MN 135 — MN 135 The Shorter Analysis of Action | Cūḷa Kamma-vibhaṅga Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

The Shorter Analysis of Action

Cūḷa Kamma-vibhaṅga Sutta (MN 135)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then Subha the student, Todeyya’s son, went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One: “Master Gotama, what is the reason, what is the cause, why baseness & excellence are seen among human beings, among the human race? For short-lived & long-lived people are to be seen, sickly & healthy, ugly & beautiful, uninfluential & influential, poor & rich, low-born & high-born, stupid & discerning people are to be seen.

So what is the reason, what is the cause, why baseness & excellence are seen among human beings, among the human race?"

"Student, beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Action is what differentiates beings in terms of baseness & excellence."

"I don't understand the detailed meaning of Master Gotama's statement spoken in brief without explaining the detailed meaning. It would be good if Master Gotama taught me the Dhamma so that I might understand the detailed meaning of his brief statement."

"In that case, student, listen & pay close attention. I will speak."

"As you say, Master Gotama," Subha the student responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said: "There is the case, student, where a woman or man is a killer of living beings, brutal, bloody-handed, given to killing & slaying, showing no mercy to living beings. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. If, on the break-up of the body, after death—instead of reappearing in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell—he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is short-lived wherever reborn. This is the way leading to a short life: to be a killer of living beings, brutal, bloody-handed, given to killing & slaying, showing no mercy to living beings.

"But then there is the case where a woman or man, having abandoned the killing of living beings, abstains from killing living beings, and dwells with the rod laid down, the knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, & sympathetic for the welfare of all living beings. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination, a heavenly world. If, on the break-up of the body, after death—instead of reappearing in a good destination, a heavenly world—he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is long-lived wherever reborn. This is the way leading to a long life: to have abandoned the killing of living beings, to abstain from killing living beings, to dwell with one's rod laid down, one's knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, & sympathetic for the welfare of all living beings.

"There is the case where a woman or man is one who harms beings with his/her fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is sickly wherever reborn. This is the way leading to sickliness: to be one who harms beings with one's fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives.

"But then there is the case where a woman or man is not one who harms beings with his/her fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good

destination… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is healthy wherever reborn. This is the way leading to health: not to be one who harms beings with one's fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives.

"There is the case, where a woman or man is ill-tempered & easily upset; even when lightly criticized, he/she grows offended, provoked, malicious, & resentful; shows annoyance, aversion, & bitterness. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is ugly wherever reborn. This is the way leading to ugliness: to be ill-tempered & easily upset; even when lightly criticized, to grow offended, provoked, malicious, & resentful; to show annoyance, aversion, & bitterness.

"But then there is the case where a woman or man is not ill-tempered or easily upset; even when heavily criticized, he/she doesn't grow offended, provoked, malicious, or resentful; doesn't show annoyance, aversion, or bitterness. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is beautiful wherever reborn. This is the way leading to beauty: not to be ill-tempered or easily upset; even when heavily criticized, not to be offended, provoked, malicious, or resentful; nor to show annoyance, aversion, & bitterness.

"There is the case where a woman or man is envious. He/she envies, begrudges, & broods about others' gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, & veneration. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is not influential wherever reborn. This is the way leading to being uninfluential: to be envious, to envy, begrudge, & brood about others' gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, & veneration.

"But then there is the case where a woman or man is not envious. He/she does not envy, begrudge, or brood about others' gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, or veneration. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination… If instead he/she comes to the human state, he/she is influential wherever reborn. This is the way leading to being influential: not to be envious; not to envy, begrudge, or brood about others' gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, or veneration.

"There is the case where a woman or man is not a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, or lighting to contemplatives or brahmans. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation… If instead he/she comes to the human state, he/she is poor wherever reborn. This is the way leading to poverty: not to be a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, or lighting to contemplatives or brahmans.

“But then there is the case where a woman or man is a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, & lighting to contemplatives & brahmans. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is wealthy wherever reborn. This is the way leading to great wealth: to be a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, & lighting to contemplatives & brahmans.

“There is the case where a woman or man is obstinate & arrogant. He/she does not pay homage to those who deserve homage, rise up for those for whom one should rise up, give a seat to those to whom one should give a seat, make way for those for whom one should make way, worship those who should be worshipped, respect those who should be respected, revere those who should be revered, or honor those who should be honored. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is low-born wherever reborn. This is the way leading to a low birth: to be obstinate & arrogant, not to pay homage to those who deserve homage, nor rise up for… nor give a seat to… nor make way for… nor worship… nor respect… nor revere… nor honor those who should be honored.

“But then there is the case where a woman or man is not obstinate or arrogant; he/she pays homage to those who deserve homage, rises up… gives a seat… makes way… worships… respects… reveres… honors those who should be honored. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is highborn wherever reborn. This is the way leading to a high birth: not to be obstinate or arrogant; to pay homage to those who deserve homage, to rise up… give a seat… make way… worship… respect… revere… honor those who should be honored.

“There is the case where a woman or man when visiting a contemplative or brahman, does not ask: ‘What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, having been done by me, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?’ Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. If, on the break-up of the body, after death—instead of reappearing in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell—he/she comes to the human state, then he/she will be stupid wherever reborn. This is the way leading to stupidity: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, not to ask: ‘What is skillful? … Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?’

“But then there is the case where a woman or man when visiting a contemplative or brahman, asks: ‘What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, having been done by me, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, having been

done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?' Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination, a heavenly world. If, on the break-up of the body, after death—instead of reappearing in a good destination, a heavenly world—he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is discerning wherever reborn. This is the way leading to discernment: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, to ask: 'What is skillful?... Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?'

"So, student, the way leading to short life makes people short-lived, the way leading to long life makes people long-lived. The way leading to sickliness makes people sickly, the way leading to health makes people healthy. The way leading to ugliness makes people ugly, the way leading to beauty makes people beautiful. The way leading to lack of influence makes people uninfluential, the way leading to influence makes people influential. The way leading to poverty makes people poor, the way leading to wealth makes people wealthy. The way leading to low birth makes people low-born, the way leading to high birth makes people highborn. The way leading to stupidity makes people stupid, the way leading to discernment makes people discerning.

"Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Action is what differentiates beings in terms of baseness & excellence."

When this was said, Subha the student, Todeyya's son, said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has Master Gotama—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha of monks. May Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life."

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 41; SN 12:46; SN 42:6; SN 42:8; SN 42:13; AN 3:101; AN 4:85; AN 4:237; AN 5:57; AN 6:63; AN 8:39–40; AN 8:54; AN 10:165