

16

Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta

The Discourse on the Great Analysis of Karma | M 136
Theme: Why sometimes the good suffer, the bad prosper
Translated by Piya Tan ©2003, 2007, rev 2010, 2016

1 How wrong view about karma can arise

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

1.1.1 The Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta (M 136) records a visit by the wanderer **Potali,putta** to the novice monk (of 3 rains), Samiddhi, in the Veḷuvana at Rājagaha. Potaliputta then tells him that he has heard the Buddha declare that all action and speech are “empty” (that is, unfortunate), and that only mental actions are significant. Potaliputta thinks that a stage could be reached where there is no feeling whatsoever. [§§2.1-2.2]

Samiddhi protests that Potali,putta has misinterpreted the Buddha’s teaching. Potaliputta then questions him regarding **karma**,¹ which Samiddhi answers. Neither approving nor disapproving, Potaliputta walks away [§2.7]. When the Buddha hears from Ananda regarding Potaliputta’s questions and Samiddhi’s answers, he chides Samiddhi for his hasty reply. Then, the Buddha instructs on the nature of karma in this connection.²

1.1.2 The Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta consists of six related sections, thus:

- (1) §§1-7. Opening narrative. (M 3:207,2-209,19)
- (2) §8. A “karmic puzzle”:³ 4 ways in which a person acts and the result rebirths. (M 3:209,20-210,8)
- (3) §§9-12. How “a certain recluse and brahmin” (that is, a non-Buddhist) misinterprets each of these four scenarios on the basis of his “divine eye” (meditative knowledge) of the actions and their subsequent rebirths. (M 3:210,9-212,10)
- (4) §§13-16. The Buddha’s assessment of each of these 4 interpretations, accepting or rejecting them, in terms of his own analysis of karma (*kammavibhaṅga*). (M 3:212,11-214,5)
- (5) §§17-20. The Buddha’s “great analysis of karma” in term of each of the 4 scenarios. (M 3:214,6-215,14)
- (6) §21. A closing summary (M 3:215,15-218).

1.2 THE 4 KINDS OF PERSON

1.2.1 The 4 kinds of persons (summary). This well known Sutta shows some of the complexities of karma and its results. The Sutta opens with the wanderer Potali,putta’s misquoting two statements on the Buddha Word to the novice monk Samiddhi, whose reply further confuses the issues. When Samiddhi seeks advice from Ānanda, he suggests that they see the Buddha, who then gives his “great analysis (or classification) of karma” based on these 4 types of persons:

¹ For an overview, see **Karma**, SD 18.1. I would like to thank Ajahn Brahmali for his prompt and helpful comments in the understanding and translation of this difficult Sutta, and for directing me to Rupert Getthin’s definitive essay (email 24 Apr 2016).

² **Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 136/3:207-214), SD 4.16. The problem about karma raised here is alluded to at Kvu 394.

³ Getthin’s term, 2015:241.

- (1) a bad-doer is reborn in a hell state,
- (2) a bad-doer who is reborn in a heavenly state,
- (3) a good-doer who is reborn in a happy state, and
- (4) a good-doer who is reborn in a hell state.

A “bad-doer” is one who follows any of the 10 courses of bad karma. A “good-doer” is one who follows any of the 10 courses of good karma. [§8]

1.2.2 The 4 kinds of persons (detailed).

1.2.2.1 The Buddha then shows how wrong view can arise from only partial understanding of the teaching. This wrong view, for example, might operate in this manner:

- (1) a meditator or mystic “sees” in a vision a bad-doer suffering in hell;
- (2) he takes this as confirmation of what he has heard about moral causality;
- (3) so he declares, “all bad-doers always go to hell,” and
- (4) his notion hardens into dogma: “Only this is true, all else is false.”

The Buddha, in his analysis of karma, explains that these views and assumptions are based on partial experience, even if they are direct experiences of reality. We may be able to directly see true reality, but we may not understand and misinterpret what we see. Such experienced should be further verifiable through personal experience and not merely dogmatic notions. Above all, we need to have clear insight to understand the actual workings of karma, regarding which the Sutta stresses.

1.2.2.2 Here is the key to the karmic puzzle [1.1.2 (2)]:⁴

(1) **An action is that unfortunate that appears unfortunate** [2.1.1]. This refers to an action that is unfortunate and appears (to result in) an unfortunate (rebirth). The unfortunate or bad action *only appears* to result in a bad rebirth. The truth is that that bad rebirth is the result of a bad karma done *before* the said bad action, or *after* that said action, or because of a wrong view at the moment of *dying*.

(2) **An action is that unfortunate that appears fortunate.** This refers to an action that is unfortunate and appears (to result in) a fortunate (rebirth). The unfortunate or bad action *only appears* to result in a good rebirth. The truth is that that good rebirth is the result of a good karma done *before* the said bad action, or *after* that said action, or because of a wrong view at the moment of *dying*.

(3) **An action is that fortunate that appears fortunate.** This refers to an action that is fortunate and appears (to result in) a fortunate (rebirth). The fortunate or good action *only appears* to result in a good rebirth. The truth is that that good rebirth is the result of a good karma done *before* the said bad action, or *after* that said action, or because of a wrong view at the moment of *dying*.

⁴ Khantipalo, in his Intro to Nāṇamoli’s **M 136** tr, summarizes the comy explanation of the 4 categories, thus:

(1) A strong unwholesome kamma (incapable of good result), the result of which will come before the results of weaker unwholesome kamma.

(2) Wholesome kamma (which appears capable of good result) is followed by unwholesome death-proximate kamma which makes the former incapable of good result immediately.

(3) A strong wholesome kamma will mature even before much accumulated unwholesome kamma.

(4) Unwholesome kamma (which appears incapable of good result) is followed by wholesome death-proximate kamma which will mature first and is capable of good results.

See <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.136.nymo.html>. See also McDermott 1980:177.

(4) **An action is that fortunate that appears unfortunate.** This refers to an action that is fortunate and appears (to result in) an unfortunate (rebirth). The fortunate or good action only appears to result in a bad rebirth. The truth is that that bad rebirth is the result of a bad karma done *before* the said bad action, or *after* that said action, or because of a wrong view at the moment of *dying*.

1.3 THE SUTTA'S KEY IDEAS

1.3.1 The great analysis of karma. Finally, the Buddha expounds his **great analysis of karma** in which he shows that such notions as “the bad-doer goes to hell” are over-simplistic. The mind is complex and many different kinds of karma are performed in a life-time: we could be influenced by an action done in a past life, or by an action done earlier in this life, or by our dying thought, any of which could shape our next life.

The Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta, for example, explains that a bad-doer may be reborn in a heaven due to any of these three reasons [§§18-20]:

- he did good karma fruiting in happiness (*kalyāṇa, kammaṃ sukha, vedanīya*) *before* the bad one;
- he did good deeds fruiting in happiness *after* his bad conduct; or
- at the time of *dying*, he has right view.⁵

1.3.2 Helpful scholarly study. Rupert Gethin’s “A note on the *Mahākammavibhaṅga-sutta* and its commentaries” (2-15) is a definitive study of the Sutta. According to him, it “is concerned with the proper understanding of two terms in the *Mahākammavibhaṅga-sutta* (M III 207-15) and its commentary (Ps [MA] V 15-21): (*a*)*bhabba* and (*a*)*bhabb’ābhāsa* [2.1]. Despite this particular focus, the problems encountered in trying to arrive at a proper understanding and translation of these terms are illustrative of the problems encountered more generally when trying to negotiate canonical Pali texts and their ancient commentaries using the available editions and dictionaries.” (2015:241)

This helpful essay explains—with a comparison of the Pali Sutta to its Chinese and Tibetan parallels—on the translation of the two pairs of key terms. Gethin shows the value of Buddhaghosa’s commentary in clarifying the senses of these key terms, which throws light on the Sutta’s teaching of karma. This paper is an example of how a disciplined and sensitive scholarly historical analysis—with the help of intertextual comparison—of an early Buddhist text can be helpful in our understanding of it.

1.3.3 Comparative notes

1.3.3.1 The Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta’s threefold analysis of karma is found, more briefly stated in its Chinese **Madhyama Āgama** parallel, MĀ 171⁶ (T1.706b27), which speaks of deeds fruiting in this life or in a subsequent one. MA 171 (T1.708b17), earlier on, mentions the possibility that instead of affecting the next life, a deed may fruit only in a subsequent life.

1.3.3.2 The same Madhyama Āgama version of the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta, however, gives altogether four reasons for the same heavenly rebirth of a bad doer:

⁵ For a detailed discussion, see Analayo 2011:779 n118.

⁶ Download from SuttaCentral: [MA 171](#), [T 1509.24](#)*, Upāyika 5.003*. For a comparative study, see Analayo 2011: 775-781.

- (1) either this person already experienced the retribution for his bad conduct in his present life, or
- (2) the retribution might be bound to ripen only in the next life, or
- (3) he performed good deeds before his bad conduct, or
- (4) at the time of passing away he cultivated right view.⁷

Other than this interesting detail, this Madhyama Āgama version closely parallels the teachings on karma found in the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta.

1.3.3.3 Clearly, then, **the threefold analysis of karma** [2.4.1.2] is a central idea in the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta. Its purpose is to show that a particular deed done in the present life need not ripen in the next life. The threefold analysis serves as a summary of how karma can operate in complex ways, not as mechanically or predictably as we would imagine. [2.4.2]

2 A comparative study of the text

2.1 Key terms: *bhabba* and *abhabba*

2.1.1 Sutta's closing summary. At the end of the Sutta [§§17-21], the Buddha summarizes his analysis of karma into these four headings: [1.2.2.2]

(1) an unfortunate karma [§17]	that appears unfortunate;	<i>abhabba abhabb'ābhāsa kamma</i>
(2) an unfortunate karma [§18]	that appears fortunate;	<i>abhabba bhabb'ābhāsa kamma</i>
(3) a fortunate karma [§19]	that appears fortunate;	<i>bhabba bhabb'ābhāsa kamma</i>
(4) a fortunate karma [§20]	that appears unfortunate.	<i>bhabba abhabb'ābhāsa kamma</i>

2.1.2 Dictionary definitions: *bhabba* and *abhabba*

2.1.2.1 The Pali-English Dictionary (PED) says that *bhabba* has two basic meanings: (1) “able, capable, fit for,” and, referring to our Sutta passage, (2) “possible”: specifically “apparently possible” is given as a translation of *bhabbābhāsa* in the present context.

The PED defines *abhabba* (svv *abhabba*, *bhabba*) as meaning “impossible, not likely, unable.” It gives *abhavya* as the Sanskrit cognate, but notes that it has a different meaning (though we are not told what that is).

2.1.2.2 The Critical Pali Dictionary (CPD) notes that *abhabba*, an adjective (Skt *abhavya*) has three different meanings, that is (1) unable, incapable; (2) unqualified; (3) inoperative, hopeless (M 3:215,15-

⁷ MA 171 (T1.708b16): “in this present life he completely experienced the retribution ... or the retribution is to be experienced later ... or earlier he did good deeds ... or at the time of death he developed a wholesome state of mind, a state of mind united with what is righteous and with right view,” 彼於現法中受報訖。或復因後報故。或復本作善業。或復死時生善心，[心]所有法正見相應。bǐ yú xiàn fǎ zhōng shòu bào qì, huò fù yīn hòu bào gù, huò fù běn zuò shàn yè, huò fù sǐ shí shēng shàn xīn, [xīn] suǒ yǒu fǎ zhèng jiàn xiāng yìng (Analayo 2005 ad M 3:214, missing 心 xīn inserted)

16 (*kammam̐ ~am̐*).⁸ The third and last is, of course, applies to our Sutta usage. CPD, too, mentions that the Sanskrit cognate *abhavya* “in different meaning.”

2.1.2.3 Dines Andersen, in his *A Pali Glossary* (1901), explains *bhabbha* as a gerund of *bhavati*, “to become,” and defines it as “future, what probably will be or ought to be, suitable, proper”; (with infinitive) “being able to.”

2.1.3 Sanskrit definitions

2.1.3.1 The Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary (BHSD: *abhavya, bhavya*) defines *bhavya* as “able, capable,” and *abhavya* as “unable, incapable, impotent,” although, according to Gethin, “they do not have these senses in Sanskrit (but once more we are not told what the Sanskrit meanings are)” (2015:245).

It is apparent that the characteristic usage of (*a*)*bhabba* and (*a*)*bhavya* in Pali and Buddhist Sanskrit is in the sense of “(un)able” or “(in)capable” followed by a dative or infinitive used to describe a person as (un)able to do something or (in)capable of doing something. This particular usage, notes Gethin, seems not to be found in Sanskrit, though both SED [2.1.3.2] and Böhtlingk-Roth [2.1.3.3] (without citing examples) list meanings for *bhavya* that approach it: “suitable, fit, proper” and “entsprechend, angemessen.”

2.1.3.2 The Sanskrit-English Dictionary (SED) notes that its Sanskrit form, *bhavya*, means “being, existing, present; what ought to be, suitable, fit, proper, right, good, excellent” (*sv bhabba*).⁹

2.1.3.3 The Boethlingk-Roth German-Sanskrit Dictionary defines *bhavya* similarly as “entsprechend, angemessen.”¹⁰ “Entsprechend” means “corresponding,” and “angemessen” means “appropriate, suitable, adequate.”

2.1.4 Commentarial definitions

2.1.4.1 The Sutta commentary rightly understands (*a*)*bhabba* in the sense of “(un)fortunate” or “(in)auspicious” (*abhabban’ti bhūta, virahitaṃ akusalaṃ*) here in accordance with the Sanskrit usage. the unwholesome (*akusala*) is said to be “unfortunate” (*abhūta*) because it is devoid of the capacity for growth. Conversely, *bhabba* is the wholesome (*kusala*), said to be “fortunate” (*bhūta*) because it has the capacity for growth (MA 5:20 f). [2.3.1.2]

2.1.4.2 As Gethin concludes, there is no good reason to reject this explanation here, that *kamma* must be qualified so. In the closing summary (at least as we have it now), *abhabba* must indeed mean something like “bad” and *bhabba* something like “good”: this is simply the sense required in order to get anything intelligible out of the closing summary. (2015:247)

2.1.5 Modern translations. The best known **Western translations** have rendered this pair or words as follows:

⁸ The CPD link is <http://pali.hum.ku.dk/cpd/>. In some places, the text may have drop-outs, and should be confirmed with the hard copy.

⁹ For SED search: <http://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/mwquery/>. For PDF version, see <http://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/MWScan/index.php?sfx=pdf>.

¹⁰ <http://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/PWGSscan/disp1/index.php>. See also Gethin 2015:245 f.

	<i>bhabba</i>	<i>abhabba</i>
K E Neumann (German) (1902) ¹¹	“möglich” (“possible”)	“unmöglich” (“impossible”).
I B Horner (1959) ¹²	“operative”	“inoperative”
Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995) ¹³	“capable”	“incapable”
R M Gethin (2008) ¹⁴	“fortunate”	“unfortunate”
Thanissaro ¹⁵	“effectual”	“ineffectual”

From all these definitions and explanations, it is clear that the translations “possible/impossible,” “operative/inoperative,” “capable/incapable,” “able/unable,” and “effectual/ineffectual” do not fit the present context of the Sutta’s fourfold analysis of karma in closing summary.

2.1.6 Dictionary definitions: *ābhāsa*

2.1.6.1 The word *ābhāsa* is the second element in the compound, ***abhabb’ābhāsa***. The Sutta commentary ***ābhāsa*** as meaning “it overcomes, overpowers, wards off the unfortunate (*abhabbam ābhāsati abhibhavati paṭibāhatī attho*, MA 5:20,5). But the word *ābhāsa* is of ambiguous origin: it can come from either *ābhāsati* (to overcome) or *ābhāsati* (to appear):¹⁶ It is uncertain why the commentary gives the verb for *ābhāsa* as coming from *abhibhavati* (one overpowers), in the sense of “prevents” (*paṭibāhati*).

2.1.6.2 The Pali dictionaries (PED, CPD, DP, *sv ābhāsati*) give no indication that ***ābhāsati*** can be used transitively in the sense of “to overpower, prevent.” In fact, both CPD and DP refer to the present passage as illustrative of the meaning “appears, looks like,” with CPD adding the transitive meaning “to illuminate.”

A Dictionary of Pali (DP) defines ***ābhāsa*** under its verb *ābhāsati*², which is derived from *ā*² + *bhāsati*²; the Sanskrit form is *ā + vbhās*. The word *ābhāsa* means “appears, looks like.”

DP, however, has a further entry for the verb ***ābhāsati***, where it cites only this passage and suggests a possible derivation from Sanskrit *abhyaśnoti*, which would give us the required sense of “to overpower.” If we are to keep to the reading *ābhāsati*, there seem to be two ways of understanding the commentarial explanation.

2.1.6.3 SED (*sv ābhāsati*) records the usage of the causative *ābhāsayati* in the sense of “to shine upon, illuminate” and hence “to throw light upon, exhibit the falsity of anything.” The sense of “exhibit the falsity of something” might underlie the commentary’s interpretation.

Alternatively, we could understand the commentary as taking the prefix “in the grammatical sense of *abhidhi* (inclusion) or more simply in the general sense of *abhi*. Either way, *ābhāsati* seems to be understood in the sense of “shines over” with the implication of taking the place of whatever it shines over.¹⁷

¹¹ K E Neumann (tr), *Die Mittlere Sammlung der Reden Gotamo Buddho’s*, vol 3, Munich, 1919:404.

¹² I B Horner (tr), *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, London, 1959:262.

¹³ Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (trs), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston, 1998, 4th ed 2009:1965.

¹⁴ R M Gethin (tr), *Sayings of the Buddha*, Oxford, 2008:204; tr of Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga S (195-204).

¹⁵ Access to Insight, 2012: <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.136.than.html>.

¹⁶ See eg M:Ce 1926:970 n22.

¹⁷ For more details on dictionary analyses and usages of the above terms, see Gethin 2015:244-246.

2.2 PARALLEL VERSIONS¹⁸

2.2.1 Chinese parallel

2.2.1.1 It is worth noting, at this point, however, that the Chinese¹⁹ and Tibetan²⁰ translations of what are likely to have been Sarvāstivādin recensions of this Sutta seem to reflect a rather different form of the closing summary. **Analayo**, in his comparative study of the Majjhima Nikāya provides a useful overview of how these two translations relate to the Pali recension.

2.2.1.2 The Madhyama Āgama version of the Sutta adds a set of **4 similes** to the closing summary of karmic categories. The similes compare the 4 karmic scenarios to a mango that may appear ripe but be unripe, appear unripe but be ripe, appear ripe and be ripe, or appear unripe and be unripe [2.2.1.3].

Analayo highlights the inclusion of this set of similes in the closing summary of the Chinese translation, although it is absent from the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta. But it is found elsewhere in the Nikāyas (2011:781). It is, in fact, **the Amba Sutta** (A 4.106).²¹

In the present context of comparative study, it is worth considering the wording of the closing summary as it appears in the Chinese version in full:

Further, there are 4 kinds of persons :	復次，有四種人：	<i>fù cì, yǒu sì zhǒng rén</i>
(1) there is the kind of person who does not have [the capability] and appears to have it,	或有人無有似有，	<i>huò yǒu rén wú yǒu sì yǒu</i>
(2) the kind who has it and appears not to have it,	或有似無有，	<i>huò yǒu sì wú yǒu</i>
(3) the kind who does not have it and appears not to have it,	或無有似無有，	<i>huò wú yǒu sì wú yǒu</i>
(4) the kind who has it and appears to have it.	或有似有。	<i>huò yǒu sì yǒu</i>
Ānanda, it is as if there were 4 kinds of mangoes : ²²	阿難！猶如四種棃：	<i>ēnán yóurú sì zhǒng nài</i>
(1) there is the mango that is unripe but appears ripe,	或棃不熟似熟，	<i>huò nài bù shú sì shú</i>
(2) the mango that is ripe and appears unripe,	或熟似不熟，	<i>huò shú sì bù shú</i>
(3) the mango that is unripe and appears unripe,	或不熟似不熟，	<i>huò bù shú sì bù shú</i>
(4) the mango that is ripe and appears ripe.	或熟似熟。	<i>huò shú sì shú</i>
Similarly, Ānanda, there are <u>4 kinds of persons</u> who are like these <u>mangoes</u> :	如是，阿難！四種棃喻人：	<i>rú shì ēnán sì zhǒng nài yù rén</i>
(1) there is the kind of person who does not have [the capability] and appears to have it,	或有人無有似有，	<i>huò yǒu rén wú yǒu sì yǒu</i>
(2) the kind who has it and appears not to have it,	或有似無有，	<i>huò yǒu sì wú yǒu</i>

¹⁸ This section is based on Gethin 2015:252-260 (his paper's conclusion), which should be read in full.

¹⁹ The parallel is MĀ 171 (T1.706b-708c), prob from a Sarvāstivādin recension, tr by Saṅghadeva in 398 CE. It agrees with M 136 on the location and has the title 分別大業經 *fēn bié dà yè jīng*, which lit would be the “discourse on an analysis of great karma,” although the sense would prob rather be a “great analysis of karma” or else a “greater discourse on an analysis of karma” (Analayo 2011:775 n102). Oon MĀ 171 see also THICH Minh Chau 1964:70, 131, 199. See MĀ 171 @ T1.708c22.

²⁰ The Tibetan translation is found in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikā, ṭīkā*, composed between the 5th and 11th cent, and is a compendium of mostly canonical sūtra passages cited in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, and which prob belong to the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda. See Skilling & Harrison 2005:700-698; Dhammānā 2012:66-70.

²¹ A 4.106/2:106 f (SD 94.9), and is almost identical to Pug 4.10/44 f.

²² Gethin renders 棃 *nài* as “fruit,” but, properly it should be “mango” (as in the Pali version); see Shì yuán bō, Hsinchu: Fu Yan Buddhist Institute, 20Apr 2007: http://www.fuyan.org.tw/main_edu/t26-2007-44.doc.

- | | | |
|---|---------|-----------------------------|
| (3) the kind who does not have it and appears not to have it, | 或無有似無有, | <i>huò wú yǒu sì wú yǒu</i> |
| (4) the kind who has it and appears to have it. ²³ | 或有似有。 | <i>huò yǒu sì yǒu</i> |
- (MĀ 171 @ T1.708c21-26)²⁴

These 4 kinds of persons are then explained with reference to those who either do or do not give the appearance of practising in the proper manner, and who either do or do not understand suffering, its origin, its ending, and the path leading to its ending. [4.1.2]

2.2.1.3 There seems little doubt that underlying what Gethin has rendered as “does not have the capability” (無有 *wú yǒu*) and “has it” (有 *yǒu*) are Middle Indian or Buddhist Sanskrit forms corresponding to *abhavya* and *bhavya* respectively: 有 (“to have, there is”) seems precisely chosen here to render a derivative of the root *bhū* in the sense of possessing the capability or capacity for something.

What is striking about the Chinese parallel, Gethin notes, is that it is the “person” that is qualified as (*a*)*bhavya* rather than the “action” as in the Pali version. The use of (*a*)*bhavya* in the sense of “(in)capable” to describe a person seems more in accord with Pali and Buddhist Sanskrit usage. [2.3.1.2]

But the set of similes of the ripe and unripe mango, found in **the Amba Sutta** (A 4.106) and in **the Puggala Paññatti** (Pug 4.10), uses quite different terminology: *āma* (unripe) and *pakka* (ripe). Clearly, the Madhyama Āgama translator or editor saw (abei erroneously) a connection between the tetrad of similes and the tetrad of karmic workings. However, other than being tetrads, the connection between the two are not even tenuous. At best, it would seem to be an innovative, but unnecessary, addition to the Chinese translation.

2.2.2 The Tibetan parallel

2.2.2.1 Like the Chinese parallel, the Tibetan translation reflects a version of the Sutta in which the closing summary describes persons (*puruṣa*) rather than actions (*karma*):

- | | |
|---|---|
| Ānanda, there are these 4 persons. What four? | <i>kun dga'bo gang zag ni bzhi po 'di dag ste </i> |
| (1) One who is unsuitable for growth but appears suitable, | <i>bzhi gang zhe na gsor mi rung ba rung</i> |
| (2) one who is suitable for growth but appears unsuitable, | <i>bar snang ba dang gsor rung ba mi rung</i> |
| (3) one who is unsuitable and also appears unsuitable for growth, | <i>bar snang ba dang gsor mi rung ba la</i> |
| (4) one who is suitable and also appears suitable. | <i>gsor mi rung bar snang ba dang gsor rung</i> |
| This is what is said. | <i>ba la gsor rung bar snang ba dang zhes gsung so </i> |
- (D 4094, ju, 268, r5-6)²⁵

2.2.2.2 Once again, notes Gethin, there seems no reason to doubt that underlying what has been rendered as “(un)suitable for growth” (*gsor mi rung ba*) are Middle Indian or Buddhist Sanskrit forms corresponding to *abhavya* and *bhavya*. As Analayo notes, the order of the 4 scenarios that set up the karmic puzzle that the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta and its parallel recensions address is different in the Chinese and Tibetan translations from that in the Pali.²⁶

²³ T26 (T1.708c21-26). THICH Minh Chau (1964:199) gives “results” rather than “capability” (“some have no results but apparently have results”): Gethin, however, notes that “this seems to me to make less sense in context; but how we choose to render the term does not affect the issue of the underlying Indian terminology” (2015:249).

²⁴ For an annotated Chin tr of **Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga S:** http://www.fuyan.org.tw/main_edu/t26-2006-14.doc

²⁵ *The Tibetan Tripitaka: Taipei ed*, 72 vols, ed-in-chief A W Barber, Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1991: XLII, 268. Gethin credits Ulrich Pagel for his advice on this passage.

²⁶ Analayo 2011:779.

We can see the difference in the order of the persons in the Tibetan version and of the karmic scenarios in the Sutta's closing summary [§21], thus:

- (1) The person who does bad karma and is then reborn in a heavenly state (= 2nd scenario in the Pali version) corresponds to the person who does not have the capability (Chinese) and is unsuitable for growth (Tibetan) yet appears to have the capability and be suitable.
- (2) The person who abstains from bad karma and is then reborn in a lower realm (= 4th scenario in the Pali version) corresponds to the person who does have the capability (Chinese), is suitable for growth (Tibetan) yet appears not to have the capability and be unsuitable.
- (3) The person who does bad karma and is then reborn in a suffering state (= 1st scenario in the Pali version) corresponds to the person who does not have the capability (Chinese), is unsuitable for growth (Tibetan) and also appears not to have the capability and be unsuitable.
- (4) The person who abstains from bad karma and is then reborn in a heavenly state (= 3rd scenario in the Pali version) corresponds to the person who does have the capability (Chinese), is suitable for growth (Tibetan) and also appears to have the capability and be suitable.²⁷

2.2.2.3 In sum, then, concludes Gethin (2015:251 f), we have three versions of this discourse on the “great analysis of karma.” As Analayo’s comparative study indicates, the core contents of the three versions are substantially the same. Yet, when we come to the closing summary, we, in effect, have only two distinct recensions: one (the Theravāda), where (*a*)*bhabba* is used to qualify actions and the other (the Sarvāstivāda) where the same terminology is used to qualify persons.

The former usage appears problematic in meaning, the latter straightforward. On the other hand, a closing summary referring to good and bad karma seems to fit the contents of the discourse better than a closing statement in terms of *persons* capable and incapable of progress on the path. In both cases, the closing summary is secondary to the main contents of the discourse: it does not add to the substance, and its function is likely to be essentially mnemonic.

2.2.2.4 Given the terminology of *bhavya/abhavya* and its usage in Pali and Buddhist Sanskrit, Gethin concludes that “perhaps the most likely evolution is the initial addition of a closing summary referring to persons as capable and incapable, which is subsequently adapted to refer to actions as good or bad.” (2015: 252)

2.3 THE COMMENTARIAL EXPLANATIONS

2.3.1 Two commentarial explanations

2.3.1.1 The Majjhima Commentary (MA 5:20 f) gives two explanations for the closing tetrad [2.1.1]. The first takes the suffix *-ābhāsa* to mean “outshine” or “overcome,” which comes from the verb *abhāsa-ti*, “to overcome” [2.1.6]. As such, the four terms show the way by which one kind of karma can “out-shine” another in generating its result.

²⁷ See Gethin 2015:251.

2.3.1.2 The commentary takes *bhabba* and *abhabba* in the Sutta’s closing summary [§21] as having the common sense of “(un)fortunate” or “(in)auspicious.” Here, it follows the Sanskrit usage [2.3.1.4; 2.1.4.1; 2.2.1.3]. Gethin notes, “It is hard to avoid the conclusion that here—as qualifying *kamma* in the statement as it has come down to us—*abhabba* must indeed mean something like “bad” and *bhabba* something like “good” : this is simply the sense required in order to get anything intelligible out of the summary statement.

2.3.1.3 How does Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta help us here? It begins by telling us that “the term *a-bhabba* means ‘deprived of fortune, unskillful’ (*abhabban’ti bhūti,-virahitam akusalam*).”²⁸ Here, the commentary takes *a* in the sense of “without” and the √BHŪ in the sense of “to thrive or prosper”²⁹ In fact, it seems clear that the commentary is here taking *abhabba* in a sense that is quite normal for *abhavya* in classical Sanskrit: “inauspicious” or just plain “not good.”³⁰ [2.3.1.2]

2.3.1.4 What is more, says Gethin, it is immediately apparent that the way the commentary understands the term (*a*)*bhabba* as equivalent to (*a*)*kusala* in the Sutta’s closing summary has the virtue of mapping perfectly intelligibly on to the four scenarios set out in the Sutta [§21], thus:

<u>The 4 kinds of persons</u>	<u>illustrates</u>
(1) The person who performs bad actions and is then reborn in a lower realm	karma that is unfortunate and appears unfortunate.
(2) The person who performs bad actions and is then reborn in a heavenly realm	karma that is unfortunate but appears fortunate.
(3) The person who abstains from bad actions and is then reborn in a heavenly realm	karma that is both fortunate and appears fortunate.
(4) The person who abstains from bad actions and is then reborn in a lower realm	karma that is fortunate but appears unfortunate.

2.3.1.5 This is where, says Gethin, we can note that Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi solve the “karmic riddle” of the 4 statements of the closing summary [§21] by coherently translating *abhabba* in the usual Pali sense of “incapable” and supplying “of good”: thus *abhabba* is taken as meaning “incapable [of good]” and *bhabba* as “capable [of good].” In a footnote, Bodhi, curiously notes that “this explanation sounds suspect: *bhabba* (Skt *bhavya*)³¹ may simply mean ‘efficacious, capable of producing results,’ without implying any particular moral valuation” (emphasis added).³²

“Yet,” Gethin points out, “by adding ‘of good’ to ‘incapable’ their [Ñāṇanamoli & Bodhi’s] translation takes a ‘particular moral valuation’ as implied here and so in effect their translation nonetheless follows the commentarial explanation of (*a*)*bhabba*” (2015:247). Contrary to Bodhi’s rejection of the commentarial explanation, Gethin goes on to show how the Sutta commentary actually helps us with a clearer and fuller understanding of the Sutta.

²⁸ MA 5:20,5. So Ee and Ce; Be and Se read *bhūta,virahitam*; SED (sv *bhūta*) lists “well-being, welfare, prosperity,” too, as possible meanings.

²⁹ See SED svv bhū, *bhūta*, *bhūti*.

³⁰ See Gethin 2015:246.

³¹ Skt *bhavya*, says SED. means “being, existing, present; what ought to be, suitable, fit, proper, right, good, excellent” etc.

³² Bodhi tr *bhabba* as “capable,” and *abhabba* as “incapable.” M:ÑB 2001:1065, 1347 n1234.

2.3.1.6 The second sense of *ābhāsa* comes from *ābhāsati*, “to appear, to look like.” it is this second sense which is clearly more cogent,³³ as noted by Bodhi:

On this explanation, the first type is illustrated by the person who kills living beings and is reborn in hell: his action is incapable (of good result) [unfortunate] because it is unwholesome, and it appears incapable because, since he is reborn in hell, it seems to be the cause for his rebirth there. The second is illustrated by the person who kills living beings and is reborn in heaven: his action is incapable (of good result) because it is unwholesome, yet it appears capable because he is reborn in heaven; thus, to the outside recluses and brahmins it seems to be the cause for his rebirth in heaven. The remaining two terms should be understood along the same lines, with appropriate changes. (MA 5:20 f & M:ÑB 1347 n1234)

2.3.2 The first commentarial explanations

2.3.2.1 After correcting some wrong readings, Gethin presents us with a full translation of the commentary’s 1st interpretation of the sutta’s fourfold closing summary, thus:

The term *a-bhabba* means “deprived of fortune,” unskilful. The expression *abhabb’ābhāsam* means “it shines over the unfortunate”; what is meant is that it overpowers or prevents it. [In the process of death and rebirth]³⁴ when someone has accumulated a lot of unskilful *kamma*, a strong *kamma* [sometimes] prevents the result of a weak *kamma* and creates the opportunity for its own result;

(1) this is [*kamma* that is] *both unfortunate and also prevents the unfortunate*. But when one has accumulated **skilful** *kamma* and then does something **unskilful** close [to the time of death], that [unskilful act] can prevent the result of the skilful act and create the opportunity for its result;

(2) this is [*kamma* that is] *unfortunate that prevents the fortunate*. Even when someone has accumulated a lot of skilful *kamma*, a strong *kamma* [sometimes] prevents the result of a weak *kamma* and creates the opportunity for its own result;

(3) this is [*kamma* that is] *both fortunate and also prevents the fortunate*. But when one has accumulated **unskilful** *kamma* and then does something **skilful** close [to the time of one’s death], the [skilful act] can prevent the result of the unskilful act and create the opportunity for its result;

(4) this is [*kamma* that is] *fortunate that prevents the unfortunate*.

[MA 5:20,5-18] (Gethin 2015:256 f)

2.3.2.2 According to the commentary’s first interpretation, we thus have the following pattern:

- (1) karma that is both unfortunate and also prevents the unfortunate;
- (2) karma that is unfortunate that prevents the fortunate;
- (3) karma that is both fortunate and also prevents the fortunate;

³³ In the Chinese Āgama version: 阿難！猶如四種捺，或捺不熟似熟，或熟似不熟，或不熟似不熟，或熟似熟 *ēnán yóurú sì zhǒng nài, huò nài bù shú sì shú, huò shú sì bù shú, huò bù shú sì bù shú, huò shú sì shú* (MA 171 @ T1.708c22), we see that the use of the term 似 in the explanation and the simile supports the second of two commentarial explanations found at MA 5:20, according to which *-ābhāsa* in the cpd *bhabb’ābhāsa* [2.1.3.3] has the sense of “to appear” (Analayo 2011:781 + n122). See M:ÑB 2005:1347 n1234.

³⁴ It is clear that what follows assumes the Abhidhamma understanding of the process of death and rebirth and the specific role of karma close to the time of death (*āsanna*): see Vism 19.15/601; Abhav 117 (v1244); Abhs 24, Abhs-mhṭ 130 f. For a discussion see R Gethin, “*Bhavaṅga* and rebirth according to the Abhidhamma,” in *The Buddhist Forum* 3, ed T Skorupski & U Pagel, London, 1994:11-35 (20-21).

(4) karma that is fortunate that prevents the unfortunate.

2.3.2.3 It is important to note here that the commentary takes this fourfold analysis of karma as applying *not* to the karma that the 4 persons described in §2 of the Sutta are seen performing (and which is *not* the karma that conditions their rebirth), but to the karma that they perform close to death (which *is* the karma that conditions their rebirth).

2.3.2.4 Applied to the scheme of 4 persons set out in §2 of the Sutta, **the first commentarial explanation** looks like this:

- | | | | |
|---|---|------------------------------|------------|
| (1) <u>unfortunate</u> karma near death | that prevents the <i>unfortunate</i> karma done earlier and | results in rebirth in hell | (person 1) |
| (2) <u>unfortunate</u> karma near death | that prevents the <i>fortunate</i> karma done earlier and | results in rebirth in hell | (person 4) |
| (3) <u>fortunate</u> karma near death | that prevents the <i>fortunate</i> karma done earlier and | results in rebirth in heaven | (person 3) |
| (4) <u>fortunate</u> karma near death | that prevents the <i>unfortunate</i> karma done earlier and | results in rebirth in heaven | (person 2) |

Thus, this first commentarial interpretation of the Sutta’s closing summary does not map on to the order of the 4 scenarios set out in §2 of the Sutta.

2.3.3 The second commentarial explanation

2.3.3.1 The 2nd commentarial explanation is as follows :

The meaning [of *ābhāsa*] can, however, also be understood here in the sense of “appearing.” For what is said is this: *abhabb’ābhāsa* means that it appears like, it manifests as, the unfortunate. Thus 4 persons are stated in the manner beginning: “Here in this life, some person harms living creatures ...” Of these, the first person’s karma is unfortunate and appears unfortunate: it is unfortunate since it is unskilful, and because he is reborn in hell, it appears to be unskilful and the cause of his rebirth there. The second person’s *kamma* is unfortunate but appears fortunate: it is unfortunate since it is unskilful, yet since he is reborn in heaven, it appears to the followers of other traditions to be skilful and the cause of his rebirth in heaven. Exactly the same method [of explanation] applies to the other pair of *kammas*. (MA 5:20,17-21,3)³⁵

2.3.3.2 According to the commentary’s second explanation, we thus have the following pattern:

- (1) karma that is both unfortunate and also appears unfortunate;
- (2) karma that is unfortunate that appears fortunate;
- (3) karma that is both fortunate and also appears fortunate;
- (4) karma that is fortunate that appears unfortunate.

2.3.3.3 Again it is important to note that the commentary takes this second fourfold analysis of karma as applying *not* to the karma that the 4 persons do close to death (the karma that conditions their rebirth), but to the karma that the 4 persons described in §2 of the Sutta are seen performing (which is *not* the karma that conditions their rebirth). This second commentarial explanation maps straightforwardly on to the Sutta’s closing summary.

³⁵ The Comy texts are Ce 1926, Se 1920, Be 1957; Ee (following Be 1921?): see Gethin 2015:258.

(1) unfortunate karma	that appears to result in the <i>unfortunate</i> rebirth in	hell	(person 1)
(2) unfortunate karma	that appears to result in the <i>fortunate</i> rebirth in	heaven	(person 2)
(3) fortunate karma	that appears to result in the <i>fortunate</i> rebirth in	heaven	(person 3)
(4) fortunate karma	that appears to result in the <i>unfortunate</i> rebirth in	hell	(person 4)

2.3.4 Why does the commentary offer these two explanations?

2.3.4.1 Gethin explains: The second explanation clearly fits the structure of the Sutta more comfortably and involves a more natural interpretation of *ābhāsa*. Should we therefore regard the first explanation as redundant, an example of artificial exegetical excess executed simply because two explanations are always better than one?

2.3.4.2 Clearly the commentary's exegetical purpose is not confined to providing the most plausible historical reading of the Sutta. In giving these two explanations the commentary seems not, as is sometimes the case, to be offering alternative explanations (there is no *vā*) with a preference for the latter: the second is an additional explanation, and both explanations seem to be offered as of equal status.

2.3.4.3 The commentary is quite cleverly making the Sutta closing summary serve two purposes. As Gethin has indicated, the two different explanations have different and quite specific perspectives:

- (1) **the first** applies to the karma that actually causes the rebirth in hell or heaven,
- (2) **the second** to the *kamma* that appears to cause the rebirth in hell or heaven.

2.3.4.5 The first explanation may appear forced as a way of reading the canonical text as originally conceived. Yet, Gethin stresses, it serves well the commentarial purpose of bringing out what the Sutta is trying to say: the Sutta is precisely arguing that even though certain ascetics and brahmins may indeed possess the ability to see the rebirth of other beings, they do not possess the ability to connect particular actions with their particular consequences.

2.3.4.6 Thus, even when someone is seen performing good karma in this life and is subsequently seen by such ascetics and brahmins reborn in hell, they make the *wrong* connection. As already noted, in the words of the Sutta:

17 ... that person who here [in this life] destroys life, takes what is not-given ... and has wrong views is,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell—

then *either* before *or* afterwards he has done a bad act whose result is to be experienced as painful; *or else* at the time of death he has taken on and adopted some mistaken view ...

17.2 And because he *has* here, taken what is not given ... and had wrong views, he will experience their result *here and now, or in the next life, or in a subsequent life*.

[§17] (M 3:214,6-16)

Thus, the first explanation draws attention to and highlights the significance of karma close to the time of death or at the time of dying in a manner that fits well with the understanding of the process of death and rebirth in Theravāda systematic thought.³⁶

³⁶ For Pali texts and references, see Gethin 2015:252-260.

2.4 THE 4 KINDS OF KARMA

2.4.1 Following the Commentary (MA 5:20), the 4 analytical categories of karma [§21] can be explained with examples, as follows:

(1) Unfortunate karma that appears unfortunate (*abhabba abhabb'ābhāsa kamma*) [§17]

2.4.1.1 The Commentary explains how a habitual doer of bad deeds—such as one who kills beings for a living—is seen with one’s divine eye to be reborn in hell because of any of these three conditions—a bad karma done earlier than that bad deed of killing, etc; or a bad karma done later; or a wrong view at the dying moment [§§17-20]. (MA 5:50)

In other words, although the Sutta says that the bad-doer is reborn in hell on account of some karma, this should not be misunderstood as a fixed course, but only as stating a possibility. While it may be true that he is reborn in hell because of some bad karma he was seen to be doing, it is also possible that he was reborn there because of some *other* bad karma he did earlier, or later, or because of wrong view.

2.4.1.2 As for that bad karma of killing, etc, itself, it may fruit in this life itself (at some point), or in the next left, or in some subsequent life [§§17-20]—this is the “**threefold analysis of karma**.” It is clear, then, that a karmic act—good or bad—may not fruit at once, maybe not even in this life, nor even the next one: it may appear *unfortunate*. However, every karmic act has the potential of fruiting, when there are no other stronger karma present, that is, the conditions for the fruiting of some other predominating karma.

2.4.1.3 The Pali tradition depicts **Devadatta** as a consummate bad-doer in contrast to the Buddha. If Māra is the psychological antithesis of the Buddha, then Devadatta is his ethical antithesis. Devadatta is said to have persuaded prince Ajātasattu to murder his own father, Bimbisāra (a streamwinner) (DA 1:135--137). Devadatta himself then thrice attempts to murder the Buddha himself and once succeeds in wounding him, and also causes a schism in the order (V 2:191-198).

None of these bad karma brought him immediately to hell. He suffers ill health towards the end of his life, and it is said that he dies when the earth “swallowed” him up. We are not told which of these bad karma brought him a suffering afterlife. We might surmise that he died with a mind of wrong view, which conditioned him to a suffering state.³⁷

Despite Deva,datta numerous bad karma in his life as a monk under Gotama Buddha, he is prophesied to become a pratyeka-buddha, named Aṭṭhissara, at the end of 100,000 world-cycles.³⁸ His bad karma would then be said to “appear inefficacious.” Hence, we can speak of Devadatta’s death and future lives as an example of unfortunate karma that appears unfortunate.

(2) Unfortunate karma that appears fortunate (*abhabba bhabb'ābhāsa kamma*) [§18]

2.4.1.4 This is karma whose fruit is expected, but is prevented by the predominance of an opposing karma at the dying moment. For example, a bad kamma is followed by good death-proximate kamma which makes the former incapable of fruiting. A person kills living beings, but he later stops doing so, and cultivates good karma, and, as a result, is reborn in heaven. His bad karma is *unfortunate* (incapable of fruiting) because of the predominance of the good karma, which brings him heavenly rebirth.

³⁷ On Deva,datta, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples* lecture 7: “The Buddha’s Bad Karma” (2002) §§5-14 & **Devadatta**, SD 71.4. See also below §17 + nn.

³⁸ Miin 111; DhA 1:148. See **Devadatta**, SD 71.4.

It *appears as if* this “bad person,” despite having done bad, nonetheless goes on to enjoy happiness: his bad karma only “appears” fortunate because it still has the potential of fruiting in some future occasion when the conditions are right.

2.4.1.5 A well known example here is that of Coppertothe the public executioner, **Tamba,dāṭhika Cora,ghātaka** (DhA 8.1), who after a bloody career as a bandit, kills his own comrades, and then becomes his town’s executioner of criminals for fifty years. He meets Sāriputta with a troubled mind, but the former’s teaching uplifts his mind, preventing the fruiting of his bad karma so that he attains streamwinning. In due course, a yaksha, in the form of a cow, strikes him with her shoulder and kills him, and he is reborn in Tusita heaven. (DhA 8.1/2:202-208)

(3) Fortunate karma that appears fortunate (*bhabba bhabb’ābhāsa kamma*).

2.4.1.6 This is a strong karma that ripens even before the accumulated bad karma. For example, a good karma (which appears capable of good result) is followed by good death-proximate karma which makes the good fruit immediately.

An example here is that of **Pasenadi**, rajah of Kosala. Although the 80-year-old king³⁹ right after his visit to the Buddha, dies tragically outside the walls of Rājagaha, only with his horse and a female servant.⁴⁰ On account of a wholesome dying mind, he is reborn in a happy state. The **Anāgata,vaṃsa**, a book of prophecies, says that he is now a Bodhisattva and will become the 4th future buddha after ours (JPTS 1886:37).⁴¹

(4) Fortunate karma that appears unfortunate (*bhabba abhabb’ābhāsa kamma*).

2.4.1.9 Although a person may have done much good karma, but he harps on some past bad karma, thus immediately shape his dying karma, so that he is reborn in an unhappy state. The good karma that has been habitually cultivated seems to be ineffective. It is the death-proximate karma, a bad one, that prevents the good karma from fruiting, and so the person is reborn in a suffering state.

An example here is **Mallikā**, king Pasenadi’s wife. She lives a virtuous life of generosity, keeping the 5 precepts and the 8 precepts, and so on. However, in a moment of indiscretion, she has sexual intercourse with a dog in the bath-house. When the king suspects this, she conjures up an elaborate lie. These acts weigh heavily on her mind during her last moments. As a result, she spends seven days in Avīci hell. However, her own habitual good karma, in due course, brings her rebirth in Tusita heaven.⁴²

2.4.2 In our lifetimes, we commit both good and bad deeds. Depending on the circumstances, our karma may bear fruit either here and now, in some future state, or at the moment of dying. Thus, the effect of a comparatively weak deed (*dubbala,kamma*) may be superseded by the effect of a comparatively strong deed (*balava,kamma*), or by the accumulated effects of recurrent or habitual deeds.

As such, a person may have been a murderer, a liar, an adulterer, a thief, a drunk and so forth, but on dying, he may arise in a happy state if the effects of his accumulated good karma are strong enough to supersede the results of his bad karma. However, the karmic fruits that have been superseded (that is, the bad karma) will then be experienced once the superseded good karmic results have been exhausted.

³⁹ Pasenadi is of the same age as the Buddha. See BA:H xliii-xlix for discussion on the connatals.

⁴⁰ MA 2:753 f.; J 4:131. See foll n.

⁴¹ On Pasenadi, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples* lecture 8: “The Thundering Silence” (2002) §19.

⁴² See **Mallikā Devī Vatthu** (DhA 9.6/3:119-123): see SD 42.14 (2.3),

2.5 AS WE SOW, SO WE SHALL REAP?

2.5.1 By these 4 statements on the 4 karmic scenarios—the crux of the Buddha’s “great analysis of karma” [2.1.1]—we should understand, then, it is neither that (2) “bad karma *is followed by* bad karma” nor that (4) “good karma *is followed by* good karma.” This is clearly against the basic law of karma, that is, a bad karma has the *efficacy or potential* (the seed) of bad result, etc—that is to say:

a bad karma has the *efficacy or seed* of bad fruits;
a good karma has the *efficacy or seed* of good fruits.

2.5.2 Hence, the well known saying, “**as we sow, so we shall reap**” should not be taken literally. This saying comes from a popular, but unsatisfactory, definition of karma found in **the Isayo Samuddaka Sutta** (S 11.10), which goes thus:

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.⁴³ (S 903/11.10/1:227) + SD 39.2 (2)

This verse, it should be noted, is not spoken by the Buddha, but by some sea-side rishis, whose dwellings are devastated by asuras battling the devas. The rishis appeal to the asura leader to spare them, but he refused. The desperate rishis then recited a curse upon the asura leader by way of the above verse. Interestingly, this is more of a tit-for-tat gesture, or invocation of a *lex talionis* (“an eye for an eye”). The story is recorded in **the Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 903).⁴⁴

2.5.3 The import of the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta is that our current karmic deeds may not in themselves bear good fruit (hence, they are said to be “unfortunate,” *abhabba*), and that none of the similar karma, too, seem to bear fruit. What *follows* is actually the fruiting of some other kind of karma, that is, a past karma, or a new karma, or one’s mental state at the dying moment. This is what immediately shapes our life to come. This is the crux of the teaching of the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta. [1.3.1]

2.6 KARMA AND CONDITIONS

2.6.1 The point here is an important one, that is, karma does not work mechanically like some natural law, such a gravity or motion of physical objects. It is more of a mental conditioning that affects our whole being, body and mind. The kind of action we do—good or bad—may not be *immediately* followed by a commensurate resultant karma. For that reason, we do not always see the good prospering because they are morally upright, and we see the bad prospering despite their bad habits.

2.6.2 However, whatever conditions that predominate will bring about the fruiting of some kind of karma. In a way, external (that is, physical and social) conditions, do act as the catalysts for the ripening of karma. The kind of **culture or religion** we follow may have a significant influence on our beliefs and conduct. In a culture dominated by a belief that an almighty God favours them, and that others are “outsiders,” may condition its people to be intolerant or violent to others outside the “tribe.” Or, if that

⁴³ *Yādisaṃ vappate bījaṃ, tādisaṃ harate phalaṃ | kalyāṇa, kārī kalyāṇaṃ, pāpa, kārī ca pāpakaṃ | pavuttaṃ vappate bījaṃ, phalaṃ paccañubhossati.*

⁴⁴ S 903/1:227 + SD 39.2 (2); SD 3,5 (1); SD 4.16 (2.5).

God is seen as an embodiment of power, that culture may feel justified to conquer and dominate other nations and communities.

2.6.3 Then, there are contributing **social conditions**. Let's say someone is born in a remote village, he is probably less likely to be influenced by the more selfish conduct of people living in a crowded slum or the greater anonymity of large cities. Because of the familiarity of the member of a close-knit community, they are less likely to commit crimes, at least against one another.

2.6.4 On a more **personal** level, the kind of friends we have, and the age-group we are in (for example, adolescence), are likely to influence our moral values and judgement. We may even feel justified to commit a wrong act, just to win the approval of the group, or not to be branded as a coward or outcaste.

2.6.5 Above all, karma depends mostly on how we think in the present, and what we have done in the past. Our past is like a store of karmic seeds. Our present is like a rich field, and our actions are like those of sowing the seeds, tending the crop, and harvesting it. In other words, various present conditions work together to bring our karmic past to present fruit.

2.6.6 With Dharma training and insight, we are more likely to have the fortitude and skill to endure, even mitigate or avoid, our negative karmic fruits, and to understand and direct the good karmic fruits towards our personal and spiritual growth. Karma, in other words, works in complex ways, not always clearly apparent even to a careful observer. Only a buddha is able to fully see and understand see the workings of karma in a person or a group of people at any time.⁴⁵

3 An anacoluthon?

3.1 VARIANT READINGS

3.1.1 The Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta has a very interesting passage where we find either a rhetorical break (anacoluthon) or that the sentence is incomplete (due to an error in transmission). In §6 (M 3:209), we find this passage:

“Anyway, Ānanda, how could these foolish, ignorant wanderers of other religions understand the Tathāgata’s **great analysis of karma** (*mahā kamma, vibhaṅga*).⁴⁶ If you, Ānanda, would listen to the Tathāgata’s great analysis of karma...”⁴⁷

Api c’ānanda ke ca añña, titthiya, paribbājakā bālā avyattā ke ca tathāgatassa mahā, kamma, - vibhaṅgaṃ jānissanti. Sace tumhe ānanda suneyyātha tathāgatassa mahā, kamma, vibhaṅgaṃ vibhājantassā ti...

⁴⁵ On the Buddha’s “omniscience,” see SD 10.8 (2); **Sandaka S** (M 76,21+52), SD 35.7; SD 36.2 (5.1.1.2).

⁴⁶ The Sutta’s title comes from here. See §16(4) & n below. “Great” (*mahā*) here has the sense of being “comprehensive” and does not connote any grandiosity.

⁴⁷ *Sace tumhe Ānanda suneyyātha tathāgatassa mahākammavibhaṅgaṃ vibhājantassā ti*. The sentence opens with the conjunction *sace* (“if”), but ends without saying what will follow “if” the monks and Ānanda hear the great analysis of karma. We may have here an anacoluthon (syntactical break for rhetorical effect). However, according to **Analayo**, the Madhyama Āgama version of the Sutta preserves the full sentence: see Intro (3). As regards the phrase, “great analysis of karma,” *mahā, kamma, vibhaṅga*, it occurs twice in this sentence: the former is rendered technically and the latter more freely. *Vibhanjatassa* comes from *vibhajati*, “to divide, dissect, classify, analyze” and it is the verb used by Ānanda in his response: see foll n.

7 “This is the time, Blessed One! This is the time, Sugata [Well Gone One], for the Blessed One to give the great analysis of karma.⁴⁸ Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will bear it in mind.”

“Then, listen, Ānanda, pay close attention to it, I will speak.”

Etassa Bhagavā kālo etassa Sugata kālo yaṃ Bhagavā mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ vibhajeyya. Bhagavato sutam bhikkhū dhāressantī ti.

Tena h’ānanda suṇāhi sādhuḥkaṃ manasikarohi bhāssimā ti.

[S6]⁴⁹

3.1.2 The underscored sentence reads *sace tumhe Ānanda suṇeyyātha tathāgatassa mahā,kamma,-vibhaṅgaṃ vibhajantassā ti*. It opens with the conjunction *sace* (“if”), but ends without saying what will follow “if” the monks and Ānanda hear the great analysis of karma. We may have here an anacoluthon (syntactical break for rhetorical effect).⁵⁰ The Buddha’s sentence is incomplete possibly due to Ānanda’s enthusiasm to listen to that teaching.

3.1.3 However, according to **Analayo**, the Madhyama Āgama version⁵¹ of the Sutta preserves the full sentence, explaining “if you were to hear from the Blessed One the discourse on the great analysis of karma, you would develop more and superior mental tranquillity and happiness towards the Tathagata,” 若汝從世尊聞分別大業經者，於如來倍復增上心靖得喜。⁵² Based on MĀ 171, says **Analayo**, a possible reconstruction of the missing part of the Pali sentence would result in the sentence reading: *sace tumhe, ānanda, suṇeyyātha tathāgatassa mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ vibhajantassa, tatra vo, Ānanda, tathāgate cittam bhiyyoso,mattāya pasīdeyya pāmojjaṃ labheyya*.⁵³ In either version, Ānanda understands the hint and requests the Buddha to give the great analysis of karma.

3.1.4 Of course, there is the other possibility that, if the Pali sentence follows an urtext with an anacoluthon, then the Chinese translation must either have amended for what is thought to be an incomplete sentence; or, perhaps, the Chinese redactors did not notice the anacoluthon at all, and simply regarded it as a complete sentence, as Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi has done, rendering it as “You should listen, Ānanda, to the Tathāgata as he expounds the great exposition of action” (M:ÑB 1060).

3.2 POSSIBLE SOLUTION

3.2.1 There is a better solution to this interesting puzzle. The word *vibhājantassa* is problematic, as it seems redundant since the word appears to refer to *mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ*, which, however, already

⁴⁸ “To give a great analysis of karma,” *mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ vibhajeyya*, lit “should analyze the great analysis of karma.” See prev n.

⁴⁹ M 136.6/3:209.

⁵⁰ An anacoluthon, def by OED as an instance of “anacoluthia,” ie, “a want of grammatical sequence; the passing from one construction to another before the former is completed.” *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1990) is more helpful: “a grammatical term for a change of construction in a sentence that leaves the initial construction unfinished: ‘Either you go—but we’ll see.’ For another example, see **Adhipateyya S** (A 3.40.2/1:148) + SD 27.3 n (on aposiopesis).

⁵¹ MĀ 171 @ T1.707a19.

⁵² *Ruò rǔ cóng shì zūn wén fēn bié dà yè jīng zhě, yú rú lái bèi fù zēng shàng xīn jìng dé xǐ*. Analayo adopts the variant reading 聞 for 問.

⁵³ Analayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya*, draft 2005 at M 3:209 & n.

has *vibhaṅgaṃ*. Taken thus, the sentence, *Tathāgatassa mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ vibhājantassa* would oddly translate as “of the analysis of the Tathagata’s great analysis of karma” or “the exposition of the Tathagata’s great exposition of karma.”

3.2.2 Fortunately, there is a similar sentence structure found in **Puris’indriya,ñāṇā S** (A 6.62):

“If you, Ānanda, would listen to the Tathagata’s knowledge⁵⁴ of personal faculties [of personality analysis], I will give an analysis of it [I will expound it].”

“This is the time, Blessed One! This is the time, Sugata [Well Gone One], for the Blessed One to give an analysis of the knowledge of personal faculties. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will bear it in mind.”

Sace tumhe Ānanda suneyyātha Tathāgatassa puris’indriya,ñāṇāni vibhajissāmī ti.
Etassa Bhagavā kālo etassa Sugata kālo yaṃ Bhagavā puris’indriya,ñāṇāni vibhajeyya,
Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressantī ti. (A 6.62,2/3:404; cf AA 3:405)

3.2.3 It is very significant that, although no variant of the Pali Text Society (PTS) reading *vibhājantassa* in **the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta**, the PTS text of **the Puris’indriya,ñāṇā Sutta** has *vibhājantassa*, too, but for which it gives two other variant readings: *vibhajjessāmi* (Be Mandalay MS) and *vibhajissāmi* (Be Phayre MS). This provides us the licence to amend the PTS Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta, reading thus:

Sace tumhe Ānanda suṇeyyātha Tathāgatassa mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ vibhājissāmī [vibhajjessāmī] ti...

If you, Ānanda, would listen to the Tathāgata’s great analysis of karma, I will give an analysis of it [I will expound it].

This makes perfect sense—without an anacoluthon.

4 Related suttas

4.1 PARALLEL TOPICS

4.1.1 The Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) Sutta (A 6.63), examining a similar case, records the Buddha as explicitly presenting as a “threefold” distinction of karma, where he declares, “Bhikshus, I will speak on the fruition of the 3 kinds of karma” (*ti,vidhāharā bhikkhave kammānaṃ vipakaṃ vadāmi*).⁵⁵ This threefold analysis is also found in the *Abhidharma,kośabhāṣya*,⁵⁶ and in the *Mahāvvyutpatti*.⁵⁷

4.1.2 We have already mentioned **the Amba Sutta** (A 4.106) [2.2.1.2]. The Buddha speaks of 4 kinds of mangoes: a mango that may appear ripe but be unripe, appear unripe but be ripe, appear ripe and be ripe, or appear unripe and be unripe. Similarly, there are 4 kinds of persons:

- (1) one who looks inspiring and fully aware, but he does not understand the 4 noble truths;
- (2) one who does not look inspiring and fully aware, but he understand the 4 noble truths;
- (3) one who does not look inspiring and fully aware, and he does not understand the 4 noble truths;

⁵⁴ Pali has *ñāṇāni* (pl), “knowledges.”

⁵⁵ A 6.63/3:415,18 (SD 6.63).

⁵⁶ Abhk 4.50 in Pradhan, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Patna, 1967:229,21.

⁵⁷ Mvyut no 2309 in R Sakaki, 翻譯名義大集 [Mahāvvyutpatti], Tokyo, 1926:171. K Ch’en, in *Buddhism in China*, (Princeton, 1964) notes a ref in a 4th cent Chin treatise to the same threefold presentation as a teaching found in the sutras (1964:10).

(4) one who looks inspiring and fully aware, and he understand the 4 noble truths.⁵⁸

4.2 RELATED SUTTAS ON KARMA

4.2.1 The Mahā Kamma,vibhaṅga Sutta, dealing with the more complex operations of karma, understandably comes after **the Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 135), which deals with more basic aspects of karma, that “beings are owners of karma, heirs to karma, born in karma, bound by karma, have karma as their refuge. It is karma that divides beings into low and excellent” (M 135,4).⁵⁹ While the Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta speaks of our “ownership” of our karma, nowhere does it says that everything is due to karma. **The Sīvaka Sutta** (S 36.21), for example, teaches that not everything that we feel or experience are due to karma alone, but could be the working of any of eight possible conditions.⁶⁰ **The (Kamma) Nidāna Sutta** (A 3.33) compares our karma to seeds that depend on favourable conditions to germinate, or could be destroyed by burning (through spiritual development).⁶¹

4.2.2 Both the Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta and **the Loṇa,phala Sutta** (A 3.99)⁶² teach that karma should not be taken as a simplistic “cause and effect” operation—a deterministic case of “good begets good, bad begets bad”⁶³—but one where various other aggravating or attenuating circumstances are involved. The Loṇa,phala Sutta, for example, says that the cultivation of lovingkindness can lessen or even prevent the effects of certain unwholesome karma.

4.2.3 It is important to understand here that “karma is intention” (*cetanā’ham kammaṃ vadāmi*).⁶⁴ In other words, there is only bad karma here if the person *intentionally* (through greed, hatred or delusion) shows his callousness or arrogance, etc. This Sutta should be studied in perspective with such suttas as:

Sāleyyaka Sutta	M 41	SD 5.7	causes of disparity in rebirth; choosing a happy rebirth;
Saṅkhār’upapatti Sutta	M 130	SD 2.23	choosing one’s rebirth;
Sarakāṇī Sutta 1	S 55.24	SD 3.6	an erstwhile drunk dies a streamwinner.

— — —

Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta

The Discourse on the Great⁶⁵ Analysis of Karma

⁵⁸ A 4.106/2:106 f (SD 94.9), and is almost identical to Pug 4.10/44 f.

⁵⁹ See **Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 135,4), SD 4.15; also M 1:390; A 3:72-74, 186, 5:88; Kvu 522, 598. See also K N Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:404 f.

⁶⁰ S 36.21/4:230 f (SD 5.6).

⁶¹ A 3.33/1:134-136 (SD 4.14).

⁶² A 3.99/1:249-253 (SD 3.5).

⁶³ See **Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 11.10/1:227 f), SD 39.2.

⁶⁴ A 3:416; Kvu 8.9.36/392. See SD 57.10 (1.3.2.1).

⁶⁵ The “great” (*mahā*) here qualifies *kamma,vibhaṅga*, not the *sutta* because the word *mahā kamma,vibhaṅga* occurs in this Sutta [6, 13-16]. “Great” (*mahā*) here has the sense of “comprehensive” and does not connote any grandiosity. On **mahā & cūḷa** (P) in sutta titles, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22, M 10), SD 13.1 (2).

M 136

[207]

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying at the squirrels' feeding-ground in the Bamboo Grove near Rājagaha.

Samiddhi & Potali,putta

2 At that time, the venerable Samiddhi⁶⁶ was dwelling in a forest hut.

Then the wanderer Potali,putta,⁶⁷ while walking about on a stroll,⁶⁸ went up to the venerable Samiddhi and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, he sat down at one side.

2.2 Sitting thus at one side, Potali,putta the wanderer said this to the venerable Samiddhi:

“From the ascetic Gotama himself, avuso Samiddhi, I heard and learned this:

‘Bodily action is empty [fruitless]; verbal action is empty [fruitless]; only mental action is true.’⁶⁹

And that ‘there is that attainment on attaining of which one experiences nothing at all.’⁷⁰

2.3 “Do not speak so, avuso Potali,putta! Do not speak so, avuso Potali,putta!

Do not misrepresent the Blessed One. It is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One.

For the Blessed One did not say *that bodily action is empty, verbal action is empty, only mental action is true; nor is there that attainment on attaining of which one experiences nothing.*”

2.4 “Avuso Samiddhi, for how long have you gone forth?”

“Not long, avuso, three rains.”⁷¹

2.5 “Now, what shall we say here to the elder monks when even a novice monk⁷² thinks that the Teacher should be defended thus?

Avuso Samiddhi, having done an intentional deed through the body, through speech, through the mind, what does one experience?”⁷³

2.6 “Avuso Potali,putta, having done an intentional deed through the body, through speech, through mind, one experiences pain [suffering].”

⁶⁶ Once when Samiddhi saw the Buddha's majesty in the company of Bimbisāra (*Bimbisāra, samāgame Buddhānu-bhavam disvā*), faith arose in him and he joined the order (ThaA 1:125). Once, while drying himself after bathing in the Tapodā tank, a deva appeared and asked him regarding the Bhaddeka,ratta Sutta, but both of them were ignorant of it. The deva told Samiddhi to ask the Buddha regarding this. The Buddha gave him a brief teaching which later was elaborated by Mahā Kaccāna, hence called **Mahā Kaccāna Bhaddeka,ratta S** (M 133). The Aṅguttara Comy (AA 4:175) says that he was a pupil of Sāriputta, and **Samiddhi S** (A 9.14) contains Sāriputta's instructions on “purposive thought” (*saṅkappa,vitakka*) to him (A 9.14/4:385 f). See further SD 21.4 (1.1).

⁶⁷ On Potali,putta, see SD 5.9 (2.5.8).

⁶⁸ “Walking about on a stroll,” *jaṅghā,vihāram anucaṅkamamāno anuvicaramāno*, lit “wandering to and fro on foot and walking up and down” (K R Norman, *Group of Discourses II*, 1992: 63). See D 1:235; M 1:108, 227, 2:118, 3:128; A 1:138, 3:76; Sn p105, p115. For stock refs, see M 18,2 n @ SD 6.14.

⁶⁹ *Mogham kāya,kammaṃ, mogham vacī,kammaṃ, mano,kammam eva saccan'ti*. Comy says that Potali,putta did not actually hear this statement nor the following one directly from the Buddha but from a report [§4.1]. This first remark is actually a distortion of the Buddha's declaration in **Upāli S** (M 56; MA 5:15) that mental action is the most reprehensible of the 3 types of bad actions (M 56.4/1:373). See foll n.

⁷⁰ This remark comes from the Buddha's discussion on the cessation of perception (*abhi,saññā,nirodha*) in **Poṭṭha-pāda S** (D 9/1:180; MA 5:16), SD 7.14. See prev n.

⁷¹ That is, three monastic years where each rains retreat that a monk duly completes is a “year.”

⁷² “Novice monk,” *navaka bhikkhu*, ie a monk of less than 5 rains. Samiddhi was 3 rains old.

⁷³ *Sañcetanikaṃ āvuso samiddhi kammaṃ katvā kāyena vācāya manasā kiṃ so vediyatiti?*

Potali,putta approaches Ānanda

2.7 Then, neither approving nor disapproving of the venerable Samiddhi's word, the wanderer Potali,putta rose from his seat and left.

3 Then, not long after, as the wanderer Potali,putta was leaving,⁷⁴ the venerable Samiddhi approached the venerable Ānanda [208] and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, the venerable Samiddhi sat down at one side.

3.2 Sitting thus as one side, the venerable Samiddhi *related to the venerable Ānanda the whole conversation that he had with the wanderer Potali,putta.*

3.3 When this was said, the venerable Ānanda said this to the venerable Samiddhi:

"Avuso Samiddhi, this is a conversation about which we should see the Blessed One. Come, avuso Samiddhi, let us approach the Blessed One and tell him regarding this matter. We will bear in mind the Blessed One's explanation."

"Yes, avuso," the venerable Samiddhi replied in assent to the venerable Ānanda.

The Buddha's answer

4 Then the venerable Ānanda and the venerable Samiddhi approached the Blessed One. Having saluted the Blessed One, they sat down at one side.

Sitting thus as one side, the venerable Ānanda *related to the Blessed One the whole conversation between the venerable Samiddhi and the wanderer Potali,putta.*

When this was said, the Blessed One said this to the venerable Ānanda:

5 "Ānanda, I do not recall ever having met the wanderer Potali,putta. As such, how could there have been such a conversation?

When the wanderer Potali,putta's question should have been *analyzed* before being answered, Samiddhi, this misguided person, answered it categorically!"⁷⁵

6 When this was said, the venerable Udāyī⁷⁶ said this to the Blessed One:

⁷⁴ This whole phrase, *acira,pakkante potali,putte paribbājake*, is loc abs (see Warder, *Pali Grammar*, 1974:103 f). It can also be idiomatically rendered as "Then, not long after the wanderer Potali,putta, had left ..."

⁷⁵ *Iminā ca ānanda samiddhinā mogha,purisenā potali,puttassa paribbājakassa vibhajja,vyākaraṇīyo pañho ekamāsenā vyākato'ti.* "Categorically," *ekamāsenā*, lit "one-sidedly," one-pointedly, absolutely, definitely, certainly (cf D 3:229; A 1:97, 246), ie, an answer without analysis: see SD 44.1 (3.1.2.2). On the 4 proper ways of answering a question, see **Abhaya Rāja,kumāra S** (M 58), SD 7.12 (4); **Kathā,vatthu S** (A 3.67), SD 46.11); **Pañha Vyākaraṇa S** (A 4.42/2:46), SD 46.12.

⁷⁶ Comy says that this is **Lāl'udāyī**, Udāyī the foolish. Wanting to speak, he stretches out his neck, moves his jaws and twitches his face, and is unable to sit still, plainly before the Buddha who can see him without the need of the divine eye, mental reasoning nor omniscience (MA 5:16 f). DPPN says that he was "an elder who possessed the knack for saying the wrong thing," for example, at an auspicious occasion, he would recite stanzas suitable for a funeral, and at a funeral, he would do just the opposite! (DhA 3:123 ff). His main problem seems to have been boastfulness which often got him into trouble (like being unable to teach Dharma when invited to do so) (J 2:164-7, 344 ff; DhA 3:125). His shallow knowledge neither stops him from contradicting Sāriputta thrice on one occasion (A 3:192 ff), nor from intruding into profound discussions of the Buddha himself. On two occasions, the Buddha censured him for his display of ignorance: once in **Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga S** [§6] and the other in a discussion on the 5 "stations of recollection" (*anussati-t,ṭhānā*) in **Lāl'udāyī S** (A 3:322 f; cf A 1:228). He was also guilty of breaking a number of Vinaya rules, esp Saṅghādisesa 1 (V 3:110-112), that of masturbation and encouraging Seyyasaka to do the same. However, it could be that this Lāl'udāyī of the Vinaya is another namesake. See SD 24.8 (1).

“Perhaps, bhante, the venerable Samiddhi said this is in reference to the teaching that ‘whatever is felt is included in suffering’?”⁷⁷

6.2 Then the Blessed One addressed Ānanda:

“Look, Ānanda, this misguided person Udāyī is indeed on the wrong path!⁷⁸ I knew, Ānanda, that this misguided person Udayī, when conceiving an idea, would unwisely conceive one such as this.⁷⁹

6.3 From the beginning, the wanderer Potali,putta had asked about the 3 kinds of feelings.

If, Ānanda, Samiddhi, this misguided person, [209] when asked by the wanderer Potali,putta, had answered in this manner, he would have been right, that is to say⁸⁰—

‘Avuso, Potali,putta, having done an intentional deed
through the body, through speech, through the mind, that result in pleasant feelings,⁸¹
one feels *pleasure*.

Avuso, Potali,putta, having done an intentional deed
through the body, through speech, through the mind, that result in unpleasant feelings,
one feels *pain*.

Avuso, Potali,putta, having done an intentional deed
through the body, through speech, through the mind, that result in neutral feelings,
one feels *a neutral feeling*.⁸²

—then, Ānanda, Samiddhi, this misguided person, when answering this question, would have answered rightly.

6.4 Anyway, Ānanda, how could these foolish, ignorant wanderers of other religions understand the Tathāgata’s **great analysis of karma** (*mahā kamma, vibhaṅga*)?⁸³

If you, Ānanda, would listen to the Tathāgata’s great analysis of karma, I will give an analysis of it [I will expound it].⁸⁴

⁷⁷ This quotation is from **Rahogata S** (S 36.11/4:216-218), SD 33.6, made in reference to the suffering inherent in all formations because of impermanence. Although the statement itself is true, Udayī seems to have misinterpreted it to mean that all feeling is felt as suffering, which is clearly false.

⁷⁸ *Passa kho tvam ānanda imassa udāyissa mogha, purisassa ummaṅgaṃ*. “The wrong path,” *ummagga*, lit “out of the way,” “under the way” a tunnel (V 1:8 = M 1:171 = 3:5 = A 4:191 = S 4:195); idiomatically, “Look, Ānanda, how lost is this Udāyī!” Cf A:W 2:184 n5.

⁷⁹ “When conceiving an idea, would conceive one like this,” *evam ayam ummujjamāno ayoniso ummujjissati*. This sentence is a pun on Udāyī’s mannerisms at that moment—wanting to speak, he stretches out his neck (*ummujati*), moves his jaws and twitches his face, and is unable to sit still, plainly before the Buddha who can see him without any need of the divine eye, mental reasoning nor omniscience (MA 5:16 f). On the connection between *ummujja* and Skt *unmiṅjita*, see A:W 2:184 n5, and also BHSD: *unmiṅja, unmiṅjita*, “opening, as of the mouth.”

⁸⁰ This section is qu at DhsA 88 as belonging to a discourse in which karma is thought of as intention. The wanderer’s name, however, is given as Pātali,putta.

⁸¹ “That result in pleasant feelings,” *sukha, vedanīya*. The other two feelings of this triad are “that result in painful feelings,” *dukkha, vedanīya*, and “that result in neither-painful-nor-pleasant feelings,” *adukkham-asukha, vedanīya*.

⁸² “One feels neutral,” ie neither painful nor pleasurable. “Feeling” (*vedanā*) here has the sense of “experience,” as when we say “I feel good” or “I feel nothing.” As such it makes sense here to say “neutral feeling.”

⁸³ This is in fact the Sutta’s title: see §16(4) & n below. “Great” (*mahā*) here has the sense of being “comprehensive” and does not connote any grandiosity. The Buddha’s statement here recalls the conversation at §2.

⁸⁴ *Sace tumhe Ānanda suṇeyyātha tathāgatassa mahā, kamma, vibhaṅgaṃ vibhajantassā ti*. Alt tr: “If you, Ānanda, would listen to the Tathāgata’s great analysis of karma, I will give an analysis of it [I will expound it].” The sentence opens with the conjunction *sace* (“if”), but ends without saying what will follow “if” the monks and Ānanda hear the great analysis of karma. We may have here an anacoluthon (syntactical break for rhetorical effect) [3]. However, according to **Analyo**, the Madhyama Āgama version of the Sutta preserves the full sentence [3.1.3]. As regards the phrase, “great analysis of karma,” *mahā, kamma, vibhaṅga*, it occurs twice in this sentence: the former is rendered

7 “This is the time, Blessed One! This is the time, Sugata [Well Gone One], for the Blessed One to give the great analysis of karma.⁸⁵ Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will bear it in mind.”
 “Then, listen, Ānanda, pay close attention to it, I will speak.”
 “Yes, bhante,” the venerable Ānanda replied in assent to the Blessed One.
 The Blessed One said this:

Summary: The 4 types of persons⁸⁶

8 “Ānanda, there are these **4 kinds of persons** to be found in the world. What are the four?

(1) Here, a certain person⁸⁷
 destroys life,
 takes the not-given,
 indulges in sexual misconduct,
 speaks false words,
 speaks malicious words,
 speaks harsh words,
 speaks frivolous words,
 is covetous,
 has a mind of ill will,
 holds wrong views.

After death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

(2) Here, Ānanda, a certain person
destroys life,
takes the not-given,
indulges in sexual misconduct,
speaks false words,
speaks malicious words,
speaks harsh words,
speaks frivolous words,
is covetous,
has a mind of ill will,
holds wrong views.

After death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

(3) Here, a certain person
 refrains from destroying life,

technically and the latter more freely. *Vibhanjatassa* comes from *vibhajati*, “to divide, dissect, classify, analyze” and it is the verb used by Ānanda in his response: see foll n.

⁸⁵ “To give a great analysis of karma,” *mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ vibhajeyya*, lit “should analyze the great analysis of karma.” See prev n.

⁸⁶ These 4 types of persons are not in themselves a classification of karma, but form the *maṭṭikā* (headings, summaries), set out as to detail the knowledge of the great analysis of karma (MA 5:18).

⁸⁷ Here and in (2) are listed the 10 courses of unwholesome actions (*akusala kamma,patha*), while in (3) and (4) we see the 10 courses of wholesome actions (*kusala kamma,patha*). See **San̄cetanika S** (A 10.206,7.2-12), SD 3.9; also D 33.3.2(3)/3:269, 34.2.3(5)/3:290; A 10.176.3-6/5:264-266: for refs, see **Esukāri S** (M 96.8/2:179) n, SD 37.9.

refrains from taking the not-given,
 refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrains from speaking false words,
 refrains from speaking malicious words, [210]
 refrains from speaking harsh words,
 refrains from speaking frivolous words,
 not covetous,
 has a mind without ill will,
 holds right view.

After death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

- (4) Here, Ānanda, a certain person
refrains from destroying life,
refrains from taking the not-given,
refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,
refrains from speaking false words,
refrains from speaking malicious words,
refrains from speaking harsh words,
refrains from speaking frivolous words,
not covetous,
has a mind without ill will,
holds right view.

After death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

THE 4 WRONG VIEWS DUE TO INCOMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF KARMA

(1) “There is bad karma”

9 Here, Ānanda, as a result of zeal,⁸⁸ as a result of effort, as a result of devoted practice, as a result of heedfulness, as a result of right attention,
 a certain recluse or brahmin gains a mental concentration such that with the divine eye that is purified and superhuman,
 he sees that person here who
 destroys living beings,
 takes the not-given,
 indulges in sexual misconduct,
 speaks false words,
 speaks malicious words,
 speaks harsh words,
 speaks frivolous words,
 is covetous,
 has a mind of ill will,

⁸⁸ Comy says that this word and the four that follow—*ātappa, padhāna, anuyoga, appamāda, sammā manasikāra*—are names for “energy” (*vīriya*) (MA 5:18).

holds wrong views,
and he sees that after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.⁸⁹

9.2 He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that there are bad deeds; there is the result of misconduct. For I saw a person here who destroyed life,
took the not-given,
indulged in sexual misconduct,
spoke false words,
spoke malicious words,
spoke harsh words,
spoke frivolous words,
was covetous,
had a mind of ill will,
held wrong views,

and, after death, when the body had broken up, he re-appeared in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.’

9.3 He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that *all* those who destroy living beings,
take the not-given,
indulge in sexual misconduct,
speak false words,
speak malicious words,
speak harsh words,
speak frivolous words,
are covetous,
have a mind of ill will,
hold wrong views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell. Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false.’

9.4 Thus, he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that ‘Only this is true, all else is false.’

(2) “There is no bad karma”

10 Here, Ānanda, [211] as a result of zeal, as a result of effort, as a result of devoted practice, as a result of heedfulness, as a result of right attention,

a certain recluse or brahmin gains a mental concentration such that with the divine eye that is purified and superhuman,

he sees that person here who

*destroys living beings,
takes the not-given,
indulges in sexual misconduct,
speaks false words,*

⁸⁹ For a very close parallel of this para, see **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1,1.31-33/1:13-16) on how the first 3 of the 62 wrong views arise, that is, wrong (fixed) views regarding the past in terms of eternalism (of self and the world).

*speaks malicious words,
speaks harsh words,
speaks frivolous words,
is covetous,
has a mind of ill will,
holds wrong views,*

and he sees that after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

10.2 He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that there are no bad deeds, there is no result of misconduct. For I saw all those who destroyed living beings, took the not-given, indulged in sexual misconduct, spoke false words, spoke malicious words, spoke harsh words, spoke frivolous words, was covetous, had a mind of ill will, held wrong views,

after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a happy destination, in heaven.’

10.3 He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that *all* those who destroy living beings, take the not-given, indulge in sexual misconduct, speak false words, speak malicious words, speak harsh words, speak frivolous words, are covetous, have a mind of ill will, hold wrong views,

after death, when the body has broken up, after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a happy destination, in heaven. Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false.’

10.4 Thus, he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that ‘Only this is true, all else is false.’

(3) “There is good karma”

11 Here, Ānanda, as a result of zeal, as a result of effort, as a result of devoted practice, as a result of heedfulness, as a result of right attention, a certain recluse or brahmin gains a mental concentration such that with the divine eye that is purified and superhuman he sees that person here who refrains from destroying living beings,

refrains from taking the not-given,
 refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrains from speaking false words,
 refrains from speaking malicious words,
 refrains from speaking harsh words,
 refrains from speaking frivolous words,
 is not covetous,
 has a mind without ill will,
 holds right views,

and he sees that after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

11.2 He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that there are good deeds; there is the result of good conduct. For I saw a person here who

refrained from destroying life,
 refrained from taking the not-given,
 refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrained from speaking false words,
 refrained from speaking malicious words, [210]
 refrained from speaking harsh words,
 refrained from speaking frivolous words,
 was not covetous,
 had a mind without ill will,
 held right views,

after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a happy destination, in heaven.’

11.3 He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that *all* those who
 refrain from destroying living being,
 refrain from taking the not-given,
 refrain from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrain from speaking false words,
 refrain from speaking malicious words,
 refrain from speaking harsh words,
 refrain from speaking frivolous words,
 are not covetous,
 have a mind without ill will,
 hold right views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a happy destination, in heaven. Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false.’

Thus, he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that ‘Only this is true, all else is false.’

(4) “There is no good karma”

12 Here, Ānanda, [212] as a result of zeal, as a result of effort, as a result of devoted practice, as a result of heedfulness, as a result of right attention,
 a certain recluse or brahmin gains a mental concentration such that with the divine eye that is purified and superhuman,
 he sees that person here who

refrains from destroying living beings,
 refrains from taking the not-given,
 refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrains from speaking false words,
 refrains from speaking malicious words,
 refrains from speaking harsh words,
 refrains from speaking frivolous words,
 is not covetous,
 has a mind without ill will,
 holds right views,

and he sees that after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

12.2 He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that there are no good deeds, there is no result of good conduct. For I saw all those who

refrained from destroying living beings,
 refrained from taking the not-given,
 refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrained from speaking false words,
 refrained from speaking malicious words,
 refrained from speaking harsh words,
 refrained from speaking frivolous words,
 was not covetous,
 had a mind without ill will,
 held right views,

after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.’

12.3 He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that *all* those who
 refrain from destroying living beings,
 refrain from taking the not-given,
 refrain from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrain from speaking false words,
 refrain from speaking malicious words,
 refrain from speaking harsh words,
 refrain from speaking frivolous words,
 are not covetous,
 have a mind without ill will,
 hold right views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell. Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false.’

12.4 Thus, he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that ‘Only this is true, all else is false.’

WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE, WHAT UNACCEPTABLE⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Comy says that the purpose of this section is to present the outline of the analysis, that is, to show what can be accepted and what should be rejected in the claims of other recluses and brahmins. Briefly, the propositions that

(1) Accepted: “There is bad karma”

13 In this regard,⁹¹ Ānanda, when a recluse or brahmin says thus: *‘Truly it is, sir, there are bad deeds; there is the result of misconduct’* [§9]—this I grant him.

13.2 And when he says thus: *‘For I saw an individual here who destroyed living beings, took the not-given, indulged in sexual misconduct, spoke false words, spoke malicious words, spoke harsh words, spoke frivolous words, was covetous, had a mind of ill will, held wrong views,*

after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell’—this, too, I grant him.

13.3 But when he says thus: *‘Truly it is, sir, that all those who destroy living beings, take the not-given, indulge in sexual misconduct, speak false words, speak malicious words, speak harsh words, speak frivolous words, are covetous, have a mind of ill will, hold wrong views,*

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell’—this I do not grant him.

13.4 And when he says thus: *‘Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false’*—this, too, I do not grant him.

13.5 And when he thus obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that *‘Only this is true, all else is false’*—this, too, I do not grant him.

13.6 What is the reason for this?

Because, Ānanda, the Tathāgata’s knowledge of the great analysis of karma is otherwise.

(2) Rejected: “There is no bad karma”

14 Concerning this, Ānanda, when a recluse or brahmin says thus: *‘Truly it is, sir, that there are no bad deeds, there is no result of misconduct’* [§10]—this I do not grant him.

14.2 But when he says thus: *‘For I saw a person who*

report their direct observations can be accepted, but the generalizations they derive from those observation should be rejected. (MA 5:19)

⁹¹ “In this regard,” *tatra*, lit “therein.”

*destroyed living beings,
took the not-given,
indulged in sexual misconduct,
spoke false words,
spoke malicious words,
spoke harsh words,
spoke frivolous words,
was covetous,
had a mind of ill will,
held wrong views,*

after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a happy destination, in heaven’—This I grant him.

14.3 But when he says thus: ‘Truly it is, sir, that all those who
*destroy living beings,
take the not-given,
indulge in sexual misconduct,
speak false words,
speak malicious words,
speak harsh words,
speak frivolous words,
are covetous,
have a mind of ill will,
hold wrong views,*

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a happy destination, in heaven’ [213]—this I do not grant him.

14.4 And when he says thus: ‘Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false’—this, too, I do not grant him.

14.5 And when he thus obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that ‘Only this is true, all else is false’—this, too, I do not grant him.

14.6 What is the reason for this?

Because, Ānanda, the Tathāgata’s knowledge of the great analysis of karma is otherwise.

(3) Accepted: “There is good karma”

15 Concerning this, Ānanda, when a recluse or brahmin says thus: ‘Truly it is, sir, that there are good deeds; there is the result of good conduct’ [§11]—this I grant him.

15.2 And when he says thus: ‘For I saw an individual here who
*refrained from destroying living beings,
refrained from taking the not-given,
refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct,
refrained from speaking false words,
refrained from speaking malicious words,
refrained from speaking harsh words,
refrained from speaking frivolous words,
was not covetous,
had a mind without ill will,*

*held right views,
after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a happy destination, in heaven—this, too, I grant him.*

15.3 When he says thus: *‘Truly it is, sir, that all those who
refrain from destroying living beings,
refrain from taking the not-given,
refrain from indulging in sexual misconduct,
refrain from speaking false words,
refrain from speaking malicious words,
refrain from speaking harsh words,
refrain from speaking frivolous words,
are not covetous,
have a mind without ill will,
hold right views,*

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a happy destination, in heaven’—this, I do not grant him.

15.4 But when he says thus: *‘Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false’—this, too, I do not grant him.*

15.5 When he thus he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that *‘Only this is true, all else is false’—this, too, I do not grant him.*

15.6 What is the reason for this?

Because, Ānanda, the Tathāgata’s knowledge of the great analysis of karma is otherwise.

(4) Rejected: “There is no good karma”

16 Concerning this, Ānanda, when a recluse or brahmin says thus: *‘Truly it is, sir, that there are no good deeds, there is no result of good conduct’* [§12]—this I do not grant him.

16.2 But when he says thus: *‘For I saw an individual who
refrained from destroying living beings,
refrained from taking the not-given,
refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct,
refrained from speaking false words,
refrained from speaking malicious words,
refrained from speaking harsh words,
refrained from speaking frivolous words,
was not covetous,
had a mind without ill will,
held right views,*

after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell’—this, I grant him.

16.3 When he says thus: *‘Truly it is, sir, that all those who
refrain from destroying living beings,
refrain from taking the not-given,
refrain from indulging in sexual misconduct,
refrain from speaking false words,
refrain from speaking malicious words,*

*refrain from speaking harsh words,
refrain from speaking frivolous words,
are not covetous,
have a mind without ill will,
hold right views,*

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell’—this I do not grant him.

16.4 And when he says thus: [214] ‘Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false’—this, too, I do not grant him.

16.5 When he thus he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that ‘Only this is true, all else is false’—this, too, I do not grant him.

16.6 What is the reason for this?

Because, Ānanda, the Tathāgata’s knowledge of the great analysis of karma is otherwise.

THE GREAT ANALYSIS OF KARMA⁹²

(1) Karma that is unfortunate [unwholesome] and appears unfortunate⁹³

17 Concerning this, Ānanda, that person who *here [in this life]*
destroys life,
takes the not-given,
indulges in sexual misconduct,
speaks false words,
speaks malicious words,
speaks harsh words,
speaks frivolous words,
is covetous,
has a mind of ill will,
holds wrong views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell⁹⁴—

- (a) either he has earlier on [in a previous life] done a bad deed that results in painful feelings;
- (b) or, later on [later in this life] he has done a bad deed that results in painful feelings;
- (c) or, at the time of death he has undertaken and established wrong view.⁹⁵

⁹² *Mahā kamma, vibhaṅga*. This is where the great analysis of karma actually begins. This section gives the Sutta its title.

⁹³ That is, unwholesome karma bringing unwholesome results. On this kind and 3 other kinds of karma, see (2).

⁹⁴ “Although the Pali seems to be saying that he was necessarily reborn in hell on account of some action other than the one he was seen performing, this should not be understood as an apodictic [absolutely certain] pronouncement but only as a statement of possibility. That is, while it may be true that he was reborn in hell because of a bad action he did earlier or later or because of wrong view.” (M:ÑB 1346 n1231). See foll n.

⁹⁵ These are the 3 kinds of karma classified according to *time of taking effect*. See (**Kamma**) **Nidāna S** (A 3.33), SD 4.14, on causes and kinds of karma. See **Nibbedhika, pariyāya S** (A 6.63, 12.3), SD 6.11. See also **Visuddhi, magga** where these 3 types of karma are respectively named as *diṭṭha, dhamma vedanīya kamma, upapajja, vedanīya kamma* and *apara, pariyāya vedanīya kamma*—and a 4th, *ahosi kamma*, lapsed or ineffectual karma (Vism 19.14/601). See Vism:Ñ 19.14/696 n2. The first 2 kinds of karma may be without karmic result if the circumstances required for

As such, after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.⁹⁶

17.2 And because he *has* here
 destroyed life,
 taken the not-given,
 indulged in sexual misconduct,
 spoken false words,
 spoken malicious words,
 spoken harsh words,
 spoken frivolous words,
 been covetous,
 a mind of ill will,
 held wrong views,

he will experience their result *here and now, or in the next life, or in a subsequent life.*

(2) Karma that is unfortunate but appears fortunate [wholesome]⁹⁷

18 Concerning this, Ānanda, that person who here
 destroys life,
 takes the not-given,
 indulges in sexual misconduct,
 speaks false words,
 speaks malicious words,
 speaks harsh words,
 speaks frivolous words,
 is covetous,
 has a mind of ill will,
 holds wrong views,

re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven⁹⁸—

their ripening are missing, or because of the presence of a stronger counteractive karma; as such, they are called *ahosi,kamma*: cf **Loṇa,phala S** (A 3.99), SD 3.5. The next birth actually depends on the dying person's last thought-moment. As such, our dying thoughts should be to recollect or reflect on the good deeds we have done: giving, moral virtue, lovingkindness, etc, or better on impermanence: see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1) & SD 16.7 (5). **Mahā Rāhul'ovāda S** (M 62 @ SD 3.11) closes with the remark that for one who develops and often cultivates the breath meditation, "even the last breath leaves with your knowledge, not without it" (M 62,30)—ie, one dies mindfully with right view. See Vism 8.24/291 f. On academic attempts to show that orig there are only 2 kinds of karma (present and future), and its rebuttal, see Analayo 2005 at M 3:214. On the precedence of habitual karma, see SD 58.2 (1.1.2.3). See also prev n.

⁹⁶ Devadatta, eg, persuaded Ajātasattu to murder his own father, Bimbisāra (a streamwinner) (DA 1:135-137), and thrice attempted to murder the Buddha himself, and once succeeded in wounding him, and also caused a schism in the order (V 2:191-198)—these last 2 deeds are certain to lead to rebirth in hell. On Devadatta, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples* lecture 7: "The Buddha's Bad Karma" (2002) §§5-14.

⁹⁷ That is, unwholesome karma bringing wholesome results. This is a wholesome karma (which appears capable of good result) is followed by unwholesome death-proximate karma that makes the former inconsequent of immediate good result (eg a person kills living beings, and is reborn in heaven: his action is inconsequent (incapable of good result) because it is unwholesome, yet it appears consequent because he is reborn in heaven, MA 3:50). See Intro (2).

⁹⁸ A good example here is that of Coppertooth the public executioner, **Tamba,dāṭhika Cora,ghātaka** (DhA 8.1), who after a bloody career as a bandit, killed his own comrades and then became an executioner of criminals for 50

- (a) either he has earlier on [in a previous life] done a good deed that results in pleasant feelings;
- (b) or, later on [later in this life] he has done a good deed that results in pleasant feelings;
- (c) or, at the time of death he has undertaken and established right view.

As such, after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

18.2 And because he *has* here
 destroyed living beings,
 took the not-given,
 indulged in sexual misconduct,
 spoke false words,
 spoke malicious words,
 spoke harsh words,
 spoke frivolous words,
 was covetous,
 had a mind of ill will,
 held wrong views,

he will experience their result *here and now, or in the next life, or in a subsequent life*.

(3) Karma that is fortunate and appears fortunate⁹⁹

19 Concerning this, Ānanda, that person who here
 refrains from destroying living beings,
 refrains from taking the not-given,
 refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrains from speaking false words,
 refrains from speaking malicious words,
 refrains from speaking harsh words,
 refrains from speaking frivolous words,
 is not covetous,
 has a mind without ill will,
 holds right views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven¹⁰⁰—

- (a) *either he has earlier on [in a previous life] done a good deed that results in pleasant feelings;*
- (b) *or, later on [later in this life] he has done a good deed that results in pleasant feelings;*
- (c) *or, at the time of death he has undertaken and established right view.*

19.2 As such, after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven. And because he *has* here
 refrained from destroying life, **[215]**
 refrained from taking the not-given,
 refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrained from speaking false words,
 refrained from speaking malicious words,

years. He met Sāriputta whose teachings uplifted his mind, lightening the burden of his bad karma so that he attained heavenly rebirth (DhA 8.1/2:202 ff).

⁹⁹ That is, wholesome karma bringing wholesome results. See Intro (2).

¹⁰⁰ An example here is that of king Pasenadi of Kosala. The **Anāgata, varṃsa** says that he is a bodhisattva and will become the 4th future buddha (JPTS 1886:37). On Pasenadi, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples* lecture 8: “The Thundering Silence” (2002) §19.

refrained from speaking harsh words,
 refrained from speaking frivolous words,
 not been covetous,
 a mind without ill will,
 held right views,

he will experience their result *here and now, or in the next life, or in a subsequent life.*

(4) Karma that is fortunate but appears unfortunate¹⁰¹

20 Concerning this, Ānanda, that person who here
 refrains from destroying living beings,
 refrains from taking the not-given,
 refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrains from speaking false words,
 refrains from speaking malicious words,
 refrains from speaking harsh words,
 refrains from speaking frivolous words,
 is not covetous,
 has a mind without ill will,
 holds right views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell¹⁰²—

- (a) *either he has earlier on [in a previous life] done a bad deed that results in painful feelings;*
- (b) *or, later on [later in this life] he has done a bad deed that results in painful feelings;*
- (c) *or, at the time of death he has undertaken and established wrong view.*

As such, after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

20.2 But because he *has* here
 refrained from destroying life,
 refrained from taking the not-given,
 refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct,
 refrained from speaking false words,
 refrained from speaking malicious words,
 refrained from speaking harsh words,
 refrained from speaking frivolous words,
 not been covetous,
 a mind without ill will,
 held right views,

he will experience their result *here and now, or in the next life, or in a subsequent life.*

Conclusion

¹⁰¹ That is, wholesome karma bringing unwholesome results. See Intro (2).

¹⁰² An example here is **Mallikā**, Pasenadi's queen. She lived a virtuous life of giving, keeping the 5 precepts and the 8 precepts and so on. However, in a moment of indiscretion, she had sexual intercourse with a dog in the bathhouse. When the king suspected this, she conjured up an elaborate lie. These acts weighed heavily on her mind to her last moments. As a result, she spent 7 days in Avīci hell, after which, her own habitual goodness then brought her rebirth in Tusita heaven (DhA 9.6/3:119-122).

<p>21 Thus, Ānanda, there is unfortunate karma there is unfortunate karma there is unfortunate karma there is unfortunate karma</p>	<p>that appears unfortunate; that appears fortunate; that appears fortunate; that appears unfortunate.”</p>	<p><i>atthi kammaṃ abhabbaṃ abhabb'ābhāsaṃ</i> <i>atthi kammaṃ abhabbaṃ bhabbābhāsaṃ</i> <i>atthi kammaṃ bhabbāṃ bhabbābhāsaṃ</i> <i>atthi kammaṃ bhabbāṃ abhabbābhāsaṃ</i></p>
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22 This is what the Blessed One said. Satisfied, the venerable Ānanda rejoiced in the Blessed One's word.

— evaṃ —

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