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Upāsikā Sutta

The Laywoman Follower Discourse | A 10.203 [Be A 10.214]

Theme: Karma that brings hell, karma that brings heaven, for a laywoman follower

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2020

1 Introduction

1.1 The Upāsikā Sutta (A 10.203), the laywoman follower discourse, is a short text on the 10 courses of karma (*kamma, patha*), on how female followers (*upāsikā*) who habitually create bad karma are, “as it were, carried away and cast into **hell**” [§1]; and women who habitually cultivate good karma are, “as it were, carried away and cast into **heaven**” [§2].

1.2 The Upāsikā Sutta (A 10.203) is identical to the 2 **Niraya, sagga Suttas 1 & 2** (A 10.200 + 201), SD 57.29 + 30, except that while A 10.200 + 201 refer generally to “a certain person” (*ekacco*), **A 10.203** refers specifically to “laywomen followers” [1.1]. The main difficulty here is the reading for the 3rd precept—against sexual misconduct—the reading of whose passage should be in the feminine gender [§§1(3); 2(4)].

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Upāsikā Sutta

The Laywoman Follower Discourse

A 10.203

The 10 courses of unwholesome karma

1 “Bhikshus, a **laywoman follower**, possessing 10 qualities, is, as it were, carried away and cast into **hell**.

What are the ten?

UNWHOLESOME BODILY KARMA

(1) Here, bhikshus, a certain person is one **who destroys living beings**, cruel, bloody-handed, given to cruelty and violence, merciless to all living beings.

(2) She is one who takes **the not-given**:
in a village or in a forest, she takes by way of theft, the possessions of others that are of service to them.

(3) She is one who commits **sexual misconduct**:¹
falling into such a conduct with those under the care of their mother, under the care of their father,
[under the care of their parents,] under the care of their brother, under the care of their sister,

¹ *Kāmesu micchā, cāriṇī* (fem) [also §2(3)]. The other key nouns are also fem: *pāṇātipātīnī, adinn’ādāyiniī, musā, vadinī*, etc.

under the care of a relative, protected by dharma, one with a husband,² one protected by law, even with one adorned with a string of garlands (in betrothal to another).

UNWHOLESOME VERBAL KARMA

(4) She is one who speaks **falsehood**.

When questioned as a witness before a council, before a congregation, in the midst of relatives, in the midst of a guild [a company], in the midst of the royal court [a court of law]

and questioned thus: ‘Come now, woman, tell us what you know!’

Not knowing, she says she knows, or knowing, she says she knows not;

having not seen, she says she saw, or having seen, she says she did not see—

consciously lying thus for her own sake, for the sake of others, or for some small material gain.

(5) She is one who **speaks divisively**.

What she has heard here (from others), she repeats it there (to others) to divide them;

what she has heard there, she repeats it here to divide them—

thus she divides the united, who encourages the divided (to remain so) [rejoicing in division];

being pleased at discord, enjoying discord, delighting in discord, saying words conducive to discord.

(6) She is one who **speaks harshly**.

She utters words that are rough, hard, hurting to others, offensive to others, connected with anger, inconducive to mental concentration.

(7) She is one who **chatters frivolously** [utters idle talk].

She speaks at the wrong time, speaks what is untrue, speaks what is unbeneficial,

speaks what is not the teaching, what is not the discipline;

she speaks words not worth treasuring,

spoken out of time, poorly reasoned,

undefined [rambling], unconnected with the goal.³

UNWHOLESOME MENTAL KARMA

(8) She is one who is **covetous**.

She covets the possessions of others that are of service to them, thinking,

‘Oh, may what belongs to others become mine!’

(9) She is one with a mind of **ill will** and intentions of hate thus:

‘May these beings be slain, slaughtered, cut off, destroyed, or annihilated!’

(10) She is one with **wrong view**, with distorted vision, thinking thus:

‘There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed.

There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions.

² Grammatically speaking, the Pali here refers to the *male* husband of a *female* wife. However, in a more open modern context, in terms of human relationships, we may, even should, understand this social aspect as needing to be “drawn out” (*neyy’attha*) to define “husband” as simply one who is virtually or accepted as a partner to another. The moral (karmic) implications remain the same.

³ “Unconnected with the goal,” ie, unrelated to the goal of cultivating moral virtue, of mental cultivation, of wisdom, and of liberation.

There is no this world, there is no next world;
 there is no mother, no father;
 there are no spontaneously born beings.

There are no recluses or brahmins who, living rightly and practising rightly, having directly known and realized for themselves this world and the hereafter, proclaim them.’

One possessing these 10 qualities is, as it were, carried away and cast into hell.

The 10 courses of wholesome karma

2 Bhikshus, possessing 10 qualities, a laywoman follower is, as it were, carried away and cast into heaven.

What are the ten?

WHOLESOME BODILY KARMA

(1) Here, bhikshus, a certain person,
having given up killing living beings, refrains from harming living beings,
 lays down rod and sword,
 conscientious, merciful, dwells beneficial and compassionate to all living beings.

(2) *Having given up taking the not-given, she refrains from taking what is not given.*
 She does not steal the wealth and property of others in the village or in the forest.

(3) *Having given up sexual misconduct, she refrains from sexual misconduct:*⁴
 not falling into such a conduct with those under the care of their mother, under the care of their father,
 [under the care of their parents,] under the care of their brother, under the care of their sister,
 under the care of relatives, [protected by dharma,] one with a husband,⁵ a protected woman,
 not even with one adorned with a string of garlands [in betrothal to another].

WHOLESOME VERBAL KARMA

(4) *Having given up speaking falsehood, refrains from speaking falsehood—*
 when questioned as a witness before a council, before a congregation, in the midst of relatives, in
 the midst of a guild [or company], in the midst of the royal court [a court of law]
 and questioned thus: ‘Come now, woman, tell us what you know!’

Not knowing, she says she knows not, or knowing, she says she knows;
 having not seen, she says she did not see, or having seen, she says she saw—
 not consciously telling a lie thus for her own sake, for the sake of others, or (even) for some
 small material gain.

(5) *Having given up divisive speech, she refrains from divisive speech—*
 what she has heard here (from others), she does not repeat it there (to others) to divide them;
 what she has heard there, she does not repeat it here to divide them—
 thus she is one who unites the disunited,
 or who discourages the divided (from remaining so) [not rejoicing in division];
 she is pleased at concord, enjoying concord, delighting in concord, saying words conducive to concord.

⁴ *Kāmesu micchā, cāriṇī hoti*, with fem nouns [§1(3)].

⁵ See n under §1(3) above ad loc.

(6) *Having given up harsh speech, she refrains from harsh speech—* she utters words that are blameless, pleasant to the ear, touching the heart, urbane, loved by the masses, pleasant to the masses.

(7) *Having given up frivolous talk, she refrains from frivolous talk—* she speaks at the right time, speaks what is true, speaks what is beneficial, speaks what is the teaching, what is the discipline; she speaks words worth treasuring, spoken in time, well-reasoned, well-defined [not rambling], connected with the goal.

WHOLESOME MENTAL KARMA

(8) **She is not covetous—** she covets not the possessions of others that are of service to them, thinking, ‘Oh, may what belongs to others become mine!’

(9) **She is one without a malevolent mind, a mind without wicked thoughts,** thinking, ‘May these beings be free from hate! May they be free from suffering! May they be free from woe [trouble]! May they continue to be happy!’

(10) **She is one with right view, without distorted vision,** thinking thus: ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There is fruit and result of good or bad actions. There is this world, there is the next world. There is mother, there is father. There are beings that are reborn. There are recluses and brahmins who, living rightly and practising rightly, having directly known and realized for themselves this world and the hereafter, proclaim them.’

Bhikshus, a laywoman follower, possessing these 10 qualities, is, as it were, carried away and cast into heaven.”

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