

Karota Sutta

The Discourse on Doing

[How the doctrine of non-action arises]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 24.6/3:208 f)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

Introduction

The **Karota Sutta** (S 24.6) is about the attaining of streamwinning by way of the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*), similar to that given in the suttas of **the Okkanti Saṃyutta** (S 25).¹ Like the discourse preceding it (**the N’atthi Sutta**, S 24.5)² and the two following it (**the Hetu Sutta**, S 24.7³ and **the Mahā Diṭṭhi Sutta**, S 24.8),⁴ it deals with the refuting of one of the four philosophical, but false and morally harmful, theories advocated by the Buddha’s contemporaries. The Karota Sutta specifically refutes the inefficacy of action (*akiriya,vāda*) of Pūraṇa Kassapa.⁵ [§3]

Its approach or “going” (*gamaṇa*)⁶ is—like the Hetu Sutta (S 24.7)—that of the catechism, such as “If form permanent or impermanent?” to the five aggregates, for the realization of their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and lack of self-identity [§9].

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¹ See eg (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225) = SD 16.7.

² S 24.5/3:206-208.

³ S 24.7/3:208 f = SD 23.6.

⁴ S 24.8/3:211-213.

⁵ See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.16-18/1:53) = SD 8.10.

⁶ See S:B 849.

The Discourse on Doing

(S 24.6/3:208 f)

1 At Sāvattḥī.

2 “Bhikshus, when what exists, on account of clinging to what, on account of adhering to what, does such a view as this arise?:

3 THE INEFFICACY OF ACTION (PŪRAṆA KASSAPA). ‘When one does or makes another do, such deeds as cutting others, burning others, or hurting others, tormenting others, intimidating others, killing, stealing, breaking into houses, plundering, burgling, ambushing, committing adultery, lying, *one does no evil*.

If with a razor-disc [chakra] (*cakka*), one were to turn all the living beings on this earth to a single mountain of flesh, no evil would come from it.

If one were to go along the south bank of the Ganges, [209] killing and making others kill, mutilating and making others mutilate, torturing and making others torture, *there is no evil*, no source of evil.

Or, if one were to go along the north bank of the Ganges, giving and making others give, sacrificing and making others sacrifice, *there is no merit, no source of merit*.

In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is *no merit, no source of merit*.’⁷

4 “Bhante, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, has the Blessed One as refuge. It would be good indeed if the Blessed One were to explain its meaning. Having heard the Blessed One, the monks would remember it.”⁸

“Then, listen, monks, pay close attention to it, I will speak.

How the wrong view of inefficacy of action arises

5 (1) When there is **form**, bhikshus, there is clinging to form, adhering to form, such a view as this arises, that,

‘When one does or makes another do...*one does no evil... there is no merit, no source of merit...*

In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is *no merit, no source of merit*.’

6 (2) When there is **feeling**, bhikshus, there is clinging to feeling, adhering to feeling, such a view as this arises....

7 (3) When there is **perception**, bhikshus, there is clinging to perception, adhering to perception, such a view as this arises....

8 (4) When there are **formations**, bhikshus, there is clinging to formations, adhering to formations, such a view as this arises....

9 (5) When there is **consciousness**, bhikshus, there is clinging to consciousness, adhering to consciousness, such a view as this arises, that,

‘When one does or makes another do...*one does no evil... there is no merit, no source of merit...*

In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is *no merit, no source of merit*.’

How the wrong view of non-causality ends⁹

10 Now what do you think, bhikshus? Is **form** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory [painful or pleasurable]?”¹⁰

⁷ See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.19/1:52,22-53,2) = SD 8.10. See **Apaṇṇaka S** (M 60.13-20 = 1:404-407) where this view of Purāṇa’s is refuted. See Bodhi, *The Discourse on the Fruits of Recluship*, 1989:69 f.

⁸ *Bhagavam, mūlakā no bhante dhammā, bhagavam nettikā, bhagavam paṭisaraṇā. Sādhu vata bhante bhagavatañ-ñ’eva paṭibhātu etassa bhāsitassa attho. Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressantī ti.* This is stock (M 1:309 f, 317, 465, 3:115; S 2:80 f; A 1:199, 4:158, 351, 5:355).

⁹ This section follows the structure of the parallel passage in **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.12-16/3:66-68) = SD 1.2.

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”¹¹

“No, bhante.”

11 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **feeling** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”

“No, bhante.”

12 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **perception** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”

“No, bhante.”

13 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, are **formations** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”

“No, bhante.”

14 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **consciousness** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”

“No, bhante.”¹²

How, then, could such a view as this arise, that,

‘When one does or makes another do...*one does no evil... there is no merit, no source of merit...*

In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is *no merit, no source of merit*?’

“No, bhante.”

15 “That which is **seen, heard, sensed, cognized**,¹³ that is, attained, sought after, examined by the mind—is that permanent or impermanent?”

¹⁰ *Dukkhaṃ vā sukhaṃ vā.*

¹¹ In **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), the wrong view refuted here is: the notion “This is mine,” which arises through craving (*taṇhā*); the notion “This I am,” which arises through conceit (*māna*); the notion “This is my self,” which arises through views (*diṭṭhi*). (S 22.59.12-16/3:66-68) = SD 1.2.

¹² In **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), the teaching on not-self (*anattā*) continues, and the monks become arhats at the end of the discourse. (S 22.59.12-16/3:66-68) = SD 1.2.

¹³ This is a fourfold classification of the 5 sense-objects, ie “the sense-object tetrad.” Comy: “The seen” (*diṭṭha*) is the visible-form base; “the heard” (*suta*), the sound base; “the sensed” (*muta*), the objects of smell, taste and

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth’?”

“No, bhante.”

“How, then, could such a view as this arises, that,

‘When one does or makes another do...*one does no evil... there is no merit, no source of merit...*

In generosity, self-taming, self-restraint, and truthful speech, there is *no merit, no source of merit*?’

“It cannot be, bhante.”

Overcoming wrong view results in streamwinning

16 Bhikshus, when noble disciple has abandoned doubt in these six cases,¹⁴ and when, further, he has abandoned doubt about suffering, the arising of suffering, the ending of suffering, [211] and the way leading to the ending of suffering, he is then called a noble disciple who is a streamwinner, not bound for the lower world,¹⁵ sure of liberation, destined for awakening.

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touch; and “the cognized” (*viññāta*), the remaining seven bases (ie the 6 internal bases and the mind-object base) (DA 3:914; MA 2:110; SA 2:337 f; AA 3:31; ItA 2:187; Nc 66; PmA 2:432). The words “attained, sought after, examined by the mind” (*pattam pariyesitam anuvaritā manasā*) are merely an elaboration of the fourth, the “cognized” (SA 2:338). However, from the practical viewpoint, this last phrase could well apply to the other 3 sense-objects, too; for, they are all mind-rooted.

¹⁴ Comy is silent on this term, but “it seems the six cases are the five aggregates and the tetrad of the sense objects taken collectively as one” (S:B 1095 n251). Cf **Alaggadūpama S** (M 22), where the tetrad of sense-objects actually replaces *viññāna* as a basis for wrong view (*diṭṭhi-t,thāna*). (M 22.15/1:135,34-36)

¹⁵ *Avinīpāta*, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of *vinīpāta*, “the world of suffering”, another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*) (Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (*pañca,gati*) (D 3:234=33.2.1, A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tirachāna,yoni*), the ghost realm (*pitti,visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura,kāya*) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (*sugati*). For a discussion, see Nyanaponika & Bodhi (tr), *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 1999:14-19.