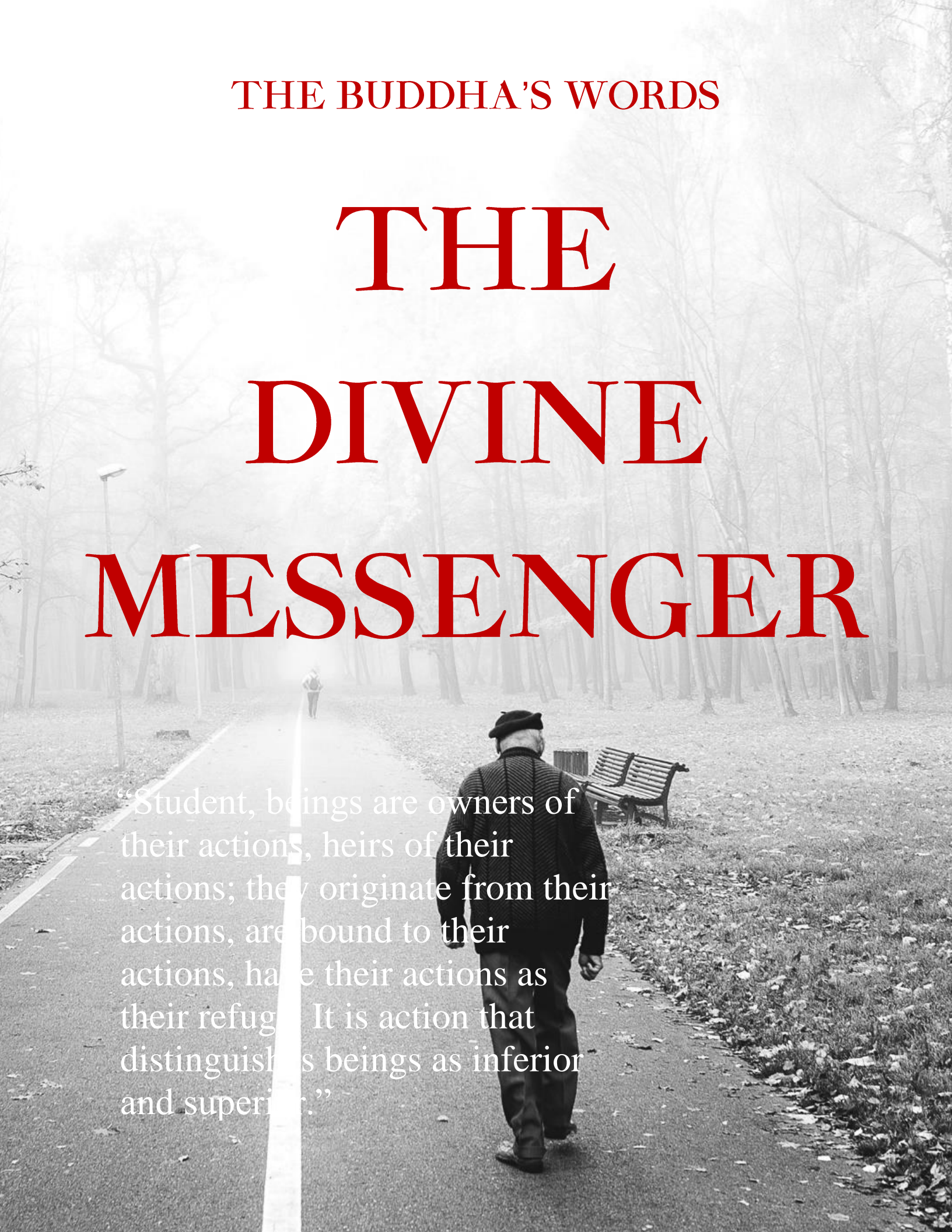


THE BUDDHA'S WORDS

# THE DIVINE MESSENGER



“Student, beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior.”

# Three Divine Messengers

“Bhikkhus, there are these three divine messengers. What three?”

“Here, bhikkhus, someone engages in misconduct by body, speech, and mind. In consequence, with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the

plane of misery, in a bad destination, in the lower world, in hell. There the wardens of hell grab him by both arms and show him to King Yama, saying: ‘This person, your majesty, did not behave properly toward his mother and father; he did not behave properly toward ascetics and brahmins; and he did not honor the elders of the family. May your majesty inflict due punishment on him!’

“Then King Yama questions, interrogates, and cross-examines him about the first divine messenger: ‘Good man, didn’t you see the first divine messenger that appeared among human beings?’ And he replies: ‘No, lord, I didn’t see him.’

“Then King Yama says to him: ‘But, good man, didn’t you ever see among human beings a man or a woman, eighty, ninety or a hundred years of age, frail, bent like a roof bracket, crooked, wobbling as they go along leaning on a stick, ailing, youth gone, with broken teeth, with grey and scanty hair or bald, with wrinkled skin and blotched limbs?’ And the man replies: ‘Yes, lord, I have seen this.’

“Then King Yama says to him: ‘Good man, didn’t it occur to you, an intelligent and mature person: “I too am subject to old age, I am not exempt from old age. Let me now do good by body, speech, and mind”?’ — ‘No, lord, I could not. I was heedless.’

“Then King Yama says: ‘Through heedlessness, good man, you failed to do good by body, speech, or mind. Surely, they will treat you in a way that fits your heedlessness. That bad kamma of yours was not done by your mother or father, nor by your brother or sister, nor by your friends and companions, nor by your relatives and family members, nor by the deities, nor by ascetics and brahmins. Rather, you were the one who did that bad kamma, and you yourself will have to experience its result.’

“When King Yama has questioned, interrogated, and cross-examined him about the first divine messenger, he again questions, interrogates, and cross-examines him about the second divine

messenger: ‘Good man, didn’t you see the second divine messenger that appeared among human beings?’ And he replies: ‘No, lord, I didn’t see him.’

“Then King Yama says to him: ‘But, good man, didn’t you ever see among human beings a man or a woman, sick, afflicted, gravely ill, lying in his own urine and excrement, having to be lifted up by some and put down by others?’ And he replies: ‘Yes, lord, I have seen this.’

“Then King Yama says to him: ‘Good man, didn’t it occur to you, an intelligent and mature person: “I too am subject to illness, I am not exempt from illness. Let me now do good by body, speech, and

mind”?”—‘No, lord, I could not. I was heedless.’

“Then King Yama says: ‘Through heedlessness, good man, you failed to do good by body, speech, or mind. Surely, they will treat you in a way that fits your heedlessness. That bad kamma of yours was not done by your mother or father, nor by your brother or sister, nor by your friends and companions, nor by your relatives and family members, nor by the deities, nor by ascetics and brahmins. Rather, you were the one who did that bad kamma, and you yourself will have to experience its result.’

“When King Yama has questioned, interrogated, and cross-examined him

about the second divine messenger, he again questions, interrogates, and cross-examines him about the third divine messenger: ‘Good man, didn’t you see the third divine messenger that appeared among human beings?’ And he replies: ‘No, lord, I didn’t see him.’

“Then King Yama says to him: ‘But, good man, didn’t you ever see among human beings a man or a woman, one, two, or three days dead, the corpse bloated, livid, and festering?’ And he replies: ‘Yes, lord, I have seen this.’

“Then King Yama says to him: ‘Good man, didn’t it occur to you, an intelligent and mature person: “I too am subject to death, I am not exempt from death. Let



me now do good by body, speech, and mind”?”—‘No, lord, I could not. I was heedless.’

“Then King Yama says: ‘Through heedlessness, good man, you failed to do good by body, speech, or mind. Surely, they will treat you in a way that fits your heedlessness. That bad kamma of yours was not done by your mother or father, nor by your brother or sister, nor by your friends and companions, nor by your relatives and family members, nor by the deities, nor by ascetics and brahmins. Rather, you were the one who did that bad kamma, and you yourself will have to experience its result.’

“When, bhikkhus, King Yama has questioned, interrogated, and cross-examined him about the third divine messenger, he falls silent. Then the wardens of hell torture him with the fivefold transfixing. They drive a red-hot iron stake through one hand and another red-hot iron stake through the other hand; they drive a red-hot iron stake through one foot and another red-hot iron stake through the other foot; they drive a red-hot iron stake through the middle of his chest. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings, yet he does not die so long as that bad kamma is not exhausted.

“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 bad kamma is not exhausted. Next the wardens of hell turn him upside down and pare him with adzes.... Next the wardens of hell harness him to a chariot and drive him back and forth across ground that is burning, blazing, and glowing.... Next the wardens of hell make him climb up and down a great mound of coals that are burning, blazing, and glowing.... Next the wardens of hell turn him upside down and plunge him into a red-hot copper cauldron that is burning, blazing, and glowing. He is cooked there in a swirl of foam. And as he is being cooked there in a swirl of foam, 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 bad kamma is not exhausted.

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

“It has four corners and four doors and is divided into separate compartments; it is surrounded by iron ramparts 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 *yojanas* which it ever covers pervasively.

**“Once, bhikkhus, in the past King Yama thought: ‘Those in the world who do evil deeds are punished with such diverse tortures. Oh, that I might attain the human state! That a Tathāgata, Arahant, Perfectly Enlightened One might arise in the world! That I might attend upon that Blessed One! That the Blessed One might teach me the Dhamma, and that I might come to understand his Dhamma!’**

**“Bhikkhus, I am not repeating something that I heard from another ascetic or brahmin, but rather I am speaking about a matter that I have actually known, seen, and understood myself.”**

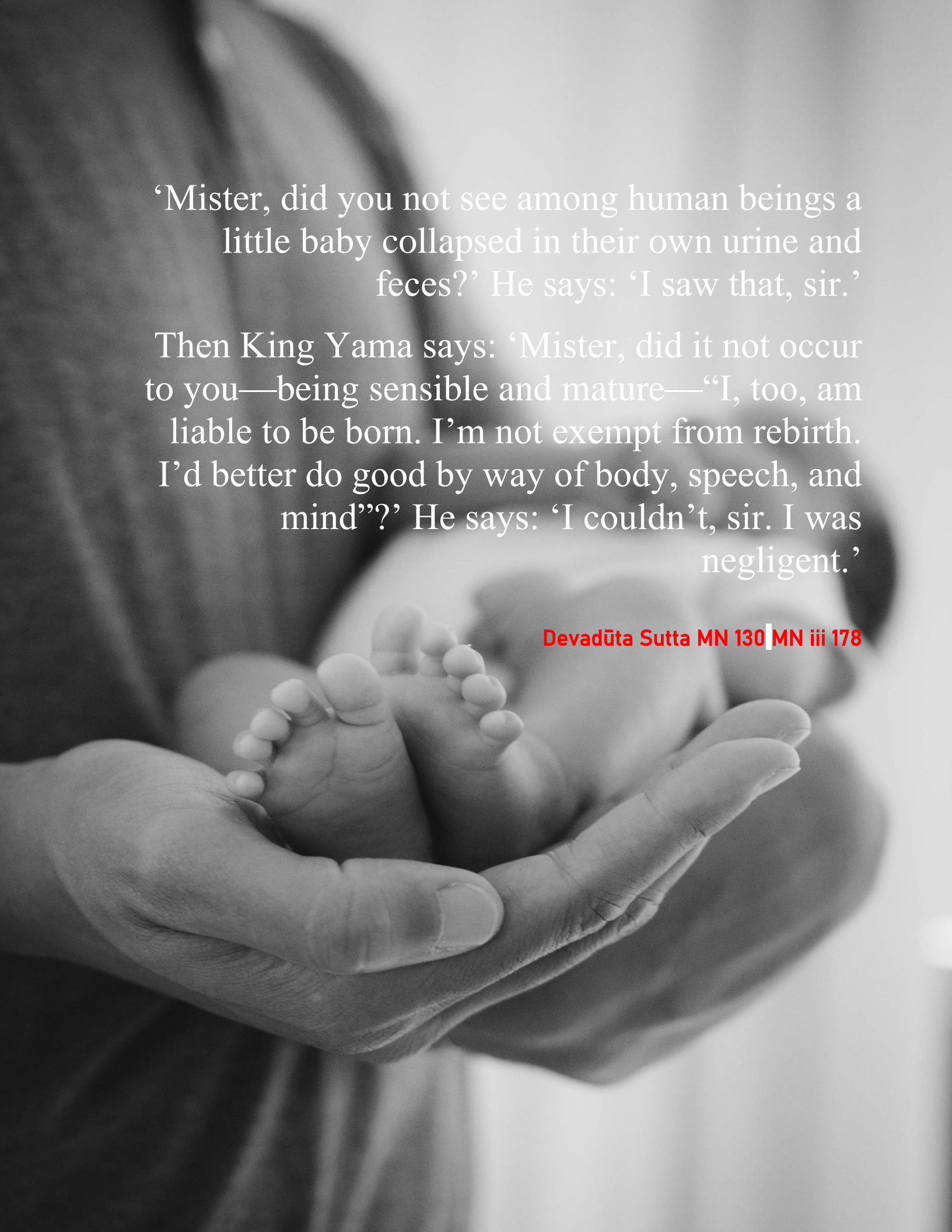
Though warned by the divine  
messengers,  
those people who remain heedless  
sorrow for a long time,  
having fared on to a lower realm.

But those good people here who,  
when warned by the divine messengers,  
never become heedless  
in regard to the noble Dhamma;  
who, having seen the peril in clinging  
as the origin of birth and death,  
are liberated by non-clinging  
in the extinction of birth and death:  
those happy ones have attained security;  
they have reached nibbāna in this very  
life.

Having overcome all enmity and peril,  
they have transcended all suffering.

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Devadūta Sutta AN 3.36 AN i 138  
Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi  
<https://suttacentral.net/an3.36>



‘Mister, did you not see among human beings a little baby collapsed in their own urine and feces?’ He says: ‘I saw that, sir.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did it not occur to you—being sensible and mature—“I, too, am liable to be born. I’m not exempt from rebirth. I’d better do good by way of body, speech, and mind”?’ He says: ‘I couldn’t, sir. I was negligent.’

**Devadūta Sutta MN 130 | MN iii 178**



# Messengers

*(Second Notation)*

SO I HAVE HEARD. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvattthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. There the Buddha addressed the mendicants:  
“Mendicants!”

“Venerable sir,” they replied. The Buddha said this:

“Mendicants, suppose there were two houses with doors. A person with good eyesight standing in between them would see people entering and leaving a house and wandering to and fro. In the same way, with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, I see sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. I understand how sentient beings are reborn according to their deeds. ‘These dear beings did good things by way of body, speech, and mind. They never spoke ill of the noble

ones; they had right view; and they chose to act out of that right view. When their body breaks up, after death, they're reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm, or among humans. These dear beings did bad things by way of body, speech, and mind. They spoke ill of the noble ones; they had wrong view; and they chose to act out of that wrong view. When their body breaks up, after death, they're reborn in the ghost realm, the animal realm, or in a lower realm, a bad destination, a world of misery, hell.'

Then the wardens of hell take them by the arms and present them to King Yama, saying: 'Your Majesty, this person did

not pay due respect to their mother and father, ascetics and brahmins, or honor the elders in the family. May Your Majesty punish them!’ Then King Yama pursues, presses, and grills them about the first messenger of the gods. ‘Mister, did you not see the first messenger of the gods that appeared among human beings?’ He says: ‘I saw nothing, sir.’ Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did you not see among human beings a little baby collapsed in their own urine and feces?’ He says: ‘I saw that, sir.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did it not occur to you—being sensible and mature—“I, too, am liable to be born.

I'm not exempt from rebirth. I'd better do good by way of body, speech, and mind"?)' He says: 'I couldn't, sir. I was negligent.'

Then King Yama says: 'Mister, because you were negligent, you didn't do good by way of body, speech, and mind. Well, they'll definitely punish you to fit your negligence. That bad deed wasn't done by your mother, father, brother, or sister. It wasn't done by friends and colleagues, by relatives and kin, by ascetics and brahmins, or by the deities. That bad deed was done by you alone, and you alone will experience the result.'

Then King Yama grills them about the second messenger of the gods. ‘Mister, did you not see the second messenger of the gods that appeared among human beings?’ He says: ‘I saw nothing, sir.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did you not see among human beings an elderly woman or a man—eighty, ninety, or a hundred years old—bent double, crooked, leaning on a staff, trembling as they walk, ailing, past their prime, with teeth broken, hair grey and scanty or bald, skin wrinkled, and limbs blotchy?’ He says: ‘I saw that, sir.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did it not occur to you—being sensible and mature—“I, too, am liable to grow old. I’m not exempt from old age. I’d better do good by way of body, speech, and mind”?’ He says: ‘I couldn’t, sir. I was negligent.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, because you were negligent, you didn’t do good by way of body, speech, and mind. Well, they’ll definitely punish you to fit your negligence. That bad deed wasn’t done by your mother, father, brother, or sister. It wasn’t done by friends and colleagues, by relatives and kin, by ascetics and brahmins, or by the deities. That bad

deed was done by you alone, and you alone will experience the result.’

Then King Yama grills them about the third messenger of the gods. ‘Mister, did you not see the third messenger of the gods that appeared among human beings?’ He says: ‘I saw nothing, sir.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did you not see among human beings a woman or a man, sick, suffering, gravely ill, collapsed in their own urine and feces, being picked up by some and put down by others?’ He says: ‘I saw that, sir.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did it not occur to you—being sensible and mature—“I, too, am liable to become



sick. I'm not exempt from sickness. I'd better do good by way of body, speech, and mind"?)' He says: 'I couldn't, sir. I was negligent.'

Then King Yama says: 'Mister, because you were negligent, you didn't do good by way of body, speech, and mind. Well, they'll definitely punish you to fit your negligence. That bad deed wasn't done by your mother, father, brother, or sister. It wasn't done by friends and colleagues, by relatives and kin, by ascetics and brahmins, or by the deities. That bad deed was done by you alone, and you alone will experience the result.'

Then King Yama grills them about the fourth messenger of the gods. ‘Mister, did you not see the fourth messenger of the gods that appeared among human beings?’ He says: ‘I saw nothing, sir.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did you not see among human beings when the rulers arrested a bandit, a criminal, and subjected them to various punishments—whipping, caning, and clubbing; cutting off hands or feet, or both; cutting off ears or nose, or both; the ‘porridge pot’, the ‘shell-shave’, the ‘demon’s mouth’, the ‘garland of fire’, the ‘burning hand’, the ‘grass blades’, the ‘bark dress’, the ‘antelope’, the ‘meat hook’, the ‘coins’,

the ‘acid pickle’, the ‘twisting bar’, the ‘straw mat’; being splashed with hot oil, being fed to the dogs, being impaled alive, and being beheaded?’ He says: ‘I saw that, sir.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did it not occur to you—being sensible and mature—that if someone who does bad deeds receives such punishment in the present life, what must happen to them in the next; I’d better do good by way of body, speech, and mind”?’ He says: ‘I couldn’t, sir. I was negligent.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, because you were negligent, you didn’t do good

by way of body, speech, and mind. Well, they'll definitely punish you to fit your negligence. That bad deed wasn't done by your mother, father, brother, or sister. It wasn't done by friends and colleagues, by relatives and kin, by ascetics and brahmins, or by the deities. That bad deed was done by you alone, and you alone will experience the result.'

Then King Yama grills them about the fifth messenger of the gods. 'Mister, did you not see the fifth messenger of the gods that appeared among human beings?' He says: 'I saw nothing, sir.'

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did you not see among human beings a woman or a man, dead for one, two, or three days, bloated, livid, and festering?’ He says: ‘I saw that, sir.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, did it not occur to you—being sensible and mature—“I, too, am liable to die. I’m not exempt from death. I’d better do good by way of body, speech, and mind”?’ He says: ‘I couldn’t, sir. I was negligent.’

Then King Yama says: ‘Mister, because you were negligent, you didn’t do good by way of body, speech, and mind. Well, they’ll definitely punish you to fit your

negligence. That bad deed wasn't done by your mother, father, brother, or sister. It wasn't done by friends and colleagues, by relatives and kin, by ascetics and brahmins, or by the deities. That bad deed was done by you alone, and you alone will experience the result.'

Then, after grilling them about the fifth messenger of the gods, King Yama falls silent. Then the wardens of hell punish them with the five-fold crucifixion. They drive red-hot stakes through the hands and feet, and another in the middle of the chest. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings—but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated. Then

the wardens of hell throw them down and hack them with axes. ... They hang them upside-down and hack them with hatchets. ... They harness them to a chariot, and drive them back and forth across burning ground, blazing and glowing. ... They make them climb up and down a huge mountain of burning coals, blazing and glowing. ... Then the wardens of hell turn them upside down and throw them in a red-hot copper pot, burning, blazing, and glowing. There they're seared in boiling scum, and they're swept up and down and round and round. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings—but they don't die until that bad deed is

eliminated. Then the wardens of hell toss them into the Great Hell. Now, about that Great Hell:

‘Four are its corners, four its doors,  
divided into measured parts.  
Surrounded by an iron wall,  
of iron is its roof.

The ground is even made of iron,  
it burns with fierce fire.  
The heat forever radiates  
a hundred leagues around.’

Now in the Great Hell, flames surge out of the walls and crash into the opposite wall: from east to west, from west to



east, from north to south, from south to north, from bottom to top, from top to bottom. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings—but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated.

There comes a time when, after a very long period has passed, the eastern gate of the Great Hell is opened. So they run there as fast as they can. And as they run, their outer skin, inner skin, flesh, and sinews burn and even their bones smoke. Such is their escape; but when they've managed to make it most of the way, the gate is slammed shut. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings—

but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated.

There comes a time when, after a very long period has passed, the western gate ... northern gate ... southern gate of the Great hell is opened. So they run there as fast as they can. And as they run, their outer skin, inner skin, flesh, and sinews burn and even their bones smoke. Such is their escape; but when they've managed to make it most of the way, the gate is slammed shut. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings—but but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated.

There comes a time when, after a very long period has passed, the eastern gate of the Great Hell is opened. So they run there as fast as they can. And as they run, their outer skin, inner skin, flesh, and sinews burn and even their bones smoke. Such is their escape; and they make it out that door.

Immediately adjacent to the Great Hell is the vast Dung Hell. And that's where they fall. In that Dung Hell there are needle-mouthed creatures that bore through the outer skin, the inner skin, the flesh, sinews, and bones, until they reach the marrow and devour it. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute

feelings—but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated.

Immediately adjacent to the Dung Hell is the vast Hell of Hot Coals. And that's where they fall. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings—but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated.

Immediately adjacent to the Hell of Hot Coals is the vast Hell of the Red Silk-Cotton Wood. It's a league high, full of sixteen-inch thorns, burning, blazing, and glowing. And there they make them climb up and down. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings—

but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated.

Immediately adjacent to the Hell of the Red Silk-Cotton Wood is the vast Hell of the Sword-Leaf Trees. They enter that. There the fallen leaves blown by the wind cut their hands, feet, both hands and feet; they cut their ears, nose, both ears and nose. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings—but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated.

Immediately adjacent to the Hell of the Sword-Leaf Trees is the vast Acid Hell. And that's where they fall. There they

are swept upstream, swept downstream, and swept both up and down stream. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings—but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated.

Then the wardens of hell pull them out and place them on dry land, and say: 'Mister, what do you want?' They say: 'I'm hungry, sir.' The wardens of hell force open their mouth with a hot iron spike—burning, blazing, glowing—and shove in a red-hot copper ball, burning, blazing, and glowing. It burns their lips, mouth, tongue, throat, and stomach before coming out below dragging their entrails. And there they feel painful,

sharp, severe, acute feelings—but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated.

Then the wardens of hell say: 'Mister, what do you want?' They say: 'I'm thirsty, sir.' The wardens of hell force open their mouth with a hot iron spike—burning, blazing, glowing—and pour in molten copper, burning, blazing, and glowing. It burns their lips, mouth, tongue, throat, and stomach before coming out below dragging their entrails. And there they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings—but they don't die until that bad deed is eliminated. Then

the wardens of hell toss them back in the Great Hell.

Once upon a time, King Yama thought:

**‘Those who do such bad deeds in the world receive these many different punishments. Oh, I hope I may be reborn as a human being! And that a Realized One—a perfected one, a fully awakened Buddha—arises in the world! And that I may pay homage to the Buddha! Then the Buddha can teach me Dhamma, so that I may understand his teaching.’**



Now, I don't say this because I've heard it from some other ascetic or brahmin. I only say it because I've known, seen, and realized it for myself.”

That is what the Buddha said. Then the Holy One, the Teacher, went on to say:

“Those people who are negligent,  
when warned by the gods' messengers:  
a long time they sorrow,  
when they go to that wretched place.  
But those good and peaceful people,  
when warned by the gods' messengers,  
never neglect  
the teaching of the noble ones.

Seeing the danger in grasping,  
the origin of birth and death,  
they're freed by not grasping,  
with the ending of birth and death.  
Happy, they've come to a safe place,  
extinguished in this very life.  
They've gone beyond all threats and  
perils,  
and risen above all suffering.”

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The Buddha's words  
Devadūta Sutta MN 130 MN iii 178  
Translated for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato  
<https://suttacentral.net/mn130>

A sunset over a mountain range with a wooden fence in the foreground. The sky is a gradient of orange and red, and the mountains are silhouetted against the bright light of the setting sun. A thin, light-colored line is visible in the sky, possibly a power line or a branch.

# "The Divine Messenger"

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Compiled by  
Bhikkhu Bounnao

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distribution only.

A photograph of a concrete surface with several dark, elongated shadows cast across it, suggesting the presence of hands or fingers. The shadows are cast from the top left towards the bottom right, creating a sense of depth and movement. The concrete has a slightly textured appearance with some small specks and imperfections.

**“Having performed misconduct  
By body, misconduct by speech,  
Misconduct by mind, and whatever else  
Is reckoned a fault—**

**Not having done a good deed  
And done much that is bad—  
When his body perishes  
That foolish one is reborn in hell.”**

Duccaritasutta Iti 64 <https://suttacentral.net/iti64>  
Translated by John D. Ireland