

# Mahā Kamma,vibhaṅga Sutta

The Discourse on the Great Analysis of Karma | M 136/3:207-214

Theme: Why sometimes the good suffer, the bad prosper

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003, 2007, rev 2010

## 1 How wrong view of karma can arise

This well known Sutta shows some of the complexities of karma and its results. The Sutta opens with the wanderer Potali,putta's misquoting two statements on the Buddha Word to the novice monk Samiddhi, whose reply further confuses the issues. When Samiddhi seeks advice from Ānanda, he suggests that they see the Buddha, who then gives his Great Analysis (or Classification) of Karma based on these four types of persons:

- (1) the bad-doer who is reborn in a lower realm,
- (2) the bad-doer who is reborn in a happy state,
- (3) the doer of good who is reborn in a happy state, and
- (4) the doer of good who is reborn in a lower realm.

The Buddha then shows how wrong view can arise from only partial understanding of the teaching. This wrong view, for example, might operate in this manner:

- (1) a meditator or mystic "sees" in a vision a bad-doer suffering in hell;
- (2) he takes this as confirmation of what he has heard about moral causality;
- (3) so he declares, "all bad-doers always go to hell," and
- (4) his notion hardens into dogma: "Only this is true, all else is false."

This process is repeated for each of the four persons, after which the Buddha goes on to analyze these views that are based on partial experience. Then he points out those which are verifiable through experience and those that are merely dogmatic notions.

Finally, the Buddha expounds his Great Analysis of Karma in which he shows that such notions as "the bad-doer goes to hell" is over-simplistic. The mind is complex and many different kinds of karma are performed in a life-time: one could be influenced by an action done in a past life, or by an action done earlier in this life, or by one's dying thought, any of which could shape one's next birth.

The Mahā Kamma,vibhaṅga Sutta, for example, explains that a bad-doer may be reborn in a heaven due to any of three reasons [§18]:

- he has done good karma resulting in happiness (*kalyāṇa,kammam sukha,vedanīya*) before the bad conduct;
- has done good deeds resulting in happiness after his bad conduct; or
- at the time of dying, he has right view.

The Madhyama Āgama version gives altogether four reasons for the same heavenly rebirth of a bad doer:

- (1) either this person already experienced the retribution for his bad conduct in his present life, or
- (2) the retribution may be bound to ripen only after the rebirth, or
- (3) he performed good deeds before his bad conduct, or
- (4) at the time of passing away he acquired right view.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 How karma really operates

At the end of the Sutta, the Buddha summarizes his analysis of karma into these four headings:

- (1) inoperative karma that appears inoperative (*abhabba abhabb'ābhāsa kamma*);
- (2) inoperative karma that appears operative (*abhabba bhabb'ābhāsa kamma*);

<sup>1</sup> MA 171 = T1.708b16: "in this present life he completely experienced the retribution...or the retribution is to be experienced later...or earlier he did good deeds...or at the time of death he developed a wholesome state of mind, a state of mind united with what is righteous and with right view," 彼於現法中受報訖. 或復因後報故. 或復本作善業. 或復死時生善心, 所有法正見相應. (Analyo 2005 ad M 3:214)

- (3) operative karma that appears operative (*bhabba bhabb'ābhāsa kamma*);  
 (4) operative karma that appears inoperative (*bhabba abhabb'ābhāsa kamma*).

The Commentary explains *abhabba* as the unwholesome (*akusala*), called “inoperative” (inefficacious) because it is devoid of the capacity for growth; and explains *bhabba* as the wholesome (*kusala*), called “operative” (efficacious), because it has the capacity for growth (MA 5:20 f). **Bhikkhu Bodhi**, however, notes that “this explanation sounds suspect: *bhabba* (Skt *bhavya*) may simply mean ‘potent, capable of producing results,’ without implying any particular moral valuation.”<sup>2</sup>

The Majjhima Commentary gives two explanations of this tetrad. The first takes the suffix *-ābhāsa* to mean “outshine” or “overcome.” As such, the four terms show the way by which one kind of karma can “outshine” another in generating its result. The second explanation, “which seems more cogent” (M:ÑB 1347 n1234), takes *-ābhāsa* to mean “appear.”<sup>3</sup>

On this explanation, the first type is illustrated by the person who kills living beings and is reborn in hell: his action is incapable (of good result) [inoperative] because it is unwholesome, and it appears incapable because, since he is reborn in hell, it seems to be the cause for his rebirth there. The second is illustrated by the person who kills living beings and is reborn in heaven: his action is incapable (of good result) because it is unwholesome, yet it appears capable because he is reborn in heaven; thus to the outside recluses and brahmins it seems to be the cause for his rebirth in heaven. The remaining two terms should be understood along the same lines, with appropriate changes. (MA 5:20 f = M:ÑB 1347 n1234)

The Madhyama Agama version adds a simile to the summary of karmic categories, comparing the four examples for the working mechanism of karma to a fruit that may appear ripe but be unripe, appear unripe but be ripe, appear ripe and be ripe, or appear unripe and be unripe.<sup>4</sup>

Following the Commentary (MA 5:20), **the four analytical categories of karma** [§21] can be explained as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- (1) Karma that is (both) inoperative and appears inoperative [§17], that is, a strong unwholesome karma (incapable of good result), the result of which will come before the results of weaker unwholesome karmas. For example, a person kills living beings, and is reborn in hell: his action is *inoperative* (incapable of good result) because it is unwholesome, and it *appears inoperative* because since he is reborn there, it is the cause of his suffering state.

**Devadatta**, for example, persuaded prince Ajātasattu to murder his own father, Bimbisāra (a streamwinner) (DA 1:135-137), and thrice attempted to murder the Buddha himself and once

<sup>2</sup> M:ÑB 2001:1347 n1234.

<sup>3</sup> In the Chinese Āgama version (MA 171 = T1.708c22), we see that the use of the term 似 in the explanation and the simile supports the second of two commentarial explanations found at MA 5:20, according to which *-ābhāsa* in the compound *bhabb'ābhāsa* has the sense of “to appear.” (Analayo 2005 ad loc). See M:ÑB 2005:1347 n1234.

<sup>4</sup> MA 171 = T1.708c22. See prec n.

<sup>5</sup> Khantipalo, in his Intro to Nāṇamoli’s M 136 tr, summarizes Comy explanation of the 4 categories, thus:

(1) A strong unwholesome kamma (incapable of good result), the result of which will come before the results of weaker unwholesome kammās.

(2) Wholesome kamma (which appears capable of good result) is followed by unwholesome death-proximate kamma which makes the former incapable of good result immediately.

(3) A strong wholesome kamma will mature even before much accumulated unwholesome kamma.

(4) Unwholesome kamma (which appears incapable of good result) is followed by wholesome death-proximate kamma which will mature first and is capable of good results.

See <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.136.nymo.html>. See also McDermott 1980:177.

succeeded in wounding him, and caused a schism in the order (V 2:191-198)—these last two deeds are certain to lead to rebirth in hell.<sup>6</sup>

- (2) Karma that is inoperative but appears operative, that is, a karma, whose effect is expected, but its fruition is prevented by the cultivation of karma of opposite quality at the dying moment. For example, a wholesome karma (which appears capable of good result) is followed by unwholesome death-proximate karma which makes the former incapable of good result immediately. For example, a person kills living beings, but he is reborn in heaven: his action is *inoperative* (incapable of good result) because it is unwholesome, yet it *appears operative* because he is reborn in heaven.

A good example here is that of Coppertooth the public executioner, **Tamba,dāṭhika Cora,-ghātaka** (DhA 8.1), who after a bloody career as a bandit, killed his own comrades and then became executioner of criminals for fifty years. He met the venerable Sāriputta whose teachings uplifted his mind, lightening the burden of his bad karma so that he attained heavenly rebirth. (DhA 8.1/2:202 ff)

- (3) Karma that is (both) operative and appears operative, that is, a strong karma that ripens even before much accumulated karma of the opposite kind. For example, a wholesome karma (which appears capable of good result) is followed by wholesome death-proximate karma which makes the former incapable of good result immediately.

An example here is that of **Pasenadi**, rajah of Kosala. The **Anāgata,vamsa** says that he is a Bodhisattva and will become the 4<sup>th</sup> future Buddha (JPTS 1886:37).<sup>7</sup>

- (4) Karma that is operative but appears inoperative, that is, a karma, although cultivated at the dying moment, is prevented from fruiting due to the fruiting of a previous deed of a different moral quality. For example, an unwholesome karma that is followed by wholesome death-proximate karma that ripens first and is operative (capable of good results).

An example here is **Mallikā**, queen of king Pasenadi. She lived a virtuous life of generosity, keeping the five precepts, and the eight precepts, and so on. However, in a moment of indiscretion, she had sexual intercourse with a dog in the bath-house. When the king suspected this, she conjured up an elaborate lie. These acts weighed heavily on her mind during her last moments. As a result, she spent seven days in Avīci hell. However, her own habitual goodness in due course brought her rebirth in Tusita heaven. (DhA 9.6/3:119-122)

In other words, in our lifetimes we are capable of doing both good and bad deeds. Depending in the circumstances, our karma may fruit either here and now, or in some future state. Thus the effect of a comparatively weak deed (*dubbala,kamma*) may be superseded by the effect of a comparatively strong deed (*balava,kamma*), or by the accumulated effects of a series of deeds. As such, a person may have been a murderer, a liar, adulterer, thief, drunk and so forth, but on dying, he may arise in a happy state if the effects of his accumulated good karma are strong enough to supersede the results of his bad karma. The karmic fruits that have been superseded (the bad karma) will then be experienced once the superseded good karmic results have been exhausted.

As such, it is important here, in these four statements (that is, the great analysis of karma) to understand it is not that, for example, (2) “unwholesome karma *results* in wholesome karma,” nor that (4) “wholesome karma *results* in unwholesome karma,” both cases being against the basic law of karma, that is, that

**an unwholesome deed has the potential or seed of unwholesome results;  
a wholesome deed has the potential or seed of wholesome results.**

<sup>6</sup> On Deva,datta, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples* lecture 7: “The Buddha’s Bad Karma” (2002) §§5-14 & Devadatta = SD 71.4. See also below §17 + nn.

<sup>7</sup> On Pasenadi, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples* lecture 8: “The Thundering Silence” (2002) §19.

Rather, it means that such karma are attended by different kinds of results depending on the new circumstances. This is the crux of the teaching of the Mahā Kamma, vibhaṅga Sutta.

### 3 An anacoluthon?

VARIANT READINGS. The Mahā Kamma, vibhaṅga Sutta has a very interesting passage where we find either a rhetorical break (anacoluthon) or that the sentence is incomplete (due to an error in transmission). In §6 (M 3:209), we find this passage:

“Anyway, Ānanda, how could these foolish, ignorant wanderers of other religions understand the Tathāgata’s **great analysis of karma** (*mahā kamma, vibhaṅga*).<sup>8</sup> If you, Ānanda, would listen to the Tathāgata’s great analysis of karma...”<sup>9</sup>

*Api c’ānanda ke ca añña, titthiya, paribbājakā bālā avyattā ke ca Tathāgatassa mahā, - kamma, vibhaṅgaṃ jānissanti. Sace tumhe Ānanda suṇeyyātha Tathāgatassa mahā, kamma, - vibhaṅgaṃ vibhājantassā ti...*

7 “This is the time, Blessed One! This is the time, Sugata [Well Gone One], for the Blessed One to give the great analysis of karma.<sup>10</sup> Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will bear it in mind.”

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

*Etassa Bhagavā kālo etassa Sugata kālo yaṃ Bhagavā mahā, kamma, vibhaṅgaṃ vibhajeyya. Bhagavato suttaṃ bhikkhū dhāressantī ti.*

*Tena h’ānanda suṇāhi sādhu kaṃ manasikarohi bhāsissāmī ti.*

[§6]<sup>11</sup>

The sentence in bold print reads *sace tumhe Ānanda suṇeyyātha tathāgatassa mahā, kamma, vibhaṅgaṃ vibhajantassā ti*. It opens with the conjunction *sace* (“if”), but ends without saying what will follow “if” the monks and Ānanda hear the great analysis of karma. We may have here an anacoluthon (syntactical break for rhetorical effect).<sup>12</sup> The Buddha’s sentence is incomplete possibly due to Ānanda’s enthusiasm to listen to that teaching.

However, according to **Analayo**, the Madhyama Āgama version<sup>13</sup> of the Sutta preserves the full sentence, explaining “if you were to hear from the Blessed One the discourse on the great analysis of karma, you would develop more and superior mental tranquillity and happiness towards the Tathagata,” 若汝從世尊聞分別大業經者，於如來倍復增上心靖得喜。<sup>14</sup> Based on MĀ 171, says **Analayo**, a possible re-

<sup>8</sup> The Sutta’s title comes from here. See §16(4) & n below. “Great” (*mahā*) here has the sense of being “comprehensive” and does not connote any grandiosity.

<sup>9</sup> *Sace tumhe Ānanda suṇeyyātha tathāgatassa mahā kammavibhaṅgaṃ vibhajantassā ti*. The sentence opens with the conjunction *sace* (“if”), but ends without saying what will follow “if” the monks and Ānanda hear the great analysis of karma. We may have here an anacoluthon (syntactical break for rhetorical effect). However, according to **Analayo**, the Madhyama Āgama version of the Sutta preserves the full sentence: see Intro (3). As regards the phrase, “great analysis of karma,” *mahā, kamma, vibhaṅga*, it occurs twice in this sentence: the former is rendered technically and the latter more freely. *Vibhanjatassa* comes from *vibhajati*, “to divide, dissect, classify, analyze” and it is the verb used by Ānanda in his response: see foll n.

<sup>10</sup> “To give a great analysis of karma,” *mahā, kamma, vibhaṅgaṃ vibhajeyya*, lit “should analyze the great analysis of karma.” See prev n.

<sup>11</sup> M 136.6/3:209.

<sup>12</sup> **An anacoluthon**, defined by OED as an instance of “anacoluthia,” ie, “a want of grammatical sequence; the passing from one construction to another before the former is completed.” *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1990) is more helpful: “a grammatical term for a change of construction in a sentence that leaves the initial construction unfinished: ‘Either you go—but we’ll see.’ For another example, see **Adhipateyya S** (A 3.40.2/-1:148) & SD 27.3 n (on aposiopesis).

<sup>13</sup> MĀ 171 = T1.707a19.

<sup>14</sup> Analayo adopts the variant reading 聞 for 問.

construction of the missing part of the Pali sentence would result in the sentence reading: *sace tumhe, Ānanda, suṇeyyātha tathāgatassa mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ vibhajantassa, tatra vo, Ānanda, tathāgate cittaṃ bhīyyoso,mattāya pasīdeyya pāmojjaṃ labheyya.*<sup>15</sup> In either version, Ānanda understands the hint and requests the Buddha to give the great analysis of karma.

Of course, there is the other possibility that, if the Pali sentence follows an urtext with an anacoluthon, then the Chinese translation must either have amended for what is thought to be an incomplete sentence; or, perhaps, the Chinese redactors did not notice the anacoluthon at all, and simply regarded it as a complete sentence, as Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi has done, rendering it as “You should listen, Ānanda, to the Tathāgata as he expounds the great exposition of action” (M:ÑB 1060).

POSSIBLE SOLUTION. I think there is a better solution to this interesting puzzle. The word *vibhājantassa* here is problematic, as it seems redundant since the word it appears to refer to *mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ*, which, however, already has *vibhaṅgaṃ*. Taken thus, the sentence, *Tathāgatassa mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ vibhājantassa* would oddly translate as “of the analysis of the Tathagata’s great analysis of karma” or “the exposition of the Tathagata’s great exposition of karma.”

Fortunately, there is a similar sentence structure found in **Puris’indriya,ñāṇā S** (A 6.62):

“If you, Ānanda, would listen to the Tathagata’s knowledge<sup>16</sup> of personal faculties [of personality analysis], I will give an analysis of it [I will expound it].”

“This is the time, Blessed One! This is the time, Sugata [Well Gone One], for the Blessed One to give an analysis of the knowledge of personal faculties. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will bear it in mind.”

*Sace tumhe Ānanda suṇeyyātha Tathāgatassa puris’indriya,ñāṇāni vibhajissāmi ti.  
Etassa Bhagavā kālo etassa Sugata kālo yaṃ Bhagavā puris’indriya,ñāṇāni vibhajeyya,  
Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressantī ti.* (A 6.62.2/3:404; cf AA 3:405)

It is very significant that, although no variant of the PTS [Pali Text Society] reading *vibhājantassa* in **the Mahā Kamma,vibhaṅga Sutta**, the PTS text of **the Puris’indriya,ñāṇā Sutta** has *vibhājantassa*, too, but for which it gives two other variant readings: *vibhajessāmi* (Be Mandalay MS) and *vibhajissāmi* (Be Phayre MS). This provides us the licence to amend the PTS Mahā Kamma,vibhaṅga Sutta, reading thus:

*Sace tumhe Ānanda suṇeyyātha Tathāgatassa mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgaṃ vibhājissāmi [vibhajessāmi] ti...*

If you, Ānanda, would listen to the Tathāgata’s great analysis of karma, I will give an analysis of it [I will expound it].

This makes perfect sense—without an anacoluthon.

#### 4 Related suttas

The Mahā Kamma,vibhaṅga Sutta, dealing with the more complex operations of karma, understandably comes after the **Cūḷa,kamma,vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 135), which deals with more basic aspects of karma, 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” (M 135.4).<sup>17</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), for example, teaches that not everything that we feel or experience

<sup>15</sup> Analayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya*, draft 2005 at M 3:209 & n.

<sup>16</sup> Pali has *ñāṇāni* (pl), “knowledges.”

<sup>17</sup> See **Cūḷa Kamma,vibhaṅga S** (M 135.4) = SD 4.15; also M 1:390; A 3:72-74, 186, 5:88; Kvu 522. See also K N Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:404 f.

are due to karma alone, but could be the working of any possible eight conditions.<sup>18</sup> **The (Kamma) Nidāna Sutta** (A 3.33) compares one’s karma to seeds that depend on favourable conditions to germinate, or could be destroyed by burning (through spiritual development).<sup>19</sup>

Both the Cūḷa Kamma,vibhaṅga Sutta and **the Loṇa,phala Sutta** (A 3.99)<sup>20</sup> teach that karma should not be taken as a simplistic “cause and effect” operation—a deterministic case of “good begets good, bad begets bad”<sup>21</sup>—but one where various other aggravating or attenuating circumstances are involved. The Loṇa,phala Sutta, for example, says that the cultivation of lovingkindness can lessen or even prevent the effects of certain unwholesome karma.

It is important here to understand here that “karma is intention” (*cetanā’haṃ kamman vadāmi*).<sup>22</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:

<b>Sāleyyaka Sutta</b>	(M 41 = SD 5.7)	causes of disparity in rebirth; choosing one’s happy rebirth;
<b>Saṅkhār’upapatti Sutta</b>	(M 130 = SD 2.23)	choosing one’s rebirth;
<b>Sarakāṇī Sutta 1</b>	(S 55.24 = SD 3.6)	an erstwhile drunk dies a streamwinner.

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## The Discourse on The Great Analysis of Karma<sup>23</sup>

M 136/3:207-214

[207]

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying at the Squirrels’ Feeding-ground in the Bamboo Grove near Rājagaha.

### Samiddhi & Potali,putta

2 At that time, the venerable Samiddhi<sup>24</sup> was dwelling in a forest hut. Then the wanderer Potali,-putta, while walking about on a stroll,<sup>25</sup> went up to the venerable Samiddhi and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and amiable exchange was concluded, he sat down at one side.

<sup>18</sup> S 36.21/4:230 f = SD 5.6.

<sup>19</sup> A 3.33/1:134-136 = SD 4.14.

<sup>20</sup> A 3.99/1:249-253 = SD 3.5.

<sup>21</sup> See **Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 11.10/1227 f) = SD 39.2.

<sup>22</sup> A 3:416; Kvu 8.9.36/392.

<sup>23</sup> The *mahā* here qualifies *kamma,vibhaṅga*, not the *sutta* because the word *mahā kamma,vibhaṅga* occurs in this Sutta [6, 13-16]. “Great” (*mahā*) here has the sense of “comprehensive” and does not connote any grandiosity. On the prefix *mahā* before sutta titles, see M:H 1:xiii.

<sup>24</sup> Once when Samiddhi saw the Buddha’s majesty in the company of Bimbisāra (*Bimbisāra,samāgame Buddhā-nubhavam disvā*), faith arose in him and he joined the Order (ThaA 1:125). Once, while drying himself after bathing in the Tapodā tank, a deva appeared and asked him regarding the Bhaddeka,ratta Sutta, but both of them were ignorant of it. The deva told Samiddhi to ask the Buddha regarding this. The Buddha gave him a brief teaching which later was elaborated by Mahā Kaccāna, hence called **Mahā Kaccāna Bhaddeka,ratta S** (M 133). The Aṅgut-

Sitting thus at one side, Potali,putta the wanderer said this to the venerable Samiddhi:

“From the ascetic Gotama himself, avuso Samiddhi, I heard and learned this: ‘Bodily action is useless [fruitless]; verbal action is useless [fruitless]; only mental action is the truth.’<sup>26</sup> And that ‘there is that attainment on attaining of which one experiences nothing at all.’<sup>27</sup>”

“Do not speak so, avuso Potali,putta! Do not speak so, avuso Potali,putta! Do not misrepresent the Blessed One. It is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. For the Blessed One did not say that bodily action is useless, verbal action is useless, only mental action is the truth; nor is there that attainment on attaining of which one experiences nothing.”

“Avuso Samiddhi, for how long have you gone forth?”

“Not long, avuso, three rains.”<sup>28</sup>

“Now, what shall we say here to the elder monks when even a novice monk<sup>29</sup> thinks that the Teacher should be defended thus? Avuso Samiddhi, having done an intentional deed through the body, through speech, through the mind, what does one experience?”

“Avuso Potali,putta, having done an intentional deed through the body, through speech, through mind, one experiences pain [suffering].”

Then, neither approving nor disapproving of the venerable Samiddhi’s word, the wanderer Potali,putta rose from his seat and left.

**3** Then, not long after the wanderer Potali,putta had left, the venerable Samiddhi approached the venerable Ānanda [208] and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and amiable exchange was concluded, the venerable Samiddhi sat down at one side. Sitting thus as one side, the venerable Samiddhi *related to the venerable Ānanda the whole conversation that he had with the wanderer Potali,putta*. When this was said, the venerable Ānanda said this to the venerable Samiddhi:

“Avuso Samiddhi, this is a conversation about which we should see the Blessed One. Come, avuso Samiddhi, let us approach the Blessed One and tell him regarding this matter. We will bear in mind the Blessed One’s explanation.”

“Yes, avuso,” the venerable Samiddhi replied in assent to the venerable Ānanda.

### The Buddha’s answer

**4** Then the venerable Ānanda and the venerable Samiddhi approached the Blessed One. Having saluted the Blessed One, they sat down at one side. Sitting thus as one side, the venerable Ānanda *related to the Blessed One the whole conversation that the venerable Samiddhi had had with the wanderer Potali,putta*. When this was said, the Blessed One said this to the venerable Ānanda:

“Ānanda, I do not recall ever having met the wanderer Potali,putta. As such, how could there have been such a conversation? When the wanderer Potali,putta’s question should have been analyzed before being answered, Samiddhi, this misguided person, answered it categorically!”<sup>30</sup>

tara Comy (AA 4:175) says that he was a pupil of Sāriputta, and **Samiddhi S** (A 9.14) contains Sāriputta’s instructions on “purposive thought” (*sankappa,vitakka*) to him (A 9.14/4:385 f). See further SD 21.4 (1.1).

<sup>25</sup> “Walking about on a stroll,” *jaṅghā,vihāraṃ anucankamāno anuvicaramāno*, lit “wandering to and fro on foot and walking up and down” (KR Norman, *Group of Discourses II*, 1992: 63). See D 1:235; M 1:108, 227, 2:118, 3:128; A 1:138, 3:76; Sn p105, p115.

<sup>26</sup> Comy says that Potali,putta did not actually hear this statement nor the following one directly from the Buddha but from a report. This first remark is actually a distortion of the Buddha’s declaration in **Upāli S** (M 56; MA 5:15) that mental action is the most reprehensible of the 3 types of bad actions (M 56.4/1:373). See foll n.

<sup>27</sup> This remark comes from the Buddha’s discussion on the cessation of perception (*abhi,saññā,nirodha*) in

**Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9/1:180; MA 5:16) = SD 7.14. See prev n.

<sup>28</sup> That is, three monastic years where each rains retreat that a monk duly completes is a “year.”

<sup>29</sup> “Novice monk,” *navaka bhikkhu*, ie a monk of less than 5 rains. Samiddhi was 3 rains old.

<sup>30</sup> “Categorically,” *ekamsena*, lit “one-sidedly”, one-pointedly, absolutely, definitely, certainly (cf D 3:229; A 1:97, 246), ie an answer without analysis. On the 4 proper ways of answering a question, see **Abhaya Rāja,kumāra S** (M 58) @ SD 7.12 (4), under **Pañha Vyākaraṇa S** (A 4.42/2:46).

6 When this was said, the venerable Udāyī<sup>31</sup> said this to the Blessed One:

“Perhaps, bhante, the venerable Samiddhi said this is in reference to the teaching that ‘whatever is felt is included in suffering’?”<sup>32</sup>

Then the Blessed One addressed Ānanda:

“Look, Ānanda, how lost<sup>33</sup> this misguided person Udāyī is! I knew, Ānanda, that this misguided person Udāyī, when conceiving an idea, would unwisely conceive one such as this.<sup>34</sup>

From the beginning, the wanderer Potali,putta had asked about the three kinds of feelings. If, Ānanda, Samiddhi, this misguided person, [209] when asked by the wanderer Potali,putta, had answered in this manner, he would have been right, that is to say<sup>35</sup>—

‘Avuso, Potali,putta, having done an intentional deed through the body, through speech, through the mind, that result in pleasant feelings,<sup>36</sup> one feels pleasure.

Avuso, Potali,putta, having done an intentional deed through the body, through speech, through the mind, that result in unpleasant feelings, one feels pain.

Avuso, Potali,putta, having done an intentional deed through the body, through speech, through the mind, that result in neutral feelings, one feels neutral.<sup>37</sup>

—then, Ānanda, Samiddhi, this misguided person, when answering this question, would have answered rightly.

Anyway, Ānanda, how could these foolish, ignorant wanderers of other religions understand the Tathāgata’s great analysis of karma (*mahā kamma, vibhaṅga*).<sup>38</sup> If you, Ānanda, would listen to the Tathāgata’s great analysis of karma, I will give an analysis of it [I will expound it].<sup>39</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Comy says that this is Lāl’udāyī, Udāyī the foolish. Wanting to speak, he stretches out his neck, moves his jaws and twitches his face, and is unable to sit still, plainly before the Buddha who can see him without the need of the divine eye, mental reasoning nor omniscience (MA 5:16 f). DPPN says that he was “an elder who possessed the knack for saying the wrong thing,” for example, at an auspicious occasion, he would recite stanzas suitable for a funeral, and at a funeral, he would do just the opposite! (DhA 3:123 ff). His main problem seems to have been boastfulness which often got him into trouble (like being unable to teach Dharma when invited to do so) (J 2:164-7, 344 ff; DhA 3:125). His shallow knowledge does stop him from contradicting Sāriputta thrice on one occasion (A 3:192 ff), nor from intruding into profound discussions of the Buddha himself. On two occasions, the Buddha censured him for his display of ignorance: once in **Mahā Kamma, vibhaṅga S** [6] and the other in a discussion on the 5 “stations of recollection” (*anussati-ṭṭhānā*) in **Lāl’udāyī S** (A 3:322 f; cf A 1:228). He was also guilty of breaking a number of Vinaya rules, esp Saṅghādisesa 1 (V 3:110-112), that of masturbation and encouraging Seyyasaka to do the same. However, it could be that this Lāl’udāyī of the Vinaya is another namesake. See SD 24.8 Intro (1).

<sup>32</sup> This quotation is from **Rahogata S** (S 36.11/4:216-218 = SD 33.6), made in reference to the suffering inherent in all formations because of impermanence. Although the statement itself is true, Samiddhi seems to have misinterpreted it to mean that all feeling is felt as suffering, which is clearly false.

<sup>33</sup> “Lost,” *ummagga*, lit “out of the way,” “under the way” a tunnel (V 1:8 = M 1:171 = 3:5 = A 4:191 = S 4:195). Cf A:W 2:184 n5.

<sup>34</sup> “When conceiving an idea, would conceive one like this,” *evam ayaṃ ummujjamāno ayoniso ummujjissati*. This sentence is also a pun on Udāyī’s mannerisms at that moment—wanting to speak, he stretches out his neck (*ummu-jati*), moves his jaws and twitches his face, and is unable to sit still, plainly before the Buddha who can see him without the needs of the divine eye, mental reasoning nor omniscience (MA 5:16 f). On the connection between *ummuja* and Skt *unmiṅjita*, see A:W 2:184 n5, and also BHSD: *unmiṅja, unmiṅjita*, “opening, as of the mouth.”

<sup>35</sup> This section is qu at DhsA 88 as belonging to a discourse in which karma is thought of as intention. The wanderer’s name, however, is given as Pātali,putta.

<sup>36</sup> “That result in pleasant feelings,” *sukha, vedanīya*. The other two feelings of this triad are “that result in painful feelings,” *dukkha, vedanīya*, and “that result in neither-painful-nor-pleasant feelings,” *adukkhā-asukha, vedanīya*.

<sup>37</sup> “One feels neutral,” ie neither painful or pleasurable. “Feeling” (*vedanā*) here has the sense of “experience”, as when we say “I feel good” or “I feel nothing.” As such it makes sense here to say “neutral feeling.”

<sup>38</sup> The sutta’s title comes from here. See §16(4) & n below. “Great” (*mahā*) here has the sense of “comprehensive” and does not connote any grandiosity.

<sup>39</sup> *Sace tumhe Ānanda suṇeyyātha tathāgatassa mahākammavibhaṅgaṃ vibhajantassā ti*. The sentence opens with the conjunction *sace* (“if”), but ends without saying what will follow “if” the monks and Ānanda hear the great analysis of karma. We may have here an anacoluthon (syntactical break for rhetorical effect). However, according to

7 “This is the time, Blessed One! This is the time, Sugata [Well Gone One], for the Blessed One to give the great analysis of karma.<sup>40</sup> Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will bear it in mind.”  
 “Then, listen, Ānanda, pay close attention to it, I will speak.”  
 “Yes, bhante,” the venerable Ānanda replied in assent to the Blessed One.  
 The Blessed One said this:

### Summary: Four types of persons<sup>41</sup>

8 “Ānanda, there are these four kinds of person to be found in the world. What are the four?”

- (1) Here, a certain person  
 destroys life,  
 takes the not-given,  
 indulges in sexual misconduct,  
 speaks false words,  
 speaks malicious words,  
 speaks harsh words,  
 speaks frivolous words,  
 is covetous,  
 has a mind of ill will,  
 holds wrong views.<sup>42</sup>

After death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

- (2) Here, Ānanda, a certain person  
 destroys life,  
 takes the not-given,  
 indulges in sexual misconduct,  
 speaks false words,  
 speaks malicious words,  
 speaks harsh words,  
 speaks frivolous words,  
 is covetous,  
 has a mind of ill will,  
 holds wrong views.

After death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

- (3) Here, a certain person  
 refrains from destroying life,  
 refrains from taking the not-given,  
 refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
 refrains from speaking false words,  
 refrains from speaking malicious words, [210]  
 refrains from speaking harsh words,

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**Analayo**, the Madhyama Āgama version of the Sutta preserves the full sentence: see Intro (3). As regards the phrase, “great analysis of karma,” *mahā,kamma,vibhaṅga*, it occurs twice in this sentence: the former is rendered technically and the latter more freely. *Vibhanjatassa* comes from *vibhajati*, “to divide, dissect, classify, analyze” and it is the verb used by Ānanda in his response: see foll n.

<sup>40</sup> “To give a great analysis of karma,” *mahā,kamma,vibhaṅgam vibhajeyya*, lit “should analyze the great analysis of karma.” See prev n.

<sup>41</sup> These four types of persons are not in themselves the classification of karma, but form the *maṭikā* (headings, summaries), set out as to detail the knowledge of the great analysis of karma (MA 5:18).

<sup>42</sup> These are the ten courses of unwholesome action (*akusala kamma,patha*) (D 33.3.2(3)/3:269, 34.2.3(5)/3:290; A 10.176.3-6/5:264-266): for full refs, see **Esukāri S** (M 96.8/2:179) n = SD 37.9.

refrains from speaking frivolous words,  
not covetous,  
has a mind without ill will,  
holds right view.

After death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

- (4) Here, Ānanda, a certain person  
refrains from destroying life,  
refrains from taking the not-given,  
refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
refrains from speaking false words,  
refrains from speaking malicious words,  
refrains from speaking harsh words,  
refrains from speaking frivolous words,  
not covetous,  
has a mind without ill will,  
holds right view.

After death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

#### FOUR WRONG VIEWS DUE TO INCOMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF KARMA

##### “There is bad karma”

9 (1) Here, Ānanda, as a result of zeal,<sup>43</sup> as a result of effort, as a result of devoted practice, as a result of heedfulness, as a result of right attention, some recluse or brahmin gains such a mental concentration so that with the divine eye that is purified and superhuman, he sees that person here who

destroys living beings,  
takes the not-given,  
indulges in sexual misconduct,  
speaks false words,  
speaks malicious words,  
speaks harsh words,  
speaks frivolous words,  
is covetous,  
has a mind of ill will,  
holds wrong views,

and he sees that after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.<sup>44</sup>

He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that there are bad deeds; there is the result of misconduct. For I saw a person here who  
destroyed life,  
took the not-given,  
indulged in sexual misconduct,  
spoke false words,  
spoke malicious words,

<sup>43</sup> Comy says that this word and the four that follow—*ātappa*, *padhāna*, *anuyoga*, *appamāda*, *sammā manasikāra*—are names for “energy” (*vīriya*) (MA 5:18).

<sup>44</sup> For a very close parallel of this para, see **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1.1.31-33/1:13-16) on how the first 3 of the 62 wrong views arise, that is, wrong (fixed) views regarding the past in terms of eternalism (of self and the world).

spoke harsh words,  
 spoke frivolous words,  
 was covetous,  
 had a mind of ill will,  
 held wrong views,

and, after death, when the body had broken up, he re-appeared in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.’

He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that all those who  
 destroy living beings,  
 take the not-given,  
 indulge in sexual misconduct,  
 speak false words,  
 speak malicious words,  
 speak harsh words,  
 speak frivolous words,  
 are covetous,  
 have a mind of ill will,  
 hold wrong views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell. Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false.’

Thus he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that ‘Only this is true, all else is false.’

### “There is no bad karma”

**10** (2) Here, Ānanda, [211] as a result of zeal, as a result of effort, as a result of devoted practice, as a result of heedfulness, as a result of right attention, some recluse or brahmin gains such a mental concentration so that with the divine eye that is purified and superhuman, he sees that person here who destroys living beings...holds wrong views, and he sees that after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that there are no bad deeds, there is no result of misconduct. For I saw all those who  
 destroyed living beings,  
 took the not-given,  
 indulged in sexual misconduct,  
 spoke false words,  
 spoke malicious words,  
 spoke harsh words,  
 spoke frivolous words,  
 was covetous,  
 had a mind of ill will,  
 held wrong views,

after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a happy destination, in heaven.’

He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that all those who  
 destroy living beings,  
 take the not-given,  
 indulge in sexual misconduct,  
 speak false words,  
 speak malicious words,

speak harsh words,  
 speak frivolous words,  
 are covetous,  
 have a mind of ill will,  
 hold wrong views,

after death, when the body has broken up, after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a happy destination, in heaven. Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false.’

Thus he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that ‘Only this is true, all else is false.’

### “There is good karma”

**11** (3) Here, Ānanda, as a result of zeal, as a result of effort, as a result of devoted practice, as a result of heedfulness, as a result of right attention, some recluse or brahmin gains such a mental concentration so that with the divine eye that is purified and superhuman he sees that person here who

refrains from destroying living beings,  
 refrains from taking the not-given,  
 refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
 refrains from speaking false words,  
 refrains from speaking malicious words,  
 refrains from speaking harsh words,  
 refrains from speaking frivolous words,  
 is not covetous,  
 has a mind without ill will,  
 holds right view,

and he sees that after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that there are good deeds; there is the result of good conduct. For I saw a person here who refrained from destroying life...held right view, after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a happy destination, in heaven.’

He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that all those who  
 refrain from destroying living being,  
 refrain from taking the not-given,  
 refrain from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
 refrain from speaking false words,  
 refrain from speaking malicious words,  
 refrain from speaking harsh words,  
 refrain from speaking frivolous words,  
 are not covetous,  
 have a mind without ill will,  
 hold right views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a happy destination, in heaven. Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false.’

Thus he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that ‘Only this is true, all else is false.’

“There is no good karma”

**12** (4) Here, Ānanda, [212] as a result of zeal, as a result of effort, as a result of devoted practice, as a result of heedfulness, as a result of right attention, some recluse or brahmin gains such a mental concentration so that with the divine eye that is purified and superhuman, he sees that person here who

refrains from destroying living beings,  
 refrains from taking the not-given,  
 refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
 refrains from speaking false words,  
 refrains from speaking malicious words,  
 refrains from speaking harsh words,  
 refrains from speaking frivolous words,  
 is not covetous,  
 has a mind without ill will,  
 holds right view,

and he sees that after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that there are no good deeds, there is no result of good conduct. For I saw all those who

refrained from destroying living beings,  
 refrained from taking the not-given,  
 refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
 refrained from speaking false words,  
 refrained from speaking malicious words,  
 refrained from speaking harsh words,  
 refrained from speaking frivolous words,  
 was not covetous,  
 had a mind without ill will,  
 held right views,

after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.’

He says thus:

‘Truly it is, sir, that all those who refrain from destroying living beings...hold right views, after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell. Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false.’

Thus he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that ‘Only this is true, all else is false.’

### WHAT IS TO BE ACCEPTED, WHAT TO BE REJECTED<sup>45</sup>

Accepted: “There is bad karma”

**13** (1) In this regard,<sup>46</sup> Ānanda, when a recluse or brahmin says thus: ‘*Truly it is, sir, that there are bad deeds; there is the result of misconduct*’—this I grant him.

And when he says thus: ‘*For I saw an individual here who*

<sup>45</sup> Comy says that the purpose of this section is to present the outline of the analysis, that is, to show what can be accepted and what should be rejected in the claims of other recluses and brahmins. Briefly, the propositions that report their direct observations can be accepted, but the generalizations they derive from those observations should be rejected. (MA 5:19)

<sup>46</sup> “In this regard,” *tatra*, lit “therein.”

*destroyed living beings,  
took the not-given,  
indulged in sexual misconduct,  
spoke false words,  
spoke malicious words,  
spoke harsh words,  
spoke frivolous words,  
was covetous,  
had a mind of ill will,  
held wrong views,*

*after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell’—this, too, I grant him.*

But when he says thus: *‘Truly it is, sir, that all those who  
destroy living beings,  
take the not-given,  
indulge in sexual misconduct,  
speak false words,  
speak malicious words,  
speak harsh words,  
speak frivolous words,  
are covetous,  
have a mind of ill will,  
hold wrong views,*

*after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell’—this I do not grant him.*

And when he says thus: *‘Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false’—this, too, I do not grant him.*

And when he thus obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that *‘Only this is true, all else is false’—this, too, I do not grant him.*

What is the reason for this?

Because, Ānanda, the Tathāgata’s knowledge of **the great analysis of karma** is otherwise.

### Rejected: “There is no bad karma”

**14** (2) Concerning this, Ānanda, when a recluse or brahmin says thus: *‘Truly it is, sir, that there are no bad deeds, there is no result of misconduct’—this I do not grant him.*

But when he says thus: *‘For I saw a person who  
destroyed living beings,  
took the not-given,  
indulged in sexual misconduct,  
spoke false words,  
spoke malicious words,  
spoke harsh words,  
spoke frivolous words,  
was covetous,  
had a mind of ill will,  
held wrong views,*

*after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a happy destination, in heaven’—This I grant him.*

But when he says thus: *‘Truly it is, sir, that all those who  
destroy living beings,*

take the not-given,  
 indulge in sexual misconduct,  
 speak false words,  
 speak malicious words,  
 speak harsh words,  
 speak frivolous words,  
 are covetous,  
 have a mind of ill will,  
 hold wrong views,

after death, when the body has broken up, after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a happy destination, in heaven' [213]—this I do not grant him.

And when he says thus: 'Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false'—this, too, I do not grant him.

And when he thus obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that 'Only this is true, all else is false'—this, too, I do not grant him.

What is the reason for this?

Because, Ānanda, the Tathāgata's knowledge of the great analysis of karma is otherwise.

### Accepted: "There is good karma"

**15** (3) Concerning this, Ānanda, when a recluse or brahmin says thus: 'Truly it is, sir, that there are good deeds; there is the result of good conduct'—this I grant him.

And when he says thus: 'For I saw an individual here who  
 refrained from destroying living beings,  
 refrained from taking the not-given,  
 refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
 refrained from speaking false words,  
 refrained from speaking malicious words,  
 refrained from speaking harsh words,  
 refrained from speaking frivolous words,  
 was not covetous,  
 had a mind without ill will,  
 held right views,

after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a happy destination, in heaven—this, too, I grant him.

When he says thus: 'Truly it is, sir, that all those who  
 refrain from destroying living beings,  
 refrain from taking the not-given,  
 refrain from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
 refrain from speaking false words,  
 refrain from speaking malicious words,  
 refrain from speaking harsh words,  
 refrain from speaking frivolous words,  
 are not covetous,  
 have a mind without ill will,  
 hold right views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a happy destination, in heaven'—this, I do not grant him.

But when he says thus: 'Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false'—this, too, I do not grant him.

When he thus he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that *'Only this is true, all else is false'*—this, too, I do not grant him.

What is the reason for this?

Because, Ānanda, the Tathāgata's knowledge of the great analysis of karma is otherwise.

### Rejected: "There is no good karma"

**16** (4) Concerning this, Ānanda, when a recluse or brahmin says thus: *'Truly it is, sir, that there are no good deeds, there is no result of good conduct'*—this I do not grant him.

But when he says thus: *'For I saw an individual who refrained from destroying living beings, refrained from taking the not-given, refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct, refrained from speaking false words, refrained from speaking malicious words, refrained from speaking harsh words, refrained from speaking frivolous words, was not covetous, had a mind without ill will, held right views,*

*after death, when the body had broken up, re-appeared in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell'*—this, I grant him.

When he says thus: *'Truly it is, sir, that all those who refrain from destroying living beings, refrain from taking the not-given, refrain from indulging in sexual misconduct, refrain from speaking false words, refrain from speaking malicious words, refrain from speaking harsh words, refrain from speaking frivolous words, are not covetous, have a mind without ill will, hold right views,*

*after death, when the body has broken up, re-appear in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell'*—this I do not grant him.

And when he says thus: **[214]** *'Those who know thus, know rightly; those who know otherwise, their knowledge is false'*—this, too, I do not grant him.

When he thus he obstinately holds on to and tenaciously clings on to what he himself has known, what he himself has seen, what he himself has understood, expressing that *'Only this is true, all else is false'*—this, too, I do not grant him.

What is the reason for this?

Because, Ānanda, the Tathāgata's knowledge of the great analysis of karma is otherwise.

## THE GREAT ANALYSIS OF KARMA<sup>47</sup>

### Karma that is inoperative [unwholesome] and appears inoperative<sup>48</sup>

- 17** (1) Concerning this, Ānanda, that person who *here [in this life]*  
 destroys life,  
 takes the not-given,  
 indulges in sexual misconduct,  
 speaks false words,  
 speaks malicious words,  
 speaks harsh words,  
 speaks frivolous words,  
 is covetous,  
 has a mind of ill will,  
 holds wrong views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell<sup>49</sup>—

- (a) *either he has earlier on [in a previous life] done a bad deed that results in painful feelings;*  
 (b) *or, later on [later in this life] he has done a bad deed that results in painful feelings;*  
 (c) *or, at the time of death he has undertaken and established a wrong views.<sup>50</sup>*

As such, after death, *when the body has broken up, re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.<sup>51</sup>*

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<sup>47</sup> *Mahā kamma,vibhaṅga*. This is where the great analysis of karma actually begins. It is this section that gives this sutta its title.

<sup>48</sup> That is, unwholesome karma bringing unwholesome results. This is a strong unwholesome karma (incapable of good result), but the result of which will precede the results of weaker unwholesome karma (eg a person kills living beings, and is reborn in hell: his action is inoperative (incapable of good result) because it is unwholesome, and it appears inoperative because since he is reborn there, it seems to be the cause of this, MA 5:50). It is important here, in these 4 statements (the great analysis of karma) to understand that it is not that (2) “unwholesome karma *results* in wholesome karma” nor that (4) “wholesome karma *results* in unwholesome karma” (which are against the basic law of karma that an unwholesome deed has the potential or seed of unwholesome result, etc), but rather that such karma *are followed by* different kinds of results depending on the new circumstances. This is the crux of the teaching of this sutta.

<sup>49</sup> “Although the Pali seems to be saying that he was necessarily reborn in hell on account of some action other than the one he was seen performing, this should not be understood as an apodictic [absolutely certain] pronouncement but only as a statement of possibility. That is, while it may be true that he was reborn in hell because of a bad action he did earlier or later or because of wrong view.” (M:ÑB 1346 n1231). See foll n.

<sup>50</sup> These are the 3 kinds of karma classified according to time of taking effect. See **(Kamma) Nidāna S** (A 3.33/1:134-136) = SD 4.14, on causes and kinds of karma. See **Nibbedhika,pariyāya S** (A 6.63.12c) = SD 6.11. See also **Visuddhi,magga** where these 3 types of karma are respectively named as *diṭṭha,dhamma vedanīya kamma, upapajja,vedanīya kamma* and *apara,pariyāya vedanīya kamma*—and a fourth, *ahosi kamma*, lapsed or ineffectual karma (Vism 19.14/601). See Vism:Ñ 19.14/696 n2. The first two kinds of karma may be without karmic result if the circumstances required for their ripening are missing, or because of the presence of a stronger counteractive karma; as such, they are called *ahosi,kamma*: cf **Loṇa,phala S** (A 3.99) = SD 3.5. The next birth actually depends on the dying person’s last thought-moment. As such, one’s dying thoughts should be to recollect or reflect on the good deeds one has done: giving, moral virtue, lovingkindness, etc. The **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62 = SD 3.11) closes with the remark that for one who develops and often cultivates the Breath Meditation, “even the last breath leaves with your knowledge, not without it” (M 62.30/1:426)—that is, one dies mindfully with right view. See Vism 8.24/-291 f. On academic attempts to show that orig there are only 2 kinds of karma (present and future), and its rebuttal, see Analayo 2005 at M 3:214. See also prev n.

<sup>51</sup> Devadatta, for example, persuaded prince Ajātasattu to murder his own father, Bimbisāra (a streamwinner) (DA 1:135-137), and thrice attempted to murder the Buddha himself and once succeeded in wounding him, and caused a

And because he has here  
 destroyed life,  
 taken the not-given,  
 indulged in sexual misconduct,  
 spoken false words,  
 spoken malicious words,  
 spoken harsh words,  
 spoken frivolous words,  
 been covetous,  
 a mind of ill will,  
 held wrong views,

he will experience their result either here and now, or in the next life, or in a subsequent life.

### Karma that is inoperative but appears operative [wholesome]<sup>52</sup>

**18** (2) Concerning this, Ānanda, that person who here  
 destroys life,  
 takes the not-given,  
 indulges in sexual misconduct,  
 speaks false words,  
 speaks malicious words,  
 speaks harsh words,  
 speaks frivolous words,  
 is covetous,  
 has a mind of ill will,  
 holds wrong views,

re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven<sup>53</sup>—

- (a) *either he has earlier on [in a previous life] done a good deed that results in pleasant feelings;*
- (b) *or, later on [in this life] he has done a good deed that results in pleasant feelings;*
- (c) *or, at the time of death he has undertaken and established right view.*

As such, after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

And because he has here  
 destroyed living beings,  
 took the not-given,  
 indulged in sexual misconduct,  
 spoke false words,  
 spoke malicious words,  
 spoke harsh words,  
 spoke frivolous words,  
 was covetous,  
 had a mind of ill will,  
 held wrong views,

---

schism in the order (V 2:191-198)—these last two deeds are certain to lead to rebirth in hell. On Devadatta, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples* lecture 7: “The Buddha’s Bad Karma” (2002) §§5-14.

<sup>52</sup> That is, unwholesome karma bringing wholesome results. This is a wholesome karma (which appears capable of good result) is followed by unwholesome death-proximate karma that makes the former inoperative of immediate good result (eg a person kills living beings, and is reborn in heaven: his action is inoperative (incapable of good result) because it is unwholesome, yet it appears operative because he is reborn in heaven, MA 3:50). See Intro (2).

<sup>53</sup> A good example here is that of Coppertooth the public executioner, **Tamba,dāṭhika Cora,ghātaka** (DhA 8.1), who after a bloody career as a bandit, killed his own comrades and then became executioner of criminals for fifty years. He met the venerable Sāriputta whose teachings uplifted his mind, lightening the burden of his bad karma so that he attained heavenly rebirth (DhA 8.1/2:202 ff).

he will experience their result either here destroyed life,  
 taken the not-given,  
 indulged in sexual misconduct,  
 spoken false words,  
 spoken malicious words,  
 spoken harsh words,  
 spoken frivolous words,  
 been covetous,  
 a mind of ill will,  
 held wrong views,  
 and now, or in the next life, or in a subsequent life.

### Karma that is operative and appears operative<sup>54</sup>

- 19** (3) Concerning this, Ānanda, that person who here refrains from destroying living beings, refrains from taking the not-given, refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct, refrains from speaking false words, refrains from speaking malicious words, refrains from speaking harsh words, refrains from speaking frivolous words, is not covetous, has a mind without ill will, holds right views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven<sup>55</sup>—

- (a) *either he has earlier on [in a previous life] done a good deed that results in pleasant feelings;*  
 (b) *or, later on [in this life] he has done a good deed that results in pleasant feelings;*  
 (c) *or, at the time of death he has undertaken and established right view.*

As such, after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a happy destination, in heaven.

And because he has here

refrained from destroying life, [215]  
 refrained from taking the not-given,  
 refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
 refrained from speaking false words,  
 refrained from speaking malicious words,  
 refrained from speaking harsh words,  
 refrained from speaking frivolous words,  
 not been covetous,  
 a mind without ill will,  
 held right view,

he will experience their result either here and now, or in the next life, or in a subsequent life.

<sup>54</sup> That is, wholesome karma bringing wholesome results. See Intro (2).

<sup>55</sup> An example here is that of king Pasenadi of Kosala. The **Anāgata,vaṁsa** says that he is a Bodhisattva and will become the 4<sup>th</sup> future Buddha (JPTS 1886:37). On Pasenadi, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples* lecture 8: “The Thundering Silence” (2002) §19.

Karma that is operative but appears inoperative<sup>56</sup>

- 20 (4) Concerning this, Ānanda, that person who *here*  
 refrains from destroying living beings,  
 refrains from taking the not-given,  
 refrains from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
 refrains from speaking false words,  
 refrains from speaking malicious words,  
 refrains from speaking harsh words,  
 refrains from speaking frivolous words,  
 is not covetous,  
 has a mind without ill will,  
 holds right views,

after death, when the body has broken up, re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell<sup>57</sup>—

- (a) *either he has earlier on [in a previous life] done a bad deed that results in painful feelings;*  
 (b) *or, later on [in this life] he has done a bad deed that results in painful feelings;*  
 (c) *or, at the time of death he has undertaken and established wrong views.*

As such, after death, when the body has broken up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

- But because he has here  
 refrained from destroying life,  
 refrained from taking the not-given,  
 refrained from indulging in sexual misconduct,  
 refrained from speaking false words,  
 refrained from speaking malicious words,  
 refrained from speaking harsh words,  
 refrained from speaking frivolous words,  
 not been covetous,  
 a mind without ill will,  
 held right view,

he will experience their result either here and now, or in the next life, or in a subsequent life.

Conclusion

- 21 Thus, Ānanda,  
 there is karma that is inoperative and appears inoperative (*abhabba abhabb'ābhāsa kamma*);  
 there is karma that is inoperative but appears operative (*abhabba bhabb'ābhāsa kamma*);  
 there is karma that is operative and appears operative (*bhabba bhabb'ābhāsa kamma*);  
 there is karma that is operative but appears inoperative (*bhabba abhabb'ābhāsa kamma*).<sup>58</sup>

This is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Ānanda joyfully approved of the Blessed One's word.

— evaṃ —

<sup>56</sup> That is, wholesome karma bringing unwholesome results. See Intro (2).

<sup>57</sup> An example here is **Mallikā**, queen of king Pasenadi. She lived a virtuous life of giving, keeping the five precepts, and the 8 precepts and so on. However, in a moment of indiscretion, she had sexual intercourse with a dog in the bath-house. When the king suspected this, she conjured up an elaborate lie. These acts weighed heavily on her mind to her last moments. As a result she spent seven days in Avīci hell. However, her own habitual goodness then brought her rebirth in Tusita heaven (DhA 9.6/3:119-122).

<sup>58</sup> On “capable” (*bhabba*) & “incapable” (*abhhabba*), see Intro (2) above.

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