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Kim,dada Sutta

The Discourse on “Giving What?” | S 1.42/1:32

Chinese Āgama SĀ 998 = T 2.261b17-261c4; SĀ 2 135 = T 2.426b27-426c13

Theme: On the best gifts

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003; rev 2010

[Devatā:]

141 *Kim,dado bala,do hoti
kim,dado hoti vaṇṇa,do
kim,dado sukha,do hoti
kim,dado hoti cakkhu,do
ko ca sabba,do hoti
taṃ me akkhahi pucchito*

[A deity:]

Giving what, does one give strength?
Giving what, does one give beauty?
Giving what, does one give comfort?¹
Giving what, does one give sight?
But who is the giver of everything?
Please answer what has been asked by me.

[Bhagavā:]

142 *Anna,do bala,do hoti
vattha,do hoti vaṇṇa,do
yāna,do sukha,do hoti
dīpa,do hoti cakkhu,do*

[The Blessed One:]

Giving food, one gives strength;
Giving clothes, one gives beauty;
Giving transport,² one gives comfort;
Giving lights, one gives sight;

143 *so ca sabba,dado hoti
yo dadāti upassayam
amataṃ dado ca so hoti
yo dhammam anusāsati ti*

and the giver of everything
is he who gives shelter;
but the giver of the death-free³
is he who teaches the Dharma.

— evaṃ —

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¹ “Comfort,” *sukha*, also “happiness”.

² “Transport,” *yāna*, lit “vehicle” but here taken in the physical sense of “vehicle” as well as *the act* of providing transport to someone to get to their destination.

³ “Death-free,” *amata*, often rendered as “deathless,” or worse “undying, immortal,” all of which suggest an abiding state (as if we live forever there). The point is that nirvana is neither impermanent nor permanent, with neither birth nor death, and beyond positive predication. No one is born in nirvana, and no one dies there. One way of talking about it is through negative language, such as “death-free.” See K R Norman, 1991c:3-9, 1997:13. The final choice of translation is your karmic choice, whatever it might be, as long as you define your terms, and that it should be as easy to understand as possible.