Pv 39 — Revatī Sutta: The Ghost Revati

English translation by Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery (Sutta Friends).

Source: https://suttafriends.org/sutta/pv4-4/

Source revision: 65df35a80b782d2e8ab71620d450cf3461882e4937847da3f28cc476fb24b9bc

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Completeness: UNKNOWN. Complete publisher article including supplied Pali, notes and lists. Unabridged canonical coverage and translation accuracy not independently established.

Text

In praise of the lay follower Nandiya's generosity, the Supreme Buddha uttered the following verse.

Supreme Buddha:

When somebody safely returns home having lived in a faraway country for a long time, his relatives, friends, and associates welcome him with joy. In the same way, when someone who does meritorious acts in this world goes to the next world, his own meritorious deeds will welcome him.

Nandiya asked Revati, his wife, to continue practicing generosity when he went away, but Revati stopped. When it was time for her to die, she was addressed by two messengers from hell.

Hell Wardens:

Evil, greedy Revati! Now you must get up. The doors of hell are opening for you. Evil doers have to suffer terribly in hell. We are here to bring you to that miserable world.

Both hell wardens with big red eyes grabbed Revati's hands. They first took her to the Tavatimsa Heaven, where her husband had been reborn.

Revati:

What a wonderful mansion this is! It is made of golden nets, shining like the rays of the sun and filled with beautiful gods. Whose mansion is this? Goddesses with beautiful bodies adorned with sandalwood cream beautify the whole mansion. Who enjoys this heavenly mansion?

Hell Wardens:

In the human world, in the city of Baranasi there was a lay follower named Nandiya who was generous and helpful to others. He is the owner of this beautiful mansion. Goddesses with beautiful bodies adorned with sandalwood cream beautify the whole mansion. Nandiya enjoys this heavenly mansion.

Revati:

Ah! I was Nandiya's wife. I had authority over the whole family. I want to stay and enjoy my husband's mansion. I don't even want to see hell, let alone live there.

Hell Wardens:

Evil woman, the hell for you is down there. You did not do anything to earn merit in the human world. Those who are greedy, make others angry, and lead evil lives can never live with gods.

Revati:

Oh, what is that terrible smell? What is that rotten excrement, urine, and filth?

Hell Wardens:

Evil Revati, this is Samsavaka hell. It is as deep as the height of more than one hundred humans. You are going to boil here for a thousand years.

Revati:

Why? What bad action did I do by body, speech, and mind to have to boil in this terrible hell?

Hell Wardens:

You deceived monks, beggars, and virtuous people with lies. Those were your evil deeds. That is why you have to suffer in this deep hell for a thousand years.

In this hell, beings' hands are cut off, legs are cut off, ears are cut off, and noses are cut off. Then a flock of ravens chase the beings and eat their flesh with their sharp beaks.

Revati:

No, no! Please take me back to the human world. Surely I will do more meritorious deeds. I will practice generosity, behave well, keep the precepts, and restrain my senses. I will do many meritorious deeds which lead to happiness and freedom from remorse.

Hell Wardens:

You are too late. You were heedless in the human world. Now weep! You will experience the results of what you did.

Revati:

Now, when I go back to the human world, who will encourage me to collect merit? Who will ask me to offer robes, shelter, food and drink to virtuous people? Who will teach me that greedy, angry, and evil people won't go to heaven?

Surely when I go from this world to the human world I will practice generosity, behave well, keep the precepts, and restrain the senses. I will do many meritorious deeds.

I will enthusiastically make bridges in places where it is hard to cross, plant trees, set out pots of water for drinking, build parks and ponds. Furthermore, I will observe the Eight Precepts four times a month on each of the four moon phases. I will protect the precepts carefully and practice generosity eagerly. I have seen the results of merit with my own eyes.

Shaken with fear, Revati was deluded in thinking that she could return to the human world. The hell wardens grabbed her legs, turned her upside down and threw her into the terrible Samsavaka Hell.

Revati:

Previously I was very greedy and insulted monks and virtuous people. I cheated on my husband and lied to him. Now I am boiling in this frightful hell.