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## Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta

The Discourse on the Lesser Analysis of Karma | M 135/3:202-206  
 also (Kamma) Subha Sutta The Subha Sutta on karma  
 Theme: An analysis of karma and its fruition  
 Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

### 1 Two key suttas on karma

In the **Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 136), which follows the above Sutta, the Buddha says that he is making a “great(er) analysis of karma” (*mahā.kamma,vibhaṅga*, M 136.7/3:209). Hence, by analogy, this Sutta title should be rendered as “the discourse on the lesser analysis of karma”, with *cūḷa* qualifying not *sutta*, but *kamma,vibhaṅga*.<sup>1</sup> The Majjhima Commentary calls this Sutta **the Subha Sutta** (MA 5:8)<sup>2</sup> after the name of the protagonist, adding that it is also called **the Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta** (MA 5:15).

Subha’s father, the fabulously wealthy (*mahā,sālā*) brahmin **Todeyya** was one of Pasenadi’s chaplains (*purohita*) and is mentioned in the famous list of eminent brahmins who gathered at Iccha,naṅkala and Manasākāṭa (D 1:235; Sn p115). According to Buddhaghosa, his home town was Tudi.gāma near Sāvatti, hence his name.<sup>3</sup>

Although very wealthy, Todeyya is very miserly. After his death, he is reborn as a dog in his own home and of which Subha is very fond. One day, when the Buddha is going on his almsround in Tudi,-gāma, he arrives at Subha’s house. The dog, seeing the Buddha barks at him, and the Buddha addresses it as “Todeyya.” The dog then runs into the house and lies on a bed, from which no one could drive it away. When Subha asks the cause of the uproar, the Buddha tells him the reason: that the dog is Todeyya previously.

Subha is greatly offended, claiming that his father has been reborn in the Brahma world. The Buddha then proves the dog’s identity by getting it to show where some of his father’s treasure are buried. The dog is later reborn in hell. To refute the Buddha, Subha visits the monastery, and this is the occasion for the teaching of the Subha Sutta (M 135), better known as **the Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta**.<sup>4</sup>

### 2 The fruits of karma

The Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta is special in that it gives some specific examples of the fruits of karma, good and evil, based on the simple folk notion of good begets good, evil begets evil.<sup>5</sup> Clearly this discourse is addressed to the lay community, especially those not yet familiar with deeper doctrine of karma in the light of not-self. Significantly, here the protagonist is the brahmin youth, Subha Todeyya,putta.

Besides the Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta, other discourses and texts that mention specific benefits of karma include:

<b>Suppavāsā Sutta</b>	A 4.57/2:62 f	the benefits of giving.
<b>Mallikā Sutta</b>	A 4.197/2:202-205	personality often has to do with past karma.
<b>Vimāna Vatthu</b>	Vv, Khuddaka Nikāya	heavenly benefits of good karma.
<b>Peta Vatthu</b>	Pv, Khuddaka Nikāya	unwholesome benefits of bad karma.

<sup>1</sup> See M:H 3:248 n1 & 254 n2. On *vibhaṅga* in the sense of “detailed analysis and explanation” as opposed to *uddesa*, a “brief statement,” see Jayatilleke 1963:293 f.

<sup>2</sup> Both D 10 and M 99 are also called **Subha S**. See M:H 3:248 n1.

<sup>3</sup> DA 2:399; MA 5:8 f; AA 3:164. *Todeyya* is a secondary derivation (*taddhita*) from *tudi* + *eyya*, with the strengthening of the vowel *u* in *Tudi*: see Warder, *Introduction to Pali Grammar*, 1974:252-254.

<sup>4</sup> DA 2:384; MA 5:8 f. See further (**Brahma,vihāra**) **Subha S** (M 99/2:196-209) = SD 38.6 (1.2).

<sup>5</sup> See **Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 11.10/1:227 f) = SD 39.2.

### 3 The nature of karma

The Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta should not be misconstrued as a rational ethical argument for karma and rebirth, especially from the statement that

beings are owners of karma, heirs to karma, born in karma, bound by karma, have karma as their refuge. It is karma that divides beings into low and excellent. [§4]<sup>6</sup>

This well known statement is also found in the **Saṃsappati Pariyāya Sutta** (A 10.205) which should be studied in this connection.<sup>7</sup>

While the Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta speaks of one's "ownership" of one's karma, nowhere does it say that everything is due to karma. **The Sīvaka Sutta** (S 36.21/4:230 f), for example, teaches that not everything that we feel or experience are due to karma alone, but could be the working of any possible eight conditions. **The (Kamma) Nidāna Sutta** (A 3.33/1:134-136) compares one's karma to seeds that depend on favourable conditions to germinate, or could be destroyed by burning (through spiritual development).

The workings of karma as stated here [§§5-20] in the context of a spiritual instruction to the brahmin youth Subha Todeyya,putta who was familiar with the law of karma, which was after all a pre-Buddhist notion, refined in Buddhism. It should not be simplistically taken as an immediate "cause and effect" situation, but one where various other aggravating or attenuating circumstances are involved. In **the Loṇa,phala Sutta** (A 3.99),<sup>8</sup> for example, it is stated that the cultivation of lovingkindness can limit the effects of one's unwholesome karma.

The teachings on karma here is one "whose meaning needs to be drawn out" (*neyy'attha*),<sup>9</sup> unlike, for example, **the Assu Sutta** (S 2:179 f) whose meaning is directly apparent (*nī'attha*).<sup>10</sup> In our Sutta here, take the example of the statement that one who is callous and arrogant, who does not show respect to those worthy of respect would reborn in hell, and if reborn as a human would in a low family [§15]. It is important here to understand here that "karma is intention" (*cetanā'ham kammaṃ vadāmi*).<sup>11</sup> In other words, there is only bad karma here if the person *intentionally* (through greed, hatred or delusion) shows his callousness or arrogance, etc. In fact, this Sutta should be studied in perspective with such suttas as:

**Sāleyyaka Sutta** (M 41 = SD 5.7), causes of disparity in rebirth; choosing one's happy rebirth;

**Saṅkhār'upapatti Sutta** (M 130 = SD 2.23), choosing one's rebirth;

**Sarakāṇī Sutta** (S 55.24 = SD 3.6), an erstwhile drunk dies a streamwinner.

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## The Discourse on The Lesser Analysis of Karma

M 135/3:202-206

[202]

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying at Anātha,piṇḍika's park in Jeta's grove near Sāvathī.

2 Then the brahmin youth Subha Todeyya,putta [Todeyya's son] went up to the Blessed One and

<sup>6</sup> See K N Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:404 f.

<sup>7</sup> **Saṃsappati Pariyāya S** (A 10.205/5:288, 291) = SD 39.7. See also M 1:390; A 372-74, 186, 5:88; Kvu 522.

<sup>8</sup> See **Loṇa,phala S** (A 3.99/1:249-253) = SD 3.5.

<sup>9</sup> D 3:127 f; A 1:60; Nett 21.

<sup>10</sup> See Piya Tan, "Teaching Methods of the Buddha," National Univ of Singapore Buddhist Society, 2002: 27.

<sup>11</sup> A 3:416; Kvu 8.9.36/392.

exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and amiable exchange was concluded, he sat down at one side. Sitting thus at one side, the brahmin youth Subha Todeyyaputta said this to the Blessed One:

### DISPARITY AMONGST HUMANS

2 “What is the reason why, master Gotama, what is the cause that there is inferiority and superiority amongst humans?<sup>12</sup> For, master Gotama, humans are

seen to be short-lived,	seen to be long-lived;	<i>app'āyukā...dīgh'āyukā</i>
seen to be often sick,	seen to be rarely sick,	<i>bavh-ābādha<sup>13</sup>...appābādha</i>
seen to be ugly,	seen to be beautiful,	<i>dubbaṇṇā...vaṇṇavanto</i>
seen to be uninfluential,	seen to be greatly influential,	<i>appēsakkhā...mahēsakkhā</i>
seen to be poor,	seen to be rich,	<i>appa,bhogā...mahā,bhogā</i>
seen to be low-born,	seen to be high-born,	<i>nīca,kulīnā...uccākulīnā</i>
seen to be unwise,	seen to be [203] wise?	<i>duppaññā...paññavanto</i>

What is the reason why, master Gotama, what is the cause that there is inferiority and superiority amongst humans?”

4 “Young brahmin, beings are owners of karma, heirs to karma, born in karma, bound by karma, have karma as their refuge.<sup>14</sup> It is karma that differentiates beings, that is to say, by way of inferiority and excellence.”<sup>15</sup>

“I do not understand in detail the meaning of master Gotama’s word made in brief without explaining in detail. It would be good if master Gotama would teach me the Dharma so that I might understand in detail the meaning of master Gotama’s word.”

“Then, listen, young brahmin, pay close attention, I will speak.”

“Yes, master!” the brahmin youth Subha Todeyya,putta replied in assent to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said this:

### 1 Short life

5 “Here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man **kills living beings**, cruel, bloody-handed, given to violence and killing, merciless to living beings.

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body’s breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell.

And if, with the body’s breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is short-lived.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ko nu kho bho gotama hetu ko paccayo yena manussānam yeva satam manussa,bhūtānam dissanti hīna-p,pañ-tatā.*

<sup>13</sup> *Bavh'ābādha = bahu* (“much”) + *ābādha* (“illness”): M 2:94; A 1:107, 2:75, 85; Miln 65. In cpds with initial vowels, *bahu* as a rule appears as *bahv-* (with metathesis, *-hu* becoming *-vh*): see Geiger. *A Pāli Grammar*, 1994 §49.1.

<sup>14</sup> **Kukkura,vatika S** (M 57.7/1:390), **Cūla Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 135.4/3:203, 20/3:206); **Abhiṅga Pacca-vekkhitabba Ṭhāna S** (A 5.57/3:72-74), **Suta,dhara S** (A 5.96/3:186), **Pabbajita Abhiṅga S** (A 10.48/5:88), **Saṃsappaniya Pariyāya S** (A 10.205/5:288, 290, 291); **Kvu 522**; **Miln 65**. See also K N Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:404 f. Intro (3) for related statements on karma.

<sup>15</sup> This karma formula is given in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person sg in **Āghāta Paṭivinaya S 1** (A 5.161/3:185 f) = SD 12.23.

<sup>16</sup> “If the kamma of killing directly determines the mode of rebirth, it will produce rebirth in one of the states of deprivation. But if a wholesome kamma brings about a human rebirth—and rebirth as a human being is always the result of wholesome kamma—the kamma of killing will operate in a manner contrary to that of the rebirth-generative kamma by causing various adversities that may eventuate in a premature death. The same principle holds for the subsequent causes in which unwholesome kamma comes to maturity in a human existence: in each case the unwholesome kamma counteracts the wholesome kamma responsible for the human rebirth by engendering a specific type of misfortune corresponding to its own distinctive quality.” (M:ÑB 1345 n1224)

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to a short life, namely, *one harms living beings, is cruel, bloody-handed, given to violence and killing, merciless to living beings*.

**6** But here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man **has given up harming living beings**, refrains from harming living beings, laid down rod and sword, conscientious, merciful, one dwells beneficial and compassionate to all living beings.

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body's breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven., if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is long-lived.<sup>17</sup>

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to a long life, namely, *one has given up harming living beings, refrains [204] from harming living beings, laid down rod and sword, conscientious, merciful, dwells beneficial and compassionate to all living beings*.

## 2 Sickliness

**7** Here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man **habitually injures living beings** with a clod of earth, with a stick, or with a sword.

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body's breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is sickly [constantly ill].

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to sickliness, namely, *one habitually injures beings with a clod of earth, with a stick, or with a sword*.

**8** But here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man is **not of the nature of injuring beings**, refrains from harming living beings, laid down rod and sword, conscientious, merciful, one dwells beneficial and compassionate to all living beings.

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body's breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is healthy.

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to health, namely, *one has given up harming living beings, refrains from harming living beings, laid down rod and sword, conscientious, merciful, dwells beneficial and compassionate to all living beings*.

## 3 Ugliness<sup>18</sup>

**9** Here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man **is angry, often irritable**; even over a trivial remark, becomes cross, shaken, vexed, stubborn, and shows temper, anger and sulkiness [bitterness].

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body's breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is ugly.

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to ugliness, namely, *one is angry, often irritable; even over a trivial remark, becomes cross, shaken, vexed, stubborn, and shows temper, anger and sulkiness [bitterness]*.

<sup>17</sup> "In this case the wholesome kamma of refraining from killing may be directly responsible for either the heavenly rebirth or the longevity in a human existence. The same principle applies to all the passages on the maturation of wholesome kamma." (M:ÑB 1345 n1224).

<sup>18</sup> For parallels, see **Vajirūpama S** (A 3.24/1:124,4); **Jiguchitabba S** (A 3.27/1:126,30) = **Pug 3.5/30,5, 14/36,25**; (**Kamma**) **Mallikā S** (A 4.197.2/2:202) = SD 39.10; **Nm 2:231 f**; **ItA 2:164**. Cf **Dukkathā S** (A 5.157/3:181 f)

**10** But here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man is **neither angry nor often irritable**; even over a wordy remark [strong word],<sup>19</sup> he is not cross, not shaken, not vexed, not stubborn, and does not show any temper, anger or sulkiness [bitterness].

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body's breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven., if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is pleasant.<sup>20</sup>

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to pleasantness, namely, *one is neither angry nor often irritable; even over a wordy remark [strong word], he is not cross, not shaken, not vexed, not stubborn, and does not show any temper, anger or sulkiness [bitterness]*.

#### 4 Jealousy

**11** Here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man **has a jealous heart**; jealous of others' receiving gains, honour, respect, esteem, homage and worship; one is vengeful and holds grudges.<sup>21</sup>

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body's breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is uninfluential.

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to lack of influence, namely, *one has a jealous heart; jealous of others' receiving gains, honour, respect, esteem, homage and worship; one is vengeful and holds grudges. [205]*

**12** But here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man **has no jealous heart**; not jealous of others' receiving gains, honour, respect, esteem, homage and worship; neither vengeful nor holds grudges.

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body's breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is of great influence.

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to great influence, namely, *one has no jealous heart; not jealous of others' receiving gains, honour, respect, esteem, homage and worship; neither vengeful nor holds grudges.*

#### 5 Stinginess

**13** Here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man [being stingy] is **not a giver** of food, drinks, cloth, vehicles, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwelling, and lightings, to recluses and brahmins.

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body's breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn one is poor.

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to poverty, namely, *one is not a giver of food, drinks, cloth, vehicles, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwelling, and lightings to recluses and brahmins.*

**14** But here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man is **a giver** of food, drinks, cloth, vehicles, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwelling, or lightings, to recluses and brahmins.

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body's breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven.

<sup>19</sup> "Wordy remark," *bahum pi vutto*, lit "many a word". M:ÑB missed this word.

<sup>20</sup> "Pleasantness," *pāsādika*, "one who is pleasant, lovely," for earlier *vaṇṇavanta*, "one who is beautiful" [3].

<sup>21</sup> As at (**Kamma**) **Mallikā S** (A 4.197) but with somewhat different results (A 4.197.2.3/2:202) = SD 39.10.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is rich.

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to wealth, namely, *one is a giver of food, drinks, cloth, vehicles, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwelling, or lightings, to recluses and brahmins*.

## 6 Callousness and arrogance

**15** Here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man is **callous and arrogant**, to one worthy of homage, one pays no homage; before one worthy of rising up to, one does not rise up; to one worthy of a seat, one offers no seat; for one worthy of being given way to, one does not give way; to one worthy of honour, one honours not; for one worthy of esteem, one shows no esteem; to one worthy of respect, one respects not; to one worthy of veneration, one venerates not.

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, with the body's breaking up, after death, one re-appears in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is of a low family.

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to birth in a low family, namely, *one is callous and arrogant, to one worthy of homage, one pays no homage; before one worthy of rising up to one does not rise up; to one worthy of a seat, one offers no seat; for one worthy of being given way to, one does not give way; to one worthy of honour, one honours not; for one worthy of esteem, one shows no esteem; to one worthy of respect, one respects not; to one worthy of veneration, one venerates not*.

**16** But here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man is **neither callous nor arrogant**, to one worthy of homage, one pays homage; before one worthy of rising up, one rises up; to one worthy of a seat, one offers a seat; to one worthy of being given way, one gives way; to one worthy of honour, one honours; for one worthy of esteem, one shows esteem; to one worthy of respect, one shows respect; to one worthy of veneration, one venerates.

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, after death, with the body's breaking up, one re-appears in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven., if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is of a high family.

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to birth in a high family, namely, *one is neither callous nor arrogant, to one worthy of homage, one pays homage; before one worthy of rising up to, one rises up; to one worthy of a seat, one offers a seat; for one worthy of being given way to, one gives way; to one worthy of honour, one honours; for one worthy of esteem, one shows esteem; to one worthy of respect, one shows respect; to one worthy of veneration, one venerates*.

## 7 Not seeing holy ones

**17** Here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man **does not visit a recluse or a brahmin** to ask,

'Bhante, what is wholesome?

What is unwholesome?

What is blamable?

What is blameless?

What should be cultivated?

What should not be cultivated?

What kind of action will lead to my loss and suffering for a long time?

What kind of action will lead to my welfare and happiness for a long time?'

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, after death, with the body's breaking up, one re-appears in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell.

And if, with the body's breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is unwise.

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to lack of wisdom, namely, *one does not visit a recluse or a brahmin to ask, ‘Bhante, what is wholesome? What is unwholesome? What is blamable? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What kind of action will lead to my loss and suffering for a long time? What kind of action will lead to my welfare and happiness for a long time?’* [206]

**18** But here, young brahmin, a certain woman or man **visits a recluse or a brahmin** to ask, ‘Bhante, what is wholesome? What is unwholesome?...What kind of action will lead to my welfare and happiness for a long time?’

Through such karma, thus accomplished, thus undertaken, after death, with the body’s breaking up, one re-appears in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven.

And if, with the body’s breaking up, after death, one does not re-appear in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven, if one returns to a human state, then wherever one is reborn, one is very wise.

This, young brahmin, is the way leading to great wisdom, namely, *one visits a recluse or a brahmin to ask, ‘Bhante, what is wholesome? What is unwholesome? What is blamable? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What kind of action will lead to my loss and suffering for a long time? What kind of action will lead to my welfare and happiness for a long time?’*

## Conclusion

**19** Thus, young brahmin, this is

the way that leads one to	a short life,	the way that leads to	a long life;
the way that leads to	sickliness,	the way that leads to	good health;
the way that leads to	ugliness,	the way that leads to	beauty;
the way that leads to	lack of influence,	the way that leads to	great influence;
the way that leads to	poverty,	the way that leads to	wealth;
the way that leads to	low birth,	the way that leads to	high birth;
the way that leads to	foolishness,	the way that leads to	great wisdom.

**20** Young brahmin, beings are owners of karma, heirs to karma, born in karma, bound by karma, have karma as their refuge. It is karma that differentiates beings into inferior and excellent.”

**21** When this was said, the brahmin youth Subha Todeyyaputta said to the Blessed One:

“Excellent, master Gotama! Excellent, master Gotama! Bhante, just as if one were to place upright what had been overturned, or were to reveal what was hidden, or were to show the way to one who was lost, or were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms,

in the same way master Gotama has, in numerous ways, the Dharma has been made clear by master Gotama.

I go to master Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks. May master Gotama remember me as a layman who has gone for refuge from this day forth for life.”

— evaṃ —

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