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(Brahma,cariya) Mahā Koṭṭhita Sutta

The Discourse with Mahā Koṭṭhita (on the Holy Life) | A 9.13/4:382-385

or, **Mahā Koṭṭhika Sutta** The Discourse to Mahā Koṭṭhika;

or, **Koṭṭhika Sutta** The Discourse to Koṭṭhika

Theme: The reward of the holy life is not good karma, but liberation through the truths

Translated by Piya Tan ©2009, 2012

1 Sutta style

1.1 There are a number of discourses that record discussions between Sāriputta and Koṭṭhita, conducted in the *saṅgāyanā* (question-and-answer or catechical) style.¹ The structure of the (Brahma,cariya) Mahā Koṭṭhika Sutta is similar to that of **Ratha Vinīta Sutta** (M 24), but this is on a smaller scale. There, Sāriputta questions Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta on the purpose of the holy life.² The elder Sāriputta evidently has a great regard for the elder Mahā Koṭṭhita. **The Thera,gāthā** (Tha 1006-1008; ThaA 2:117) contains three verses in which Sāriputta proclaims Koṭṭhita's excellence.

1.2 In the (Brahma,cariya) Mahā Koṭṭhita Sutta, the elder Mahā Koṭṭhita acts as the questioner (*pucchaka*), while the elder Sāriputta answers his questions (*visajjaka*). This is, in fact, is also the method of **the Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44).³ It is possible that during such sessions, junior monks and the unawakened would form the audience so that they could learn from the proceedings.

It is also possible that during such sessions, the unawakened Mahā Koṭṭhita is actually asking the questions for Sāriputta to answer for his training. From his good questions and Sāriputta's better answers, Mahā Koṭṭhita goes on to fully awaken and be the foremost among monks who are masters of the analytic skills (*paṭisambhida-p,atta*) (A 1:24),⁴ which he attains while still a learner (*sekha*).⁵

2 Sutta comment

The (Brahma,cariya) Mahā Koṭṭhita Sutta records a series of ten questions [§1.2] that the elder Mahā Koṭṭhita asks the elder Sāriputta. Many of these questions might appear simplistic at first glance, especially when asked by a well known elder. However, they reflect some finer points of karma which could be mistaken as especially significant as to concern a spiritual practitioner. Sāriputta, however, clarifies that these ten points are not what the Buddhist training is about. Paraphrased, these ten questions are as follows:

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| (1) Can a <i>present</i> action be experienced in | the future? |
| (2) Can a <i>future</i> action be experienced | now? |
| (3) Can a <i>pleasurable</i> experience be felt as | painful? |
| (4) Can a <i>painful</i> experience be felt as | pleasurable? |
| (5) Can a <i>fully ripened</i> action be | not fully ripened? |
| (6) Can a <i>not fully ripened</i> action be | fully ripened? |
| (7) Can what is <i>felt</i> much be felt as | little? |
| (8) Can what is felt as <i>little</i> be felt as | much? |
| (9) Can an <i>experienced</i> action be | not experienced? |
| (10) Can an <i>unexperienced</i> action | be experienced? |

Questions (1)+(2) concern time. Could our present happiness, for example, occur again just as it is in the future? Could something desirable that has not yet happened be enjoyed for? The spiritual training is not about making "good" karma occur whenever we want them to.

¹ For a list of suttas, see (Samyojana) Koṭṭhita S (S 35.232) @ SD 28.4 (1.2), where also see Mahā Koṭṭhita's details (2).

² M 24/1:145-151 = SD 28.3.

³ M 44/1:299-305 = SD 40a.9. MAT:Be 2:278.

⁴ Also MA 2:336; AA 1:285. "Analytic skills," *paṭisambhidā*, see SD 28.4 (4).

⁵ PmA 6,33 = VbhA 388,27 ≠ Vism 14.27/442,13.

Questions (3)+(4) concern experiential quality. For example, we see someone else enjoying something, but we desire that it be turned into a painful experience instead. Or, if that experience is something painful, and we wish that it would be pleasurable. The purpose of the spiritual life is not simply the control or displacement of incidental experiences of pleasure and pain.

Questions (5)+(6) concern the fullness or extent of karmic effects. For example, we might be experiencing a bad patch in life, and we wish that it would simply end through some kind of religious ritual or magic. There are proper spiritual methods of facing life's difficulties (such as practising meditation), but this is not the real aim of spiritual training.

Questions (7)+(8) concern the intensity of karmic effects. Suppose we meet with some kind of success, but we wish that it could be more. Or, we notice that someone else is overwhelmed with success, and we wish that he would not benefit so much. Such a thinking is not beneficial for spiritual training.

Questions (9)+(10) concern the control of karmic effects, that is, preventing or at least lessening them. We might try to end what we perceive as a certain negative karma in our live, or to promote some kind of good karma. These are only temporary solutions to temporary problems. The real issues are still untouched.

The bottom line in spiritual training is the penetration of the four noble truths. They define the true human situation and life itself, identify the root condition for it all, point to an ideal state that is free of any such issues, and finally lay out the solution or way to end the whole problem.

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The Discourse with Mahā Koṭṭhita (on the Holy Life)

A 9.13/4:382-385

1.1 Then the venerable Mahā Koṭṭhita⁶ approached the venerable Sāriputta and exchanged greetings with him. After this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, the venerable Mahā Koṭṭhita sat down at one side.

1.2 Sitting thus at one side, the venerable Mahā Koṭṭhita said this to the venerable Sāriputta:

Mahā Koṭṭhita questions Sāriputta

- (1) “Now, avuso Sāriputta, is **the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose**, ‘May an action that is felt here and now turn into an action that is to be felt by me in a *future* life?’⁷”
“No, avuso.”
- (2) “Now then, avuso Sāriputta, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose, ‘May an action that is to be felt in a future life turn into an action that is felt by me *here and now*?’”
“No, my avuso.”
- (3) “Now then, avuso Sāriputta, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose, ‘May an action that is felt as pleasurable turn into an action that is felt by me as *painful*?’”
“No, avuso.”
- (4) “Now then, avuso Sāriputta, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose, ‘May an action that is felt as painful turn into an action that is felt by me as *pleasurable*?’”
“No, avuso.”
- (5) “Now then, avuso Sāriputta, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

⁶ Called Mahā Koṭṭhika throughout in Be.

⁷ *Yam kammaṃ diṭṭha, dhamma, vedanīyam, tam me kammaṃ samparāya, vedanīyam hotūti, etassa atthāya bhagavati brahma, cariyam vussatīti?*

‘May an action that is felt when fully ripened turn into an action that is felt by me when *not fully ripened*?’”

“No, avuso.”

(6) “Now then, avuso Sāriputta, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt when not fully ripened turn into an action that is felt by me when *fully ripened*?’”

“No, avuso.”

(7) “Now then, avuso Sāriputta, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt much turn into an action that is felt by me as *little*?’”⁸

“No, avuso.”

(8) “Now then, avuso [383] Sāriputta, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt little turn into an action that is felt by me as *much*?’”

“No, avuso.”

(9) “Now then, avuso Sāriputta, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt turn into an action that is *unfelt* by me?’”⁹

“No, avuso.”

(10) “Now then, avuso Sāriputta, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is not felt turn into an action that is *felt* by me?’”

“No, avuso.”

Mahā Koṭṭhita counter-questions Sāriputta

2.1 (1) “Now, avuso Sāriputta, when you were asked,

‘Now is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt here and now turn into an action that is felt by me in a *future* life?’”

you said, ‘No, avuso.’

(2) When asked, ‘Now is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt in a future life turn into an action that is felt by me *here and now*?’”

you said, ‘No, avuso.’

(3) When asked, ‘Now is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt as pleasurable turn into an action that is felt by me as *painful*?’”

you said, ‘No, avuso.’

(4) When asked, ‘Now is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt as painful turn into an action that is felt by me as *pleasurable*?’”

you said, ‘No, avuso.’

(5) When asked, ‘Now is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt when fully ripened turn into an action that is felt by me when *not fully ripened*?’”

you said, ‘No, avuso.’

(6) When asked, ‘Now is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose, [384]

‘May an action that is felt when not fully ripened turn into an action that is felt by me when *fully ripened*?’”

you said, ‘No, avuso.’

(7) When asked, ‘Now is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt much turn into an action that is felt by me as *little*?’”

you said, ‘No, avuso.’

(8) When asked, ‘Now is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose,

‘May an action that is felt little turn into an action that is felt by me as *much*?’”

⁸ *Yaṃ kammaṃ bahu,vedanīyaṃ, taṃ me kammaṃ appa,vedanīyaṃ hotūti, etassa atthāya bhagavati brahma,cariyaṃ vussatīti?*

⁹ *Yaṃ kammaṃ vedanīyaṃ, taṃ me kammaṃ avedanīyaṃ hotūti.*

you said, ‘No, avuso.’

(9) When asked, ‘Now is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose, “May an action that is felt turn into an action that is *unfelt* by me?”’

you said, ‘No, avuso.’

(10) When asked, ‘Now is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for this purpose, “May an action that is not felt turn into an action that is *felt* by me?”’

you say, ‘No, avuso.’

2.2 How then, avuso, does one live the purpose of the holy life under the Blessed One?’

The holy life’s purpose: The penetration of the truths

3.1 “The holy life, avuso, is lived under the Blessed One for the sake of knowing, seeing, attaining, realizing, penetrating, into the unknown, unseen, unattained, unrealized, unpenetrated.”¹⁰

3.2 “But what, avuso Sāriputta, is *that unknown, unseen, unattained, unrealized, unpenetrated*, for the sake of knowing, seeing, attaining, realizing, penetrating of which the holy life is lived under the Blessed One?”

3.3 (1) “‘This is suffering’—

this, avuso, is the unknown, unseen, unattained, unrealized, unpenetrated for the sake of whose knowing, seeing, attaining, realizing, penetrating, that the holy life lived under the Blessed One. [385]

(2) ‘This is the arising of suffering’—

This, avuso, is the unknown, unseen, unattained, unrealized, unpenetrated for the sake of whose knowing, seeing, attaining, realizing, penetrating, that the holy life lived under the Blessed One.

(3) ‘This is the ending of suffering’—

This, avuso, is the unknown, unseen, unattained, unrealized, unpenetrated for the sake of whose knowing, seeing, attaining, realizing, penetrating, that the holy life lived under the Blessed One.

(4) ‘This path leading to the ending of suffering’—

This, avuso, is the unknown, unseen, unattained, unrealized, unpenetrated for the sake of whose knowing, seeing, attaining, realizing, penetrating, that the holy life lived under the Blessed One.

This indeed, avuso, is the unknown, unseen, unattained, unrealized, unpenetrated, for the sake of knowing, seeing, attaining, realizing, penetrating of which the holy life is lived under the Blessed One.”

— evaṃ —

120511; 120514; 120521; 120601; 120605a

¹⁰ *Yam khv-assa āvuso aññātāṃ aditṭhāṃ appattāṃ asacchikatāṃ anabhisametāṃ, tassa ñāṇāya dassanāya pattiyā sacchikiriyāya abhisamayāya bhagavati brahma, cariyaṃ vussatīti.*