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(Sotāpatti) Hetu Sutta

The (Streamwinning) Discourse on Causes | S 24.7
Theme: How the wrong view of non-causality arises
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

1 Introduction

1.1 The (Sotāpatti) Hetu Sutta (S 24.7) is about the attaining of streamwinning by way of the perception of impermanence (anicca, saññā), similar to that given in the 10 suttas of the Okkanti Samyutta (S 25).¹ Like the two discourses preceding it (the N’atthi Sutta, S 24.5;² the Karota Sutta, S 24.6)³ and the one following it (the Mahā Diṭṭhi Sutta, S 24.8),⁴ it deals with the refuting of one of the four false and morally harmful, theories advocated by the Buddha’s contemporaries.

1.2 The (Sotāpatti) Hetu Sutta specifically refutes the fatalism (niyati) or anti-karma views (akiriya, vāda) of Makkhali Go,sāla⁵ and the non-causalist (ahetuka, vāda) views of Pūraṇa Kassapa.⁶ In the translation below. The wrong view of fatalism is stated in roman print once, and all recurrences after that are given in italics. During reading, if we like, we may only read the first (underscored) line of the “fatalism” refrain (which is, after all, about a wrong view).

1.3 Its approach or “going” (gamaṇa)⁷ is that of the catechism, such as “Is form permanent or impermanent?” to the 5 aggregates, for the realization of their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and lack of self-identity [§9].

1.4 The (Sotāpatti) Hetu Sutta (S 24.7) is closely related to the Chaḷ-ābhijāti Sutta (A 6.57).⁸ Pūraṇa Kassapa’s view of the “six classes by birth” (chaḷ-ābhijāti) is mentioned and refuted in both these suttas. While the Hetu Sutta refutes the six classes by means of the perception of impermanence (anicca, saññā), the Chaḷ-ābhijāti Sutta rebuts it with a new set of 6 kinds of spiritual developments. As such, they both deal with the same topic, and should be studied together.

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¹ See eg (Anicca) Cakkhu S (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7.
³ S 24.6/3:208 f (SD 23.10).
⁴ S 24.8/3:211-213.
⁵ On Makkhali Go,sāla’s fatalistic (a kind of indeterminist) view that we are “purified through transmigration” (samsāra,suddhi): see Sāmañña, phala S (D 2,19-21/1:53 f), SD 8.10. See Chaḷ-ābhijāti S (S 6.57), SD 23.5 (1.1). On determinism and fatalism, see SD 7.7 (1.6).
⁶ See Sāmañña, phala S (D 2,16-18/1:53), SD 8.10.
⁷ See S:B 849.
⁸ A 6.57/3:383-387 @ SD 23.5.

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(Sotāpatti) Hetu Sutta
The Discourse on Causes
S 24.7

1 At Sāvatthī. [210]

The wrong view of non-causality

2 “Bhikshus, when what exists, by clinging to what, by adhering to what, does such a view as this arise, that? FATALISM (MAKKHALI GOSĀLA)

‘There is neither cause nor condition’¹⁰ for the defilement of beings.

Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.

There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.

Beings are purified without cause, without condition.

[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]¹¹

There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.

All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (jīva) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.

Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?¹²

3 “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.”¹³

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

“Yes, bhante!” the monks answered the Blessed One in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

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⁹ The foll passage, as in Sāmañña,phala S (D 2), where these fatalistic views are attrib to Makkhali Gosāla (D 2,19–/1:53), SD 8.10.

¹⁰ Ahetu,appaccaya: “condition,” hetu, means “root” (eg greed, hatred, delusion); paccaya means “condition.”

¹¹ N’attī atta,kārē n’attī para,kārē, n’attī purīsa,kārē. This sentence is found in the Sāmañña,phala S passage (D 2,19/1:83,29–29), SD 8.10, but omitted here and from Sandaka S passage (M 76,13/1:516,33–517,3). The ideas here and in the next para are presented by a certain brahmin to the Buddha who refutes them in Atta,kāri S (A 6.38/3:337 f), SD 7.6.

¹² Niyati,saṅgati,bhāva,parinātā chass’ev’ābhijātisu sukha,dukkhaṁ paṭisaṁvedeti. See Apanṇaka S (M 60,21–28/1:407–410 @ SD 35.5) where this wrong view is answered. On these 6 “classes by birth” (ābhijātī), see Cha-jābhijāti S (A 6.57/3:383 @ SD 23.5), where according to the antinomian Pūrana Kassapa, they are (1) the black class (kaṁhābhijātī), i.e. the bloody trade (butchers, fishermen, robbers, etc); (2) the blue class (nīlābhijātī), i.e. monks who subscribe to karma; (3) the red class (lohitābhijātī), i.e. the loin-clad Jains; (4) the yellow class (holiddābhijātī), i.e the white-clad disciples of naked ascetics; (5) the white class (sukkābhijātī), i.e. the male and female Ājīvikas; (6) the purest white class (parama,sukkhābhijātī), i.e Nanda Vaccha, Kisa Saṅkicca and Makkhali Gosāla. The Buddha however rejects this arbitrary gesture, and teaches that it is karma, not class, that makes us what we are (A 6.57/-3:383–387; also DA 1:182; MA 3:131; AA 2:342 f; SA 2:342 f). See also Deva,daha S (M 101,22(4)/2:222 @ SD 18.4), where ābhijātī is mentioned in connection with the Nirgranthas, and Bodhi, Discourse on the Fruits of Recluseship, 1989: 73-75.

How the wrong view of non-causality arises

4  (1) “Bhikshus, when there is form, clinging to form, adhering to form, such a view as this arises, that,
[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (jīva) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’

5  (2) Bhikshus, when there is feeling, clinging to feeling, adhering to feeling, such a (wrong) view as this arises, that,
[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (jīva) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’

6  (3) Bhikshus, when there is perception, clinging to perception, adhering to perception, such a view as this arises, that,
[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (jīva) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’

7  (4) Bhikshus, when there are formations, clinging to formations, adhering to formations, such a view as this arises, that,
[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (jīva) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’

8 (5) Bhikshus, when there is consciousness, clinging to consciousness, adhering to consciousness, such a view as this arises, that,

[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (jīva) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’

How the wrong view of non-causality ends

9 Now what do you think, bhikshus? Is form permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [painful] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?”
“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (jīva) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’
“No, bhante.”
10 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus? Is feeling permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

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14 This section parallels that in Anatta Lakkhaṇa S (S 22.59,12-16/3:66-68), SD 1.2.
15 Dukkham vâ sukham vâ.
16 In Anatta Lakkhaṇa S (S 22.59), the wrong view refuted here is: the notion “This is mine,” which arises through craving (tanhis); the notion “This I am,” which arises through conceit (mûna); the notion “This is my self,” which arises through views (dihi). (S 22.59,12-16/3:66-68), SD 1.2.
“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”
“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (jīva) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?
“No, bhante.”

10 “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:

[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (jīva) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?
“No, bhante.”

12 “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:

[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (jīva) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?
“No, bhante.”

13 “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:

[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls [jīva] are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”
“No, bhante.”

14 “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.”
“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

[THE FATALISM REFRAIN]
‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings.
Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.
There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.
Beings are purified without cause, without condition.
[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]
There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.
All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls [jīva] are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.
Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”
“No, bhante.”

17 In Anatta Lakkhaṇa S (S 22.59), the teaching on non-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.
18 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” (sūta), the sound base; “the sensed” (mūta), the objects of smell, taste and touch; and “the known” (viññāta), the remaining 7 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; Nc 66; PmA 2:432). The words “attained, sought after, examined by the mind” (pattām pariyesitām anuvicaritām 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 sūta mūta viññāta as the bases for wrong views, see SD 3.13 (5.2).
Overcoming wrong view results in streamwinning

15 Bhikshus, when noble disciple has abandoned doubt in these 6 bases, 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, surely destined for awakening.

—evam—

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19 Chaṭṭha, 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-tṭhāna). (M 22,15/1:135) + SD 3.13 (5.2).

20 Avinīpāta, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of vinīpāta, “the world of ruin/suffering,” another name for the 4 woeful courses (duggati) or the 4 lower worlds (apāya), esp as niraya, tiracchāna, pettivisaya, asurākāya (KhpA 189,12 = DA 2:496,11 (on D 2:55,27) = SA 2:97,5 (on S 2:92,16); Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 courses (pañca,gati) (D 33,2.1(4)/3:234; A 9.68/4:459) are mentioned: the hells (niraya), the animal birth (tiracchāna,yoni), the ghost realm (petti- or 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 A:NB 1999:14-19. See Pañca,gati S (A 9.68/4:459), SD 2.20. See also a late work, Pañca,gati,dīpana, ed L Feer (JPTS 1884:152 ff); tr Feer, Annales du Musée Guimet 5, 1883:514-528: sv Narašaka,kaṇḍa, Tiracchāna~, Peta~, Manussa~, Deva~.