



City of Ten Thousand Buddhas



Cause and Effect Sutra

The Buddha Speaks The Sutra On Cause And Effect In The Three Periods Of Time

Translated by the Buddhist Text Translation Society

At that time, Ananda was on Magic Mountain, together with twelve hundred fifty in the assembly. Ananda made obeisance with his palms together, circumambulated the Buddha three times, and knelt with his palms joined. Then he asked Shakyamuni Buddha this question: "During the Dharma-Ending Age, all the living beings in Southern Jambudvīpa will give rise to much unwholesome karma. They will not revere the Triple Jewel, or respect their parents. They will be lacking in the Three Bonds. The Five Constants that safeguard the universal obligations between people will be in disharmony and disarray. Beings will be poor, destitute, lowly, and vile. Their six faculties will suffer

impairment. All day long they will engage in killing and harming. Moreover, they will not be of equal status; some will be wealthy while others will be poor. What are the conditions leading to these various different rewards and retributions? We disciples pray that the World Honored One will compassionately explain each one of these for us."

The Buddha told Ananda and the assembly of great disciples, "You should now listen attentively. Good indeed, good indeed! I will clearly set forth all of this for you. All men and women of the world, whether they be poor and lowly or wealthy and noble, whether they be undergoing limitless sufferings or enjoying blessings without end, are all undergoing the rewards or retributions which are due to causes and effects from their past lives.

What should they do from now on?

"First, they should be filial and respectful to their parents. Next, they should reverently believe in the Triple Jewel.

Third, they should refrain from killing and instead liberate the living. Fourth, they should eat pure vegetarian food and practice giving.

These acts will enable them to plant seeds in the field of blessings for their future lives."

Then the Buddha spoke these verses on cause and effect:

*Wealth and dignity come from one's destiny
From causes planted in lives in the past.
People who hold to this simple principle
Will reap good fortune in lives in the future.*

*Kind men and women, listen to the causes,
Hear and remember this Sutra's reminder
Of the causes and effects of karmic deeds
In the past, in the future, and in the present.
Cause and effect is no small care.
True are my words; don't take them lightly.
Why are some people officials at present?
Because with gold they gilded the Buddhas
In their past lives, long long ago.
It's from their practice in lives in the past
That they reap in this life a rich fruition.
The purple gown and golden cordon--
The honored marks of higher office:
Should you seek them, seek with the Buddhas
Gilding the Buddhas is your own gain;
Robing Thus Come Ones, you robe yourself.
Don't say it's easy to become an official;
It cannot happen if causes aren't planted.
What are the causes of owning a carriage
And riding on palanquins? People like that
Were builders and menders of bridges and roads.*

4) Why are some people wearers of fine material?

*That is because in times in the past,
Robes they save as gifts to the Sangha.
Sometimes people have plentiful goods,
The reason, in fact, again is quite fair.
In the past those people gave food to the poor.*

3) Others don't have food or drink,

Who can guess the reason why?

*Before those people were plagued with a fault:
Stingy greed made them squeeze every penny.
5) The well-to-do among us dwell
In very tall mansions and vast estates.
The reason is they gladly gave rice,
Lavishing gifts of grain on monasteries.
Enjoying blessings and justly prosperous,
Are People who reap a fitting reward.
In times now past they helped build temples
And saw that the Sangha had huts and shelters.
Some people's features are fine and perfect,
Surely the reason for such rewards
Is that beautiful flowers they offered to Buddhas.*

*2) Why are some people gifted and wise?
In former lives they ate pure food
And remembered the Buddhas with mindful regard.
Look at men whose wives are loyal,
Their reward comes now for what happened before:
Their conditions are strong in the Buddha's door.
Some have marriages lasting and meaningful.
Their happiness doesn't happen by chance.
The cause this time is the hanging of canopies
And streamers before the Buddhas' statues.
Some happy fellows' fathers and mothers
Enjoy long lifespans, contentment, and ease.
Where is the source for rewards such as these?
They protected orphans in times now past
And regarded all elderly ones as their own.
Orphans must live without fathers and mothers
Since before they shot down birds for sport.*

*How does one get lots of children and grandchildren?
By letting birds fly from their cages to freedom.
In raising children, some really fail badly.
It's because before they drowned female infants.
When barren, people won't bear any children.
That's their due for committing promiscuous deeds.
Some have long lifespans, why are they lucky?
Liberating creatures, they ransomed lives.
Have you seen how many suffer short lifespans?
Their wanton slaughter of beings is why.
Lonely are men whom no women will marry.
They're paying their debt for committing adultery.
Widows bear a sad retribution.
They held their past lives' husbands in scorn.
Servants and slaves made that bondage themselves
By neglecting repayment of goodnesses done them.
Bright are the eyes of some fortunate beings.
Before Buddhas they offered lamps filled with oil.
The blind of this world bear a heavy burden
For past failure to tell the way clearly to travellers.
Some people's mouths are very misshapen.
They blew out lamps on the Buddhas' altars.
To be deaf and mute is a dreary existence.
Reward appropriate for scolding one's parents.
How do people get to be hunchbacks?
They berated and laughed at those bowing to
Buddhas.
Take heed of malformed hands, my friend.
They betray people prone to evil.
Fellows with crippled and useless feet
Ambushed and robbed with reckless abandon.*

*Most cows and horses were humans before--
People who didn't settle their debts.
Many former people are now pigs or dogs
Because they injured and cheated others.
Illness and pain: an effect inevitable
For bestowing meat and wine on the Buddhas.
Freedom from illness: a fine reward
For relieving the sick by bestowing medicines.
The fate of imprisonment catches some people
Due to fiendish deeds and a failure to yield.
Death by starvation: due retribution
For stopping up holes of rats and snakes.
Appropriate that a victim of poisoning
Caused aquatic poisoning; dammed up waters.
Abandoned, forlorn, rejected beings
Were cruel of old, abusing others.
The stature of some is extremely short.
Before, they read Sutras spread out on the floor.
Vomiting blood? Believe it's from first
Eating meat, then reciting the Sutras.
Another deed that determines deafness:
To not listen well to Sutra recitals.
Sores and scabies bother some people
Who gave stinking fish and flesh to the Buddhas.
People who reek with a terrible stench
Sold inferior scents and phony goods.
Why do some by their own hand hang themselves?
Before, they used nooses to capture their prey.
All those widowed, alone, unwed, or orphaned,
Are now paid justly for former jealousy.*

*Those struck by lightning, consumed by fire,
Rigged their scales to better their business income.
Fierce tigers and snakes that feast on people
Are enemies bearing resentments from lives before.
In our myriad deeds, whatever we do,
We reap our own rewards, it's true.
Who can we blame for our woe in the hells?
Who can there be to blame but ourselves?
Don't say that cause and effect is unseen.
Look at you, your offspring, heirs, and grand children.
If you doubt the good of pure eating and giving,
Look around and find those enjoying fortune.
Having practiced of old, they now harvest abundance.
To cultivate now will bring blessings anew.
Those who slander the cause and effect in this Sutra
Will fall and have no chance to be human.
Those who recite and uphold this Sutra
Are supported by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.
Write out this Sutra, study it hard
And in the future your families will flourish.
Uphold this Sutra atop your heads
To avert disasters and fatal accidents.
To lecture this Sutra on Cause and Effect
Is to sharpen your wits in successive rebirths.
Chanting this Sutra on Cause and Effect
Will make one revered, well-regarded by all.
Print and distribute this precious Sutra
And reap rebirth as a ruler or king.
To verify former cause and effect,
Regard Mahakashyapa's golden body.
A case of future cause and effect:*

*Bhikshu Good Star slandered the Dharma
And lost his chance for human life.
If cause and effect contained no truth,
Why did Maudgalyayana seek to rescue his mother
From the hells to save her from suffering?
Those who trust the words of this Sutra as true,
Will all be reborn in the Western Land of Bliss.
To speak of present cause and effect
To proclaim future and past as well,
Is a deed that could never be done to its end.
Join at the door of the Triple Gem.
With blessings and wholesome belief one can enter
The door, supported by gods and dragons,
Dragons and gods who won't let you down.
For every part of giving you practice,
You'll reap ten thousand parts reward.
Such blessings are stored in a solid treasury,
For enjoyment in future rebirths without end.
If you care to know of past live's causes,
Look at rewards you are reaping today
1 If you wish to find out about future lives,
You need but notice what you're doing right now.
End Of The Buddha Speaks The Sutra On Cause and
Effect In Three Periods Of Time*

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Avoid the ten unwholesome actions,
And make your faith and confidence be strong.
With few wants, be content with what you have,
And with gratitude repay any kindness you
receive.
Overcome anger and arrogance,
And let humility rule your mind.
Give up any unwholesome kind of living,