MN 57 — Kukkuravatika Sutta: The Dog-duty Ascetic

English translation by Ñanamoli Thera.

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Text

Introduction

by Bhikkhu Khantipalo

There were some strange people around in the Buddha's days believing some strange things — but that is no different from our own days when people still believe the most odd off-balance ideas. In this sutta we meet some people who believed that by imitating animals they would be saved. Maybe they're still with us too!

Belief is often one thing, action another. While beliefs sometimes influence actions, for other people their beliefs are quite separate from what they do. But the Buddha says all intentional actions, whether thoughts, speech or bodily actions, however expressed, are kamma and lead the doer of them to experience a result sooner or later. In this sutta the Buddha classifies kamma into four groups:

dark with a dark result;

bright with a bright result;

dark and bright with a dark and bright result;

neither dark nor bright with a neither dark nor bright result.

Dark (evil) kamma does not give a bright (happy) result, nor does bright (beneficial) kamma lead to dark (miserable) result. Kamma can be mixed, where an action is done with a variety of motives, some good, some evil. And that kind of kamma also exists which gives up attachment to and interest in the other three and so leads beyond the range of kamma.

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Koliyan country: there is a town of the Koliyans called Haliddavasana.

2. Then Punna, a son of the Koliyans and an ox-duty ascetic, and also Seniya a naked dog duty ascetic, went to the Blessed One, and Punna the ox duty ascetic paid homage to the Blessed One and sat down at one side, while Seniya the naked dog-duty ascetic exchanged greetings with the Blessed One, and when the courteous and amiable talk was finished, he too sat down at one side curled up like a dog. When Punna the ox-duty ascetic sat down, he asked the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, this naked dog-duty ascetic Seniya does what is hard to do: he eats his food when it is thrown on the ground. That dog duty has long been taken up and practiced by him. What will be his destination? What will be his future course?"[1]

"Enough, Punna, let that be. Do not ask me that."

A second time... A third time Punna the ox-duty ascetic asked the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, this naked dog-duty ascetic Seniya does what is hard to do: he eats his food when it is thrown on the ground. That dog duty has long been taken up and practiced by him. What will be his destination? What will be his future course?"

"Well, Punna, since I certainly cannot persuade you when I say 'Enough, Punna, let that be. Do not ask me that,' I shall therefore answer you.

3. "Here, Punna, someone develops the dog duty fully and unstintingly, he develops the dog-habit fully and unstintingly, he develops the dog mind fully and unstintingly, he develops dog behavior fully and unstintingly. Having done that, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in the company of dogs. But if his view is such as this: 'By this virtue or duty or asceticism or religious life I shall become a (great) god or some (lesser) god,' that is wrong view in his case. Now there are two destinations for one with wrong view, I say: hell or the animal womb. So, Punna, if his dog duty is perfected, it will lead him to the company of dogs; if it is not, it will lead him to hell."

4. When this was said, Seniya the naked dog-duty ascetic wept and shed tears. Then the Blessed One told Punna, son of the Koliyans and an ox-duty ascetic: "Punna, I could not persuade you when I said, 'Enough Punna, let that be. Do not ask me that.'"

"Venerable sir, I am not weeping that the Blessed One has spoken thus. Still, this dog duty has long been taken up and practiced by me. Venerable sir, there is this Punna, a son of the Koliyans and an ox duty ascetic: that ox duty has long been taken up and practiced by him. What will be his destination? What will be his future course?"

"Enough, Seniya, let that be. Do not ask me that." A second time... A third time Seniya the naked dog-duty ascetic asked the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, there is this Punna, a son of the Koliyans and an ox-duty ascetic; that ox duty has long been taken up and practiced by him. What will be his destination? What will be his future course?"

"Well, Seniya, since I certainly cannot persuade you when I say 'Enough, Seniya, let that be. Do not ask me that,' I shall therefore answer you."

5. "Here, Seniya, someone develops the ox duty fully and unstintingly, he develops the ox habit fully and unstintingly, he develops the ox mind fully and unstintingly, he develops the ox behavior fully and unstintingly. Having done that, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in the company of oxen. But if his view is such as this: 'By this virtue or duty or asceticism or religious like I shall become a (great) god or some (lesser) god,' that is wrong view in his case. Now there are two destinations for one with wrong view, I say: hell or the animal womb. So, Seniya, if his ox duty is perfected, it will lead him to the company of oxen; if it is not, it will lead him to hell."

6. When this was said, Punna, a son of the Koliyans and an ox-duty ascetic, wept and shed tears. Then the Blessed One told Seniya, the naked dog duty ascetic: "Seniya, I could not persuade you when I said, 'Enough, Seniya, let that be. Do not ask me that.'"

"Venerable sir, I am not weeping that the Blessed One has spoken thus. Still, this ox duty has long been taken up and practiced by me. Venerable sir, I have confidence in the Blessed One thus: 'The Blessed One is capable of teaching me the Dhamma in such a way that I may abandon this ox duty and that this naked dog-duty ascetic Seniya may abandon that dog duty.'"

7. "Then, Punna, listen and heed well what I shall say."

"Yes, venerable sir," he replied. The Blessed One said this:

8. "Punna, there are four kinds of kamma proclaimed by me after realization myself with direct knowledge. What are the four? There is dark kamma with dark ripening, there is bright kamma with bright ripening, there is dark-and-bright kamma with dark-and-bright ripening, and there is kamma that is not dark and not bright with neither-dark-nor-bright ripening that conduces to the exhaustion of kamma.

9. "What is dark kamma with dark ripening? Here someone produces a (kammic) bodily process (bound up) with affliction,[2] he produces a (kammic) verbal process (bound up) with affliction, he produces a (kammic) mental process (bound up) with affliction. By so doing, he reappears in a world with affliction. When that happens, afflicting contacts[3] touch him. Being touched by these, he feels afflicting feelings entirely painful as in the case of beings in hell. Thus a being's reappearance is due to a being: he reappears owing to the kammas he has performed. When he has reappeared, contacts touch him. Thus I say are beings heirs of their kammas. This is called dark kamma with dark ripening.

10. "And what is bright kamma with bright ripening? Here someone produces a (kammic) bodily process not (bound up) with affliction, he produces a (kammic) verbal process not (bound up) with affliction, he produces a (kammic) mental process not (bound up) with affliction. By doing so, he reappears in a world without affliction. When that happens, unafflicting contacts touch him. Being touched by these, he feels unafflicting feelings entirely pleasant as in the case of the Subhakinha, the gods of Refulgent Glory. Thus a being's reappearance is due to a being: he reappears owing to the kammas he has performed. When he has reappeared, contacts touch him. Thus I say are beings heirs of their kammas. This is called bright kamma with bright ripening.

11. "What is dark-and-bright kamma with dark-and-bright ripening? Here someone produces a (kammic) bodily process both (bound up) with affliction and not (bound up) with affliction... verbal process... mental process both (bound up) with affliction and not (bound up) with affliction. By doing so, he reappears in a world both with and without affliction. When that happens, both afflicting and unafflicting contacts touch him. Being touched by these, he feels afflicting and unafflicting feelings with mingled pleasure and pain as in the case of human beings and some gods and some inhabitants of the states of deprivation. Thus a being's reappearance is due to a being: he reappears owing to the kammas he has performed. When he has reappeared, contacts touch him. Thus I say are beings heirs of their kammas. This is called dark-and-bright kamma with dark-and-bright ripening.

12. "What is neither-dark-nor-bright kamma with neither-dark-nor-bright ripening that leads to the exhaustion of kamma? As to these (three kinds of kamma), any volition in abandoning the kind of kamma that is dark with dark ripening, any volition in abandoning the kind of kamma that is bright with bright ripening, and any volition in abandoning the kind of kamma that is dark-and bright with dark-and-bright ripening: this is called neither-dark-nor-bright kamma with neither-dark-nor-bright ripening.

"These are the four kinds of kamma proclaimed by me after realization myself with direct knowledge."

13. When this was said, Punna, a son of the Koliyans and an ox-duty ascetic, said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent, Master Gotama! The Dhamma has been made clear in many ways by Master Gotama as though he were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing the hidden, showing the way to one who is lost, holding up a lamp in the darkness for those with eyesight to see forms.

14. "I go to Master Gotama for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of bhikkhus. From today let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge for life."

15. But Seniya the naked dog-duty ascetic said: "Magnificent, Master Gotama!... The Dhamma has been made clear... for those with eyesight to see forms.

16. "I go to Master Gotama for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of bhikkhus. I would receive the going forth under Master Gotama and the full admission."[4]

17. "Seniya, one who belonged formerly to another sect and wants the going forth and the full admission in this Dhamma and Discipline lives on probation for four months. At the end of the four months bhikkhus who are satisfied in their minds give him the going forth into homelessness and also the full admission to the bhikkhus' state. A difference in persons has become known to me in this (probation period)."

"Venerable sir, if those who belonged formerly to another sect and want the going forth and the full admission in this Dhamma and Discipline live on probation for four months and at the end of four months bhikkhus who are satisfied in their minds give them the going forth into homelessness and the full admission to the bhikkhus' state, I will live on probation for four years and at the end of the four years let bhikkhus who are satisfied in their minds give me the going forth into homelessness and the full admission to the bhikkhus' state."

18. Seniya the naked dog duty ascetic received the going forth under the Blessed One, and he received the full admission. And not long after his full admission, dwelling alone, withdrawn, diligent, ardent, and self-controlled, the venerable Seniya by realization himself with direct knowledge here and now entered upon and abode in that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the home life into homelessness. He had direct knowledge thus: "Birth is exhausted, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more of this to come."

And the venerable Seniya became one of the arahants.

Notes

1.

Of births in samsara, the wandering-on in birth and death.

2.

A defiled kamma expressed through the body (speech, mind).

3.

Painful "touches" through eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind.

4.

That is, the novice ordination and the full ordination as a bhikkhu or monk.

See also: AN 4.235; "Kamma and the Ending of Kamma" in The Wings to Awakening (Thanissaro Bhikkhu).