

WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS PREVAILING IN THE HIGHER PLANES OF MATERIAL EXISTENCE TAUGHT IN BUDDHISM?

By C. P. Ranasinghe

There are altogether 31 planes of material existence taught in Buddhism: 4 worlds of Arupa Jhana, 16 worlds of Rupa Jhana, 6 worlds of Devas, 1 of Manussa or human, and 4 worlds of Apaya or lower existence. The beings living in the 4 worlds of Arupa Jhana and the 16 worlds of Rupa Jhana, live in a state of bliss of mind. They live for very long periods of time and do not have any desire for sensual pleasures. The defect with this life is that they consume the accumulated charge of merit and, when their charge of merit is over, they fall back to lower life. This condition of life is reached only by those who have purified their minds by acts of deep thought, concentration, and meditation.

The six worlds of Devas are the planes of life, where there exists much in common with the conditions prevailing in the human world. Many Buddhists desire to be born in one of these worlds as a preliminary step towards the state of Nibbana. Compared with the conditions prevailing in human life, there are many advantages in being born in these worlds of Devas; there is also a number of disadvantages.

Smallest amongst the six worlds and with beings who are shortest lived, is the "*Catummaharajika*". The average life about 9 million years, measured in terms of this Earth's lunar calendar. This world is often referred to as the "Visible Star". It would be interesting to investigate how this world came to be named as the "Visible Star."

The world known as the "*Paranimmita Vasawatti*" is the largest and living in it are longest lived beings. The average life expectancy in this world is about 9,216 million years. The age of the beings living in the other 4 worlds vary from 9 million to 9,216 million years. Thus the longer age in these worlds is an advantage over the human beings.

The most important amongst the other advantages is the fact that the beings in these worlds have no need to eat each other for their existence. These beings are born with adequate strength of mind to process and absorb their nutrition direct from nature. They need food as much as we do, but each one can condition all the food required by self-effort, and that too, without inflicting any harm on his fellow beings.

Clothing and shelter too are found by these beings in like manner. They create all the clothing and shelter they need, merely by utilising the strength of their minds to assemble the elements of the atmosphere to produce all their wants. These beings, therefore, have no basic economic problems. All the food, clothing, and shelter are available to them freely and plentifully.

No problems of education exist in these worlds, as these beings are also born with the requisite intelligence to continue in that life. They are clean both of mind and body, and their childhood and old age are very short, being limited to a few days only. They are thus healthy, and, hence health services and sanitation arrangements are unnecessary. In short, in the atmosphere of the life of these beings, everything is found and no one is in need.

As it is with us, the beings in these worlds of Devas are born into the two broad groups of sex: male and female. The normal family life exists; births occur without pain; and not one in each family has any need to work either at home or out of doors. The latter situation has created problems in the worlds of the Devas.

All beings in these worlds spend their time in idle leisure, and, naturally, in order to spend their time, they indulge themselves in sensual pleasure. Music, dancing, and merry-making goes on incessantly, and occasionally disputes also arise, and even warfare is not uncommon. Greed, hatred, and jealousy often overwhelm them. In spite of such occasional spells of trouble, the heavens are good places to live in.