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(Kamma,vāda) Bhūmija Sutta

The Discourse to Bhūmija (on the Proponents of Karma) | S 12.25

Theme: Not all karmas arise consciously

Translated by Piya Tan ©2007, 2010

Introduction

1 Bhūmija

The Thera,gāthā Commentary says that Bhūmija joins the order with his friends Sīta,vanīya Sambhūta,¹ Jeyyasena and Abhirādhana.² The monk Bhūmija (meaning “earth-born”) gives his name to at least two suttas that have come down to us. The first is **the Bhūmija Sutta** (M 126), where prince Jayasena (who is his nephew, says the Commentary)³ questions him whether it is true that the holy life cannot be effected “through wishing” (*āsam haritvā*). Bhūmija then consults the Buddha on this question and receives an answer. The second sutta to which Bhūmija lends his name is **the (Kamma,vāda) Bhūmija Sutta** (S 12.25).

2 Sutta summary

The (Kamma,vāda) Bhūmija Sutta opens with the monk Bhūmija questioning Sāriputta about the Buddha’s teaching of karma in terms of the arising of pleasure and pain [§§1-4]. Sāriputta replies that they arise interdependently, adding that pleasure and pain are conditioned by contact (sense-stimulus) [§§5-6].

Ānanda hears the conversation and reports it to the Buddha [§§9-10]. The Buddha approves of Sāriputta’s teaching [§§11-12], and adds that karma may arise through any of the three sense-doors (the body, speech, or the mind) and we may be fully aware of it or not fully aware of it, whether we are self-motivated or we do it motivated by others [§§13-19a]. Finally, the Buddha tells how karma ceases [§19b].

3 Related suttas

The second half of the (Kamma,vādā) Bhūmija Sutta [§§13-19.2], its key section, forms a sutta of its own, **the Sañcetanā Sutta** (A 4.171) where, instead of Ānanda, it is addressed to “bhikshus” (*bhikkhave*).⁴ There are at least two possible explanations here: (1) the Saṃyutta Reciters and the Aṅguttara Reciters drew from the same ancient source (urtext) but separately attributed them to actors known to them, or (2) the two reciter traditions, each codified the teaching as they had remembered it, giving their own narrative frame. In either case, it is possible that the same Sutta teaching is given on two separate occasions.

4 The nature of intention

4.1 In this second half, the Buddha explains that not all karmic actions are done with full awareness or consciously (*sampajana*).⁵ The same theme is found in **the Cetanā Sutta 1** (S 12.38)—a very important text in this connection—where it is stated that karma still works without our being aware of it, that is, we are often driven by our latent tendencies (*anusaya*):⁶

¹ Tha 6.

² ThaA 1:47.

³ MA 4:199.

⁴ A 4.171/2:157-159 (SD 51.20).

⁵ See *Saṅkhāra*, SD 17.6 (6.2) & (8.2).

⁶ See *Anusaya*, SD 31.3.

⁷If, bhikkhus, one neither thinks nor plans, but if one is still driven by latent tendencies (*anuseti*)⁸—this is a mental basis (*ārammaṇa*) that supports consciousness.

When there is a mental basis, there is a support for consciousness.

When consciousness has a support and grows, there is **further [continued] arising of rebirth.**

When there is the further arising of rebirth, there further arise birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair.

Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.⁹

(S 12.38.3/2:65), SD 7.6

4.2 Intention (*cetanā*)

4.2.1 Intention, then, is very subtle reality: we may not always be aware that we are *intending* to do something, we may not even be deliberately committing an act—our action may be conscious (*sampajāna*) (we are clearly aware of it) or unconscious (*asampajāna*) (we are not clearly aware of it), it is still karmically potent. A simple example is that of a professional assassin, or even a butcher—he kills so habitually that he may feel neither greed nor hate over his actions, but there is always delusion.

A habitual bad action, even when unconsciously done is still functionally intentional. Psychologically, that bad habit has been “wired” deeper into our mind that lies below the radar of the conscious mind—hence, we are not *aware* that our act is unwholesome. However, if there is greed, hate or delusion present behind the action, it is clearly *intentional*. In other words, such karma will bear fruit when the conditions are right.

4.2.2 As such, it is not enough that we avoid *consciously* or even “deliberately” creating bad karma, but we have to make sure that we are not subtly manipulated by our latent tendencies, our **unconscious** that record and replay our bad habits. The precepts can only control our conscious bad habits—not to consciously kill, steal, misconduct oneself sexually, lie or get drunk or drugged—but not out *unconscious* actions. We need meditation to reach the deeper limits of our mind to correct these bad habits. It is helpful to note here than a strong practice of **lovingkindness** helps us in this karmic correction process.¹⁰ What we have here is a *Buddhist psychology of the unconscious*.¹¹

5 Significance of the Sutta

The importance of this Sutta’s teaching is shown by the fact that its main teaching is repeated elsewhere as a separate sutta,¹² and also by the fact that it is *twice authenticated*: first, by being delivered by Sāriputta, the Buddha’s right-hand monk, and secondly, by the Buddha’s own approval. A special feature of this Sutta is that Ānanda is only a silent witness, or rather listener, who then reports the whole conversation to the Buddha, for the final seal of approval, as it were.

⁷ *No ce bhikkhave ceteti no ce pakappeti atha ce anuseti, ārammaṇam etaṃ hoti viññāṇassa ṭhītiyā.*

⁸ “**But one is still driven by latent tendencies**” (*atha ce anuseti*): the latent tendencies are included because they have not been abandoned here in the resultants of the three planes, in the limited functional states (the five-door adverting and mind-door adverting cittas), and in form. As long as the latent tendencies exist, they become a condition for the karmic consciousness; for there is no way to prevent its arising. See Intro (2) for more details.

⁹ Comy says that this section refers to the moment when there is occurrence of volition of the 3 planes, and no occurrence of mental fabrications of craving and views (SA 2:71). See **Cetanā S 1** (S 12.38) (3) for details.

¹⁰ On how lovingkindness can limit our karma, see SD 2.10 (2); **Karaja,kāya Brahma,vihāra S** (A 10.208) + SD 2.10 (1+2); SD 3.9 (7.2.3).

¹¹ See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b.

¹² **Cetanā S 1** (S 12.38/2:65 f), SD 7.6.

The Discourse to Bhūmija (on the Proponents of Karma)

S 12.25

1 At Sāvaththī.

(1.1) Bhūmija's questions

2 Then the venerable Bhūmija, having emerged in the evening from his retreat, approached the venerable Sāriputta. [38] Having approached the venerable Sāriputta, he exchanged greetings with him.

When the friendly and cordial exchange was concluded, he sat down at one side. Sitting thus at one side, he said this to the venerable Sāriputta:

- 3 “There are, avuso, some ascetics and brahmins,
proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are self-created (*sayam,katam*).
There are, avuso, some ascetics and brahmins,
proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are other-created (*param,katam*).
There are, avuso, some ascetics and brahmins,
proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are self-created and other-created
(*sayam,katañ ca param,katañ ca*).

There are, avuso, some ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are neither self-created nor other-created, but arise by chance (*asayam,kāram aparam,kāram adhicca,samuppanam*).¹³

4 Here, avuso Sāriputta, what does the Blessed One say about this?

What does he teach?

How are we to answer if we are to state what has been said by the Blessed One?

And how are we not to misrepresent him with what is untrue?

And how do we explain the matter in accordance with the Dharma so that there arises no reasonable ground for disputation or censure?”¹⁴

(1.2) Pleasure and pain arise interdependently

5 “Avuso, the Blessed One has said that **pleasure and pain arise interdependently**.

Dependent on what?

Dependent on contact.¹⁵

¹³ As Bodhi notes, “It is difficult how these ascetics could be ‘proponents of kamma’ (*kamma,vādā*) when they hold that pleasure and pain arise fortuitously.” (S:B 748 n76). Comy and Sub-comy are silent. The term *kamma,vādā* is prob simply a generic term including various views of karma, incl those against it.

¹⁴ *Katham vyākaramānā ca mayam vutta,vādino ceva bhagavato assāma, na ca bhagavantam abhūtena abbhā-ikkheyāma, dhammassa cānudhammam vyākareyyāma, na ca koci saha,dhammiko vādānupāto [vī vādānupāto] gārayham thānam āgaccheyyāti.* This is stock: D 1:161; M 1:368 f; M 2:127; S 3:6, 4:330, 340 x2; A 1:161, 2:190, 4:182. Cf D 3:115 x2; M 2:222, 233, 2:243, 3:77, 78, 3:139, 140; S 2:33 x2, 34, 36 x2, 38 x2, 39, 41 x2, 3:33, 41 x2, 4:51, 54, 4:326 x2, 381, 382, 5:7 x2; A 3:4 x2. **Saha,dhammika** has at least 4 important senses: (1) a follower of the same Dharma (doctrine) (M 1:64); (2) (adj) just, justified, legitimate, reasonable (S 4:299 f); (3) in accordance with the Dharma (M 1:482; Dhs 1327); (4) regarding the Dharma (V 1:134; D 1:94, 161; M 1:368). The context above points to sense (2). On *saha,dhammika*, see BHSD: sahadharmika & S:B 747 n72.

¹⁵ Broadly, contact (*phassa*) refers to sense-stimuli, how we “sense” things, ie, our sense-experiences. Specifically, it is a vital link in dependent arising, see **Mine: the nature of craving**, SD 19.3(4). In **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1), the Buddha, using the principle of dependent arising, explains how wrong views arise and are sustained through craving caused by contact (*phassa*), ie, through misunderstanding sense-experience (D 1,118-144/1:42-45), SD 25.2.

If you are to speak thus, you would be stating what has been said by the Blessed One. You would not misrepresent him with what is untrue. And you would explain the matter in accordance with the Dharma so that there arises no reasonable ground for disputation or censure.

- 6** Therein, avuso, as regards those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are self-created—
this is conditioned by contact;
- those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are other-created—
this is conditioned by contact, too;
- those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are self-created and other-created—
this is conditioned by contact, too;
- those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are neither self-created nor other-created, but arise by chance—
this is conditioned by contact, too.
- 7** Therein, avuso, as regards those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are self-created—
it is impossible that they would indeed experience anything other than contact;
- those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are other-created—
it is impossible that they would indeed experience anything other than contact, too;
- those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are self-created and other-created—
it is impossible that they would indeed experience anything other than contact, too; [39]
- those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are neither self-created nor other-created, but arise by chance—
it is impossible that they would indeed experience anything other than contact, too.

(2) The Buddha approves of Sāriputta's instruction

8 The venerable Ānanda heard this conversation between the venerable Sāriputta and the venerable Bhūmija.

9 Then the venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One, and saluted him. Having saluted him, he sat down at one side. Sitting thus at one side, the venerable Ānanda reported to the Blessed One the whole conversation between the venerable Sāriputta and the venerable Bhūmija.

10 “Sadhu, sadhu, Ānanda! Anyone answering rightly would answer as Sāriputta has done. Ānanda, I have indeed said that pleasure and pain arise interdependently.

Dependent on what?

Dependent on contact.

If you are to speak thus you would be stating what has been said by me; you would not misrepresent me with what is untrue. And you would explain the matter in accordance with the Dharma so that there arises no reasonable ground for disputation or censure.

11 Therein, Ānanda, as regards those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that pleasure and pain are self-created—
this is conditioned by contact;

those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that	pleasure and pain are <u>other-created</u> — <i>this is conditioned by contact, too;</i>
those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that	pleasure and pain are <u>self-created and other-created</u> — <i>this is conditioned by contact, too;</i>
those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that	pleasure and pain are neither self-created nor other-created, but <u>arise by chance</u> — <i>this is conditioned by contact, too.</i>
12 Therein, Ānanda, as regards those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that	pleasure and pain are <u>self-created</u> — <i>it is impossible that they would indeed experience anything other than contact;</i>
those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that	pleasure and pain are <u>other-created</u> — <i>it is impossible that they would indeed experience anything other than contact, too;</i>
those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that	pleasure and pain are <u>self-created and other-created</u> — <i>it is impossible that they would indeed experience anything other than contact, too;</i>
those ascetics and brahmins, proponents of karma, who declare that	pleasure and pain are neither self-created nor other-created, but <u>arise by chance</u> — <i>it is impossible that they would indeed experience anything other than contact, too.</i>

(3) How karma is generated¹⁶

13 Ānanda, with ignorance as condition:¹⁷

when there is <u>the body</u> ,	because of bodily volition,	pleasure and pain arise [40] internally;
when there is <u>speech</u> ,	because of verbal volition,	pleasure and pain arise internally;
when there is <u>the mind</u> ,	because of mental volition,	pleasure and pain arise internally.

14 (1) Ānanda,

either by oneself [on one's own initiative] (*sāmam*)

one generates that **bodily formation**,¹⁸ conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally;

or, on account of others [prompted by others] (*pare*)

one generates that bodily formation, conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.

¹⁶ From here right to the end is also found as **Sañcetanā S** (A 4.171/2:157-159), SD 18.6. See (3).

¹⁷ *Avijjā, paccayā ca*. Comy: This section shows that pleasure and pain do not arise conditioned by contact alone, but with other conditions as well. In this case, the bodily volitions (*kāya, sañcetanā*), verbal volitions (*vacī, sañcetanā*) and mental volitions (*mano, sañcetanā*) are the karmically effective volitions that function as conditions for the resultant pleasure and pain (*vipāka, sukha, dukkha*) (SA 2:57). Bodhi, following Be & Ce, reads *avijjā, paccayā ca* and takes this phrase as belonging to the end of the present para. This has the support of SA, which explains that this is said to show that these volitions are conditioned by ignorance (SA 2:58). PTS reads *va* for *ca*, and places the phrase at the start of the next para. (S:B 561 n77)

¹⁸ Comy identifies the 3 volitional formations—*kāya, saṅkhāra, vacī, saṅkhāra, mano, saṅkhāra*—with the 3 types of volition just mentioned here. One creates them “by oneself” (*sāmam*) when one acts without being induced by others, with an unprompted mind (*asaṅkhārika, citta*); one creates them “on account of others” (*pare*) when one acts with a prompted mind (*saṅkhārika, citta*), ie, deliberately. One acts fully aware (*sampajāno*) when one acts, knowing karma and its fruit; or, not fully aware (*asampajāno*), ie, without deliberation, when one acts without such knowledge (SA 2:58). This text, Bodhi notes, “may be the original basis for the Abhidhamma distinction between *sasaṅkhārika, citta* and *asaṅkhārika, citta*,” on which see Abhs:BRS 1.4. (S:B 561 n78).

14.2 (2) Ānanda,

either fully aware [consciously] (*sampajano*)

one generates that bodily formation, conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally;

or, not fully aware [unconsciously] (*asampajano*)

one generates that bodily formation, conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.

15 (3) Ānanda,

either by oneself one generates that **verbal formation**,

conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally;

or, on account of others one generates that verbal formation,

conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.

16 (4) Ānanda,

either fully aware one generates that verbal formation,

conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally;

or, not fully aware one generates that verbal formation,

conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.

17 (5) Ānanda,

either by oneself [on one's own initiative] one generates that **mental formation**,¹⁹

conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally;

or, on account of others [prompted by others] one generates that mental formation,

conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.

18 (6) Ānanda, either fully aware one generates that mental formation,

conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally;

or, not fully aware one generates that mental formation,

conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.

19 Subject to ignorance, Ānanda, are these states.²⁰

The ending of karma

19.2 Indeed, Ānanda, **with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance,**

that body does not exist conditioned by which that pleasure and pain rise internally;

that speech does not exist conditioned by which that pleasure and pain rise internally;

that mind does not exist conditioned by which [41] that pleasure and pain rise internally.²¹

¹⁹ In this context, *mano,saṅkhāra*, as **Bodhi** notes, is clearly syn with *citta,saṅkhāra* in (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2,14/2:4), SD 5.15 (see S:B 727 n7). However, there is no textual justification for identifying the latter with the *citta,saṅkhāra* at **Kāma,bhū S 2** (S 41.6/4:293,17), SD 48.7, & **Cūḷa Dhamma,samādāna S** (M 45/1:301,28-29), SD 32.4, def as *saññā* and *vedanā*. (S:B 561 n79)

²⁰ *Imesu Ānanda [chasu] dhammesu avijjā anupatitā: chasu* is only found in PTS. Bodhi thinks *chasu* ("six") is redundant (S:B 561 n80). Lit, "Ānanda, ignorance is included in these states." Comy: Ignorance is included among these states under the heading of decisive support (*upanissaya*). For they are all understood under the phrase, "with ignorance as condition, there are volitional formations." (SA 2:58). On the interpretation of dependent arising by way of the 24 conditional relations of the Paṭṭhāna, see Vism 17: see Nyanatiloka, *Guide Through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, 1971:159-173.

²¹ Comy: No such body exists where it would enable pleasure and pain to arise conditioned by bodily volition: the same applies to speech and mind. (Question:) But an arhat acts, speaks and thinks, show how is it that his body, etc, do not exist? (Reply:) In the sense, that they do not create karmic results. For, the deeds done by an arhat are neither wholesome nor unwholesome karma, but merely functional (*kiriya,matta*); thus, for him, it is said: "that body, etc,

There is no field; there is no land; there is no base; there is no foundation, conditioned by which that pleasure and pain arises internally.”²²

— evaṃ —

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do not exist.” (SA 2:58). On the arhat’s functional consciousness, see Abhs:BRS 1.15. **Bodhi** says that “an alternative expl might be simply that with the elimination of ignorance there will be no further arising of the five aggregates, the basis of all experience, and thus no further experience of pleasure and pain.” (S:B 749 n81)

²² Comy: There is no *field* (*khetta*) in the sense of a place of growth; no *land* (*vatthu*), in the sense of a support; no *base* (*āyatana*) in the sense of a condition; no *foundation* (*adhikaraṇa*), in the sense of a cause. (SA 2:59)