

Majjhima Nikāya
The Middle Length Discourses

Vibhaṅga Vagga
The Section on Breakdowns

Cūḷa Kammavibhaṅga Sutta
“The Shorter Classification on Kamma (Intentional *Actions*)”

Translated by Candana Bhikkhu

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I have personally heard this.

Once, while The Blessed One was living in Sāvattṭhī, at Anāthapiṇḍika’s Monastery in Jeta’s Park, the brahmin student Subha, the son of Todeyya, went and approached The Teacher. After exchanging friendly and cordial greetings, he then sat to one side and by addressing The Blessed One, asked a question:

“What is behind, what is the cause, O Master Gautama, whereby some human beings are born as inferior to others, while others are born as superior?”

“What is behind, what is the cause, O Master Gautama, whereby some human beings end up having short lives, while others go on living up to advanced age, and only die after having lived for a very long time?”

“Why are some human beings weakly and prone to sickness, while others are not; living healthy lives without having many ailments?”

“What is the reason, Master Gautama, that some are born ugly and unattractive in appearance, while others are beautiful and lovely?”

“What is the reason that some are born into families and positions that are important and influential in society, while others are not, and thus live without any influence?”

“What is behind, what is the reason, Master Gautama, whereby some human beings are born into wealth and affluence, while others are born into poverty, without the resources or means that others have?”

“What is the reason that some humans are born into the lower-caste families in society, while others are high-born into prominent and leading castes?”

“Why are some human beings stupid and witless, while others are wise and discerning?”

“Therefore, Master Gautama, what is behind, what is the cause, for some human beings to be born as inferior, while others are born as superior?”

“Young pupil, beings are the owners of their intentionally committed actions, their *Kamma*; they are the inescapable inheritors of their kamma; for, kamma is their matrix and origin; kamma is their ancestral blood line; kamma is their refuge and resort.

“Therefore, it is one’s own intentional actions that lead one to be born as inferior, while others are born as superior. All that is due to the individual’s kamma: one’s own true and binding inheritance.”

Then, on hearing these words spoken by The Blessed One, the young brahmin Subha said this, while addressing The Teacher:

“But, Master Gautama, I am unable to grasp the deeper meaning or understand the detailed nuances of what Master Gautama just mentioned briefly.

“Please, may the Great Gautama kindly unfold and reveal the depth of meaning of what he outlined in brief. That way, I may hear and thus learn the deeper meaning and understand the detailed nuances of Master Gautama’s instruction to me.”

“In that case, young pupil, listen carefully to what I shall say!”

“Yes, Blessed Lord,” replied the young brahmin.

And The Blessed One continued instructing, as he said this:

1. “Here, young pupil, there is a type of man or woman who kills living beings, while having a ravenously blood-thirsty heart. Being a violent person, he or she would seek to murder and assault living beings, having a cold-blooded and merciless disposition.

“Now, while living contentiously with an angry heart and possessing wrong view, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of utter misery, sorrow, and pain, reappearing into the lower realms, being reborn in the hells. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing in the hell realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then the life that person is reborn into will be short-lived.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings end up having short lives, while others go on living up to advanced age, and only die after having lived a very long life. Thus, wanting to harm and kill living beings is the surest way to have a life that is short-lived.

1a. “On the other hand, there may be another man or woman, who abstains from harming or killing living beings; someone who puts down weapons and sticks that are used to harm others, and thus, he or she lives a kind and caring life, with compassion in the heart and an empathic disposition towards all living beings.

“Now, while living contentedly with a kind heart and possessing right view, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of heavenly delights, reappearing into the divine realms. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing into the divine realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then the life that person is reborn into is long-lived.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings have a long lifespan, up to an advanced age, and only die after having lived a very long life, while others end up having lives that are short-lived. Thus, living one’s life with a kind and caring attitude, with compassion in one’s heart and an empathic disposition towards all living beings, is the surest way to have a life that is long-lived.

2. “Further, young pupil, there is a type of man or woman who enjoys hurting and harming living beings, whether through his body, such as by striking with his hand, or by other objects like a cane or a stick, or with a blade.

“Now, as a result of having such a nasty way of thinking, and behaving in a mean manner towards others, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of utter misery, sorrow, and pain, reappearing into the lower realms; being reborn in the hells. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing in the hell realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then as a human being that person will be weakly and prone to sickness, experiencing many ailments and unable to enjoy health.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings end up being weakly and prone to sickness, while others do not, living healthy lives without many ailments.

“Thus, being nasty and behaving in such a mean manner towards others, whether by using one’s body, such as in striking with one’s hand, or by other objects like a cane or a stick, or with a blade – is the surest way to end up having a body that is weakly and prone to sickness; of experiencing many ailments, and being unable to enjoy health.

2a. “On the other hand, there may be another man or woman, who abstains from hurting or harming living beings, whether through his body, such as by striking with his hand, or by other objects like a cane or a stick, or with a blade.

“Now, as a result of having avoided such damaging behaviors, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of heavenly delights, reappearing into the divine realms. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing into the divine realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then the life of that person brings with it a body that does not become sick or weak; he or she thus lives a healthy life, without experiencing ailments or sickness.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings come to possess and enjoy healthy lives without having many ailments, whereas others end up being weakly in their bodies, and prone to becoming sick.

“Thus, refusing to be nasty or to behave in such a mean manner towards others, whether through one’s body, such as by striking with one’s hand, or in using objects like a cane or a stick, or a

blade – is the surest way to be reborn into a body that does not become sick nor weak. Instead, such a person lives a healthy life, without experiencing ailments or sickness.

3. “Further, young pupil, there is a type of man or woman with an angry character, irritable and short-tempered, who becomes inflamed with rage and hostility at the slightest provocation, and whose heart hardens quickly, turning bitter, nasty and cold in his or her attitude towards others.

“Now, as a result of having such a harsh and mean attitude towards others, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of utter misery, sorrow, and pain; reappearing into the lower realms, being reborn in the hells. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing in the hell realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then as a human being, such a person will be born ugly and unattractive to look at, unlike others are beautiful and lovely.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings end up being born ugly and unattractive to look at, while others are beautiful and lovely.

“Thus, living with an angry character, being irritable and short-tempered, becoming inflamed with rage and hostility at the slightest provocation, and having a heart that hardens quickly, turning bitter, nasty and cold in his or her attitude towards others – is the surest way to end up being born ugly and unattractive to look at, while others are beautiful and lovely.

3a. “On the other hand, there may be another man or woman, who does not possess an angry character, who avoids becoming irritable or bitter, and instead, is patient and persevering; someone who does not become hostile nor inflamed with rage at the slightest provocation, where he or she maintains a soft heart, remaining kind and sweet, as well as being considerate towards others.

“Now, as a result of having such a lovely character, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of heavenly delights, reappearing into the divine realms. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing into the divine realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then in that life, such a person is reborn into a body that is beautiful and lovely, compared to others, who are born ugly and unattractive to look at.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings are born to be attractive and beautiful, whereas others end up being ugly and unattractive to look at.

“Thus, refusing to be an angry person and avoiding to become irritable or bitter, and instead choosing to become patient and persevering, one who does not become hostile nor inflamed with rage at the slightest provocation, who maintains a soft heart, remaining kind and sweet, as well as considerate towards others – is the surest way to be reborn into a body that is both attractive and beautiful, whereas others end up being ugly and unattractive to look at.

4. “Further, young pupil, there is a type of man or woman who is envious and resentful of others; someone who is jealous, full of grudges and antagonism towards those who gain fame, respect, and honor.

“Now, as a result of being envious and jealous of others, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of utter misery, sorrow, and pain; reappearing into the lower realms, being reborn in the hells. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing in the hell realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then that person would be born into a family and positions that are insignificant, without much importance or influence in society.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings end up being born into families and positions that are insignificant or unimportant, hence without any influential role to play in society.

“Thus, being envious and resentful of others, full of grudges and antagonism towards those who gain fame, respect, and honor – is the surest way to end up being born into an insignificant role in society, a position that is without any influence.

4a. “On the other hand, there may be another man or woman, who is neither envious nor resentful of others; someone who is not jealous, who neither begrudgingly looks at what others have or enjoy, nor is antagonistic towards those who gain fame, respect, and honor.

“Now, as a result of overcoming the tendency to become envious, thus abstaining to have any jealousy towards others, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of heavenly delights, reappearing into the divine realms. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing into the divine realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then such a person would be born into a family and positions that are important and influential in society.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings are born into families and positions that are important and influential in society, while others are not, living without such influence.

“Thus, refusing to be envious or jealous of others, while not begrudgingly looking at the successes of others – is the surest way to be reborn as a human into families and positions that are important and influential in society.

5. “Further, young pupil, there is a type of man or woman who does not offer any food or drinks to those in need; someone who refuses to support or give any gifts of clothing, transportation, various requisites, such as a dwelling place, oil lamps and other utensils to help them see in the dark, or other basic necessities of life to those in need.

“Now, as a result of being stingy and miserly, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of utter misery, sorrow, and pain, reappearing into the lower realms, being reborn in the hells. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing in the hell realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then such a person would be born into poverty, lacking most if not all the necessities of life; born into families that are destitute and without resources or means.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings end up being born into poverty, in families that are destitute and without resources or means, whereas others are born into much wealth and affluence.

“Thus, living a stingy and miserly life, refusing to help others or support them by giving gifts of food or drinks to those in need; nor offering gifts of clothing, transportation, various requisites, such as a dwelling place, oil lamps and other utensils to help them see in the dark, and thus not offering basic necessities of life to those in need – is the surest way to end up being born into poverty, lacking most if not all of the basic necessities of life; being born among families that are destitute and without resources or means.

5a. “On the other hand, there may be another man or woman, who does indeed offer food and drinks to those practitioners and brahmins in need; someone who eagerly supports others by giving gifts of clothing, transportation, various requisites, such as a dwelling place, oil lamps and other utensils to help them see in the dark, or other basic necessities of life to those in need.

“Now, as a result of being generous and open-handedly giving to all those practitioners and brahmins in need, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of heavenly delights, reappearing into the divine realms. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing into the divine realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then such a person would be born into an affluently rich family, with much wealth and vast resources to enjoy.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings are born into affluently rich families, with much wealth and vast resources to enjoy, whereas others are born into poverty, in families that are destitute and without resources or means.

“Thus, living with open-handed generosity, while offering food and drinks to those practitioners and brahmins in need, eagerly supporting them by giving gifts of clothing, transportation, various requisites, such as a dwelling place, oil lamps and other utensils to help them see in the dark, and other basic necessities of life to those in need – is the surest way to be reborn as a human into affluently rich families, with much wealth and vast resources to enjoy.

6. “Further, young pupil, there is a type of man or woman who is arrogant and conceited, obstinately refusing to pay respects nor venerate those who are worthy of respect and veneration. Thus, they do not bow, nor rise from their seats, and neither offer their seat, to those truly deserving of honor and respect.

“Now, as a result of their arrogance and conceit, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of utter misery, sorrow, and pain; reappearing into the lower realms, being reborn in the hells. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing in the hell realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then such a person would be born into the lower-caste families of society.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings end up being born into the lower-caste families of society, while others are high-born into prominent and leading castes.

“Thus, living arrogantly and conceited, obstinately refusing to pay any respects nor venerate those who worthy of respect and veneration; not bowing, nor rising from one’s seat, and neither offering their seat to those truly deserving of honor and respect – is the surest way to be reborn into the lower-caste families of society.

6a. “On the other hand, there may be another man or woman, who is not arrogant or conceited, who pays genuine respects to and venerates those who are worthy of respect and veneration. Thus, they are humble enough to bow, rise from their seats, and offer their seat, to those truly deserving of honor and respect.

“Now, as a result of not being arrogant, conceited, or obstinate in their behavior, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of heavenly delights, reappearing into the divine realms. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing into the divine realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then that person would reappear into high-born families, into prominent and leading castes.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings are high-born into prominent and leading families and castes, whereas others end up being born into the lower-caste families of society.

“Thus, not being arrogant or conceited, and instead paying genuine respects to and venerating those who are worthy of respect and veneration; living with humility, where one bows, rises up from their seats, and offers one’s seat, to those truly deserving of honor and respect – is the surest way to be reborn into prominent families, being high-born, and thus reappearing among leading families and castes.

7. “Further, young pupil, there is a type of man or woman who does not take the initiative to approach and ask a teacher or a dedicated practitioner the following questions:

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what is skillful and what is unskillful?’ or

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what is a blameworthy behavior, and what is a blameless action or behavior?’ or

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what should be cultivated and what should not?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what kind of action is in fact damaging, that could lead to my destruction and lasting harm?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what kind of action I must engage in that brings about my happiness and wellbeing, for a very long time?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me the kind of action that once performed, will take the one who commits it into states of misery, and even to hell?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what the reason is why some human beings are stupid and witless, while others are wise and discerning?’

“Now, because of their lack in initiative or interest to approach and ask a teacher or a dedicated practitioner such important questions, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of utter misery, sorrow, and pain, reappearing into the lower realms, being

reborn in the hells. However, if for some reason or other, instead of reappearing in the hell realms, he or she is reborn as a human, then that person will be stupid and witless.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings are born stupid and witless, while others are wise and discerning.

“Thus, living without taking the initiative to approach and ask a teacher or a dedicated practitioner the following questions:

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what is skillful and what is unskillful?’ or

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what is a blameworthy behavior, and what is a blameless action or behavior?’ or

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what should be cultivated and what should not?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what kind of action is in fact damaging, that could lead to my destruction and lasting harm?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what kind of action I must engage in that brings about my happiness and wellbeing, for a very long time?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me the kind of action that once performed, will take the one who commits it into states of misery, and even to hell?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what the reason is why some human beings are stupid and witless, while others are wise and discerning?’

“Is the surest way to end up reappearing as a stupid and witless person, if one is reborn into the human realm.

7a. “On the other hand, young pupil, there is a type of man or woman who does indeed take the initiative to approach and ask a teacher or a dedicated practitioner the following questions:

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what is skillful and what is unskillful?’ or

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what is a blameworthy behavior, and what is a blameless action or behavior?’ or

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what should be cultivated and what should not?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what kind of action is in fact damaging, that could lead to my destruction and lasting harm?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what kind of action I must engage in that brings about my happiness and wellbeing, for a very long time?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me the kind of action that once performed, will take the one who commits it into states of misery, and even to hell?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what the reason is why some human beings are stupid and witless, while others are wise and discerning?’

“Now, as a result of one’s vested interest in wanting to find out and therefore learn what one does not know, having the interest and curiosity in finding out the truth about these very important matters, at the breakup of the body, after death, such a person is reborn into states of heavenly delights, reappearing into the divine realms. However, if for some reason or other,

instead of reappearing into the divine realms, he or she is reborn into the human realm, then one would be a wise and discerning human being.

“This, therefore, is the cause, whereby some human beings are born as wise and discerning, whereas others are born stupid and witless.

“Thus, taking the initiative to approach and ask a teacher or a dedicated practitioner the following questions:

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what is skillful and what is unskillful?’ or

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what is a blameworthy behavior, and what is a blameless action or behavior?’ or

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what should be cultivated and what should not?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what kind of action is in fact damaging, that could lead to my destruction and lasting harm?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what kind of action I must engage in that brings about my happiness and wellbeing, for a very long time?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me the kind of action that once performed, will take the one who commits it into states of misery, and even to hell?’

‘Bhante, could you please teach me what the reason is why some human beings are stupid and witless, while others are wise and discerning?’

“Would be the surest way to end up reappearing as a wise and discerning human being, unlike those who are reborn as stupid and witless.

“Now this, young pupil, is therefore the path of practice; the way of living one’s life, the very reason, why some human beings end up having short lives, while others go on living into advanced age, and only die after having lived for a very long time.

“Furthermore, this is the path of practice; the way of living one’s life, the very reason, young pupil, why some human beings are weakly and prone to sickness, while others are not; living healthy lives without having many ailments.

“Also, this is the path of practice; the way of living one’s life, the very reason, young pupil, why some are born ugly and unattractive to look at, while others are beautiful and lovely.

“Also, this is the path of practice; the way of living one’s life, the very reason, young pupil, why some are born into families and positions that are important and influential in society, while others are not and thus live without any influence.

“Also, this is the path of practice; the way of living one’s life, the very reason, young pupil, why some human beings are born into wealth and affluence, while others are born into poverty, without the resources or means that some others have.

“Also, this is the path of practice; the way of living one’s life, the very reason, young pupil, why some humans are born into the lower-caste families of society, while others are high-born into prominent and leading castes.

“Also, this is the path of practice; the way of living one’s life, the very reason, young pupil, why some human beings are stupid and witless, while others are wise and discerning.

“After all, young pupil, beings are the owners of their intentionally committed actions, their *Kamma*; they are the inescapable inheritors of their kamma; for, kamma is their matrix and origin; kamma is their ancestral blood line; kamma is their refuge and resort.

“Therefore, it is one’s own intentional actions that lead one to be born as inferior, while others are born as superior, all due to the individual’s *kamma*: one’s own true and binding inheritance.”

Then, on hearing these words spoken by The Blessed One, the young brahmin Subha, Todeyya’s son, said this, while addressing The Teacher with his hands clasped together in front of his heart, in *anjalī*:

“It is excellent, Bhante! It is marvelous, Bhante! The Blessed One has made The Dhamma clear to me in many ways. I feel as though The Blessed One has turned upright what was overturned; revealing what was hidden, by showing the correct path to someone who was lost, much like bringing a lit oil lamp into the darkness, for all those with eyesight to see!

“From this day forth, may The Blessed One remember me as one of His lay disciples, who has gone for Refuge to Him, until my very last breath!”

Sādhū

Sādhū

Sādhū