MN 136 — The Longer Analysis of Deeds

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Source revision: 3bc8665e0e28e70518eba94304a2fafcab80f933
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Text

Middle Discourses 136

The Longer Analysis of Deeds

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the squirrels' feeding ground.

Now at that time Venerable Samiddhi was staying in a wilderness hut. Then as the wanderer Potaliputta was going for a walk he came up to Venerable Samiddhi and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, he sat down to one side and said to him:

"Reverend Samiddhi, I have heard and learned this in the presence of the ascetic Gotama: 'Deeds by way of body and speech are done in vain. Only mental deeds are real.' And: 'There is such an attainment where the one who enters it does not feel anything at all.'"

"Don't say that, Reverend Potaliputta, don't say that! Don't misrepresent the Buddha, for misrepresentation of the Buddha is not good. And the Buddha would not say this: 'Deeds by way of body and speech are done in vain. Only mental deeds are real.' But, reverend, there is such an attainment where the one who enters it does not feel anything at all."

"Reverend Samiddhi, how long has it been since you went forth?"

"Not long, reverend: three years."

"Well now, what are we to say to the senior mendicants, when even such a junior mendicant imagines their Teacher needs defending? After doing an intentional deed by way of body, speech, or mind, reverend, what does one feel?"

"After doing an intentional deed by way of body, speech, or mind, reverend, one feels suffering." Then, neither approving nor rejecting Samiddhi's statement, Potaliputta rose from his seat and left.

Soon after he had left, Venerable Samiddhi went to Venerable Ānanda, and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, he sat down to one side, and informed Ānanda of all they had discussed.

When he had spoken, Ānanda said to him, "Reverend Samiddhi, we should see the Buddha about this matter. Come, let's go to the Buddha and inform him about this. As he answers, so we'll remember it."

"Yes, reverend," Samiddhi replied.

Then Ānanda and Samiddhi went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and told him what had happened.

When they had spoken, the Buddha said to Ānanda, "I don't recall even seeing the wanderer Potaliputta, Ānanda, so how could we have had such a discussion? The wanderer Potaliputta's question should have been answered after analyzing it, but this futile man answered categorically."

When he said this, Venerable Udāyī said to him, "But perhaps, sir, Venerable Samiddhi spoke in reference to the statement: 'Suffering includes whatever is felt.'"

But the Buddha said to Venerable Ānanda, "See what this futile man Udāyī comes up with? I knew that he was coming up with something irrational. Right from the start Potaliputta asked about the three feelings. Suppose the futile man Samiddhi had answered the wanderer Potaliputta's question like this: 'After doing an intentional deed to be experienced as pleasant by way of body, speech, or mind, one feels pleasure. After doing an intentional deed to be experienced as painful by way of body, speech, or mind, one feels pain. After doing an intentional deed to be experienced as neutral by way of body, speech, or mind, one feels neutral.' Answering in this way, Samiddhi would have rightly answered Potaliputta.

Still, who are those foolish and incompetent wanderers of other religions to understand the Realized One's great analysis of deeds? If you would all listen, Ānanda, I will explain the Realized One's great analysis of deeds."

"Now is the time, Blessed One! Now is the time, Holy One! Let the Buddha explain the great analysis of deeds. The mendicants will listen and remember it."

"Well then, Ānanda, listen and apply your mind well, I will speak."

"Yes, sir," Ānanda replied. The Buddha said this:

"Ānanda, these four individuals are found in the world. What four? It's when an individual here kills living creatures, steals, and commits sexual misconduct. They use speech that's false, backbiting, harsh, or nonsensical. And they're covetous, malicious, and have wrong view. When their body breaks up, after death, they're reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell.

But some other individual here kills living creatures, steals, and commits sexual misconduct. They use speech that's false, backbiting, harsh, or nonsensical. And they're covetous, malicious, and have wrong view. When their body breaks up, after death, they're reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm.

But some other individual here refrains from killing living creatures, stealing, sexual misconduct, or using speech that's false, divisive, harsh, or nonsensical. And they're contented, kind-hearted, with right view. When their body breaks up, after death, they're reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm.

But some other individual here refrains from killing living creatures, stealing, sexual misconduct, or using speech that's false, divisive, harsh, or nonsensical. And they're contented, kind-hearted, with right view. When their body breaks up, after death, they're

reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell.

Now, some ascetic or brahmin—by dint of keen, resolute, committed, and diligent effort, and right application of mind—experiences an immersion of the heart of such a kind that it gives rise to clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman. With that clairvoyance they see that individual here who killed living creatures, stole, and committed sexual misconduct; who used speech that's false, backbiting, harsh, or nonsensical; and who was covetous, malicious, and had wrong view. And they see that, when their body breaks up, after death, they are reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell. They say: 'It seems, worthy sir, that there is such a thing as bad deeds, and the result of bad conduct. For I have seen a individual here who killed living creatures … and had wrong view. And when their body broke up, after death, they were reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell.' They say: 'It seems that everyone who kills living creatures … and has wrong view is reborn in hell. Those whose notion is this have the right notion. Those whose notion is otherwise have a wrong notion.' And so they obstinately stick to what they have known, seen, and understood for themselves, insisting that: 'This is the only truth, anything else is futile.'

But some other ascetic or brahmin—by dint of keen, resolute, committed, and diligent effort, and right application of mind—experiences an immersion of the heart of such a kind that it gives rise to clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman. With that clairvoyance they see that individual here who killed living creatures … and had wrong view. And they see that they are reborn in a heavenly realm. They say: 'It seems that there is no such thing as bad deeds, and the result of bad conduct. For I have seen an individual here who killed living creatures … and had wrong view. And I saw that they were reborn in a heavenly realm.' They say: 'It seems that everyone who kills living creatures … and has wrong view is reborn in a heavenly realm. Those whose notion is this have the right notion. Those whose notion is otherwise have a wrong notion.' And so they obstinately stick to what they have known, seen, and understood for themselves, insisting that: 'This is the only truth, anything else is futile.'

Take some ascetic or brahmin who with clairvoyance sees an individual here who refrained from killing living creatures … and had right view. And they see that they are reborn in a heavenly realm. They say: 'It seems that there is such a thing as good deeds, and the result of good conduct. For I have seen an individual here who refrained from killing living creatures … and had right view. And I saw that they were reborn in a heavenly realm.' They say: 'It seems that everyone who refrains from killing living creatures … and has right view is reborn in a heavenly realm. Those whose notion is this have the right notion. Those whose notion is otherwise have a wrong notion.' And so they obstinately stick to what they have known, seen, and understood for themselves, insisting that: 'This is the only truth, anything else is futile.'

Take some ascetic or brahmin who with clairvoyance sees an individual here who refrained from killing living creatures … and had right view. And they see that they are reborn in hell. They say: 'It seems that there is no such thing as good deeds, and the result of good conduct. For I have seen an individual here who refrained from killing living creatures … and had right view. And I saw that they were reborn in hell.' They say: 'It seems that

everyone who refrains from killing living creatures … and has right view is reborn in hell. Those whose notion is this have the right notion. Those whose notion is otherwise have a wrong notion.' And so they obstinately stick to what they have known, seen, and understood for themselves, insisting that: 'This is the only truth, anything else is futile.'

In this case, when an ascetic or brahmin says this: 'It seems that there is such a thing as bad deeds, and the result of bad conduct,' I grant them that. And when they say: 'I have seen an individual here who killed living creatures … and had wrong view. And after death, they were reborn in hell,' I also grant them that. But when they say: 'It seems that everyone who kills living creatures … and has wrong view is reborn in hell,' I don't grant them that. And when they say: 'Those whose notion is this have the right notion. Those whose notion is otherwise have a wrong notion.' I also don't grant them that. And when they obstinately stick to what they have known, seen, and understood for themselves, insisting that: 'This is the only truth, anything else is futile,' I also don't grant them that. Why is that? Because the Realized One's knowledge of the great analysis of deeds is otherwise.

In this case, when an ascetic or brahmin says this: 'It seems that there is no such thing as bad deeds, and the result of bad conduct,' I don't grant them that. But when they say: 'I have seen an individual here who killed living creatures … and had wrong view. And I saw that they were reborn in a heavenly realm,' I grant them that. But when they say: 'It seems that everyone who kills living creatures … and has wrong view is reborn in a heavenly realm,' I don't grant them that. … Because the Realized One's knowledge of the great analysis of deeds is otherwise.

In this case, when an ascetic or brahmin says this: 'It seems that there is such a thing as good deeds, and the result of good conduct,' I grant them that. And when they say: 'I have seen an individual here who refrained from killing living creatures … and had right view. And I saw that they were reborn in a heavenly realm,' I also grant them that. But when they say: 'It seems that everyone who refrains from killing living creatures … and has right view is reborn in a heavenly realm,' I don't grant them that. … Because the Realized One's knowledge of the great analysis of deeds is otherwise.

In this case, when an ascetic or brahmin says this: 'It seems that there is no such thing as good deeds, and the result of good conduct,' I don't grant them that. But when they say: 'I have seen an individual here who refrained from killing living creatures … and had right view. And after death, they were reborn in hell,' I grant them that. But when they say: 'It seems that everyone who refrains from killing living creatures … and has right view is reborn in hell,' I don't grant them that. But when they say: 'Those whose notion is this have the right notion. Those whose notion is otherwise have a wrong notion,' I also don't grant them that. And when they obstinately stick to what they have known, seen, and understood for themselves, insisting that: 'This is the only truth, anything else is futile,' I also don't grant them that. Why is that? Because the Realized One's knowledge of the great analysis of deeds is otherwise.

Now, Ānanda, take the case of the individual here who killed living creatures … and had wrong view, and who, when their body breaks up, after death, is reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell. That bad deed of theirs that is to be experienced as painful

was either done previously, or later, or else at the time of death they undertook wrong view. And that's why, when their body breaks up, after death, they're reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell. But anyone here who kills living creatures … and has wrong view experiences the result of that in this very life, or in the next life, or in some subsequent period.

Now, Ānanda, take the case of the individual here who killed living creatures … and had wrong view, and who is reborn in a heavenly realm. That good deed of theirs that is to be experienced as pleasurable was either done previously, or later, or else at the time of death they undertook right view. And that's why, when their body breaks up, after death, they're reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm. But anyone here who kills living creatures … and has wrong view experiences the result of that in this very life, or in the next life, or in some subsequent period.

Now, Ānanda, take the case of the individual here who refrained from killing living creatures … and had right view, and who is reborn in a heavenly realm. That good deed of theirs that is to be experienced as pleasurable was either done previously, or later, or else at the time of death they undertook right view. And that's why, when their body breaks up, after death, they're reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm. But anyone here who refrains from killing living creatures … and has right view experiences the result of that in this very life, or in the next life, or in some subsequent period.

Now, Ānanda, take the case of the individual here who refrained from killing living creatures … and had right view, and who is reborn in hell. That bad deed of theirs that is to be experienced as painful was either done previously, or later, or else at the time of death they undertook wrong view. And that's why, when their body breaks up, after death, they're reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell. But anyone here who refrains from killing living creatures … and has right view experiences the result of that in this very life, or in the next life, or in some subsequent period.

So, Ānanda, there are deeds that are ineffective and appear ineffective. There are deeds that are ineffective but appear effective. There are deeds that are effective and appear effective. And there are deeds that are effective but appear ineffective."

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, Venerable Ānanda approved what the Buddha said.