



next life after passing away from the present one. If there were no such thing as taking a next life, it would be logical that all the living beings would be extinguished by now. Since that is not the case, there is certainly a next life. This is like the physical plants and trees growing up again after having dried out due to the ravages of time.

Question Two: O Bhagawan! Will the sentient beings that pass away from this world be born into types of rebirth without alteration? For example, will the gods be reborn as gods? Likewise, the humans as humans, animals as animals, famished spirits as famished spirits and hell-beings as hell-beings?

Response: No. Sentient beings are born as different types by the force of their wholesome and unwholesome actions. For example, the present humans may have become humans from previous gods. The present animals may have become animals from previous humans who indulged in unwholesome actions.

Question Three: O Bhagawan! Can gods, after death, be born into other types, such as humans, etc.? Likewise, can the humans, the animals, the famished spirits, and the hell-beings, after their deaths, be born as other beings such as gods?

Response: Yes, that is so. Gods, after death, can be born into other beings such as humans, etc. Likewise, the humans, the animals, the famished spirits, and the hell-beings, after their deaths, can be born as other beings such as gods.

Question Four: O Bhagawan! When sentient beings pass away from this life, they retain in the next life the same circle of family members as in this present life such as the parents, the grandparents, the great grandparents, etc. whom they had been born with life after life from the beginningless time. Such is the understanding of the ordinary people. Is this true?

Response 1: When parents and children, etc. appear to each other, they do so as physically embodied beings. It is not that one mind appears to another mind. When the physical aggregate is left behind here and has ceased to be, how could minds accompany minds and appear to each other? The deceased parents, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. are not seen even by their living children and grandchildren who possess physical bodies. How could the parents, grandparents, great grandparents, etc., who had already died and no longer possess physical bodies, be thought of as accompanying each other as they did before? Even granting this, without physical bodies how could we see them accompanying each other?

2: In this life, when parents, children, and the numerous relatives live together, they acknowledge each other on the basis of their different physical bodies. They do not see even their own minds, let alone seeing the minds of each other. Therefore, how would they see each other after death? How would the parents, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. see and accompany each other?

- 3: If, in the beginningless flow of time, there were the first ancestors whom the present grandchildren accompanied, then all the present tribes, clans, clusters, types, of which there are many who are enemies, have settled in places, belong to tribes, speak languages and carry out customs not heard or known to each other, must have descended from that same ancestor. So, where would one draw the line among these fore-parents and grandchildren, and demarcate between the accompanied and the unaccompanied?

Question Five: O Bhagawan! Do those who are rich and affluent in this life remain rich and affluent in the next life, too? Do those who are poor and destitute in this life remain poor and destitute in the next life, too? Or do the two states vary and not remain fixed?

Response: Among those now alive, there are some who are wealthy at birth, but become poor later in life. There are others who are destitute from birth, but later become rich. So, affluence and poverty are undoubtedly impermanent.

For instance, in the world when the conditions of warmth and moisture are present, leaves and branches of plants flourish, whereas in conditions of extreme cold and lack of moisture, they dry out. Similarly, with the conditions of generosity, etc. one becomes rich, and with the conditions of theft and stinginess, one becomes destitute. There are those who remain rich through lifetimes because of having engaged in acts of generosity without break. Whereas, with interrupted acts of generosity, engaging in it sometimes and not other times, or by regretting one's act of generosity, one may become poor either in the early part or later part of one's life. With persistent theft and stinginess, one may remain poor throughout several lifetimes. However, there are those who became rich in certain lifetimes or in either the earlier or later part of a particular life after one had regretted one's acts of theft and miserliness. Poverty and deprivation do not emerge from generosity, nor does affluence emerge from stinginess. Also affluence and poverty do not necessarily alternate over lifetimes.

Question Six: O Bhagawan! Whatever horses, elephants, etc. one may ride in this life, whatever ornaments and dresses one may utilise in this life, whatever foods and drinks one may enjoy in this life, one gets to use the same in the next life. Such is the understanding of the ordinary people. Is this true?

Response 1: No. Humans, when they die, take birth either in the higher or lower realms in accordance with whatever actions -- wholesome or unwholesome -- they may have done.

- 2: Sometimes people are seen in their old familiar clothes even after death. Such appearances are due to the fact that there are limitless, unimaginable, countless

world-systems of the *gandharvas*<sup>3</sup> (scent-eating spirits) filling the space. Among these scent-eaters is a particular type called entering the mind-stream of those on the verge of dying<sup>4</sup>. In search of food, these scent-eaters take on the appearance of those deceased beings with their physical forms, clothes, ornaments and custom and even speaking like them.

- 3: In addition, other than these scent-eaters mentioned above, there are *yakḥas*<sup>5</sup> (malignant spirits), *gandharvas*<sup>6</sup> (scent-eating spirits), *piṣacas*<sup>7</sup> (meat-eating spirits), *bhūtas*<sup>8</sup> (evil spirits), etc. who, in order to entice the relatives and friends of the deceased, through mundane magical powers, learn the behaviours, the burial locations, and life events associated with the deceased. They would then cast spells over the relatives, etc. who would see them or dream about them.
- 4: It is possible for the relatives, etc. to see or dream of the deceased due to the maturation of latencies left because of having been together a long time. For example, suppose a person dreams of his living relatives, servants or anyone with whom he shared the pleasure of their company and wealth, or, for that matter, suppose he dreams of his enemy or anyone who robbed him of his possessions, i.e. someone with whom he shared the displeasure of fighting or arguing. If the persons whom he saw in the dream also had the same dream, then it could be considered a true experience. However, the others do not dream his dreams. So, if, even among those who are alive, we do not experience the dreams of each other, then how could the dreams about the deceased truly be the deceased? Thus, it is just a case of past latencies being activated.
- 5: There is yet another example to represent the working of latencies. Suppose there is a person who, in the first half of his life, owned a castle, a house, a town which he left behind, and moved to another town. In the meantime, his earlier town was totally destroyed and obliterated. Later, he dreams of his past castle, the house, and the town all intact, complete in size and shape so vividly that it seemed real. However, all he saw in the dream was just a case of his latencies being activated. Likewise, dreaming or having the vision of the deceased is similar to dreaming of the past house. Since the consciousness of the deceased has already taken rebirth in accordance with ones karmic action, there is no way it can still be seen. Therefore, it is due to the maturation of the potential of latencies that one sees and dreams of the characteristics and clothes of the deceased.

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<sup>3</sup> They are of two kinds. One refers to the celestial music players belonging to the Desire Realm who have melodious throats and sustain on smell. The other refers to the intermediate beings of the Desire Realm who, too, sustain on smell. Here, the reference is to the latter type.

<sup>4</sup> This merely refers to a type of such spirit, not someone who actually enters the mental continuum of others.

<sup>5</sup> This class of spirits is sometimes associated as retinues of Kūber, one of the four directional kings, located to the north of Mt. Meru, or it refers to a type that sustains on the eatables offered to the gods.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid note 3.

<sup>7</sup> This refers to a class of famished spirits who live on meats. In some usage, this class of spirits represents ghosts.

<sup>8</sup> This has several usages. Often it is used generically to refer to any one of the eighteen, according to certain sources, kinds of ghostly spirits. More specifically, this type stands for a class within the famished spirits who make up physical appearances and usurp the vitality of other beings.

- 6: Likewise, appearances of or dreaming of the deceased person holding weapons such as swords; wearing clothes, ornaments, etc.; riding mounts such as elephants, etc., are due to the maturing of the latencies. So, view this like the example of the house.

Question Seven: O Bhagawan! Those who are left behind such as the relatives, etc. give away food and drinks, no matter how little it may be, and dedicate them for the deceased. They believe such items will last unexhausted for eons for the deceased to partake of. Such is the understanding of the ordinary people. Is this true?

Response 1: Have you ever seen or heard of sentient beings, from the world system of four continents to the first thousand-fold world system, the second thousand-fold world system, the third thousand-fold world system and the limitless, unimaginable world systems, who partake of the food and drinks bit by bit, in all times, or for several eons? There are none.

- 2: A Universal Monarch possesses a wish-fulfilling gem which is the result of his having accumulated limitless collection of merit many eons ago. It neither falls from the sky nor does it emerge suddenly. Thus, it is not possible for beings to partake of such small amount of food and drinks till the end of eons without exhaustion because there is no cause for these things to last forever.

- 3: Even among parents, children, and siblings still alive, but far distant from each other, no matter how much they wish to dedicate food and drink to benefit the other, the other ones do not even see these gifts in dreams, let alone being able to actually partake of them. If this is the case, how feasible would it be for those who have passed away and are separated from their bodies to partake of the foods and drinks dedicated to them by those still alive? No, it is not feasible.

- 4: How would those who have passed away and are separated from their bodies and thus reduced to mind, which is non-substantial and non-physical, be able to take possession of substantial foods and drinks offered by their children and relatives? That is not feasible. For eatables and chewable things react to efforts made by physical organs attached to a body. Does the mind possess such an activity of a physical organ attached to a body?

Question Eight: O Bhagawan! If that is the case, does it then mean that all our acts of dedicating things of use in this life such as food, vehicles, clothes and ornaments to the deceased are meaningless?

Response: To a deceased who has yet to experience a maturing karmic result of whatever actions he/she may have committed, such as by taking rebirth in a realm of existence, any help extended to him/her in the form of dedicated wholesome actions that would amount to an accumulation of merit undefiled by negativity would lead him/her to a higher birth and even to nirvana. If the deceased had

already taken rebirth, any help extended to him/her in the form of wholesome actions that would amount to an accumulation of merit would enable him/her to find wealth, reap good harvest, expand desired possessions, and receive respect and devotion from all others. It is not that a deceased never takes rebirth and instead remains forever in the Kingdom of Death<sup>9</sup> using those foods, drinks, vehicles, clothes and ornaments.

Question Nine: O Bhagawan! Whatever words and secrets sentient beings share with their relatives, etc., and whatever physical features they may have at the verge of death will be spoken and shown to relatives, and accordingly their living relatives shall hear and witness them subsequent to death. Such is the understanding of the ordinary people. Is this true?

Response 1: Speech is made in dependence upon the physical organs of mouth and tongue attached to a body. Since the deceased had left the body behind, how could a formless being ever make a speech? When one hears that a deceased possesses a body, it is when it has already taken rebirth. For that, it would require parents. Thus, there is no such thing as perennial Death Kingdom.

- 2: What worldly beings speak of in terms of the lingering signs and evidences of the deceased is all the handiwork of a class of scent-eaters called the 'Pervasive'. Just as a strong storm instantly engulfs a wide expanse of ground and water, likewise there are scent-eaters called *Vicana*, malignant spirits (*yakshas*) belonging to the class of 'Willing-to-Utter', and evil spirits (*bhūtas*) called 'All-Searching' (*Parahinta*) who immediately pervade the consciousness<sup>10</sup> of the deceased, and by mimicking his/her mannerisms and ways of speech deceive the ordinary beings by showing those skills.

At this point, Devadatta<sup>11</sup> and Mahanama of *Sakya* clan, both of whom are there, express their disbelief in what the Buddha said about what happens in the wake of death. In order to test the Buddha's claim to omniscience by means of which He sees all this, Devadatta cuts branches of every tree and shrub and burns them. He then puts the ashes into separate pouches and marks each so that he wouldn't himself confuse which pouch has the ash of which tree. He then brings them to the Buddha and asks Him which tree the ash is from. The Buddha answers each and every one of his questions correctly without a single error.

Similarly, Mahanama of the *Sakya* clan goes about the great town of *Kapila*<sup>12</sup> and collects a handful of rice from each family. He puts the rice into separate pouches and marks each so that he wouldn't himself confuse them. He brings an elephant-load of rice pouches to the Buddha and

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<sup>9</sup> This points to such a kingdom only hypothetically, suggesting there is no such kingdom in actuality.

<sup>10</sup> This is only indicative of their intention to overpower the deceased and master their mannerisms to deceive their living relatives.

<sup>11</sup> He is one of the cousin brothers of the Buddha notorious for all kinds of mischief.

<sup>12</sup> The kingdom of King Suddhodana, Buddha's father. Almost the entire populace of the kingdom, around that time, belonged to the *Sakya* clan.

asks Him which family each pouch of rice is from. The Buddha answers each and every one of his questions correctly without a single error.

All those gathered there, including Devadatta and Mahanama, fully marvel at the Buddha's omniscience and become convinced of the truth in whatever He said about what happens in the wake of death. Both Devadatta and Mahanama separately compose spontaneous praise of the Buddha.

Question Ten: O Bhagawan! Sentient beings who have committed unwholesome actions such as the boundless crimes and are certain to experience their horrible karmic consequences, by what means could they attain a happy rebirth?

Response 1: If sentient beings who have committed such unwholesome actions as the boundless crimes genuinely believe in the law of karma and its effects and sincerely expiate their wrongdoings, those unwholesome actions will be purified. At the time of death, if they regret their past unwholesome actions and generate genuine admiration for the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and take refuge in them, the unwholesome actions will be purified. They could even take rebirth in the higher realms. Do not think that there is no next life. Do not think that birth is due to a creator or whim of self, or is without a cause. Do not cling to worldly pleasures or any aspect of cyclic existence.

2: When one transmigrates from this life and takes rebirth into a next one, it is not the case that either something permanent continues to the next life, or that everything is discontinued and becomes naught. It is not the case that there is no cause whatsoever or that something is born without cause, or that there is anything brought about by a creator. Rather, rebirth takes place due to the aggregation of causes and conditions in the form of afflictive emotions and actions induced by them.

Question Eleven: O Bhagawan! When sentient beings die and take rebirth, there is neither something permanent transmitted, nor is it that everything discontinues, nor is it that there is no cause at work, nor is this all a handiwork of the Creator, and yet rebirth into the next world takes place. This is all difficult to comprehend. Are there supporting examples for this?

Response: There are eight supporting examples<sup>13</sup> for this. 1) The example of a student learning from his teacher's lectures; 2) the example of a lamp being lit from another lamp; 3) the example of reflections appearing in a mirror; 4) the example of embossed impressions and designs emerging from stamps; 5) the example of fire produced by a magnifying glass; 6) the example of sprouts growing from seeds; 7) the example of salivating from the mention of something tasting sour, and 8) the example of echo. Through these examples one may arrive at understanding.

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<sup>13</sup> These are not alternative examples capable of individually reflecting the complete process of rebirth. They work as a set to collectively capture the process.

It is thus:

1) The teacher stands for the present life; the student stands for the next life; the lecturing stands for the consciousness entering the union of sperm and egg at the time of conception. 2) The previous lamp stands for the present life; the new lamp stands for the next life; that the previous lamp still exists even after the new lamp is lit indicates that nothing permanent is transmitted; that the new lamp is lit from the previous one indicates that the new one doesn't come about from no cause. 3) The example of reflections in a mirror indicates that the next life comes about because of the existence of the present life. However, in the process, although no phenomenon is transferred, the next life is assured. 4) The stamp or seal indicates that in accordance with whatever actions one has accumulated in life, one will take a future life. 5) The magnifying glass indicates that upon death one may take birth in a realm different from the present one. 6) The seed growing into a sprout indicates that one doesn't merely disintegrate and cease to exist. 7) The salivation from the mention of something tasting sour indicates that one takes rebirth by the force of one's own previous action. 8) The echo indicates that one shall take rebirth when conditions are ripe and there are no obstacles. It also indicates that the next birth is neither one with nor separate from the present one.

1) Besides, one is not born in the next life with this present one having completely disintegrated. For, it neither discontinues nor ceases altogether. 2) One does not transmigrate to the next with any permanent entity carried on intact. 3) One is not born into the next world without depending on this life. 4) One is not born in this life because of one's having wished to do so. 5) One is not born in this life because of having prayed to be born in the higher realms in dependence upon the Creator. 6) One is not born due to the wish "May I be born either in the higher or the lower realm, wherever I want". 7) One is not born due to the wish "May I be born without depending on any cause and condition, with no causative action whatsoever". 8) It is not asserted here that nothing remains after death when the aggregates disintegrate. 9) It is not asserted that one continues to remain in the so-called Kingdom of Death after passing away from this life as if there were no rebirth. 10) It is not asserted that one takes the next birth with a consciousness completely unconnected with the consciousness of the present life. 11) It is not asserted that the aggregates of both the present and next lives exist simultaneously. 12) It is not asserted that someone who is lame would be reborn lame, white as white. 13) It is not asserted that a god would be reborn a god, a human reborn as a human. 14) It is not asserted that a wholesome action could impel one into an unfortunate birth, and an unwholesome action into a fortunate birth. 15) It is not the case that numerous consciousnesses emerge from a single consciousness. 16) It is not the case that one can be born as god even though no wholesome action was committed, or into the lower realms even though no unwholesome action was committed. 17) It is not the case that one's birth is the handiwork of the Creator.

If you ask why it is not so, here are the reasons:

1) From the example of a student learning from the lectures of a teacher, one may misinterpret that a being takes rebirth into the next life without its previous consciousness having to cease. To prevent such an interpretation, the instance of seed has been put forth. This is because if sprouts grew without their seeds having undergone any change, then the atman<sup>14</sup>-exponents would have been right in their assertions. However, it is not the case. The sprouts grew only after the seed had transformed into something different than it was before.

2) From the example of the lamps where both lamps are present when one is being lit from the other, one may misinterpret that in both the present and future lives the same aggregates persist. To prevent such an interpretation, the instance of echo has been put forth. This is because echo is not produced without anyone having made a noise, nor does it happen at the same time as the noise. Thus, the same aggregates are not carried on.

3) From the example of a reflection in a mirror where there is the element of similarity, one may misinterpret that one who is lame would be reborn lame. To prevent such an interpretation, the instance of fire being produced by a magnifying glass has been put forth. This is because the magnifying glass produces fire which is something different from it.

4) From the example of embossing stamps one may misinterpret that a god is reborn as god after death and a human as human. To prevent such an interpretation, the instance of a student learning from the lectures of a teacher is put forth. This is because the teacher, who represents this life, and the student, who represents the next life, are not the same. The teacher is not the student, nor is the student the teacher.

5) From the example of the magnifying glass one may misinterpret that a wholesome action would lead to birth in the unfortunate realms and an unwholesome action in fortunate realms. To prevent such an interpretation, the instance of one lamp being lit from another has been put forth. This is because a light produces a light, not anything discordant and different. Likewise, it is appropriate only for a wholesome action to impel rebirth into a fortunate realm, and an unwholesome action into an unfortunate realm.

6) From the example of seed one may misinterpret that a single consciousness could give rise to numerous consciousnesses. To prevent such an interpretation, the instance of embossing stamp has been put forth. This is because irrespective of whatever design a stamp may have, it would impress the same design, not another, on the clay.

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<sup>14</sup> An independent, permanent and monolithic 'Self' as postulated by the adherents of early non-Buddhist philosophical schools.

7) From the example of sour taste, one may misinterpret that even if one had not committed a wholesome action, someone who had experienced existence as a god would always be reborn as a god, and someone who had experienced unfortunate existence would always be born in an unfortunate realm even without having committed an unwholesome action. To prevent such an interpretation, the instance of mirror has been put forth. This is because the mirror exactly reflects the image. Likewise, it is untenable and contradictory for wholesome actions and unwholesome actions to be associated with unrelated resultant states.

8) From the example of echo, where an echo is not heard unless a person has made a noise, one may misinterpret that no beings would be born unless a Creator has wished it. To prevent such an interpretation, the instance of sour taste has been put forth. This is because only someone who has had the experience of having drunk or eaten something sour before would respond by salivating at the mention of something sour. Likewise, only someone who had earlier indulged in afflicted emotions and the actions they induced would be subjected to a conditioned birth, not others.

O Great King! Let it be known that sentient beings take birth, die, migrate to the next life, and undergo change in the above ways.

With this admonishment, the sūtra concludes. This sūtra is said to have been translated during the earlier dissemination of the Doctrine and it was not edited or polished in the process of standardization.

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#### Notes

1. The bibliographic information for the sūtra is: tshe 'pho ba ji ltar 'gyur ba zhus pa'i mdo; □yu 'pattiyathakaraparip, cchasūtra; Tohoku catalogue number 308 (for sDege redaction): MDO, SA 145b4 -155a1; Peking catalogue number 974 (for Peking redaction): MDO SNA TSHOGS, SHU 155b1-164b8. In the Lhasa redaction of the bka'-'gyur (MDO, LA 223b7-237b3) the title is given as: 'chi 'pho ba ji ltar 'gyur ba zhus pa'i mdo.
2. Gautama Buddha's father who was the king of Kapilavastu.
3. they are of two kinds. One refers to the celestial music players belonging to the Desire Realm who have melodious throats and sustain on smell. The other refers to the intermediate beings of the Desire Realm who, too, sustain on smell. Here, the reference is to the latter type.
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