

A Study of Increasing Ways in Human Life Based on the Devadūta Sutta

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Abstract

The Devadūta Sutta is the tenth *sutta* in the Suññata Vagga, the Uparipaññāsa Pāli, the Majjhima Nikāya. Those who fall to hell for doing evil deeds are brought by wardens of hell to Yama, King of Death (*Vemānikapetās*). Yama King examined the evil doers through the five divine messengers. If they are convicted, they are consigned to Mahāvīsi hell. When they are released from Avīci hell, they are found to suffer in excrement hell, hot-ash hell, Bombax tree hell, hell of sword-like leaves, hell of molten iron. Yama King thought of attaining human life and listening to the Buddha's dhamma. The Buddha did not hear *Devadūta* dhamma from no one. He preached the *Devadūtu* dhamma as he knew the dhamma clearly by himself. The Buddha exhorted monks to hold onto the *appamādadhamma* mindfully and to be remorseful on seeing a baby. This is a qualitative study using the descriptive method.

Key Words: Devadūta, hell, Yama King, *Kamma*.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to present why people should not do bad deeds. The objectives of this paper are to observe how to do good deeds and to classify what the good deeds are and what the bad deeds are.

Materials and Methods

This paper shows that the people should do merits mindfully. The method of this paper was extracted from Pāli canon, Aṭṭhakāthā and other Ganthantara texts and presented with descriptive method.

Research Questions

1. Why should people study the Devadūta sutta?
2. How many kinds of bad deeds should people always avoid to do?

Introduction

The Uparipaññāsa text in The Mijjhima Nikāya comprises five *vaggas* and 52 *suttas*. The five *vaggas* are (1) the Devadaha Vagga, (2) the Anupada Vagga, (3) the Suññata Vagga, (4) the Vibhaṅga Vagga and (5) the Sālāyatana Vagga. Four *vaggas* contain ten *suttas* each and the fourth *vagga* contains 12 *suttas*.

The Buddha explained the views of the Nigaṇḍa sect and various the Abhidhammā sects in the Devadaha Vagga. The Buddha also expounded on the four foundations of mindfulness, the five powers, and cultivation of the five faculties of the senses and facts pertaining to Buddhism. The Buddha clearly explained the six factors conducive to collapse of unity and the six factors promoting unity. The Buddha differentiated two kinds of persons; true arahat and arahat-minded person by giving examples. Buddha's exhortation to be replete with heedfulness (*appamāda dhamma*) is also found. The Buddha explained the eight characteristics by which a wicked person can be recognized and the eight characteristics by which a virtuous person can be recognized.

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The qualifications of the Venerable Sāriputta who knew dhammas in details are found to be extolled in the Anupada Vagga. Arahatsip is investigated with six collection of the dhamma. The dhamma that should be adhered to and the dhamma that should not be adhered to are also differentiated. Explanation regarding *ānāpānakammaṭṭhā*, contemplation regarding to the aggregates and the arising of conditioned aggregates are also explained in the Anupada Vagga.

Buddha's 19 wonders, instruction regarding *Vinaya*, the importance of the right view regarding the special benefits from leading a noble life and cultivation of generating loving-kindness, King Yama's judgements on sinners according to the magnitude of their sins are found to be described in the Suññata Vaggas. The Buddha warned the meditators not to think of their past and not to long for the future but to solve the present.

The accounts of the six sense bases and the non-arising the sufferings from rebirth, ageing and death if the mind is securely guarded, to follow the middle path by avoiding the two extremes, the Four Noble Truths and the Path of eight constituents are completely described in the Vibhaṅga Vagga. How to make offering of different offertories and 14 kinds of donees are further described in this *vagga*.

The impermanence of conditional phenomena, instruction on how to dispel cankers, suitability of controlling the faculties of the senses by monks and to restrain the sense faculties are explained in the Sālayatana Vagga.

Discussion on matter and mind such as *khandha* (aggregates), *āyatana*s (sense bases), *dhātu*, *saṅkhāra* (conditional things), *saḷāyatana*, etc. is also presented with examples in this *vagga*. The Buddha exhorted monks to destroy the purities that obstruct the consciousness of *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*, *samyojanas*, *kilesas*, *taṇhā*, etc. Buddha also showed the recipes of the Four Noble truths, the eight constituents of the Path and contemplation of *ānāpānakammaṭṭhāna*.

It is also found that the Buddha gave admonition to direct one's attention to the present and to reject attention to the past and future. The different destination of living beings and benefits and consequences of one's good and bad past deeds are completely presented. One has the chance to study root cause of unity and dissension in a community. Moreover other religious sects that were contemporary to Buddha and different views of other religions are known partially.¹

Historical Background

Meaning of Devadūta

The word “*deva*” means king and “*dūta*” means messenger. Here in this case *devadūta* means the messenger of death. In other words, *Devadūta* means one who is like a messenger of death, a divine messenger sent from celestial beings to a reminder of mortality.²

Devadūtas

According to the description in the Devadūta Sutta in the Devadūta Vagga, the Tikanipāta Pāli, the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the aged, the sick and the death are devadūtas.³

According to the Devadūta Sutta in the Suññata Vagga, the Uparipaṇṇāsa Pāli, the Majjhima Nikāya, a child, the aged, the sick, the prisoner being tormented or tormentor, and

¹ M III.1-352.

² MA III. 214. AA II 117. တိပိဓာန်၊ အဝဂ္ဂ (၁၀)၊ ၇၈၄။

³ A I.137-140.

death are *devadūtas*.¹ The *devadūtas* described in the Aṭṭhakathā texts are the aged, the sick, the death and a monk. They were the four great omens encountered by the Bodhisatta Siddattha in visiting the Royal Garden. Siddattha became Buddha after becoming remorseful, renunciation and strenuous practice. The four omens are called divine messengers because they incited *saṃvega-ñāṇa* and reminded the Bodhisatta to perform wholesome deeds mindfully.²

While the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana monastery in Sāvatti city, the Buddha called the monks to him and preached the Devadūta Sutta. The Buddha preached, “Monks, just as a person with good eye-sight, sees the people who come into and who come out of the house while standing at the middle of the two doors, I, the Buddha, with the supreme divine eyesight of wisdom, see dead beings who are being born, wicked persons, noble persons, beautiful persons, ugly persons, living beings who are being born, wicked persons, noble persons, beautiful person, ugly persons, living beings with good destination and living beings with bad destination.”³ This preaching enables us to know the Buddha’s faculty to see living beings together with their volitional activities. By exercising the mental faculty, the Buddha was able to know the living beings with their traits of character and tendencies. This is the venerable mental power of the Buddha.

“Monks, as the persons who are replete with good deed, good speech and good thought follows the doctrine of the Ariyā persons, they are destined to the celestial abodes when they pass away. They are also reborn in the human world.”

“Monks, the persons who are replete with bad deed, bad speech and bad thoughts are the persons who slander the Ariyā persons and the persons who behave badly to cause false views. When they pass away, they are destined to the abode of Petas. They are also destined to animal world and to hell.”

If *kamma* is favourable, it brings forth well-being. There are different *kammās* that bears results in the present life and that bear results in the future life. There is a difference in the time of bearing result. In the life of puthujanas, they experience similar fate at one time, at one place or the other.

There two kinds of *kamma*, good *kamma* and bad *kamma*. Good *kamma* bears good result and bad *kamma* bears bad result. Those who have done both good *kamma* and bad *kamma* will have to enjoy the benefit of good *kamma* as well as experience the consequences of bad *kamma*. On observing the statements in the Devadūta Sutta, those who have done good speech and good thought shall enjoy celestial wealth in celestial abode and worldly wealth in human life. When the persons who have done bad deed, bad speech and thought will have to suffer in miserable adobes such as hells, the animal world, Peta world, etc. Therefore those with good intelligence and mindfulness should strive to perform meritorious deed by avoiding all evil deeds, speech and thought.

There five kinds of *gati* or destination are described in the Devadūta Sutta. They are:-

- (1) *Devagati* (celestial abode, celestial life),
- (2) *Manussagati* (world of humans, Human life),
- (3) *Petagati* (world of *Petas*, life of *Peta*)
- (4) *Tiracchānagati* (animal world, animal life),

¹ M III.216-225.

² MA III.214. AA II. 117. Abhi A I. 76. DhA I. 54. JA I. 155

³ M III. 216.

(5) *Nirayagati* (hell)¹**Hell**

Just as there are prisons or jails to keep the offenders and criminals in the human world, there are hells where the sinners are punished for their evil deeds. The hells are places where sinners suffer punishments according to their sins. As the *kamma* of the beings are varied, there are a number of hells. These hells are *utuja-rupa* or matter caused by *utu* conditioned by one's evil *kamma*. Hells differ in nature depending on the degree and severity of the evil deeds committed. The Lohakumbhi hell (the hell of molten metal) is described in the Buddhist Scriptures to be in existence below the crust of the earth in close proximity to the human abode.

There are eight major hells at different levels. They are:-

- (1) Sañjiva Hell
- (2) Kaḷasutta hell
- (3) Saṃghāta hell
- (4) Roruva hell
- (5) Mahāroruva hell
- (6) Tāpana hell
- (7) Mahātāpana hell and
- (8) Avici hell

Each major hell is surrounded, as a wall, by five minor hells: (1) excrement hell, (2) hot ashes hell, (3) hell of Bombax trees, (4) hell of trees with sword-like leaves and (5) hell of molten iron. These five hells are called Ussada hells.

King Yama, King of Hell

The king of Vemānika-petas, who belong to devas of the Catumahārājika abode, is called King Yama. He sometimes enjoys pleasures of devas and sometimes suffers the painful fruits of bad *kamma* (like ordinary Petas). There are many Yamas who presided over the trial of sinners in their offices situated at the four gates of each major hell. Their duties are like the judges of appeal in the human world.

But not all those who arrive at the gate are subject to trial. Those who have done grave unwholesome *kammās* and so are evident sinners go direct to hells. Those with minor *akusala kamma* get the opportunity to be judged by Yamas with the expectation that they might escape hell. Yamas are like the judges of the court of appeal nowadays. Therefore King Yamas are like just and impartial monarchs.

The Wardens of Hell

These hell wardens also belong to the class of the Catumahārājika-devas. They are either ogres or demons. Their regular duties include sending minor sinners to Yama for trial and carry out cruel punishments to serious sinners. As hell fire is a form of *utuja-rūpu* conditioned by evil deeds, only sinners and not hell wardens are scorched by the heat.²

¹ M III. 217.

² ကိုယ်ကျင့်အဘိဓမ္မာ ၊ (၂၀၀၇)၊ ၂၅၅-၂၇၇။ MA IV. 164.

In Devadūta Sutta hell wardens bring the sinners by their hands and present them to King Yama “King Yama, this person did not look after his mother He also did not look after his father. He did not pay respect to those who are noble He did not pay respect to the elder ones among his relatives. Therefore pass judgement to punish him.” King Yama did not directly punish the sinner brought by hell warden. Whenever a sinner is brought before King Yama, he always asks him about the five divine messengers: an infant, an aged, an infirm, a dead person and a prisoner.¹

King Yama asked sinner if he had never seen a newborn baby wallowing helplessly in his or her own excreta; while he was a human being. Sinner replied respectfully that he had done. King Yama asked if so, if it had occurred in his thoughts. He would be reborn like this helpless baby wallowing in excreta and urine in many future lives he could not also escape rebirths. It was high time he controlled his thoughts, words and deeds so as not to suffer again like that infant. Sinner replied that on his honour he had not been mindful and thus had not been interested in doing wholesome deeds. King Yama said that unwholesome deeds were done by himself, not by his relatives, parents and friends. Since he was guilty of living thoughtlessly, he had to then pay for his evil deeds as was the custom.²

It is expounded in the Aṭṭhakathā as follows: "Oh comrades, I have hands and legs like you. Even though I have hands and legs like you, I am smeared with my own excreta and urine. I am wallowing in excreta and urine. I am not able to stand up by myself and take a bath to clean myself. I have my body smeared with filth. I am not able to tell someone to clean my body and to give a bath to me. Every newborn baby cannot escape this kind of suffering. Not only I but also you cannot yet escape from this kind of suffering since still you have rebirths to undergo. You will be subject to rebirth just like me. You better do meritorious deeds before you are born again." This is the evocation of the helpless baby on the sinner on seeing a baby as expounded in the Aṭṭhakathā.³

In Pāli on seeing a baby smeared with excreta and urine, the sinner must be remorseful by thinking like this: "I will become like this baby when I am born again. It is high time to perform meritorious deeds." But in the Aṭṭhakathā it is expounded as if a baby is exhorting the sinner to perform meritorious deeds. The apprehension aroused by observing the present situation and the awareness of suffering of rebirth are the same.

One who has rebirths to undergo is inevitably bound to suffer. In delivering the *dukkha-sacca* in the first sermon, Dhammacakka, the Buddha showed “Jātipidukkhā” (rebirth is suffering). This is shown as the Truth of suffering.⁴ If there is rebirth, one will also definitely experience *jarā* (ageing), *byādhi* (sickness) and *maraṇa* (death). The ageing, the sickness and death are all suffering. They are also the Truth of suffering. In *Devadūta Sutta* not only the nature of *jāti* (rebirth) but also the nature of ageing, sickness, etc, are described. King Yama's dialogue with the sinner is described to arouse awareness of Samsarā suffering.

King Yama asked sinner if he had never seen an aged person with decayed body while he was a human being. Sinner replied respectfully that he had done. King Yama asked if he had thought like that by observing the infirm would become aged and infirm like that aged man; when he had got to an aged of understanding. He could not escape from ageing. Now he would do good bodily deeds, good verbal deeds and good mental deeds. Sinner replied that he has not been mindful and thus had no interest in doing wholesome deeds. King Yama said that unwholesome deeds were done by himself not by his relatives, his teacher, his parents and his

¹ M III. 217.

² M III. 217-218.

³ MA IV. 164.

⁴ S III. 368 Vin III 14.

friends. Since he was guilty of living thoughtlessly he had to now pay for his evil deeds as was the custom.¹

"Comrades, I had strong hands and legs like you. I was youthful and could move quickly. Now my youth, strength, quickness in movement have disappeared. Although I have hands and legs, they are feeble and could not do their functions well. The nature of ageing cannot be escaped. Not only I but also you cannot escape from ageing. Just as I reach to a state of ageing, you will also reach a state of ageing. Therefore you had better perform meritorious deeds before you become aged." It is expounded as an aged person exhorts those to see an aged person to perform works of merit before ageing.²

Just as the aged is a messenger of death, the infirm is also a messenger of death. Ageing is the decay of physical and mental formations. King Maghadeva became apprehensive and remorseful on finding a strand of grey hair. He renounced the secular life practised meditation. Although grey hair is described as a messenger of death in the Jātaka story, it seems to be combined with ageing phenomenon in the Devadūta Sutta.³

Man is a possessor of existence which is composed of aggregates of mind and matter. The mind and matter are subject to constant change. The proportionate change of mind and matter is called healthiness. The disproportionate change of mind and body is called unhealthiness or it is diseased.

During the life time of the Gotama Buddha a monk supplicated to the Buddha. "Venerable Sir, the people of this world speak of disease. Which is called disease, Venerable Sir? Then the Buddha said to the monks, "Dear Son, disease a name for material phenomenon."

" Rogā rogoti bhante vuccati, katamo nukho rogoti vuccati.

Rogoti kho bhikkhu rūpānaṃ metaṃ adhivacanaṃ."

Illness is the pain due to weakness of karajakāya. Buddhas and Arahats have karajakāya. The state of weakness of karajakāya ought not be eliminated with magga-ñāṇa. Therefore Arahats have the nature of tiring on a long journey or in carrying out other matter. Physical pain ought not be eliminated with magga-ñāṇa. Arahats have no mental pain. Mental pain has already been eradicated with magga-ñāṇa.⁴

The Buddha, who is not like anyone in this world, suffers physical pain as bodily pain ought not to be eradicated. It is needless to say that all other persons are subject to physical pain as described in Paritta Ṭika by Venerable Tejodīpaka Thera.

In this world there are physical and mental diseases. Apart from Buddhas and Arahats all other persons are subject to both physical and mental diseases. The Buddhas and Arahats are subject to only physical disease but not the mental diseases because mental disease has already been eradicated with magga-ñāṇa.

The one who is afflicted with disease is called the sick. The sick is a messenger of death. Regarding the sick, the dialogue between King Yama and the sinner is described in *Devadūta Sutta*.

King Yama asked sinner if he had never seen a person who was afflicted with a disease, he had been a human being. Sinner replied respectfully that he had done. King Yama asked if

¹ M III. 218-219.

² MA IV. 165.

³ JA I. 155. JA IV. 119.

⁴ ပရိတ္တိကော ၊ (၁၉၉၀)၊ ၁၀၅-၁၀၆။

he had not had thoughts on seeing a sick person like that he had got the nature of afflicting with disease like that sick man; when he had reached to an understandable age. No one could escape from sickness. Therefore he would perform meritorious deeds by restraining deed, speech and thought. Sinner replied that as he was forgetful, he had had no interest in performing meritorious deeds. King Yama said sinner that he had done all unwholesome deeds by himself not by his relatives, his teacher, his parents and his friends. Since he was guilty of living thoughtlessly, he had to now pay for his evil deeds as was the custom.¹

"Comrades, I was a healthy person with strong hands and legs like you. I could move quickly. Now my strength, my lightness and quickness have disappeared. Although I have hands and legs, they cannot perform their functions. The nature of ageing cannot be escaped. Not only I but also you cannot escape from ageing. Just as ageing has come to me, ageing will also come to you. Therefore strive to do good deeds before ageing comes to you." It is expounded in the *Aṭṭhakathā* as if an aged person is exhorting the persons who see ageing to become apprehensive of suffering of existence and to perform good deeds.²

The sickness is described in the *Devadūta Sutta* as a messenger of death to enable the person who sees a sick man to feel remorse and to evoke performance of meritorious deeds.

Although the death is to appear after the sick, the fourth messenger of death is found to be described in the *Devadūta Sutta* as a prisoner who is suffering torment. Therefore the dialogue between King Yama and the sinner regarding seeing a prisoner is described.

King Yama asked sinner if he had never seen a prisoner who had been meted out punishment in various ways such as beating, tying with rope, cutting off hand, cutting off leg, cutting of ears, etc.; while he had in the human world. Sinner replied respectfully that he had done. King Yama asked if he had had ever thoughts on seeing a prisoner being meted out punishments as; when he had come to an understandable aged. The evil doers suffered punishment in various ways in the present life. It was needless to say of the future like. They would have to suffer punishments in the future life as well. Therefore, I would perform meritorious deeds by restraining three *kammās*, bodily, misdeed, verbal misdeed and mental misdeeds. Sinner replied that he was forgetful he had been not interested in performing meritorious deeds. King Yama said that he had committed all the unwholesome deeds by himself, not by his relatives, his teachers, his parents and his friends. Now he would have to suffer punishments for his past evil deeds committed in human life.³

"Comrades, we are being punished in various ways. Trees are not punished. Stone slab is not punished. Just as your bodies are punished, my body is also punished. You must strive to perform meritorious deeds so that you will not suffer punishments like me." This is an evocation of the prisoner suffering from punishment to those who see the prisoners suffering from punishment as expounded in the *Aṭṭhakathā*.⁴

It is natural that an evil doer suffers for his past evil deeds. He who kills the other's life, steals the other's property, etc. is bound to suffer the punishment according to the law and the evil consequences of one's evil deeds. On seeing a prisoner or a prisoner being tormented, one must know that it is due to the consequences of past evil deeds. Therefore one must be apprehensive to do meritorious deeds so that one is not kept in a prison and tormented. A prisoner being tormented is described in the *Devadūta Sutta* as a messenger of death in order to arouse apprehension of the resultant *kamma* of evil deeds.

¹ M III. 219.

² MA IV. 165.

³ M III. 219-220.

⁴ MA IV. 165.

One who is reborn is bound to die inevitably at a time, on a day and at a place. No one can escape from death. There are five things that ordinary people cannot know.

They are:-

- (1) Duration of one's life-span,
- (2) The disease one will be afflicted with,
- (3) The time of one's death,
- (4) The place where one's corpse will be cremated, and
- (5) The destination one will reach after death.¹

The living beings constituted of material and mental phenomena is bound to die according to the nature of material and mental phenomena. Having the right to live is having the time to do both good deeds and bad deeds. When one passes away, one has chances to do good deeds. While one is alive, as one has the chance to do works of merit for future well-being with reference to a dead person, death is described in the Devadūta Sutta as a messenger of death. Regarding a dead person the dialogue between King Yama and the sinner is described.

King Yama asked sinner if he had never seen a dead man; while in the life of a human being. Sinner replied respectfully that he had done. King Yama asked sinner if he had had ever thoughts like that on seeing a dead person; he had the nature of dead; when he had reached to an understandable age. No one could escape from dead. Therefore he would now perform meritorious deeds by restraining the three evil *kammās*; evil bodily deed, evil verbal deed and evil mental deed. Sinner replied that as he had been unmindful, he had not been interested in performing good deeds. King Yama said that he had done all those unwholesome deeds by himself, not by his relatives, his teachers, his parents and his friends. Now he had to suffer the evil consequences his evil deeds in the past.²

“Comrades, come and look at me who has reached a state of death for discarding the corpse at the cemetery. One who is reborn cannot escape from death. Not only I but also you cannot escape from death. Just as I have reached to a state of death, you will also reach a state of death. Therefore, before the death can reach, you have to strive to do meritorious deeds.” This is expounded as if the death exhorts the persons who see the dead meritorious deed to become apprehensive of the suffering of existence and to do wholesome deeds before death comes.³

In the Devadūta Sutta, King Yama and denizens of hell had five dialogues on five points. If the sinner is unable to recall wholesome deeds to his credit, many punishments are described to be inflicted on the denizen of hell. King Yama's thoughts and Buddha's bold words are also described.

The thoughts of King Yama are: "Comrades, in this world, those who have done wicked unwholesome deeds suffer from various ways of punishment. It will indeed be good to attain the life of a human being. It will indeed be good for the Buddha to appear in this world. It will be good to attain human life when the Buddha appears in the human world. It will be good to take refuge in the Buddha. It will be good to hear dhamma preached by the Buddha to me. It will be good to realize Buddha's Dhamma."

¹ VinA I. 228. SA I. 39.

² M III. 220-221.

³ MA IV. 165-166.

By observing the above longing of King Yama, human life is found to be very valuable. It is also very valuable to encounter with the time when Buddha appears in the human world. In the present life, although the Buddha was not alive, the Buddha's dhammas are in existence in this world. Those who practise Buddha's dhamma can be said to meet with the Buddha. One should be aware of the words spoken by the Buddha to the Venerable Ānandā on the eve of entering Parinibbāna as follows:

"Yāva ca dhammavinayo tiṭṭhati tāva anatītasattukameva pācanaṃ hoti."

"Ānandā, I have preached all dhammas to you. I have prescribed Vinaya rules to abide by. The Dhammavinaya I have taught to you will be Your Teacher when the Tathagathā passes away into Parinibbāna."¹

As long as the Dhammavinaya exists, the Buddha's Teaching does not disappear. It is like the Buddha is still alive.²

One who believes and understands the above teachings and who follows and practises the Buddha's teachings is like meeting with the Buddha. Therefore just as King Yama longs for one should also strive to understand Buddha's Dhamma.

Apart from the persons who committed serious deeds, the persons with minor evil deeds will remember their good deeds on account of the dialogue with King Yama and so they can attain human life or celestial life. Those who committed minor evil deeds may remember their good deeds by themselves or they may remember their good deeds due to other's prompting.

Dīghajayantadamīla remembered his past good deeds by himself. He paid homage to the Ākāsetī in Sumanagīri monastery by offering a reddish garment. As he was in hell, he remembered his past good deed when he saw red tongues of flame in hell. Thereupon he was reborn in a celestial abode. This is an instance of attaining a celestial abode on remembering one's own good deed by oneself.

A hunter saw signs of hell on nearing his death but due to the reminding of his son, a monk, he recollected a past good deed. Therefore he was sent to a celestial abode. The hunter's son, the monk, performed a meritorious deed for his father. The son told his father about the good deed done for his father. The hunter attained celestial abode when he remembered the good deed done for him by his son.

When a sinner could not remember his past good deeds by himself, King Yama asked him a question on the first messenger of death to arouse his memory. Some sinners remembered their past good deeds on account of the first question. Some remembered their past good deeds on account of the second question. If the sinner could not remember any of his past good deeds after asking five questions, King Yama himself tried to remember if the sinner in front of him had ever shared merits with him when he did meritorious deeds. A minister paid homage to Mahācetī by offering a pot of Spanish jasmine and also shared his merit with King Yama. Because of evil deeds the minister was brought to the presence of King Yama by a hell warden. When the minister could not recall any good deed after asking five questions on the messengers of death, King Yama reminded him by telling thus: "You offered Spanish jasmine to Mahācetī and did you not share merit with me?" The minister attained celestial abode on remembering his past good deed at the reminding of King Yama. When King Yama

¹ D II. 133.

² VinA I. 5. DA I. 3.

cannot see any good deed to his credit, king Yama kept silent thinking in his mind that this living will have suffer a great deal.¹

King Yama asks the first question by pointing out a baby. He asks the second question by pointing out the aged. He asks the third question by pointing out the sick. He asks the fourth question by pointing out the dead. He asks the fifth question by pointing out the prisoner. After the fifth question, if the sinner did not recall any of his past good deeds, King Yama himself tried to recall if the sinner had ever shared merit with him when he did meritorious deeds. On account of this point people share merit with King Yama when they do meritorious deeds. If or the sinner himself reminding of recalled such an incident, as soon as he remembered his meritorious deed, he escaped from hell and was reborn in the celestial abode. There were many of such beings. Only in such circumstances did it become evident that one's meritorious deeds are one's refuge. When it was evident that the sinner had no merits to his credit, King Yama kept silent. Then only hell wardens would come and take away the sinner to torture him in a deserving hell.²

In the Devadūta Sutta the Buddha preached this *sutta* of his own Omniscience. He concluded the sutta by pointing out the nature of living beings with four gāthās. In spite of the promptings of the messengers of death as the living beings are forgetful of performing good deeds they are destined to wicked abodes and are miserable for a very long time. Those who are mindful of the promptings of the divine messengers strive strenuously on seeing the faults of upadāna (clinging) to reach Nibbāna which is the end of rebirth, and death. As a result of striving to practise dhamma of the virtuous they enjoy bliss in the present life as they are free from clinging. They are free from all kinds of danger. Therefore, on seeing the divine messengers, the baby, the aged, the infirm, the death and the prisoner, one should become apprehensive of the suffering of the round of rebirth and mindful to perform meritorious deed and meditation.³

Conclusion

In delivering dhamma there were times when the Buddha preached according to the desire of the living beings. There were also times when the Buddha preached for the comeliness of the Dhamma without having regard to the listener living beings. The Devadūta Sutta was not preached by yielding to the desire of the dhamma listeners. It was the Sutta which was preached to make clear the happenings between King Yama and sinners in hells and to make the nature of dhamma clear.

The Buddha sometimes began preaching from hell and ended at celestial abode. Sometimes the Buddha began preaching with celestial abode and concluded with hell. When the Buddha wanted to expound the celestial wealth in detail, he preached on the suffering of hell, animal world, Peta world and worldly wealth summarily. When the Buddha wanted to expound the suffering and misery of hells in detail he preached summarily on celestial wealth, worldly wealth and suffering of animal, Peta worlds. In this the Devadūta Sutta, suffering in hells was expounded in detail and the discourse was brought to a conclusion with hells. The celestial wealth, human wealth and the suffering of animals and Petas were summarily preached and the suffering in hells is expounded in detail.

He, who repeatedly reflects the suffering in hell, should strive to multiply wholesome deeds by preventing the occurrence of fresh unwholesome deeds with mindfulness. In times past, a young priest was learning the Devadūta Sutta from a teacher. He supplicated,

¹ MA IV. 166.

² ကိုယ်ကျင့်အဘိဓမ္မာ၊ (၂၀၀၇)၊ ၂၈၈။

³ M III. 224-225.

"Venerable Sir, please give me meditation subject without teaching me the text". The young priest strived to practise meditation. He soon became a Sotāpanna. After becoming a Sotāpanna, he learned the Pāli text. There were uncountable numbers of persons who practised meditation and became Arahats at the end of the Devadūta Sutta. Various Buddhas preached the Devadūta Sutta .

Therefore after studying and considering this *Devadūta Sutta*, one should, at the prompting of the divine messengers of death, perform meritorious deeds with keen faith associated with wisdom.

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 ဇနကာဘိဝံသ၊ အရှင်၊ ကိုယ်ကျင့်အဘိဓမ္မာ၊ နယူးဘားမားစ် အေ့ဖ်ဆက်၊ ဝိဇ္ဇာကတ်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ (၂၀၀၇) အမရပူရမြို့။