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Titth'āyatana Sutta

The Discourse on Sectarian Tenets or **Tittha Sutta** the Discourse on the Sectarrians | A 3.61

Theme: The 3 wrong views regarding karma

Translated with notes by Piya Tan ©2003, 2023

1 The Titth'āyatana Sutta and its teachings

1.1 The Titth'āyatana Sutta, whose main idea—the wrong view that all our pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings are due to **the doctrine of non-action** (*akiriya, vāda*) [1.3]—is also found in **the Sīvaka Sutta**¹ and **the Devadaha Sutta**,² is an example of early Buddhist apologetics, that is, a defence of the teachings.³ In the Titth'āyatana Sutta, the Buddha answers the following doctrines or notions:

(1) determinism (everything is due to past action),	<i>pubbe, kata, hetu</i>	[§2]
(2) theism (everything is due to God), and	<i>issara, nimmāṇa, hetu</i>	[§3]
(3) fatalism (no causality).	<i>ahetu, paccaya</i>	[§4]

1.2 The 1st wrong view, **determinism**, is ascribed by the Buddhists to the Jains; but in **the Sāmañña, phala Sutta** (D 2),⁴ their leader, Nigaṇṭha Naṭaputta, is ascribed a different set of teachings. The 2nd wrong view, theism, is common among the brahmins. The 3rd wrong view, fatalism (that denies causality) was taught by Makkhali Gosāla, a contemporary of the Buddha who held that all things are fated.⁵ In our times, fatalism would include luck and chance. These doctrines, together with the doctrine of non-action (or inaction), belong to the group of “wrong views with a fixed destiny” (*niyata micchā, diṭṭhi*), that is, a wrong view leading to a bad rebirth (Tkp 168).

1.3 These 3 notions all fall under the category of “**the doctrine of non-action**” (*akiriya, vāda*) [§1]. The Buddha’s basic rebuttal is that if any of these 3 notions were true, then no one would be morally responsible for their commission and omission of deeds, and would follow the 10 unwholesome course of actions (*akusala kamma, patha*, D 3:269, 290; A 5:264) [§2], that is, the breaking of the precepts through the 3 doors (body, speech and mind).

1.4 Although the potential results of past karma cannot be erased by present actions, the Buddha teaches that present **volition** conditions future karma. Thus, the Buddha attributes profound moral significance to human free will and effort. In **the Kesa, kambala Sutta** (A 3.135), SD 77.19, the Buddha declares the teachings of Makkhali Gosāla—that “there is neither cause nor condition” for the morality, and that everything is fated (**Sāmañña, phala Sutta**, D 2, 19/1:53 f, SD 8.10)—to be the meanest (*paṭikiṭṭha*), destructive to humans like fishes swimming into a fish-trap that covers the river-mouth. For this reason, in the same sutta, the Buddha also declares that his is a teaching of karma (*kamma, vāda*), a

¹ S 36.21/4:230 f, SD 5.6.

² M 101/2:214-228, SD 18.4.

³ The view that everything is due to past karma (*pubbaka, hetu, vāda*) is often criticized and refuted in various ways by the Buddha: **Devadaha S** (M 101/2:214-223) where it is ascribed to the Jains, **Sīvaka S** (S 36.21/4:230f) & **Titth'āyatana S** (A 3.61/1:173 f). A formal refutation of *pubbala, hetu, vāda* is found in **Kathā, vatthu** (Kvu 17.3/545 f = Kvu:SRD 314 f).

⁴ D 2, 28-30/1:57 & nn, SD 8.10. For rebuttal of the Jain view, see **Devadaha S** (M 101), SD 18.4.

⁵ D 2, 19/1:53, M 30, 2/1:198, 36, 5/1:238, 36, 48/1:250, 60, 21/1:407, 76, 53/1:524, 77, 6/2:2 ff.

teaching of the efficacy of action (*kiriya,vāda*), a teaching of (spiritual) effort (*virīya,vāda*) (A 3.135/1:236-238).

1.5 The central idea of the Tittth'āyatana Sutta—that everything is due to past action, or determinism (*pubbe,kata,hetu*) [§2]—is also found in **the Sīvaka Sutta**⁶ and **the Devadaha Sutta**.⁷ The Buddha's response to this false view clearly shows that the dependent arising as he taught is one that spreads over the 3 periods of time (past, present and future). The view that what one feels now is merely due to what one did in the past is attributed by the Devadaha Sutta to the Jains, and the Buddha shows the errors of such a view.

1.6 The term ***tittth'āyatana*** (literally, “bases for sects or sectarianism”) is translated as “sectarian tenets.” The word ***titttha*** (Skt *tīrtha*) originally meant a ford in a river, and was used as a metaphor by the Jains for their teachings, in the sense that these teachings serve as a “ford” for crossing the stream of defilements and reaching the far shore of liberation. We see just this theme used in **the Cūḷa Gopāla-ka Sutta** (M 34).⁸

The Aṅguttara Commentary explains that the “sects” (*titttha*) actually refers to the 62 wrong views (AA 2:272,18 f).⁹ The term ***titttha,kāra*** (Skt *tīrthamkara*, “ford-maker”) was used by the Jains to refer to their founders—such as Nirgrantha Nāta,putta (better known as Mahāvīra), that is, the one who held these views (as listed in **the Tittth'āyatana Sutta**). The term ***tittthiya*** (“forder, one who crosses the ford”) was a term used by the Jain followers, who approve of these views.

2 The 3-life dependent arising

2.1 The Tittth'āyatana declares that the view—“Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral, all that is caused by past action [done in past lives]” [§§1-2] is a “doctrine of non-action” (*akiriya,vāda*), that is, a wrong view. On the basis of this statement, some have been led to interpret that feeling (*vedanā*) is *not* caused by karma-formations (*saṅkhāra*) done in a past life. Therefore, they argue, the link called “formations” (*saṅkhāra*) in the dependent arising formula cannot mean karma-formations of a previous life. This is clearly a misreading of the Sutta.¹⁰

This doctrine of non-action—all that a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral, is caused by past action—is, in **the Deva,daha Sutta** (M 101), attributed to the Nirgranthas (the Jains). They held that all suffering one experiences in this life is due to bad karma from a previous life. Indeed, this Sutta clarifies this theory as meaning that *everything* that one feels now is due to what one has done in a past life. The Devadaha Sutta actually disproves this theory.

2.2 The Buddha denies that everything that one feels—happiness, suffering, or neutral feeling—is due to what one did in a past life, they are due to karma-formations of a past life. This should be obvious, as some of what one feels is caused by karma-formations; some caused by past karma-formations earlier in this life; and some caused by karma-formations being performed now. What the Buddha is denying is that *all* happiness or suffering or neutral feelings are caused by karma from a previous life.

It should be pointed out that the Buddha is here referring to *the type* of feeling, rather than to *feeling itself*. It is true that whichever one of the 3 types of feeling that one experiences, happiness or suffering

⁶ S 36.21/4:230 f (SD 5.6).

⁷ M 101/2:214-228 (SD 18.4).

⁸ M 34/1:225-227 (SD 61.3).

⁹ On the 62 wrong views, see **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,1.29-3.29/1:12-39), SD 25.2.

¹⁰ Cf *Dhamma Journal* 4,2 July 2003:66 f.

or neutral, is not always due to karma from a past life. But it is also true that the situation whereby one can experience feeling at all, the fact that feeling (*vedanā*) exists, is due to karma from a past life.

2.3 A modern parable will make this clear. The fact that we have a TV on today (let's say) is due to our having bought it some day before. Its presence, then, may be said to be our action (karma) in the past. It has 3 channels: Happiness, Suffering and Neutral. Whichever of these 3 channels that we turn to is not due to what we did on that past day (when we bought the TV).

The nature of the TV shows' content is not because we bought the TV in the past. The two events are "correlated," but our buying did not condition whether we turn to any of those channels to watch a show. The content of the channel is not due to what we did in the past (buying the TV). It depends on how we react when we watch the show, or is unable to watch it, and so on.

In the same way, the Buddha teaches that the existence of feeling in this life is due to karma formations done in a previous life. But the particular type of feeling—happy, suffering or neutral—is not always due to past karma. Present conditions also factor into how we act or react now.

2.4 Once the distinction is made between feeling (*vedanā*) and the nature, tones or contents of feeling (happy, suffering or neutral), it is clear that the Tittth'āyatana Sutta does not say that feeling is *not* caused by karma-formations from a previous life.¹¹ This does not disprove that orthodox understanding of dependent arising as spanning 3 lives.¹²

Indeed, in a later part of the Tittth'āyatana Sutta, dependent arising is presented from a unique starting point [§9]:

*Channaṃ bhikkhave dhātūnaṃ upādāya
gabbhassāvakkanti hoti,
okkantiyā sati nāma,rūpaṃ,
nāma,rūpa,paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ,
saḷāyatana,paccayā phassa,
phassa,paccayā vedanā.*

Dependent on the 6 elements,¹³ bhikshus,
there is descent into the womb;¹⁴
When there is descent, there is name-and-form;¹⁵
With name-and-form as condition, there are 6 sense-bases;
With the 6 sense-bases as condition there is contact;
With contact as condition, there is feeling.

(A 3.61,9/1:176)

2.5 Thus, the Buddha clearly shows that the arising of feeling is due to the descent of the being to be born into the womb. This passage should now be compared to the definition of *nāma,rūpa* in **the Mahā,-nidāna Sutta** (D 15):

"It is said: **'With consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form.'**

Ānanda, how consciousness conditions name-and-form should be known in this manner:

If there were no consciousness to descend into a mother's womb, would name-and-form take shape in the womb?"¹⁶

¹¹ A 3.61/1:173-177 (SD 6.8).

¹² See **Dependent Arising**, SD 5.16 (10).

¹³ That is, earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness.

¹⁴ "Descent into the womb," *gabbhassāvakkanti*. See §9n ad loc.

¹⁵ See §9n ad loc.

¹⁶ Cf §9 [2.4], where the Buddha explains conception beginning the 6 elements and relates this to "one who feels that I make known [the 4 noble truths]." This clearly shows that feeling arises with the descent of the gandharva (rebirth consciousness) into the womb. However, this is not a common interpretation of *viññāṇa-nāma,rūpa* dyad, where "*viññāṇa*" in this context became the consciousness that descends into the mother's womb at conception, while *nāma-rūpa* became the body complex that takes shape and, after developing sense-organs (*saḷāyatana*),

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“*Viññāṇa, paccayā nāma, rūpan ti iti kho pan’etaṃ vuttaṃ.*’

*Tad-Ānanda iminā petaṃ pariyāyena veditabbaṃ, yathā viññāṇa, paccayā nāma, rūpan
Viññāṇaṃ ca hi Ānanda mātu, kucchismiṃ na okkamissatha, api nu kho nāma, rūpan
mātu, kucchismiṃ samuccissathā ti?”*

“No hetuṃ bhante.”

(D 15,21/2:63), SD 5.17

2.6 This passage clearly equates the descent of the being-to-be-born (*gabbha*) of the Tittth’āyatana Sutta with the descent of rebirth-linking (*paṭisandhi*) consciousness of the Mahā, nidāna Sutta. Thus, feeling is said in the Tittth’āyatana Sutta to be caused by the first consciousness arising in this life, whose own cause can only be found in a previous life.

As such, the Tittth’āyatana Sutta, far from supporting the idea that dependent arising does not span more than one life, actually clearly proves the opposite! The fact that feeling exists at all is due to ignorance (*avijjā*) and karma-formations (*saṅkhāra*) from the previous life, and dependent arising, as taught by the Buddha, does indeed span more than one life.¹⁷

3 Sīvaka Sutta

3.1 In the **Sīvaka Sutta** (S 36.21) the Buddha make an important statement, in reply to Sīvaka (who might have been a physician), that karma is *not* the only factor conditioning our experiences: if that were so, then karma might be considered as fatalism. What we experience may be caused by any of these 8 factors, that is to say, our feelings (*vedanā*), that is, disease and pain, may arise from any of the following factors [with the Commentary within brackets]:¹⁸

- (1) bile (*pitta*) disorders;¹⁹
- (2) phlegm (*semha*) disorders;
- (3) wind (*vāta*) disorders;
- (4) a combination or an imbalance of the above three (*sannipātika*);
- (5) change in the weather, climate and season (*utu, pariṇāma*);
- (6) stress of unusual behaviour (*visama, parihāra*) [such as sitting or standing too long, wrong food, going out at night, or being stung by a snake, etc];
- (7) assault (*opakkamika*, Skt *upakrama*, “sudden attack”),²⁰ that is, external agencies: generally violence and trauma (injury) inflicted on the body [during imprisonment, flogging, being arrested, etc].²¹

experiences contact (*phassa*) and so on.” (Bucknell 1999:339). More commonly, *viññāṇa* is “the consummation of the 6 types of consciousness associated with the sense organs, which makes the version read like an account of the psychological process of sensory perception.” (Bucknell 1999: 327): see **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18,16-18/1:111-113), SD 6.14. See discussion on **nāma, rūpa** in the essay **Dependent arising**, SD 5.11 Intro.

¹⁷ These same arguments are found at **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (10).

¹⁸ These 8 factors are actually the ancient aetiology of disease (ie, dis-ease). While some, says Sīvaka, think that all diseases are caused by karma, the Buddha replies by giving these 8 causes. The list is repeated in **Samāṇa-m- acala S** (A 4.87/2:87), SD 20.13, in connection with disease, and (**Samāṇa**) **Sukhumala S** (A 5.104/ 3:131), where one disease-free (*appābādha*) is said to be one free from these 8 conditions; cf Nm 370. See also Miln 134-148, where Nāgasena discusses the 8 causes of suffering in the context of the Buddha’s lack of moral vice. See Zysk 1998:30.

¹⁹ The foll 3 are called “humours” (*dosa*), ie, the *tri, doṣa* (Skt) of Ayurvedic medicine. See Zysk 1998:29 f.

²⁰ “Assault,” *opakkamika*, also “torture.” Such pains can also come from self-inflicted torture as in the phrase: “painful, sharp, piercing pains due to (self-inflicted) torture” (*opakkamikā dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā*) (M 1:92, 2:218 f).

(8) result of karma (*kamma, vipāka*). (S 36.21/4:230 f)

3.2 These 8 factors probably later became systematized as the **5 natural orders** (*pañca, niyāma*):

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| (1) <i>utu, niyāma</i> | “the order of heat” | the physical inorganic order, physical laws, temperature |
| (2) <i>bīja, niyāma</i> | “the order of seeds” | physical organic order, biological laws, genetics |
| (3) <i>citta, niyāma</i> | “the order of the mind” | the function of consciousness, mental process |
| (4) <i>kamma, niyāma</i> | “the law of karma” | the order of action and result, moral causality; |
| (5) <i>dhamma, niyāma</i> | “the Dharma order” | the general law of cause and effect, conditionality; certain events connected with the Dharma, such as the events in the lives of the Buddhas. (DA 2:432; DhsA 272) |

4 Dialogues on karma

4.1 The (Kamma, vāda) Bhūmija Sutta (S 12.25) relates how the monk Bhūmija asks the venerable Sāriputta regarding these four questions on karma (*kamma, vāda*) in connection with pleasure and pain:

- (1) Are pleasure and pain created by oneself (*sayañ, kata*)?
- (2) Are pleasure and pain created by another (*parañ, kata*)?
- (3) Are pleasure and pain created by both oneself and another (*sayañ, katañ ca parañ, katañ ca*) as in partial eternalism (*ekacca sassata, vāda*, D 1:17-21)]?
- (4) Are pleasure and pain created by neither oneself nor another, but fortuitously (*adhicca, samuppanna*), that is, by chance, without cause (D 2:28 f)?

Sāriputta answers by saying,

Brother, the Blessed One has said that pleasure and pain arise through dependent arising (*paṭicca, samuppanna*). Dependent on what? Dependent on contact. *In each of the four cases*, it is impossible that one will experience (anything) without contact.²²

4.2 The Acela (Kassapa) Sutta (S 12.17) contains an important dialogue on karma between the Buddha and Kassapa the naked ascetic. Kassapa asks the Buddha these four questions on how karma brings suffering and the Buddha answers (both paraphrased) as follows:

²¹ This is according to Ayurvedic medicine (Caraka Saṃhitā Sūtra, sthāna 20.3-4; Suśruta Saṃhitā Sūtra, sthāna 1.24-25).

²² S 12.25/2:38 f; see also S 12.24, 26. “Contact” (*phassa*) here means “sense-impression:” in cpds, it becomes *samphassa*, as in eye-contact (or eye-impression, etc), ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, mind-contact (M 9,44-47/1:52). Understandably, *phassa* is not physical impact, but a mental factor (*cetasika*) and belongs to the formation aggregate (*saṅkhāra-k, khandha*). In **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18), Mahā Kaccāna declares that dependent on the sense-organ and sense-object, sense-consciousness arises: “the meeting of these 3 is contact. With contact as condition, there is feeling. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, that one mentally proliferates. With what one has mentally proliferated as the source, perceptions and notions (born of) mental proliferation beset a person in respect of past, future and present sense-objects through the sense-organs” (M 18,16/1:111 f; see M:ÑB 1205 n232), SD 6.14.

1. “Is suffering created by oneself (*sayañ,kaṭaṃ*)?”

Answer: To say that “the one who does is the one who feels (the result)” implies that “this self-created suffering has existed since the beginning” (*ādito sato sayañ,kaṭaṃ dukkhan ti*):

2. “Is suffering created by another (*parañ,kaṭaṃ*)?”

Answer: To say that “the one who does is one, the one who feels is another” implies that suffering is created by another (ie one is not responsible for one’s actions): this amounts to **annihilationism**.

Kassapa, avoiding both these extremes, the Tathagata teaches **the Dharma in the middle** (*majjhena dhammaṃ*) [that is, interdependent arising]:

with ignorance as condition,	(volitional) formations arise;
with formations as condition,	consciousness arises;
with consciousness as condition,	name-and-form arises;
with name-and-form as condition,	the 6 sense-bases arise;
with the 6 sense-bases as condition,	contact arises;
with contact as condition,	feeling arises;
with feeling as condition,	craving arises;
with craving as condition,	clinging arises;
with clinging as condition,	becoming arises;
with becoming as condition,	birth arises;
with birth as condition,	there arise decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

—Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. (S 12.17/2:20 f)²³

5 The fruits of karma

5.1 In the Deva,dūta Sutta (M 130) when the evil man was brought before king Yama, he declares: “This evil deed was done by you yourself, and you yourself will feel its results!” (M 130,4/3:180). This is known in modern ethics as “the natural consequence of one’s deeds” (Fujita 1982:156), a constant principle found in early Buddhism. No unchanging soul is involved in this scheme of things.

The Mahā Puṇṇama Sutta (M 109 = S 22.82) records the case of a monk who asks, “So, it seems that form ... feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness is not self. What self, then, will deeds by the not-self affect? (*anatta,kaṭāni kammāni kam attānaṃ phusissanti*).” Then, the Buddha, reading the monk’s mind, rebukes his foolishness:

“It is possible, bhikshus, that some dull and ignorant empty person, his mind dominated by craving, might think he could outdo the Teacher’s Teaching, thinking thus: ‘So, it seems that form ... feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness is not self. What self, then, will deeds by the not-self affect?’ Now, bhikshus, you have been trained by me through questioning (*paṭipucchā*) now and again in various teachings.

What do you think, bhikshus, is form ... feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?”

²³ Cf **Naḷa,kalāpiya S** (S 12.67/2:112-115) where Mahā Koṭṭhita asks Sāriputta the 4 question in regard to each of the interdependent links from aging and death up to consciousness.

“Suffering, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self’?”

“No, bhante.”

(M 109,14-15/3:19 f = S 22.82/3:104), SD 17.11

5.2 The Tith’āyatana Sutta not only makes an important statement on karma, but also gives an important and interesting variation of the practice of **the focuses of mindfulness** (*satipaṭṭhāna*):

		=	focus of mindfulness	<i>satipaṭṭhāna</i>
[§6] The 6 elements	<i>dhātu</i>	=	the body	<i>kāya</i>
[§7] The 6 bases of contact	<i>phass’āyatana</i>	=	feelings	<i>vedanā</i>
[§8] The 18 mental examinations	<i>mano,pavicāra</i>	=	mind	<i>mano</i>
[§9] The 4 noble truths	<i>ariya,sacca</i>	=	mind-objects	<i>dhamma</i>

There is an important focus on the contemplation of feelings (*vedanā’nupassanā*) [§9] that introduces the 4 noble truths [§§10-13] which close the sutta. In fact, here we find a delightful variation of the exposition of the noble truths in terms of dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*), first an *abridged* one [§9], then *the full cycle* [§10].

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Tith’āyatana Sutta

The Discourse on Sectarian Doctrines

A 3.61

The 3 common wrong views

1 Bhikshus, there are **3 sectarian doctrines**²⁴ which when fully examined, investigated, discussed by the wise, even if taken in any other way,²⁵ will remain stuck as **non-action** (*akiriya*).²⁶

²⁴ “Sectarian doctrines,” *tith’āyatanāni*. M 1:483,21,23; A 1:173, 175; Nc 154; Vbh 145, 367; AA 2:272; DhA 2:63. On the term *tith’āyatana*, see (1.6).

²⁵ “Even if taken in any other way, | will remain stuck as non-action” *param pi gantvā akiriya saṅṭhahanti*. Comy glosses *param* with *parampara*, “lineage”—they are stuck with this view “even if they have gone to one of the 3 kinds of lineage or tradition: the lineage of teachers, the lineage of beliefs, and the lineage of (one’s) individual existences” (*ācariya,paramparā laddhi,paramparā attabhāva,paramparā ti etesu yamkihci paramparam gantvā’pi*, AA 2:273,18-20). It’s difficult to see how this gloss is related to Sutta context. *Param* can also mean “later, further, afterward,” suggesting that these positions, when extended can only lead to non-doing. On the basis of this interpretation, we can take *param pi gantvā* as “leading to the conclusion.” **Santhahanti** (pl) means “they stop at.” (AA 2:273,18-274,5).

²⁶ “**Non-action**” refers to the rejection of karma, that we are not accountable for our actions, that they have no moral consequences. **Sāmañña,phala S** ascribes the doctrine of non-action to Pūraṇa Kassapa (D 2,17/1:52 f). “Although on first encounter the view seems to rest on materialistic premises ... , there is canonical evidence that

What are the three?

- (1) There are, bhikshus, some recluses and brahmins who teach and hold this view:
 “Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral,
 all that is caused by **past action** [done in past lives].”²⁷ *pubbe kata,hetu*
- (2) There are, bhikshus, some recluses and brahmins who teach and hold this view:
 “Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral,
 all that is caused by **God’s creation**.”²⁸ *issara,nimmāna,hetu*
- (3) There are, bhikshus, some recluses and brahmins who teach and hold this view:
 “Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral,
 all that is uncaused and unconditioned.”²⁹ *ahetu appaccaya*

The 10 unwholesome courses of action

2 (1) Now, bhikshus, I approached those recluses and brahmins who held that
 “Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral,
 all that is caused by **past action**.”

2.2 Having approached them, I asked them:

“Is it true, as they say, that you, venerables, teach and hold *such a view*:

‘Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral,
 all that is caused by past action?’”

Being asked thus by me, they said, “Yes.” [174]

2.3 Then I said this to them, “In that case, venerables,

- (1) it is due to past action [done here and in past lives],
 there will be those who destroy life,
 (2) *it is due to past action*, there will be those who take the not-given,
 (3) *it is due to past action*, there will be those who are incelibate [who break the celibacy rule],³⁰
 (4) *it is due to past action*, there will be speakers of false speech,
 (5) *it is due to past action*, there will be speakers of divisive speech,
 (6) *it is due to past action*, there will be speakers of harsh speech,
 (7) *it is due to past action*, there will be speakers of useless talk,
 (8) *it is due to past action*, there will be the covetous,
 (9) *it is due to past action*, there will be the malevolent,
 (10) *it is due to past action*, there will be those with false views.”³¹

Pūraṇa Kassapa subscribed to a *fatalistic* doctrine. Thus, his moral antinomianism probably follows from the view that all action is predestined in ways that abrogate the ascription of moral responsibility to its agent.” (M:ÑB 1264 n629). See Basham 1951:84.

²⁷ This determinist (fixed) view is ascribed by the Buddhists to the Jains; but cf **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,28-30/1:57 & nn), where Nigaṇṭha Naṭaputta is ascribed a different set of teachings. For rebuttal, see **Deva,daha S** (M 101).

²⁸ This theist (God-belief) view is common among the brahmins.

²⁹ This fatalist view (that denies causality) was taught by Makkhali Gosāla, a contemporary of the Buddha who held that all things are fated (D 2,20/1:53, M 30,2/1:198, 36,5/1:238, 36.48/1:250, 60,21/1:407, 76,53/1:524, 77,6/2:2 ff). This doctrine, together with the doctrine of non-action (or inaction) belongs to the “wrong views with a fixed destiny” (*niyata micchā,diṭṭhi*), ie, a wrong view leading to a bad rebirth (Tkp 168).

³⁰ This rule applies only to those who have taken the precept against incelibacy (*abrahmacariya*).

2.4 Furthermore, bhikshus, one who falls back on **past action** as the decisive factor will lack the desire and effort, thus: “This should be done. This should not be done.”

Since one lacks true and real³² ground for doing or not doing something,
one dwells confused and unwary
—such a one cannot, in accordance to the Dharma [rightly],³³ call oneself “recluse.”

2.5 This, bhikshus, was my 1st **refutation**, in accordance to the Dharma, of such teachings and views of those recluses and brahmins.³⁴

3 (2) Then, bhikshus, I approached those recluses and brahmins who held that
“Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral,
all that is caused by **God’s creation.**”

3.2 Having approached them, I asked them:

“Is it true, as they say, that you, venerables, teach and hold *such a view*:

“Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral,
all that is caused by God’s creation.”

Being asked thus by me, they said, “Yes.”

3.3 Then I said this to them,

“In that case, venerables,

- | | | |
|---|---------------|-------------------------------|
| (1) it is due to <u>God’s creation</u> , | there will be | those who destroy life, |
| (2) <i>it is due to God’s creation</i> , | there will be | those who take the not-given, |
| (3) <i>it is due to God’s creation</i> , | there will be | those who are incelibate, |
| (4) <i>it is due to God’s creation</i> , | there will be | speakers of false speech, |
| (5) <i>it is due to God’s creation</i> , | there will be | speakers of divisive speech, |
| (6) <i>it is due to God’s creation</i> , | there will be | speakers of harsh speech, |
| (7) <i>it is due to God’s creation</i> , | there will be | speakers of useless talk, |
| (8) <i>it is due to God’s creation</i> , | there will be | the covetous, |
| (9) <i>it is due to God’s creation</i> , | there will be | the malevolent, |
| (10) <i>it is due to God’s creation</i> , | there will be | those with false views.’ |

³¹ In **Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 14) and **Devadaha S** (M 101) the Buddha uses other arguments to counter the Jain notion that everything we experience are due to past karma. (M 14,15-19/1:92 f), SD 4.7; (M 101/2:214-228), SD 18.4.

³² “True and real,” *saccato thetato*: also at §§3-4; as at **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,25/1:138; cf 22,36/1:140); **Yamaka S** (S 22.85,34/3:112); **Anurādha S** (S 22.86,21/3:118 = S 44.2,21/4:384); Vbh 376 f (×4), 382 (×6); Pug 3.17/38 (×12); Kvu 67 f (×13). Vbh:T tr *saccato thetato* as “firmly as truth” (Vbh:T 487).

³³ *Saha,dhammiko*. Here translated as an adverb (V 1:134; D 1:94, 161; M 1:368, 482; Dhs 1327; DA 1:263). Alt tr “keeping to the nature of things.” As a noun, “co-religionist, colleague-in-Dharma, sharing the same Dharma” (M 1:64).

³⁴ It is important to note here that although feeling (*vedanā*) is due to karma from a past life, the nature of such feeling—that is, *pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neutral feeling*—is not always due to past karma; it may be due to present conditions. See §9 where the Buddha explains that our feeling is due to the descent of the being-to-be-born into the womb. Take this simile: “The fact we have a TV is due to our having bought it on earlier, even years ago. Its presence, then, is due to *kamma* from the past. Now it has 3 channels: Joy Channel, Suffering Channel, and Neutral Channel. These Channels are not due to what we did on some previous day. We switch on a Channel now and watch it. The nature or content of the Channel, is not due to past *kamma*. It depends on our present selection of the Channel and how we watch it. In other words, it is important to make a distinction between *vedanā* as a fact and the nature of *vedanā*. Cf Brahmavaṃso 2003b:66-69.

3.4 Furthermore, bhikshus, one who falls back on **God’s creation** as the decisive factor, will lack the desire and effort, thus: “This should be done. This should not be done.”

Since one lacks true and real ground for doing or not doing something,
one dwells confused and unwary

— such a one cannot, in accordance to the Dharma, call oneself “recluse.”

3.5 This, bhikshus, was my **2nd refutation**, in accordance to the Dharma, of such teachings and views of those recluses and brahmins. [175]

4 (3) Then, bhikshus, I approached those recluses and brahmins who held that “Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral, all that is **uncaused and unconditioned**.”³⁵

4.2 Having approached them, I asked them:

“Is it true, as they say, that you, venerables, teach and hold *such a view*:

‘Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral, all that is uncaused and unconditioned?’”

Being asked thus by me, they said, “Yes.”

4.3 Then I said this to them,

“In that case, venerables,

- | | | |
|---|---------------|-------------------------------|
| (1) with <u>neither cause nor condition</u> , | there will be | those who destroy life, |
| (2) with neither cause nor condition, | there will be | those who take the not-given, |
| (3) with neither cause nor condition, | there will be | those who are incelibate, |
| (4) with neither cause nor condition, | there will be | speakers of false speech, |
| (5) with neither cause nor condition, | there will be | speakers of divisive speech, |
| (6) with neither cause nor condition, | there will be | speakers of harsh speech, |
| (7) with neither cause nor condition, | there will be | speakers of useless talk, |
| (8) with neither cause nor condition, | there will be | the covetous, |
| (9) with neither cause nor condition, | there will be | the malevolent, |
| (10) with neither cause nor condition, | there will be | those with false views.’ |

4.4 Furthermore, bhikshus, one who falls back on the notion that “there is **neither cause nor condition**” as the decisive factor, will lack the desire and effort, thus: “This should be done. This should not be done.”

Since one lacks true and real³⁶ ground for doing or not doing something,
one dwells confused and unwary

— such a one cannot, in accordance to the Dharma, call oneself “recluse.”

4.5 This, bhikshus, was my **3rd refutation**, in accordance to the Dharma, of such teachings and views of those recluses and brahmins.

4.6 Bhikshus, there are **3 sectarian doctrines** which when fully examined, investigated, discussed by the wise, even if taken in any other way, will remain a doctrine of **non-action**.

³⁵ This is Makkhali Gosāla’s view, technically known as “circumstantial causation” (*saṅgati, bhāva, hetu*): see **Devadaha S** (M 101,22(3)/2:222), SD 18.4, and is criticized at length in **Apāṇṇaka S** (M 60,21/1:407), SD 35.5.

³⁶ “True and real,” *saccato thetato*: see §2 n.

The nature of the 4 focuses of mindfulness

5 Now, bhikshus, there is **this Dharma** taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.

And what, bhikshus, is this Dharma *taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins?*

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| (1) They are these 6 elements , bhikshus—
<i>this Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.</i> | <i>cha dhātu</i> |
| (2) They are these 6 bases of contact , bhikshus—
<i>this Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.</i> | <i>cha phass'āyatana</i> |
| (3) They are these 18 mental examinations , bhikshus—
<i>this Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.</i> | <i>aṭṭhārasa mano,pavicāra</i> |
| (4) They are these 4 noble truths , bhikshus—
<i>this Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.</i> | <i>catu ariya,sacca</i> |

The 4 focuses of mindfulness³⁷

(1) CONTEMPLATION OF THE BODY

6 “These **6 elements**,³⁸ bhikshus, are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and [176] brahmins.”

Thus, it is said—on what account is this said?

³⁷ These novel 4 focuses of mindfulness are detailed in **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,14-19/3:240-243), where however, the 4 noble truths are replaced by the “4 foundations [for gaining arhathood]” (*adhiṭṭhāna*), ie, the foundations of wisdom, of truth, of letting go, and of peace (M 140,11/3:240), SD 4.17.

³⁸ AA on **the 6 elements** (*cha dhātu*) as meditation subject (*dhātu,kammaṭṭhāna*): The elements of earth, water, fire, wind are the 4 “great” or primary elements (*mahā,bhūta*). The space element is a “derived” or secondary form (*upādā,rūpa*), which when mentioned alone, the other types of derived forms (the sense-organs and their objects, etc) are implied. The element of consciousness (*viññāṇa,dhātu*) is mind (*citta*) or the aggregate of **consciousness** (*viññāṇa-k,khandha*). The coexistent feeling is the aggregate of **feeling** (*vedanā-k,khandha*); the coexistent perception is the aggregate of **perception** (*saññā-k,khandha*); the coexistent contact and volition, the aggregate of **formations** (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*). These are the 4 mental aggregates; the 4 primaries and the form derived from them are the aggregate of form (*rūpa-k,khandha*). These 4 mental aggregates are *nāma* (“name” or “mind”) and the aggregate of **form** (*rūpa-k,khandha*) is *rūpa*. As such, there are only these two (dvandva): name and form (*nāma,-rūpa*). Other than this, there is neither a substantial being (*satta*) or an abiding soul (*jīva*). Thus, should one understand in brief the meditation subject of the 6 elements that leads up to arhathood. See **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 62), SD 3.11.

6.2 Bhikshus, there are these **6 elements**, namely,³⁹

The earth element;	<i>paṭhavī</i>	<i>dhātu</i>
The water element;	<i>āpo</i>	<i>dhatu</i>
The fire element;	<i>tejo</i>	<i>dhatu</i>
The wind element;	<i>vāyo</i>	<i>dhatu</i>
The space element;	<i>ākāsa</i>	<i>dhatu</i>
The consciousness element.	<i>viññāṇa</i>	<i>dhatu</i>

Bhikshus, these 6 elements are the Dharma taught by me

that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.

Thus it is said; on account of this that it was said.

(2) CONTEMPLATION OF FEELINGS

7 “Bhikshus, these **6 bases of contact** are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.” Thus, it is said—on what account is this said?

7.2 Bhikshus, there are these **6 bases of contacts**, namely,

The eye	as a base of contact;	<i>cakkhu</i>	<i>phass’āyatana</i>
The ear	as a base of contact;	<i>sota</i>	<i>phass’āyatana</i>
The nose	as a base of contact;	<i>ghāna</i>	<i>phass’āyatana</i>
The tongue	as a base of contact;	<i>jivhā</i>	<i>phass’āyatana</i>
The body	as a base of contact;	<i>kāya</i>	<i>phass’āyatana</i>
The mind	as a base of contact;	<i>mano</i>	<i>phass’āyatana</i>

Bhikshus, these 6 bases of contact are the Dharma taught by me

that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.

Thus it is said; on account of this that it was said.

(3) CONTEMPLATION OF THE MIND

8 “Bhikshus, these **18 kinds of mental examinations**⁴⁰ are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.” Thus, it is said—on what account is this said?

8.2 Bhikshus, there are these **18 mental examinations**, namely,

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| i. seeing a form with <u>the eye</u> , one examines <u>form</u>
as the basis for pleasure, or for pain, or for neither-pain-nor-pleasure; | <i>cakkhu, rūpa</i>
<i>vedanā</i> |
| ii. hearing a sound with <u>the ear</u> , one examines <u>sound</u>
as the basis for pleasure, or for pain, or for neither-pain-nor-pleasure; | <i>sota, sadda</i>
<i>vedanā</i> |

³⁹ Only in this set of 6 are space (*ākāsa*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) called “elements” (*dhātu*). They are never referred as so on their own.

⁴⁰ “Mental examinations,” *mano, pavicāra*. There are 18 of them in connection with the senses, and their respective sense-objects and sense-consciousnesses: 6 in mental pleasure (*somanassūpavicāra*), 6 in mental pain (*domanassūpavicāra*), 6 in equanimity (*upekkhā*). See also M 137,8/3:216 f where MA (and AA, too) explains *manōpavicāra* as initial thought and sustained thought (or thinking and pondering). One examines the object by the occurrence of sustained thought (*vicāra*), and initial thought is associated with the latter (MA 5:22). Comy: *Mano, pavicāra* makes the 18 examinations “using the ‘feet’ (*pāda*)” that is *vicāra*, lit, “wandering around” (AA 2:278,3 f)).

- | | |
|---|--|
| iii. smelling a smell with <u>the nose</u> , one examines <u>smell</u>
as the basis for pleasure, or for pain, or for neither-pain-nor-pleasure; | <i>ghāna, gandha</i>
<i>vedanā</i> |
| iv. tasting a taste with <u>the tongue</u> , one examines <u>taste</u>
as the basis for pleasure, or for pain, or for neither-pain-nor-pleasure; | <i>jivhā, rasa</i>
<i>vedanā</i> |
| v. feeling a touch with <u>the body</u> , one examines <u>touch</u>
as the basis for pleasure, or for pain, or for neither-pain-nor-pleasure; | <i>kāya, phoṭṭhabba</i>
<i>vedanā</i> |
| vi. cognizing a mental object with <u>the mind</u> , one examines <u>mental object</u>
as the basis for pleasure, or for pain, or for neither-pain-nor-pleasure. | <i>mano, dhamma</i>
<i>vedanā</i> |

Bhikshus, these 18 mental examinations are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins. Thus it is said; on account of this that it was said.

(4) CONTEMPLATION OF MIND-OBJECTS

9 “Bhikshus, these **4 noble truths** are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.” Thus, it is said—on what account is this said?

9.2 (In dependence) of these 6 elements,⁴¹ bhikshus,
 With grasping, there is descent into the womb;⁴²
 With descent, there is name-and-form;⁴³
 With name-and-form as condition, there are the 6 sense-bases;

⁴¹ That is, earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness [6.2]. Comy: “Why does he begin in this way? For ease of understanding. For the Tathāgata wants to explain the cycle of the 12 conditions, so he shows the round by the term ‘descent of a [future] embryo’ (*gabbhasāvakkanti*). For when the round has been shown by the descent of a [future] embryo, what follows will be easy to understand. Whose 6 elements serve as the condition, the mother's or the father's? It is neither, but descent of a [future] embryo occurs conditioned by the 6 elements of the being taking rebirth.” (AA 2:281,10-20). AA cites **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38,26/1:265,35-266,6), SD 7.10; see also **Assalāyana S** (M 93,18/2:156,30-57,3), SD 40a.2.

⁴² “**Descent into the womb**,” *gabbhasāvakkanti*. In this passage unique to this Sutta, the Buddha declares that feeling (*vedanā*) is due to the descent of the *gandhabba* into the womb. This fact is reflected in **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15) statement: “It is said: “**With consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form.**” | Ānanda, how consciousness conditions name-and-form should be known in this manner: “If there were no consciousness to descend into a mother's womb, would name-and-form take shape in the womb?” | “Certainly not, bhante.” (D 15,21/2:62 f). AA says that *avakkanti* or *okkanti* refers to origination or manifestation, meaning the process of rebirth, or more exactly, *a new conception* (“reconception”). **The 4 material elements**, plus space, are the material bases for rebirth supplied by the fertilized ovum (zygote). However, for rebirth to occur, there must be a rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi,citta*) of a being who has just died. This rebirth-consciousness is the 6th element, the “element of consciousness.” **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38) refers to this rebirth-consciousness as the *gandhabba*, and says that the 3 conditions for conception are (in the case of a human being and other viviparous beings): the sexual union of the parents, the fertile period of the woman, and the being to be born (*gandhabba*) (M 38,26/1:266), SD 7.10.

⁴³ This line, *okkantiyā sati nāma,rūpaṃ*, is the same as *viññāṇa,paccayā nāma,rūpaṃ*, “with consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form.” It is at this point that the consciousness descends into the zygote, giving it life, and as such referred to as “name-and-form.” This is one of the canonical references that justifies the commentarial explanation that the “consciousness” of the dependent arising cycle refers to rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi,-viññāṇa*). The full formula is given in §11.

With the 6 sense-bases as condition there is contact;
With contact as condition, there is feeling.

9.3 Now, it is for **one who feels**⁴⁴:

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| i. that I, bhikshus, make known: This is <u>suffering</u> ; | <i>dukkha</i> |
| ii. that I, bhikshus, make known: This is <u>the arising</u> of suffering; | <i>samudaya</i> |
| iii. that I, bhikshus, make known: This is <u>the ending</u> of suffering; | <i>nirodha</i> |
| iv. that I, bhikshus, make known: This is <u>the path</u> leading to the ending of suffering. | <i>paṭipadā</i> |

10 (i) And what, bhikshus, is **the noble truth that is suffering**?⁴⁵

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| (1) birth | is suffering, |
| (2) decay ⁴⁶ | is suffering, |
| (3) death | is suffering; [177] |
| (4) sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair | are suffering |
| (5) to be associated with the unpleasant | is suffering; |
| (6) to be separated from the pleasant | is suffering; |
| (7) not getting what one desires | is suffering— |
| (8) in short, the 5 aggregates of clinging ⁴⁷ | are suffering. |

This, bhikshus, is called the noble truth that is suffering.

11 (ii) And what, bhikshus, is **the noble truth that is the arising of suffering**?

With <u>ignorance</u>	as condition, there are	(volitional) formations, ⁴⁸
With (volitional) formations	as condition, there is	consciousness;
With consciousness	as condition, there are	name-and-form;
With name-and-form	as condition, there are	the 6 sense-bases;
With the 6 sense-bases	as condition, there is	contact;
With contact	as condition, there is	feeling;
With feeling	as condition, there is	craving;
With craving	as condition, there is	clinging;
With clinging	as condition, there is	becoming;
With becoming	as condition, there is	birth;
With birth	as condition, there arise	decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

—Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

This, bhikshus, is called the noble truth that is the arising of suffering.

⁴⁴ This whole sentence reflects the *vedanā'nupassanā* section of **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,32-33/1:59; also D 22,11/-2:298). Comy says that “feeling” here is more than mere sensation (*anubhavanto*), but is feeling connected with knowing (*jānanto*), quoting the Satipaṭṭhāna S passage as an example. In other words, the 4 noble truths are here addressed to those who understand the true nature of feeling as evident in personal experience and mindful observation (AA 2:282).

⁴⁵ See **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141,3 passim), SD 11.11.

⁴⁶ *Jarā*, old age, aging.

⁴⁷ *Pañc'upadāna-k,khandha*, namely, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (S 3:47, Vbh 1).

⁴⁸ “The usual analysis of the Four Truths mentions only craving (*taṇhā*) as the origin of suffering, but here the entire formula of dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*) is brought in to provide a fuller explanation. Similarly, just below, instead of explaining the cessation of suffering simply as a consequence of the cessation of craving, here the full formula for the reversal of dependent arising is given.” (A:ÑB 286 n46).

12 (iii) And what, bhikshus, is **the noble truth that is the ending of suffering?**

With the utter fading away and ending of this	<u>ignorance,</u>	(volitional) formations	end;
With the ending of	(volitional) formations,	consciousness	ends;
With the ending of	consciousness,	name-and-form	end;
With the ending of	name-and-form,	the 6 sense-bases	end;
With the ending of	the 6 sense-bases,	contact	ends;
With the ending of	contact,	feeling	ends;
With the ending of	feeling,	craving	ends;
With the ending of	craving,	clinging	ends;
With the ending of	clinging,	existence	ends;
With the ending of	existence,	birth	ends;
With the ending of	birth,		

there end decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.⁴⁹

This, bhikshus, is called the noble truth that is the ending of suffering.

13 (iv) And what, bhikshus, is **the noble truth that is the path leading to the ending of suffering?**

It is this very noble eightfold path, that is,

i. right view,	<i>sammā diṭṭhi</i>
ii. right thought,	<i>sammā saṅkappa</i>
iii. right speech,	<i>sammā vācā</i>
iv. right action,	<i>sammā kammantā</i>
v. right livelihood,	<i>sammā ājīva</i>
vi. right effort,	<i>sammā vāyāma</i>
vii. right mindfulness,	<i>sammā sati</i>
viii. right concentration.	<i>sammā samādhi</i>

This, bhikshus, is called the noble truth that is the path leading to the ending of suffering.

These 4 noble truths, bhikshus, are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.

It is on this account that (all) this is said.

— evaṃ —

⁴⁹ It is unique that here the noble truths of the arising and the ending of suffering are laid out by way of the full 12 links of dependent arising. In **(Nidāna) Dukkha S** (S 12.43/2:72 f), SD 108.14, the arising (*samudaya*) of suffering is explained by way of the links from consciousness through craving; its ending (*atthaṅgama*), by way of the ending of the links from craving through old age and death. In the Chinese parallel (MĀ 13/T1.435a24-436a10), the 2nd and 3rd truths are not explained by way of dependent arising but according to the stock formulations, such as that found in **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S** (S 56.11/5:421), SD 1.1.

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