

By The Buddha

The Sutra of the Causes and Effects of Actions (in Sogdian). Edited by D.N. MacKenzie. (Taken from the Oxford University Press edition).



Namo Buddha, namo Dharma, namo Sangha! Thus have I heard:

Once the Buddha was at Sravasti town, in the garden of Jeta, with many monks (sramana) and countless bodhisattvas and gods (devas), and they were with countless other worlds in company. The Chief Sovereign of the World (Lokajyestha) was expounding the Law and the assembly was listening with pure minds.

Thereupon Ananda, on account of these human beings, addressed the Buddha thus:

“Chief of the World, now I see that each creature is born alike among people. There are handsome and ugly, strong and weak, rich and poor, happy and sad, noble and base, and their voices are not alike and their words diverse. There is the person who at one hundred years does not die and there is the one who dies at thirty; there is the one, not yet of full age, dies in the womb. There is the person who is handsome but poor, and there is the base and ugly, but who is rich; then there is the noble and strong without dignity and without rank, and there is the weak with dignity and rank, but unhappy. There is the person whose life is long and who is happy, and there is the one whose life is short. Then there is the person who does good and gets into trouble and the one who does evil and gains success. There is the person with white lips and squinting eyes and there is the black person with attractive eyes. There is the person who has many sons and daughters and there is the one who is alone and solitary, childless and orphaned. There is the person who goes out, wandering and straying and numbed with cold, and there is the person who thirsts and hungers, and the one who stays at home and eats and puts on clothes at will. There is the person who in their youth is poor and needy and in their old age is rich. There is the one who is true and just, and without fault or sin suffers imprisonment and is confined in prison. There is the parent who is compassionate towards the child and the child who is respectful of its parent, and there are such children who always fight and quarrel. There are those who make their life and sustenance from everything without stint; and there is the one who has no house of their own and always stays in another’s house. There is the person who dwells in desert country like a wild beast; there is the person who is always settled, with joy, and there is the one who endures servitude, from evil; there is one who is intelligent and clever, and one who is stupid and ignorant. There is the person who makes efforts and then gains, and there is the one who does not seek and the thing comes itself. There is the rich person, but greedy and mean, there is the poor person who is generous; there is the one who speaks gentle and fine words and there is the one who speaks words as if they were pricking with thorns. There is the person dear to all, and with whom all have dealings, and there is the one who is hateful to all, so that they avoid them. There is the person who is compassionate towards all living beings, and there is the person who likes killing. There are those who seek and find and rejoice; and there is the one whom people chase out. There are the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law who hate one another, and brothers’ wives dear to each other. There is the person who likes to hear the word of the Law and there is the person who hears the sutra and sleep comes upon them. There is the one who understands neither law nor rule,

and there is the one who has love for the doctrine; and there are also those like both animals and other beings of different forms. “Now, O Lord, expound to us the causes and the effects so that this great gathering may hear with pure minds and may go sincerely towards good actions.”

Then the Buddha spoke to Ananda thus, “This question that you are asking--it is all on account of a previous existence, in which every one’s mind was not alike and equal. Therefore, in consequence, the retribution is of a thousand and a myriad separate and different minds. Thus the person who in this world is handsome comes from a patient mind, and the ugly comes from amid anger; the needy come from meanness. The height and noble comes from prayer and service, and the lowly and base comes from pride. The great and tall person comes from honor and respect and the short-legged person comes on account of contempt. The person who hinders the bright splendor of the Buddha is born black and thin; and the one who tastes the food of the fast is born deprived of food. The person who is too sparing of fire and light is born infirm; the one in whose eyes fault always appears is born night-blind. The person who slanders the Law is born dumb; and the person who does not want to hear the Law is born deaf. The one who likes to gnaw bones is born gap-toothed; and the one who makes perfume of the Buddha a foul perfume is born with obstructed nostrils. The person who angles fish is born hare-lipped. The person who touches the image of the Buddha with his garment is born red. The one who plucks pigs’ bristles is born with greenish hair; the one who pierces the ears of living beings is born with pierced ears. The person who puts the image of the Buddha in that porch where there is smoke is born black; the one who sees their teacher and does not rise is born paralyzed. The one who goes out of the house of Buddha and turns his back to the image of the Buddha is born hunch-backed. The one who sees the Buddha and does not pay homage but merely taps his forehead from afar has a dent in his forehead; the person who sees his master or parents and lowers and turns away his head is born with a short neck. Then the person who has heart pains, it is because he pricks living beings. The person who has no eyebrows, it is because he harms the three jewels and takes another’s wealth unjustly. The person who in winter gives cold food, is born ill with asthma; the person who kills the babies of flying birds is childless and the one who nourishes living beings has numerous children. The person who is compassionate is born long-lived, and the one who kills living beings is born short-lived. The one who gives gifts is born rich. The one who gives a gift of horse and carriage to the three jewels has many horses and carriages. Then the person who reads and asks about the sutra is born intelligent; but the stupid person comes from an animal existence. The person who cannot stay in his place comes from among the apes; the one who binds the hands and feet of living beings is born paralyzed in hand and foot. The person who is of evil passions comes from snakes and scorpions; the one who keeps the precepts (sila) is complete in the six kinds of organ, but the person who breaks the precepts is incomplete in the six kinds of organ. The unclean person comes from the existence of pigs; the person who likes song and dance comes from among actors. The one who is greedy comes from dogs; the one who eats alone, their neck is goiterous. The one who castrates living beings has incomplete pudenda; the one who on one side abuses his superior has a short tongue. The one who seduces the spouse of another, after dying falls among the geese, and a person who commits incest will fall into the existence of sparrows.

One who is sparing with the sutra and knowledge and does not expound it, after dying is born as an insect in the earth or wood. The person who likes falconry and archery, after dying is born in the desert of the north; one who likes to hunt, after dying is born as a jackal or wolf. The person who likes hairpins and flowers is born in the existence of a hoopoe; one who likes long garments is born a long-tailed insect. One who eats lying down is born in the existence of a pig; one who likes colored clothes is born as a mottled bird. One who imitates the voice of a person in ridicule is born as a parrot; one who likes slandering is born a venomous snake. One who torments persons unjustly is born a pond-water insect; one who always likes bearing evil rumors is born an owl. One who likes to utter evil portents is born in the existence of a fox; one who frightens people so that they are distressed is born as a deer or gazelle. One who enters the vihara wearing clogs is born an animal with whole hooves; and one who likes to break wind is born a stinking insect. One who gives a person measured food is born a woodpecker; one who steals the water of the ordained is born a fish or a turtle. One who soils the earth of the ordained is born an insect in excrement; one who steals ordained persons’ property is born as a mule or donkey. The person who by force demands something on loan from an ordained person is born a pigeon. One who abuses the ordained is born an insect in the neck of an ox; one who eats the vegetables of the community of ordained persons is born an earthworm; whoever consumes the property of ordained persons is born a ‘long-lived’ insect, which itself goes into the fire. One who enters the vihara with bone hair-pins stuck on his head is

born as a long-beaked bird. One who at home smears white on his face and adorns it, and enters the vihara is born a red-beaked crow. One who enters the vihara with colored clothes is born a yellow bird; if a husband with his wife lie the night in the vihara, he is born a pigeon. The person who sits upon the stupa of the vihara is born a camel. One who enters the chamber of the Buddha with boots or shoes is born a frog. One who in the place where the Law is uttered, has done another thing is born as a singing bird. He who defiles pure nuns will fall into the iron hell where a myriad wheels with knives will descend on his body and cut it all up.”

Thereupon Ananda addressed the Buddha thus: “As the Buddha has explained, one who may be at fault in anything concerning ordained persons, it is very serious. If it be so, how then will the donor (danapati) enter the vihara for worship and for reverence and prayer?” The Buddha said to Ananda, “The person who enters the monastery (samaharama), may have a mind of two kinds: one with good thoughts, the other with evil thoughts. Now the person who enters with good thoughts is such that, if that person sees the Buddha, he pays homage; if he sees an ordained person, he pays respect, asks for an explanation of the sutra and precepts, begs forgiveness, does not spare his wealth and strives for the three jewels; he does not spare himself or his life and supports the great Law. When such a person walks one step, paradise comes to him, reaching him itself, and he has the same retribution as Jodiga (Jyotiska) and is called an altogether eminent person. But the person with evil thoughts is such that when he enters the vihara, he will beg something from the sramanas, seek out the sins of the ordained and cause them torment, eat the food of the sramanas and have no shame of them. When such a person dies, he falls into the hell of heated iron lumps, where there is cauldron and furnace, the mountain of knives and trees of swords, and there is no place anywhere which he will not reach; such a person is an entirely inferior one.”

The Buddha said to Ananda, “Later such a time will come--tell the disciples that they should take good heed of the Three Jewels and not be at fault and strive in good deeds and not make a retiring mind, for those who believe the words of the Buddha--when Matriya Buddha shall go out into the world--will at once find salvation, have no doubt of it.”

The Buddha said, “Those who do violence to people and confiscate their clothes fall into the hell of glaciers and are reborn among silk-worms, which are continually boiled and skinned. After death, the person who does not wish to light a lamp for the Buddha image and the sutra falls into the dark black hell in the middle of the mountain of the iron enclosure (Cakravala). One who kills and cuts up living beings falls into the hell of the mountain of knives and the trees of swords. The person who is the hunter of game and both shoots with the bow and trains a falcon and dog, falls into the hell of the iron tree. (It is a great sin to be a hunter.) One who has illicit desires falls into the hell of brazen columns, and falls into the hell of iron beds. He who has many wives falls into the hell of iron millstones; she who has many husbands falls into the hell of ferocious snakes. One who cooks chickens falls into the hell of burning ash. One who with boiling water skins living beings falls into the hell of boiling cauldrons. One who castrates living beings falls into the hell of stone spikes. One who is a drinker of beer falls into the hell of brass. One who is an eater of meat falls into the hell of excrement. One who eats raw fish falls into the hell of the forest of knives and the tree of swords. If the stepmother slanders the son of the first mother she falls into the hell of the fire-chariot. One who is deceitful and brings trouble and turmoil falls into the hell of the iron plowshare. One who is abusive falls into the hell of tongue pulling out. One who is a liar falls into the hell of iron nails. One who slaughters animals and sacrifices them to a god, falls into the hell of iron pestles. She who is a sorceress and speaks demonic words and makes fools of other people and takes their property, falls into the hell of the mountain of flesh. The sorceress who shuts her eyes and with lies says, “I shall go up so as to summon the souls,” falls into the hell of cutting through the waste. He who is a sorcerer so as to teach other people to kill and to slaughter animals to ask favors of the great god, of the spirit of the five roads, of the local god and of the ‘queens’, and all those who are deceivers and make fools of people, after dying they fall into the hell of cutting with axes, where the demons of hell begin to chop them up and iron-beaked birds peck out their eyes. One who is a soothsayer and also a magician, who examines good and bad fortune for people and does the ‘fifth star’ and other actions, saying “So that I may remove evil portent,” and makes fools of ignorant people and takes much of their property, and speaks falsely of good and evil and causes trouble, after dying falls into the iron hell, in nets; many birds gather and eat his flesh down to the bones and marrow and this person endlessly suffers an evil punishment. He who is a physician and cannot make people better, and by fraud and lies takes the property of others, falls into the hell of burning iron, where the fire is lit on all his body. The person who breaks and damages the stupa of the vihara and is opposed to the ordained and is not perfect with mother

and father, after dying both falls into the worst hell (avici) and reaches everywhere in the eight kalpas, and thereafter goes out; if that person then meets with a good counselor (kalyanamitra), he will produce a thought of a bodhisattva, but if one does not meet the one, then accordingly he falls back into hell.”

The devatideva Buddha spoke thus, “The person who is big of body, stinking and angry, who is freed from anger only with difficulty, comes from the existence of a camel. One who likes to walk and eats much and does not know satiety comes from the existence of a horse. One who walks in both cold and hot and has no pity comes from the existence of an ox. The person whose voice is high and who knows no shame and things much and does not know right from wrong comes from the existence of a donkey. The person who eats meat and is fearless comes from the existence of a lion. The person whose body is long and eyes round, who prefers to wander in wild country, and hates his spouse and children, comes from the existence of a tiger. The person who has long hair on his body and small eyes and does not like to stay in one place comes from the existence of a flying bird. The person with evil passions and without love, who likes to kill small animals, comes from the existence of a fox. The person who is brave and valiant, with few desires, and no love of their spouse and children, comes from the existence of a wolf. The one who does not like ornate clothes, who watches thieves, has little sleep and much anger, comes from the existence of a dog. The person who likes looking and speech, who likes sensuality, who does not fix their intentions, and who becomes disturbed at beauty, comes from the existence of a sparrow. The person who loves the company of other people and who speaks much comes from the existence of a mynah bird. The person who has red eyes and short teeth, spits when speaking and wraps his body when lying down to sleep, comes from the existence of a snake. The person who likes to be alone and is greedy for food and whose sleep at night is short comes from the existence of a wild cat. The person who breaks walls and commits theft, who is greedy for riches and shows rancor, and has neither close nor distant relatives, comes from the existence of a mouse.”

Then the devatideva Buddha spoke thus, “The person who breaks and damages the stupa of the vihara, and conceals and spends the wealth of the Three Jewels, falls into the avici hell. The person who praises himself much and takes himself to be better than (or, raises himself above) everything, after dying arrives at the three evil ways. When the person is freed from that, accordingly acquires the existence of an animal, or a slave-woman, or a slave, and always goes about covered with heavy loads, being a porter for all people; this person always goes about erect, but loses the condition of a human being. But, although such an evil action is done, if the person then listens to the sutra, his body will be freed from evil reproach and from such a sin, and he attains good praise. The one who breaks and damages the stupa of the vihara, and conceals and spends the wealth of the three jewels, falls into the avici hell. When freed from the punishment of hell, the person acquires the existence of an animal and becomes both pigeon and sparrow and goose and duck and parrot and ‘green sparrow’ and fish and turtle and monkey and gazelle and deer. Likewise, when reborn human, he becomes a eunuch or a female body or bisexual or sexless or a prostitute. The person who is irascible and of venomous nature acquires the existence of a snake or lion or tiger or wolf or bear or wild cat or falcon or hawk; and then when later is born human, becomes a pig- or chicken-fancier or a butcher or hunter or trapper or prison warden. One who is stupid and does not understand the rule and the Law and does not ask or inquire or go (to learn) acquires the existence of an elephant or ox or sheep or water buffalo or louse or flea or mosquito or gadfly or even an ant; and later, when born human becomes both blind and deaf and mute and hunch-backed and crippled and incomplete in all limbs and cannot receive the Law. The person who is proud and contemptuous is born an insect in dung and becomes both horse and donkey and camel and dog, and when later is born human, becomes a slave-woman or a slave, or poor, a beggar, despised by all. The person who is a judge and greedy and seized the property of others, after dying falls into the hell of the mountain of flesh, and for a hundred years myriad men cut from his flesh and eat it. The person who keeps other persons standing before them excessively, after dying acquires the existence of an elephant, which is so stiff that it cannot lie down. The person who breaks the fast by eating food at night, when he dies acquires the existence of a hungry ghost (preta) and for a hundred myriad years does not know food; and when walking, fire issues from every joint. The person who prefers to keep people naked, after dying acquires the existence of the cold animals. One who eats the remains of the fast of people or takes them home, after dying falls into the hell of the earth of hot iron, and when later acquires the existence of a person, has the illness of an obstructed throat and is short-lived. The person who pays homage to the Buddha and does not bring his head to the ground, after dying falls into the hell of hanging head down, and later when he acquires the existence of a human all make a fool of him. One who pays homage to the Buddha and does not join his hands

falls into the land of the border countries and has much trouble and misery, and no success at all. One who hears the sound of the bell and does not rise and make 'namo Buddha' acquires the existence of a snake, which is long of body, and little insects constantly eat it and nibble it. One who pays homage to the Buddha with hands crossed falls into the hell of tying arms behind the back, and when he acquires the existence of a human meets, unjustly, evil misfortune. But the person who joins hands properly, and brings the five members of the body to the ground, and with a pure mind pays homage to the Buddha, is born always a great chief and noble, who receives much happiness. The person who is irascible and irritable about food comes from the existence of madness. When a man looks unlawfully at the wife of another his eye will be squinting. The person, who because of his spouse abuses his mother and father, falls into the hell of cutting out tongues. When someone who adds water to liquor and sells it to others dies, he is born an insect in water, and when later born human, is dropsical, with impeded breath such that he dies."

Then the Buddha spoke further to Ananda thus, "These many kinds of things that I have explained are all because the person commits the following ten kinds of misdeed (in the first degree, the person falls into hell; in the second, among animals, and in the lowest, into the existence of pretas).

1. For the sin of killing, the person falls both into hell and into the existence of animals and pretas; then, when later born human, acquires two kinds of retribution: one is that the person is short-lived, and the other is that the person is sickly.
2. The person who commits theft falls both into hell and into the existence of animals and pretas, and when born human acquires two kinds of retribution: one is that the person is born poor and needy and the other is that the person's possessions are united with those of others so that he cannot act at will.
3. The person who practices unlawful desire falls both into hell and into the existence of animals and pretas, and when born human acquires two kinds of retribution: one is that the person's spouse is debauched and the other is that there is always quarreling and disputing with the person's spouse, so that matters do not go (or the person's spouse does not behave) as the person would like.
4. One who speaks lies falls both into hell and into the existence of animals and pretas; and when later is born human acquires two kinds of retribution: one is that whatsoever the person does, everything is subject to damage and calumny and the other is that people constantly injure the person with lies.
5. One who is deceitful and two-tongued falls both into hell and into the existence of animals and pretas; and when later is born human acquires two kinds of retribution: one is that he encounters relatives who torment him and the other is that he is attached to irritable relatives.
6. He who is evil-tongued and abusive falls both into hell and into the existence of animals and pretas, and when later is born human acquires two kinds of retribution: the first is that the person always hears evil noises and the second is that whatever the person says, there is always quarreling and dispute.
7. The person who uses ornate words falls both into hell and into the existence of animals and pretas; and when born human acquires two kinds of retribution: the first is that even though the person speaks the truth, nobody believes him and the other is that whatever the person says, he is completely unable to bring it to an end.
8. The person who is greedy suffers both hell and the existence of animals and pretas, and when born human acquires two kinds of retribution: one is that the person is always insatiably greedy for possessions and the other is that whatever the person seeks and gets, it is not at all as his heart desires.
9. The person who is irascible suffers both hell and the existence of animals and pretas; and when born human acquires two kinds of retribution: one is that people seek the person's faults and shortcomings and the other that they always cause the person pain and suffering.
10. The person who has heretical views suffers both hell and the existence of animals and pretas; and when born as human, acquires two kinds of retribution: one is that deception is always born in the person's heart. Now O

child of the Buddha, these ten kinds of misdeed are the cause of all kinds of evil of the way.”

And then among the great assembly there was a man who had committed the ten kinds of misdeed. When he heard from the devatideva these infernal punishments and retributions he began to weep and lament; and he spoke thus to the devatideva Buddha: “Chief of the World, what sort of good deed should I now do, that I may be delivered from this evil?” The Buddha said to him, “Arrange the minds of all people and all of you, united together, practice piety and good deeds. For the person who in this existence is a great mind-converter, is a chief among all people, and whoever makes a vihara or a vihara house, will in a future loka be a minister in the royal assembly and a chief of the people, complete and intelligent in everything that is desirable and pleasing to the person’s mind. The person too who in this existence arranges the minds of people so that they practice all kinds of good deed will be rich and fortunate in future loka and will do him honor and regard the man with respect, and in the four directions the way will be open to the person; all work that the person begins will be successful. One who in the present existence likes to light the lamp will be born in a future loka near the sun and the moon and his bright splendor will always shine. One who gives gifts and is compassionate and does not kill, in whatever place that person is born, will be rich and fortunate and will not only lack neither possessions nor riches in food and clothing, but they will appear spontaneously. One too who gives food, in whatever place the person is born, divine food will appear spontaneously; the person will be complete in beauty and strength, brilliant, intelligent, eloquent and long-lived. If one gives a gift to an animal, accordingly the person will acquire recompense a hundred-fold. If one gives a gift to an ordained person who keeps the precepts, the donor will acquire recompense a myriad-fold. But if the person gives a gift to an ordained person, a master of the Law, who expounds the law of the treasure of the secret of the Great Vehicle of the Buddha, who opens the eyes of the great assembly, the donor will acquire countless many recompenses. How much more then, you may ask, will the person who gives a gift to bodhisattvas and to the Buddhas acquire; how much countless recompense the person will acquire! And if the person gives a gift to these three kinds of people, he will acquire recompense without end: if to the Buddhas, and secondly to his mother and father, and thirdly to a sick man, he gave a gift of one meal so great is his recompense. How much more then, you may ask, one who gives always; how can this person’s reward be counted? Now the person who gives the ordained a bath and shall wash their bodies, in whatever place the person is born, will be handsome and food and clothing will be ready and from people he will receive honor and respect. One too who loves the sutra and shall read it and praises and exalts it, in whatever place born, the person’s voice is ornate and excellent; whoever hears it rejoices in their heart. One who keeps the precepts, in whatever place born, will be handsome and among persons the very foremost. The person who digs wells and sets jars of water on the roads so that the travelers may drink, and shall plant trees so that persons may sit in the shade, in whatever place born, the person will be a leader of people and a hundred kinds of food and drink, according to the person’s desire, will come of themselves. The person who loves to write the Law of the sutras and gives it to people for them to read it, in whatever place born, will be eloquent in explanation, and whatever Law the person studies, when hearing it once, the person takes it all in and understands it; the bodhisattvas always protect and watch over the person and among all people the person will be the very first and foremost. The one too who makes a bridge or puts a boat for men to cross, then whatever place born, the person will have the seven kinds of jewels entirely and all people will praise and honor the person; where he goes and arrives, all do him honor and regard him with respect.”

Then the Buddha said to Ananda thus, “The sutra and the Law which I have expounded in every place, the causes and the effects--exhort all living beings to read them and act upon them so that they may be saved from evil. But the person who hears this sutra and scorns and slanders it--as for such a person, (even) in the present world, his tongue falls to the ground.”

Thereupon Ananda addressed the Buddha thus, “O Chief of the World, what name should be given to this sutra, and how should we dispose our minds (towards it)?”

The Buddha said to Ananda, “Let the name of this sutra be The Causes of the Retribution of Good and Evil, and let its name also be The Sutra of Righteousness with the Desire of Becoming a Bodhisattva, and let it be understood and kept in that way.”

Now when the Buddha had finished expounding this sutra, eight myriad of divine men in that assembly disposed their minds towards utmost complete enlightenment (annutara samyaksambodhi), one thousand two hundred evil men abandoned their poisoned minds and understood the previous loka; many were the pious men who acquired the view of non-birth and received eternal joy; many were the dead who were reborn in pure lands and who assembled with the Buddha. Then the great assembly all became joyful and they set out and began to practice piety and good deeds and accepted the commandment of the Buddha on their heads.

Namo Buddha, namo Dharma, namo Sangha.

The sutra in which the Buddha has expounded the causes and effects of good and evil.

One chapter.