



KARMA

Q&A

Karma Q & A

A STUDY GUIDE

by

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Karma is a Sanskrit word meaning “action.” In Pāli, the language of the earliest Buddhist Canon, it’s rendered as “kamma.” Because “karma” is more widely known in the English-speaking world, it’s been used for the title of this book. But because “kamma” is probably the word the Buddha himself used, it—along with Pāli spellings of other terms—has been used in the text.

INTRODUCTION

KAMMA AND REBIRTH are often understood to be teachings of fate and helplessness in the face of unknowable influences from the past. For this reason, they're often rejected. Many people regard them as Buddhism's cultural baggage: a set of Indian beliefs that—either because the Buddha wasn't thinking carefully or because his early followers didn't stay true to his teachings—got mixed up with the Dhamma, his teaching, even though they don't fit in with the rest of what he taught. So now that the Dhamma has come to the West, many people believe that it's time to leave all this unnecessary baggage unclaimed on the carousel so that we can focus on his true message in a way that speaks directly to our own cultural needs.

However, the real problem with kamma and rebirth is that we tend to misunderstand what these teachings have to say. This is because Buddhism came to the West at the same time as other Indian religions, and its luggage got mixed up with theirs in transit. When we sort out which luggage really belongs to the Dhamma, we find that its bags marked “Kamma” and “Rebirth” actually contain valuables that are priceless in any culture. Instead of teaching fate, they're empowering, showing how people can develop skills in the present that will lead to the end of suffering. So, to help show how valuable these teachings are, here's a set of answers, based on the Pāli Canon, to some questions frequently asked about these topics.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. What is kamma?

The word “kamma” has two meanings, depending on context. Primarily, it means intentional actions in thought, word, and deed [[§1](#)]; secondarily, the results of intentional actions—past or present—which are shaped by the quality of the intention behind those actions [[§2](#)].

2. How do actions determine results?

Skillful intentional acts—those that would lead to no harm for yourself or anyone else—tend toward pleasant results. Unskillful intentional acts—those that would lead to harm for yourself or others, or both—tend toward painful results [[§16](#)]

It’s important to emphasize the word *tend* here, as there’s no ironclad, tit-for-tat deterministic connection between an intentional act and its results. One of the Buddha’s images for kamma is a seed [[§§19, 47](#)]. When you plant a bitter melon seed, it’ll tend to produce a bitter melon vine. When you plant a grape seed, it’ll tend to produce a grape vine. You can’t expect a grape seed to produce a bitter melon vine, or a bitter melon seed to produce a grape vine. That much is certain. But as to whether either seed will produce a strong, healthy vine depends on more than just the health of the seed. The soil, the sun, the rain all play a role, and then there’s the possibility that the seed might be damaged or destroyed by a fire, eaten by an animal, or squeezed out by plants growing from other, stronger seeds in the field surrounding it.

In the same way, when you plant a “kamma seed,” it’ll tend to give pleasant results if it’s skillful, and painful results if it’s not. For instance, acts of generosity, over the long term, tend to lead to wealth; taking intoxicants tends to lead to mental derangement. But how strong those results will be and how long they will take to ripen will depend on many factors in addition to the original actions: the actions you’ve done before, the actions you’ve done after, and in particular, the state of your mind when the results are fully ripe [[§11](#)].

In fact, this last factor—how your mind acts around the ripening of old kamma seeds—is the most important factor determining whether you suffer from those results. If your present actions—your new kamma—are unskillful as they engage with the results of old kamma, you can suffer even from the results of good past kamma. If your present kamma is skillful, it can minimize the suffering that would come from bad past kamma. For instance, if you treat the pleasure coming from past good kamma as an excuse for pride or selfishness, you’re going to suffer. If you treat the pain coming from an unskillful action as an opportunity to comprehend pain so as to release yourself from its power, you’ll suffer much less.

3. If your intentions influence the quality of the result, does this mean that every action done with good intentions will tend toward a good result?

For an intention to give good results, it has to be free of greed, aversion, and delusion [[§31](#)]. Now, it’s possible for an intention to be well-meaning but based on delusion, which can easily disguise subtle aversion or greed. When that’s the case, acting on the intention would lead to bad results: believing, for instance, that there are times when the compassionate course of action would be to kill, to tell a lie, or to have illicit sex. To give good results, an action has to be not only good, but also skillful: in other words, free of delusion.

To minimize delusion, you have to gain practical experience in what actually gives good results in the long term, and what doesn’t. This is why the Buddha taught himself to develop three qualities in his actions:

wisdom—aiming to act for long-term happiness;

compassion—intending not to harm anyone with his actions; and

purity—checking the actual results of his actions, and learning from his mistakes so as not to be fooled by an intention that seems wise and compassionate but really isn’t. It’s through developing purity in this way that good intentions are trained to be skillful.

Beyond that, there are two main levels of skill: the skillful actions that lead to a good rebirth, and those that lead beyond rebirth entirely, to

nibbāna (*nirvāṇa*): a dimension totally outside of space and time, and totally free from suffering.

4. How long do the results of kamma last?

This depends on the original action and on the actions surrounding it. Sometimes they last only for a moment, sometimes for a period in this lifetime, after which they end. Sometimes they last until the next lifetime, and other times—if they’re really strong—they can last for many lifetimes [§1]. There are also cases where the results of an action won’t appear in this lifetime or even in the next lifetime. This is because your other actions get in the way of their appearing. In this sort of case, the results won’t show until a later lifetime [§14].

But just because you’re born with bad kamma from a past lifetime doesn’t mean you’ll have to suffer from it throughout this lifetime. There’s a passage where the Buddha describes three kinds of sick people: those who will recover from their illness even if they don’t get medicine, those who will recover only if they get medicine, and those who won’t recover even if they do get medicine. It’s because the second group exists that doctors give medicine to all three groups, because it’s impossible to know beforehand to which group a sick person belongs [§6].

In the same way, if you’re born poor as a result of having been ungenerous in the past, it’s no sign that you have to stay poor. Some people get out of poverty with little effort on their part—this is a case where the old kamma simply runs out on its own. Some get out of poverty only if they make an effort—a case where new kamma can hasten the end of the old kamma. And some won’t get out of poverty no matter how hard they work—a case where the old kamma is really strong. It’s because the second group exists that people should do what they can to counteract the bad effects of old kamma. Even if their efforts don’t yield effects in the present life, they will form the basis for happiness later on.

5. Does kamma shape everything you experience?

The Buddha used the teaching on kamma to explain only three things:

- your experience of pleasure and pain;

- the level of rebirth you take after death, in terms of such things as your wisdom or lack of wisdom, wealth or lack of wealth, and the length of your lifespan; and

- what to do to get out of the cycle of rebirth. The noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration—is this last type of kamma: the kamma that, in leading to nibbāna, puts an end to kamma [§§1, 17].

Aside from these issues, the Buddha said that if you tried to work out all the ramifications of the results of kamma, you'd go crazy [§15]. Because his teaching deals simply with suffering and the end of suffering, that's as far as he took the issue.

6. Is it true that “If you want to see a person's past actions, look at his present condition; if you want to see his future condition, look at his present actions”?

That's much too simplistic. It implies that you have a single kamma account, like a bank account, with your present situation showing the running balance.

As mentioned above, kamma is like seeds in a field. You're planting kamma seeds in your field with every intention, and those seeds mature at different rates. So you've got lots of kamma accounts at different stages of development. All you can see at any one moment are the seeds that are currently sprouting. As for the other seeds that haven't yet sprouted, good or bad, you can't see those at all.

7. Is there a general principle underlying the way these kamma seeds interact?

Yes. In describing the factors leading to suffering, the Buddha explained the underlying pattern as a combination of two causal principles. In the first principle, results arise at the same time that their cause arises, and disappear at the same time that the cause disappears: *When this is, that is. When this isn't, that isn't*. This is causality in the present moment. In the second principle, the arising of a cause leads to the arising of the result either in the present or at a later point in time; the

cessation of the cause leads to the cessation of the result, again, either in the present or at a later point in time: *From the arising of this comes the arising of that. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.* This is causality that can extend over time [[§7](#)].

An example of the first principle would be when a mental pain comes as soon as a desire arises, and ceases as soon as the desire ceases. An example of the second principle would be when a desire gives rise to an action, either immediately or later in time. Because the desire will stop at some time, the action and its results will eventually have to stop as well, even though they may outlive the desire.

These two principles constantly interact, so that—in terms of kamma—your present experience is shaped by three factors:

- the results of past intentions—and this includes all your sense spheres: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind;
- your present intentions; and
- the results of your present intentions.

Past intentions provide you with the raw material or potentials for your present experience, but your present intentions are what shape those raw potentials into your actual experiences, in the same way that a cook takes raw ingredients and prepares food that can be eaten. Because the results of many past actions, as they ripen, could be offering all sorts of raw materials at any point in time, and because you're potentially free to create any type of new kamma at all, these conditions can interact in many complex ways.

In fact, in your experience of the present, your current intentions come prior to your awareness of the senses [[§9](#)]. What this means is that you don't simply respond to sights, sounds, etc., after they happen. You actually approach sensory input with some intentions already in mind. These intentions determine what you will notice coming in through the senses, how you'll interpret it, what you'll want out of it, and what you'll do with it. If you're looking for something to get angry about, you'll find some sight, sound, etc., to feed your anger. If you're looking for reasons to be kind to someone, you'll find them. As we noted above, if these present intentions are unskillful, they'll lead you to suffer even from pleasant sights, sounds, etc. If they're skillful, you can avoid suffering even when sights, sounds, etc., are painful.

For this reason, your present intentions are very important. In fact, without present intentions you'd have no experience of the world of space and time offered by the senses at all. You'd be free from their limitations. On the ultimate level, this fact is what makes awakening to a dimension outside of space and time—*nibbāna*—possible. On the immediate level, it explains why even though you may have bad kamma seeds from past unskillful intentions ripening in your kamma field, you have some freedom in how you treat the ripening seeds so that you don't have to suffer from them. You can be proactive in preventing suffering. The more alert you are to what you're doing in the present, and the more mindful you can be about how to act skillfully, the more freedom you have to choose the skillful course of action here and now.

This is why we meditate: to provide ourselves with more freedom in the present. In particular, by intentionally trying to focus on one object—such as the breath—we become sensitive to other present intentions, some of which are very subtle. This sensitivity enables us to expand our knowledge of what's actually going on in the mind, and this in turn expands the range of our freedom of choice in the present. We're better able to train the mind in the skills it needs to create positive present kamma, to deal positively with the raw material from past negative kamma, and eventually to go beyond the kamma of intentions entirely. That's how suffering comes to an end.

8. If there's freedom of choice in the present moment, does this mean we have free will?

To a certain extent. As with so many other issues, the Buddha took a middle path between the two extremes of determinism and total free will. If all your experience were predetermined from the past—through impersonal fate, the design of a creator god, or your own past actions—the whole idea of a path of practice to the end of suffering would be nonsense [§§3–5]. You wouldn't be able to choose to follow such a path, and there wouldn't be such a path for you to choose in the first place: Everything would have already been determined for you. But if, on the other extreme, your choices in the present moment were totally free, with no constraints from the past, that would mean that your present choices would in turn have no impact on the future. It'd be like flailing around in a vacuum: You

could move your arms in any direction you wanted, but you'd get nowhere.

The Buddha took this issue so seriously that, even though he rarely sought out other teachers to argue with them, he *would* if they taught determinism or the chaos of totally random freedom.

In contrast, he taught that we have the *potential* for free choice in the present moment, but that this potential can be limited by unskillful actions in the past. These limitations can be felt both in the range of outside conditions those actions make available to you, and in the range of the habits you've developed inside. Still, the potential for free choice can be developed, particularly in the area where it matters most: our freedom to choose and follow the path that leads to true happiness.

One of the main purposes of Buddhist practice is to improve the habits you bring to shaping each present moment so that they can lead in that direction. Take, for instance, the three habits that the Buddha recommended as part of the practice of mindfulness so that it would lead to concentration and discernment:

- *alertness*, the ability to be clearly aware both of what you're doing as you do it, and of the results that come from what you're doing;
- *mindfulness*, the ability to keep in mind lessons you've learned, both from Dhamma instructions and from your own actions, as to what's beneficial and what's harmful to do; and
- *ardency*, the whole-hearted desire to act as skillfully as you can with every moment [[§44](#)].

As you develop these habits, you build a fund of knowledge as to what works and doesn't work in leading to true happiness. You also become a more discerning judge of which actions lead to which results, and what really qualifies as true happiness. As your mindfulness develops into strong concentration, you learn how not to be overcome by pleasure or pain—by maintaining your focus in the practice of concentration even in the presence of intense pleasure, and by comprehending pain to the point of not suffering from it. This increased strength of mind expands your freedom. You have more choices available to you, and you're more able to act on skillful intentions regardless of the circumstances shaped by your

past intentions. You become like an expert cook, able to make good food out of whatever, good or bad, is growing in the kitchen garden.

9. When people talk about kamma, why do they tend to focus on the punishments and hardships coming from past kamma?

Because they ignore the positive role that present kamma can play in shaping your life. They think that past kamma is deterministic, leaving you helpless in the face of misfortune in the present moment—which is not how the Buddha taught kamma at all. In fact, when he introduced the topic of kamma to his listeners, he focused on how it empowers you in the present moment, at the same time allowing for qualities we all know to be good—like generosity and gratitude—to actually make sense [§23]. Here's why:

- In terms of *empowerment*, the Buddha's teachings on kamma and causality explain why we can develop skills that lead to the end of suffering. On the one hand, because certain actions tend to lead to certain results, we can learn from past actions the general pattern as to what would and wouldn't work in leading to more happiness. If the relationship between actions and results were totally random, we couldn't learn any skills at all. On the other hand, if past actions totally determined your present situation—including your present actions—you wouldn't have the freedom to choose to learn a skill in the first place. So the Buddha's combination of causal influences plus freedom of choice provides just the right conditions for why we can develop skills in our actions that will lead to the happiness we desire.

- As for the *good qualities of the heart*, if our actions were totally predetermined, generosity would be nothing special: People would give, not because they wanted to, but because they had no choice. There would be no reason to be grateful for the goodness that other people have done for us: They would have had no choice in the matter.

But because people *do* have some freedom of choice, the choice to be generous is something praiseworthy. It means that you are sensitive to the needs of others, and can restrain your own selfishness and greed. And when other people help us, they deserve our gratitude. Their help may

have caused them hardships, but they went ahead and did it for us anyway out of the goodness of their hearts.

In fact, one of the first lessons the Buddha teaches about freedom of choice is in the practice of generosity. It's when we first give a gift—not because we are told to, but because we want to—that we begin to realize that we don't have to be driven by our selfishness and greed. To protect the sense of freedom around this act, he taught his monks not to put any pressure on their supporters to give. Instead, monks should teach people to give where they feel inspired. That's how freedom of choice becomes real in people's lives.

10. You say that certain actions tend to lead to certain results. Can you give some examples?

Yes. On the unskillful side, the Buddha noted these tendencies:

killing — to a short life;

stealing — to loss of wealth;

sexual misconduct (having sex with minors, with people already in another committed relationship, or with those who have taken a vow of celibacy) — to rivalry and revenge;

telling lies — to being misrepresented and falsely accused;

divisive speech — to the breaking-up of your own friendships;

harsh speech — to hearing unappealing sounds;

idle chatter — to hearing words that aren't worth taking to heart;

taking intoxicants — to mental derangement;

beating others — to sickness and poor health;

being ill-tempered and easily angered — to ugliness;

being envious — to being uninfluential;

being ungenerous — to poverty;

being disrespectful and arrogant — to a low birth;

not asking knowledgeable people about what to do to bring about long-term happiness — to a lack of discernment [[§§25–26](#)].

These are actually some of the slightest results coming from these actions. If you engage in them repeatedly, they can lead to the lower realms of rebirth, such as rebirth as a common animal, in hell, or as a hungry ghost. (In Buddhism, all of these states are temporary, and will end when the power of the actions leading there runs out.)

It's also possible for unskillful actions to have a snowball effect, in which one unskillful action makes it more likely that you'll engage in more unskillful actions, at the same time putting yourself in a position where you don't want to hear the truths about the long-term results of your unskillful actions. This increases the likelihood that you'll do even more unskillful things. The pursuit of power is particularly harmful in this way: You have to harm those who threaten your power, and when you get used to doing harm, you don't want to hear the truth of what harmful actions can do to you. This makes it less and less likely that you'll change your ways [[§31](#)].

On the skillful side, the opposite of the above actions can lead to higher rebirths—in the human or the heavenly realms—which likewise last as long as the actions leading there still give results. For example, the Buddha noticed these causal relationships:

abstaining from killing — to a long life;
abstaining from stealing — to no loss of wealth;
abstaining from sexual misconduct — to freedom from rivalry and
revenge;
and so on.

11. If hurting others tends to lead to illness in the next lifetime, is illness in this lifetime always the result of past kamma?

As with every other experience of pain, illness can come from a wide variety of kammic factors, past and present. You've already noticed this yourself: When you intentionally stick your finger in a fire, the resulting pain doesn't come from an action in your previous lifetime. It comes from a choice you made here and now.

The Buddha himself argued against the idea that all pain comes from past kamma, and in the course of his argument he provided a list of other

factors that could give rise to illness. The list comes from the medical beliefs of his day, and although it includes a lot of other causes besides past kamma—things like a chemical imbalance in the elements in the body, the change of the seasons, or poor care of the body—all the causes included in the list come under what, in another discourse, he identifies either as past kamma or present kamma [[§§2, 5](#)].

So his list conveys two points. First, when the kamma leading to a disease plays out, it can often fall under the laws recognized by science. When it does, as when it's a result of poor diet or body chemistry, the knowledge of medical science can be used to alleviate it—if the person has the good kamma to be able to find the proper treatment.

Second, some diseases come primarily from past kamma; some primarily from present kamma. If it's a present-kamma disease—coming, say, from poor treatment of the body or unhealthy attitudes in the mind—it can go away when the present kamma changes. If it's a past-kamma disease, there are times when treatment in the present can make it go away—in which case, the seeds of good kamma are ripening to counteract the effect of bad kamma seeds. But there are also times when the past kamma is so strong that no treatment will help it. In cases like this, though, your present kamma—your attitudes, intentions, and mental skills—can be changed so that even in the face of the illness in the body, your mind doesn't have to suffer.

12. Can kamma get in the way of making progress in Dhamma practice?

When the Buddha talks about people who can and can't achieve awakening even though they hear the Dhamma, he focuses primarily on present kamma: whether you're paying attention, whether you have respect for the Dhamma, and whether you want to understand. But he also mentions some cases where past kamma can get in the way: the prime case being when a person is born with dull discernment [[§§27–29](#)].

However, even if your discernment is dull, there are ways of compensating for it. As the Buddha recommends, try to find wise people and ask for their advice as to what's skillful or not; what's blameworthy or not; what, when you do it, will lead to long-term happiness; what, when you do it, will lead to long-term harm and suffering [[§26](#)]. Then try to put

their instructions into practice, and ask them questions when you don't get good results.

Still, there are five actions that, if committed in the present life, can make it impossible to gain awakening in this life—or even to go to a good rebirth immediately after death. They can have this effect even if the person who has done them otherwise has a favorable attitude toward the Dhamma. These actions are: killing one's mother, killing one's father, killing an arahant (a fully awakened follower of the Buddha), causing the Buddha to bleed (when doing this through malicious intent), and causing a split in the Saṅgha, the order of monks [[§30](#)]. If done in a previous lifetime, these actions don't make progress impossible—one of the Buddha's foremost disciples is said to have killed his parents in a lifetime eons ago—but their consequences can persist in other ways for a long time. For this reason, you should avoid these actions at all cost.

13. What's the best way to act if you know you've done unskillful things in the past?

First off, remember that each moment that you're still alive gives you the opportunity to change your ways and engage in skillful actions. And remember, too, that actions *tend* to give certain results, and that these tendencies can be strengthened or weakened by other actions. This means that if you've been acting unskillfully but then, seeing the error of your ways, begin to act more skillfully, your newer actions will weaken the results of your older, unskillful actions. In fact, the Buddha points out that simply affirming the intention to act skillfully is already a positive first step.

So if you've done something unskillful, recognize that the action was unskillful and wrong, but that feelings of remorse and guilt won't undo what you've already done—in fact, too much remorse or guilt can actually sap your confidence that you can change your ways. Then resolve never to repeat that action again. To strengthen your resolve, both for your own good and for the good of others, spread thoughts of goodwill and compassion to yourself and to all beings [[§32](#)]. If you can maintain an attitude of goodwill to all—wishing for everyone to act in ways that will lead them to true happiness, and being happy to help everyone in that direction—you'll be less likely to do them, or yourself, any further harm.

14. Can you get out of the consequences of unskillful actions by getting other people to do them for you?

No. In fact, one of the worst ways you can harm others is to get them to act in unskillful ways, because those actions then become *their* kamma. And the fact that you got them to harm themselves would be bad kamma for you.

15. Is it possible to burn off old kamma—say, by simply putting up with pain?

No. In the Buddha's time, an ascetic group called the Nigaṇṭhas believed that they could burn off old kamma by not reacting to the pain of their austerities, and the Buddha reserved some of his sharpest ridicule for that belief. As he said, the Nigaṇṭhas should have noticed that the pain they experienced during their austerities ended when they stopped the austerities, which meant that the pain was the result not of old kamma being burned off, but of their present kamma in undertaking the austerities [[§4](#)].

Still, it is possible to weaken the results of bad past kamma. The Buddha compared past bad kamma to a big lump of salt. If you put the salt into a small glass of water, you can't drink the water because it's too salty. But if you toss it into a large, clean river, it doesn't make the water of the river too salty to drink. The river here stands for a mind that has developed four qualities:

- unlimited goodwill and equanimity: wishing for the happiness of all beings, and yet being equanimous when seeing that some beings are currently beyond help, in that they refuse to create the causes for true happiness, so that you can focus your energies, not on the futile attempt to change their ways, but on areas where you can make a difference;
- mature virtue: avoiding killing, stealing, illicit sex, lying, and taking intoxicants;
- mature discernment: understanding the causes for suffering and mastering the skills needed to put suffering to an end; and
- the ability not to allow pleasure or pain to overwhelm the mind.

When the mind has strengthened these four qualities, then the results of past bad kamma hardly touch it at all [[§10](#)].

16. Can rituals put an end to old kamma? Can prayer? Can an awakened being end my old kamma for me?

No, no, and no. The four qualities for weakening old kamma listed under the previous question are skills. Skills of this sort can't be mastered simply by following a ritual formula, nor can anyone else—regardless of that person's level of awakening—master them for you. You have to master them yourself.

As for prayer, you can—as a way of focusing your intention—make a determination to master these skills, but prayer on its own won't be enough to do the job. As the Buddha said, if results could be obtained simply through prayer, who in the world would be ugly, in pain, or die young? [[§§34–35](#)]

17. Does forgiveness have any effect on kamma?

It can't erase the effects of old bad kamma, but it can help prevent new bad kamma.

When people wrong you, it's always wise to forgive them. Although this won't negate the bad kamma of their actions, it does remove you from what the Buddha called *vera*, or animosity: the kammic mud fight of trying to settle old scores. You console yourself with the thought that, if you didn't have that kind of kamma in your own background, you wouldn't have been wronged that way in the first place. In fact, in light of rebirth, you don't know how long the back-and-forth of that kind of kamma has already been going on. If you tried to get back at the people who've wronged you, you'd simply be continuing the mud fight, creating more of that kamma, which would tend to lead to another round of the same sort of thing. Do you want that? If not, forgive the other side. This doesn't mean that you have to love them. You simply promise yourself that you won't try to get back at them.

By being generous with your forgiveness, you pose no danger to others, even those who have wronged you, and in that way you pose no danger to yourself. And by setting a good example in this way, you might also inspire others to be forgiving as well. This will help them pose no danger to themselves, either. In this way, you not only think thoughts of goodwill, but also show goodwill in action to all sides. As the Buddha said,

animosities aren't ended by more animosity, but by putting animosity aside [[§13](#)].

18. Can we know who we've had kammic relations with in previous lifetimes?

There are some people who can develop that ability in their meditation. However, the Buddha didn't encourage speculation in this area, because it would get in the way of trying to free yourself from kamma, which is what his teaching is all about. And he commented once that—given how very, very long the process of rebirth has been going on—it would be hard to find someone who hadn't been your mother, your father, your sister, your brother, your daughter, or your son in a previous life. Our roles have switched around that much. He made this comment, not to encourage sentimental feelings toward everyone you meet, but to encourage a sense of dismay over how ephemeral our relationships are, and to encourage a desire to be released from the whole show [[§41](#)].

19. Is there such a thing as group kamma?

It's not the case that first you're born into a particular group of people at a particular point in time and then, as a result of joining them, you assume the kamma committed by earlier members of that group. It's actually the other way around: First, through your own individual intentions, you develop a particular type of kamma. Then you're born into a group of people who have similar kamma in their individual backgrounds. In the Buddha's terms, we're "kamma-related," or related through our kamma [[§26](#)].

What this means is that if a particular group—a family, a nation—suffers hardships, it's not because earlier members of that group created bad kamma. It's because the individuals currently in that group have bad kamma in their own individual backgrounds. And remember: People are not always reborn, life after life, in the same family, ethnic group, nation, gender, or even species. Sometimes a person goes from a class of oppressors to a class of the oppressed, and sometimes back. The Buddha's image is of a stick thrown up into the air: Sometimes it lands on its base, sometimes on its tip, sometimes smack on its middle. We're slippery characters, changing roles all the time [[§41](#)].

20. As a summary, what would be a good way to teach children some healthy lessons about kamma?

You might try the lessons the Buddha gave to his own son, Rāhula [[§42](#)].

First he taught Rāhula how important it was to be truthful—and this means being truthful to yourself as well as to others. In the Buddha’s words, a person who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is totally empty of goodness. Truth is the basis for all progress in the life of the mind, and forms the basis for all the Buddha’s remaining instructions on how to learn from your actions. You can’t learn from your actions unless you’re true to yourself in admitting what you did and why.

The Buddha then taught Rāhula to examine his actions as he would examine his face in a mirror. Before acting—in body, speech, or mind—Rāhula should ask himself if he foresaw any harm coming from the action, either for himself or for others. If he foresaw harm, he shouldn’t do the action. If he didn’t foresee any harm, he could go ahead and act.

While acting, he should check the immediate results coming from his action. If any harm came up, he should stop the action. If not, he could continue with it.

After the action was done, he should check the long-term results of the action. If it actually did cause harm, then if it was an act in body or speech, he should talk it over with someone more experienced on the path. For a child at present, this would mean talking it over with his or her parents. This gives the child the opportunity to learn from the parents’ experience—assuming that the parents are wise enough not to make the child regret being open and honest with them.

If the action was simply a mental action, the Buddha told Rāhula that he should feel a healthy sense of shame around the action—shame in the sense of the opposite of shamelessness—and resolve not to engage in that kind of thinking again.

If, however, the action caused no harm, Rāhula should take delight that he was making progress, and continue training to become even more skillful in his actions.

These instructions in how to learn from your mistakes give at least three sorts of lessons about kamma:

A. First, they teach some important lessons about action in general.

- One, you have the ability to choose how to act.
- Two, actions have results.
- Three, your intentions are important in determining results, but good intentions are not enough. You have to learn how to make your intentions skillful by looking at the results your actions actually give, so that you get more experienced in anticipating the results that will come from your actions.
- Four, the results coming from your actions follow a pattern. If they didn't, you wouldn't be able to learn any lessons from actions today that would apply to actions tomorrow.
- Five, this pattern can show itself both in the present and over time. This relates to the two principles underlying actions. The Buddha's recommendation to examine the results of actions while doing them relates to the first principle, that actions can shape the present moment. When you slam the door on your finger, you don't have to wait for the next lifetime to feel the pain. The Buddha's instructions to check the long-term results of the action relate to the second principle, that actions can take time to show their results. When you plant a seed, it'll take time, sometimes a lot of time, for the plant to mature.

Keeping these two principles in mind as you look at your actions teaches you to be responsible for what you do. Seeing results in the present shows you that you don't have to be a passive victim of present circumstances. You can take the initiative to make changes. Seeing results that take time to ripen teaches an important lesson in delayed gratification: Don't measure your pleasures and pains only by how they feel in the present. Think about the long-term harm that can come from indulging in some pleasures, and the long-term benefit that can come from doing difficult tasks.

- Six, even if you've acted unskillfully in the past, you can change your actions now and into the future. This is perhaps the most important lesson of all.

B. To carry through with these instructions develops some important character traits:

- *Heedfulness*, in realizing that your actions can mean the difference between benefit and harm.
- *Compassion*, in not wanting to do harm to anyone.
- *Truthfulness*, in being willing to admit your mistakes.
- *Integrity*, in taking responsibility for any harm you've done.
- *Wisdom*, in being able to convince yourself to choose your actions based on the long-term results they'll give, and not on your moods as to what you like or don't like to do.

C. Finally, carrying through with these instructions also develops the three qualities, mentioned above under Question 8, needed to develop mindfulness and concentration:

- *Alertness*, in clearly seeing what you're doing while you're doing it, along with the results that come from your actions.
- *Mindfulness*, in remembering to examine your intentions and actions at all times, and in remembering lessons you've learned from past actions; and
- *Ardency*, in trying to do your best to avoid harm.

These are some of the ways in which the Buddha's instructions to Rāhula provide an excellent introduction for children in how to understand the principles of kamma and make good use of them in their lives. And, of course, these lessons aren't meant only for children. Adults can benefit from following them as well.

OBJECTIONS

21. Doesn't the teaching on kamma teach people to be callous toward the sufferings of others?

No. Knowing that you have both good and bad seeds in your field that haven't yet matured, the teaching on kamma teaches you to ask this question instead: What's the wisest way to view other people whose bad seeds are currently sprouting? And the answer is: with compassion. Is your compassion so rarified that you give it only to people who have never done anything wrong? If it were, you wouldn't find anyone to receive it.

So when you see someone suffering, you don't say, "They deserve it," and leave them to their suffering. Actions yield results, but nobody "deserves" to suffer. The path is for putting an end to suffering, "deserved" or not. You look for the potential good seeds in other people's fields that are about to mature, and try to give whatever help that will aid those people in not suffering from the bad seeds. After all, that's how you'd like them to treat you when *your* bad seeds start to mature. And in acting this way, you create good kamma for yourself.

When you see someone who's suffering, the Buddha recommends that you reflect: "I, too, have experienced that sort of suffering in the course of my many rebirths." When you see someone who's happy, he has you reflect in a similar way, "I, too, have experienced that sort of happiness in the course of my many rebirths." This reflection helps you not to be jealous of the happiness of others, or to look down on those who are suffering. You've been there, too—and it's likely that you'll return there at some point if you don't find a way out of rebirth. So be compassionate to everyone you meet [[§41](#)].

As for whether your attempts to help another person will bear fruit, it's useful to remember the Buddha's observation about the three groups of sick people, mentioned in Question 4: those who will recover from their illness even if they don't get medicine, those who will recover only if they get medicine, and those who won't recover even if they get medicine. As he noted, it's because the second group exists that doctors give medicine

to all three groups, because it's impossible to know beforehand to which group a sick person belongs. In the same way, the Buddha said, there are those who will gain awakening even if they don't hear the teaching, those who will gain awakening only if they hear the teaching, and those who won't gain awakening even if they do hear the teaching. It's because the second group exists that he teaches everyone who comes to him.

The same principle can be applied to kamma in general: Some people born with bad kamma will see the results of that kamma run out on their own in this lifetime even if they don't get help from others; some will get past that kamma only if they get help from others; some won't get past it even with the help of others. It's because the second group exists that we should all have compassion and be helpful to one another.

22. But can't kamma be used to justify social injustices?

Only by people who don't really understand or believe in kamma. If someone has the kamma that tends to poverty or a painful death, there are plenty of natural causes or accidents that will provide an opportunity for that kamma to bear fruit without your getting involved. You don't have to play the role of kammic-law enforcer. If you decide to oppress that person economically or bring about his painful death, you don't get away with it. That bad kamma now becomes yours. And if, unbeknownst to you, that person has had a taste of awakening, your kamma becomes many times over bad.

23. Don't people believe in kamma just because they want the universe to seem just?

If they do, they're in for a disappointment. When you sow seeds in your kamma field, you get the same kind of plant whose seed you sow, but—as we noted above—the size of your harvest will vary in line with many other factors: other actions you do before or after, and your state of mind when the seed ripens. This means that a minor action might yield huge results, or a major action, small results.

A long discourse [[§11](#)] tells of Aṅgulimāla, a bandit who murdered many people but then had a total change of heart and became fully awakened. The only result coming from the kamma of all those murders was that people threw things at him when he was on his almsround. The

relatives of those he killed probably didn't think that justice was served, but that was how kamma worked in his case.

And we're fortunate that kamma isn't always just. As the Buddha said, if we had to pay back all the bad kamma we've done in the past before reaching awakening, no one would ever awaken [[§10](#)].

It's important to remember that our common idea of justice requires a story that begins at a particular point in time. Only then can we determine who threw the first stone and tally up the score of who did what after that first provocation. But in the Buddha's view of the universe, a beginning point for the process of rebirth is inconceivable. Not just unknowable, inconceivable [[§15](#)]. This means that trying to tally up the score of who did what to whom is futile. The only way to find peace is to get out of the process entirely: That's how we stop doing harm to one another, and how we stop harming ourselves.

24. You say that I experience other people's present actions through my senses, which are my old kamma. But you also say that those people have the freedom to choose their actions in the present. Isn't there a conflict here?

Remember, the principles of kamma explain pleasure and pain. That's it. Like you, other people are free to choose their intentions in the present, but you don't directly experience their intentions. You experience actions inspired by their intentions, and the pleasure or pain you take from those actions will be filtered by your past and present kamma. Your good kamma seeds may sprout in time to help you not to suffer from someone's bad intentions toward you, or your bad seeds may be sprouting in a way that interferes with their wise efforts to help you.

25. Can the Buddha's teachings on kamma be divorced from his teachings on rebirth?

Not really. If there were no life before birth, kamma would have no role in explaining pleasure and pain early in life. And as the Buddha said, many people are rewarded in this lifetime for doing unskillful things—he cited people who are rewarded for killing the enemies of a king, stealing from an enemy of a king, or telling a lie that entertains a king—and you can probably think of similar examples in modern business and politics

[§12]. Sometimes the results of those unskillful actions don't even show until many lifetimes later—because the causal principle underlying kamma is so complex [§14].

26. But kamma and rebirth are metaphysical issues. Didn't the Buddha avoid metaphysical issues?

There's no word for “metaphysics” in ancient Indian languages. The Buddha avoided two sorts of issues that we would call metaphysical—(1) the size and duration of the cosmos, and (2) the identity of the self—because they were distractions on the path. But because he taught a path of action to put an end to suffering, he had to explain the metaphysics of action: whether it's real, whether it gives results, what determines those results, and how far actions go in causing suffering in the first place. If he hadn't taken a stand on these matters, he wouldn't have been able to explain how action had the power to bring suffering to an end.

27. If there's no self, what gets reborn?

The Buddha never said that there is no self. He never said that there is a self. The whole question of whether or not the self exists was one he put aside.

There's a common misconception that the Buddha started with the idea that there was no self and, in the context of no self, taught the doctrine of kamma, which makes no sense: If there's no self, nobody does the kamma and nobody receives the results, so actions and their results wouldn't matter, because there's no one choosing to act, and no one to suffer the results. But that's putting the context backwards. Actually, the Buddha started with the reality of kamma, and then viewed ideas of “self” and “not-self” as types of kamma within that context. This means that he focused on seeing the way we define our sense of self as an action. Then the question becomes, when is the act of identifying things as your self a skillful action, and when is it not? When is the act of identifying things as not-self a skillful action, and when is it not? When a healthy sense of self is needed to be responsible, self-reliant, and heedful of the future, it's a skillful action. When the perception of not-self helps you not to identify with desires that would lead to harm, it's a skillful action.

In other words, both “self” and “not-self” are *strategies* for achieving happiness. They should be used—and mastered—as needed for the sake of true happiness, and abandoned when no longer needed. So instead of getting involved in the tangle of trying to define what a self is and whether it exists, the Buddha advised treating “self” and “not-self” as processes to be mastered, as tools.

Similarly with rebirth: He avoided talking about *what* gets reborn and instead focused on *how* it happens, as a process. Because the process is a type of kamma, it’s something you’re responsible for, and it’s also a skill you can master: either with relative skill, reaching a comfortable rebirth, or with consummate skill, learning how not to be reborn at all.

28. What *is* the process by which rebirth happens?

The Buddha’s short explanation is that, at the moment of death, an act of craving heads toward a new birth in a new world of experience. If you cling to that craving, you’re reborn. The analogy he gives is of a fire jumping from one house to another. Just as a fire depends on the wind to sustain and carry it from one house to the next, when you cling to craving here and now, at the moment of death, it sustains and carries you to the next life [[§36](#)].

In a longer explanation, the Buddha lists four stages to the process:

- First, based on ignorance, there’s *craving*, which can be for any of three things:

- sensual fantasies;

- becoming—a particular identity in a particular world of experience;
or

- non-becoming, the desire to destroy a particular identity in a particular world of experience.

One of the Buddha’s discoveries is that this last craving, instead of putting an end to becoming, actually creates new becoming. This is why the path to the end of kamma and rebirth has to develop dispassion for all three forms of craving so as to put them aside.

- Next, based on craving, there’s *clinging*—you feed mentally off the craving, in hopes that it will take you to even more food.

- Then there's *becoming*, in which a potential world of experience, together with a potential identity within that world, appears to the mind.

These worlds can exist on any of three levels:

- the sensory level—ranging from the pains of hell and the animal realm, through the mixed pleasures and pains of the human world, and on up to the pleasures of the sensual heavens;

- the realm of form—heavens in which the inhabitants enjoy the pleasures of pure form;

- the realm of formlessness—heavens in which the inhabitants enjoy formless pleasures, such as the pleasure of infinite space or of infinite consciousness.

The range of worlds and identities that will appear in this way at your death will come from your past actions—in body, speech, and mind. Unskillful actions will produce painful becomings; skillful actions, pleasant ones. This is why it's important to develop skillful actions throughout life. In this way, such practices as generosity, virtue, and meditation not only lead to happiness in this lifetime, but also provide the possibility of happy future lives.

- Then there's *birth*, when you move into taking on a role in one of the potential worlds of experience [[§37](#)].

These four steps are the same process you experience when the mind goes for a distracting thought while you meditate—which is why learning how to keep the mind concentrated on a single object without getting waylaid by distracting thoughts is an excellent preparation in learning to die skillfully.

29. Didn't the Buddha teach people to believe only things they can see for themselves? How can people see kamma and rebirth for themselves?

The Buddha was very clear on the point that some of his teachings couldn't be proven until you had put them into practice. This means that they have to be adopted as working hypotheses. A discourse on this topic [[§39](#)] includes teachings on topics like these:

Is there kamma?

Does kamma give results?

Are pleasure and pain totally determined from the past?

Is it possible to experience formlessness?—in other words, does awareness need a body, or can it exist independently of a body?

Is nibbāna for real?

In each case, if you want to put an end to suffering, you need to take a position that seems most conducive to following the path leading to that goal.

Similarly, when the Buddha was teaching the Kālāmas [[§38](#)] to test views for themselves, the test was this: When this view is adopted, does it lead to skillful or unskillful actions?

So the same principle applies to the teaching on kamma and rebirth: If you adopted these views as a working hypothesis, would they lead you to be more careful or less careful in trying to be skillful in your actions? A good experiment would be to devote a year to living as if you really believed in kamma and rebirth, and to see how that affected the way you behaved and thought about your behavior.

30. Didn't the Buddha simply pick up his ideas on kamma and rebirth from the culture around him?

It's true that the word "kamma" already existed in his culture, but the questions of whether kamma was real, whether it bore results, and whether you had any control over your kamma were all hotly debated. Similarly with rebirth: Some people believed in it, others didn't, and even those who did believe in it didn't agree as to whether kamma had any impact on it.

So given that there was no general agreement on these topics, we can't say that the Buddha simply absorbed his teachings on them unthinkingly from his environment. As with everything he taught, he chose to teach only what was relevant to the path of putting an end to suffering. He saw on the night of his awakening that people's intentional actions do have an impact on their rebirth, and that if they don't believe in kamma and rebirth, they tend to create bad kamma that leads to the suffering of bad rebirths. That's why he taught kamma and rebirth as the major principles of basic right view.

31. But how could a human mind possibly know these things?

There are two ways to answer this question: the typical way and the Buddha's way. The typical way—which has been typical from ancient India until now—is to define what a human being is, or what the mind is, and from that definition to decide what a human mind can know. If, for instance, you define the mind as just a brain, and a brain is just a bunch of atoms, your definition of the mind prejudices what it can and cannot know.

But the Buddha's approach was the other way around. As he said, if you define yourself, you place limitations on yourself. So, instead of starting out with a definition of the mind, he explored the skills that the mind could develop, to see what those skills could enable it to realize. In mastering those skills, he learned that there was a lot more to the mind than he had originally thought, and that it was capable of knowing many things that he hadn't imagined possible: all the way to a deathless happiness. Through his example, he's showing how to drop some of your own cultural baggage—such as materialistic, Romantic, or Judeo-Christian views of what you are—and to try on views that will allow you to test whether he was right: by developing the same skills he did.

32. Can't I just be agnostic about kamma and rebirth, and practice without taking a position on these issues?

Even though you can't know the truth of kamma and rebirth prior to your first taste of awakening, you're already placing bets on these issues all the time. Every time you act, you're calculating whether the results will be worth the effort. The fact that you're expecting results means you believe in the power of kamma to at least some extent. Even if you deny that you're acting with any expectation of results, part of the mind is calculating that your denial will give good results of one sort or another. If you do something you know is unskillful, but tell yourself it won't matter, you're taking a position against kamma. If your calculation of the results doesn't include the possibility that they could extend into future lifetimes, you're taking a position against the idea that kamma can influence rebirth. So you're taking positions on these issues all the time. The Buddha's simply pointing out that you'll benefit from adopting his

position consciously and consistently: Kamma works 24/7, so it's good to take it as a working hypothesis 24/7.

33. But kamma and rebirth focus on past and future. Doesn't the Dhamma teach us to focus totally on simply being mindful—i.e., fully present—in the present moment?

The Buddha talks about the importance of focusing on the present moment only in the context of what he taught on kamma: You focus on the present because you know that there's work to be done in training the mind in developing skillful present intentions, and you don't know how much more time you have to accomplish that training. If you don't train it now, you'll suffer both now and on into the future.

And it's important to note that mindfulness doesn't mean being fully present in the present moment. It means keeping something in mind. Right mindfulness means keeping in mind lessons from the past—either teachings you've learned from others, or lessons you've learned from your own experience—so that you can apply them skillfully, by also being alert, in shaping your present intentions.

When the Buddha's discussions of kamma touch on the far past and the distant future, he always concludes by coming back to the present: Just as the past has been shaped by previous kamma, the future will be shaped by what you do *now*. He discourages people from asking what particular actions led to their present state, or what particular future state they can expect from their current actions. Instead, he asks them to keep the general principle in mind—that skillful actions lead to good results, and unskillful actions to bad—and to focus on being as skillful as possible in the present moment, ideally for the sake of reaching awakening through the level of skill that puts an end to kamma.

Even the highest insights that arise in meditation focus on kamma in the present moment. As the Buddha says, you develop discernment by noticing which of your mind states are skillful actions, which are unskillful [[§45](#)]. Then you pay attention to how you can develop the skillful ones and abandon the unskillful ones [[§§20–21](#)]. In this way, you come to see how you shape the present moment through your present intentions—which, in the context of meditation, the Buddha calls “fabrications” (*saṅkhāra*). Even the highest states of bliss attained in

meditation are dependent on inconstant causes—your own actions—which means that they, too, are inconstant. Seeing this, you arrive at a wise value judgment: You want something more dependable than that. That's when you realize that you have to let go of even your most skillful intentions: not staying in the state of bliss but also not going anywhere else. When you can drop the present intentions that keep your awareness of space and time going, the unfabricated—the experience of nibbāna—is found.

So, in practice, the present isn't divorced from the past and future. It's tied to the past and future through the dynamics of kamma, and the goal of the practice is to get beyond past, present, and future entirely.

THE END OF KAMMA

34. Why try to get out of kamma and rebirth?

Because the unawakened mind is so quick to change that it can't really trust itself to act consistently on skillful intentions. After working hard to develop good qualities, you can easily get attached to their results. If those results don't lie outside the round of rebirth, they're going to be impermanent. Your efforts to hold on to them will likely develop into unskillful qualities—such as greed and possessiveness—leading to unskillful kamma, which will pull you back down to the suffering you've been trying to escape. The only happiness that's truly reliable and genuinely harmless all around is the happiness of nibbāna: free from impermanence, free from attachment. Once it's attained, it requires no kamma, good or bad, at all.

35. Why focus on issues of skillful and unskillful actions when we can instead open up to the sense of non-dual emptiness or space that already surrounds us?

That emptiness is conditioned. It, too, is the result of actions—subtle perceptions, but perceptions are actions nonetheless. The freedom that's truly unconditioned lies right next to our freedom of choice in the present moment. Unconditioned freedom doesn't cause freedom of choice, but it's right next to it. The only way to know unconditioned freedom is to get more sensitive to our freedom of choice. And we do that best by trying to get more sensitive to what's skillful and what's unskillful in our actions. As this sensitivity develops, we'll be in a better position to judge when we're still making subtle choices, and when we're experiencing something in which no act of intention is involved at all [[§46](#)].

36. Does this mean that awakened people have no intentions?

There's no intention at the moment of awakening. But when fully awakened people return to the world of the senses, they still experience old kamma. They also have new intentions, but they destroy the potential for those intentions to yield results as kamma. In the Buddha's image, they destroy the seeds as they create them. But to understand what that means, you have to gain awakening yourself [[§47](#)].

37. Where do fully awakened people go after they die?

Nibbāna is not a place [[§§50–51](#)]. When there's no more kamma, there's no more becoming, and every place that we experience—both in body and mind—is a type of becoming.

The Buddha describes nibbāna as the ultimate happiness and freedom, and he states that it really exists, but beyond that, he doesn't define it. And because people are defined by their kamma [[§49](#)], awakened people after death—when there's no more kamma at all—can't be defined, even as existing or not. But again: To know what that means—and to see if nibbāna really is the ultimate happiness and freedom—you have to follow the path of skillful action to find out for yourself.

• • •

In fact, the only way to know for sure if the principles explained here are true is to gain the first stage of awakening, when you have your first glimpse of nibbāna, outside of time, outside of space, and free from all activity. It's only on returning from that experience that you can know how your actions shape your experience of time and space.

In the meantime, though, as the Buddha pointed out, it's wise to take as working hypotheses the basic principles of kamma:

Your actions are real.

They come from your choices.

They have results.

Those results are determined by the intention behind the act.

Those results follow patterns that shape both the present moment and the future, even beyond death.

You can learn the patterns underlying actions and their results.

Having learned the patterns, you are free to choose to change the way you act so as to get the results you want.

A central principle of those patterns is that your present actions determine whether or not you will suffer from the results of past actions.

And you can act in such a way that you can put an end to suffering—and to birth, aging, and death—altogether.

If you don't accept these principles, the path to the end of suffering is closed to you. If you do accept them and try them out in your actions, it's open.

Despite the complexity of kamma, the choice is as simple as that.

READINGS

What is Kamma?

§ 1. “Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, & intellect.

“And what is the cause by which kamma comes into play? Contact....

“And what is the diversity in kamma? There is kamma to be experienced in hell, kamma to be experienced in the realm of common animals, kamma to be experienced in the realm of the hungry ghosts, kamma to be experienced in the human world, kamma to be experienced in the heavenly worlds. [In the Buddhist cosmology, sojourns in hell or in heaven, as in the other realms, are not eternal. After the force of one’s kamma leading to rebirth in those levels has worn out, one is reborn elsewhere.] ...

“And what is the result of kamma? The result of kamma is of three sorts, I tell you: that which arises right here & now, that which arises later [in this lifetime], and that which arises following that....

“And what is the cessation of kamma? From the cessation of contact is the cessation of kamma; and just this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—is the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma.

“Now when a disciple of the noble ones discerns kamma in this way, the cause by which kamma comes into play in this way, the diversity of kamma in this way, the result of kamma in this way, the cessation of kamma in this way, & the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of kamma. — [AN 6:63](#)

§ 2. “What is old kamma? The eye is to be seen as old kamma, fabricated & willed, capable of being felt. The ear... The nose... The

tongue... The body... The intellect is to be seen as old kamma, fabricated & willed, capable of being felt. This is called old kamma.

“And what is new kamma? Whatever kamma one does now with the body, with speech, or with the intellect. This is called new kamma.

“And what is the cessation of kamma? Whoever touches the release that comes from the cessation of bodily kamma, verbal kamma, & mental kamma. That is called the cessation of kamma.

“And what is the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma? Just this noble eightfold path.... This is called the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma.” — [SN 35:145](#)

Principles of Causality

§ 3. “Monks, there are these three sectarian guilds that—when cross-examined, pressed for reasons, & rebuked by wise people—even though they may explain otherwise, remain stuck in [a doctrine of] inactivity. Which three?

“There are contemplatives & brahmans who hold this teaching, hold this view: ‘Whatever a person experiences—pleasant, painful, or neither pleasant nor painful—that is all caused by what was done in the past.’ There are contemplatives & brahmans who hold this teaching, hold this view: ‘Whatever a person experiences—pleasant, painful, or neither pleasant nor painful—that is all caused by a supreme being’s act of creation.’ There are contemplatives & brahmans who hold this teaching, hold this view: ‘Whatever a person experiences—pleasant, painful, or neither pleasant nor painful—that is all without cause & without condition.’

“Having approached the contemplatives & brahmans who hold that... whatever a person experiences... is all caused by what was done in the past, I said to them: ‘Is it true that you hold that... whatever a person experiences... is all caused by what was done in the past?’ Thus asked by me, they admitted, ‘Yes.’ Then I said to them, ‘Then in that case, a person is a killer of living beings because of what was done in the past. A person is a thief... unchaste... a liar... a divisive speaker... an abusive speaker... an idle chatterer... covetous... malevolent... a holder of wrong views because of what was done in the past.’ When one falls back on what was done in

the past as being essential, monks, there is no desire, no effort [at the thought], ‘This should be done. This shouldn’t be done.’ When one can't pin down as a truth or reality what should & shouldn’t be done, one dwells bewildered & unprotected. One cannot righteously refer to oneself as a contemplative....

“Having approached the contemplatives & brahmans who hold that... whatever a person experiences... is all caused by a supreme being’s act of creation, I said to them: ‘Is it true that you hold that... whatever a person experiences... is all caused by a supreme being’s act of creation?’ Thus asked by me, they admitted, ‘Yes.’ Then I said to them, ‘Then in that case, a person is a killer of living beings... a holder of wrong views because of a supreme being’s act of creation.’ When one falls back on a supreme being’s act of creation as being essential, monks, there is no desire, no effort [at the thought], ‘This should be done. This shouldn’t be done.’ When one can't pin down as a truth or reality what should & shouldn’t be done, one dwells bewildered & unprotected. One cannot righteously refer to oneself as a contemplative...

“Having approached the contemplatives & brahmans who hold that... whatever a person experiences... is all without cause, without condition, I said to them: ‘Is it true that you hold that... whatever a person experiences... is all without cause, without condition?’ Thus asked by me, they admitted, ‘Yes.’ Then I said to them, ‘Then in that case, a person is a killer of living beings without cause, without condition. A person is a thief... unchaste... a liar... a divisive speaker... an abusive speaker... an idle chatterer... covetous... malevolent... a holder of wrong views without cause, without condition.’ When one falls back on lack of cause and lack of condition as being essential, monks, there is no desire, no effort [at the thought], ‘This should be done. This shouldn’t be done.’ When one can't pin down as a truth or reality what should & shouldn’t be done, one dwells bewildered & unprotected. One cannot righteously refer to oneself as a contemplative.” — [AN 3:61](#)

§ 4. The Buddha: “So I asked the Nigaṇṭhas further, ‘Friend Nigaṇṭhas, what do you think? When there is fierce striving, fierce exertion, do you feel fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment? And when there is

no fierce striving, no fierce exertion, do you feel no fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment?’

“‘Yes, friend...’

“‘... Then it’s not proper for you to assert that, “Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted.”

“‘If it were the case that when there was fierce striving, fierce exertion, you felt fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment; and when there was no fierce striving, no fierce exertion, you still felt fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment, then—that being the case—it would be proper for you to assert that, “Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted.” But because when there is fierce striving, fierce exertion, you feel fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment; and when there was no fierce striving, no fierce exertion, you feel no fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment, then—that being the case—it is not proper for you to assert that, “Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted.”’ But when I said this, I did not see that the Nigaṇṭhas had any legitimate defense of their teaching.” — [MN 101](#)

§ 5. As he was sitting there, Moliyasivaka the wanderer said to the Blessed One, “Master Gotama [Gotama is the Buddha’s clan name], there are some contemplatives & brahmans who are of this doctrine, this view: Whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before. Now what does Master Gotama say to that?”

[The Buddha:] “There are cases where some feelings arise based on bile [i.e., diseases and pains that come from a malfunction of the gall bladder]. You yourself should know how some feelings arise based on bile. Even the world is agreed on how some feelings arise based on bile. So any contemplatives & brahmans who are of the doctrine & view that whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before—slip past what they themselves know, slip past what is agreed on by the world. Therefore I say that those contemplatives & brahmans are wrong.”

“There are cases where some feelings arise based on phlegm... based on internal winds... based on a combination of bodily humors... from the change of the seasons... from uneven [‘out-of-tune’] care of the body... from harsh treatment... from the result of kamma. You yourself should know how some feelings arise from the result of kamma. Even the world is agreed on how some feelings arise from the result of kamma. So any contemplatives & brahmans who are of the doctrine & view that whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before—slip past what they themselves know, slip past what is agreed on by the world. Therefore I say that those contemplatives & brahmans are wrong.” — [*SN 36:21*](#)

§ 6. “There are these three types of sick people to be found existing in the world. Which three?

“There is the case of the sick person who—regardless of whether he does or does not receive amenable food, regardless of whether he does or does not receive amenable medicine, regardless of whether he does or does not receive proper nursing—will not recover from that illness. There is the case of the sick person who—regardless of whether he does or does not receive amenable food, regardless of whether he does or does not

receive amenable medicine, regardless of whether he does or does not receive proper nursing—will recover from that illness. There is the case of the sick person who will recover from that illness if he receives amenable food, amenable medicine, & proper nursing, but not if he doesn't.

“Now, it is because of the sick person who will recover from that illness if he receives amenable food, amenable medicine, & proper nursing—but not if he doesn't—that food for the sick has been allowed, medicine for the sick has been allowed, nursing for the sick has been allowed. And it is because there is this sort of sick person that the other sorts of sick persons are to be nursed as well [on the chance that they may actually turn out to need and benefit from such nursing].

“These are the three types of sick people to be found existing in the world.

“In the same way, these three types of people, like the three types of sick people, are to be found existing in the world. Which three?

“There is the case of the person who—regardless of whether he does or doesn't get to see the Tathāgata {Buddha}, regardless of whether he does or doesn't get to hear the Dhamma & Vinaya [Discipline] proclaimed by the Tathāgata—will not alight on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities. There is the case of the person who—regardless of whether he does or doesn't get to see the Tathāgata, regardless of whether he does or doesn't get to hear the Dhamma & Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata—will alight on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities. There is the case of the person who will alight on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities if he gets to see the Tathāgata and gets to hear the Dhamma & Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata, but not if he doesn't.

“Now, it is because of the person who will alight on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities if he gets to see the Tathāgata and gets to hear the Dhamma & Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata—but not if he doesn't—that the teaching of the Dhamma has been allowed. And it is because there is this sort of person that the other sorts of persons are to be taught the Dhamma as well [on the chance that they may actually turn out to need and benefit from the teaching].

“These are the three types of people, like the three types of sick people, to be found existing in the world.” — [AN 3:22](#)

§ 7. [This is the basic principle of causality, with the statements falling into two pairs: The first and third statements express causality in the present moment. The second and fourth express causality over time.]

“When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn’t, that isn’t. From the stopping of this comes the stopping of that.” — [*AN 10:92*](#)

§ 8. Phenomena are

preceded by the heart,
ruled by the heart,
made of the heart.

If you speak or act
with a corrupted heart,
then suffering follows you—
as the wheel of the cart,
the track of the ox
that pulls it.

Phenomena are

preceded by the heart,
ruled by the heart,
made of the heart.

If you speak or act
with a calm, bright heart,
then happiness follows you,
like a shadow
that never leaves.— [*Dhp 1-2*](#)

§ 9. [Notice here that intention, under “name,” comes prior to experience of the six senses, which passage §2 equates with old kamma.]

“From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

“From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

“From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.

“From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

“From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.

“From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.

“From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.

“From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.

“From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.

“From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

“From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering....

“And what is *name-&-form*? Feeling, perception, intention [= kamma], contact, & attention: This is called name. The four great elements & the form dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name & this form are called name-&-form....

“And what are *fabrications*? These three are fabrications: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, mental fabrications. These are called fabrications.

“And what is *ignorance*? Not knowing in terms of stress, not knowing in terms of the origination of stress, not knowing in terms of the cessation of stress, not knowing in terms of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called ignorance.” — [SN 12:2](#)

§ 10. “Monks, for anyone who says, ‘In whatever way a person makes kamma, that is how it is experienced,’ there is no living of the holy life, there is no opportunity for the right ending of stress. But for anyone who says, ‘When a person makes kamma to be felt in such & such a way, that is how its result is experienced,’ there is the living of the holy life, there is the opportunity for the right ending of stress.

“There is the case where a trifling evil deed done by a certain individual takes him to hell. There is the case where the very same sort of trifling deed done by another individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

“Now, a trifling evil deed done by what sort of individual takes him to hell? There is the case where a certain individual is undeveloped in [contemplating] the body, undeveloped in virtue, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in discernment: restricted, small-hearted, dwelling with

suffering. A trifling evil deed done by this sort of individual takes him to hell.

“Now, a trifling evil deed done by what sort of individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment? There is the case where a certain individual is developed in [contemplating] the body, developed in virtue, developed in mind, developed in discernment: unrestricted, large-hearted, dwelling with the unlimited. A trifling evil deed done by this sort of individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

“Suppose that a man were to drop a lump of salt into a small amount of water in a cup. What do you think? Would the water in the cup become salty because of the lump of salt, and unfit to drink?”

“Yes, lord....”

“Now suppose that a man were to drop a lump of salt into the River Ganges. What do you think? Would the water in the River Ganges become salty because of the lump of salt, and unfit to drink?”

“No, lord....”

“In the same way, there is the case where a trifling evil deed done by one individual [the first] takes him to hell; and there is the case where the very same sort of trifling deed done by the other individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.” —

[AN 3:101](#)

§ 11. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. And at that time in King Pasenadi’s realm there was a bandit named Aṅgulimāla: brutal, bloody-handed, devoted to killing & slaying, showing no mercy to living beings. He turned villages into non-villages, towns into non-towns, settled countryside into unsettled countryside. Having repeatedly killed human beings, he wore a garland [*māla*] made of fingers [*aṅguli*].

Then the Blessed One, early in the morning, having adjusted his under robe and carrying his bowl & outer robe, went into Sāvattthī for alms. Having gone for alms in Sāvattthī and returning from his alms round after his meal, he set his lodging in order. Carrying his bowl & robe, he went along the road to where Aṅgulimāla was staying. Cowherds, shepherds, &

farmers saw him going along the road to where Aṅgulimāla was staying, and on seeing him said to him, “Don’t go along that road, contemplative, for on that road is Aṅgulimāla: brutal, bloody-handed, devoted to killing & slaying, showing no mercy to living beings. He has turned villages into non-villages, towns into non-towns, settled countryside into unsettled countryside. Having repeatedly killed human beings, he wears a garland made of fingers. Groups of ten, twenty, thirty, & forty men have gone along that road, and even they have fallen into Aṅgulimāla’s hands.” When this was said, the Blessed One kept going in silence.

A second time.... A third time, cowherds, shepherds, & farmers said to the Blessed One, “Don’t go along that road, contemplative.... Groups of ten, twenty, thirty, & forty men have gone along that road, and even they have fallen into Aṅgulimāla’s hands.” When this was said, the Blessed One kept going in silence.

Then Aṅgulimāla saw the Blessed One coming from afar and on seeing him, this thought occurred to him: “Isn’t it amazing! Isn’t it astounding! Groups of ten, twenty, thirty, & forty men have gone along this road, and even they have fallen into my hands, and yet now this contemplative comes attacking, as it were, alone and without a companion. Why don’t I kill him?” So Aṅgulimāla, taking up his sword & shield, buckling on his bow & quiver, followed right behind the Blessed One.

Then the Blessed One willed a feat of psychic power such that Aṅgulimāla, though running with all his might, could not catch up with the Blessed One walking at normal pace. Then the thought occurred to Aṅgulimāla: “Isn’t it amazing! Isn’t it astounding! In the past I’ve chased & seized even a swift-running elephant, a swift-running horse, a swift-running chariot, a swift-running deer. But now, even though I’m running with all my might, I can’t catch up with this contemplative walking at normal pace.” So he stopped and called out to the Blessed One, “Stop, contemplative! Stop!”

“I *have* stopped, Aṅgulimāla. *You* stop.”

Then the thought occurred to Aṅgulimāla, “These Sakyan contemplatives are speakers of the truth, asserters of the truths, and yet this contemplative, even while walking, says, ‘I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla. *You* stop.’ Why don’t I question him?”

So Aṅgulimāla the bandit addressed this verse to the Blessed One:

“While walking, contemplative,
you say, ‘I have stopped.’
But when *I* have stopped
you say I haven’t.
I ask you the meaning of this:
How have you stopped?
How haven’t I?”

The Buddha:

“I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla,
once & for all,
having cast off violence
toward all living beings.
You, though,
are unrestrained toward beings.
That’s how I’ve stopped
and you haven’t.”

Aṅgulimāla:

“At long last a greatly revered great seer
for my sake
has come to the great forest.
Having heard your verse
in line with the Dhamma,
I will go about
having abandoned evil.”
So saying, the bandit
hurled his sword & weapons
over a cliff
into a chasm,
a pit.
Then the bandit paid homage
to the feet of the One Well-Gone,
and right there requested the Going-forth.
The Awakened One,

the compassionate great seer,
the teacher of the world, along with its devas,
said to him then:
“Come, bhikkhu.”
That in itself
was bhikkhuhood for him.

Then the Blessed One set out wandering toward Sāvattthī with Ven. Aṅgulimāla as his attendant monk. After wandering by stages he reached Sāvattthī, and there he lived near Sāvattthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery....

Then Ven. Aṅgulimāla, early in the morning, having adjusted his under robe and carrying his bowl & outer robe, went into Sāvattthī for alms. As he was going from house to house for alms, he saw a woman suffering a breech birth. On seeing her, the thought occurred to him: “How tormented are living beings! How tormented are living beings!” Then, having gone for alms in Sāvattthī and returning from his alms round after his meal, he went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to him, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, “Just now, lord, early in the morning, having adjusted my under robe and carrying my bowl & outer robe, I went into Sāvattthī for alms. As I was going from house to house for alms, I saw a woman suffering a breech birth. On seeing her, the thought occurred to me: ‘How tormented are living beings! How tormented are living beings!’”

“In that case, Aṅgulimāla, go to that woman and on arrival say to her, ‘Sister, since I was born I do not recall intentionally killing a living being. Through this truth may there be wellbeing for you, wellbeing for your fetus.’”

“But, lord, wouldn’t that be a lie for me? For I have intentionally killed many living beings.”

“Then in that case, Aṅgulimāla, go to that woman and on arrival say to her, ‘Sister, since I was born in the noble birth, I do not recall intentionally killing a living being. Through this truth may there be wellbeing for you, wellbeing for your fetus.’”

Responding, “As you say, lord,” to the Blessed One, Aṅgulimāla went to that woman and on arrival said to her, “Sister, since I was born in the

noble birth, I do not recall intentionally killing a living being. Through this may there be wellbeing for you, wellbeing for your fetus.” And there was wellbeing for the woman, wellbeing for her fetus.

Then Ven. Aṅgulimāla, dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute, in no long time reached & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now. He knew: “Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world.” And thus Ven. Aṅgulimāla became another one of the arahants.

Then Ven. Aṅgulimāla, early in the morning, having adjusted his under robe and carrying his bowl & outer robe, went into Sāvattthī for alms. Now at that time a clod thrown by one person hit Ven. Aṅgulimāla on the body, a stone thrown by another person hit him on the body, and a potsherd thrown by still another person hit him on the body. So Ven. Aṅgulimāla—his head broken open and dripping with blood, his bowl broken, and his outer robe ripped to shreds—went to the Blessed One. The Blessed One saw him coming from afar and on seeing him said to him: “Bear with it, brahman! Bear with it! The fruit of the kamma that would have burned you in hell for many years, many hundreds of years, many thousands of years, you are now experiencing in the here-&-now!” — [MN 86](#)

§ 12. “There are, headman, some contemplatives & brahmins who hold a doctrine & view like this: ‘All those who kill living beings experience pain & distress in the here & now. All those who take what is not given... who engage in illicit sex... who tell lies experience pain & distress in the here & now.’

“Now there is the case where a certain person is seen garlanded & adorned, freshly bathed & groomed, with hair & beard trimmed, enjoying the sensualities of women as if he were a king. They ask about him: ‘My good man, what has this man done that he has been garlanded & adorned... as if he were a king?’ They answer: ‘My good man, this man attacked the king’s enemy and took his life. The king, gratified with him, rewarded him. That is why he is garlanded & adorned... as if he were a king.’

“Then there is the case where a certain person is seen bound with a stout rope with his arms pinned tightly against his back, his head shaved bald, marched to a harsh-sounding drum from street to street, crossroads to crossroads, evicted through the south gate, and beheaded to the south of the city. They ask about him: ‘My good man, what has this man done that he is bound with a stout rope... and beheaded to the south of the city?’ They answer: ‘My good man, this man, an enemy of the king, has taken the life of a man or a woman. That is why the rulers, having had him seized, inflicted such a punishment upon him.’

“Now, what do you think, headman: have you ever seen or heard of such a case?”

“I have seen this, lord, have heard of it, and will hear of it [again in the future].”

“So, headman, when those contemplatives & brahmans who hold a doctrine and view like this say: ‘All those who kill living beings experience pain & distress in the here & now,’ do they speak truthfully or falsely?” — “Falsely, lord.”

“And those who babble empty falsehood: Are they moral or immoral?”

“Immoral, lord.”

“And those who are immoral and of evil character: Are they practicing wrongly or rightly?” — “Wrongly, lord.”

“And those who are practicing wrongly: Do they hold wrong view or right view?” — “Wrong view, lord.”

“And is it proper to place confidence in those who hold wrong view?”

“No, lord.”

“Then, headman, there is the case where a certain person is seen garlanded & adorned... as if he were a king. They ask about him: ‘My good man, what has this man done that he has been garlanded & adorned... as if he were a king?’ They answer: ‘My good man, this man attacked the king’s enemy and stole a treasure. The king, gratified with him, rewarded him....’

“Then there is the case where a certain person is seen bound with a stout rope... and beheaded to the south of the city. They ask about him: ‘My good man, what has this man done that he is bound with a stout rope... and beheaded to the south of the city?’ They answer: ‘My good

man, this man, an enemy of the king, has committed a theft, stealing something from a village or a wilderness....’

“Then there is the case where a certain person is seen garlanded & adorned... as if he were a king. They ask about him: ‘My good man, what has this man done that he has been garlanded & adorned... as if he were a king?’ They answer: ‘My good man, this man seduced the wives of the king’s enemy....’

“Then there is the case where a certain person is seen bound with a stout rope... and beheaded to the south of the city. They ask about him: ‘My good man, what has this man done that he is bound with a stout rope... and beheaded to the south of the city?’ They answer: ‘My good man, this man seduced women & girls of good families....’

“Then there is the case where a certain person is seen garlanded & adorned... as if he were a king. They ask about him: ‘My good man, what has this man done that he has been garlanded & adorned... as if he were a king?’ They answer: ‘My good man, this man made the king laugh with a lie....’

“Then there is the case where a certain person is seen bound with a stout rope... and beheaded to the south of the city. They ask about him: ‘My good man, what has this man done that he is bound with a stout rope... and beheaded to the south of the city?’ They answer: ‘My good man, this man has brought the aims of a householder or a householder’s son to ruin with a lie. That is why the rulers, having had him seized, inflicted such a punishment upon him.’

“Now what do you think, headman: Have you ever seen or heard of such a case?”

“I have seen this, lord, have heard of it, and will hear of it [again in the future].”

“So, headman, when those contemplatives & brahmans who hold a doctrine & view like this, say: ‘All those who tell lies experience pain & distress in the here & now,’ do they speak truthfully or falsely?... Is it proper to place confidence in those who hold wrong view?” — “No, lord.” — *SN 42:13*

§ 13. ‘He

insulted me,
hit me,
beat me,
robbed me'
—for those who brood on this,
animosity isn't stilled.

He
insulted me,
hit me,
beat me,
robbed me'—
for those who don't brood on this,
animosity is stilled.

Animosities aren't stilled
through animosity,
regardless.

Animosities are stilled
through non-animosity:
this, an unending truth.

Unlike those who don't realize
that we're here on the verge
of perishing,
those who do:
their quarrels are stilled.— [*Dhp 3-6*](#)

§ 14. “There are four kinds of person to be found in the world. Which four? There is the case where a certain person takes life, takes what is not given [steals], engages in illicit sex, lies, speaks divisively, speaks abusively, engages in idle chatter; is covetous, malevolent, & holds wrong views. On the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell.

“But there is also the case where a certain person takes life... holds wrong views [yet], on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.

“And there is the case where a certain person abstains from taking life, abstains from taking what is not given... is not covetous, not malevolent, & holds right views. On the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.

“But there is also the case where a certain person abstains from taking life, abstains from taking what is not given... is not covetous, not malevolent, & holds right views [yet], on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell....

“In the case of the person who takes life... [yet] on the break-up of the body, after death, reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world: either earlier he performed fine kamma that is to be felt as pleasant, or later he performed fine kamma that is to be felt as pleasant, or at the time of death he adopted & carried out right views. Because of that, on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world. But as for the results of taking life... holding wrong views, he will feel them either right here & now, or later [in this lifetime], or following that....

“In the case of the person who abstains from taking life... [yet] on the break-up of the body, after death, reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell: either earlier he performed evil kamma that is to be felt as painful, or later he performed evil kamma that is to be felt as painful, or at the time of death he adopted & carried out wrong views. Because of that, on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But as for the results of abstaining from taking life... holding right views, he will feel them either right here & now, or later [in this lifetime], or following that.” — [MN 136](#)

§ 15. “There are these four inconceivables that are not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about them. Which four?

“The Buddha-range of the Buddhas [i.e., the range of powers a Buddha develops as a result of becoming a Buddha] is an inconceivable that is not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about it.

“The jhāna-range of a person in jhāna [i.e., the range of powers that one may obtain while absorbed in jhāna]....

“The [precise working out of the] results of kamma....

“Conjecture about [the origin, etc., of] the world is an inconceivable that is not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about it.

“These are the four inconceivables that are not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about them.” — [AN4:77](#)

Skillful & Unskillful Kamma

§ 16. The Buddha: “Unflagging persistence was aroused in me, and unmuddled mindfulness established. My body was calm & unaroused, my mind concentrated & single. Quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, I entered & remained in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, I entered & remained in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. With the fading of rapture I remained equanimous, mindful, & alert, and sensed pleasure with the body. I entered & remained in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joy & distress—I entered & remained in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.

“When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the *knowledge of recollecting my past lives*. I recollected my manifold past lives, i.e., one birth, two... five, ten... fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction & expansion: ‘There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-

arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.’ Thus I remembered my manifold past lives in their modes & details.

“This was the first knowledge I attained in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose—as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute.

“When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the *knowledge of the passing away & reappearance of beings*. I saw—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—beings passing away & re-appearing and I discerned how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma: ‘These beings — who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, & mind, who reviled noble ones, held wrong views, and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.’ Thus—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—I saw beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma.

“This was the second knowledge I attained in the second watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose — as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute.

“When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the *knowledge of the ending of the effluents* [sensuality, becoming, & ignorance]. I discerned, as it had come to be, that ‘This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress... These are effluents... This is the origination of effluents ... This is the cessation of

effluents ... This is the way leading to the cessation of effluents.’ My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the effluent of sensuality, released from the effluent of becoming, released from the effluent of ignorance. With release, there was the knowledge, ‘Released.’ I discerned that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

“This was the third knowledge I attained in the third watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose — as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute.” —

[MN 4](#)

§ 17. “These four types of kamma have been understood, realized, & made known by me. Which four? There is kamma that is dark with dark result; kamma that is bright with bright result; kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result; and kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma.

“And what is kamma that is dark with dark result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates an injurious bodily fabrication... an injurious verbal fabrication... an injurious mental fabrication... He rearises in an injurious world where he is touched by injurious contacts... He experiences feelings that are exclusively painful, like those of the beings in hell....

“And what is kamma that is bright with bright result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates an uninjurious bodily fabrication... an uninjurious verbal fabrication... an uninjurious mental fabrication... He rearises in an uninjurious world where he is touched by uninjurious contacts... He experiences feelings that are exclusively pleasant, like those of the Ever-radiant Devas....

“And what is kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates a bodily fabrication that is injurious & uninjurious... a verbal fabrication that is injurious & uninjurious... a mental fabrication that is injurious & uninjurious... He rearises in an injurious & uninjurious world where he is touched by injurious & uninjurious contacts... He experiences injurious &

uninjurious feelings, pleasure mingled with pain, like those of human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms....

“And what is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma? The intention right there to abandon this kamma that is dark with dark result... this kamma that is bright with bright result... this kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result.” — AN 4:232

§18. *AN 4:234 repeats most of the above, defining dark kamma with dark result with the following example: “There is the case of a certain person who kills living beings, steals what is not given, engages in illicit sex, tells lies, and drinks fermented & distilled liquors that are the basis for heedlessness,” and bright kamma with bright result with the following example: “There is the case of a certain person who abstains from killing living beings, abstains from stealing what is not given, abstains from engaging in illicit sex, abstains from telling lies, and abstains from drinking fermented & distilled liquors that are the basis for heedlessness.”*

AN 4:237 equates kamma that is neither dark nor bright with the factors of the noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. AN 4:238 equates it with the seven factors for awakening: mindfulness, analysis of dhammas, persistence, rapture, calm, concentration, and equanimity.

§ 19. “Just as when a nimb-tree seed, a bitter creeper seed, or a bitter melon seed is placed in moist soil, whatever nutriment it takes from the soil & the water, all conduces to its bitterness, acridity, & distastefulness. Why is that? Because of the evil nature of the seed.

“In the same way, when a person has wrong view, whatever bodily deeds he undertakes in line with that view, whatever verbal deeds... whatever mental deeds he undertakes in line with that view, whatever intentions, whatever determinations, whatever vows, whatever fabrications, all lead to what is disagreeable, unpleasing, unappealing, unprofitable, & stressful. Why is that? Because of the evil nature of the view....

“Just as when a sugar cane seed, a rice grain, or a grape seed is placed in moist soil, whatever nutriment it takes from the soil & the water, all

conduces to its sweetness, tastiness, & unalloyed delectability. Why is that? Because of the auspicious nature of the seed.

“In the same way, when a person has right view, whatever bodily deeds he undertakes in line with that view, whatever verbal deeds... whatever mental deeds he undertakes in line with that view, whatever intentions, whatever vows, whatever determinations, whatever fabrications, all lead to what is agreeable, pleasing, charming, profitable, & easeful. Why is that? Because of the auspicious nature of the view.” — *AN 1:189–190*

§ 20. Then Ven. Ānanda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, “I say categorically, Ānanda, that bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct should not be done.”

“Given that the Blessed One has declared, lord, that bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct should not be done, what drawbacks can one expect when doing what should not be done?”

“Given that I have declared, Ānanda, that bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct should not be done, these are the drawbacks one can expect when doing what should not be done: One can fault oneself; observant people, on close examination, criticize one; one’s bad reputation gets spread about; one dies confused; and—on the break-up of the body, after death—one reappears in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. Given that I have declared, Ānanda, that bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct should not be done, these are the drawbacks one can expect when doing what should not be done.

“I say categorically, Ānanda, that good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct should be done.”

“Given that the Blessed One has declared, lord, that good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct should be done, what rewards can one expect when doing what should be done?”

“Given that I have declared, Ānanda, that good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct should be done, these are the rewards one can expect when doing what should be done: One doesn’t

fault oneself; observant people, on close examination, praise one; one's good reputation gets spread about; one dies unconfused; and—on the break-up of the body, after death—one reappears in a good destination, a heavenly world. Given that I have declared, Ānanda, that good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct should be done, these are the rewards one can expect when doing what should be done.” — [AN 2:18](#)

§ 21. “Abandon what is unskillful, monks. It is possible to abandon what is unskillful. If it were not possible to abandon what is unskillful, I would not say to you, ‘Abandon what is unskillful.’ But because it is possible to abandon what is unskillful, I say to you, ‘Abandon what is unskillful.’ If this abandoning of what is unskillful were conducive to harm and pain, I would not say to you, ‘Abandon what is unskillful.’ But because this abandoning of what is unskillful is conducive to benefit and pleasure, I say to you, ‘Abandon what is unskillful.’

“Develop what is skillful, monks. It is possible to develop what is skillful. If it were not possible to develop what is skillful, I would not say to you, ‘Develop what is skillful.’ But because it is possible to develop what is skillful, I say to you, ‘Develop what is skillful.’ If this development of what is skillful were conducive to harm and pain, I would not say to you, ‘Develop what is skillful.’ But because this development of what is skillful is conducive to benefit and pleasure, I say to you, ‘Develop what is skillful.’” — [AN 2:19](#)

§ 22. “Just as the footprints of all legged animals are encompassed by the footprint of the elephant, and the elephant's footprint is reckoned the foremost among them in terms of size; in the same way, all skillful qualities are rooted in heedfulness, converge in heedfulness, and heedfulness is reckoned the foremost among them.” — [AN 10:15](#)

§ 23. “And how is one made impure in three ways by bodily action? There is the case where a certain person takes life, is brutal, bloody-handed, devoted to killing & slaying, showing no mercy to living beings. He takes what is not given. He takes, in the manner of a thief, things in a village or a wilderness that belong to others and have not been given by them. He engages in sexual misconduct. He gets sexually involved with

those who are protected by their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their relatives, or their Dhamma; those with husbands, those who entail punishments, or even those crowned with flowers by another man. This is how one is made impure in three ways by bodily action.

“And how is one made impure in four ways by verbal action? There is the case where a certain person tells lies. When he has been called to a town meeting, a group meeting, a gathering of his relatives, his guild, or of the royalty [i.e., a royal court proceeding], if he is asked as a witness, ‘Come & tell, good man, what you know’: If he doesn’t know, he says, ‘I know.’ If he does know, he says, ‘I don’t know.’ If he hasn’t seen, he says, ‘I have seen.’ If he has seen, he says, ‘I haven’t seen.’ Thus he consciously tells lies for his own sake, for the sake of another, or for the sake of a certain reward. He engages in divisive speech. What he has heard here he tells there to break those people apart from these people here. What he has heard there he tells here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus breaking apart those who are united and stirring up strife between those who have broken apart, he loves factionalism, delights in factionalism, enjoys factionalism, speaks things that create factionalism. He engages in harsh speech. He speaks words that are insolent, cutting, mean to others, reviling others, provoking anger and destroying concentration. He engages in idle chatter. He speaks out of season, speaks what isn’t factual, what isn’t in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, & the Vinaya, words that are not worth treasuring. This is how one is made impure in four ways by verbal action.

“And how is one made impure in three ways by mental action? There is the case where a certain person is covetous. He covets the belongings of others, thinking, ‘O, that what belongs to others would be mine!’ He bears ill will, corrupt in the resolves of his heart: ‘May these beings be killed or cut apart or crushed or destroyed, or may they not exist at all!’ He has wrong view, is warped in the way he sees things: ‘There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no contemplatives or brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after

having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is how one is made impure in three ways by mental action.

“These, Cunda, are the ten courses of unskillful action. When a person is endowed with these ten courses of unskillful action, then even if he gets up at the proper time from his bed and touches the earth, he is still impure. [This and the following actions are ancient Indian rituals for purification.] If he doesn’t touch the earth, he is still impure. If he touches wet cow dung, he is still impure. If he doesn’t touch wet cow dung, he is still impure. If he touches green grass... If he doesn’t touch green grass... If he worships a fire... If he doesn’t worship a fire... If he pays homage to the sun with clasped hands... If he doesn’t pay homage to the sun with clasped hands... If he goes down into the water three times by nightfall... If he doesn’t go down into the water three times by nightfall, he is still impure. Why is that? Because these ten courses of unskillful action are impure and cause impurity. And further, as a result of being endowed with these ten courses of unskillful action, (rebirth in) hell is declared, (rebirth in) an animal womb is declared, (rebirth in) the realm of hungry ghosts is declared—that or any other bad destination.

“Now, Cunda, there are three ways in which one is made pure by bodily action, four ways in which one is made pure by verbal action, and three ways in which one is made pure by mental action.

“And how is one made pure in three ways by bodily action? There is the case where a certain person, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from the taking of life. He dwells with his rod laid down, his knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings. Abandoning the taking of what is not given, he abstains from taking what is not given. He does not take, in the manner of a thief, things in a village or a wilderness that belong to others and have not been given by them. Abandoning sexual misconduct, he abstains from sexual misconduct. He does not get sexually involved with those who are protected by their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their relatives, or their Dhamma; those with husbands, those who entail punishments, or even those crowned with flowers by another man. This is how one is made pure in three ways by bodily action.

“And how is one made pure in four ways by verbal action? There is the case where a certain person, abandoning the telling of lies, abstains from telling lies. When he has been called to a town meeting, a group meeting, a gathering of his relatives, his guild, or of the royalty, if he is asked as a witness, ‘Come & tell, good man, what you know’: If he doesn’t know, he says, ‘I don’t know.’ If he does know, he says, ‘I know.’ If he hasn’t seen, he says, ‘I haven’t seen.’ If he has seen, he says, ‘I have seen.’ Thus he doesn’t consciously tell a lie for his own sake, for the sake of another, or for the sake of any reward. Abandoning divisive speech, he abstains from divisive speech. What he has heard here he does not tell there to break those people apart from these people here. What he has heard there he does not tell here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus reconciling those who have broken apart or cementing those who are united, he loves concord, delights in concord, enjoys concord, speaks things that create concord. Abandoning harsh speech, he abstains from harsh speech. He speaks words that are soothing to the ear, that are affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing & pleasing to people at large. Abandoning idle chatter, he abstains from idle chatter. He speaks in season, speaks what is factual, what is in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, & the Vinaya. He speaks words worth treasuring, seasonable, reasonable, circumscribed, connected with the goal. This is how one is made pure in four ways by verbal action.

“And how is one made pure in three ways by mental action? There is the case where a certain person is not covetous. He does not covet the belongings of others, thinking, ‘O, that what belongs to others would be mine!’ He bears no ill will and is not corrupt in the resolves of his heart. (He thinks,) ‘May these beings be free from animosity, free from oppression, free from trouble, and may they look after themselves with ease!’ He has right view and is not warped in the way he sees things: ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is how one is made pure in three ways by mental action.

“These, Cunda, are the ten courses of skillful action. When a person is endowed with these ten courses of skillful action, then even if he gets up at the proper time from his bed and touches the earth, he is still pure. If he doesn’t touch the earth, he is still pure. If he touches wet cow dung, he is still pure. If he doesn’t touch wet cow dung, he is still pure. If he touches green grass... If he doesn’t touch green grass... If he worships a fire... If he doesn’t worship a fire... If he pays homage to the sun with clasped hands... If he doesn’t pay homage to the sun with clasped hands... If he goes down into the water three times by nightfall... If he doesn’t go down into the water three times by nightfall, he is still pure. Why is that? Because these ten courses of skillful action are pure and cause purity. And further, as a result of being endowed with these ten courses of skillful action, (rebirth among) the devas is declared, (rebirth among) human beings is declared—that or any other good destination.” — [AN 10:165](#)

§ 24. “There are these four qualities, TigerPaw, that lead to a lay person’s happiness and well-being in this life. Which four? Being consummate in initiative, being consummate in vigilance, admirable friendship, and maintaining one’s livelihood in tune.

“And what is meant by being consummate in initiative? There is the case where a lay person, by whatever occupation he makes his living—whether by farming or trading or cattle tending or archery or as a king’s man or by any other craft—is clever and untiring at it, endowed with discrimination in its techniques, enough to arrange and carry it out. This is called being consummate in initiative.

“And what is meant by being consummate in vigilance? There is the case where a lay person has righteous wealth—righteously gained, coming from his initiative, his striving, his making an effort, gathered by the strength of his arm, earned by his sweat—he manages to protect it through vigilance (with the thought), ‘How shall neither kings nor thieves make off with this property of mine, nor fire burn it, nor water sweep it away, nor hateful heirs make off with it?’ This is called being consummate in vigilance.

“And what is meant by admirable friendship? There is the case where a lay person, in whatever town or village he may dwell, associates with householders or householders’ sons, young or old, who are consummate

in conviction, consummate in virtue, consummate in generosity, consummate in discernment. He talks with them, engages them in discussions. He emulates consummate conviction in those who are consummate in conviction, consummate virtue in those who are consummate in virtue, consummate generosity in those who are consummate in generosity, and consummate discernment in those who are consummate in discernment. This is called admirable friendship.

“And what is meant by maintaining one’s livelihood in tune? There is the case where a lay person, knowing the income and outflow of his wealth, maintains a livelihood in tune, neither a spendthrift nor a penny-pincher, (thinking,) ‘Thus will my income exceed my outflow, and my outflow will not exceed my income.’ Just as when a weigher or his apprentice, when holding the scales, knows, ‘It has tipped down so much or has tipped up so much,’ in the same way, the lay person, knowing the income and outflow of his wealth, maintains a livelihood in tune, neither a spendthrift nor a penny-pincher, (thinking,) ‘Thus will my income exceed my outflow, and my outflow will not exceed my income.’ If a lay person has a small income but maintains a grand livelihood, it will be rumored of him, ‘This clansman devours his wealth like a fruit-tree eater [Commentary: one who shakes more fruit off a tree than he can possibly eat].’ If a lay person has a large income but maintains a miserable livelihood, it will be rumored of him, ‘This clansman will die of starvation.’ But when a lay person, knowing the income and outflow of his wealth, maintains a livelihood in tune, neither a spendthrift nor a penny-pincher, (thinking,) ‘Thus will my income exceed my outflow, and my outflow will not exceed my income,’ this is called maintaining one’s livelihood in tune.

“These are the four drains on one’s store of wealth: being debauched in sex; being debauched in drink; being debauched in gambling; and having evil people as friends, associates, & companions. Just as if there were a great reservoir with four inlets and four drains, and a man were to close the inlets and open the drains, and the sky were not to pour down proper showers, the depletion of that great reservoir could be expected, not its increase. In the same way, these are the four drains on one’s store of wealth: being debauched in sex, being debauched in drink, being

debauched in gambling, and having evil people as friends, associates, & companions.

“These are the four inlets to one’s store of wealth: not being debauched in sex; not being debauched in drink; not being debauched in gambling; and having admirable people as friends, associates, & companions. Just as if there were a great reservoir with four inlets and four drains, and a man were to open the inlets and close the drains, and the sky were to pour down proper showers, the increase of that great reservoir could be expected, not its depletion. In the same way, these are the four inlets to one’s store of wealth: not being debauched in sex, not being debauched in drink, not being debauched in gambling, and having admirable people as friends, associates, & companions.

“These, TigerPaw, are the four qualities that lead to a lay person’s happiness and well-being in this life.

“There are these four qualities that lead to a lay person’s happiness and well-being in lives to come. Which four? Being consummate in conviction, being consummate in virtue, being consummate in generosity, being consummate in discernment.

“And what does it mean to be consummate in conviction? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones has conviction, is convinced of the Tathāgata’s awakening: ‘Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in clear-knowing & conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of people fit to be tamed, teacher of devas & human beings, awakened, blessed.’ This is called being consummate in conviction.

“And what does it mean to be consummate in virtue? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking life, abstains from stealing, abstains from sexual misconduct, abstains from lying, abstains from taking intoxicants that cause heedlessness. This is called being consummate in virtue.

“And what does it mean to be consummate in generosity? There is the case of a disciple of the noble ones, his awareness cleansed of the stain of miserliness, living at home, freely generous, openhanded, delighting in being magnanimous, responsive to requests, delighting in the distribution of alms. This is called being consummate in generosity.

“And what does it mean to be consummate in discernment? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones is discerning, endowed with discernment of arising and passing away—noble, penetrating, leading to the right ending of stress. This is called being consummate in discernment.

“These, TigerPaw, are the four qualities that lead to a lay person’s happiness and well-being in lives to come.” — [AN 8:54](#)

§ 25. “Monks, the taking of life—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from the taking of life is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to a short life span.

“Stealing—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from stealing is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to the loss of one’s wealth.

“Illicit sexual behavior—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from illicit sexual behavior is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to rivalry & revenge.

“Telling falsehoods—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from telling falsehoods is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to being falsely accused.

“Divisive tale-bearing—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from divisive tale-bearing is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to the breaking of one’s friendships.

“Abusive speech—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming

from abusive speech is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to unappealing sounds.

“Frivolous chattering—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from frivolous chattering is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to words that aren't worth taking to heart.

“The drinking of fermented & distilled liquors—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from drinking fermented & distilled liquors is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to mental derangement.”

— [AN 8:40](#)

§ 26. “Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Action is what differentiates beings in terms of baseness & excellence....

“There is the case where a woman or man is a killer of living beings, brutal, bloody-handed, given to killing & slaying, showing no mercy to living beings. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. If, on the break-up of the body, after death—instead of reappearing in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell—he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is short-lived wherever reborn. This is the way leading to a short life: to be a killer of living beings, brutal, bloody-handed, given to killing & slaying, showing no mercy to living beings.

“But then there is the case where a woman or man, having abandoned the killing of living beings, abstains from killing living beings, and dwells with the rod laid down, the knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, & sympathetic for the welfare of all living beings. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination, a heavenly world. If, on the break-up of the body, after death—instead of reappearing in a good destination, a heavenly world—he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is long-

lived wherever reborn. This is the way leading to a long life: to have abandoned the killing of living beings, to abstain from killing living beings, to dwell with one's rod laid down, one's knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, & sympathetic for the welfare of all living beings.

"There is the case where a woman or man is one who harms beings with his/her fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is sickly wherever reborn. This is the way leading to sickness: to be one who harms beings with one's fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives.

"But then there is the case where a woman or man is not one who harms beings with his/her fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is healthy wherever reborn. This is the way leading to health: not to be one who harms beings with one's fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives.

"There is the case, where a woman or man is ill-tempered & easily upset; even when lightly criticized, he/she grows offended, provoked, malicious, & resentful; shows annoyance, aversion, & bitterness. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is ugly wherever reborn. This is the way leading to ugliness: to be ill-tempered & easily upset; even when lightly criticized, to grow offended, provoked, malicious, & resentful; to show annoyance, aversion, & bitterness.

"But then there is the case where a woman or man is not ill-tempered or easily upset; even when heavily criticized, he/she doesn't grow offended, provoked, malicious, or resentful; doesn't show annoyance, aversion, or bitterness. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is beautiful wherever reborn. This is the way leading to beauty: not to be ill-tempered or easily upset; even when heavily criticized, not to be

offended, provoked, malicious, or resentful; nor to show annoyance, aversion, & bitterness.

“There is the case where a woman or man is envious. He/she envies, begrudges, & broods about others’ gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, & veneration. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is not influential wherever reborn. This is the way leading to being uninfluential: to be envious, to envy, begrudge, & brood about others’ gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, & veneration.

“But then there is the case where a woman or man is not envious. He/she does not envy, begrudge, or brood about others’ gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, or veneration. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination... If instead he/she comes to the human state, he/she is influential wherever reborn. This is the way leading to being influential: not to be envious; not to envy, begrudge, or brood about others’ gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, or veneration.

“There is the case where a woman or man is not a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, or lighting to contemplatives or brahmans. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation... If instead he/she comes to the human state, he/she is poor wherever reborn. This is the way leading to poverty: not to be a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, or lighting to contemplatives or brahmans.

“But then there is the case where a woman or man is a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, & lighting to contemplatives & brahmans. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is wealthy wherever reborn. This is the way leading to great wealth: to be a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, & lighting to contemplatives & brahmans.

“There is the case where a woman or man is obstinate & arrogant. He/she does not pay homage to those who deserve homage, rise up for

those for whom one should rise up, give a seat to those to whom one should give a seat, make way for those for whom one should make way, worship those who should be worshipped, respect those who should be respected, revere those who should be revered, or honor those who should be honored. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is low-born wherever reborn. This is the way leading to a low birth: to be obstinate & arrogant, not to pay homage to those who deserve homage, nor rise up for... nor give a seat to... nor make way for... nor worship... nor respect... nor revere... nor honor those who should be honored.

“But then there is the case where a woman or man is not obstinate or arrogant; he/she pays homage to those who deserve homage, rises up... gives a seat... makes way... worships... respects... reveres... honors those who should be honored. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is highborn wherever reborn. This is the way leading to a high birth: not to be obstinate or arrogant; to pay homage to those who deserve homage, to rise up... give a seat... make way... worship... respect... revere... honor those who should be honored.

“There is the case where a woman or man when visiting a contemplative or brahman, does not ask: ‘What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, having been done by me, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?’ Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. If, on the break-up of the body, after death—instead of reappearing in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell—he/she comes to the human state, then he/she will be stupid wherever reborn. This is the way leading to stupidity: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, not to ask: ‘What is skillful? ... Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?’

“But then there is the case where a woman or man when visiting a contemplative or brahman, asks: ‘What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, having been done by me, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?’ Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in a good destination, a heavenly world. If, on the break-up of the body, after death—instead of reappearing in a good destination, a heavenly world—he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is discerning wherever reborn. This is the way leading to discernment: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, to ask: ‘What is skillful?... Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?’

“So, student, the way leading to short life makes people short-lived, the way leading to long life makes people long-lived. The way leading to sickness makes people sickly, the way leading to health makes people healthy. The way leading to ugliness makes people ugly, the way leading to beauty makes people beautiful. The way leading to lack of influence makes people uninfluential, the way leading to influence makes people influential. The way leading to poverty makes people poor, the way leading to wealth makes people wealthy. The way leading to low birth makes people low-born, the way leading to high birth makes people highborn. The way leading to stupidity makes people stupid, the way leading to discernment makes people discerning.

“Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Action is what differentiates beings in terms of baseness & excellence.” — [MN 135](#)

§ 27. “Monks, endowed with five qualities, even though listening to the True Dhamma, one is incapable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities. Which five?

”One holds the talk in contempt.

”One holds the speaker in contempt.

”One holds oneself in contempt.

“One listens to the Dhamma with a scattered mind, a mind not gathered into one.

“One attends inappropriately.”

“Endowed with these five qualities, even though listening to the True Dhamma, one is incapable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities.

“Endowed with (the) five (opposite) qualities when listening to the True Dhamma, one is capable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities. Which five?

“One doesn’t hold the talk in contempt.

“One doesn’t hold the speaker in contempt.

“One doesn’t hold oneself in contempt.

“One listens to the Dhamma with an unscattered mind, a mind gathered into one.

“One attends appropriately.”

“Endowed with these five qualities when listening to the True Dhamma, one is capable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities.” — [AN 5:151](#)

§ 28. “Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

“He is endowed with a (present) kamma obstruction, a defilement obstruction, a result-of-(past)-kamma obstruction; he lacks conviction, has no desire (to listen), and has dull discernment.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even while listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

“He is not endowed with a (present) kamma obstruction, a defilement obstruction, or a result-of-(past)-kamma obstruction; he has conviction, has the desire (to listen), and is discerning.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even while listening to the true Dhamma.” — [AN 6:86](#)

§ 29. “Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

“When the Dhamma & Vinaya declared by the Tathāgata is being taught, he does not listen well, does not give ear, does not apply his mind to gnosis, grabs hold of what is worthless, rejects what is worthwhile, and is not endowed with the patience [or: preference] to comply with the teaching.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even while listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

“When the Dhamma & Vinaya declared by the Tathāgata is being taught, he listens well, gives ear, applies his mind to gnosis, rejects what is worthless, grabs hold of what is worthwhile, and is endowed with the patience [or: preference] to comply with the teaching.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even while listening to the true Dhamma.” — [AN 6:88](#)

§ 30. “There are these five inhabitants of the states of deprivation, inhabitants of hell, who are in agony & incurable. Which five? One who has killed his/her mother, one who has killed his/her father, one who has killed an arahant, one who—with a corrupted mind—has caused the blood of a Tathāgata to flow, and one who has caused a split in the Saṅgha. These are the five inhabitants of the states of deprivation, inhabitants of hell, who are in agony & incurable.” — [AN 5:129](#)

§ 31. “Monks, there are these three roots of what is unskillful. Which three? Greed is a root of what is unskillful, aversion is a root of what is

unskillful, delusion is a root of what is unskillful.

“Greed itself is unskillful. Whatever a greedy person fabricates by means of body, speech, or intellect, that too is unskillful. Whatever suffering a greedy person—his mind overcome with greed, his mind consumed—wrongly inflicts on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment, (with the thought,) ‘I have power. I want power,’ that too is unskillful. Thus it is that many evil, unskillful qualities/events—born of greed, caused by greed, originated through greed, conditioned by greed—come into play.

[Similarly with aversion and delusion.]

“And a person like this is called one who speaks at the wrong time, speaks what is unfactual, speaks what is irrelevant, speaks contrary to the Dhamma, speaks contrary to the Vinaya. Why...? Because of having wrongly inflicted suffering on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment, (with the thought,) ‘I have power. I want power.’ When told what is factual, he denies it and doesn’t acknowledge it. When told what is unfactual, he doesn’t make an ardent effort to untangle it (to see), ‘This is unfactual. This is baseless.’ That’s why a person like this is called one who speaks at the wrong time, speaks what is unfactual, speaks what is irrelevant, speaks contrary to the Dhamma, speaks contrary to the Vinaya.

“A person like this—his mind overcome with evil, unskillful qualities born of greed... born of aversion... born of delusion, his mind consumed—dwells in suffering right in the here & now—feeling threatened, turbulent, feverish—and at the break-up of the body, after death, can expect a bad destination.

“Just as a sal tree, a birch, or an aspen, when smothered & surrounded by three parasitic vines, falls into misfortune, falls into disaster, falls into misfortune & disaster, in the same way, a person like this—his mind overcome with evil, unskillful qualities born of greed... born of aversion... born of delusion, his mind consumed—dwells in suffering right in the here & now—feeling threatened, turbulent, feverish—and at the break-up of the body, after death, can expect a bad destination.

“These are the three roots of what is unskillful.

“Now, there are these three roots of what is skillful. Which three? Lack of greed is a root of what is skillful, lack of aversion is a root of what is

skillful, lack of delusion is a root of what is skillful.

“Lack of greed itself is skillful...

“Lack of aversion itself is skillful...

“Lack of delusion itself is skillful...

“And a person like this is called one who speaks at the right time, speaks what is factual, speaks what is relevant, speaks in line with the Dhamma, speaks in line with the Vinaya. Why...? Because of not having wrongly inflicted suffering on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment, (with the thought,) ‘I have power. I want power.’ When told what is factual, he acknowledges it and does not deny it. When told what is unfactual, he makes an ardent effort to untangle it (to see), ‘This is unfactual. This is baseless.’ That’s why a person like this is called one who speaks at the right time, speaks what is factual, speaks what is relevant, speaks in line with the Dhamma, speaks in line with the Vinaya.

“In a person like this, evil, unskillful qualities born of greed... born of aversion... born of delusion have been abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. He dwells in ease right in the here & now—feeling unthreatened, placid, unfeverish—and is unbound right in the here & now.

“Just as if there were a sal tree, a birch, or an aspen, smothered & surrounded by three parasitic vines. A man would come along, carrying a spade & a basket. He would cut the vines at the root and, having cut them at the root, would dig around them. Having dug around them, he would pull them out, even down to the rootlets. He would cut the stalks of the vines. Having cut them, he would slice them into splinters. Having sliced them into splinters, he would pound them into bits. Having pounded them into bits, he would dry them in the wind & sun. Having dried them in the wind & sun, he would burn them in a fire. Having burned them in a fire, he would reduce them to powdered ash. Having reduced them to powdered ash, he would winnow them before a high wind or let them be washed away in a swift-flowing stream. In that way the parasitic vines would have their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising.

“In the same way, in a person like this, evil, unskillful qualities born of greed... born of aversion... born of delusion have been abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. He dwells in ease right in the here & now—feeling unthreatened, placid, unfeverish—and is unbound right in the here & now.

“These are the three roots of what is skillful.” — [AN 3:70](#)

§ 32. “There’s the case, headman, where a certain teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: ‘All those who take life are destined for a plane of deprivation, are destined for hell. All those who steal... All those who indulge in illicit sex... All those who tell lies are destined for a plane of deprivation, are destined for hell.’ A disciple has faith in that teacher, and the thought occurs to him, ‘Our teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: “All those who take life are destined for a plane of deprivation, are destined for hell.” There are living beings that I have killed. I, too, am destined for a plane of deprivation, am destined for hell.’ He fastens onto that view. If he doesn’t abandon that doctrine, doesn’t abandon that state of mind, doesn’t relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would thus be placed in hell.

“(The thought occurs to him,) ‘Our teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: ‘All those who steal... All those who indulge in illicit sex... All those who tell lies are destined for a plane of deprivation, are destined for hell.’ There are lies that I have told. I, too, am destined for a plane of deprivation, am destined for hell.’ He fastens onto that view. If he doesn’t abandon that doctrine, doesn’t abandon that state of mind, doesn’t relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would thus be placed in hell.

“There is the case, headman, where a Tathāgata appears in the world, worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in clear-knowing & conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of people fit to be tamed, teacher of devas & human beings, awakened, blessed. He, in various ways, criticizes & censures the taking of life, and says, ‘Abstain from taking life.’ He criticizes & censures stealing, and says, ‘Abstain from stealing.’ He criticizes & censures indulging in

illicit sex, and says, 'Abstain from indulging in illicit sex.' He criticizes & censures the telling of lies, and says, 'Abstain from the telling of lies.'

"A disciple has faith in that teacher and reflects: 'The Blessed One in a variety of ways criticizes & censures the taking of life, and says, "Abstain from taking life." There are living beings that I have killed, to a greater or lesser extent. That was not right. That was not good. But if I become remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone.' So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then the taking of life, and in the future refrains from taking life. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.

"(He reflects:) 'The Blessed One in a variety of ways criticizes & censures stealing... indulging in illicit sex... the telling of lies, and says, "Abstain from the telling of lies." There are lies that I have told, to a greater or lesser extent. That was not right. That was not good. But if I become remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone.' So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then the telling of lies, and in the future refrains from telling lies. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.

"Having abandoned the taking of life, he refrains from taking life. Having abandoned stealing, he refrains from stealing. Having abandoned illicit sex, he refrains from illicit sex. Having abandoned lies, he refrains from lies. Having abandoned divisive speech, he refrains from divisive speech. Having abandoned harsh speech, he refrains from harsh speech. Having abandoned idle chatter, he refrains from idle chatter. Having abandoned covetousness, he becomes uncovetous. Having abandoned ill will & anger, he becomes one with a mind of no ill will. Having abandoned wrong views, he becomes one who has right views.

"That disciple of the noble ones, headman—thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unbewildered, alert, mindful—keeps pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with goodwill, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with goodwill—abundant, enlarged, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will. Just

as a strong conch-trumpet blower can notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the awareness-release through goodwill is thus developed, thus pursued, any deed done to a limited extent no longer remains there, no longer stays there.

“That disciple of the noble ones—thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unbewildered, alert, mindful—keeps pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with compassion... empathetic joy... equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity—abundant, enlarged, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will. Just as a strong conch-trumpet blower can notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the awareness-release through equanimity is thus developed, thus pursued, any deed done to a limited extent no longer remains there, no longer stays there.”
— [SN 42:8](#)

§ 33. “Long life is welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world.

“Beauty is welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world.

“Happiness is welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world.

“Status is welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world.

“Rebirth in heaven is welcome, agreeable, pleasant, & hard to obtain in the world.

“Now, I tell you, these five things are not to be obtained by reason of prayers or wishes. If they were to be obtained by reason of prayers or wishes, who here would lack them?

“It’s not fitting for the disciple of the noble ones who desires long life to pray for it or to delight in doing so. Instead, the disciple of the noble ones who desires long life should follow the path of practice leading to long life. In so doing, he will attain long life, either human or divine.

“... the disciple of the noble ones who desires beauty should follow the path of practice leading to beauty... *the disciple of the noble ones who desires happiness should follow the path of practice leading to happiness.* In so doing,

he will attain happiness, either human or divine... the disciple of the noble ones who desires status should follow the path of practice leading to status...

“It’s not fitting for the disciple of the noble ones who desires rebirth in heaven to pray for it or to delight in doing so. Instead, the disciple of the noble ones who desires rebirth in heaven should follow the path of practice leading to rebirth in heaven. In so doing, he will attain rebirth in heaven.” — [AN 5:43](#)

§ 34. “Suppose a man were to throw a large boulder into a deep lake of water, and a great crowd of people, gathering & congregating, would pray, praise, & circumambulate with their hands palm-to-palm over the heart, (saying,) ‘Rise up, O boulder! Come floating up, O boulder! Come float to the shore, O boulder!’ What do you think? Would that boulder—because of the prayers, praise, & circumambulation of that great crowd of people—rise up, come floating up, or come float to the shore?”

“No, lord.”

“So it is with any man who takes life, steals, indulges in illicit sex; is a liar, one who speaks divisive speech, harsh speech, & idle chatter; is greedy, bears thoughts of ill-will, & holds to wrong views. Even though a great crowd of people, gathering & congregating, would pray, praise, & circumambulate with their hands palm-to-palm over the heart—(saying,) ‘May this man, at the break-up of the body, after death, reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world!’—still, at the break-up of the body, after death, he would reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. ...

“Suppose a man were to throw a jar of ghee or a jar of oil into a deep lake of water, where it would break. There the shards & jar-fragments would go down, while the ghee or oil would come up. Then a great crowd of people, gathering & congregating, would pray, praise, & circumambulate with their hands palm-to-palm over the heart (saying,) ‘Sink, O ghee/oil! Submerge, O ghee/oil! Go down, O ghee/oil!’ What do you think? Would that ghee/oil, because of the prayers, praise, & circumambulation of that great crowd of people sink, submerge, or go down?”

“No, lord.”

“So it is with any man who refrains from taking life, from stealing, & from indulging in illicit sex; refrains from lying, from speaking divisive speech, from harsh speech, & from idle chatter; is not greedy, bears no thoughts of ill-will, & holds to right view. Even though a great crowd of people, gathering & congregating, would pray, praise, & circumambulate with their hands palm-to-palm over the heart—(saying,) ‘May this man, at the break-up of the body, after death, reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell!’—still, at the break-up of the body, after death, he would reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world.” — [SN 42:6](#)

§ 35. “And how is one an individual who practices for his own benefit but not for that of others? There is the case where a certain individual himself abstains from the taking of life but doesn’t encourage others in undertaking abstinence from the taking of life. He himself abstains from stealing but doesn’t encourage others in undertaking abstinence from stealing. He himself abstains from sexual misconduct but doesn’t encourage others in undertaking abstinence from sexual misconduct. He himself abstains from lying but doesn’t encourage others in undertaking abstinence from lying. He himself abstains from intoxicants that cause heedlessness but doesn’t encourage others in undertaking abstinence from intoxicants that cause heedlessness. Such is the individual who practices for his own benefit but not for that of others.” — [AN 4:99](#)

§ 36. “I designate the rebirth of one who has sustenance [or: clinging], Vaccha, and not of one without sustenance. Just as a fire burns with sustenance and not without sustenance, even so I designate the rebirth of one who has sustenance and not of one without sustenance.”

“But, Master Gotama, at the moment a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, what do you designate as its sustenance then?”

“Vaccha, when a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, I designate it as wind-sustained, for the wind is its sustenance at that time.”

“And at the moment when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, what do you designate as its sustenance then?”

“Vaccha, when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, I designate it as craving-sustained, for craving is its sustenance at that time.” — [SN 44:9](#)

§ 37. “From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

“From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

“From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.

“From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

“From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.

“From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.

“From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.

“From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.

“From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.

“From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

“From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.”

When this was said, a certain monk said to the Blessed One: “Which is the aging-&-death, lord, and whose is the aging-&-death?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “If one were to ask, ‘Which is the aging-&-death, and whose is the aging-&-death?’ and if one were to say, ‘Aging-&-death are one thing, and the aging-&-death are something/someone else’s,’ both of them would have the same meaning, even though their words would differ. When one is of the view that the soul is the same as the body, there is no leading the holy life. And when one is of the view that the soul is one thing and the body another, there is no leading the holy life. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&-death.”

[And similarly with the remaining factors.] — [SN 12:35](#)

Working Hypotheses

§ 38. As they were sitting there, the Kālāmas of Kesaputta said to the Blessed One, “Lord, there are some contemplatives & brahmans who

come to Kesaputta. They expound & glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, disparage them, show contempt for them, & pull them to pieces. And then other contemplatives & brahmins come to Kesaputta. They expound & glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, disparage them, show contempt for them, & pull them to pieces. They leave us absolutely uncertain & in doubt: Which of these venerable contemplatives & brahmins are speaking the truth, and which ones are lying?”

“Of course you are uncertain, Kālāmas. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kālāmas, don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, ‘This contemplative is our teacher.’ When you know for yourselves that, ‘These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the observant; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering’—then you should abandon them.

“What do you think, Kālāmas? When greed arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For harm, lord.”

“And this greedy person, overcome by greed, his mind possessed by greed, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person’s wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm & suffering.”

“Yes, lord.”

[Similarly with aversion & delusion.]

“So what do you think, Kālāmas: Are these qualities skillful or unskillful?”

“Unskillful, lord.”

“Blameworthy or blameless?”

“Blameworthy, lord.”

“Criticized by the observant or praised by the observant?”

“Criticized by the observant, lord.”

“When adopted & carried out, do they lead to harm & to suffering, or not?”

“When adopted & carried out, they lead to harm & to suffering. That is how it appears to us.”

“So, as I said, Kālāmas: ‘Don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, ‘This contemplative is our teacher.’ When you know for yourselves that, ‘These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the observant; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering’—then you should abandon them.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

“Now, Kālāmas, don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, ‘This contemplative is our teacher.’ When you know for yourselves that, ‘These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the observant; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness’—then you should enter & remain in them.

“What do you think, Kālāmas? When lack of greed arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For welfare, lord.”

“And this ungreedy person, not overcome by greed, his mind not possessed by greed, doesn’t kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person’s wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term welfare & happiness.”

“Yes, lord.”

[Similarly with lack of aversion & lack of delusion.]

“So what do you think, Kālāmas: Are these qualities skillful or unskillful?”

“Skillful, lord.”

“Blameworthy or blameless?”

“Blameless, lord.”

“Criticized by the observant or praised by the observant?”

“Praised by the observant, lord.”

“When adopted & carried out, do they lead to welfare & to happiness, or not?”

“When adopted & carried out, they lead to welfare & to happiness. That is how it appears to us.”

“So, as I said, Kālāmas: ‘Don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, “This contemplative is our teacher.” When you know for yourselves that, “These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the observant; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness”—then you should enter & remain in them.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said. — [AN 3:66](#)

§ 39. So the brahman householders of Sāla went to the Blessed One. On arrival, some of them bowed down to the Blessed One and sat to one side. Some of them exchanged courteous greetings with him and, after an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, sat to one side. Some of them sat to one side having saluted him with their hands palm-to-palm over their hearts. Some of them sat to one side having announced their name & clan. Some of them sat to one side in silence.

As they were sitting there, the Blessed One asked them, “Householders, is there any teacher agreeable to you, in whom you have found grounded conviction?”

“No, lord, there is no teacher agreeable to us, in whom we have found grounded conviction.”

“As you have not found an agreeable teacher, you should adopt and practice this safe-bet teaching, for this safe-bet teaching—when accepted and adopted—will be to your long-term welfare & happiness.

“And what is the safe-bet teaching?”

EXISTENCE & NON-EXISTENCE

A. “There are some contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view: ‘There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no contemplatives or brahmans who, faring rightly and

practicing rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known and realized it for themselves.’

B. “Some contemplatives & brahmans, speaking in direct opposition to those contemplatives & brahmans, say this: ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.’

“What do you think, householders? Don’t these contemplatives & brahmans speak in direct opposition to each other?”

“Yes, lord.”

A1. “Now, householders, of those contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—‘There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no contemplatives or brahmans who, faring rightly and practicing rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known and realized it for themselves’—it can be expected that, shunning these three skillful activities—good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, good mental conduct—they will adopt & practice these three unskillful activities: bad bodily conduct, bad verbal conduct, bad mental conduct. Why is that? Because those venerable contemplatives & brahmans do not see, in unskillful activities, the drawbacks, the degradation, and the defilement; nor in skillful activities the rewards of renunciation, resembling cleansing.

A2. “Because there actually is the next world, the view of one who thinks, ‘There is no next world’ is his wrong view. Because there actually is the next world, when he is resolved that ‘There is no next world,’ that is his wrong resolve. Because there actually is the next world, when he speaks the statement, ‘There is no next world,’ that is his wrong speech. Because there actually is the next world, when he says that ‘There is no next world,’ he makes himself an opponent to those arahants who know the next world. Because there actually is the next world, when he persuades another that ‘There is no next world,’ that is persuasion in what is not true Dhamma. And in that persuasion in what is not true Dhamma,

he exalts himself and disparages others. Whatever good habituation he previously had is abandoned, while bad habituation is manifested. And this wrong view, wrong resolve, wrong speech, opposition to the arahants, persuasion in what is not true Dhamma, exaltation of self, & disparagement of others: These many evil, unskillful activities come into play, in dependence on wrong view.

A3. “With regard to this, an observant person considers thus: ‘If there is no next world, then—with the breakup of the body, after death—this venerable person has made himself safe. But if there is the next world, then this venerable person—on the breakup of the body, after death—will reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. Even if we didn’t speak of the next world, and there weren’t the true statement of those venerable contemplatives & brahmans, this venerable person is still criticized in the here-&-now by the observant as a person of bad habits & wrong view: one who holds to a doctrine of non-existence.’ If there really is a next world, then this venerable person has made a bad throw twice: in that he is criticized by the observant here-&-now, and in that—with the breakup of the body, after death—he will reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. Thus this safe-bet teaching, when poorly grasped & poorly adopted by him, covers (only) one side, and leaves behind the possibility of the skillful.

B1. “Now, householders, of those contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves’—it can be expected that, shunning these three unskillful activities—bad bodily conduct, bad verbal conduct, bad mental conduct—they will adopt & practice these three skillful activities: good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, good mental conduct. Why is that? Because those venerable contemplatives & brahmans see in unskillful activities the drawbacks, the degradation, and the defilement; and in skillful activities the rewards of renunciation, resembling cleansing.

B2. “Because there actually is the next world, the view of one who thinks, ‘There is a next world’ is his right view. Because there actually is the next world, when he is resolved that ‘There is a next world,’ that is his right resolve. Because there actually is the next world, when he speaks the statement, ‘There is a next world,’ that is his right speech. Because there actually is the next world, when he says that ‘There is a next world,’ he doesn’t make himself an opponent to those arahants who know the next world. Because there actually is the next world, when he persuades another that ‘There is a next world,’ that is persuasion in what is true Dhamma. And in that persuasion in what is true Dhamma, he doesn’t exalt himself or disparage others. Whatever bad habituation he previously had is abandoned, while good habituation is manifested. And this right view, right resolve, right speech, non-opposition to the arahants, persuasion in what is true Dhamma, non-exaltation of self, & non-disparagement of others: These many skillful activities come into play, in dependence on right view.

B3. “With regard to this, an observant person considers thus: ‘If there is the next world, then this venerable person—on the breakup of the body, after death—will reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world. Even if we didn’t speak of the next world, and there weren’t the true statement of those venerable contemplatives & brahmans, this venerable person is still praised in the here-&-now by the observant as a person of good habits & right view: one who holds to a doctrine of existence.’ If there really is a next world, then this venerable person has made a good throw twice, in that he is praised by the observant here-&-now; and in that—with the breakup of the body, after death—he will reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world. Thus this safe-bet teaching, when well grasped & adopted by him, covers both sides, and leaves behind the possibility of the unskillful.

ACTION & NON-ACTION

A. “There are some contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view: ‘In acting or getting others to act, in mutilating or getting others to mutilate, in torturing or getting others to torture, in inflicting sorrow or in getting others to inflict sorrow, in tormenting or getting others to torment, in intimidating or getting others to intimidate,

in taking life, taking what is not given, breaking into houses, plundering wealth, committing burglary, ambushing highways, committing adultery, speaking falsehood—one does no evil. If with a razor-edged disk one were to turn all the living beings on this earth to a single heap of flesh, a single pile of flesh, there would be no evil from that cause, no coming of evil. Even if one were to go along the right bank of the Ganges, killing and getting others to kill, mutilating and getting others to mutilate, torturing and getting others to torture, there would be no evil from that cause, no coming of evil. Even if one were to go along the left bank of the Ganges, giving and getting others to give, making sacrifices and getting others to make sacrifices, there would be no merit from that cause, no coming of merit. Through generosity, self-control, restraint, and truthful speech there is no merit from that cause, no coming of merit.’

B. “Some contemplatives & brahmans, speaking in direct opposition to those contemplatives & brahmans, say this: ‘In acting or getting others to act, in mutilating or getting others to mutilate, in torturing or getting others to torture, in inflicting sorrow or in getting others to inflict sorrow, in tormenting or getting others to torment, in intimidating or getting others to intimidate, in taking life, taking what is not given, breaking into houses, plundering wealth, committing burglary, ambushing highways, committing adultery, speaking falsehood—one does evil. If with a razor-edged disk one were to turn all the living beings on this earth to a single heap of flesh, a single pile of flesh, there would be evil from that cause, there would be a coming of evil. If one were to go along the right bank of the Ganges, killing and getting others to kill, mutilating and getting others to mutilate, torturing and getting others to torture, there would be evil from that cause, there would be a coming of evil. If one were to go along the left bank of the Ganges, giving and getting others to give, making sacrifices and getting others to make sacrifices, there would be merit from that cause, there would be a coming of merit. Through generosity, self-control, restraint, and truthful speech there is merit from that cause, there is a coming of merit.’

“What do you think, householders? Don’t these contemplatives & brahmans speak in direct opposition to each other?”

“Yes, lord.”

A1. “Now, householders, of those contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—‘In acting or getting others to act, in mutilating or getting others to mutilate, in torturing or getting others to torture... one does no evil ... Through generosity, self-control, restraint, and truthful speech there is no merit from that cause, no coming of merit’—it can be expected that, shunning these three skillful activities—good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, good mental conduct—they will adopt & practice these three unskillful activities: bad bodily conduct, bad verbal conduct, bad mental conduct. Why is that? Because those venerable contemplatives & brahmans do not see, in unskillful activities, the drawbacks, the degradation, and the defilement; nor in skillful activities the rewards of renunciation, resembling cleansing.

A2. “Because there actually is action, the view of one who thinks, ‘There is no action’ is his wrong view. Because there actually is action, when he is resolved that ‘There is no action,’ that is his wrong resolve. Because there actually is action, when he speaks the statement, ‘There is no action,’ that is his wrong speech. Because there actually is action, when he says that ‘There is no action,’ he makes himself an opponent to those arahants who teach action. Because there actually is action, when he persuades another that ‘There is no action,’ that is persuasion in what is not true Dhamma. And in that persuasion in what is not true Dhamma, he exalts himself and disparages others. Whatever good habituation he previously had is abandoned, while bad habituation is manifested. And this wrong view, wrong resolve, wrong speech, opposition to the arahants, persuasion in what is not true Dhamma, exaltation of self, & disparagement of others: These many evil, unskillful activities come into play, in dependence on wrong view.

A3. “With regard to this, an observant person considers thus: ‘If there is no action, then—with the breakup of the body, after death—this venerable person has made himself safe. But if there is action, then this venerable person—on the breakup of the body, after death—will reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. Even if we didn’t speak of action, and there weren’t the true statement of those venerable contemplatives & brahmans, this venerable person is still criticized in the here-&-now by the observant as a person of bad habits & wrong view: one who holds to a doctrine of non-action.’ If there really is

action, then this venerable person has made a bad throw twice: in that he is criticized by the observant here-&-now; and in that—with the breakup of the body, after death—he will reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. Thus this safe-bet teaching, when poorly grasped & poorly adopted by him, covers (only) one side, and leaves behind the possibility of the skillful.

B1. “Now, householders, of those contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—‘In acting or getting others to act, in mutilating or getting others to mutilate, in torturing or getting others to torture... one does evil.... Through generosity, self-control, restraint, and truthful speech there is merit from that cause, there is a coming of merit’—it can be expected that, shunning these three unskillful activities—bad bodily conduct, bad verbal conduct, bad mental conduct—they will adopt & practice these three skillful activities: good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, good mental conduct. Why is that? Because those venerable contemplatives & brahmans see in unskillful activities the drawbacks, the degradation, and the defilement; and in skillful activities the rewards of renunciation, resembling cleansing.

B2. “Because there actually is action, the view of one who thinks, ‘There is action’ is his right view. Because there actually is action, when he is resolved that ‘There is action,’ that is his right resolve. Because there actually is action, when he speaks the statement, ‘There is action,’ that is his right speech. Because there actually is action, when he says that ‘There is action,’ he doesn’t make himself an opponent to those arahants who teach action. Because there actually is action, when he persuades another that ‘There is action,’ that is persuasion in what is true Dhamma. And in that persuasion in what is true Dhamma, he doesn’t exalt himself or disparage others. Whatever bad habituation he previously had is abandoned, while good habituation is manifested. And this right view, right resolve, right speech, non-opposition to the arahants, persuasion in what is true Dhamma, non-exaltation of self, & non-disparagement of others: These many skillful activities come into play, in dependence on right view.

B3. “With regard to this, an observant person considers thus: ‘If there is action, then this venerable person—on the breakup of the body, after death—will reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world. Even if we

didn't speak of action, and there weren't the true statement of those venerable contemplatives & brahmans, this venerable person is still praised in the here-&now by the observant as a person of good habits & right view: one who holds to a doctrine of action.' If there really is a next world, then this venerable person has made a good throw twice, in that he is praised by the observant here-&now; and in that—with the breakup of the body, after death—he will reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world. Thus this safe-bet teaching, when well grasped & adopted by him, covers both sides, and leaves behind the possibility of the unskillful.

CAUSALITY & NON-CAUSALITY

A. "There are some contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view: 'There is no causality, no requisite condition, for the defilement of beings. Beings are defiled without causality, without requisite condition. There is no causality, no requisite condition, for the purification of beings. Beings are purified without causality, without requisite condition. There is no strength, no effort, no human energy, no human endeavor. All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls are powerless, devoid of strength, devoid of effort. Subject to the changes of fate, serendipity, and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six great classes of birth.'

B. "Some contemplatives & brahmans, speaking in direct opposition to those contemplatives & brahmans, say this: 'There is causality, there is requisite condition, for the defilement of beings. Beings are defiled with causality, with requisite condition. There is causality, there is requisite condition, for the purification of beings. Beings are purified with causality, with requisite condition. There is strength, there is effort, there is human energy, there is human endeavor. It's not the case that all living beings, all life, all beings, all souls are powerless, devoid of strength, devoid of effort; or that subject to the changes of fate, serendipity, and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six great classes of birth.'

"What do you think, householders? Don't these contemplatives & brahmans speak in direct opposition to each other?"

"Yes, lord."

A1. "Now, householders, of those contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—'There is no cause, no requisite

condition, for the defilement of beings.... Subject to the changes of fate, serendipity, and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six great classes of birth—it can be expected that, shunning these three skillful activities—good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, good mental conduct—they will adopt & practice these three unskillful activities: bad bodily conduct, bad verbal conduct, bad mental conduct. Why is that? Because those venerable contemplatives & brahmans do not see, in unskillful activities, the drawbacks, the degradation, and the defilement; nor in skillful activities the rewards of renunciation, resembling cleansing.

A2. “Because there actually is causality, the view of one who thinks, ‘There is no causality’ is his wrong view. Because there actually is causality, when he is resolved that ‘There is no causality,’ that is his wrong resolve. Because there actually is causality, when he speaks the statement, ‘There is no causality,’ that is his wrong speech. Because there actually is causality, when he says that ‘There is no causality,’ he makes himself an opponent to those arahants who teach causality. Because there actually is causality, when he persuades another that ‘There is no causality,’ that is persuasion in what is not true Dhamma. And in that persuasion in what is not true Dhamma, he exalts himself and disparages others. Whatever good habituation he previously had is abandoned, while bad habituation is manifested. And this wrong view, wrong resolve, wrong speech, opposition to the arahants, persuasion in what is not true Dhamma, exaltation of self, & disparagement of others: These many evil, unskillful activities come into play, in dependence on wrong view.

A3. “With regard to this, an observant person considers thus: ‘If there is no causality, then—with the breakup of the body, after death—this venerable person has made himself safe. But if there is causality, then this venerable person—on the breakup of the body, after death—will reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. Even if we didn’t speak of causality, and there weren’t the true statement of those venerable contemplatives & brahmans, this venerable person is still criticized in the here-&-now by the observant as a person of bad habits & wrong view: one who holds to a doctrine of non-causality.’ If there really is a next world, then this venerable person has made a bad throw twice: in that he is criticized by the observant here-&-now, and in that—with the

breakup of the body, after death—he will reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. Thus this safe-bet teaching, when poorly grasped & poorly adopted by him, covers (only) one side, and leaves behind the possibility of the skillful.

B1. “Now, householders, of those contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—‘There is causality, there is requisite condition, for the defilement of beings.... It’s not the case that all living beings, all life, all beings, all souls are powerless, devoid of strength, devoid of effort; or that subject to the changes of fate, serendipity, and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six great classes of birth’—it can be expected that, shunning these three unskillful activities—bad bodily conduct, bad verbal conduct, bad mental conduct—they will adopt & practice these three skillful activities: good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, good mental conduct. Why is that? Because those venerable contemplatives & brahmans see in unskillful activities the drawbacks, the degradation, and the defilement; and in skillful activities the rewards of renunciation, resembling cleansing.

B2. “Because there actually is causality, the view of one who thinks, ‘There is causality’ is his right view. Because there actually is causality, when he is resolved that ‘There is causality,’ that is his right resolve. Because there actually causality, when he speaks the statement, ‘There is causality,’ that is his right speech. Because there actually is causality, when he says that ‘There is causality,’ he doesn’t make himself an opponent to those arahants who teach causality. Because there actually is causality, when he persuades another that ‘There is causality,’ that is persuasion in what is true Dhamma. And in that persuasion in what is true Dhamma, he doesn’t exalt himself or disparage others. Whatever bad habituation he previously had is abandoned, while good habituation is manifested. And this right view, right resolve, right speech, non-opposition to the arahants, persuasion in what is true Dhamma, non-exaltation of self, & non-disparagement of others: These many skillful activities come into play, in dependence on right view.

B3. “With regard to this, an observant person considers thus: ‘If there is causality, then this venerable person—on the breakup of the body, after death—will reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world. Even if we didn’t speak of causality, and there weren’t the true statement of those

venerable contemplatives & brahmans, this venerable person is still praised in the here-&-now by the observant as a person of good habits & right view: one who holds to a doctrine of causality.’ If there really is causality, then this venerable person has made a good throw twice, in that he is praised by the observant here-&-now; and in that—with the breakup of the body, after death—he will reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world. Thus this safe-bet teaching, when well grasped & adopted by him, covers both sides, and leaves behind the possibility of the unskillful.

FORMLESSNESS

“There are some contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view: ‘There is no total formlessness.’ Some contemplatives & brahmans, speaking in direct opposition to those contemplatives & brahmans, say this: ‘There is total formlessness.’ What do you think, householders? Don’t these contemplatives & brahmans speak in direct opposition to each other?”

“Yes, lord.”

“With regard to this, an observant person considers thus: ‘As for those venerable contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—“There is no total formlessness”—I haven’t seen that. As for those venerable contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—“There is total formlessness”—I haven’t known that. If I, not knowing, not seeing, were to take one side and declare, “Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless,” that would not be fitting for me. As for those venerable contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—“There is no total formlessness”: If their statement is true, there’s the safe-bet possibility that I might reappear among the mind-made devas of form. As for those venerable contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—“There is total formlessness”: If their statement is true, there’s the safe-bet possibility that I might reappear among the perception-made devas of no form. The taking up of rods & weapons, quarrels, contention, disputes, recrimination, divisiveness, & false speech are seen to arise from form, but not from total formlessness.’ Reflecting thus, he practices for disenchantment toward forms, for dispassion toward forms, and for the cessation of forms.

CESSATION OF BECOMING

“There are some contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view: ‘There is no total cessation of becoming.’ Some contemplatives & brahmans, speaking in direct opposition to those contemplatives & brahmans, say this: ‘There is total cessation of becoming.’ What do you think, householders? Don’t these contemplatives & brahmans speak in direct opposition to each other?”

“Yes, lord.”

“With regard to this, an observant person considers thus: ‘As for those venerable contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—“There is no total cessation of becoming”—I haven’t seen that. As for those venerable contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—“There is total cessation of becoming”—I haven’t known that. If I, not knowing, not seeing, were to take one side and declare, “Only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless,” that would not be fitting for me. As for those venerable contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—“There is no total cessation of becoming”: If their statement is true, there’s the safe-bet possibility that I might reappear among the perception-made devas of no form. As for those venerable contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—“There is total cessation of becoming”: If their statement is true, it is possible that I will be totally unbound in the here-&-now. As for those venerable contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—“There is no total cessation of becoming”: This view of theirs borders on passion, borders on fettering, borders on relishing, borders on grasping, borders on clinging. As for those venerable contemplatives & brahmans who hold this doctrine, hold this view—“There is total cessation of becoming”: This view of theirs borders on non-passion, borders on non-fettering, borders on non-relishing, borders on non-grasping, borders on non-clinging.’ Reflecting thus, he practices for disenchantment toward becomings, for dispassion toward becomings, and for the cessation of becomings.” — [*MN 60*](#)

§ 40. “Now, based on what line of reasoning should one often reflect... that ‘I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator.

Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir’? There are beings who conduct themselves in a bad way in body... in speech... and in mind. But when they often reflect on that fact, that bad conduct in body, speech, & mind will either be entirely abandoned or grow weaker....

“A disciple of the noble ones considers this: ‘I am not the only one who is the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator; who—whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir. To the extent that there are beings—past & future, passing away & re-arising—all beings are the owners of their actions, heir to their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Whatever they do, for good or for evil, to that will they fall heir.’ When he/she often reflects on this, the [factors of the] path take birth. He/she sticks with that path, develops it, cultivates it. As he/she sticks with that path, develops it, & cultivates it, the fetters are abandoned, the obsessions destroyed.” — [AN 5:57](#)

§ 41. “Long have you (repeatedly) experienced the death of a mother... the death of a father... the death of a brother... the death of a sister... the death of a son... the death of a daughter... loss with regard to relatives... loss with regard to wealth... loss with regard to disease. The tears you have shed over [each of these losses] while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time—crying & weeping from being joined with what is displeasing, being separated from what is pleasing—are greater than the water in the four great oceans.

“Why is that? From an inconceivable beginning comes the wandering-on. A beginning point is not discernible, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on. Long have you thus experienced stress, experienced pain, experienced loss, swelling the cemeteries—enough to become disenchanted with all fabricated things, enough to become dispassionate, enough to be released.” ...

“Just as a stick thrown up in the air lands sometimes on its base, sometimes on its side, sometimes on its tip; in the same way, beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving, transmigrating &

wandering on, sometimes go from this world to another world, sometimes come from another world to this.” ...

“When you see someone who has fallen on hard times, overwhelmed with hard times, you should conclude: ‘We, too, have experienced just this sort of thing in the course of that long, long time.’” ...

“When you see someone who is happy & well-provided in life, you should conclude: ‘We, too, have experienced just this sort of thing in the course of that long, long time.’” ...

“A being who has not been your mother at one time in the past is not easy to find.... A being who has not been your father.... your brother.... your sister.... your son.... your daughter at one time in the past is not easy to find.

“Why is that? From an inconceivable beginning comes the wandering-on. A beginning point is not discernible, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on. Long have you thus experienced stress, experienced pain, experienced loss, swelling the cemeteries—enough to become disenchanted with all fabricated things, enough to become dispassionate, enough to be released.”— [SN 15:3](#), [9](#), [11–12](#), [14–19](#)

Discernment in Action

§ 42. The Buddha: “What do you think, Rāhula: What is a mirror for?”

Rāhula [his son, who was seven at the time]: “For reflection, sir.”

The Buddha: “In the same way, Rāhula, bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions are to be done with repeated reflection.

“Whenever you want to perform a bodily action, you should reflect on it: ‘This bodily action I want to perform—would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then any bodily action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a

skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then any bodily action of that sort is fit for you to do. [Similarly with verbal actions & mental actions.]

“While you are performing a bodily action, you should reflect on it: ‘This bodily action I am doing—is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to affliction of others, or both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it. [Similarly with verbal actions & mental actions.]

“Having performed a bodily action, you should reflect on it.... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful mental qualities. [Similarly with verbal actions.]

“Having performed a mental action, you should reflect on it.... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful mental action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should feel horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with it. Feeling horrified... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful mental action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful mental qualities.

“Rāhula, all the contemplatives & brahmans in the course of the past who purified their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, did it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

“All the contemplatives & brahmans in the course of the future... All the contemplatives & brahmans at present who purify their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, do it through repeated

reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

“So, Rāhula, you should train yourself: ‘I will purify my bodily actions... verbal actions... my mental actions through repeated reflection.’ That’s how you should train yourself.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Rāhula delighted in the Blessed One’s words. — [MN 61](#)

§ 43. “As for the course of action that is unpleasant to do but that, when done, leads to what is profitable, it’s in light of this course of action that one may be known... as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn’t reflect, ‘Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is profitable.’ So he doesn’t do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, ‘Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is profitable.’ So he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him.

“As for the course of action that is pleasant to do but that, when done, leads to what is unprofitable, it’s in light of this course of action that one may be known... as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn’t reflect, ‘Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is unprofitable.’ So he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, ‘Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is unprofitable.’ So he doesn’t do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him.” — [AN 4:115](#)

§ 44. “Now what, monks, is the noble eightfold path? Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

“And what, monks, is right view? Knowledge with regard to [or: in terms of] stress, knowledge with regard to the origination of stress, knowledge with regard to the stopping of stress, knowledge with regard to the way of practice leading to the stopping of stress: This, monks, is called right view.

“And what, monks, is right resolve? Resolve for renunciation, resolve for non-ill will, resolve for harmlessness: This, monks, is called right resolve.

“And what, monks, is right speech? Abstaining from lying, abstaining from divisive speech, abstaining from harsh speech, abstaining from idle chatter: This, monks, is called right speech.

“And what, monks, is right action? Abstaining from taking life, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from sexual intercourse [[MN 141](#) replaces “sexual intercourse” with “illicit sex”]: This, monks, is called right action.

“And what, monks, is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood. This, monks, is called right livelihood.

“And what, monks, is right effort? (i) There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (ii) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen. (iii) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (iv) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This, monks, is called right effort.

“And what, monks, is right mindfulness? (i) There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. (ii) He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. (iii) He remains focused on the mind in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. (iv) He remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. This, monks, is called right mindfulness.

“And what, monks, is right concentration? (i) There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. (ii) With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. (iii) With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ (iv) With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This, monks, is called right concentration.” — [SN 45:8](#)

§ 45. “And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *analysis of qualities* as a factor for awakening [among the factors for awakening, this is the discernment factor], or for the growth & increase of analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening once it has arisen? There are qualities that are skillful & unskillful, blameworthy & blameless, gross & refined, siding with darkness & with light. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of analysis of qualities... once it has arisen.” — [SN 46:51](#)

§ 46. “A person immersed in ignorance: If he fabricates a meritorious fabrication, his consciousness goes on to merit. If he fabricates a demeritorious fabrication, his consciousness goes on to demerit. If he fabricates an imperturbable fabrication, his consciousness goes on to the imperturbable.

“When ignorance is abandoned by a monk, clear knowing arises. From the fading of ignorance and the arising of clear knowing, he neither fabricates a meritorious fabrication nor a demeritorious fabrication nor an imperturbable fabrication. Neither fabricating nor willing, he is not sustained by [does not cling to] anything in the world. Unsustained, he is not agitated. Unagitated, he is totally unbound right within. He discerns

that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’” — [SN 12:51](#)

§ 47. “Monks, these three are causes for the origination of actions. Which three? Greed is a cause for the origination of actions. Aversion is a cause for the origination of actions. Delusion is a cause for the origination of actions.

“Any action performed with greed—born of greed, caused by greed, originating from greed: Wherever one’s selfhood [*attabhāva*] turns up, there that action will ripen. Where that action ripens, there one will experience its fruit, either in this very life that has arisen or further along in the sequence.

[Similarly with aversion & delusion.]

“Just as when seeds are not broken, not rotten, not damaged by wind & heat, capable of sprouting, well-buried, planted in well-prepared soil, and the rain-god would offer good streams of rain: Those seeds would thus come to growth, increase, & abundance. In the same way, any action performed with greed... performed with aversion... performed with delusion—born of delusion, caused by delusion, originating from delusion: Wherever one’s selfhood turns up, there that action will ripen. Where that action ripens, there one will experience its fruit, either in this very life that has arisen or further along in the sequence.

“These are three causes for the origination of actions.

“Now, these three are (further) causes for the origination of actions. Which three? Non-greed is a cause for the origination of actions. Non-aversion is a cause for the origination of actions. Non-delusion is a cause for the origination of actions.

“Any action performed with non-greed—born of non-greed, caused by non-greed, originating from non-greed: When greed is gone, that action is thus abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising.

[Similarly with non-aversion & non-delusion.]

“Just as when seeds are not broken, not rotten, not damaged by wind & heat, capable of sprouting, well-buried, planted in well-prepared soil, and

a man would burn them with fire and, burning them with fire, would make them into fine ashes. Having made them into fine ashes, he would winnow them before a high wind or wash them away in a swift-flowing stream. Those seeds would thus be destroyed at the root, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising.

“In the same way, any action performed with non-greed... performed with non-aversion... performed with non-delusion—born of non-delusion, caused by non-delusion, originating from non-delusion: When delusion is gone, that action is thus abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising.” — [AN 3:34](#)

§ 48. “If one stays obsessed with form, monk, that’s what one is measured/limited by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

“If one stays obsessed with feeling....

“If one stays obsessed with perception....

“If one stays obsessed with fabrications....

“If one stays obsessed with consciousness, that’s what one is measured by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

“But if one doesn’t stay obsessed with form, monk, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with feeling....

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with perception....

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with fabrications....

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with consciousness, that’s not what one is measured/limited by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.” — [SN 22:36](#)

§ 49. As he was sitting there, Ven. Rādhā said to the Blessed One: “‘A being,’ lord. ‘A being,’ it’s said. To what extent is one said to be ‘a being’?”

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for form, Rādhā: when one is caught up [*satta*] there, tied up [*visatta*] there, one is said to be ‘a being

[satta].’

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for feeling... perception... fabrications...

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for consciousness, Rādhā: when one is caught up there, tied up there, one is said to be ‘a being.’

“Just as when boys or girls are playing with little sand castles (lit: dirt houses): as long as they are not free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for those little sand castles, that’s how long they have fun with those sand castles, enjoy them, treasure them, feel possessive of them. But when they become free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for those little sand castles, then they smash them, scatter them, demolish them with their hands or feet and make them unfit for play.

“In the same way, Rādhā, you too should smash, scatter, & demolish form, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for form.

“You should smash, scatter, & demolish feeling, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for feeling.

“You should smash, scatter, & demolish perception, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for perception.

“You should smash, scatter, & demolish fabrications, and make them unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for fabrications.

“You should smash, scatter, & demolish consciousness and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for consciousness—because the ending of craving, Rādhā, is unbinding.” — [SN 23:2](#)

§ 50. “But, Master Gotama, the monk whose mind is thus released: Where does he reappear?”

“‘Reappear,’ Vaccha, doesn’t apply.”

“In that case, Master Gotama, he does not reappear.”

“‘Does not reappear,’ Vaccha, doesn’t apply.”

“...both does & does not reappear.”

“...doesn’t apply.”

“...neither does nor does not reappear.”

“...doesn’t apply.”

“How is it, Master Gotama, when Master Gotama is asked if the monk reappears... does not reappear... both does & does not reappear... neither does nor does not reappear, he says, ‘... doesn’t apply’ in each case. At this point, Master Gotama, I am befuddled; at this point, confused. The modicum of clarity coming to me from your earlier conversation is now obscured.”

“Of course you’re befuddled, Vaccha. Of course you’re confused. Deep, Vaccha, is this phenomenon, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. For those with other views, other practices, other satisfactions, other aims, other teachers, it is difficult to know. That being the case, I will counter-question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think, Vaccha? If a fire were burning in front of you, would you know that ‘This fire is burning in front of me’?”

“...yes...”

“And if someone were to ask you, Vaccha, ‘This fire burning in front of you, dependent on what is it burning?’: Thus asked, how would you reply?”

“...I would reply, ‘This fire burning in front of me is burning dependent on grass & timber as its sustenance.’”

“If the fire burning in front of you were to go out, would you know that, ‘This fire burning in front of me has gone out’?”

“...yes...”

“And if someone were to ask you, ‘This fire that has gone out in front of you, in which direction from here has it gone? East? West? North? Or south?’: Thus asked, how would you reply?”

“That doesn’t apply, Master Gotama. Any fire burning dependent on a sustenance of grass & timber, being unnourished—from having consumed that sustenance and not being offered any other—is classified simply as ‘out’ [unbound].”

“In the same way, Vaccha, any form by which one describing the Tathāgata would describe him: That the Tathāgata has abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of form, Vaccha, the Tathāgata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like

the sea. ‘Reappears’ doesn’t apply. ‘Does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Both does & does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Neither reappears nor does not reappear’ doesn’t apply.

“Any feeling.... Any perception.... Any fabrication....

“Any consciousness by which one describing the Tathāgata would describe him: That the Tathāgata has abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of consciousness, Vaccha, the Tathāgata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the sea. ‘Reappears’ doesn’t apply. ‘Does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Both does & does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Neither reappears nor does not reappear’ doesn’t apply.” — [MN 72](#)

§ 51. In one who
has gone the full distance,
is free from sorrow,
is everywhere
 fully released,
has abandoned all bonds:
 No fever is found. — [Dhp 90](#)

FURTHER READINGS

On the place of kamma in the Buddha's teachings as a whole:

[*The Buddha's Teaching: An Introduction*](#)

On skillful kamma: [*Merit*](#); [*Discernment*](#); [*"The Healing Power of the Precepts"*](#); [*"Getting the Message"*](#); [*"The Integrity of Emptiness"*](#); [*"The Lessons of Gratitude"*](#); [*"No Strings Attached"*](#); [*Opening the Door to the Dhamma*](#)

On kamma and meditation: [*The Karma of Mindfulness*](#); [*The Five Faculties*](#); [*Right Mindfulness*](#)

On kamma and goodwill: [*The Sublime Attitudes*](#); [*"Educating Compassion"*](#)

On kamma and not-self: [*Selves & Not-self*](#); [*"The Wisdom of the Ego"*](#)

On rebirth: [*The Truth of Rebirth*](#); [*"Saṃsāra"*](#)

On kamma and becoming: [*The Paradox of Becoming*](#)

On the path to the end of kamma: [*The Noble Eightfold Path*](#); [*On the Path*](#); [*The Wings to Awakening*](#); [*The Shape of Suffering*](#); [*"Saṃsāra Divided by Zero"*](#)

On nibbāna: [*The Mind Like Fire Unbound*](#); [*"A Verb for Nirvāṇa"*](#)