

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. There he addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus." "Venerable sir," they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. "Bhikkhus, suppose there were two houses with doors and a man with good sight standing there between them saw people going in and coming out and passing to and fro. So too, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I see beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate. I understand how beings pass on according to their actions thus: 'These worthy beings who were well conducted in body, speech, and mind, not revilers of noble ones, right in their views, giving effect to right views in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a happy destination, even in the heavenly world. Or these worthy beings who were well conducted in body, speech, and mind, not revilers of noble ones, right in their views, giving effect to right views in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared among human beings. But these worthy beings who were ill conducted in body, speech, and mind, revilers of noble ones, wrong in their views, giving effect to wrong views in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in the realm of ghosts. Or these worthy beings who were ill conducted...on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in the animal world. Or these worthy beings who were ill conducted...on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell.'

3. "Now the wardens of hell seize such a being by the arms and present him to King Yama, saying: 'Sire, this man has ill-treated his mother, ill-treated his father, ill-treated recluses, ill-treated brahmins; he has had no respect for the elders of his clan. Let the king order his punishment.'

4. "Then King Yama presses and questions and cross-questions him about the first divine messenger: 'Good man, did you not see the first divine messenger to appear in the world?' He says: 'I did not, venerable sir.' Then King Yama says: 'Good man, have you never seen in the world a young tender infant lying prone, fouled in his own excrement and urine?' He says: 'I have, venerable sir.'

"Then King Yama says: 'Good man, did it never occur to you "an intelligent and mature man "I too am subject to birth, I am not exempt from birth: surely I had better do good by body, speech, and mind"?' He says: 'I was unable, venerable sir, I was negligent.' Then King Yama

says: 'Good man, through negligence you have failed to do good by body, speech, and mind. Certainly they will deal with you according to your negligence. But this evil action of yours was not done by your mother or your father, or by your brother or your sister, or by your friends and companions, or by your kinsmen and relatives, or by recluses and brahmins, or by gods: this evil action was done by you yourself, and you yourself will experience its result.'

5. "Then, after pressing and questioning and cross-questioning him about the first divine messenger, King Yama presses and questions and cross-questions him about the second divine messenger: 'Good man, did you not see the second divine messenger to appear in the world?' He says: 'I did not, venerable sir.' Then King Yama says: 'Good man, have you never seen in the world a man □ or a woman □ at eighty, ninety, or a hundred years, aged, as crooked as a roof bracket, doubled up, supported by a walking stick, tottering, frail, youth gone, teeth broken, grey-haired, scanty-haired, bald, wrinkled, with limbs all blotchy?' He says: 'I have, venerable sir.'

"Then King Yama says: 'Good man, did it never occur to you □ an intelligent and mature man □ "I too am subject to ageing, I am not exempt from ageing: surely I had better do good by body, speech, and mind"?' He says: 'I was unable, venerable sir, I was negligent.' Then King Yama says: 'Good man, through negligence you have failed to do good by body, speech, and mind. Certainly they will deal with you according to your negligence. But this evil action of yours was not done by your mother...or by gods: this evil action was done by you yourself, and you yourself will experience its result.'

6. "Then, after pressing and questioning and cross-questioning him about the second divine messenger, King Yama presses and questions and cross-questions him about the third divine messenger: 'Good man, did you not see the third divine messenger to appear in the world?' He says: 'I did not, venerable sir.' Then King Yama says: 'Good man, have you never seen in the world a man □ or a woman □ afflicted, suffering, and gravely ill, lying fouled in his own excrement and urine, lifted up by some and set down by others?' He says: 'I have, venerable sir.'

"Then King Yama says: 'Good man, did it never occur to you □ an intelligent and mature man □ "I too am subject to sickness, I am not exempt from sickness: surely I had better do good by body, speech, and mind"?' He says: 'I was unable, venerable sir, I was negligent.' Then King Yama says: 'Good man, through negligence you have failed to do good by body, speech, and mind. Certainly they will deal with you according to your negligence. But this evil action of yours was not done by your mother...or by gods: this evil action was done by you yourself, and you yourself will experience its result.'

7. “Then, after pressing and questioning and cross-questioning him about the third divine messenger, King Yama presses and questions and cross-questions him about the fourth divine messenger: ‘Good man, did you not see the fourth divine messenger to appear in the world?’ He says: ‘I did not, venerable sir.’ Then King Yama says: ‘Good man, have you never seen in the world, when a robber culprit is caught, kings having many kinds of tortures inflicted on him: having him flogged with whips...(*as Sutta 129, §4*)...and having his head cut off with a sword?’ He says: ‘I have, venerable sir.’

“Then King Yama says: ‘Good man, did it never occur to you □ an intelligent and mature man □ “Those who do evil actions have such tortures of various kinds inflicted on them here and now; so what in the hereafter? Surely I had better do good by body, speech, and mind”?’ He says: ‘I was unable, venerable sir, I was negligent.’ Then King Yama says: ‘Good man, through negligence you have failed to do good by body, speech, and mind. Certainly they will deal with you according to your negligence. But this evil action of yours was not done by your mother...or by gods: this evil action was done by you yourself, and you yourself will experience its result.’

8. “Then, after pressing and questioning and cross-questioning him about the fourth divine messenger, King Yama presses and questions and cross-questions him about the fifth divine messenger: ‘Good man, did you not see the fifth divine messenger to appear in the world?’ He says: ‘I did not, venerable sir.’ Then King Yama says: ‘Good man, have you never seen in the world a man □ or a woman □ one-day dead, two-days dead, three-days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing with matter?’ He says: ‘I have, venerable sir.’

“Then King Yama says: ‘Good man, did it never occur to you □ an intelligent and mature man □ “I too am subject to death, I am not exempt from death: surely I had better do good by body, speech, and mind”?’ He says: ‘I was unable, venerable sir, I was negligent.’ Then King Yama says: ‘Good man, through negligence you have failed to do good by body, speech, and mind. Certainly they will deal with you according to your negligence. But this evil action of yours was not done by your mother...or by gods: this evil action was done by you yourself, and you yourself will experience its result.’

9. “Then, after pressing and questioning and cross-questioning him about the fifth divine messenger, King Yama is silent.

10. “Now the wardens of hell torture him with the fivefold transfixing. They drive a red-hot iron stake through one hand, they drive a red-hot iron stake through the other hand, they drive a red-hot iron stake through one foot, they drive a red-hot iron stake through the other foot, they drive a red-hot iron stake through his belly. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

11. “Next the wardens of hell throw him down and pare him with axes. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

12. “Next the wardens of hell set him with his feet up and his head down and pare him with adzes. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

13. “Next the wardens of hell harness him to a chariot and drive him back and forth across ground that is burning, blazing, and glowing. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

14. “Next the wardens of hell make him climb up and down a great mound of coals that are burning, blazing, and glowing. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

15. “Next the wardens of hell take him feet up and head down and plunge him into a red-hot metal cauldron that is burning, blazing, and glowing. He is cooked there in a swirl of froth. And as he is being cooked there in a swirl of froth, he is swept now up, now down, and now across. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

16. “Next the wardens of hell throw him into the Great Hell. Now as to that Great Hell, bhikkhus:

It has four corners and is built

With four doors, one set in each side,

Walled up with iron and all around

And shut in with an iron roof.

Its floor as well is made of iron

And heated till it glows with fire.

The range is a full hundred leagues

Which covers all-pervasively.

17. “Now the flames that surge out from the Great Hell’s eastern wall dash against its western wall. The flames that surge out from its western wall dash against its eastern wall. The flames that surge out from its northern wall dash against its southern wall. The flames that surge out from its southern wall dash against its northern wall. The flames that surge out from the bottom dash against the top. And the flames that surge out from the top dash against the bottom. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

18. “Some time or other, bhikkhus, at the end of a long period, there comes an occasion when the Great Hell’s eastern door is opened. He runs towards it, treading quickly. As he does so, his outer skin burns, his inner skin burns, his flesh burns, his sinews burn, his bones turn to smoke; and it is the same when his foot is uplifted. When at long last he reaches the door, then it is shut. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

“Some time or other, bhikkhus, at the end of a long period, there comes an occasion when the Great Hell’s western door is opened...when its northern door is opened...when its southern door is opened. He runs towards it, treading quickly...When at long last he reaches the door, then it is shut. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

19. “Some time or other, bhikkhus, at the end of a long period, there comes an occasion when the Great Hell’s eastern door is opened. He runs towards it, treading quickly. As he does so, his outer skin burns, his inner skin burns, his flesh burns, his sinews burn, his bones turn to smoke; and it is the same when his foot is uplifted. He comes out by that door.

20. “Immediately next to the Great Hell is the vast Hell of Excrement. He falls into that. In that Hell of Excrement needle-mouthed creatures bore through his outer skin and bore through his inner skin and bore through his flesh and bore through his bones and devour his marrow. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

21. “Immediately next to the Hell of Excrement is the vast Hell of Hot Embers. He falls into that. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

22. “Immediately next to the Hell of Hot Embers is the vast Wood of Simbali Trees, a league high, bristling with thorns sixteen finger-breadths long, burning, blazing, and glowing. They make him climb up and down those trees. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

23. “Immediately next to the Wood of Simbali Trees is a vast Wood of Sword-leaf Trees. He goes into that. The leaves, stirred by the wind, cut his hands and cut his feet and cut his hands and feet; they cut his ears and cut his nose and cut his ears and nose. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

24. “Immediately next to the Wood of Sword-leaf Trees is a great river of caustic water. He falls into that. There he is swept along the stream and against the stream and both along and against the stream. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

25. “Next the wardens of hell pull him out with a hook, and setting him on the ground, they ask him: ‘Good man, what do you want?’ He says: ‘I am hungry, venerable sirs.’ Then the wardens of hell prise open his mouth with red-hot iron tongs, burning, blazing, and glowing, and they throw into this mouth a red-hot metal ball, burning, blazing, and glowing. It burns his lips, it burns his mouth, it burns his throat, it burns his stomach, and it passes out below carrying with it his intestines and mesentery. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

26. “Next, the wardens of hell ask him: ‘Good man, what do you want?’ He says: ‘I am thirsty, venerable sirs.’ Then the wardens of hell prise open his mouth with red-hot iron tongs, burning, blazing, and glowing, and they pour into his mouth molten copper, burning, blazing, and glowing. It burns his lips, it burns his mouth, it burns his throat, it burns his stomach, and it passes out below carrying with it his intestines and mesentery. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.

27. “Then the wardens of hell throw him back again into the Great Hell.

28. “It has happened that King Yama thought: ‘Those in the world who do evil unwholesome actions indeed have all these many kinds of tortures inflicted on them. Oh, that I might attain the human state, that a Tathāgata, accomplished and fully enlightened, might appear in the world, that I might wait on that Blessed One, that the Blessed One might teach me the Dhamma, and that I might come to understand that Blessed One’s Dhamma!’

29. “Bhikkhus, I tell you this not as something I heard from another recluse or brahmin. I tell you this as something that I have actually known, seen, and discovered by myself.”

30. That is what the Blessed One said. When the Sublime One had said that, the Teacher said further:

“Though warned by the divine messengers,

Full many are the negligent,

And people may sorrow long indeed

Once gone down to the lower world.

But when by the divine messengers

Good people here in this life are warned,

They do not dwell in negligence

But practise well the noble Dhamma.

Clinging they look upon with fear

For it produces birth and death;

And by not clinging they are freed



In the destruction of birth and death.

They dwell in bliss for they are safe

And reach Nibbāna here and now.

They are beyond all fear and hate;

They have escaped all suffering.”

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Majjhima Nikāya 130

Part Three— The Final Fifty Discourses (Uparipaṭṭi āsapāṭi)

The Division on Voidness (Suññatavagga)

Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi

Contributed by Chris Burke