

10a

Rāga Sutta 1

Paṭhama Rāga Sutta The First Discourse on Lust | **It 68**

Theme: Greed, hate, delusion are Māra's traps

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2011, 2018

1 Sutta summary and highlights

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

1.1.1 The Rāga Sutta 1 (It 68) is a short instructive text on how Māra (the embodiment of all that is bad) overwhelms us through the 3 unwholesome roots: greed, hate and delusion. Only in fully overcoming these 3 unwholesome roots are we free from Māra's power, that is, we joyfully awaken to nirvana.

1.2 MĀRA

1.2.1 Māra is the embodiment of whatever is bad. The Commentaries speak of **the 5 kinds of Māra** (*pañca māra*):¹

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| (1) the defilements as Māra, | <i>kilesa, māra</i> |
| (2) the 5 aggregates as Māra, | <i>khandha, māra</i> |
| (3) karma-formations as Māra, | <i>abhisankhāra, māra</i> |
| (4) the deity Māra, and | <i>deva, putta māra</i> |
| (5) death as Māra. | <i>maccu, māra</i> |

1.2.2 “Bound by Māra” (*baddho māraṣṣa*) [§3] means that as long as we are yet unawakened we are somehow under Māra's power, thus:

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| (1) Māra, as our defilements | <u>psychologically</u> , we are troubled by ignorance and craving; |
| (2) Māra, as the 5 aggregates | <u>existentially</u> , we are but body and mind, caught up in impermanence; |
| (3) Māra, as karma-formations | <u>conatively</u> , we think we have free will, but our karma controls us; |
| (4) Māra the deity | <u>spiritually</u> , we construct views and faiths that project our inner needs; |
| (5) Māra as death | <u>teleologically</u> , we all experience impermanence and meet death. |

1.2.3 “Not bound by Māra” (*abaddho māraṣṣa*) [§5] means that

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| (1) <u>Psychologically</u> , | we see ourself as <i>a conditioned process</i> , with many causes and many effects; |
| (2) <u>Existentially</u> , | we understand and accept ourself to be <i>impermanent</i> , reflecting on this truth; |
| (3) <u>Conatively</u> , | we avoid bad <i>karma</i> , promote good karma, and free our mind with wisdom; |
| (4) <u>Spiritually</u> , | we keep our mind in the present moment, seeing <i>the rise and fall</i> of things; |
| (5) <u>Teleologically</u> , | we direct our mind to the death-free <i>nirvana</i> , beyond time and space. |

Māra, then, is a catchword for all that fetter us to this cyclic world of rebirths and redeaths.

¹ On Māra, see **(Māra) Samiddhi S** (S 4.22), SD 36.11; **Māra** SD 61.8; SD 36.4 (2.3); **Sela S** (M 92,19 = Sn 561b = Tha 831b) n, SD 45.7a; SD 52.1 (9.1.2.2).

1.3 “WHOEVER” (yassa kassaci)

1.3.1 The Sutta Commentary states that **the Rāga Sutta 1** (It 68) addresses both the laity (*gahaṭṭha*) and the monastic (*pabbajita*) (ItA 2:36,7). In the case of **the Rāga Sutta 2** (It 69, SD 52,10b), the Sutta clearly and specifically addresses “monks and nuns” [§§2+4].

Otherwise, the teachings of both the Suttas are the same—the abandoning of the 3 unwholesome roots: greed (*dosa*), hate (*lobha*) and delusion (*moha*) [§§2+4]. The purpose is to attain awakening, that is, to be free of suffering.

1.3.2 The sutta context—in this case, the Iti,vuttaka Commentary—helps in ascertaining the Sutta’s intended audience. Although the word *bhikkhu* (both nominative and vocative), and its vocative plural, *bhikkhave*, are used, it is clear that It 68 addresses both the laity and the renunciants. [1.3.1]

If the context concerns some issue of monastic discipline where rules or decisions are made or to be observed—that is, an ecclesiastical or monastic context—these words would address the monastics. In a Dharma context (as a rule in the Suttas), such terms address would encompass *all* of the 4 assemblies (*catu,parisā*),² that is, the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen.³

2 THE 3 ROOTS AND SAINTHOOD

2.1 THE 3 ROOTS. The 3 roots (*mūla*) are of 2 kinds: the unwholesome (*akusala*) and the wholesome (*kusala*), thus:

The unwholesome roots (akusala,mūla)

(1) greed [lust]	<i>lobha</i>
(2) hate	<i>dosa</i>
(3) delusion	<i>moha</i>

The wholesome roots (kusala mūla)

(1) non-greed	<i>alobha</i>	=	charity	<i>cāga</i>
(2) non-hate	<i>adosa</i>	=	lovingkindness	<i>mettā</i>
(3) non-delusion	<i>amoha</i>	=	wisdom	<i>paññā</i>

The key defilement is **greed** (*lobha*). On a deeper level, this is lust (*rāga*), so called because it makes us delight (*rañjana*) in them, that is, to crave for them (when we think we do not have them), and to cling to them (once we think we have them). The problem here is that there may be *pleasure* arising from such situations (but it is never really satisfying). When there is really joy (*pīti*), then, there is satisfaction or happiness (*sukha*).

It’s like we have eaten a really good meal—we do not want to eat any more. When we are joyfully satisfied with something, we don’t really need it any more. The goodness (joy and satisfaction) remains with us making our minds calm and clear.

2.2 The Commentary explains how overcoming these 3 unwholesome roots brings about the various stages of sainthood:

Herein, that lust, hate and delusion that lead to the states of loss are abandoned by way of the 1st path (streamwinning). Lust for sense-desires (Nett 28,3) and delusion that are gross are overcome by the 2nd path (once-returning). When all these same defilements are abandoned without remains by way of the 3rd path (non-returning). Lust for existence and such delusion that remains are overcome by the 4th path (arhathood). (ItA 2:36,15-17)

² A 2:132.

³ See SD 4.9 (5.3); SD 13.1 (3.1.1).

These 4 paths (*magga*) will be explained below. [1.2.2.2-1.2.2.4]

2.3 THE 10 FETTERS AND SAINTHOOD

2.3.1 The 10 fetters. To understand what the Commentary is saying here about the 4 paths, it helps that we relate how the 3 unwholesome roots work as the 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*), those defilements that hinder our spiritual progress and awakening:

The 5 lower fetters (*orāma, bhāgiya saṃyojana*) [SD 50.11]

(1) <u>self-identity view</u>	} (1) conditions for spiritual loss (2) sensual lust + delusion (gross)	} (3) the 5 lower fetters
(2) <u>spiritual doubt</u>		
(3) <u>attachment to rituals and vows</u>		
(4) sensual lust		
(5) repulsion		

The 5 higher fetters (*uddhama, bhāgiya saṃyojana*) [SD 50.12]

(6) lust for form-existence	} “fetters that obtain existence”	} (4) lust for existence & remaining defilements
(7) lust for formless existence		
(8) conceit	} “fetters that obtain rebirth”	
(9) restlessness		
(10) ignorance		

Key: Destroyed respectively by (1) streamwinning; (2) once-returning; (3) non-returning; (4) arhathood.

Table 2.3 The 10 fetters, unwholesome roots, and sainthood⁴

2.3.2 Streamwinning. “Has abandoned lust, hate and delusion that lead to the states of loss” (*apāya, gamanīyā raga, dosa, mohā paṭhama, maggena [pahīyati]*). Here, “lust, hate and delusion,” as a set, serves as a shorthand (synecdoche) for the first 3 fetters. Let us briefly examine each of them.

2.3.2.1 Lust gives us the false notion that there must be something *permanent* about the pleasure (what we like) that we can derive from sense-objects. As a corollary, we reject what we view as being unpleasurable or preventing us from getting that pleasure —this is **hate**, the opposite of lust, in the sense it tries to remove whatever it sees as not feeding lust. Both this conditionings create the **delusion** that “I” am enjoying “my” pleasure; hence, it is “mine.” We try to own these pleasures—this is how the notion of self (*attā*) rises. We *identify* with these pleasures, etc; hence, it is called **self-identity view** (*sakkāya, ditṭhi*). This is the 1st fetter we need to understand and abandon.

2.3.2.2 Spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*) refers to our inability or non-inclination towards what really helps us to know our self (that is, our *mind*), to tame our mind (direct it to bodily and mental cultivation),⁵ and

⁴ Cf Table 1.1.2 (SD 50.19). For details on the 10 fetters, see SD 10.19 (1.6.6-1.6.8).

⁵ This is a shorthand for training in moral virtue as “bodily cultivation” (*kāya bhāvanā*) and in mental cultivation (*citta bhāvanā*): see **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,4-10), SD 49.4.

to free our mind from this self-centricity caught in “owning,” thinking in terms of *I, me, mine*.⁶ This self-identifying process conditions us to *measure* everything as “things” we can have: we measure ourself against others in terms of being “inferior,” “superior” and “equal,” and we act accordingly with this delusion.⁷ This is the 2nd fetter that we need to break.

2.3.2.3 Attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata parāmāsa*), psychologically, refers to our compulsive and addictive habits with which we try to own or relive memories of past experiences (of the 6 senses). This is the karmic uroboros feeding on its own tail: while self-identity view leads to narcissism, attachment to rituals and vows can have the effect of self-mortification, even self-destruction, especially when it is rooted in guilt, delusion or fear.

This ritual attachment is pernicious because we are looking for external solutions to problems that have arisen within our own mind—we are misguided by the notion that repeating an action again and again makes it right and good, or that it might even bring a gratifying result—but with devastating results upon ourself.

It has been said by some experts, “The price may seem higher for the addict who prostitutes for a fix than it is for the addict who merely lies to a doctor, but ultimately both pay with their lives. Insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results.”⁸

2.3.3 Breaking the 3 fetters

2.3.3.1 When these 3 fetters—self-identity view, spiritual doubt, and attachment to rituals and vows—are broken, one becomes a **streamwinner** (*sotāpanna*), one who is “no longer bound for the lower world, sure of going over to self-awakening” (*avinipāta,dhammo niyato sambodhi,parāyano*).⁹ The streamwinner will never be reborn in the “lower world,” that is, any of the asura, the preta, the animal, or the hell states, but in some heavenly state or in a human state conducive to spiritual cultivation.

2.3.3.2 In the defining phrase, the word **avinipāta** (*a*, “not” + *vi*, “asunder, various” + *ni*, “down, downward” + *pāta*, “falling”), literally means “not falling into downward state.” Idiomatically, it means “not fated for birth in a suffering state.” Its opposite is *vinipāta*, “a state of loss; the world of suffering,”¹⁰ and is another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*),¹¹ that is, the sub-

⁶ This “owning” works with the notions of “I am” (*ahañ,kāra*), “mine-making” (*mamañ,kāra*) and “conceit” (*mān-ānusaya*)—the 3 clingings (*gaha*): **Mānānusaya S** (S 18.21,5), SD 19.2a(7.5); for refs, see DEB: ahañ.kāra,mamañ.-kāra,mānānusaya.

⁷ For details, see **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1; **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a; **Mine: The nature of craving** SD 19.3. On the opp of self-identification—“this is not mine” (*n’etañ mama*), “I am not this” (*n’eso ’ham asmi*), “this is not my self” (*na mēso attā ti*), as applied to the 5 aggregates—see **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.19,12-16), SD 1.2.

⁸ Narcotics Anonymous Pamphlet (Basic Text Approval Form, Unpublished Literary Work), ch 4: How It Works, Step Two, PDF p11,16 [link](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Narcotics_Anonymous). See https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Narcotics_Anonymous.

⁹ See (**Khandha**) **Sotāpanna S** (S 22.109), SD 17.1a(2.3); also V 3:10,24 (VA 1:196,13-18 ≈ DA 2:544,7-9); D 1:156,9 (Comy: *catusu apāyesu apatana,dhammo*), 2:93,9-19; M 1:141,37, 466,4, 3:81,4, 277,17 (qu at DhsA 229,15); S 2:68, 18, 5:193,16-194,2, 343,26-344,2, 346,29-347,11, 357,6-16 (SA 3:289,9-11); A 1:232,1 (AA 2:349,9), 2:80,12, 89,1, 238,14, 3:331,28-333,32, 4:405,25 ... 408,6, 5:182,25-184,32; U 50,10 (UA 290,5-7); pl *avinipāta,dhammā*, SA 1:221,-14, ~*a,tiracchāna,gāmino*).

¹⁰ **Vinipāta**: for stock, see foll n on *āpaya*.

¹¹ **Āpaya**, in the stock, ~*añ duggatiñ vinipātañ nirayañ upapajjati (upapannā)*: V 3:5,7 (VA; Vism 13.92 f/427,10, MahT); D 1:82,32, 185,30, 3:111,26; M 1:22,36, 73,22, 308,17, 2:21,16, 86,10, 149,20, 3:165,14; S 2:232,10, 4:240,3,

human planes of the hells, the animal kingdom, the preta realm and the asura abode (*niraya, tiracchāna, petti.visaya, asura.kaya*).¹²

2.3.4 Once-returning. “Lust for sense-pleasures and delusion that are gross” (*oḷārikā kāma.rāga, dosā dutiya, maggena*). The **Netti-p, pakaraṇa** defines “lust for sense-pleasures” (*kāma, rāga*)¹³ as having the 5 cords of sense-pleasure¹⁴ as its basis or proximate cause¹⁵ (*pañca kāma, guṇā kāma, rāgassa pada-t, ṭhān-am*, Nett 28,3). More specifically, this “lust” (which includes its opposite, ill will) refers to the 4th and 5th fetters. “Gross” (*oḷārika*) refers to the sense-objects of the sense-world as a whole—as compared to the “fine” (*paṇīta*) sense-objects (lacking the 5 physical senses) of the form-world and the formless world.

When a streamwinner—through mindfulness or deep meditation—weakens the 3 unwholesome roots—that is, become less attached to the 5 physical senses—then, he goes on to attain **once-returning**. In other words, the once-returner has fully abandoned the 3 fetters and significantly weakens his attachment to the sense-world. He needs only one more life to finish off his karma and attains arhat-hood in the next life.

2.3.5 Non-returning. “When all these same defilements are abandoned without remains” (*te yeva anavasesā tatiya, maggena [pahīyati]*). “All these same defilements” refers to the 5 lower fetters already mentioned [1.2.2.4]. When all these are abandoned, we attain **non-returning**. This means that upon dying, we are reborn in the pure abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*),¹⁶ never to return to this world (the sense-world) again.¹⁷

2.3.6 Arhathood. “Lust for existence and such delusion that remains are overcome” (*bhava, rāgo avasiṭṭha, moho ca catuttha, maggena pahīyanti*). The 5 higher fetters comprise two kinds of fetter: 6+7 are fetters to existence, and 8-10 are fetters that bring rebirth.

The fetters of (6) lust for form-existence and (7) lust for formless existence sustain our existence in the form-world or the formless world—this applies only to the non-returner. The rest of the higher fetters—(8) conceit, (9) restlessness and (10) ignorance—keeps the non-returner being reborn in the pure abodes—arising in one abode after another until he becomes **an arhat**.¹⁸

Arhathood is the end of the path—the arhat’s awakening is just the same as that of the Buddha. Awakening is the final realization of non-self and true reality; hence, the Buddha’s awakening and the arhat’s awakening are no different, except that the Buddha is the first arhat during an epoch, and the other arhats of that epoch are his followers (*anubuddha*)—as stated in **the Sambuddha Sutta** (S 22.58).

313,13, 342,7; A 1:55,27; ~am duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ saṃsāraṃ nātivattati, D 2:55,16 (DA); S 2:92,16, 4:158,8; Nm 356,2 NmA 2:125,1; U 87,5 (UA); It 12,22 (ItA), 73,13 f; Pug 51,32.

¹² See SnA 1:189,12 = DA 2:496,11 (ad D 2:55,27) = SA 2:97,5 (ad S 2:92,16). See SD 2.22 (1.7) & CPD: apāya.

¹³ On the tr of *kāma, rāga* as “lust for sense-pleasures,” see SD 6.11 (2); see foll n. See also **Nibbāna, sukha S** (A 9.34), SD 91.5. On their nature, see **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,8.3), SD 3.13.

¹⁴ On the 5 cords of sense-pleasure (*pañca kāma, guṇa*), see **Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) S** (A 6.63,3.2-3.3), SD 6.11; also SD 32.2 (1.2.2).

¹⁵ On tr as “proximate cause,” see DhA 63 at DhA:PR 1:84,16; Abhs:SR 13,32; Abhs:BRS 391; Abhs:WG “footing” 385.

¹⁶ The pure abodes, inhabited by only non-returners, are Āviha, Ātappa, Sudassā, Sudassī and Akaṇiṭṭha: SD 10.16 (13.1.6). On their location in the Buddha universe, see SD 1.7 (App).

¹⁷ On the non-returners (*anāgāmī*), see **Niṭṭha S** (A 10.63,3), SD 3.3(1.2); SD 2.17 (4-5).

¹⁸ See **Sa,saṅkhāra S** (A 4.169,1+4), SD 50.7; SD 8.5 (11.3).

This truth should be carefully noted, and we should not fall for the wrong view of later sectarian teachings.¹⁹

3 Puñña and kusala

3.1 PUÑÑA AS MERITORIOUS ACTION

3.1.1 Before the Buddha's times, the religious idea was basically that of performing the right rituals and acting rightly in a ritual manner—such as offering sacrifices to the priests, the gods and the dead on special occasions. **Kamma** (Skt *karma*) referred to the right and proper ritual actions as defined by the brahmin priests. In other words, it was an *external* performance of ritual conduct and priestcraft. Such rituals were both elaborate (hence, expensive) and often involved immoral acts, such as making life-sacrifices and destroying plant-life. Such priest-centred and externalized rituals were believed to bring “merit” (*puñña*) to the sacrifice.

3.1.2 The Buddha rejected the priestly and externalized rationale for merit-making, and by “natural adaptation,”²⁰ accepted its practice as being based on **the threefold purities** (*ti,koṭi parisuddhi*), both synchronically and diachronically. Synchronically, merit-making is effective when we (the actors) act with purity of body, speech and mind, that is, the 3 doors of karma, are free (at least temporarily) of greed, hate and delusion.

Diachronically—that is, across time—such as in the act of giving (*dāna*), should be done with loving-kindness (be happy, showing positive emotions) while *preparing* the offering, while *giving* the offering, and *after* the offering. **The (Sumana) Dāna Sutta** (A 6.37) calls this the 3 “limbs of a giver” (*dāyakassa tīṅ'āṅgāni*), that is, to say:²¹

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| (1) before giving (preparing to give), | the giver is happy; | |
| (2) while giving, | her mind is joyful with faith; | |
| (3) having given, | her mind is joyful. ²² | (A 6.37,2/3:336), SD 22.1 |

3.1.3 In place of the old non-Buddhist tradition of merits, the Buddha introduced a new Dharma-centred teaching called the 3 grounds for meritorious deeds (*puñña,kiriya,vatthu*), which is found in **the Puñña,-kiriya,vatthu Sutta 1** (A 8.36,2).²³ The 3 grounds of meritorious deed comprise of: (1) giving (*dāna*), (2) moral virtue (*sīla*) and (3) mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). More fully, these teaching comprises the following:

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| (1) <i>the ground for merit-making based on</i> | giving; | <i>dāna,maya puñña,kiriya,vatthu</i> |
| (2) <i>the ground for merit-making based on</i> | moral virtue; | <i>sīla,maya puñña,kiriya,vatthu</i> |
| (3) <i>the ground for merit-making based on</i> | mental cultivation. | <i>bhāvanā,maya puñña,kiriya,vatthu</i> |

¹⁹ S 22.58 (SD 49.10).

²⁰ On natural adaptation, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

²¹ For other right conditions of giving, see **Dutiyaṅguttaka S** (S 3.20), SD 22.5 (2).

²² *Idha bhikkhave pubb'eva dānā sumano hoti, dadari cittaṃ pasādeti, datvā attamano hoti*. See also **Aṅkura Pv** (Pv 11.9.49/27); PvA 132 f.

²³ A 8.86,2 (SD 22.17); also in **Puñña.kiri,vatthu S 2** (It 60), SD 22.17(2.1).

In the **Mā Puñña Bhāyī Sutta** (It 22), the 3 grounds for meritorious deeds are respectively called: (1) **giving** (*dāna*), (2) **taming** (*dama*) and (3) **restraint** (*saññāma*) (It 22).²⁴ The first ground is the same as in the 10 grounds for meritorious deeds. The second ground, “taming” (*dama*), refers to the taming of our body and speech—which constitutes moral virtue. And the third, “restraint” (*saññāma*), apparently refers to the guarding of the mind to remove the 5 mental hindrances: sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and guilt, and doubt.²⁵

3.1.4 The Commentaries expanded the 3 grounds for meritorious deeds into the 10 grounds for meritorious deeds (*dasa puñña, kiriya, vatthu*), as follows:²⁶

<u>The 10 ground for meritorious deeds</u>			<u>The divine abodes</u>	
(1) <u>giving</u>	<i>dāna</i>	}	lovingkindness	<i>mettā</i>
(2) <u>moral virtue</u>	<i>sīla</i>			
(3) <u>mental cultivation</u>	<i>bhāvanā</i>			
(4) respectfulness	<i>apacāyana</i>	}	compassion	<i>karuṇā</i>
(5) service	<i>veyyāvacca</i>			
(6) dedicating of merit	<i>patti, dāna</i>	}	gladness	<i>muditā</i>
(7) rejoicing in the merit of others	<i>pattānumodanā</i>			
(8) listening to the Dharma	<i>dhamma, savana</i>			
(9) teaching the Dharma	<i>dhamma, desanā</i>	}	equanimity	<i>upekkhā</i>
(10) straightening of views	<i>diṭṭhi'jju, kamma</i>			

Table 3.1.4 The 10 grounds for meritorious deeds and the divine abodes

We can see that the set of the 10 grounds for meritorious deeds is structured on the framework of **the 4 divine abodes** (*brahma, vihāra*): lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity.²⁷ It is possible that this set was formulated under the influence of the decimal system which was well known to Indian mathematicians around and after the Buddha’s times. It is also possible that this set of 10 grounds was also the prototype for the late set of the 10 perfections²⁸ of the Bodhisattva, which was introduced in response to early Mahāyāna developments in the Bodhisattva ideal.²⁹

3.1.5 Merit (*puñña*), as we already know, is the pre-Buddhist notion of good—especially right action in terms of proper rituals and priestly practice. The opposite of this is called “bad” (*pāpa*): those who belief in some kind of God-idea would probably use the term “evil,” or even “sin,” to signify any kind of action contrary to their dogmas and orthodoxy (or technically, orthopraxy), especially belief in God and related beliefs. The Buddha rejects such beliefs and false, imaginative and harmful—as clearly seen in, for example, **the Te, vija Sutta** (D 13).³⁰

²⁴ It 22 (SD 2.11b).

²⁵ See **It 22** esp the closing verses (§§6-7). On the mental hindrances, see **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1.

²⁶ For details on the set of 10 grounds for meritorious deeds, see SD 22.17 (5.1.2).

²⁷ On the 4 divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), see **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5.

²⁸ The 10 perfections (*dasa pāramī*) are those of: (1) giving (*dāna*), (2) moral virtue (*sīla*), (3) renunciation (*nek-khamma*), (4) wisdom (*paññā*), (5) effort (*virīya*), (6) patience (*khanti*), (7) truth (*sacca*), (8) determination (*adhī-jhāna*), (9) lovingkindness (*mettā*), and (10) equanimity (*upekkhā*) (J 1:73; DhA 1:84): see SD 15.7 (2.4) (1) n.

²⁹ DA 3:999; Abdh 146.

³⁰ D 13 (SD 1.8).

3.2 KUSALĀKUSALA: UNWHOLESOME AND WHOLESOME ACTION

3.2.1 A comparison of the courses. In place of the unquestioning faith and superstition of the priestly and theistic religions, the Buddha teaches **the 10 courses of unwholesome actions** (*dasa kusala kamma, -patha*) and **the 10 courses of wholesome actions** (*dasa kusala kamma, patha*)—simply, these are the 10 kinds of good karma and the 10 kinds of bad karma, respectively. These twin teachings are given in some detail in, for example, **the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 136).³¹ These teachings are here summarized in this comparative table as follows:

<u>Unwholesome courses of action</u> ³²	<u>Whole courses of action</u>	<u>Virtues conducive to:</u>	<u>karmic doors of deeds</u> ³³
(1) killing	non-killing	compassion	the body (bodily karma)
(2) stealing	non-stealing	generosity	
(3) sexual misconduct	restraint	contentment	
(4) false speech	non-falsehood	truth	speech (verbal karma)
(5) divisive speech	non-divisive speech	concord	
(6) harsh speech	non-harsh speech	pleasant speech	
(7) frivolous chatter	non-frivolous chatter	beneficial talk	the mind (mental karma)
(8) covetousness	non-covetousness	charity	
(9) ill will	non-ill will	lovingkindness	
(10) wrong view	right view	wisdom	

Table 3.2.1 The 10 unwholesome courses of action

3.2.2 These 2 sets of the 10 courses of karma—the first on the ethics of omission, the second on the ethics of commission—provides a very comprehensive **philosophy of social ethics** or universal morality. This is not only a philosophy—the idea—of universal ethics, but also a code of daily practice for all Buddhists. Such a habitual conduct is said to be wholesome in the sense of being *meritorious* (*puñña*), that is, it is the foundation for a “good society.” When people behave in such ethical ways, it makes human society wholesome and productive—the is the “good society.”

On a deeper level, it sustains the conditions that conduce to good rebirths. On the other hand, any act of demerit (*apuñña* or *pāpa*) conduces to bad rebirths, even to any of the 4 lower worlds—the asura, the animal, the preta and the hell states. Notice, too, that “mental cultivation” or meditation is missing from both the 3 grounds of meritorious deeds and also from the 10 grounds. In other words, this is the basic human conduct that humanizes us and keeps us human.

These courses of good karma (*kusala kamma, patha*), when practised fully and diligently, can bring us even beyond the human state, **divinizing** us with heavenly blessings in this life itself, and heavenly life in the hereafter. However, they go no further than that. In other words, they still keep us *within samsara*, the cycle of rebirths and re-deaths.

³¹ M 136 (SD 4.16). See also **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,7-10), SD 5.7; **Sañcetanika S** (A 10.206,1-7), SD 3.9; **(Vitthāra) Kamma S** (A 4.232) + SD 4.13 (2.2.3).

³² For analyses of each of the 10 unwholesome courses of action, see SD 5.7 (2).

³³ On the 3 doors (*dvāra*) of karma, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,11-14), SD 5.7.

3.3 BEYOND MERIT AND DEMERIT

3.3.1 The 3 grounds for meritorious deeds (*puñña, kiriya, vatthu*), on the other hand, is an ancient teaching (notice, too, it is a very small set of 3 items) that includes meditation, that is, giving, moral conduct and mental cultivation as the bases of merit. This **merit** is no more the old idea of “right ritual and external action,” but that of right mindfulness and self-effort.

3.3.2 Dāna. Clearly, the teaching of the 3 grounds for meritorious deeds (*puñña, kiriya, vatthu*) [1.2.3.3] are for lay practice. The true Buddhist life begins with **giving** (*dāna*) and charity (*cāga*): those who are able should help those who are less able. Wealth is a blessing because we are able to practice **charity** with it, that is, alleviate the sufferings of others so that they are able to cultivate more human productivity and creativity, and divine qualities of love, ruth, joy and peace.³⁴

Wealth can be used, unwholesomely or wholesomely. When we use our wealth to define and control society and religion, to define and delimit Buddhism, then we are only contributing to its spiritual decline. Wealth, then, is merely a symptom of a profound and perpetual inner poverty. This is, of course, a seriously unwholesome karma.

Wealth, then, should be wholesomely used to promote learning and freedom, social and spiritual: the full joy of living with others and being truly ourselves. Instead of raising temple walls for idol-worship and tribal activities, it is better to build Dharma centres and Buddhist universities, and to support worthy renunciants and promote full-time lay Dharma workers and ministries.

In other words, wealth can be a very effective tool in educating people in the true teaching of the Buddha and letting this education free them from selfishness (including narcissism), from doubts (and ignorance), and from attachment to rituals and vows (including superstition). Wealth, properly used, can and should conduce to spiritual individuation—even fruiting in the attaining of streamwinning in this life itself. It is in this spirit that the Buddha, in **the Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11), declares that education as “the miracle of instruction” (*anusāsani pāṭihāriya*) is the greatest of miracles.³⁵

3.3.2 Sīla. **Moral virtue** (*sīla*) is the 2nd of the 3 grounds for meritorious deeds, following giving. Wholesome giving based on lovingkindness (*mettā*) generates joy in both the giver and the recipient. When there is lovingkindness and joy, it is easier to practise the moral precepts of respecting *life, labour, freedom, truth and the mind*. These are the values or qualities embodied in the 10 wholesome courses of action.³⁶

More specifically, these are **the 5 precepts**—which reminds us to respect life, labour, freedom, truth and the mind—which are, in fact, the essence of both the 10 wholesome courses of action and the 3 grounds for meritorious deeds. The last value—that of “the mind,” that is, keeping it unintoxicated—is that of mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*)—see (4) below—as a ground for merit. A calm and clear mind leads into a meditation of self-discovery and self-liberation, which empowers us to reach out benevolently to others.

3.3.4 Bhāvanā. **Mental cultivation**—that is, mindfulness and meditation—is what makes the early Buddhist conception of merit (*puñña*). While the outside doctrine of “merit” is based on right ritual conduct and a show of decency for social approval and legitimization, Buddhist **merit** is about cultivating the

³⁴ “Love, ruth, joy and peace” are colloquial counterparts of lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity, ie, the 4 divine abodes: see **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5 (1.3.2.2).

³⁵ D 11,8 (SD 1.7).

³⁶ On how lovingkindness (*mettā*) generates merit, see **Puñña) Mettā S** (A 7.58a), SD 2.11a; **Ma Puñña Bhāyī S** (It 22), SD 2.11b.

body (moral virtue) for the sake of cultivating the mind. A true Buddhist, then, is one who is both “bodily cultivated” (*bhāvita, kāya*)—morally ethical in action and speech—and “mentally cultivated,” with a calm and clear mind of wisdom and joy. In short, he is one with a healthy mind in a healthy body (*mens sana in corpore sana*).³⁷

3.3.5 Hence, even though the 3 grounds for meritorious deeds are for lay practice, they work—through mental cultivation—as a preparation for us to reach the noble eightfold path in this life itself. Indeed, the proper practice of such meritorious action is the training of the path (*sikkhā, pada*) itself. This is **the 3 trainings** (*ti, sikkhā*) in moral virtue, mental concentration and insight wisdom.³⁸ It is in this connection that the Buddha declares in **the Ma Puñña Bhāyī Sutta** (It 22): “Bhikshus, do not fear merit.³⁹ This ‘merit,’ bhikshus, is another name for happiness, desirable, pleasant, beloved and agreeable.”⁴⁰

3.3.6 While merits (*puñña*), in themselves, keep us happy *in* this world—both as humans and in the heavens, here and the hereafter—our **wholesome action** (*kusala, kamma*) are what prepares us to be free of even this world—to cross over (*tiṇṇa*) the sea of suffering for the other shore (*paraṅgata*), that is, nirvana. What makes *wholesome action* stand above meritorious deed is that our mental wholesomeness is able to free us from the cycle of samsara—this cycle of rebirths and redeaths—itsself.

Since merit and demerit (*puñña, pāpa*) fetter to this cyclic world, we need to understand how to manage them. On a simple psychological level, to “have given up (both) good and bad” (*puñña, pāpa, pahīna*, Dh 39),⁴¹ means freeing the mind from all our views about good and bad. This is not a philosophical non-chalance or laissez-faire, but a mind that has freed itself from the world of senses so that it is able to joyfully see and understand itself—a mind of calm and clarity that has realized insight wisdom.

The same, too, is said to overcoming the duality of both “the unwholesome and the wholesome” (*kusalākusala-p, pahīna*) (Sn 715c)—that is, one whose spiritual task is all done. He is the one who is truly free from both good and bad—he is the arhat.⁴²

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³⁷ See SD 29.6a (4.2.3).

³⁸ On the 3 training, see **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88), SD 24.10c; **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6; SD 1.11 (5).

³⁹ “Merit,” *puñña*, given in the plural (*puññānaṃ*) in Pali, but in modern English, “merit” is an uncountable noun. In the pl sense, it refers to “acts of merit.” On merit, see **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 (6.3) *Puñña*.

⁴⁰ It 22/15 (SD 2.11b).

⁴¹ See SD 2.10 (3.2.3.4).

⁴² See **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 (6.3); SD 2.10 (3.2.3.4). On merit and demerit, see **(Vitthāra) Kamma S** (A 4.232) @ SD 4.13 (2.2.3).

Rāga Sutta 1

The First Discourse on Lust

It 68

1 This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One, spoken by the arhat [worthy one], thus have I heard.⁴³

One who has not abandoned the 3 roots

2 Bhikshus, whoever ⁴⁴	has <u>not</u> abandoned has <i>not</i> abandoned has <i>not</i> abandoned	lust, hate, delusion,
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3 that one, bhikshus, is said to be
bound by Māra,⁴⁵

caught in Māra's snare,
one who acts according to the wishes of the bad one.

*baddho*⁴⁶ *mārassa*
paṭimukk'assa māra,pāso
yathā,kāma,karaṇīyo ca pāpimato

One who has abandoned the 3 roots

4 Bhikshus, whoever	<u>has</u> abandoned <i>has</i> abandoned <i>has</i> abandoned	lust, ⁴⁷ hate. delusion,
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5 one, bhikshus, is said to be
not bound by Māra,

released from Māra's snare,
one who acts not according to the wishes of the bad one.

*abaddho*⁴⁸ *mārassa*
omukk'assa māra,pāso
na yathā,kāma,karaṇīyo ca pāpimato

The self-cultivated verse

6 This is the meaning of what the Blessed One said. The meaning here is spoken thus:⁴⁹ [57]

7 <i>Yassa rāgo ca doso ca</i> <i>avijjā ca virājitā </i> <i>taṃ bhāvit'att'aññataram</i> <i>brahma,bhūtam tathāgataṃ </i>	For whom lust and hate and ignorance, too, have been overcome— that one is amongst the self-cultivated, ⁵⁰ become holy, thus-come [tathāgata],
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⁴³ *Vuttam h'etaṃ bhagavatā. Vuttam arahatā' ti me sutam*. This is said to be spoken by the laywoman **Khujj'uttarā**: see SD 16.14 (1).

⁴⁴ *Yassa kassaci*, "whichever one who ...," addressing the laity and the monastic (ItA 2:36,7) [1.3]. See (1.3). Cf **Rāga S 2** (It 69,2+4), which addresses monastics (SD 52.10b).

⁴⁵ On Māra, see (1.2).

⁴⁶ Be Ce *baddho*; Ee Se *bandho*. See (1.2.2).

⁴⁷ On how these are abandoned by the 4 stages of sainthood, see (2).

⁴⁸ Be Ce *abaddho*; Ee Se *abandho*. See (1.2.3).

⁴⁹ *Etam attham bhagavā avoca, tatth'etaṃ iti vuccati*.

⁵⁰ "Self-cultivated," *bhāvit'atta*, ie, mentally developed. On *attā* as "mind," see SD 26.9 (1.6.2, 2.1.2); words SD 26.9 (2.1).

*buddham vera, bhay'atītam
āhu sabba, pahāyinan'ti ||*

awakened [buddha], has crossed over anger and fear,
who is said to have abandoned the all.

8 This matter [meaning] too was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.⁵¹

— evaṃ —

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⁵¹ *Ayam pi attho vutto bhagavatā. Iti me sutan ti.* The foll verse is quoted at Kvu 477 (Kvu:SR 273); cf V 2:205.