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(Nava Purāṇa) Kamma Sutta¹

The Discourse on (New and Old) Karma | S 35.146/4:132 f

Theme: Karma in the light of the 4 Noble Truths

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

This short but profound Sutta is a restatement of the four noble truths in terms of karma. “Old karma” here refers to the six senses. The theme of “old karma” (*purāṇa, kamma*) is applied to the body (synonymous with the six senses) in **the (Kāya) Na Tumha Sutta** (S 12.37/2:64 f), where the Aṅguttara Commentary explains that the body is not “old karma” but because it arises from old karma, it is referred to in terms of its conditions. It is seen as “put together” (*abhisāṅkhata*) since it is created by conditions. It is “thought out” (*abhisāñcetaṇita*) because it is based on volition (the will), rooted in volition. It is “to be felt” (*vedaniya*) because it is basis for what is to be felt [ie the basis and object for feeling] (SA 2:70, 402).

In terms of **dependent arising** (*paṭicca, samuppāda*),² the body here comes under form (*rūpa*) of “name-and-form” (*nāma, rūpa*). Name-and-form arises as a result of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), that is, rebirth-consciousness, a co-nascent (*sahajāta*), and that both consciousness and name-and-form arise from volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*), the karma of the previous existence. As such, this Sutta is closely connected with the three **Cetanā Suttas** (S 12.38-40/2:65-67).³

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The Discourse on (New and Old) Karma

S 35.146/4:132 f

[132]

2 Bhikshus, I will teach you new and old karma, the ending of karma, and the way to the ending of karma. Listen, pay close attention to it, I will speak.

3 (1) And what, bhikshus, is **old karma**?

The eye, bhikshus, is to be regarded as old karma, put together, thought out, something to be felt.⁴

The ear, bhikshus, is to be regarded as old karma, put together, thought out, something to be felt.

The nose, bhikshus, is to be regarded as old karma, put together, thought out, something to be felt.

The tongue, bhikshus, is to be regarded as old karma, put together, thought out, something to be felt.

The body, bhikshus, is to be regarded as old karma, put together, thought out, something to be felt.

The mind, bhikshus, is to be regarded as old karma, put together, thought out, something to be felt.

—This, bhikshus, is called old karma.

4 (2) And what, bhikshus, is **new karma**?

¹ Called **Nirodha Kamma S** in Be (VRI CSCD); called **Kamma Nirodha S** in World Tipitaka.

² The 12 links of the dependent arising is as follows: with ignorance as condition, (volitional) formations arise; with formations as condition, consciousness arises; with consciousness as condition, name-and-form arises; with name-and-form as condition, the six sense-bases arise; with the six sense-bases as condition, contact arises; with contact as condition, feeling arises; with feeling as condition, craving arises; with craving as condition, clinging arises; with clinging as condition becoming arises; with becoming as condition, birth arises; with birth as condition, there arise decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering (Acela Kassapa S 1, S 12.17/2:20 f = SD 18.5). See Intro to **Tiṭṭh’āyatana S** (A 3.61 = SD 6.8) & also **(Kāya) Na Tumha S** (S 12.37 = SD 5.14).

³ See S:B 757 n111.

⁴ *Vedaniya*, lit “to be felt”; “intelligible” (DPL); “(a) to be known, intelligible, comprehensible (D 1:12, 2:36; M 1:487, 2:220); (b) to be experienced (S 4:114; A 1:249, 4:382)” (PED: *vedeti*).

Whatever deed, bhikshus, one does now through the body, through speech, through the mind—this, bhikshus, is called new karma.⁵

5 (3) And what, bhikshus, is **the ending of karma**?

When, bhikshus, one reaches liberation [133] with the ending of these deeds of the body, of speech, and of the mind—this, bhikshus, is called the ending of karma.

6 (4) And what, bhikshus, is called **the path leading to the ending of karma**?

It is this noble eightfold path, that is,
 right view,
 right thought,
 right speech,
 right action,
 right livelihood,
 right effort,
 right mindfulness,
 right concentration.

—This, bhikshus, is the path leading to the ending of karma.

7 Thus, bhikshus, have I taught old karma, taught new karma, taught the ending of karma, taught the path leading to the ending of karma.

8 Bhikshus, whatever a teacher should do out of compassion for the good of disciples, for the sake of their welfare, it has been done to you by me.

9 These, bhikshus, are the foot of trees;⁶ these are empty houses.⁷ Meditate,⁸ bhikshus! Be not heedless! Regret not later!

This is our instruction to you.”⁹

— evaṃ —

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⁵ In other words, “new karma” here refers to the 3rd noble truth, the arising of suffering.

⁶ “Those are the foot of trees,” *etāni rukkha, mūlāni*. “Foot” here is usually single, like “bottom.”

⁷ Sometimes rendered as “empty place”.

⁸ “Meditate!” *jhāyatha*, lit “cultivate *jhāna*” (M 1:45, 118; S 4:133, 4:359, 361, 362, 368, 373; A 3:87, 89, 4:139, 392). Syn *bhāvētha* (2nd pl), “cultivate!”

⁹ §§8-9 are stock (the *jhāyatha* pericope): *Etāni bhikkhave rukkha, mūlāni, etāni suññ’āgārāni. Jhāyatha bhikkhave mā pamādattha, mā pacchā vippaṭṭisārino ahuvattha. Ayam vo amhākaṃ anusāsanīti. Dvedhā Vitakka S (M 19.-27/1:118,22) = SD 61.1; (Nava Purāṇa) Kamma S (S 35.146/4:133,17) = SD 4.12; Kāya S (S 43.1/4:359) = SD 12.21.1, & all suttas in the same **Asaṅkhata Saṃyutta** (S 43.2-44/4:360-373); **Yodh’ājīva S 1** (A 5.75.7/3:87) = SD 69.2, **Yodh’ājīva S 2** (A 5.76.7/89) = SD 69.3, **Araka S** (A 7.70.4/4:139) = SD 16.17, **Devatā S** (A 9.19.4/-4:392) = SD 57.14; cf **Mahā Palobhana J** (J 507).*