

## 5

## Loṇa,phala Sutta

Loṇa,palla Sutta<sup>1</sup> or Loṇaka,palla Sutta, The Discourse on the Salt Crystal | A 3.99

Theme: How lovingkindness can limit the effects of bad karma

Translated &amp; annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

1 Does one reap what one has sown?

## 1.1 KARMA AS A CURSE

1.1.1 A popular definition of karma is found in **the Isayo Samuddaka Sutta**<sup>2</sup> (S 11.10):

Whatever seed that is sown, that is the fruit reaped therefrom;  
 Good (comes) to the good-doer; bad to the bad-doer!  
 By you, dear, the seed is sown, so the fruit you will taste.<sup>3</sup> (S 903/11.10/1:227), SD 39.2

This verse or its popular version—“as we sow, so we shall reap”—has often been quoted as a Buddhist article of faith. The interesting point here is that this stanza (*gāthā*), included in **the Sa,gāthā Vagga** (the first chapter) of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, actually belongs to the free floating ancient gnomic poetry of India which the Buddhists have preserved.<sup>4</sup> In other words, this is technically not “Buddha Word” (*Buddha,vacana*) but a popular saying. Only what is truly “well-said” (*subhāsita*)—that which lessens or removes greed, hate and delusion—is regarded as Buddha Word.

**1.1.2** The background of this popular “sower’s karma” saying is found in **the Samuddaka Sutta** (S 1:227), where a Buddhist myth relates an impending battle between the gods and the asuras (“titans”).<sup>5</sup> The asuras, according to the account, dwell in the great ocean. Some virtuous seers who dwell on the ocean shore, fearing that the asuras would destroy their hermitage as they had before, requested “a guarantee of safety” (*abhaya,dakkhiṇā*) from Sambara, the asura leader. However, Sambara, who detest the seers for being “the hated devotees of Sakra [the lord of the devas]” (*duṭṭhānaṃ sakka,sevināṃ*), reply, “I will give you only fear!” The terrified seers resort to putting a curse on Sambara:

Asking for safety, you give us but fear.  
 We received this from you: may fear without end be yours!

Whatever seed that is sown, that is the fruit reaped therefrom;  
 Good (comes) to the good-doer; bad to the bad-doer!  
 By you, dear, the seed is sown, so the fruit you will taste. (S 902 f/11.10/1:227)

<sup>1</sup> So Be, WT.

<sup>2</sup> Also called **Sambara Samuddaka S** or simply **Samuddaka S**. An almost identical saying, “By good works a man becomes good (*puṇya*), by bad works bad (*pāpa*),” attr to the Vedic sage Yajñavalkya and secretly transmitted to another sage, Jāratkāra (Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.2). See Basham 1989:43 f.

<sup>3</sup> *Yādisaṃ vappate bījaṃ, tādisaṃ harate phalaṃ | kalyāṇa,kārī kalyāṇaṃ, pāpa,kārī ca pāpakaṃ | pavuttaṃ vappate bījaṃ, phalaṃ paccaṇubhossasī ti.*

<sup>4</sup> Winternitz 1933 2:57 f. Another example of the ancient Indian gnomic tradition is **Āḷavaka S** (Sn 1.10), which is a riddle in the ballad (*ākhyāna*) form, given by the yaksha Āḷavaka to the Buddha who answers them, Sn 181-192. “Too many cooks spoil the broth” and “Good wine needs no bush” are English gnomes.

<sup>5</sup> “Asuras,” (*asurā*), lit “anti-god”, variously tr as “titan,” “demon.” They were once gods in Tāvatiṃsa but fell from their state through being intoxicated with alcohol. Their attempted return to Tāvatiṃsa resulted in protracted battles with the gods led by Sakra (S 1:216 ff; J 1:202-204; DhA 1:272-280; SnA 484 f).

It is said that as soon as Sambara falls asleep, he wakes up howling as if struck from all sides by a hundred spears. The other asuras rush to comfort him until the break of dawn. Henceforth, his sickened mind trembles; hence, his other name, Vepa,citti (*cittam vepati*) (SA 1:347).

## 1.2 KARMA AS FUTURE INSURANCE

**1.2.1** Another popular notion of karma is found in **the Ayyakā Sutta** (S 3.22), where the Buddha consoles Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, on account of the loss of his beloved grandmother:

|                        |  |  |
|------------------------|--|--|
| 431                    | <i>Sabbe sattā marissantī<br/>maraṇ'antaṃ hi jīvitam<br/>yathā kammaṃ gamissantī<br/>puñña,pāpa,phalūpagā</i>  | All beings will die—<br>for life ends in death.<br><u>They will fare according to their karma,<br/>reaping the fruits of good and bad—</u>                                     |
| 431A                   | <i>nirayaṃ pāpa,kammantā<br/>puñña,kammā ca suggaṭim</i>   | Bad deeds bring them to hell,<br>but because of good deeds, to heaven.   |
| Alternate translation: |  | [Bad deeds are hell;   deeds of merit, heaven.]  |
| 432                    | <i>Tasmā kareyya kalyāṇam<br/>nicayaṃ samparāyikam<br/>puññāni para,lokasmim<br/>patiṭṭhā honti pāṇinan ti</i> | Therefore, one should do what is good<br>to store up for what is to come [the future life].<br>Merits are the support for living beings<br>in the other world. (S 3.22,8/1:97) |

**1.2.2** Here we see the Buddha consoling the grieving rajah with a simple popular truth without going into deep teachings which the rajah was not ready for anyway. Understandably this is only a “provisional” teaching without any mention of the way of the samsara that karma supports.

## 1.3 KARMA ACCORDING TO THE LOṆA,PHALA SUTTA

### 1.3.1 The Sutta teaching on karma

**1.3.1.1 The Loṇa,phala Sutta** presents karma in two possible ways: the first is a fixed “lex talionis”-like way and the second, a more flexible position. These two positions are formulated as follows:

(1) The position rejected by the Buddha:

**“Whoever, bhikshus, were to say thus: ‘Whatever karma this person has done, he would experience that very same karma,’ this being so, bhikshus, there is no living of the holy life, there appears to be no opportunity for the utter ending of suffering.” [§1.1]**

(*Yo bhikkhave evaṃ vadeyya, yathā yathā’yaṃ puriso kammaṃ karoti tathā tathā taṃ paṭisaṃvediyatīti, evaṃ santam, bhikkhave, brahma,cariya,vāso na hoti, okāso na paññāyati sammā dukkhassa anta,kiriyāya.*)

(2) The position accepted by the Buddha:

**“But, bhikshus, whoever were to say thus: ‘Whatever karma experienceable in certain way that a person does, he would experience its ripening [fruiting] in just that way,’ then, there is the living of the holy life, the opportunity for the utter ending of suffering.” [§1.2]**

(*Yo ca kho bhikkhave evaṃ vadeyya, yathā yathā vedanīyaṃ ayaṃ puriso kammaṃ karoti tathā tathā'ssa vipākaṃ paṭisaṃvediyatāti, evaṃ santam, bhikkhave, brahma, cariya, vāso hoti, okāso paññāyati sammā dukkhassa anta, kiriyāya.*)

**1.3.1.2** The exact difference between the two positions may not be clearly evident, if we are unfamiliar with the sutta teachings on karma. The Sutta Commentary gives instructive clarifications:

“**That very same karma**” (*tathā tathā tam*) means that if one says, ‘Whatever karma one has done, one would experience that very same karma’ (*yathā yathā kammaṃ karoti, tathā tathā'ssa vipākaṃ paṭisaṃvediyat'eva*), then, since it is not possible to prevent the fruition of karma once it is done, one would surely experience the result of that very same karma.

‘**There is no living of the holy life**’ (*brahma, cariya, vāso na hotīti*). This means that karma to be experienced upon rebirth (*upapajja, vedanīyaṃ kammaṃ*), done before the cultivation of the path, must be experienced, whether or not one has lived the holy life.

‘**There appears to be no opportunity for the utter ending of suffering**’ (*okāso na paññāyati sammā dukkhassa anta, kiriyāyāti*). Since, in such a situation, there is the accumulating of karma by oneself and the potential of its result, therefore, there appears to be no opportunity for making an end to the cycle of suffering.” (AA 2:359)

**1.3.1.3** The Chinese parallel (MĀ 11) seemed to have struggled with this key passage, too. The Chinese at **T1.433a15-a17** reads as follows:

|                       |  |  |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| 世尊告諸比丘：               | 隨人所作業則受其報。                               | 如是不行梵行不得盡苦。                            |
| Shìzūn gào zhū bīqiū: | <u>suí rén suǒ zuò yè zé shòu qí bào</u> | rúshì bùxíng fànxíng bùdé jìn kǔ       |
| 若作是說，                 | 隨人所作業則受其報。                               | 如是 修行梵行便得盡苦。                           |
| ruò zuò shì shuō,     | <u>suí rén suǒ zuò yè zé shòu qí bào</u> | rú shì xiūxíng fànxíng biàn dé jìn kǔ. |

#### Translation:

The Blessed One said to the monks, |

(If one says:) “‘According to what a person has done, he receives its result,’ | —

as such, if he does not practise the holy life, he is unable to end suffering. | |

If it is the case that | ‘according to what a person has done, he receives its result,’ | then, if he leads the holy life, he will end suffering.”

(The text, further on, adds that this person’s lifespan will be very long, 壽命極至長 *shòumìng jí cháng.*)

The Chinese translation is saying that two persons may hold the same view about karma, as stated here, but the one who does not practise the holy life will *not* end suffering, while the one who does will end suffering. This interpretation clearly differs from the Pali version.<sup>6</sup>

**1.3.1.4** According to the Commentary [1.3.1.2], the Sutta teaching is that if we have to experience every karmic result to be experienced in our next life (*upapajja, vedanīya kamma*), and every karmic result of our actions to be experienced in some subsequent life (*apara, pariyāya, vedanīya kamma*), we would have to continue indefinitely, rebirth after rebirth, to experience those results. Since such karma would keep on fruiting, we would have to remain in samsara forever!

The Commentary then clarifies that it is only the cycle of the fruition of accumulated karma that is experienced accordingly (*aṭṭhakathāyañ hi laddha, vipāka, vāram eva kammaṃ yathā, vedanīyaṃ kammaṃ nāmāti vuttam*). This is followed by an Abhidhamma analysis of karma.

<sup>6</sup> For another error in the Chin tr, see §2(1) n (last line).

**1.3.1.5** The Commentary explains the possibility of the holy life and ending suffering [§1.2] in terms of **Abhidhamma theory**. Karma, according to this theory, is created by the 7 “impulsion” moments of consciousness (*jāvana,citta*) (the karmically active cycle in the cognitive process). The first impulsion moment (*jāvana*) is of the type to be experienced in this life itself (*diṭṭha,dhamma,vedanīya*). If it does not fruit in this life, it becomes inoperative (*ahosi*).

The 7<sup>th</sup> impulsion moment is to be experienced in the next life (*upapajja,vedanīya*), and if it does not ripen, it becomes inoperative. The middle 5 impulsion moments are to be experienced in some future rebirth (*apara,pariyāya,vedanīya*), that is, at any future time as long as we remain in samsara. Bodhi instructively notes, “Since this theory arose long after the compilation of the Nikāyas, it is improbable that it conveys the purport of the present passage [§1.2].”<sup>7</sup> (A:B 1666 n547)

**1.3.1.6** According to the Sutta, when we create unwholesome karma, we will experience its result as painful whether in a severe way or in a mild way. The degree of the karmic result, however, is not strictly commensurate with the severity of the original karma. In other words, we need not experience the result of our karma in *exactly the same way* that we have created it.

For example, if we have killed a cockroach, we will *surely not* be reborn as a cockroach. How we would suffer the pain of a bad karma depends significantly on our habitual conduct and our mental state. If we constantly cultivate lovingkindness, for example, we would feel the effect of bad karma much less severely than if we had a negative mind. Although the karmic fruit of being habitually drunk is that of eventually falling into “madness” or worse, **the Sarakāṇi Sutta** (S 55.24) records how a drunkard actually dies a streamwinner, on account of his wholesome change before dying.<sup>8</sup>

The same principle works with wholesome karma. We experience its fruition in a pleasant way *to some degree*. Both bad karmas and good karmas work their respective effects on us in varying degrees. There is no rigid quid pro quo between karmic actions and consequences. It is this variability that allows us, through the cultivation of the path—living a moral life, cultivating the mind, nurturing wisdom, seeing true reality—to overcome the consequences of even severe bad karmas. This way, we are able to attain the end of suffering.

This is the understanding of karma that we can tease out from the parables given in the Sutta. The import of the Sutta, then, is that when our good and bad karmas ripen, they will be experienced accordingly, as pleasant and as painful, regardless of the nature of the original action.<sup>9</sup>

### **1.3.2 Early Buddhist conception of karma**

**1.3.2.1** The Saṃyutta statements on karma, as such, should be understood in its context as a folk saying, that are not fully reflective of the Buddhist doctrine of karma, especially since such a folk notion may encourage a determinist or fatalist view of karma. The Buddhist conception of karma is much more sophisticated as would be apparent from our study of the Loṇa,phala Sutta.

<sup>7</sup> These 3 kinds of karma—*diṭṭha,dhamma kamma, vedanīya, upapajja,vedanīya kamma* and *apara,pariyāya,-vedanīya kamma*—are mentioned at Kvu 611,21 f (cf A 9.13/4:382,9 f); AA 2:210,6. On the 4 kinds of karma—with *ahosi,kamma*, “inoperative karma,” see Vism 19.14/601,1.

<sup>8</sup> On the karmic fruit of being habitually drunk, see **Sabba,lahusa S** (A 8.40,8), SD 6.5. On the good rebirth of a drunkard, see **Sarakāṇi S** (S 55.24), SD 3.6. However, this should not be misconstrued as any kind of approval of killing or drinking. This only illustrates the mitigating circumstances that often attend to our karmic actions. Karma does not arise from merely a single cause, but their effects are shaped by numerous conditions. See **Karma**, SD 18.1 esp (5.4).

<sup>9</sup> For a possible misinterpretation in the Chin parallel at MĀ 11 (T1.1.433a12-434a11), see A:B 1666 f n547.

**1.3.2.2** In the Sutta, the sentence ‘Whatever experienceable karma [that do entail a consequence] that a person does, he would experience *the result of that karma*’ [§1.1] means that a man must reap what he has sown.<sup>10</sup> In fact, **H C Warren**, despite rendering *bhikkhū* as “priests,” gives an insightful translation of the sentence as:

O priests, if anyone were to say that a man must reap according to his deeds, in that case, O priests, there is no religious life, nor is any opportunity afforded for the entire extinction of misery. (*Buddhism in Translations*, 1896:221; emphasis added)

And Warren similarly renders well the closing sentence:

But if anyone says, O priests, that the reward a man reaps accords with his deeds, in that case, O priests, there is religious life, and opportunity is afforded for the entire extinction of misery.” (*Buddhism in Translations*, 1896:221; emphasis added)

**1.3.2.3 Luis Gomez**, on the other hand, renders the clause (*vedanīyaṃ kammaṃ*) as that there are “acts that do entail a consequence,” explaining that there are also “those (acts) that do not entail a fruit,” adding,

Moreover, the nature of consequence does not necessarily correspond or is not directly proportional to the nature or intensity of the act, for the final result depends on the maturation of the fruit, the vipāka, and this maturation depends on the soil in which the act is, so to speak, planted.<sup>11</sup> (Gomez 1975:83)

**1.3.2.4** If we take “experienceable” (*vedanīyaṃ*) here as qualifying “karma” (*kammaṃ*), then we can also take it as distinguishing “experientable karma” (our personal action) from the Vedic *karma* or rituals. The Buddha rejects the notion of any efficacy of the brahminical sacrifices or rituals (done in the belief that whatever we offer would reward us with the same in the next life or in future lives, or that such rituals could bring us any spiritual progress or liberation).

## 2 The “great self” and the “small self”

The idea of a “great self” is mentioned in **the Loṇa,phala Sutta** (A 3.99). The doer of a minor bad deed experiences karmic pains in hell for it, but the same minor bad deed done by another only fruits in this life and not beyond.

The first kind of person is “of uncultivated body,<sup>12</sup> uncultivated virtue, uncultivated mind, uncultivated wisdom: he is (mentally) limited (*paritta*), he has a **small self** (*app’ātuma*)<sup>13</sup>—he dwells with a little suffering.” [§2.1]

<sup>10</sup> Compare this to the seers’ curse (and gnome) mentioned earlier here: “Just as the seeds are sown, so shall the harvest be.”

<sup>11</sup> On a plant imagery—karma as seeds—see (**Kamma**) **Nidāna Sutta** (A 3.33/1:134-136).

<sup>12</sup> “Of uncultivated body,” *abhāvita,kāya*. The explanation to this term and *bhāvita,kāya* (“cultivated body”) are found in **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36) where Saccaka initially identifies *kāya,bhāvanā* (“development of body”) as “self-mortification” (M 36,4/1:237). Comy explains that the Buddha takes “development of body” to mean “cultivation of insight” (*vipassanā bhāvanā*) and “development of mind” to be “cultivation of calmness” (*samatha bhāvanā*) (MA 2:285). Considering the bifurcation of meditation into “insight” and “calmness” is not canonical, we might take the term *abhāvita,kāya* to simply mean “torturing the body” or “not taking proper care of one’s health” and that *bhāvita,kāya* to mean “keeping oneself physically healthy”.

The second kind of person is “of cultivated body, cultivated virtue, cultivated mind, cultivated wisdom, he is (mentally) unlimited (*aparitta*), he has a **great self** (*mah’attā*)—he dwells immeasurable (*appamāṇa*).” [§2.2]

## 2.2 HOW THE SELF IS TRANSFORMED

**2.2.1** The contrast between the two is given by **the parable of the salt crystal**. A salt crystal put into a bowl of water makes it salty and undrinkable, but the salt crystal when thrown into the Ganges river does not make it salty nor undrinkable.

**2.2.2** A person with a “great self” commits a small bad deed that brings karmic result but he does not experience its karmic fruits in hell (nor any of the lower states). In other words, this refers especially to a stream-winner, a once-returner or a non-returner (but not an arhat, since he has already transcended rebirth).

**2.2.3** We can transform our “small” self into a “great” self through such practices as the cultivation of **lovingkindness** (*mettā*) or of **mindfulness** (*sati*). The importance of the cultivation of lovingkindness is attested by **the Brahma,viḥāra Sutta** (A 10.208),<sup>14</sup> where a meditator whose mind has “grown great” and “immeasurable” through lovingkindness knows:

Formerly my mind was limited (*paritta*) and uncultivated, but now my mind is boundless and well cultivated. Any limited karma<sup>15</sup> that was done neither remains nor persists there.

(A 10.208/5:299)

**2.2.4** Instructions in the practice of mindfulness with an immeasurable mind are given in **the Mahā Taṇha,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38), where it is stated that one who feels neither attraction nor repulsion for any of the six sense-objects, and who has mindfulness of the body, lives “with a mind that is immeasurable (*appamāṇa,cetaso*),” in contrast to someone with the opposite qualities who dwells “with a mind that is limited (*paritta,cetaso*).”<sup>16</sup>

**2.2.5** The Loṇa,phala Sutta should also be studied with **the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 136), which discusses the complex working of karma and not merely that “good begets good, bad begets bad.”

<sup>13</sup> “Small self” (*app’ātumā*) or “insignificant self” (Harvey 1995:56; 2000:25).

<sup>14</sup> A 10.208/5:299 (SD 2.10).

<sup>15</sup> “Limited karma,” *pamāṇa,katam kammaṃ*, as in **Tevijja S** (D 13,77/1:251) & **Saṅkha(dhama) S** (S 42.8/4:322). AA here says that “limited karma” refers to sense-sphere karma (*kāmmāvacara,kamma*),” and “unlimited karma’ (*appamāṇa,katam kammaṃ*) refers to form-sphere karma. It is called ‘unlimited’ because it is done by transcending the limit, for it is developed by way of specified, unspecified and directional pervasion.” SA on **Saṅkha S** explains that “When (simple) lovingkindness is said, this can be interpreted either as access concentration or absorption, but when it is qualified as ‘freedom of mind’ (*ceto,vimutti*) it definitely means absorption (*jhāna*).” The point is that if a person masters the “freedom of mind by lovingkindness” at the level of absorption, the karmic potential of this absorption attainment will take precedence over sense-sphere karma and will generate rebirth into the form realm. See Vism 309-311/9.49-58. (S:B 1149 n346; A:B 315 n73)

<sup>16</sup> M 38,40/1:270 (SD 4.16).

### 3 Karma is what we are

**3.1** The Loṇaphala Sutta presents the early Buddhist teaching on karma as an instructive counterpoint to that of the brahminical version and karma as ritual.<sup>17</sup> The Sutta, in fact, opens with the Buddha's outright rejection of the notion that 'Whatever karma a person performs, he would experience *that same karma*.' Good does *not* always beget good, at least not in kind, or by the same measure, quid pro quo.<sup>18</sup>

This is actually common sense. If I have done you a kind deed (say, translate this Sutta for you): does that mean you owe me that same kind deed in return (that you must somehow end up translating the same sutta for me in a future life)? Karma is not something that is really within our control, and yet there seems to be a natural justice about it. I may not get an exact recompense from you for my good deed to you, but the good that I have done *adorns* me: it *makes* me good. In other words, "I *am* my karma," or "I am the 'owner' of my karma,"<sup>19</sup> that is, "I become my karma."<sup>20</sup>

**3.2** Here, it is easy for us to see the vital difference between being and having. A powerful person may *have* much wealth, a lot of things and many friends, but a lone simple money-free monastic *is* still most truly happy even without them, or *because* he is free of them. We may be *measured* by what we have, but we are *defined* and *liberated* by what we are.

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## Loṇaphala Sutta The Discourse on the Salt Crystal

A 3.99

### The great self

**1 [249]** "Whoever, bhikshus, were to say thus:

'Whatever karma this person<sup>21</sup> has done, he would experience *that very same karma*,<sup>22</sup>

this being so, bhikshus, there is no living of the holy life,

there appears to be no opportunity for the utter ending of suffering.

1.2 But, bhikshus, whoever were to say thus:

'Whatever karma experienceable in certain way that a person does,

**he would experience its ripening [fruiting] in just that way,**<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> To the brahmins, *karma* means (1) "right social conduct" (like the lower classes serving the brahmins) and (2) "proper ritual action" (like sponsoring sacrifices for the brahmins to perform). The former is better known in brahminical ideology as *Dharma*, which here means "social duty, propriety." For the Buddhist response to (1), see **Esu-kāri S** (M 96/2:177-184), SD 37.9; to (2), see **Kūṭa,danta S** (D 5/1:127-149), SD 22.8.

<sup>18</sup> A 3.99/1:249-253 (SD 3.5).

<sup>19</sup> *Kamma-s,sako'mhi*, see **Abhiṇṇa Pacca,vekkhitabba Ṭhāna S** (A 5.57,2(5)/3:74), SD 5,12 = **Pabbajita Abhiṇṇa S** (A 10.48,2(7)), SD 48.9.

<sup>20</sup> See **Karma**, SD 18.1 (5.3.3, 6.2).

<sup>21</sup> "This person," *ayaṃ puriso*, ie, a human being.

<sup>22</sup> *Yathā yathāyaṃ puriso kammaṃ karoti tathā tathā taṃ patisaṃvediyati*. It is possible here that "karma" (*kammaṃ*) also refers to the Vedic sacrifice. In that case, the Buddha is saying that there is no wholesome efficacy in such rituals.

<sup>23</sup> *Yathā vedanīyaṃ ayaṃ puriso kammaṃ karoti tathā tathāssa vipākaṃ patisaṃvediyati*, "that should be experienced," *vedanīyaṃ*, or "that which should be experienced or known," ie, whatever fruits one reaps would accord

then, there is the living of the holy life, the opportunity for the utter ending of suffering.<sup>24</sup>

1.3 Here, bhikshus,

a certain person has **done only a slight bad karma**, but it takes him to hell.<sup>25</sup>

1.4 Here again, bhikshus, for another<sup>26</sup> person

such a slight bad karma *that is experienceable right here and now*,<sup>27</sup>

is not experienced in the least, how would it ever be abundant at all?<sup>28</sup>

**2 (1) Bhikshus, what sort of person has done only a slight bad karma, but it takes him to hell?**

Here, bhikshus, a certain person is of

uncultivated body,<sup>29</sup> uncultivated moral conduct, uncultivated mind, uncultivated wisdom:<sup>30</sup>

he is mentally limited,<sup>31</sup> with a small self,<sup>32</sup> [has a limited, small self,] dwelling with (only a) little suffering.<sup>33</sup>

Such a person, bhikshus, has done only a slight bad karma but it takes him to hell.<sup>34</sup>

with one's karma. A:ÑB has "But if one says that a person who performs a kammic action (with a result) that is variably experienceable, will reap its result accordingly—in that there will be (a possibility for) the holy life ... " (A:ÑB 315 n70). Here, *vedanīyaṃ* qualifies *kammaṃ*, thus distinguishing this "karma" (one's deliberate actions) from the Vedic *karma* as ritual. Gomez renders *vedanīyaṃ* here as those which "do entail a consequence" (1975:83). See (2) above.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Clarke Warren, in the early years of western Buddhist scholarship, gives a very insightful, if somewhat free, tr of this passage [§1.1]: "O priests, if any one were to say that a man must reap according to his deeds, in that case, O priests, there is no religious life, nor is any opportunity afforded for the entire extinction of misery. But if anyone says, O priests, that the reward a man reaps accords with his deeds, in that case, O priests, there is religious life, and opportunity is afforded for the entire extinction of misery." (*Buddhism in Translations*, 1896:221). On a problem in the Chin tr, see (1.3.1.3). On how Comy interprets this key idea in Abhidhamma terms, see (1.3.1.5). On an explanation of the Sutta teaching here, see (1.3.1.6).

<sup>25</sup> *Idha bhikkhave ekaccassa puggalassa appamattikam pi pāpaṃ kammaṃ tam enaṃ nirayaṃ upaneti.*

<sup>26</sup> "For another," *ekaccassa*, lit "for a certain (person)".

<sup>27</sup> *Tādisaṃ yeva appamattakaṃ pāpaṃ kammaṃ kataṃ diṭṭha, dhamme c'eva vedanīyaṃ hoti.*

<sup>28</sup> Be *Nāṇu'pi khāyati kiṃ bahu-d-eva*. Cf *n'atthi aṇūpi saññā*, "not even a minute perception; not the least" (Sn 802).

<sup>29</sup> "Uncultivated in body," *abhāvita, kāya*, here meaning "resorting to self-torture, not taking care of one's body or health." See (2.1) above.

<sup>30</sup> Prec 2 lines: *Idha bhikkhave ekacco puggalo abhāvita, kāyo abhāvita, sīlo abhāvita, citto abhāvita, pañño*. The 4 terms "cultivated body" etc occur in (**Piṇḍola**) **Bhāra, dvāja S** (S 35.127, 7/4:111), SD 27.6a(2.4); **Loṇa, phala S** (**A 3.99, 2/1:249, 4/1:250, 5.3/251×2, 8.2/253**), SD 3.5; **Mahā Cunda S** (A 10.24/5:42, 43×2, 44, 45), SD 72.12. See SD 49.4 (1.2.3).

<sup>31</sup> "(Mentally) limited," *paritta*, on account of "limited virtue" (*paritta, guṇa*).

<sup>32</sup> "Small self" (*app'ātumā*) or "insignificant self" (Harvey 1995:25, 56). Comy: His self (*ātumā = attā*) or his personality (*attabhāva*). Even though he may have a large body, he has a bad character on account of his limited virtue (AA 2:361). The Chin parallel, MĀ 11, adds that "his lifespan is extremely short" (壽命甚短 *shòumìng shèn duǎn*) (T1.433a20 = 28).

<sup>33</sup> *Paritto app'ātumo appa, dukkha, vihārī*. I take both *paritto* and *app'ātumo* as referring to the mind. Comy glosses **appa, dukkha, vihārī** as "he dwells in suffering because of the little bad (that he has done)" (*appakena pi pāpena dukkha, vihārī*, AA 2:361).

<sup>34</sup> The Chin (MĀ 11) tr of this whole subsection (1) clearly differs from the Pali (the difference is underscored): 有一人不修身、不修戒、不修心、不修慧，壽命甚短，是謂有人作不善業。必受苦果地獄之報 *wèi yǒu yì rén bù xiū shēn, bù xiū jiè, bù xiū xīn, bù xiū huì, shòu mìng shèn duǎn. shì wèi yǒu rén zuò bù shàn yè, bì shòu kǔ guǒ dìyù zhī bào*, "That is to say, a person who is of uncultivated body, uncultivated moral conduct, uncultivated mind, uncultivated wisdom, has a lifespan that is extremely short. Therefore, a certain person who does bad karma, will surely experience the bitter result that is hell." (T1.26 @ T1.433a19-a21). The Chin parallel omits the line, *paritto app'ātumo*



(2) Bhikshus, what sort of person

**has done such a slight bad karma experienceable right here and now**

but which<sup>35</sup> he does not experience in the least, how would it ever be abundant at all?

Here, bhikshus, a certain person is of

cultivated body,<sup>36</sup> cultivated moral conduct, cultivated mind, cultivated wisdom:

he is mentally unlimited, with a great self, [has a boundless, great self,] who dwells mentally immeasurable.<sup>37</sup>

Such a person, bhikshus, is

*one who has done that same slight bad karma experienceable right here and now,*

*but which he does not experience in the least, how could it ever be abundant at all?*

### The simile of the salt crystal

[250] 3 Bhikshus, suppose a person were to drop **a salt crystal** in a small bowl of water.<sup>38</sup>

What do you think, bhikshus?

Would the water in that small bowl of water become salty on account of that<sup>39</sup> salt crystal, and be unfit to drink?"<sup>40</sup>

"Yes, bhante."

"Why is that?"

"That<sup>41</sup> bowl of water, bhante, has only a little water so that it becomes salty because of the salt crystal, and would be *unfit* to drink."

3.2 Bhikshus, suppose a person were to drop **a salt crystal** in the Ganges river.

What do you think, bhikshus? Would the water in the Ganges river become salty on account of the salt crystal, and be unfit to drink?"

"No, bhante."

"Why is that?"

"That<sup>42</sup> Ganges river, bhante, is a great body of water so that it does not become salty because of the salt crystal, and would *not* be unfit to drink."

3.3 In the same way, bhikshus, here a certain person is one *has done only a slight bad karma but it takes him to hell*. [§1.3]

But, here, again for another person such a slight bad karma experienceable right here and now *is not experienced in the least, how would it ever be abundant at all?* [§1.4]

4<sup>43</sup>(1) Bhikshus, what sort of person

**done only a slight bad karma but it takes him to hell?**

*Here, bhikshus, a certain person is of*

*appa,dukkha,vihārī*, "he is mentally limited, with a small self, [has a limited, small self,] dwelling with (only a) little suffering." See also A:B 1667 n549, where Bodhi says that only *appa,dukkha,vihārī* is omitted.

<sup>35</sup> ie, the fruits.

<sup>36</sup> "Uncultivated body," *abhāvita,kāyo*. Comy to **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja S** (S 35.127/4:111) glosses it as *abhāvita,-pañca,dvārika,kāyā*, "uncultivated in the body that is the 5 (sense-)doors," ie, lacking in sense-restraint (SA 2:395).

<sup>37</sup> *Aparitto mah'attā appamāṇa,vihārī*. On the "great self," see Intro above.

<sup>38</sup> *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave puriso loṇa,phalaṃ paritte udaka,mallake [Ka udaka,kapallake] pakkhipeyya*.

<sup>39</sup> "On account of that," *amunā*, instr of *amu* or *asu*.

<sup>40</sup> *Api nu taṃ parittaṃ udaka,mallake udakaṃ amunā loṇa,pallena loṇaṃ assa apeyyan'ti*.

<sup>41</sup> "That," *adurū*, mfn demon pron = *adurū*.

<sup>42</sup> "That," *asu*. See prev 2 nn.

<sup>43</sup> These two sections are a repeat of §2.

*uncultivated body, uncultivated moral conduct, uncultivated mind, uncultivated wisdom:  
he is (mentally) limited, he has a small self—he dwells with (only a) little suffering.*

*Such a person, bhikshus, has done only a slight bad karma but it takes him to hell. [§2(1)]*

(2) Bhikshus, what sort of person

**has done such a slight bad karma experienceable right here and now**

*but which he does not experience in the least, how would it ever be abundant at all?*

*Here, bhikshus, a certain person is*

*of cultivated body, cultivated moral conduct, cultivated mind, cultivated wisdom:*

*he is mentally unlimited, with a great self, who dwells (mentally) immeasurable.*

*Such a person, bhikshus, has done such a slight bad karma that is experienceable right here and now, but which he does not experience in the least, how could it ever be abundant at all? [§2(2)]*

## The parables of crime and punishment

5 Here, bhikshus, a certain person is thrown into prison on account (of a debt or theft) of half a gold coin,<sup>44</sup> or on account of a gold coin, or on account of a hundred [251] gold coins.

Again, bhikshus, another person is not be thrown into prison on account of half a gold coin, or on account of a gold coin, or on account of a hundred gold coins.

5.2 Bhikshus, what sort of person **is thrown into prison** on account (of a debt or theft) of half a gold coin, or on account of a gold coin, or on account of a hundred gold coins?

Here, bhikshus, a certain person is poor, having little possession or means.

As such, he is thrown into prison on account (of a debt or theft)<sup>45</sup> of half a gold coin, or on account of a gold coin, or on account of a hundred gold coins.

5.3 Bhikshus, what sort of person **is not be thrown into prison** on account of half a gold coin, or on account of a gold coin, or on account of a hundred gold coins?

Here, bhikshus, a certain person is wealthy, having great wealth and means. As such, he is not thrown into prison on account of half a gold coin, or on account of a gold coin, or on account of a hundred gold coins.

5.4 In the same way, bhikshus, here, a certain person *has done only a slight bad karma that takes him to hell.* [§1.3]

But, here, again for another person such a slight bad karma experienceable right here and now *is not experienced in the least, how would it ever be abundant at all?* [§1.4]

6 <sup>46</sup>Bhikshus, what sort of person

**has done only a slight bad karma but it takes him to hell?**

*Here, bhikshus, a certain person is of*

*uncultivated body, uncultivated moral conduct, uncultivated mind, uncultivated wisdom:*

*he is (mentally) limited, he has a small self—he dwells with (only a) little suffering.*

*Such a person, bhikshus, has done only a slight bad karma but it takes him to hell. [§2(1)]*

6.2 Bhikshus, what sort of person

**has done such a slight bad karma experienceable right here and now**

*but which he does not experience in the least, how would it ever be abundant at all?*

*Here, bhikshus, a certain person is of*

<sup>44</sup> "A gold coin," *kahapāna*. A *kahapāna* was probably a small gold coin. See V:H 1:29n, 71 n2, 2:100 n1-2, 102 n1. See also Intro to **Money and monastics**, SD 4.19.

<sup>45</sup> His imprisonment is due to the fact that either he is unable to return the money or he is unable to buy back his freedom.

<sup>46</sup> These two sections are a repeat of §2.

*cultivated body, cultivated moral conduct, cultivated mind, cultivated wisdom:*

*he is (mentally) unlimited, he has a great self—he dwells (mentally) immeasurable.*

*Such a person, bhikshus, has done such a slight bad karma that is experienceable right here and now, but which he does not experience in the least, how could it ever be abundant at all? [§2(2)]*

## The parables of the poor and the rich

7 Bhikshus, suppose a butcher or a sheep slaughterer [252] is **able** to strike, or bind, or dispossess, or do as he likes to someone who, without permission, has taken away<sup>47</sup> a ram,

but is **unable** to strike, or bind, or dispossess, or do as he likes to another who, without permission, has taken away a ram.

7.2 What sort of person is a butcher or a sheep slaughterer able to strike, or bind, or dispossess, or do as he likes, *that is, to someone who, without permission, has taken away a ram.*

Here, bhikshus, a certain person is **poor, having little possession or means.**

As such, a butcher or a sheep slaughterer is able to strike, or bind, or dispossess, or do as he likes to *him who, without permission, has taken away a ram.*

7.3 What sort of person is a butcher or a sheep slaughterer unable to strike, or bind, or dispossess, or do as he likes, that is, to someone who, without permission, has taken away a ram?

Here, bhikshus, a certain person is **wealthy, having great wealth and means,** a rajah or a rajah's minister.

As such, a butcher or a sheep slaughterer is unable to strike, or bind, or dispossess, or do as he likes to *him who, without permission, has taken away a ram.*

There is nothing else that he could do but with palms together, beg him thus:

'Sir, please give me a ram or give the cost of a ram!'

7.4 In the same way, bhikshus, here a certain person **who has done only a slight bad karma but it takes him to hell.**

But, here, again for another person **that same slight bad karma is experienced right here and now—**not in the least does it seem to be abundant at all.

8 <sup>48</sup>Bhikshus, what sort of person is the one

**who has done only a slight bad karma but it takes him to hell?**

Here, bhikshus, a certain person is of

*uncultivated body, uncultivated moral conduct, uncultivated mind, uncultivated wisdom:*

*he is (mentally) limited, he has a small self—he dwells with (only a) little suffering.*

*Such a person, bhikshus, [253] has done only a slight bad karma but it takes him to hell. [§2(1)]*

8.2 Bhikshus, what sort of person is one

**one who has done such a slight bad karma experienceable right here and now**

**but which he does not experience in the least, how would it ever be abundant at all?**

Here, bhikshus, a certain person is of

*cultivated body, cultivated moral conduct, cultivated mind, cultivated wisdom:*

*he is (mentally) unlimited, he has a great self—he dwells (mentally) immeasurable.*

*Such a person, bhikshus, has done such a slight bad karma that is experienceable right here and now, but which he does not experience in the least, how could it ever be abundant at all? [§2(2)]*

8.3 Whoever, bhikshus, were to say thus:

<sup>47</sup> "Without permission takes away," *adinnam ādiyati*, lit "takes the not-given" or "steals," but I wish here to maintain a correlated tr between here and (c). Alt tr "takes the ungiven (ram) away".

<sup>48</sup> These two sections (a)-(b) are a repeat of §2.

‘Whatever karma this person has done, he would experience *that very same karma*,’  
 this being so, bhikshus, there is no living of the holy life,  
 there appears to be no opportunity for the utter ending of suffering.

8.4 But, bhikshus, for one who says thus:

‘Whatever karma experienceable in certain way that a person does,  
**he would experience its ripening in just that way,**  
 then, there is the living of the holy life, the opportunity for the utter ending of suffering.

— evaṃ —

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