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Pātāla Sutta

The Discourse on the Bottomless Abyss | S 36.4/4:206 f¹

Chinese Āgama SĀ 469 = T2.119

S 4.2.1.4 = Saṃyutta Nikāya 4, Saḷāyatana Vagga Saṃyutta 2, Vedanāsaṃyutta 1, Sagāthāvagga 4

Theme: On the symbolic nature of “hell”

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“The abyss” is only a name

3 [206] Bhikshus, when the uninstructed ordinary person makes the statement:

“In the great ocean there is a **bottomless abyss** (*pātāla*),” he makes such a statement about something that is non-existent and false.

4 This “bottomless abyss,” bhikshus, is rather a designation (*adhivacana*) for painful bodily feelings.

Hell as a mental state

5 When the uninstructed ordinary person is touched by a painful bodily feeling, he sorrows, grieves, laments, beats his breast and falls into confusion.

This is called an uninstructed ordinary person who has not risen up from the bottomless abyss, one who has not gained solid ground.

Rising out of “hell”

6 But, bhikshus, when the instructed noble disciple is touched by a painful bodily feeling, he does not sorrow, nor grieve, nor lament, nor weep, nor beat his breast, nor fall into confusion.

This is called an instructed ordinary person who has risen up from the bottomless abyss, one who has gained solid ground.

One who endures not
bodily feelings that take away life,
who weeps and wails,
he has not risen up from the bottomless abyss,

painful feelings that have arisen,
who trembles at their touch,
who is weak, of little strength—
nor has he even gained solid ground. [207]

But one endures them—
bodily feelings that take away life,
he has risen up from the bottomless abyss,

the painful feelings that have arisen,
who trembles not at their touch,
he has he gained solid ground, too.

— evaṃ —

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¹ S 147d*, 517b*, 759c*. On the hells as allegories, see **Deva,dūta S** (M 130) = SD 2.23 Intro (3).