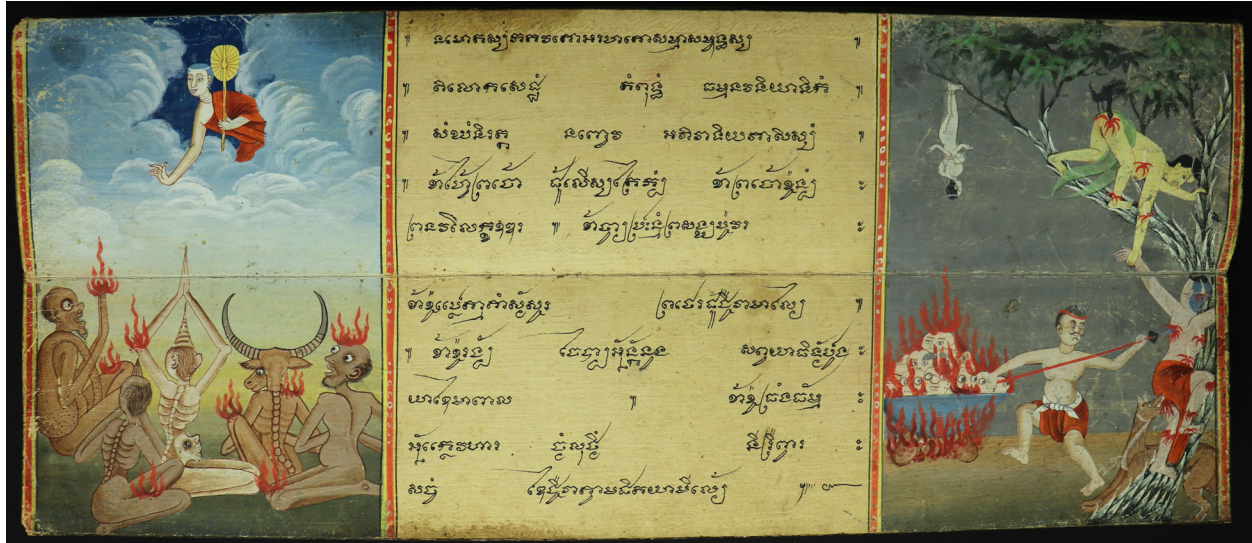


Hungry Ghosts and the Karma of Meanness

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The realm of hungry ghosts is one of the unfortunate realms of rebirth in the Buddhist cycle of existence, and those reborn there are said to have led lives consumed by greed and spite. But hungry ghosts know the error of their ways, and they sometimes appear among humans, like the ghosts that haunt Ebenezer Scrooge, as augurs of what may await. Hungry ghosts are like modern felons who participate in “scared straight” programs. In the past they broke the law (*dharmā*), and now they suffer the terrible consequences because of justice (*karmā*). And since they don’t want others to make the same mistakes, they speak passionately and honestly, hoping to scare humanity straight. The cause of all this misery, according to some of our earliest sources, is the cultivation of meanness (*mātsarya*), which makes people miserly, spiteful, and cruel, immoral, and oblivious to their own self-righteousness. How do we avoid such a fate?

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