

Titth'āyatana Sutta

The Discourse on Sectarian Tenets

Also called **Tittha Sutta** (the Discourse on the Sectarials)

[The three wrong views regarding karma]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.61/1:173-177)

Translated and abridged with notes by Piya Tan ©2003

1 Is everything due to karma?

The Titth'āyatana Sutta, whose main idea—the wrong view that all one's pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings are due to past karma—are also found in **the Sīvaka Sutta**¹ and **the Devadaha Sutta**,² is an example of early Buddhist apologetics, that is, a defence of the teachings.³ In the Titth'āyatana Sutta, the Buddha answers the following doctrines or notions:

- (1) determinism (everything is due to past action) (*pubbe,kata,hetu*) [§2],
- (2) theism (everything is due to God) (*issara,nimmāṇa,hetu*) [§3], and
- (3) fatalism (no causality) (*ahetu,paccaya*) [§4].

The first wrong view, determinism, is ascribed by the Buddhists to the Jains; but in **the Sāmañña,-phala S** (D 2),⁴ their leader, Nigaṇṭha Naṭaputta, is ascribed a different set of teachings. The second wrong view, theism, is common among the brahmins. The third wrong view, fatalism (that denies causality) was taught by Makkhali Gosāla, a contemporary of the Buddha who held that all things are fated.⁵ In our times, fatalism would include luck and chance. These doctrines, together with the doctrine of non-action (or inaction), belong to the group of “wrong views with a fixed destiny” (*niyata micchā,diṭṭhi*), that is, a wrong view leading to a bad rebirth (Tkp 168).

These three notions all fall under the category of “the doctrine of non-action” (*akiriya,vāda*) [§1]. The Buddha's basic rebuttal is that if any of these three notions were true, then no one would be morally responsible for their commission and omission of deeds, and would follow the ten unwholesome course of actions (*akusala kamma,patha*, D 3:269, 290; A 5:264) [§2], that is, the breaking of the precepts through the three doors (body, speech and mind).

Although the potential results of past karma cannot be erased by present actions, the Buddha teaches that present **volition** conditions future karma. Thus the Buddha attributes profound moral significance to human free will and effort. In **the Kesa,kambala Sutta** (A 3.135) the Buddha declares the teachings of Makkhali Gosāla—that “there is neither cause nor condition” for the morality, and that everything is fated (D 1.19/1:53 f)—to be the meanest (*paṭikiṭṭha*), destructive to humans like fishes swimming into a fish-trap that covers the river-mouth. For this reason, in the same sutta, the Buddha also declares that his is a teaching of karma (*kamma,vāda*), a teaching of the efficacy of action (*kiriya,vāda*), a teaching of (spiritual) effort (*virīya,vāda*) (A 3:135/1:236-38).

The central idea of the Titth'āyatana Sutta—that everything is due to past action, or determinism (*pubbe,kata,hetu*) [§2]—is also found in **the Sīvaka Sutta**⁶ and **the Devadaha Sutta**.⁷ The Buddha's response to this false view clearly shows that the dependent arising as he taught it is one that spreads over

¹ S 36.21/4:230 f = SD 5.6.

² M 101/2:214-228 = SD 18.

³ The view that everything is due to past karma (*pubbaka,hetu,vāda*) is often criticized and refuted in various ways by the Buddha: **Devadaha S** (M 101/2:214-223) where it is ascribed to the Jains, **Sīvaka S** (S 36.21/4:230f) & **Titth'āyatana S** (A 3.61/1:173 f). A formal refutation of *pubbala,hetu,vāda* is found **Kathā,vatthu** (Kvu 17.3/545 f = Kvu:SRD 314 f).

⁴ D 2.28-30/1:57 & nn = SD 8.10. For rebuttal of the Jain view, see **Devadaha S** (M 101) = SD 18.4..

⁵ D 2.20/1:53, M 30.2/1:198, 36.5/1:238, 36.48/1:250, 60.21/1:407, 76.53/1:524, 77.6/2:2 ff.

⁶ S 36.21/4:230 f = SD 5.6.

⁷ M 101/2:214-228 = SD 18.

the three periods of time (past, present and future). The view that what one feels now is merely due to what one did in the past is attributed by the Devadaha Sutta to the Jains, and the Buddha shows the errors of such a view.

2 The three-life dependent arising

The Tittth'āyatana declares that the view—“Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral, all that is caused by past action [done in past lives]” [§§1-2] is a “doctrine of non-action” (*akiriya, vāda*), that is, a wrong view. On the basis of this has statement, some have been led to interpret that feeling (*vedanā*) is *not* caused by karma-formations (*saṅkhāra*) done in a past life. Therefore, they argue, the link called “formations” (*saṅkhāra*) in the dependent arising formula cannot mean karma-formations of a previous life. This, as **Brahmavamso** has pointed out, is clearly a misreading of the Sutta.⁸

This doctrine of non-action—all that a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral, is caused by past action—is, in **the Deva,daha Sutta** (M 101), attributed to the Nirgranthas (the Jains). They held that all suffering one experiences in this life is to bad karma from a previous life. Indeed, this Sutta clarifies this theory as meaning that *everything* that one feels now is due to what one has done in a past life. The Devadaha Sutta actually disproves this theory.

The Buddha denies that everything that one feels—happiness, suffering, or neutral feeling—is due to what one did in a past life, they are due to karma-formations of a past life. This should be obvious, as some of what one feels is caused by karma-formations; some caused by past karma-formations earlier in this life; and some caused by karma-formations being performed now. What the Buddha is denying is that *all* happiness or suffering or neutral feelings are caused by karma from a previous life.

It should be pointed out that the Buddha is here referring to *the type* of feeling, rather than to *feeling itself*. It is true that whichever one of the three types of feeling that one experiences, happiness or suffering or neutral, is not always due to karma from a past life. But it is also true that the situation whereby one can experience feeling at all, the fact that feeling (*vedanā*) exists, is due to karma from a past life.

A simile might make this clear. This situation that you possess a TV on a public holiday is due to your having purchased it on some previous day. Its presence, as it were, is due to karma from a past day. But whichever one of the three available channels that appears on the screen—Channel Happiness, or Channel Suffering, or Channel Neutral—is not always due to what you did on some previous day. The content is not at all due to what you did on some previous day: the content is not due to karma from the past.

In the same way, the Buddha states that the existence of feeling in this life is due to karma formations done in a⁹ previous life. But this particular type of feeling—happiness, suffering or neutral feeling—is not always due to karma from a previous life.

Once the distinction is made between feeling (*vedanā*) and the contents of feeling (happiness, suffering or neutral), it is clear that the Tittth'āyatana Sutta does not state that feeling is not caused by karma-formations from a previous life.¹⁰ This does not disprove that orthodox understanding of dependent arising as spanning three lives.¹¹

Indeed, in a later part of the Tittth'āyatana Sutta, dependent arising is presented from a unique starting point [§9]:

Dependent on the six elements,¹² bhikshus, there is descent into the womb;¹³
When there is descent, there is name-and-form;¹⁴

⁸ See *Dhamma Journal* 4,2 July 2003:66 f.

⁹ Original text has “the.”

¹⁰ A 3.61/1:173-177 = SD 6.8.

¹¹ See **Dependent Arising** = SD 5.16 (10).

¹² That is, earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness.

¹³ “Descent into the womb,” *gabbhassāvakkanti*. See §9n ad loc.

¹⁴ See §9n ad loc.

With name-and-form as condition, there are six sense-bases;
 With the six sense-bases as condition there is contact;
 With contact as condition, there is feeling.

*Channam bhikkhave dhātūnam upādāya gabbhassāvakkanti hoti,
 okkantiyā sati nāma,rūpaṃ,
 nāma,rūpa,paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ,
 saḷāyatana,paccayā phassa,
 phassa,paccayā vedanā.*

(A 3.61.9/1:176)

Thus the Buddha clearly shows that the arising of feeling is due to the descent of the being to be born into the womb. This passage should now be compared to the definition of *nāma,rūpa* in **the Mahā,nidāna Sutta** (D 15):

“It is said: **‘With consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form.’**
 Ānanda, how consciousness conditions name-and-form should be known in this manner:
 If there were no consciousness to descend into a mother’s womb, would name-and-form take shape in the womb?”¹⁵
 “Certainly not, venerable sir.”

*“Viññāṇa,paccayā nāma,rūpaṃ ti iti kho pan’etaṃ vuttaṃ.’
 Tad-Ānanda iminā petaṃ pariyāyena veditabbam, yathā viññāṇa,paccayā nāma,rūpaṃ
 Viññāṇaṃ ca hi Ānanda mātu,kucchismiṃ na okkamissatha, api nu kho nāma,rūpaṃ
 mātu,kucchismiṃ samuccissathā ti?”*
 “No hetam bhante.”

(D 15.21/2:63) = SD 5.17

This passage clearly equates the descent of the being-to-be-born (*gabbha*) of the Tittth’āyatana Sutta with the descent of rebirth-linking (*paṭisandhi*) consciousness of the Mahā,nidāna Sutta. Thus feeling is said in the Tittth’āyatana Sutta to be caused by the first consciousness arising in this life, whose own cause can only be found in a previous life. As such, the Tittth’āyatana Sutta, far from supporting the idea that dependent arising does not span more than one life, actually clearly proves the opposite! The fact that feeling exists at all is due to ignorance (*avijjā*) and karma-formations (*saṅkhāra*) from the previous life, and dependent arising, as taught by the Buddha, does indeed span more than one life.¹⁶

3 Sīvaka Sutta

In **the Sīvaka Sutta** (S 36.21) the Buddha make an important statement, in reply to Sīvaka (who might have been a physician), that karma is *not* the only factor conditioning our experiences: if that were so, then karma might be considered as fatalism. What we experience may be caused by any of these eight

¹⁵ Cf **Tittth’āyatana S** (A 3.61) where the Buddha declares: “Based on the six elements, there is descent into the womb; | (On account of) such a descent, there is name-and-form; | With name-and-form as condition, there is contact; | With contact as condition, there is feeling. | Now, it is for one who feels that I make known [the 4 noble truths]” (A 3.61.9/1:176). This clearly shows that feeling arises with the descent of the gandharva (rebirth consciousness) into the womb. However, this is not a common interpretation of *viññāṇa-nāma,rūpa* dyad, where “*viññāṇa* in this context became the consciousness that descends into the mother’s womb at conception, while *nāma-rūpa* became the body complex that takes shape and, after developing sense-organs (*saḷāyatana*), experiences contact (*phassa*) and so on.” (Bucknell 1999:339). More commonly, *viññāṇa* is “the consummation of the six types of consciousness associated with the sense organs, which makes the version read like an account of the psychological process of sensory perception.” (Bucknell 1999: 327): see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18.16-18/1:111-113). See discussion on **nāma,rūpa** in the essay “Dependent Arising” = SD 5.11 Introd.

¹⁶ These same arguments are found at **Dependent Arising** = SD 5.16(10).

factors, that is to say, our feelings (*vedanā*), that is, disease and pain, may arise from any of the following factors [with the Commentary within brackets]:¹⁷

- (1) bile (*pitta*) disorders;¹⁸
- (2) phlegm (*semha*) disorders;
- (3) wind (*vāta*) disorders;
- (4) a combination or an imbalance of the above three (*sannipātika*);
- (5) change in the weather, climate and season (*utu,pariṇāma*);
- (6) stress of unusual behaviour (*visama.parihāra*) [such as sitting or standing too long, wrong food, going out at night, or being stung by a snake, etc];
- (7) assault (*opakkamika*, Skt *upakrama*, “sudden attack”),¹⁹ ie external agencies: generally violence and trauma (injury) inflicted on the body [in connection with imprisonment, flogging, being arrested, etc].²⁰
- (8) result of karma (*kamma,vipāka*). (S 36.21/4:230 f)

These eight factors probably later became systematized as the **five natural orders** (*pañca,niyāma*):

- (1) *utu,niyāma*, “the order of heat,” that is, the physical inorganic order, physical laws, temperature;
- (2) *bīja,niyāma*, “the order of seeds,” that is, physical organic order, biological laws, genetics;
- (3) *citta,niyāma*, “the order of consciousness,” that is, the function of consciousness, mental process;
- (4) *kamma,niyāma*, “the law of karma,” that is, the order of action and result, moral causality;
- (5) *dhamma,niyāma*, “the order of the Dharma,” the general law of cause and effect, conditionality; certain events connected with the Dharma, such as the lives of the Buddhas.

(DA 2:432; DhsA 272)

4 Dialogues on karma

The (**Kamma,vāda**) **Bhūmija Sutta** (S 12.25) relates how the monk Bhūmija asks the venerable Sāriputta regarding these four questions on karma (*kamma,vāda*) in connection with pleasure and pain:

1. Are pleasure and pain created by oneself (*sayañ,katañ*)?
2. Are pleasure and pain created by another (*parañ,katañ*)?
3. Are pleasure and pain created by both oneself and another (*sayañ,katañ ca parañ,katañ ca*) [ie partial eternalism (*ekacca sassata,vāda*, D 1:17-21)]?
4. Are pleasure and pain created by neither oneself nor another, but fortuitously (*adhicca,samuppannāñ*), that is, by chance, without cause (D 2:28 f)?

Sāriputta answers by saying,

Brother, the Blessed One has said that pleasure and pain arise through dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppannāñ*). Dependent on what? Dependent on contact. *In each of the four cases*, it is impossible that they will experience (anything) without contact.²¹

¹⁷ These 8 factors are actually the ancient aetiology of disease (ie dis-ease). While some, says Sīvaka, think that all diseases are caused by karma, the Buddha replies by giving these 8 causes. The list is repeated in **Samāṇa-m-ācala S** (A 4.87/2:87) in connection with disease, and (**Samāṇa**) **Sukhumala S** (A 5:104/ 3:131), where one disease-free (*appābādha*) is said to be one free from these 8 conditions; cf Nm 370. See also Miln 134-148, where Nāgasena discusses the 8 causes of suffering in the context of the Buddha’s lack of moral vice. See Zysk 1998:30.

¹⁸ The foll 3 are called “humours” (*dosa*), ie the *tri,doṣa* (Skt) of Ayurvedic medicine. See Zysk 1998:29 f.

¹⁹ “Assault,” *opakkamika*, also “torture.” Such pains can also come from self-inflicted torture as in the phrase: “painful, sharp, piercing pains due to (self-inflicted) torture” (*opakkamikā dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā*) (M 1:92, 2:218 f).

²⁰ This is according to Ayurvedic medicine (Caraka Saṁhitā Sūtra,sthāna 20.3-4; Suśruta Saṁhitā Sūtra,sthāna 1.24-25).

²¹ S 12.25/2:38 f; see also S 12.24, 26. “Contact” (*phassa*) here means “sense-impression:” in cpds, it becomes *samphassa*, as in eye-contact (or eye-impression, etc), ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, mind-contact (M 9.44-47/1:52). Understandably, *phassa* is not physical impact, but a mental factor (*cetasika*) and belongs to the formation aggregate (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*). In **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), Mahā Kaccāna declares

The Acela (Kassapa) Sutta (S 12.17) contains an important dialogue on karma between the Buddha and Kassapa the naked ascetic. Kassapa asks the Buddha these four questions on how karma brings suffering and the Buddha answers (both paraphrased) as follows:

1. “Is suffering created by oneself (*sayaṃ, kataṃ*)?”
 Answer: To say that “the one who does is the one who feels (the result)” implies that “this self-created suffering has existed since the beginning” (*ādito sato sayaṃ, kataṃ dukkhan ti*): this amounts to **eternalism**.
2. “Is suffering created by another (*paraṃ, kataṃ*)?”
 Answer: To say that “the one who does is one, the one who feels is another” implies that suffering is created by another (ie one is not responsible for one’s actions): this amounts to **annihilationism**.

Kassapa, avoiding both these extremes, the Tathagata teaches **the Dharma in the middle** (*majjhena dhammam*) [that is, interdependent arising]:

- with ignorance as condition, (volitional) formations arise;
- with formations as condition, consciousness arises;
- with consciousness as condition, name-and-form arises;
- with name-and-form as condition, the six sense-bases arise;
- with the six sense-bases as condition, contact arises;
- with contact as condition, feeling arises;
- with feeling as condition, craving arise;
- with craving as condition, clinging arises;
- with clinging as condition becoming arises;
- with becoming as condition, birth arises;
- with birth as condition, there arise decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, anguish and despair.

—Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. (S 12.17/2:20 f)²²

5 Results of karma

In **the Deva, dūta Sutta** (M 130) when the evil man was brought before king Yama, he declares: “This evil deed was done by you yourself, and you yourself will feel its results!” (M 130.4/3:180). This is known in modern ethics as “the natural consequence of one’s deeds” (Fujita 1982:156), a constant principle found in early Buddhism. No unchanging soul is involved in this scheme of things. **The Mahā Puṇṇama Sutta** (M 109 = S 22.82) records the case of a monk who asks, “So, it seems that form...feeling... perception...formations...consciousness is not self. What self, then, will deeds by the not-self affect? (*anatta, katāni kammāni kam attānaṃ phusissanti*).” Then, the Buddha, reading the monk’s mind, rebukes his foolishness:

“It is possible, monks, that some dull and ignorant empty person, his mind dominated by craving, might think he could outdo the Teacher’s Teaching, thinking thus: ‘So, it seems that form...feeling...perception...formations...consciousness is not self. What self, then, will deeds by the not-self affect?’ Now, monks, you have been trained by me through questioning (*paṭipucchā*) now and again in various teachings.

that dependent *on the sense-organ and sense-object, sense-consciousness arises*: “the meeting of these three is contact. With contact as condition, there is feeling. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, that one mentally proliferates. With what one has mentally proliferated as the source, perceptions and notions (born of) mental proliferation beset a person in respect of past, future and present *sense-objects through the sense-organs*” (M 18.16/1:111 f; see M:NB 1205 n232) = SD 6.14.

²² Cf **Naḷa, kalāpiya S** (S 12.67/2:112-115) where Mahā Koṭṭhita asks Sāriputta the four question in regards to each of interdependent links from aging and death up to consciousness.

What do you think, monks, is form...feeling...perception...formations...consciousness permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, venerable sir."

"Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?"

"Suffering, venerable sir."

"Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self'?"

"No, venerable sir."

(M 109.14-15/3P19 f= S 22.82/3:104)

The Tittth'āyatana Sutta not only makes an important statement on karma, but also gives an important and interesting variation of the practice of **the focus of mindfulness** (*satipaṭṭhāna*):

	<u>Station of mindfulness</u>
[§6] The six elements (<i>dhātu</i>).	= the body
[§7] The six bases of contact (<i>phass'āyatana</i>)	= feelings
[§8] The 18 mental examinations (<i>mano,pavicāra</i>)	= mind
[§9] The four noble truths (<i>ariya,sacca</i>)	= mind-objects (<i>dhamma</i>)

There is an important focus on the contemplation of feelings (*vedanā'nupassanā*) [§9] that introduces the Four noble truths [§§10-13] which closes the sutta. In fact, here we find a delightful variation of the exposition of the noble truths in terms of dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*), first an abridged one [§9], then the full cycle [§10].

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The Discourse on Sectarian Doctrines

(A 3.61/1:173-177)

Three common wrong views

1 Monks, there are three sectarian doctrines²³ which when fully examined, investigated, discussed by the wise, even if taken in any other way,²⁴ will remain a **doctrine of non-action** (*akiriya, vāda*).²⁵ What are the three?

(a) There are, monks, some recluses and brahmins who teach and hold this view: “Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral, all that is caused by past action [done in past lives] (*pubbe kata, hetu*).”²⁶

(b) There are, monks, others who teach and hold this view: “Whatever a person experiences... all that is caused by God’s creation (*issara, nimmāna, hetu*).”²⁷

(c) There are, monks, others who teach and hold this view: “Whatever a person experiences... all that is uncaused and unconditioned (*ahetu appaccaya*).”²⁸

The ten unwholesome courses of action

2 (a) Now, monks, I approached those recluses and brahmins who held that “Whatever a person experiences, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral, all that is caused by past action” and said to them: “Is it true, as they say, that you venerable sirs teach and hold *such a view*?”

Being asked thus by me, they said, “Yes.”

[174] Then I said this to them, “In that case, venerable sirs, it is due to **past action** [done here and in past lives],

there will be those who harm life,
there will be those who take the not-given,
there will be those who are incelibate [ie who break the rule of celibacy],
there will be speakers of false speech,
there will be speakers of divisive speech,
there will be speakers of harsh speech,
there will be speakers of useless talk,
there will be the covetous,
there will be the malevolent,
there will be those with false views.²⁹

²³ “Sectarian doctrines,” *titt’h’āyatanāni*. M 1:483,21,23; A 1:173, 175; Nc 154; Vbh 145, 367; AA 2:272; DhA 2:63.

²⁴ “Even if taken in any other way,” *param pi gantvā*. I have taken the Pali as it is *pace* Comy which glosses it as *yañ kiñci paramparañ gantvā pi*, “even if adopted because of tradition” (A:ÑB 61).

²⁵ **Sāmañña, phala S** ascribes the doctrine of non-action to Pūraṇa Kassapa (D 2.17/1:52 f). “Although on first encounter the view seems to rest on materialistic premises... there is canonical evidence that Pūraṇa Kassapa subscribed to a fatalistic doctrine. Thus his moral antinomianism probably follows from the view that all action is predestined in ways that abrogate the ascription of moral responsibility to its agent.” (M:ÑB 1264 n629). See Basham 1951:84.

²⁶ This determinist view is ascribed by the Buddhists to the Jains; but cf **Sāmaññaphala S** (D 2.28-30/1:57 & nn), where Niṅaṅṭha Naṭaputta is ascribed a different set of teachings. For rebuttal, see **Devadaha S** (M 101).

²⁷ This theist view is common among the brahmins.

²⁸ This fatalist view (that denies causality) was taught by Makkhali Gosāla, a contemporary of the Buddha who held that all things are fated (D 2.20/1:53, M 30.2/1:198, 36.5/1:238, 36.48/1:250, 60.21/1:407, 76.53/1:524, 77.6/2:2 ff). This doctrine, together with the doctrine of non-action (or inaction) belongs to the “wrong views with a fixed destiny” (*niyata micchā, diṭṭhi*), ie a wrong view leading to a bad rebirth (Tkp 168).

²⁹ In **Devadaha S** (M 101) the Buddha uses other arguments to counter the Jain notion that everything we experience are due to past karma.

Furthermore, monks, one who falls back on past action as the decisive factor will lack the desire and effort for doing this and not doing that. Since one lacks true and real³⁰ ground for doing or not doing something, one dwells confused and unwary—such a one cannot with justice [in accordance with Dharma]³¹ call oneself “recluse”.

This, monks, was my first refutation justified [in accordance with Dharma] of such teachings and views of those recluses and brahmins.³²

3 (b) Then, monks, I approached those recluses and brahmins who held that “Whatever a person experiences...all that is caused by **God’s creation**” and said to them: “Is it true, as they say, that you venerable sirs teach and hold *such a view*?”

Being asked thus by me, they said, “Yes.”

Then I said this to them, “In that case, venerable sirs, due to God’s creation, there will be those who **follow the ten unwholesome course of actions**.

Furthermore, monks, one who falls back on God’s creation as the decisive factor will lack the desire and effort for doing this and not doing that. Since one lacks true and real³³ ground for doing or not doing something, one dwells confused and unwary—such a one cannot with justice [in accordance with Dharma] call oneself “recluse”.

This, monks, was my second refutation justified [in accordance with Dharma] of such teachings and views of those recluses and brahmins. [175]

4 (c) Then, monks, I approached those recluses and brahmins who held that “Whatever a person experiences...all that is **uncaused and unconditioned**”³⁴ and said to them: “Is it true, as they say, that you venerable sirs teach and hold *such a view*?”

Being asked thus by me, they said, “Yes.”

Then I said this to them, “In that case, venerable sirs, with neither cause nor condition, there will be those who **follow the ten unwholesome course of actions**.

Furthermore, monks, one who falls back on the notion that “there is neither cause nor condition” as the decisive factor will lack the desire and effort for doing this and not doing that. Since one lacks true and real³⁵ ground for doing or not doing something, one dwells confused and unwary—such a one cannot with justice [in accordance with Dharma] call oneself “recluse”.

This, monks, was my third refutation justified [in accordance with Dharma] of such teachings and views of those recluses and brahmins.

Monks, there are three sectarian doctrines which when fully examined, investigated, discussed by the wise, even if taken in any other way, will remain a doctrine of non-action.

³⁰ “True and real,” *saccato thetato*: also at §§3-4; as at **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22.25/1:138; cf 22.36/1:140); **Yamaka S** (S 22.85.34/3:112); **Anurādha S** (S 22.86.21/3:118 = S 44.2.21/4:384); Vbh 376 f (×4), 382 (× 6); Pug 3.17/38 (×12); Kvu 67 f (×13). Vbh:T tr *staccato thetato* as “firmly as truth” (Vbh:T 487).

³¹ “With justice,” *saha,dhammiko*. Here translated as an adverb (V 1:134; D 1:94, 161; M 1:368, 482; Dhs 1327; DA 1:263). Alt tr “in accordance to the Dharma,” “keeping to the nature of things.” As a noun, “co-religionist, colleague-in-Dharma, sharing the same Dharma” (M 1:64).

³² It is important to note here that the fact that feeling (*vedanā*) exists is due to karma from a past life. However, the contents of such feeling—that is, pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neutral feeling—are not always due to past karma. See §9 where the Buddha explains that our feeling is due to the descent of the being-to-be-born into the womb. Brahmavaṃso gives the following simile: “The situation that you possess a TV on a public holiday is due to you having purchased it on some previous day. Its presence, as it were, is due to *kamma* from a past day. But whichever one of the three available channels that appears on the screen, Channel Happiness or Channel Suffering or Channel Neutral, is not always due to what you did on some previous day. The content is not all due to *kamma* from the past.” (2003b:67). In other words, it is important to make a distinction between *vedanā* as a fact and the contents of *vedanā*. See Brahmavaṃso 2003b:66-69.

³³ “True and real,” *saccato thetato*: see §2 n.

³⁴ This is Makkhali Gosāla’s view, technically known as “circumstantial causation” (*saṅgati,bhāva,hetu*): see **Deva,daha S** (M 101.22(3)/2:222) = SD 18.4, and is criticized at length in **Apaṇṇaka S** (M 60.21/1:407) = SD 35.5.

³⁵ “True and real,” *saccato thetato*: see §2 n.

The four focusses of mindfulness³⁶

5 Now, monks, there is this Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins. And what, monks, is this Dharma...uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins?

(a) They are the six elements (*dhātu*), this Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.

(b) They are the six bases of contact (*phassa'āyatana*)....

(c) They are the eighteen mental examinations (*mano,pavicāra*)....

(d) They are the four noble truths (*ariya,sacca*), this Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.

6 (a) Contemplation of the body. “These **six elements**³⁷ are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and [176] brahmins.” Thus it is said—on what account is this said?

(On account of) these six elements, namely,³⁸

- The earth element;
- The water element;
- The fire element;
- The wind element;
- The space element;
- The consciousness element.

These six elements are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.

7 (b) Contemplation of feelings. “These **six bases of contact** are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.” Thus it is said—on what account is this said?

(On account of) the six bases of contacts, namely,

- The eye as base of contact;
- The ear as base of contact;
- The nose as base of contact;
- The tongue as base of contact;
- The body as base of contact;
- The mind as base of contact;

These six bases of contact are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.

³⁶ These novel four stations of mindfulness are also given in **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140), where however, the four noble truths are replaced by the “4 foundations [for gaining arhathood]” (*adhiṭṭhāna*), ie the foundations of wisdom, of truth, of letting go, and of peace (M 140.11/3:240).

³⁷ AA on the 6 elements as meditation subject (*dhātu,kammaṭṭhāna*): The elements of earth, water, fire, wind are the four primary elements (*mahā,bhūta*). The space elements is a “derived” or secondary form (*upādā,rūpa*), which when mentioned alone, the other types of derived forms (the sense-organs and their objects, etc) are implied. The element of consciousness (*viññāṇa,dhātu*) is mind (*citta*) or the aggregate of **consciousness** (*viññāṇa-k,khandha*). The coexistent feeling is the aggregate of **feeling** (*vedanā-k,khandha*); the coexistent perception is the aggregate of **perception** (*saññā-k,khandha*); the coexistent contact and volition, the aggregate of **formations** (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*). These are the four mental aggregates; the four primaries and the form derived from them are the aggregate of form (*rūpa-k,khandha*). These four mental aggregates are *nāma* (“name” or “mind”) and the aggregate of **form** (*rūpa-k,khandha*) is *rūpa*. As such, there are only these two (dvandva): name and form (*nāma,rūpa*). Other than this, there is neither a substantial being (*satta*) or an abiding soul (*jīva*). Thus, should one understand in brief the meditation subject of the six elements that leads up to arhathood. See **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62) = SD 3.11.

³⁸ Only in this set of 6 are space (*ākāsa*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) are called “elements” (*dhātu*). They are never referred as so on their own.

8 (c) Contemplation of the mind. “These **eighteen kinds of mental examinations**³⁹ are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.” Thus it is said—on what account is this said?

(On account of) the eighteen mental examinations, namely,

Seeing a form with the eye, one examines the form as the basis for pleasure, or for pain, or for neither-pain-nor-pleasure;

Hearing a sound with the ear, one examines the sound...

Smelling a smell with the nose, one examines the smell...

Tasting a taste with the tongue, one examines the taste...

Feeling a touch with the body, one examines the touch...

Cognizing a mental object with the mind, one examines the mental object as the basis for pleasure, or for pain, or for neither-pain-nor-pleasure

These eighteen mental examinations are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.

9 (d) Contemplation of mind-objects. “These **four noble truths** are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.” Thus it is said—on what account is this said?

Dependent on the six elements,⁴⁰ bhikshus, there is descent into the womb;⁴¹

When there is descent, there is name-and-form;⁴²

With name-and-form as condition, there are six sense-bases;

With the six sense-bases as condition there is contact;

With contact as condition, there is feeling.

Now, it is for one who feels⁴³ that I make known:

³⁹ “Mental examinations,” *mano,pavicāra*. There are 18 of them in connection with the senses, and their respective sense-objects and sense-consciousnesses: 6 in mental pleasure (*somanassūpavicāra*), 6 in mental pain (*domanassūpavicāra*), 6 in equanimity (*upekkhā*). See also M 137.8/3:216 f where MA (and AA, too) explains *manōpavicāra* as initial thought and sustained thought (or thinking and pondering). One examines the object by the occurrence of sustained thought (*vicāra*), and initial thought is associated with the latter. (MA 5:22)

⁴⁰ That is, earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness.

⁴¹ “Descent into the womb,” *gabbhassāvakkanti*. In this passage unique to this sutta, the Buddha declares that feeling (*vedanā*) is due to the descent of the *gandhabba* into the womb. This fact is reflected in **the Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15) statement: “It is said: **“With consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form.”** | Ānanda, how consciousness conditions name-and-form should be known in this manner: “If there were no consciousness to descend into a mother’s womb, would name-and-form take shape in the womb?” | “Certainly not, venerable sir.” (D 15.21/2:62 f). AA says that *avakkanti* or *okkanti* refers to origination or manifestation, meaning the process of rebirth, or more exactly, a new conception (“reconception”). The four material elements, including space, are the material basis for rebirth supplied by the fertilized ovum (zygote). However, for rebirth to occur, there must be a rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi,citta*) of a being who has just died. This rebirth-consciousness is the sixth element, the “element of consciousness.” **The Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38) refers to this rebirth-consciousness as the *gandhabba*, and says that the three conditions for conception are (in the case of a human being and other viviparous beings): the sexual union of the parents, the fertile period of the woman, and the being to be born (*gandhabba*) (M 38.26/1:266).

⁴² This line, *okkantiyā sati nāma,rūpaṃ*, is the same as *viññāna,paccayā nāma,rūpaṃ*, “with consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form.” It is at this point that the consciousness descends into the zygote, giving it life, and as such referred to as “name-and-form.” This is one of the canonical references that justifies the commentarial explanation that the “consciousness” of the dependent arising cycle refers to rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi,-viññāna*). The full formula is given in §11.

⁴³ This whole sentence reflects the Vedanā’nupassanā section of **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.32-33/1:59; also D 22.11/2:298). AA says that “feeling” here is more than mere sensation (*anubhavanto*), but is feeling connected with knowing (*jānanto*), quoting the Satipaṭṭhāna S passage as an example. In other words, the four Noble Truths are here addressed to those who understand the true nature of feeling as evident in personal experience and mindful observation.

- i. This is suffering;
- ii. This is the arising of suffering;
- iii. This is the cessation of suffering;
- iv. This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

10 (d.i) And what, monks, is **the noble truth of suffering**?

- (1) birth is suffering,
- (2) decay⁴⁴ is suffering,
- (3) death is suffering; [177]
- (4) sorrow, lamentation, (mental) pain, anguish and despair are suffering
- (5) to be associated with the unpleasant is suffering;
- (6) to be separated from the pleasant is suffering;
- (7) not getting what one desires is suffering—
- (8) In short, the five aggregates of clinging⁴⁵ are suffering.

This, monks, is called the noble truth of suffering.

11 (d.ii) And what, monks, is **the noble truth of the arising of suffering**?

With ignorance as condition,	there are (volitional) formations; ⁴⁶
With (volitional) formations as condition,	there is consciousness;
With consciousness as condition,	there are name-and-form;
With name-and-form as condition,	there are the six sense-bases;
With the six sense-bases as condition,	there is contact;
With contact as condition,	there is feeling;
With feeling as condition,	there is craving;
With craving as condition,	there is clinging;
With clinging as condition,	there is becoming;
With becoming as condition,	there is birth;
With birth as condition,	there arise decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, anguish and despair.

—Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

This, monks, is called the noble truth of the arising of suffering.

12 (d.iii) And what, monks, is **the noble truth of the cessation of suffering**?

With the utter fading away and cessation of this ignorance, (volitional) formations cease;	
With the cessation of (volitional) formations,	consciousness ceases;
With the cessation of consciousness,	name-and-form cease;
With the cessation of name-and-form,	the six sense-bases cease;
With the cessation of the six sense-bases,	contact ceases;
With the cessation of contact,	feeling ceases;
With the cessation of feeling,	craving ceases;
With the cessation of craving,	clinging ceases;
With the cessation of clinging,	becoming ceases;
With the cessation of becoming,	birth ceases;
With the cessation of birth, there cease decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, anguish and despair.	

—Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

This, monks, is called the noble truth of the cessation of suffering.

⁴⁴ *Jarā*, old age, aging.

⁴⁵ *Pañc'upadāna-k,khandha*, namely, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (S 3:47, Vbh 1).

⁴⁶ “The usual analysis of the Four Truths mentions only craving (*taṇhā*) as the origin of suffering, but here the entire formula of dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*) is brought in to provide a fuller explanation. Similarly just below, instead of explaining the cessation of suffering simply as a consequence of the cessation of craving, here the full formula for the reversal of dependent arising is given.” (A:ÑB 286 n46).

13 (d.iv) And what, monks, is **the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering?**

It is this very noble eightfold path, that is,

- i. right view,
- ii. right thought,
- iii. right speech,
- iv. right action,
- v. right livelihood
- vi. right effort,
- vii. right mindfulness,
- viii. right concentration.

This, monks, is called the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

These four noble truths, monks, are the Dharma taught by me that is unrefuted, undefiled, blameless, uncensured by wise recluses and brahmins.

It is on this account that (all) this is said.

—evam—

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050123; rev 061029; 070424; 0801128; 090827; 090930a