



Karma & Rebirth in Early Buddhism

*A course for **study** and **reflection***

*by **Bhante Sujato** and **Ajahn Brahmali**.*

*Presented by **The Buddhist Society of Western Australia**.*

Introduction

Following the success of the Early Buddhism Course of 2013, the BSWA will hold a course on Karma & Rebirth in Early Buddhism. Whereas the 2013 course was a general survey of Early Buddhist texts, teachings, and practices, the current course focus on the key, interrelated teachings of karma and rebirth. The course will follow a similar format of teachings, discussions, and meditations, with readings assigned for each workshop. The course will be available on the internet for those not able to attend personally.

As in 2013, the course will be held at Dhammaloka Centre once a month on a Sunday. However, the times are changed, and the course will be from 12.30 pm to 6.30 pm.

The course will be led by Bhante Sujato and Ajahn Brahmali, and from January to June it will take the place of the Sutta Class which is normally held on the fourth Sunday of the month.

The proposed schedule is as follows. Details are subject to change, so please check each month to confirm.

Schedule

12.00	Arrive
12.30	Teachings and meditation
2.00	Tea
2.30	Small group reading & discussion
4.00	Tea
4.30	Teachings and meditation
6.00	Discussion
6.30	Finish

On the readings

The readings are essential to the course, and should be completed prior to each workshop. By completing the reading students will acquire a reasonable knowledge of the suttas, as well as the skills to explore and interpret on their own. Reading time is expected to be one or two hours per week.

All texts will be available online, with links given here to available translations.

While the readings will be translations from the Pali, the classes will also refer to comparative studies, most of which are based on the work of Venerable Anālayo. A list of his publications, many for free download, is at <http://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/pdf/analayo/publications.htm>.

Online resources and discussion

We have set up an online platform for hosting the course resources and further discussions. There you'll find the readings, videos, talks, and so on, and you'll be able to ask questions and join in the discussion with people taking the course in various locations.

<http://discourse.suttacentral.net/c/courses/karma-rebirth>

Registration

You must register to attend the course.

How do I register?

You can register through the BSWA website (<http://www.dhammaloka.org.au/home/item/1796-early-buddhism-course.html>) or call the BSWA on 9345 1711.

How much does the course cost?

The course is freely offered by the BSWA.

What if I can't make it every month?

If you have to miss a session or two, don't worry, just do the reading and catch up online. However if you will be absent for more than two sessions, please let us know, as we will have to give preference to those who plan to attend the entire course.

Where is the course held?

18–20 Nanson Way, Nollamara 6061, Western Australia.

When is it on?

12.30pm–6.30pm.

January 25, February 22, March 29, April 26, May 24, June 28.

Workshop 1: Myth-busting

Sunday, 25 January

Of all the Buddha's teachings, kamma is one of the best known and at the same time one of the most misunderstood. So before presenting what the Buddha taught we're going to clear away a bunch of preconceptions that commonly give rise to confusions. Get your beginner's mind ready, and prepare to have your beliefs challenged.

Here are some of the "myths" that we'll be looking at. Find out which are true and which need busting! If you have any other kamma "myths" you'd like us to look at, please let us know well before the event, and we'll try to include it.

- There is no in-between state.
- The realms of rebirth only refer to psychological states; rebirth is a metaphor.
- It is better to be reborn as a human than as a god.
- Collective kamma.
- Everything is due to kamma.
- Your last mind moment determines your rebirth.
- Rituals are powerful kamma.
- You can burn off your kamma by meditating on pain.
- Mahāmoggallāna's death.
- The law of attraction (good attracts good).
- The Buddha taught rebirth and kamma because of the cultural views at the time.
- Consciousness enters the embryo at the moment of conception.
- Transference of merit.
- Birth as a woman is because of bad kamma.

Readings

We are not supplying a list of suttas for this workshop, as we will be covering a whole range of different issues. But feel free to get started on the readings for the subsequent workshops. Instead, here are some general summaries of the Buddha's teachings on karma, by Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhante Dhammika.

- *Questions on Kamma*, by Bhikkhu Bodhi: <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebdha057.htm>
- *Good Kamma, Bad Kamma, What Exactly is Kamma?* by Bhante Dhammika: <http://www.bhantedhammika.net/what-exactly-is-kamma>

Workshop 2: Historical context

Sunday, 22 February

The Buddha taught within a complex, shifting, and dynamic religious and philosophical environment. His teaching is marked by a conscious and reflective engagement with the views and ideas that he encountered around him. Yet he would always insist that the core of his teaching was based on the direct perception of the truth. What was new about the teachings of the Buddha? How did they relate to and build on existing ideas?

Readings

- Transcript of our interview with Richard Gombrich.
<http://discourse.suttacentral.net/t/interview-with-richard-gombrich>
- MN101 Devadaha: Jain ideas. (§ 1–20 in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn101>
- DN5 Kūṭadanta: brahmanical vs. Buddhist sacrifice. (§ 9–27 in Maurice Walshe's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/dn5>
- MN56 Upāli: Jain versus Buddhist ideas of kamma. (§ 1–14 in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn56>
- MN51 Kandaraka: more on the brahmanical sacrifice. (§ 10 in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn51>
- DN2 Sāmaññaphala: ideas on kamma and rebirth of other ascetics. (§ 15–33 in Maurice Walshe's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/dn2/29-57>
- SN35:146 Kamma: old kamma and new kamma; compare with Jain ideas.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/sn35.146>
- AN10.219 The deed-born body: an example of Jain influence on the Pali Canon? (only first § in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an10.219>

Workshop 3: What the suttas say

Sunday, 29 March

A general overview of how the suttas describe karma and rebirth.

Readings

- Transcript of our interview with Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi.
<http://discourse.suttacentral.net/t/interview-with-bhikkhu-bodhi>
- MN41.14 Sāleyyaka: definition of ordinary right view; general teaching on kamma.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn41>
- AN3.69 Akusalamūla: the roots of bad choices.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an3.69>
- AN6:63 Nibbhedika: kamma is intention. (only the fifth section/item, which is on kamma)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an6.63>
- AN3:34 Hetu: the roots of good and bad; the connection between kamma, intention and motivation.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an3.34>
- MN120 Saṅkhāruppatti: rebirth according to intention and kamma.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn120>
- AN10:47 Mahāli: *ayoniso manasikāra* and wrongly directed mind added as causes of bad kamma.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an10.47>
- MN57 Kukkaravatika: directing the mind successfully gives a corresponding rebirth, but wrong view leads to hell + the four type of kamma.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn57>
- MN60 Apaṇṇaka: why acting as if there is rebirth and kamma is always right + consequences of wrong view. (§ 1–28 in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn60>
- MN135 Cūḷakammavibhaṅga: root sutta on kamma, but with important interpretational problems.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn135>
- MN136 Mahākammavibhaṅga: root sutta on kamma, on the complexity of the relationship between kamma and rebirth.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn136>

- SN36:21 Salla: eight causes of feeling, of which kamma is only one.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/sn36.21>
- AN3:61 Tittiya: the view that all is the result of kamma leads to the negation of the spiritual life. (only first half of sutta)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an3.61>
- AN3:100 Loṇaphala: the lump of salt: well known and powerful simile + a number of other good similes.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an3.100>
- MN 129 Bālapaṇḍita: various destinations and the path leading there + simile of the blind turtle and the yoke.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn129>
- AN3:36 Yama the interrogator: how this should be understood.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an3.36>
- MN68 Naḷakapāṇa: the Buddha declares people's rebirths to inspire. (§ 9–24 in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn68>
- AN7:57 Sīha: he says he does not know rebirth, but accepts it on faith/confidence.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an7.57>
- AN10:177 Jānussoni: what we can do for the departed.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an10.177>
- SN42:6 Asibandhakaputta: why prayers do not help for rebirth.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/sn42.6>
- SN15:3 Tears: on the sheer scale of *saṃsāra*.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/sn15.3>

Workshop 4: The evidence

Sunday, 26 April

Are rebirth and kamma just traditional Buddhist ideas, or is there any evidence to substantiate them? What kinds of things would constitute good evidence? What principles are contained in the suttas themselves to guide us? Are certain aspects of the Buddhist teachings better supported than others? In this session we will introduce the groundbreaking research of Ian Stevenson and Jim Tucker, and look at the evidence for, and sceptical response to, the notion that rebirth can be supported within a scientific context.

Readings

- Transcript of our interview with Dr. Jim Tucker.
<http://discourse.suttacentral.net/t/interview-with-jim-tucker>
- DN23 Pāyāsi: why various experiments fail to prove rebirth.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/dn23>
- MN4 Bhayabherava: the Buddha's awakening included seeing rebirth and kamma (anecdotal evidence of the highest significance). (§ 27–33 in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn4>
- MN12 Mahāsīhanada: the Buddha says he understands all destinations and the paths leading there (anecdotal evidence). (§ 35–41 in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn12>
- AN8:64 Gaya: perfect awakening only after he had a thorough knowledge of the heavenly realms and the kamma that lead to rebirth there (anecdotal evidence).
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an8.64>

Workshop 5: Going deeper

Sunday, 24 May

How does kamma and rebirth fit into the Buddha's teachings on liberation, especially the four noble truths, dependent origination, and awakening? We will be asking questions such as: How do we contemplate rebirth so that it has a real spiritual impact? How does karmic continuity and rebirth without a self work? Does the Dhamma make sense without rebirth, for instance, the idea of suffering?

Readings

- MN72 Aggivacchagotta: on the meaning of the ending of rebirth.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn72>
- MN38 Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya: dependent origination with practical example, including rebirth. (§ 25–40 in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/mn38>
- DN15: Mahānidāna: dependent origination and rebirth. (§ 4+21–22 in Maurice Walshe's translation)
<http://suttacentral.net/en/dn15>
- AN3:111 Causes: good kamma leads to the end of kamma.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an3.111>
- AN4:77 Inconceivable matters: in what way kamma is inconceivable.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an4.77>
- AN3:77+78 Bhava: kamma is the field.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/an3.77>
- SN15:9 The stick: how to interpret this simile.
<http://suttacentral.net/en/sn15.9>
- SN12.46 A certain Brahmin: who experiences the result of kamma?
<http://suttacentral.net/en/sn12.46>

Workshop 6: Reflections

Sunday, 28 June

In this final session we will step back, summarize and digest what we have learned. We'll be in a much better position to reflect on what the teaching means, and how it relates to us as human beings who wish to follow the Buddha's path. We will also discuss such questions as whether one can be a Buddhist while rejecting rebirth, and what happens if rebirth ever is conclusively disproved.