth and status are impermanent; using them wisely is possible without treating them as the basis of one's identity. Giving is part of the path, not proof by itself of rebirth or other contested doctrines.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Buddhism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote.
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the Buddhist school one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Kusumā continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare a brief exercise: use or adapt one from the handout, or create another grounded in your school's philosophy and sources. Anyone may guide it. Participation may be silent or observational, with no personal disclosure required.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Powers and Limits

You may offer counsel on generosity, patronage, and practical care. You cannot promise your family's resources to other characters, guarantee that gifts will solve social problems, bind the Buddhist community to royal policies, or cast an allegiance vote.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

Giving and attachment: What makes generosity genuinely generous? Can a gift be good when its giver also desires praise, influence, or recognition?

Patronage: Should a Buddhist community accept Menander's support if it risks making its teachers dependent on his favor? What conditions would protect its independence?

Public duties: What can you tell Mālatī about usefulness beyond work, or Demetrios about withdrawing from court? Where does voluntary giving end and an obligation to others begin?

Source Suggestions

Use Sutta Nipāta 1.8 on goodwill, AN 6.63 on intention, and DN 5 on the social conditions of harmful conduct. These texts provide starting points for evaluating generosity, public responsibility, and the limits of charity.