AN 4.171 — Intention

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
Source: https://suttacentral.net/an4.171/en/sujato
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Text

Numbered Discourses 4.171

18. Intention

Intention

“Mendicants, as long as there’s a body, the intention that gives rise to bodily action causes pleasure and pain to arise in oneself. As long as there’s a voice, the intention that gives rise to verbal action causes pleasure and pain to arise in oneself. As long as there’s a mind, the intention that gives rise to mental action causes pleasure and pain to arise in oneself. But this is only when dependent on ignorance.

By oneself one instigates the choice that gives rise to bodily, verbal, and mental action, conditioned by which that pleasure and pain arise in oneself. Or else others instigate the choice … One instigates the choice after deliberation … Or else one instigates the choice without deliberation …

Ignorance is included in all these things. But when ignorance fades away and ceases with no residue left behind, that body, that voice, and that mind no longer exist dependent on which that pleasure and pain arise in oneself. That field does not exist, that ground does not exist, that dimension does not exist, that foundation does not exist, dependent on which that pleasure and pain arise in oneself.”

“Mendicants, there are four kinds of incarnation. What four?

There is incarnation where one’s own intention is effective, not that of others.

There is incarnation where the intention of others is effective, not one’s own.

There is incarnation where both one’s own and others’ intentions are effective.

There is incarnation where neither one’s own nor others’ intentions are effective.

These are the four kinds of incarnation.”

When he said this, Venerable Sāriputta said to the Buddha:

“Sir, this is how I understand the detailed meaning of the Buddha’s brief statement. Take the case of the incarnation where one’s own intention is effective, not that of others. Those sentient beings pass away from that realm due to their own intention. Take the case of the incarnation where the intention of others is effective, not one’s own. Those sentient beings pass away from that realm due to the intention of others. Take the case of the incarnation

where both one's own and others' intentions are effective. Those sentient beings pass away from that realm due to both their own and others' intentions. But sir, in the case of the incarnation where neither one's own nor others' intentions are effective, what kind of gods does this refer to?"

"Sāriputta, it refers to the gods reborn in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception."

"What is the cause, sir, what is the reason why some sentient beings pass away from that realm as returners who come back to this place, while others are non-returners who don't come back?"

"Sāriputta, take an individual who hasn't given up the lower fetters. In this very life they enter and abide in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. They enjoy it and like it and find it rewarding. If they abide in that, are committed to it, and meditate on it often without losing it, when they die they're reborn in the company of the gods of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. When they pass away from there, they're a returner, who comes back to this place.

Sāriputta, take an individual who has given up the lower fetters. In this very life they enter and abide in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. They enjoy it and like it and find it rewarding. If they abide in that, are committed to it, and meditate on it often without losing it, when they die they're reborn in the company of the gods of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. When they pass away from there, they're a non-returner, not coming back to this place.

This is the cause, this is the reason why some sentient beings pass away from that realm as returners who come back to this place, while others are non-returners who don't come back."