Karota Sutta
The Discourse on Doing | S 24.6
Theme: How the doctrine of non-action arises
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

Introduction
The Karota Sutta (S 24.6) is about the attaining of streamwinning by way of the perception of impermanence (anicca, saññā), similar to that given in the suttas of the Okkanta Saṁyutta (S 25). Like the discourse preceding it (the N’aththi Sutta, S 24.5) and the two following it (the Hetu Sutta, S 24.7 and the Mahā Diṭṭhī Sutta, S 24.8), it deals with the refuting of one of the four philosophical, but false and morally harmful, theories advocated by the Buddha’s contemporaries. The Karota Sutta specifically refutes the inefficacy of action (akiriya,vāda) of Pūraṇa Kassapa. Its approach or “going” (gamaṇa) is—like the Hetu Sutta (S 24.7)—that of the catechism, such as “If form permanent or impermanent?” to the five aggregates, for the realization of their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and lack of self-identity [§9].

Karota Sutta
The Discourse on Doing
S 24.6

1 At Sāvatthī.
2 “Bhikshus, when what exists, on account of clinging to what, on account of adhering to what, does such a view as this arise?:

3 THE INEFFICACY OF ACTION (PŪRAṆA KASSAPA). ‘When one does or makes another do, such deeds as cutting others, burning others, or hurting others, tormenting others, intimidating others, killing, stealing, breaking into houses, plundering, burgling, ambushing, committing adultery, lying, one does no evil.

If with a razor-disc [chakra] (cakka), one were to turn all the living beings on this earth to a single mountain of flesh, no evil would come from it.

If one were to go along the south bank of the Ganges, [209] killing and making others kill, mutilating and making others mutilate, torturing and making others torture, there is no evil, no source of evil.

Or, if one were to go along the north bank of the Ganges, giving and making others give, sacrificing and making others sacrifice, there is no merit, no source of merit.

In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is no merit, no source of merit.”

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1 See eg (Anicca) Cakkhu S (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7.
3 S 24.7/3:208 f @ SD 23.6.
4 S 24.8/3:211-213.
5 See Sāmañña,phala S (D 2,16-18:1/53), SD 8.10.
6 See S:B 849.

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“Bhante, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, have the Blessed One as refuge. It would be good indeed if the Blessed One were to explain its meaning. Having heard the Blessed One, the monks would remember it.”

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

How the wrong view of inefficacy of action arises

1. When there is **form**, bhikshus, **there is clinging to form, adhering to form**, such as this arises, that, ‘When one does or makes another do *one does no evil... there is no merit, no source of merit* ... In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is *no merit, no source of merit*.’

2. When there is **feeling**, bhikshus, **there is clinging to feeling, adhering to feeling**, such as this arises ...

3. When there is **perception**, bhikshus, **there is clinging to perception, adhering to perception**, such as this arises ...

4. When there are **formations**, bhikshus, **there is clinging to formations, adhering to formations**, such as this arises ...

5. When there is **consciousness**, bhikshus, **there is clinging to consciousness, adhering to consciousness**, such as this arises, that, ‘When one does or makes another do *one does no evil... there is no merit, no source of merit* ... In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is *no merit, no source of merit*.’

How the wrong view of non-causality ends

Now what do you think, bhikshus? Is **form** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory [painful or pleasurable]?"“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings ... they experience joy and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”

“No, bhante.”

“Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **feeling** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

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7 See Sāmañña,phala S (D 2,19/1:52,22-53,2), SD 8.10. See Apanāka S (M 60,13-20 = 1:404-407) where this view of Purāṇa’s is refuted. See Bodhi, The Discourse on the Fruits of Recluseship, 1989:69 f.


9 This section follows the structure of the parallel passage in Anatta,lakkhaṇa S (S 22.59,12-16/3:66-68), SD 1.2.

10 Dukkhaṁ vā sukhāṁ vā.

11 In Anatta,lakkhaṇa S (S 22.59), the wrong view refuted here is: the notion “This is mine,” which arises through craving (tañhā); the notion “This I am,” which arises through conceit (māna); the notion “This is my self,” which arises through views (diṭṭhi). (S 22.59,12-16/3:66-68), SD 1.2.

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“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings ... they experience joy and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”
“No, bhante.”

12 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is perception permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”
“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings ... they experience joy and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”
“No, bhante.”

13 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, are formations permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”
“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings ... they experience joy and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”
“No, bhante.”

14 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is consciousness permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”
“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings ... they experience joy and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”
“No, bhante.”

12 How, then, could such a view as this arises, that, ‘When one does or makes another do ... one does no evil ... there is no merit, no source of merit ... In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is no merit, no source of merit?’”
“No, bhante.”

15 “That which is seen, heard, sensed, known, that is, attained, sought after, examined by the mind—is that permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”
“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

12 In Anatta, Lakkhaṇa S (S 22.59), the teaching on not-self (anattā) continues, and the monks become arhats at the end of the discourse. (S 22.59.12-16/3:66-68), SD 1.2.

13 This is a fourfold classification of the 5 sense-objects, ie “the sense-object tetrad.” Comy: “The seen” (diṭṭha) is the visible-form base; “the heard” (suta), the sound base; “the sensed” (muta), the objects of smell, taste and touch; and “the known” (viññāta), the remaining seven bases (ie the 6 internal bases and the mind-object base) (DA 3:914; MA 2:110; SA 2:337 f; AA 3:31; ItA 2:187; PmA 2:432). The words “attained, sought after, examined by the mind” (pattam pariyesitaṁ anuvicaritaṁ manasā) are merely an elaboration of the fourth, the “known” (SA 2:338). However, from the practical viewpoint, this last phrase could well apply to the other 3 sense-objects, too; for, they are all mind-rooted. On diṭṭha suta muta viññāta as the bases for wrong views, see SD 3.13 (5.2).
“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings ... they experience joy and pain in the six classes by birth’?”

“No, bhante.”

“How, then, could such a view as this arises, that, ‘When one does or makes another do...one does no evil ... there is no merit, no source of merit ... In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is no merit, no source of merit’? “It cannot be, bhante.”

Overcoming wrong view results in streamwinning

16 Bhikshus, when noble disciple has abandoned doubt in these 6 bases,¹⁴ and when, further, he has abandoned doubt about suffering, the arising of suffering, the ending of suffering, [211] and the way leading to the ending of suffering, he is then called a noble disciple who is a streamwinner, not bound for the lower world,¹⁵ sure of going over to self-awakening.

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¹⁴ Chaṭṭhāna, ie, the 6 bases for wrong views. Comy is silent on this term, but “it seems the six cases are the 5 aggregates and the tetrad of the sense objects taken collectively as one” (S:B 1095 n251): but see Alaggadûpama S (M 22), where they form the bases for wrong views (diṭṭhi-t,ṭhāna). (M 22,15/1:135) + SD 3.13 (5.2).

¹⁵ Aviṇīpāta, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of vinīpāta, “the world of suffering”, another name for the 4 woeful courses (duggati) or the 4 lower worlds (apāya) (Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (pañca,gati) (D 3:234=33.2.1, A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (niraya), the animal kingdom (tirachāna,yoni), the ghost realm (pitti,visaya), the human world (manussa) and the heavenly world (deva). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (asura,kāya) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (sugati). For a discussion, see Nyanaponika & Bodhi (tr), Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, 1999:14-19.

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