

From *In the Buddha's Words* by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Ch. III, 3: The Visible Origin and passing Away of Suffering [SN 42: 11]

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1. Introduction (to the Selection, Ch III, 3).

By Bhikkhu Bodhi

A similar approach underlies **Text III,3**, in which the Buddha demonstrates how present suffering arises and ceases in correlation with present craving. This short sutta, addressed to a lay follower, concisely articulates the causal principle that lies behind the Four Noble Truths, but rather than doing so in the abstract, it adopts a concrete, down-to-earth approach that has a remarkably contemporary appeal. By using powerful examples drawn from the life of a layman deeply attached to his wife and son, the sutta makes a deep and lasting impression on us.

The fact that such texts as this sutta and the *Kālāma Sutta* do not dwell on the doctrines of kamma and rebirth does not mean, as is sometimes assumed, that such teachings are mere cultural accretions to the Dhamma that can be deleted or explained away without losing anything essential. It means only that, *at the outset*, the Dhamma can be approached in ways that do not require reference to past and future lives. The Buddha's teaching has many sides, and thus, from certain angles, it can be directly evaluated against our concern for our present well-being and happiness. Once we see that the practice the teaching does indeed bring peace, joy, and inner security in very life, this will inspire our trust and confidence in the Dhamma as a whole, including those aspects that lie beyond our present capacity for personal verification. If we were to undertake certain practices – practices that require highly refined skills and determined effort – we would be able to acquire the faculties needed to validate those other aspects, such as the law of kamma, the reality of rebirth, and the existence of supersensible realms (see **Text VII,4** §§23-24 and **Text VII,5** §§19-20).

2. Main Translation of Selected Text

by Bhikkhu Bodhi

The Visible Origin and Passing Away of Suffering

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at a town of the Mallans named Uruvelakappa. Then Bhadraka the headman¹ approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him: “It would be good, venerable sir, if the Blessed One would teach me about the origin and the passing away of suffering.”

“If, headman, I were to teach you about the origin and the passing away of suffering with reference to the past, saying, ‘So it was in the past,’ perplexity and uncertainty about that might arise in you. And if I were to teach you about the origin and the passing away of suffering with reference to the future, saying, ‘So it will be in the future,’ perplexity and uncertainty about that might arise in you. Instead, headman, while I am sitting right here, and you are sitting right

1. *Gāmani*. The word suggests that he was a person of some prominence in the town.

there, I will teach you about the origin and the passing away of suffering. Listen and attend closely, I will speak.”

“Yes, venerable sir,” Bhadraka replied. The Blessed One said this: “What do you think, headman? Are there any people in Uruvelakappa on whose account sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair would arise in you if they were to be executed, imprisoned, fined, or censured?”

“There are such people, venerable sir.”

“But are there any people in Uruvelakappa on whose account sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair would not arise in you in such an event?”

“There are such people, venerable sir.”

“Why is it, headman, that in relation to some people in Uruvelakappa sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair would arise in you if they were to be executed, imprisoned, fined, or censured, while in regard to others they would not arise in you?”

“Those people in Uruvelakappa, venerable sir, in relation to whom sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair would arise in me if they were to be executed, imprisoned, fined, or censured – these are the ones for whom I have desire and attachment. But those people in Uruvelakappa in relation to whom they would not arise in me – these are the ones for whom I have no desire and attachment.”

“Headman, by means of this principle that is seen, understood, immediately attained, fathomed, apply the method to the past and to the future thus: ‘Whatever suffering arose in the past, all that is rooted in desire, with desire as its source; for desire is the root of suffering. Whatever suffering will arise in the future, all that will arise rooted in desire, with desire as its source; for desire is the root of suffering.’”

It is wonderful, venerable sir! It is amazing, venerable sir! How well that has been stated by the Blessed One: “Whatever suffering arises, all that is rooted in desire, has desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering.”² Venerable sir, I have a son named Ciravāsi, who stays at an outside residence. I rise early and send a man, saying, ‘Go, man, and find out how Ciravāsi is.’ Until that man returns, venerable sir, I am upset, thinking, ‘I hope Ciravāsi has not met with any affliction!’

“What do you think headman? If Ciravāsi were to be executed, imprisoned, fined, or censured, would sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair not arise in you?”

Venerable sir, if Ciravāsi were to be executed, imprisoned, fined, or censured, even my life would seem futile, so how could sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair not arise in me?

In this way too, headman, it can be understood: ‘Whatever suffering arises, all that arises rooted in desire, with desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering.’

“What do you think, headman? If our wife were to be executed, imprisoned, fined, or censured, would sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair arise in you?”

Venerable sir, if my wife were to be executed, imprisoned, fined, or censured, even my life would seem futile, so how could sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair not arise in me?”

“In this way too, headman, it can be understood: ‘Whatever suffering arises, all that arises rooted in desire, with desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering.’”

(SN 42:11; IV 327-30)

2. Note that the headman here ascribes to the Buddha, a direct quotation, a general statement of the causal relationship between desire and suffering not found in the Buddha’s words above. The statement is, however, clearly needed as the reagent of “this principle (*iminā dhammena*). It is possible that the statement was in the original text but had dropped out in the course of the oral transmission. Just below the Buddha does make the generalization himself.

3. Pali Text Society Translation

by F. L. Woodward

Lucky³ (or Bhagandha-Hatthaha)

Once the Exalted One was staying among the Mallas⁴ at Uruvelakappa, a township of the Mallas.

Then Bhadragaka, the headman, came to visit the Exalted One. On coming to him he saluted him and sat down at one side. So seated Bhadragaka, the headman, said to the Exalted One:

‘Well for me, lord, if the Exalted One would teach me the arising and the coming to an end of Ill.’

‘If I were to teach you, headman, the arising and the coming to an end of Ill, beginning with past time, saying, “Thus it was in the past,” you would have doubt and perplexity. And if, headman, I were to teach you the arising and the coming to an end of Ill, beginning with future time, saying, “So will it be in the future,” you would likewise have doubt and’ perplexity. But sitting here and now, headman, with you sitting here also, I will teach you the arising and the coming to an end of Ill. Do you listen attentively. Apply your mind and I will speak.’

‘Even so, lord,’ replied Bhadragaka to the Exalted One.

The Exalted One. said:

‘Now what think you, headman? Are there any men in Uruvelakappa owing to whose death or imprisonment or loss or blame there would come upon you sorrow and suffering, woe, lamentation and despair?’

‘There are such men in Uruvelakappa, lord.’

‘But, headman, are there any men in Uruvelakappa owing to whose death or imprisonment or loss or blame, no sorrow and suffering, no woe, lamentation and despair would come upon you?’

‘There are such men in Uruvelakappa, lord.’

‘Now, headman, what is the reason, what is the cause why sorrow and suffering, woe, lamentation and despair would come upon you in respect of some, but not of the others?’

‘In the case of those, lord, owing to whose death or in imprisonment or loss or blame I should suffer such sorrow . . . it is because I have desire and longing for them. And in the case of the others, lord, because I have not such desire and longing.’

‘You, say, “I have not such desire and longing for them.” Now, headman, do you shape your course⁵ by this Norm, when you have seen and known it, when you have reached it without loss of time, plunged into it both in respect of the past and of the future, thus: Whatsoever Ill arising has come upon me in the past, – all that is rooted in desire,⁶ is joined to desire. Whatsoever Ill arising may come upon me in future time, – all that is rooted in desire, is joined to desire. Desire is the root of Ill.’

‘Wonderful, lord! Strange it is, lord, how well said is this saying of the Exalted One: “Whatsoever Ill arising comes upon me, – all that is rooted in desire. Desire is indeed the root of Ill.”

Now, lord, there is my boy, Ciravāsi is his name. He lodges away from here.⁷ At the time of rising up, lord, I send off a man, saying: “Go, my man, inquire of Ciravāsi.” Then, lord, till that man comes back again, I am in an anxious state,⁸ fearing lest some sickness may have befallen Ciravasi.’

‘Now what think you, headman? Would sorrow and grief, woe, lamentation and despair come upon you if your boy Ciravāsi were slain or imprisoned or had loss or blame?’

‘Lord, if such were to befall my boy Ciravāsi, how should I not have sorrow and grief, woe, lamentation and despair?’

‘But, headman, you must regard it in this manner: “Whatsoever Ill arising comes upon me, – all that is rooted in desire, is joined to desire. Desire is indeed the root of Ill.”

‘Now what think you, headman? When you did not see, did not hear Ciravāsi’s mother, did you feel desire

3. The meaning of the name is obscure. *Bhadraka* (text *Bhadragaka*) means ‘lucky’.

4. Cf. Brethren, 10. ‘The Mallas, a confederation of independent clans, located by the two great Chinese chroniclers on the mountain-slopes eastward of the Buddha’s own clan.’ Text has *Malata*.

5. *Nayaṇ nehi*.

6. *Chanda*.

7. ‘He was acquiring learning (at school).’ Comy. Pron. Chīra-.

8. *Aññathatta*, generally in the meaning of ‘otherness, change’.

or longing or affection for her ?’

‘No indeed, lord.’

‘But, headman, when you got sight of her, got hearing of her, did you then have desire or longing or affection for her ?’

‘Yes, lord.’

‘Now what think you, headman ? Would sorrow and grief . . . come upon you if Ciravāsi’s mother were slain or imprisoned or had any loss or blame ?’

‘Why surely, lord, sorrow and grief . . . would come upon me.’

‘So in this manner, headman, must you look upon it: Whatsoever Ill arising may come upon me, – all that is rooted in desire, is joined to desire. Desire is indeed the root of Ill.’

4. A Comment on the Sutta

By Victor Gunasekara

This Sutta is important in that it states quite clearly that the cause and consequence of an action can take place in the one lifetime, and indeed even instantaneously. It is very often argued that the cause can lie in one lifetime while the consequence can occur in the subsequent lifetime. There are several doctrinal issues in the Dhamma where the question causality becomes important, one is in the doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*), another the doctrine of karma and its fruiting (*kamma - vipāka*), and still another the verification of the Noble Truths. This particular sutta is directly concerned with the last, but it has implications for the other two.

What this sutta is concerned with is the verification of the law that suffering comes from attachment, or desire (*chando*). This is explained from the layman’s point of view that suffering can result from harm coming to one’s loved ones lead to personal suffering, but harm to others would not lead to suffering. The latter proposition is not developed in this sutta. Thus it could be said that for a person who practices loving kindness to all beings will suffer even when he sees an animal tortured or killed, let alone a human being. But in this case the very loving kindness creates a certain kind of attachment. It is a moot point whether a person who practices complete equanimity will be upset, or subject to mental suffering if harm comes to a being or person who is not personally connected to him or her.

But the situation that is more problematical related to the kamma-vipāka situation, i.e whether the karmic consequences must necessarily occur in a subsequent birth to that in which the action takes place. In his Introduction to this Sutta Bhikkhu Bodhi says that “at the outset” we can take the Dhamma without reference to past and future lives, but that to apprehend the Dhamma in its totality we have to accept those aspects “that lie beyond our present capacity for personal verification”. This implies that total apprehension has to be taken on faith for those who cannot verify the hypothesis of past and future lives. But those who look at the Dhamma rationally will dispute this assertion. The kind of proof that the Buddha requires is the knowledge of past lives which is said to come to those who have reached the fourth jhāna. So it is only those who have reached this state that can confidently believe in the past and future lives. Others will have to take a skeptical view of this hypothesis. It must be noted that this question of past lives is not dealt with in this particular sutta, although it occurs in the Kālāma sutta.

The question of Dependent Origination is not involved in this sutta and can be ignored in this regard. However there are interpretations that consider the different links in this chain of causation as taking place in successive lifetimes, while others interpret the chain of causation to take place sequentially in one life time. We need not consider that theory here.

5. Pali Text of the Sutta

11. Bhadrakasuttam

363. Ekam samayaṃ bhagavā mallesu viharati uruvelakappaṃ nāma mallānaṃ nigamo. Atha kho bhadrako gāmaṇi yena bhagavā tenupasāṅkami; upasāṅkamtivā bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi. Ekamantaṃ nisinno

kho bhadraḅ gāmaṇi bhagavantaṃ etadavoca– “sādhu me, bhante, bhagavā dukkhassa samudayaṅca atthaṅgamaṅca desetū”ti. “Ahaṅce , te, gāmaṇi, atītamaddhānaṃ ārabha (pg. 2.0511) dukkhassa samudayaṅca atthaṅgamaṅca deseyyaṃ– ‘evaṃ ahoṣi atītamaddhānaṅ’ti, tatra te siyā kaṅkhā, siyā vimati. Ahaṃ ce , te, gāmaṇi, anāgatamaddhānaṃ ārabha dukkhassa samudayaṅca atthaṅgamaṅca deseyyaṃ– ‘evaṃ bhavissati anāgatamaddhānaṅ’ti, tatrāpi te siyā kaṅkhā, siyā vimati. Api cāhaṃ, gāmaṇi, idheva nisinna ettheva te nisinnassa dukkhassa samudayaṅca atthaṅgamaṅca desessāmi. Taṃ suṇāhi sādhukaṃ manasi karohi; bhāssissāmi”ti. “Evaṃ, bhante”ti kho bhadraḅ gāmaṇi bhagavato paccassosi. Bhagavā etadavoca–

“Taṃ kiṃ maṅṅasi, gāmaṇi, atthi te uravelakappe manussā yesaṃ te vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā uppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā”ti? “Atthi me, bhante, uravelakappe manussā yesaṃ me vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā uppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā”ti. “Atthi pana te, gāmaṇi, uravelakappe manussā yesaṃ te vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā nuppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā”ti? “Atthi me, bhante, uravelakappe manussā yesaṃ me vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā nuppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā”ti. “Ko nu kho, gāmaṇi, hetu, ko paccayo yena te ekaccānaṃ uravelakappiyānaṃ manussānaṃ vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā uppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā”ti? “Yesaṃ me, bhante, uravelakappiyānaṃ manussānaṃ vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā uppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā, atthi me tesu chandarāgo Yesaṃ pana, bhante, uravelakappiyānaṃ manussānaṃ vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā nuppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā, natthi me tesu chandarāgo”ti. “Iminā tvaṃ, gāmaṇi, dhammena diṭṭhena viditena akālikena pattena pariyoḅhena atītanāgate nayaṃ nehi– ‘yaṃ kho kiṅci atītamaddhānaṃ dukkhaṃ uppajjamānaṃ uppajji , sabbaṃ taṃ chandaṃ mūlakaṃ chandaṅidānaṃ. Chandaṃ hi mūlaṃ dukkhassa. Yampi hi kiṅci anāgatamaddhānaṃ dukkhaṃ uppajjamānaṃ uppajjissati, sabbaṃ taṃ chandaṃ mūlakaṃ chandaṅidānaṃ. Chandaṃ hi mūlaṃ dukkhassa””ti (pg. 2.0512) “Acchariyaṃ, bhante, abbhutaṃ, bhante! Yāva subhāsitāṃ cidaṃ , , bhante, bhagavatā

, – ‘yaṃ kiṅci dukkhaṃ uppajjamānaṃ uppajjati, sabbaṃ taṃ chandaṃ mūlakaṃ chandaṅidānaṃ. Chandaṃ hi mūlaṃ dukkhassa’”ti.

, Atthi me, bhante, ciravāsī nāma kumāro bahi āvasathe , paṭivasati. So khvāhaṃ, bhante, kālasseva vuṭṭhāya purisaṃ uyyojemi , – ‘gaccha, bhāṇe, ciravāsisaṃ kumāraṃ jānāhi’ti. Yāvakīvaṅca, bhante, so puriso nāgacchati, tassa me hoteva aññathattaṃ– ‘mā heva ciravāsissa kumārassa kiṅci ābādhayitthā””ti , .

“Taṃ kiṃ maṅṅasi, gāmaṇi, ciravāsissa kumārassa vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā uppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā”ti “Ciravāsissa me, bhante, kumārassa vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā jīvitassapi siyā aññathattaṃ, kiṃ pana me nuppajjissanti sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā”ti. “Imināpi kho etaṃ, gāmaṇi, pariyaṅena veditabbaṃ– ‘yaṃ kiṅci dukkhaṃ uppajjamānaṃ uppajjati, sabbaṃ taṃ chandaṃ mūlakaṃ chandaṅidānaṃ. Chandaṃ hi mūlaṃ dukkhassa””ti.

“Taṃ kiṃ maṅṅasi, gāmaṇi, yadā te ciravāsīmātā , adiṭṭhā ahoṣi, assutā ahoṣi, te ciravāsīmātuyā chandaṃ vā rāgo vā pemaṃ vā”ti? “No hetāṃ, bhante”. “Dassanaṃ vā te, gāmaṇi, āgamma savanaṃ vā evaṃ te ahoṣi– ‘ciravāsīmātuyā chandaṃ vā rāgo vā pemaṃ vā””ti? “Evaṃ, bhante”.

“Taṃ kiṃ maṅṅasi, gāmaṇi, ciravāsīmātuyā te vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā uppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā”ti? “Ciravāsīmātuyā me, bhante, vadhena vā bandhena vā jāniyā vā garahāya vā jīvitassapi siyā aññathattaṃ, kiṃ pana me nuppajjissanti sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā”ti! “Imināpi kho etaṃ, gāmaṇi, pariyaṅena veditabbaṃ– ‘yaṃ kiṅci dukkhaṃ uppajjamānaṃ uppajjati, sabbaṃ taṃ chandaṃ mūlakaṃ chandaṅidānaṃ. Chandaṃ hi mūlaṃ dukkhassa””ti. Ekādasamaṃ.