

## THE IMITATION OF ANIMALS

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On one occasion when the Buddha was saying in the market-town called Haliddavasana in the Koliya country, Punna, a son of a Koliya who was practising the ways of a bull (Govatika) and Seniya, a naked ascetic, who was imitating the life of a dog in all its aspects (Kukkuravatika) visited the Buddha and sat by him, once in the manner a bull would lie down and the other like a dog. Then Seniya, the naked ascetic, told the Buddha that his friend, Punna, had been observing the “practices” of a bull for a quite a long time and wanted to know where he would be reborn after his death. Punna, too, told the Buddha that his friend, Seniya, had lived in conformity to the “ethics” of a dog for a long period and enquired about his next birth. The Buddha told them as their lives were shaped and lived based on *miccha-ditthi* (wrong views), their next birth would be in a state of suffering (*Apaya*) or failing that, certainly, in *Tiracchana loka* (animal world).

They cried and shed tears at the word of the Buddha and requested him to instruct them. Buddha, explaining to them the different and varied aspects of Kamma (action), pointed out that one’s Kamma (physical, verbal and mental) determines one’s future here and hereafter. Punna gave up his animal practices and became an upasaka (lay-devotee) for life while Seniya, the naked ascetic, understanding the Dhamma in its fullest aspect, attained Arahathood. He became a full-fledged saint and comprehended, “destroyed is birth, brought to a close is the Brahma-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such and such”.

It may be emphasized here that if one imitates the ways of an animal, it is clearly logical and likely that he would take such a shape in accordance with the law of affinity in the next birth; but if one lives like a god and cultivates those states of mind and attributes of a god, it accords with reason that he would find the association of gods in the Deva-loka (Heavenly worlds) in the birth more befitting his nature and nurture. This consideration is maintained in the Tevijja Sutta in the Digha Nikaya (Long Discourses of the Buddha). Thus, after describing the four Sublime States, *Metta* (Loving-Kindness), *Karuna* (Compassion), *Mudita* (Sympathetic Joy) and *Upekkha* (Equanimity), the conversation between the Buddha and Vasettha continues:

“Now what think you Vasettha, will the bhikkhu who thus lives be in possession of women and wealth, or will he not?”

“He will not, Gotama.”

“Will he be full of anger or free from anger?”

“He will be free from anger.”

“Will his mind be full of malice or free from malice?”

“Free from malice.”

“Will his mind be tarnished or pure?”

“It will be pure.”

“Will he have self-mastery or will he not?”

“Certainly, he will, Gotama”

“Then you say, Vasettha that the bhikkhu is free from household and worldly cares, and that Brahma is free from household and worldly cares. Is there then agreement and likeness between the bhikkhu and the Brahma?”

“There is, Gotama.”

“Very good, Vasettha. Then in sooth Vasettha, that the bhikkhu who is free from household cares should after death, when the body is dissolved, become united with Brahma, who is the same – such a condition of things is every way possible.”

Even in modern times there are people, not only in India but all over the world, who live cultivating all the attributes of a god while, on the other hand, there are some who find great delight in the association of animals and behave as they do. During the time of Hitler in Germany, it is now recorded in books that there was a very rich Count who enjoyed the company of dogs and behaved as they did. As a matter of recorded fact, he had got “married” (Great Danes in particular) to keep him company. In the seclusion of his

large Estate, he indulged in all the ways peculiar to dogs; he chased rabbits with them, he barked at the moon and did many such “eccentricities”. On one occasion, however, to his great dismay and pain, his “lover” was seen “misbehaving” with another Great Dane; he could not bear it; he had all the dogs killed but kept his lover – the Great Dane bitch – though she had openly proved unfaithful to him. In the course of time, through his servants, the news of his strange behavior leaked out of the Estate. Eventually, it is said, it reached the ears of Hitler and he was very amused over it.

