

AN 10.177

Jāṇussoṇi Sutta

“Discourse to Jāṇussoṇi: So, Who’s Getting All the Merits?”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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At one time, having approached the Blessed One, the brahmin Jāṇussoṇi exchanged friendly greetings with Him, and after sitting to the side, said to the Blessed One:

“Good Gautama, we brahmins make offerings and perform memorial rites for our dead, with the faith that the merits to be gained in making these offerings also benefit our dead relatives and loved ones, by having them partake of our gift. Bhante, can the gifts and offerings that we make truly benefit our dead relatives and loved ones? Can our dead relatives and loved ones truly partake of our gifts?”

“They can be of benefit when the conditions are right, brahmin, but not when the conditions are wrong.”

“What then, Good Gautama, are the right conditions, and what are the wrong ones?”

“Here, brahmin, someone destroys living beings, takes what is not freely given, engages in sexual misconduct, speaks falsehood, slanders, uses harsh and vulgar words, talks frivolously, covets, lives with an angry mind, and holds on tightly to wrong views. Once the physical body eventually breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn in **hell**. They subsist by eating whatever food is available for hell beings. This is considered to be a wrong condition, where the merits that were gained from those offerings cannot be partaken of, and thus are of no benefit to them.

Further, brahmin, someone destroys living beings, takes what is not freely given, engages in sexual misconduct, speaks falsehood, slanders, uses harsh and vulgar words, talks frivolously, covets, lives with an angry mind, and holds on tightly to wrong views. Once the physical body eventually breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn in the animal realm. They subsist by eating whatever food is available for that particular **animal** in that realm. This too, is considered to be a **wrong condition**, where the merits that were gained from those offerings cannot be partaken of, and thus are of no benefit to them.

Further, brahmin, someone abstains from destroying living beings, abstains from taking what is not freely given, abstains from engaging in sexual misconduct, abstains from speaking falsehood, from slandering, or using harsh and vulgar words, does not talk frivolously, does not covet, while living with a loving and kind mind, and adhering to Right View. Once the physical body eventually breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn in the **human** realm. They subsist by eating whatever food is available for humans in that realm. This too, is considered to be a

wrong condition, where the merits that were gained from those offerings cannot be partaken of, and thus are of no benefit to them.

Further, brahmin, someone abstains from destroying living beings, abstains from taking what is not freely given, abstains from engaging in sexual misconduct, abstains from speaking falsehood, from slandering, or using harsh and vulgar words, does not talk frivolously, does not covet, while living with a loving and kind mind, and adhering to Right View. Once the physical body eventually breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn in the company of the devas or divine beings in the heavenly realms. They subsist by eating whatever food is available for that particular level of devas in that **heavenly** realm. This too, is considered to be a **wrong condition**, where the merits that were gained from those offerings cannot be partaken of, and thus are of no benefit to them.

Still another person, brahmin, destroys living beings, takes what is not freely given, engages in sexual misconduct, speaks falsehood, slanders, uses harsh and vulgar words, talks frivolously, covets, lives with an angry mind, and holds on tightly to wrong views. Once the physical body eventually breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn in the realm of hungry **ghosts**. They subsist by eating whatever food is available for hungry ghosts in that realm. This is considered to be a **right condition**, where the merits that were gained from those offerings can be partaken of and thus be of benefit to them.

“But, Good Gautama, who then partakes of the merits gained by that offering if one’s relatives or loved ones are not born in the realm of hungry ghosts, and thus benefits from them?”

“Brahmin, there are those who are the relatives and loved ones of other people born into the realm of the hungry ghosts that will partake of the merits gained by those offerings, and thus benefit from them.”

“But Good Gautama, if neither one’s own relatives nor loved ones, nor those of others are reborn into the realm of hungry ghosts, then who partakes of the merits gained by those offerings and thus benefits from them?”

“Brahmin, throughout the endless stretch of time in Samsāra, it is impossible that the realm of hungry ghosts could ever get empty of the relatives and loved ones of beings. However, brahmin, the offering that is made is not fruitless for the one who gives.

“And does the Good Gautama declare that this is the case, even if the conditions are wrong?”

“Indeed, brahmin, I declare that this is the case, even if the conditions are wrong. And for what reason?”

Consider someone who destroys living beings, takes what is not freely given, engages in sexual misconduct, speaks falsehood, slanders, uses harsh and vulgar words, talks frivolously, covets, lives with an angry mind, and holds on tightly to wrong views. But while still alive, he offers food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners. Once the physical body eventually

breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn as an elephant, in the company of elephants. There he gains food, drinks, and various decorative garlands.

“Now, brahmin, because while being alive, he engaged in destroying living beings, taking what was not freely given, engaging in sexual misconduct, speaking falsehood, slandering, using harsh and vulgar words, talking frivolously, coveting, living with an angry mind and holding on tightly to wrong views, he is reborn as an elephant, in the company of elephants. But, since he made offerings of food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners, there in that realm, he gains food, drinks, and various decorative garlands.

Further, brahmin, consider someone else who destroys living beings, takes what is not freely given, engages in sexual misconduct, speaks falsehood, slanders, uses harsh and vulgar words, talks frivolously, covets, lives with an angry mind, and holds on tightly to wrong views. But while still alive, he offers food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners. Once the physical body eventually breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn as a horse, in the company of horses. There he gains food, drinks, and various decorative garlands.

“Now, brahmin, because while being alive, he engaged in destroying living beings, taking what was not freely given, engaging in sexual misconduct, speaking falsehood, slandering, using harsh and vulgar words, talking frivolously, coveting, living with an angry mind and holding on tightly to wrong views, he is reborn as a horse, in the company of horses. But, since he made offerings of food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners, there in that realm, he gains food, drinks, and various decorative garlands.

Further, brahmin, consider someone else who destroys living beings, takes what is not freely given, engages in sexual misconduct, speaks falsehood, slanders, uses harsh and vulgar words, talks frivolously, covets, lives with an angry mind, and holds on tightly to wrong views. But while still alive, he offers food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners. Once the physical body eventually breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn as a cow, in the company of cattle. There he gains food, drinks, and various decorative garlands.

“Now, brahmin, because while being alive, he engaged in destroying living beings, taking what was not freely given, engaging in sexual misconduct, speaking falsehood, slandering, using harsh and vulgar words, talking frivolously, coveting, living with an angry mind and holding on tightly to wrong views, he is reborn as a cow, in the company of cattle. But, since he made offerings of food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners, there in that realm, he gains food, drinks, and various decorative garlands.

Further, brahmin, consider someone else who destroys living beings, takes what is not freely given, engages in sexual misconduct, speaks falsehood, slanders, uses harsh and vulgar words, talks frivolously, covets, lives with an angry mind, and holds on tightly to wrong views. But

while still alive, he offers food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners. Once the physical body eventually breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn as a dog, in the company of dogs. There he gains food, drinks, and various decorative garlands.

“Now, brahmin, because while being alive, he engaged in destroying living beings, taking what was not freely given, engaging in sexual misconduct, speaking falsehood, slandering, using harsh and vulgar words, talking frivolously, coveting, living with an angry mind and holding on tightly to wrong views, he is reborn as a dog, in the company of dogs. But, since he made offerings of food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners, there in that realm, he gains food, drinks, and various decorative garlands.

Further, brahmin, consider someone else who abstains from harming or killing living beings, does not take what is not freely given, does not engage in sexual misconduct, refuses to speak falsehood, neither slanders, nor uses harsh or vulgar words, does not talk frivolously, does not covet, lives with a loving and a kind mind, adhering to Right View. And while still alive, he offers food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners. Once the physical body eventually breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn as a human being, in the human realm. There he gains the five objects of human sensual pleasure.

“Now, brahmin, because while being alive, he abstained from harming or killing living beings, did not take what was not freely given, did not engage in sexual misconduct, refused to speak falsehood, and neither slandered, nor used harsh or vulgar words, did not talk frivolously, did not covet, while living with a loving and a kind mind, adhering to Right View; and since he made offerings of food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners, there in that human realm, he gains the five objects of human sensual pleasure.

Further, brahmin, consider someone else who also abstains from harming or killing living beings, does not take what is not freely given, does not engage in sexual misconduct, refuses to speak falsehood, neither slanders, nor uses harsh or vulgar words, does not talk frivolously, does not covet, lives with a loving and a kind mind, adhering to Right View. And while still alive, he offers food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners. Once the physical body eventually breaks down, after death, such a person is reborn as a divine being, in the company of devas. There he gains the five objects of heavenly sensual pleasure.

“Now, brahmin, because while being alive, he abstained from harming or killing living beings, did not take what was not freely given, did not engage in sexual misconduct, refused to speak falsehood, and neither slandered, nor used harsh or vulgar words, did not talk frivolously, did not covet, while living with a loving and a kind mind, adhering to Right View; and since he made offerings of food, drinks, clothes, transportation, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, and lighting utensils to recluses and dedicated religious practitioners, there in that heavenly realm, he gains the five objects of heavenly sensual pleasure.

“It was because of this, brahmin, that I declared how the offering that is made is not fruitless for the one who gives, even if the conditions are wrong.”

When this was said, Jāṇussoṇi, the brahmin, exclaimed to the Blessed One:

“It is amazing, Good Gautama! It is astounding, Blessed One! The explanation you gave justifies the offering of gifts and performing of the memorial rites for our dead relatives and loved ones, as it brings, at the very least, *so* many benefits to the ones who give!

“It is excellent Blessed One! It is marvelous, Blessed One! The Blessed Lord has clarified the Dhamma for me in many ways, as though he were to turn upright what had been turned upside-down, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see. Bhante, I go to the Blessed One for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of Bhikkhus. From this day forward, may the Blessed One remember me as a lay disciple who has taken refuge in him, until the end of life.”

Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu