

Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta

The Discourse at Kaṇṇaka-t,thala

[Omniscience; the 4 classes; do the gods return to earth?]

(Majjhima Nikāya 90/2:125-133; Mā 212 = T 1.797)

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1 Introduction

In the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta, Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, asks the Buddha a series of questions, first about omniscience [5-8], and then about the four castes [9-12]. The Buddha answers his questions, and Pasenadi then asks, “Now, venerable sir, are there gods [do gods exist]?” and the Buddha answers him [13]. Then Pasenadi’s son, general Viḍūḍabha asks a similar question, and Ānanda answers [14].

In 1981, KR Norman published an interesting study on the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta entitled “Devas and adhidevas in Buddhism” (1981b).¹ Norman’s views have been summarized here. Earlier on, he has written another insightful paper, “The Buddha’s view of devas” (1977a),² where he discusses **the Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100/2:209-213), with which the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta should be studied.

The key teaching of the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta comprise the five factors of exertion (*padhāni-y-aṅga*), a popular set found in the **Saṅgīti Sutta**³ and **the Padhāniyaṅga Sutta**,⁴ and also in a number of other suttas. In **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 85), the Buddha tells the prince that if anyone had only one of the five factors, he could train under the Buddha.⁵ **The Patthāna Sutta** (A 5.125) says just as a crown prince (with five noble qualities: well-born; handsome; beloved of his parents; beloved by the people; skilled in the way of the warrior) can aspire to kingship, even so a monk with the five factors can aspire to liberation (A 5.135/3:152-154). **The Senāsana Sutta** (A 10.11) says that a monk with the five factors living in a suitable lodging complete in five factors—suitably located away from a village; secluded; free from pests and bad weather; basic necessities available without difficulty; accessible learned elders dwell there—will attain liberation there (A 10.11/5:15).

The Pañca Sekha,balā Sutta (A 3.2)⁶ contains a parallel set of factors called “the learner’s five powers.” Here is a comparative table of the two sets of factors:

<u>The factors of striving</u>		<u>The learner’s powers</u>
1. faith (<i>saddhā</i>)	=	1. faith (<i>saddhā</i>)
2. health (<i>app’ābādho appātāṅko</i>)	?	2. moral shame (<i>hiri</i>)
3. honesty & sincerity (<i>asaṭho</i>)	?	3. moral fear (<i>ottappa</i>)
4. energy (<i>āradḍha,viriyo</i>)	=	4. effort (<i>viriya</i>)
5. wisdom (<i>paññā</i>)	=	5. wisdom (<i>paññā</i>)

For the most part, except for (2-3), the two lists concur. Yet on a deeper level, even these two factors refer to the same things. While in the factors of striving, the second, “health,” has to do with the body (ie physical conduct), and the third, “honesty and sincerity,” has to do with both physical action and speech, the parallel learner’s powers—moral shame and moral fear—have to do with physical and verbal actions, but also with mental deeds (intention and mindfulness). The over all difference is in the level of training, the former of the lay practitioner, the latter of the saints (that entails much more mental training).

¹ *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 9, 1981:145-155. Repr in 1991:162-171.

² *Beiträge zur Indienforschung: Ernst Waldschmidt zum 80. Geburtstag gewidmet*. Berlin, 1977:329-336. Repr in *Collected Papers* vol 2, 1991d:1-8. See **Saṅgārava S** (M 100/2:209-213) = SD 10.9 (2005).

³ D 33.2.1(16)/3:237.

⁴ A 5.53/3:65.

⁵ M 85.58/2:95.

⁶ A 5.2/3:2 = SD 12.10.

2 Omniscience

2.1 STRICT DETERMINISM REJECTED. On the nature of the Buddha's knowledge, **AK Warder** says:

Most schools of Buddhism have held that the Buddha was omniscient, that he literally was aware of everything that had ever taken place, was at present taking happening, or would happen in the future. Since other *śramaṇas* had made this claim, or had it made for them, it was perhaps natural that Buddhists should wish to set their teacher at least as high as anyone had suggested it was possible to get. However, the *Tripitāka* preserves express repudiations of such a claim by the Buddha. (AK Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 1970:135)

In the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta (M 90), the Buddha says that it is possible for one to know all and see all, but not everything simultaneously [§8]. It is in this sense that the Buddha is omniscient.

The Pāsādika Sutta (D 29) further says that some wanderers might challenge the Buddha, charging that “The recluse Gotama has limitless knowledge and vision with regard to the past but not with regard to the future.” The Buddha explains that

with regard to the past, the Tathāgata shows boundless knowledge and vision, but it is not so with the future... He can recall as far back as he wishes. But as for the future, the Tathāgata's knowledge, born of enlightenment, arises in him, thus, “This is the last birth, there is no more rebirth here!”⁷ (D 29.27/3:134)

This is a clear statement that the Buddha is able to recall anything he wants about the past (whatever has happened), but nothing of the future (what has not happened), except for certain spiritual truths, such as the non-arising in the future of those who have liberated themselves spiritually.

The Buddha's declaration about his own “ignorance”⁸ of the future properly fits in with his rejection of strict determinism (*niyati, vāda*). Since if everything about the future can be known, everything is already determined, and there is nothing we can do to change things. This is one of the greatest weaknesses in the notion of an omniscient creator-God (who has created all, knows all, whether all-loving or not). It is sufficient to argue here that if there exists such an all-knowing God who has created everything, then everything (“history”) has been determined (“God willing”). As such, there is really nothing that we can do that is not God's will!⁹

2.2 HOW THE BUDDHA BECAME OMNISCIENT. The Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta has important evidence to show that the Buddha does not always use his omniscience. When Pasenadi asks him about the four classes (*vaṇṇa*; Skt *varṇa*), he offers a wrong answer as it were (or, one could, of course, say that Pasenadi changes his mind midstream about his own question):

9 There are these four castes, venerable sir—the nobles [kshatriyas], the brahmins, the merchants [vaishyas], and the workers [shudras]. Is there any distinction or difference amongst them?”

“There are these four castes, maharajah—the nobles, the brahmins, the merchants, and the workers. Two of them, that is, the kshatriyas and the brahmins, are held to be superior since men pay homage to them, rise up for them, and show them reverence, salutation and proper conduct.”

⁷ *Aṭṭham kho addhānaṃ ārabha samaṇo Gotamo atīrakam nāṇa, dassanaṃ paññāpeti, no ca kho anāgatam... So yāvatakaṃ ākaṅkhati tāvatakaṃ anussarati. Anāgatañ ca kho addhānaṃ ārabha Tathāgatassa bodhiṃ nāṇaṃ uppajati: ayam antimā jāti, n'atthi dāni punabbhavo ti.*

⁸ “The Buddha's ‘ignorance’” here is not a defilement but refers to a non-state whereby there is nothing to know, since the future has not occurred.

⁹ Following this argument, as a young monk, I once answered an over-enthusiastic evangelist that if God wills everything, then I am a Buddhist, God willing, in which case no one should not go against his will! This argument is one of the best answers to Pascal's wager, too. For a more detailed discussion on determinism and karma, see **Tith'āyatana S** (A 3.61/1:173-177) = SD 6.8 (2004). See also Jayatilleke 1963:445 f, 469.

10 “Venerable sir, I am not asking about this present life. I am asking about the life to come. There are these four castes, venerable sir—the nobles, the brahmins, the merchants, and the workers. Is there any distinction or difference amongst them?” (M 90.9-10/2:128)

Pasenadi is here not asking about their social status, but about their future spiritual progress and attainment.

In the **Brahma,carīya Sutta** (A 4.24), the Buddha claims to know all that can be seen, heard, sensed and cognized (A 4.24/2:24), which the commentaries understand to be omniscience in a qualified sense.¹⁰ However the Buddha came to be regarded as omniscient in the unqualified sense in the Theravāda “some-time before the Pāli Canon was finally completed for we find such a claim made in the Paṭisambhidā-magga and the Kathāvatthu” (Jayatilleke 1963:380). **The Paṭisambhidā,magga** has a section called “the discourse on knowledge” (*ñāṇa,kathā*) that discusses “what is meant by the omniscience of the Tathāgata.”¹¹ It begins by saying that the Buddha’s omniscience consists in “knowing everything conditioned and unconditioned without remainder”¹² and in “knowing everything in the past, present and future.”¹³ Similarly, **the Kathā,vatthu** argues that the Buddha was omniscient (*sabbaññū*) and all-seeing (*sabba,-dassavī*), besides his other attributes (Kvu 228). In the early text, however, the Buddha made no such claim to omniscience, nor of the possibility of “knowing all, seeing all, at the same time.”

Further dramatic notions developed in the Mahāyāna tradition. For both Śāntarakṣita¹⁴ and Dharmakīrti,¹⁵ for example, believe that as the natural luminosity of consciousness is revealed, it increases the potential to realize literal omniscience, that is, knowing everything all the time.¹⁶

In asserting that a “single clear appearance of all things in a single cognition is quite possible,” Śāntarakṣita blurs one of the major distinctions made by (or for) Śākyamuni in the *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta*. The assertion that a “single cognition comprehends all that is knowable” follows the position of the *Mahāsaṃghikas*. In fact, Śāntarakṣita wants to have it both ways: “Whatever He wishes to know He comes to know it without fail—such is His power, as He has shaken off all evil. He knows things either simultaneously or in succession, just as He wishes,” thus conflating the two kinds of omniscience which were so carefully distinguished by Śākyamuni for King Pasenadi [in the *Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta*]...

Grandiose as the conception of literal omniscience is, it is not yet the last word in Buddhist philosophy. In later Mahāyāna,¹⁷ ideas of the Buddha become even more fabulous, such that Buddha’s “eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental consciousness are each omniscient. Thus a single moment of any consciousness cognizes all phenomena.”¹⁸ For example, according to this

¹⁰ **Milinda,pañha** (Miln 102-107) discusses “Was the Buddha omniscient?” Nāgasena at first says, “The Blessed One was omniscient, but knowledge-and-vision was not constantly and continuously present to the Blessed One. The Blessed One’s omniscient knowledge was dependent on his adverting, when he did so he knew whatever he wished” (*Bhagavā sabbaññū, na ca bhagavato satataṃ samitaṃ ñāṇa,dassanaṃ paccupaṭṭhitaṃ, āvajjana,paṭibaddhaṃ bhagavato sabbaññūta,ñāṇaṃ, āvajjitvā yad’icchakaṃ jānāti ti*). At the end, Nāgasena says, “Outside of the duration of adverting, even for a moment, the Buddhas, Blessed Ones, are not omniscient” (*āvajjana,vikāla,mattakena na tāvatā buddhā bhagavato asabbaññūno nāma hontī ti*): Horner’s tr errs here: “While Buddhas, Lords, are not, even in the smallest degree, adverting (their minds) they are (still) omniscient” (Miln:H 149).

¹¹ Pm 1.598-612/131-134. See Jayatilleke 1963:380 f for a discussion.

¹² *Sabbaṃ saṅkhataṃ asaṅkhataṃ anavaśesaṃ jānāti ti.*

¹³ *Atītaṃ...anāgataṃ...paccuppannaṃ sabbaṃ jānāti ti.*

¹⁴ Śāntarakṣita (8th cent Indian Buddhist philosopher), Indian author of *Tattva,saṅgraha* (Compendium of Truth).

¹⁵ Dharmakīrti (7th cent Indian Buddhist logician) author of *Pramāṇa,vārttika* (Commentary on Valid Knowledge).

¹⁶ See Alex Naughton 1991:29, 49.

¹⁷ “Shading over into Tantra, although Hopkins typically gives no specific source for the following source.” Naughton 1991:50 n25.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, 1983:120 (2nd ed 1996).

idea, Buddha's knee is able to hear, see, smell, taste, and feel all phenomena in the universe all the time, which takes the concept of omniscience about as far as it can go. By this time the Buddha has become a god, or the god above gods, and his followers, conveniently overlooking his earlier warnings, quite happily describe him in terms that far surpass their own experience...

With the development of the Mahāyāna, the figure of the human Śākyamuni is lost, replaced by a divinized and cosmic Buddha who is vastly superior to all other creatures.

(Alex Naughton, "Buddhist omniscience," 1991:48 f, 50)

2.3 WHAT THE BUDDHA KNOWS. In the **Simsapā Sutta** (S 56.31), the Buddha picks up a handful of simsapā leaves and tells the monks that what he has taught (the four noble truths) is like the handful of leaves, but what he knows is like the leaves in the forest (S 56.31/5:437). "This means that he claimed to know much more than he taught but he did not claim omniscience" (Jayatilleke 1963:469). It is also erroneous to say that an almighty all-knowing **Mahā Brahmā** revealed the truth to the Buddha. For Brahmā himself is not awakened (while the Buddha is), and, as evident from the **Kevalāḍḍha Sutta** (D 11),¹⁹ Brahmā is ignorant of some vital spiritual truths. Jayatilleke has this to say:

If the Buddha himself introduced his statements with the words, *evam me sutam*, we would have reason to believe that he was giving expression to something that he received from a human or divine source. Not only does he not say anything of this sort but claims on the contrary the following: "I do not say this having heard it from another recluse or brahmin, but what I myself have [known,] seen and experienced[—that is what I teach]" (*taṃ kho pana aham...ñāṇassa samanassa va brāhmaṇassa va sutvā vadāmi, api ca yad eva me sāmāṃ ñātāṃ sāmāṃ diṭṭham sāmāṃ viditāṃ—taṃ evāham vadāmi*, It 59, 60, 74; M 3:186). (Jayatilleke 1963:382)

2.4 THE LIMITS OF OMNISCIENCE. The **Tevijja Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 71) records the wanderer Vaccha,gotta as asking the Buddha whether he is unqualifiedly omniscient:

Venerable sir, I heard that the recluse Gotama claims to be omniscient and all-seeing, to have complete knowledge and vision thus: "Whether I am walking or standing or sleeping or awake, knowledge and vision are continuously and uninterruptedly present to me." (M 71.5/1:482)²⁰

The quoted statement is actually the claim of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta as recorded in the **Cūḷa Dukkha-k-khandha Sutta** (M 14.17/1:92 f).²¹ Although part of the statement is true—"that the Buddha is omniscient and all-seeing"—the Buddha rejects the whole statement on account of the invalid portion. The invalid portion is the assertion that knowledge and vision are continuously present in him. The Theravāda commentarial tradition holds that the Buddha is omniscient in the sense that all knowable things are potentially accessible to the Buddha. He cannot, however, know everything simultaneously, but must advert to whatever he wishes to know.

The **Cūḷa Sakul'udāyi Sutta** (M 79) contains a somewhat humorous account of the Nigaṇṭha's claim to omniscience. The wanderer Sakul'udāyi visits the Buddha at the squirrel's feeding ground in the Bamboo Grove and tells him of "one claiming to be all-knowing and all-seeing, to have complete knowledge and vision" but

¹⁹ Brahmā is unable to answer the question "Where do earth, water, fire, air find no footing...name and form totally cease" (D 11/1:211-221). See Jayatilleke 1963:378 f.

²⁰ *Sutam m'etaṃ bhante: samaṇo Gotamo sabbaññū sabba,dassavī aparisesaṃ ñāṇa,dassanaṃ paṭijānāti, carato ca me tiṭṭhato ca suttassa ca jāgarassa ca satatāṃ samitāṃ ñāṇa,dassanaṃ paccupaṭṭhitan ti.*

²¹ Both Nātaputta and Pūraṇa Kassapa make the same claim in **Brāhmaṇa S** (A 9.38/4:428-430). We know that omniscience was "one of the fundamental dogmas of the Jains" (Hermann Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras*, pt 2, Sacred Books of the East 15:xvi). "Absolute omniscience is in their tradition the fundamental criterion for liberation" (PS Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*, Berkeley, 1979:260). See Jayatilleke 1963:203 f.

when he was questioned about the past, prevaricated, avoided the question by asking an irrelevant question, showed anger, hate and bitterness.²² (M 79.6/2:31)

When the Buddha asks him who this person was, he replies that it was Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta.

In **the Sandaka Sutta** (M 76), the Buddha gives a clear rebuttal of the claim to the “simultaneous omniscience” (as claimed by Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta and Pūraṇa Kassapa):²³

He enters an empty house, he gets no almsfood, a dog bites him, he meets with a wild elephant, a wild horse, a wild bull, he asks the name and clan of a woman or a man, he asks the name of a village or a town, and the way to go there. When he is questioned, “How is this?” he replies,

“I had to enter, that is why I entered it.

I had to get no almsfood, that is why I did not get any.

I had to be bitten by a dog, that is why I was bitten.

I had to meet with a wild elephant, that is why I met with a wild elephant.

I had to meet with a wild horse, that is why I met with a wild horse.

I had to meet with a wild bull, that is why I met with a wild bull.

I had to ask the name and clan of a woman or a man, that is why I asked the name and clan of a woman or a man.

I had to ask the name of the village or town, and the way to go there, that is why I asked the name of a village or a town, and the way to go there.”

...[So when the wise man considers thus,] he finds that this holy life is without self-assurance (*anassāsikaṃ*), he turns away from it and leaves it. (M 76.21/1:519)

The most important canonical statement on omniscience—in the sense of the total knowledge of existence—is found in **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23/4:15). In other words, whatever that there is that can be known, or the total extent of human and spiritual knowledge, the Buddha declares, is the range of the six senses.²⁴

Monks, I will teach you the all.²⁵ Listen to it.

And what, monks, is the all?

The eye and forms,

the ear and sounds,

the nose and smells,

the tongue and tastes,

the body and touches,

the mind and mind-objects.²⁶

This, monks, is called the all.

Monks, if anyone were to say thus: ‘Rejecting²⁷ this all, I shall make known another all’—that would be a mere boast on his part.

When questioned he would not be able to reply and, furthermore, he would meet with vexation.

And what is the reason for this?

Because, monks, that would not be within his scope. (S 35.23/4:15)

²² *Yo tāya pubbantam ārabha pañham puṭṭho samāno aññen’aññam paṭicari, bahiddhā katham apanāmesi kopañ ca dosañ ca appaccayañ ca pātvākāsi ti.*

²³ Some early 20th century scholars of Buddhism have argued that early Buddhism was “an authoritarian creed, meaning thereby that the Buddha’s statements were in fact to be taken or intended to be taken on the authority of the omniscient Buddha” (Jayatilleke 1963:376). For a rebuttal, see Jayatilleke 1963:376-384.

²⁴ See **Sabba S** (S 35.23/4:15) = SD 7.1 (2005).

²⁵ On the all (*sabba*), see **Sabba S** (35.23/4:15) = SD 7.1 Introd.

²⁶ “Mind-objects,” *dhammā*, alt tr “mental phenomena.”

²⁷ “Rejecting,” *paccakkhāya*, lit “having reject.”

2.5 NEITHER DETERMINISM NOR INDETERMINISM. In the *Titth'āyatana Sutta* (A 3.61), the Buddha speaks against the doctrines or notions of determinism (everything is due to past action, *pubbe,kata,hetu*), of theism (everything is due to God) (*issara,nimmāṇa,hetu*), and of fatalism (there is neither cause nor condition, *ahetu,qppaccayā*). The first notions criticized by the *Titth'āyatana Sutta*—that everything that happens is “due to our past actions” (*pubbe,kata,hetu*), and that everything is “due to God’s creation” (*issara,nimmāṇa,hetu*)—are those of “strict determinism” (*niyati,vāda*),²⁸ which holds that all events affecting our lives have been predetermined. The real situation is of course more complicated than this, because there are different views of karma and of the God-idea.²⁹ The third notion is the doctrine of fatalism, that is, the notion that everything occurs “without cause or reason” (*ahetu,appaccayā*), that is, by chance (*adhicca,samuppanna*).³⁰

All these three notions fall under the category of “the doctrine of non-action” (*akiriya,vāda*). The Buddha’s basic rebuttal is that if any of these three notions were true, then no one would be morally responsible for their commission and omission of deeds, and would follow the ten unwholesome course of actions (*akusala kamma,patha*),³¹ that is, the breaking of the precepts through the three doors (body, speech and mind).

The Sāmañña,phala Sutta (D 2) mentions strict determinism and fatalism as being held and taught by the Ājīvika, Makkhali Gosāla, who claims that

Pleasure and pain are measured out by the bushel. Samsara (cycle of life and death) is fixed in its limits, with neither shortening nor lengthening, neither excess nor deficit.

Just as a ball of string, when thrown, comes to its end simply by unwinding, in the same way, having transmigrated and wandered on, the wise and the foolish alike will put an end to pain.

(D 2.18/1:54) = SD 8.10

Indeterminism or non-action (*akiriya,vāda*) is the diametrical opposite of determinism. If this were the case, then we would not be able to gain spiritual liberation since nothing is predictable, and karma and moral conduct would be meaningless as one can experience neither cause nor effect of one’s actions. The indeterminists (*adhicca,samuppanikā*) of the Buddha’s time were of two main types:

- (1) those who base their notion on conclusions drawn from their dhyanic meditation, and
- (2) those who base their notion on reasoning (D 1:28 f).

The first type of indeterminist, it is said, learn to recollect their past with their retrocognitive vision “up to the moment of the arising of consciousness but no further” (*saññ'uppādam anussarati, tato param nānussarati*, D 1:28 f). Based on this experience, they argue that “I did not exist before, and not having existed, I have now come into being” (*aham pi pubbe nāhosim, so'mhi etarahi ahutvā sattatāya pariṇato*, D 1:28 f).³²

The reasoners (takki) of indeterminism speculate on the nature of life and the self. Such speculations are mentioned in **the Brahma,jāla Sutta** (D 1)³³ and **the Pañcattaya Sutta** (M 103).³⁴ A reasoner, for example, might speculate that since he is happy in this life, argues that he was in an identical situation in the past (M 102.14/2:233).³⁵ Such ideas are at best speculative and do not reflect reality.

Buddhism avoids the two extremes of strict determinism on the one hand and of indeterminism on the other. Strict determinism means that everything is predetermined; as such there is no point in making any personal effort in moral virtue or working for one’s salvation. In the case of indeterminism, every goes by chance; so it is no point making any personal effort either. The middle way of the Buddha comprises the

²⁸ See Jayatilleke 1963:445-448.

²⁹ See for example John Hospers, *An Introduction of Philosophical Analysis*, 2nd ed 1967:321-348 (ch 17).

³⁰ See Jayatilleke 1963:261 f

³¹ D 3:269, 290; A 5:264.

³² See Jayatilleke 1963:445.

³³ D 1.2.32/1:29.

³⁴ M 103/2:228-238.

³⁵ See Jayatilleke 1963:271 f.

efficacy of personal effort and free will as stated by the Buddha in the short but important **Atta,kārī Sutta**.³⁶

3 Non-return

Pasenadi, the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala, asks the Buddha a series of questions, first about omniscience [5-8], and then about the four castes [9-12]. The Buddha answers his questions, and Pasenadi then asks,

“Now, venerable sir, are there gods [do gods exist]?” (*kim pana bhante atthi devā*).

Instead of replying immediately, the Buddha repeats the question:

“Maharajah, why do you ask, ‘Now, venerable sir, what gods are there?’?”

“Venerable sir, I am asking whether those gods return to this (human) state or whether they do not.”

[13]

Evidently here Pasenadi is asking about the non-returners (*anāgāmī*). The Buddha’s answer forms one of the key passages of the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta:

“Venerable sir, I was asking whether those gods return to this (human) state or whether they do not.”

“Maharajah, those gods who are still malevolent return to this (human) state, those gods who are no longer malevolent do not return to his [human] state.”

Ye te mahārāja devā savyāpajjhā [Be vl *sabyābajjhā*], *te devā āgantāro itthattam*. *Ye te devā abyāpajjhā* [Be vl *abyābajjhā*], *te devā anāgantāro itthattan ti*. (M 90.13/2:130)

The Commentary’s explanation of this reply (MA 3:359 f) suggests that the former class of gods are non-returners (*anāgāmī*), while the latter class are gods who have not attained the status of non-returners. The same applies to the question on the Brahmas [15]. Bhikkhu Bodhi notes:

The two key terms that here distinguish the two types of gods appear in the PTS ed as *savyāpajjhā* and *abyāpajjhā*, which would be rendered as “subject to ill will” and “free from ill will,” respectively. The [Burmese-script Buddhasāsana Samiti ed of M reading] accepted here, *sabyābajjhā* and *abyābajjhā*, has the support of MA, which glosses the former as “who have not abandoned mental suffering by eradicating it,” and the latter as “who have eradicated suffering.” As either reading would be applicable to non-returners, no significant difference is entailed. Note that the word *itthatta*, which in the stock declaration of arahantship signifies any state of manifest existence, is here glossed by MA as *manussa,loka*, the human world.

(M:ÑB 1st ed 1995, 2001:1296 n849)

KR Norman gives his own insights into this interesting passage:

It seems that Pasenadi takes this counter-question as meaning, “Why do you ask? The question is unnecessary,” for he then continues with his questioning. Buddhaghosa, when commenting upon this passage, places interpretation upon the Buddha’s reply and state: *kim, mahārāja, kin tvam “santi devā Cātummahārājikā, santi devā Tāvatiṃsa...pe...santi devā Paranimmittavasavattino, santi devā tatuttarin” [ti] evam devānam atthibhāvam na jānāsi yena eva vadesi* [MA 3:359,22 f]. “Are you unaware of the existence of such devas as the Cātummahārājika devas and the Tāvatiṃsa devas, that you ask this question?”

Pasenadi then continues: *yadi vā te, bhante, devā āgantāro itthattam, yadi vā anāgantāro itthattam*. “Will those devas return to this earthly state, or will they not?” That is to say: “Will those devas come back to existence as men, or are they non-returners?” It seems to me that Pasenadi’s question reveals some knowledge of the Buddha’s teaching, or at least something very similar to it. We find, for example, the Buddha saying: *ime vā pana bhonto sattā kāya-sucaritena samannāgatā vacī-sucaritena samannāgatā mano-sucaritena samannāgatā...te kāyassa bhedā*

³⁶ A 6.38/3:337 f = SD 10.10 Intro (2) (2005).

parammaraṇā sugatiṃ saggam saggam lokam upapannā (It 99-100). “Beings who do well in deed, word and thought are after death reborn in the heavenly world [ie as devas].”

The Buddha also taught that those who entered upon the stream went through the course of being once-returners (*sakad-āgāmino*), non-returners (*anāgāmino*), and arahants. I suggest that Pasenadi’s use of the word *anāgantāro* (an agent noun in *-r* being used as a periphrastic future)³⁷ is a definite reflection of the technical term *anāgāmin*, a non-returner who will be reborn only once more (in the Brahma-loka) before entering nibbāna. Pasenadi is therefore saying, in effect, “Some beings are reborn as devas, because of the good kamma they have performed in a previous existence. Are such devas, who have taken the first step on the way upwards, irreversibly on their way to nibbāna?”

The Buddha’s answer to this question is unambiguous: *ye te, mahārāja, devā savyāpajjhā te devā āgantāro itthattam; ye te devā avyāpajjhā, te devā anāgantāro itthattam*. “Those devas who are malevolent will return to this earthly state; those who are not will not return.” That is to say: “The devas, like the other beings, are subject to the working of kamma. If they do bad deeds in their lives as devas, they will descend to a lower gati [realm] and be reborn as men. If they do not do bad deeds, they will not be reborn as men.”

(KR Norman, “Devas and adhidevas in Buddhism” 1981:145 f; slightly ed)

4 Three types of devas

After the strange exchange between Viḍḍabha and Ānanda [14], Pasenadi then asks the Buddha “Does Brahmā exist?” As before, the Buddha does not reply immediately but repeats the question, and Pasenadi then continues as he has done with his question on the devas [13], and asks: *yadi vā te, bhante, brahmā āgantā itthattam, yadi vā anāgantā itthattam*. “Venerable sir, I was asking whether those Brahmās return to this [human] state or whether they do not.” [15]. Norman notices a change in syntax in the closing sutta’s paragraph, where two terms, *adhideve* and *adhībrahmānam*, are used by Pasenadi. Most translators, following the Critical Pali Dictionary, treat these two terms respectively as *adhi deve* (“regarding devas”) and *adhi brahmānam* (“regarding Brahmās). Norman, however, following the commentarial traditions (such as Culla Niddesa), differs by saying that the terms should be read respectively as “superior devas” and “superior Brahmās.” His insightful analysis should be read in full, but here are the salient excerpts:

Again I would suggest that such a question was based upon some knowledge of the Buddha’s teaching, or something very like it: “Can someone who has reached the last stage before nibbāna by being reborn in the Brahma-loka as Brahmā himself, still be reborn as a man?” The Buddha gives the same answer as before: “If Brahmā is not malevolent (*avyāpajjho*), he will not be reborn as a man.” We may assume that he is probably making a distinction between one who is on his way to arahantship, and one who, although not a follower of the Buddha, is nevertheless reborn in the Brahma-loka because of great merit acquired in previous births.³⁸

The discussion is then interrupted, when a servant enters to say that the king’s carriage is ready for departure. Just as Pasenadi is leaving he thanks the Buddha for having answered his questions. He says: *sabbaññutam mayam, bhante, Bhagavantam apucchimhā; sabbaññutam Bhagavā vyākāsi...cātuvaṇṇim suddhim mayam, bhante, Bhagavantam apucchimhā; cātuvaṇṇam suddhim Bhagavā vyākāsi*. “We asked the Buddha about omniscience, and the Buddha answered about omniscience...we asked about the purity of the four castes, and the Buddha answered about the purity of the four castes.”

The syntax of his speech then seems to change, and he says: *adhideve mayam, bhante, Bhagavantam apucchimhā; adhideve Bhagavā vyākāsi. [A]dhībrahmānam mayam, bhante, Bhaga-*

³⁷ Periphrastic future. A construction in which two verb forms are used as equivalent to a single verb (such as “did go” instead of “went”) is called periphrastic. See AK Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, 2nd ed 1974:233.

³⁸ “An *anāgāmin* is born in the Brahma-loka, but one born in the Brahma-loke is not necessarily an *anāgāmin*. See DPPN 2:336, sv *Brahma-loka*.” (Norman fn)

vantaṃ apucchimhā; adhibrahmānaṃ Bhagavā vyākāsi. “We asked the Buddha in respect of devas, he answered us in respect of devas. We asked the Buddha in respect of Brahmā, and he answered us in respect of Brahmā.” The syntax then reverts to the earlier pattern: *yam yad eva ca pana mayaṃ, bhante, Bhagavantaṃ apucchimhā, taṃ tad eva Bhagavā vyākāsi.* “Whatever we asked the Buddha, that he answered us.”

I say, “the syntax of his speech then seems to change.” This is to adopt the explanation of the words *adhideve* and *adhibrahmānaṃ* given in [the Critical Pali Dictionary].³⁹ Although [the Pali-English Dictionary] lists them (with this reference) *sv adhideva* with the meaning “a superior or supreme god, above the gods,” and *sv adhibrahmā* with the meaning “a superior Brahmā, higher than Brahmā,” CPD explains both *adhideve* and *adhibrahmānaṃ* as indeclinables made up of two elements: the preposition *adhi* followed by an accusative plural or locative singular *deve*, and an accusative singular *brahmānaṃ* (although *sv adhi* CPD states that both are accusative).

One hesitates to differ from Helmer Smith and Dines Andersen, who were probably the finest Pāli scholars that Europe has produced, and yet one would be very surprised to find a construction like *adhi deve apucchimhā* in any Pāli context. To find it after two occurrences of the usual construction of the root *pucch-* with two accusatives, one of the person[s] asked and one of the question[s] asked, and before another occurrence of the same construction, seems to me to be so unlikely that we can disregard it as a possibility. The natural way of taking *adhideve Bhagavantaṃ apucchimhā* in this context is to translate it as: “We asked the Buddha about adhidevas.”

(KR Norman, “Devas and adhidevas in Buddhism” 1981:165 f; slightly ed)

Although the term *adhideva* occurs again at Sn 1148 (*adhideve abhiññāya*), and its canonical Commentary, **the Culla Niddesa**, glosses it as “superior deva,” the CPD editors rejected this translation. Norman states his reason as follows:

the editors of CPD did not accept this obvious translation because they did not believe that the word *adhideva* was likely to occur in a canonical text with the meaning “superior deva”...[but] strangely enough CPD translates *adhidevakara* as “leading to the position of a super-god.” It is possible that this seeming inconsistency may be the result of a conscious attempt to see a difference between the commentarial and non-commentarial meanings. (Norman 1981b:149)

The Culla Niddesa gives this commentary on *adhideva*:

Adhideve abhiññāya ti devāti tayo devā sammati, devā⁴⁰ ca upapatti, devā ca visuddhi, devā ca. Katame sammati, devā. Rājāno ca rāja, kumārā ca deviyo ca ime sammati, devā vuccanti.

Katame upapatti, devā. Cātum, mahārājikā devā, Tāvatiṃsā devā, yāmā devā, tusitā devā, nimmāṇa, raṭṭi devā, paranimmita, vasavattī devā, Brahmakāyikā devā, ye ca devā taduttari⁴¹ ime upapatti, devā vuccanti.

Katame visuddhi, devā. Tathāgata, sāvaka arahanto khīṇ’āsavā ye ca pacceka, sambuddhā ime visuddhi, devā vuccanti.

Bhagavā sammattideve adhidevā ti abhiññāya upapatti, deve adhidevā ti abhiññāya visuddhi, -deve adhidevā ti abhiññāya jānitvā tulayitvā tīrayitvā vibhāvayitvā vibhūtaṃ katvā ti adhideve abhiññāya.

In the phrase, *adhideve abhiññāya*, “knowing the superior devas,” *deva* refers to the three kinds of devas, namely, devas by convention (*sammati, devā*), devas by birth (*upapatti, devā*) and devas by purity (*visuddhi, devā*).

Who are devas by convention? Kings, princes, and queens: they are called **devas by convention**.

³⁹ See CPD Vol I, svv *adhi-deve* and *adhi-Brahmānaṃ* (Norman’s fn).

⁴⁰ vl Nc:Ne *sammuti, devā*.

⁴¹ vll Se *tat-r-upari*, Be *tad-upari*.

Who are devas by birth? The Four Great Kings [Cātum,mahārājā], the 33 Devas [Tāvātimsa], the Yāma devas, the Tusita devas, the devas who delight in creation, the devas who lord over the creations of others, the devas of Brahma’s Host, and devas beyond them: these are **devas by birth** [born devas, congenital devas].

What are devas by purity? The Tathāgata’s disciples who are arhats whose mental influxes are destroyed and the pratyeka Buddhas: these are **devas by purity**.

“The Blessed One is the deva beyond devas” means that, by having known, weighed, recognized [judged], understood, and by having made clear, (knows) by direct knowledge, he is a superior deva (*adhi,deva*) amongst conventional devas, by direct knowledge he is “superior deva” amongst the devas by birth, by direct knowledge he is “superior deva” amongst the devas of purity. (Nc:Se 30/312/653; Nc:Be 226; cf Vbh 422)⁴²

Norman then discusses the term *adhideva* at length, on philological grounds (1981:165-169), and goes on to say:

Since, however, the word *adhi,deva* is old, found in the [Sanskrit], occurring first in the Aitreya Brāhmaṇa (7.30),⁴³ “and since I have shown in my examination of the Saṅgārava-sutta that it not only occurs in a Pāli canonical text, but actually in the [Kaṇṇakatthala S] and moreover in the nominative plural form *adhidevā*, where any idea of *deve* being governed by *adhi* can be ruled out, I hope that it will be agreed that the editors of Vol 1 of CPD were being unnecessarily cautious in [taking *adhi* as an adv meaning ‘regarding’].

If, then, it is accepted that Pasenadi was indeed thanking the Buddha for having answered about adhidevas, then we can without difficulty reconstruct the original question which Pasenadi asked. He must have said: *atthi adhidevā*. “Do adhidevas exist?” The corruption which led to the text developing into the form which we have today was therefore identical with that which I have shown occurred in the *Saṅgārava-sutta*, ie the loss of *adhi-* after the word *atthi*. The same applies to the question: *atthi adhibrahmā*. “Does an adhibrahmā exist?” (Norman 1981:149 f)

5 *Adhi,deva* and *ati,deva*

5.1 Norman’s views. Norman goes on to discuss the meanings of *adhideva* and *atideva*, and how they are synonymous. He quotes from two important classics on Pāli grammar: **the Sadda.nīti**, for example, says: *atireko devo atidevo, evaṃ adhidevo* (“an *atideva* is more than a deva; so, too, an *adhideva*”) (Sadd 752,28), and similarly **the Payoga,siddhi** says: *adhiko devo atidevo, evaṃ evaṃ adhidevo* (“a deva who is superior is an *atideva*; similarly *adhideva*”). An earlier work, **the Attha,sālinī** (Buddhaghosa’s Commentary on the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī), when explaining the meaning of the prefix *abhi-* in the word *abhidhamma* says that it has the same meaning as the prefix *ati-*:

Yo āyu vaṇṇa,issariya,yasa,sampatti,ādīhi atirekataro c’eva visesa,vantataro ca devo atidevo ti vuccati; tathā,rūpo Brahmā pi ati,brahmā ti vuccati.

The deva who is specially distinguished and surpasses others in age, beauty, dominion, pomp, and other attainments is called *ati,deva*, “the peerless deva”; similarly Brahmā is called *ati,brahmā*, “the peerless Brahmā.” (DhsA 2,24-27; DhsA:PR 1:4)

The word *atideva* (lit “beyond a deva,” “superior deva”) is found in the Pāli Canon, used in the sense of “deva by purity” (*visuddhi,deva*). In **the Thera,gāthā**, it is an epithet of the Buddha himself (Tha 489), and in **the Brahma,deva Sutta** (S 6.3) of the Saṃyutta Nikāya:

⁴² Cf Nc:Ne 238 qu Norman 1981:149 fn 1 & Sn:N 2:391 n1148).

⁴³ See O Böhtlingk & R Roth, *Sanskrit Wörterbuch*, sv *adhideva*.

- 565 Far from here, brahminee, is the Brahmā world
To which you constantly offer oblation.
Brahmā does not eat such food, brahminee:
So why do you mumble (prayers), not knowing the path to Brahmā?⁴⁴
- 566 This is the Brahma deva, brahminee,
Who is without acquisitions, who has surpassed the devas (*ati,deva,patto*).
The monk, owning nothing, supporting no other,
Has entered your house for alms.⁴⁵ (S 6.3/1:141)

Similarly, the term *ati,deva* is used of the Buddha himself in **the Culla Niddesa**: *Bhagavā sammuti,devānaṃ ca upapatti,devānaṃ ca visuddhi,devānaṃ ca devo ca atidevo ca devātidevo ca*, “The Buddha is the deva, the superior deva and the deva beyond devas of the devas by convention, of the devas by rebirth and of the devas of purity (Nc 173,16-18).

The Saṃyutta Commentary glosses the arhat as: *Brahmānaṃ atibrahma,bhāvaṃ patto*, “reached the state of a Brahmā beyond Brahmās” (SA 1:207). Similarly **the Visuddhi,magga** uses *ati,brahmā* of the Buddha: [*Bhagavā*] ...*deva,devo Sakkānaṃ ati,sakko Brahmānaṃ ati,brahmā* (Vism 1.3/2). Similarly, in a stock phrase describing the Tathāgata found several times in the Commentaries, we find the term *ati,deva*: [*Tathāgato*] ...*atulo appameyyo anuttaro rāja,rājā deva,devo Sakkānaṃ ati,sakko Brahmānaṃ ati,brahmā*, “The Tathāgata is unweighable, unmeasurable, incomparable, king of kings, god of gods, Sakra above Sakra, Brahmā above Brahmā.”⁴⁶

Who are devas by convention? Kings, princes, and queens: they are called **devas by convention**.

Who are devas by birth? The Four Great Kings [Cātum,mahārājā], the 33 Devas [Tāvataṃsa], the Yāma devas, the Tusita devas, the devas who delight in creation, the devas who lord over the creations of others, the devas of Brahma’s Host, and devas beyond them: these are **devas by birth** [born devas, congenital devas].

What are devas by purity? The Tathāgata’s disciples who are arhats whose mental influxes are destroyed and the pratyeka Buddhas: these are **devas by purity**.

(Nc:Se 30/312/653; Nc:Be 226; cf Vbh 422)⁴⁷

At this point, Norman attempts to explain why the Buddha repeated the questions asked by Pasenadi by reconstructing these questions.

It seems very likely to me that the Buddha repeated Pasenadi’s question, which (as we have reconstructed it) was “Do adhidevas exist?”, simply because he was not certain what Pasenadi was

⁴⁴ Comy says that “the path of Brahmā” (*brahma,patha*) is a name for the four wholesome dhyanas. The resultant dhyanas are called their path of living (*jīvita,patha*). Ignorant of this path, why do you mumble and mutter? For the Brahmās subsist on the rapturous dhyanas; they do not eat curdled milk flavoured with herbs and seeds (SA 1:207). The 4 Brahma,vihāras are sometimes called “the path to fellowship with Brahmā,” eg **Tevijja S** (D 13.76-81/1:250 f) = SD 1.8 (2003), **Subha S** (M 99.23-28/2:207 f).

⁴⁵ Comy explains “**without acquisitions**” (*nirūpadhika*) as being free of the acquisitions of defilements, of volitional formations, and sensual pleasures. [SAṬ: The acquisition of aggregates is not mentioned because the aggregates are still present.] “**Who has surpassed the devas**” (*ati,deva,patto*): He has attained the state of a deva beyond the devas, the state of a Brahmā beyond the Brahmās. [Evidently, there is a pun on the monk’s name, Brahma,deva.] “**Supporting no other**” (*anañña,posī*): He does not maintain a wife and children, nor because he will maintain another body after the present one. (SA 1:207). “**Owning nothing**” (*akiñcanaṃ*) is a common epithet of an arhat. Comy glosses it as being devoid of “something” (*kiñcana*), ie the impediments of lust, hate and delusion (SA 1:63). See **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43.26-37/1:298) = **Godatta S** (S 41.7/4:297).

⁴⁶ MA 1:51 = AA 1:111 = UA 132.

⁴⁷ Cf Nc:Ne 238 qu Norman 1981:166 fn 1 & Sn:N 2:391 n1148). For a fuller text (with the Pāli), see **Kaṇṇakatthala S** (M 90) = SD 10.8 Intro (4) (2005).

getting at. After all, he was (probably unconsciously, but in effect), saying, “Do you and other Buddhas exist?” As soon as Pasenadi took the Buddha’s counter-question as a signal to continue, and went on to ask about heavenly adhidevas, then it was clear that he was not asking about Buddhas but about superior devas of the heavenly type.

Once we see that Pasenadi’s original question was about the existence or otherwise of adhidevas, not devas, then the form which the subsequent questions took becomes more intelligible. The Buddha, for the reason just given, repeats Pasenadi’s question. Pasenadi takes this to mean: “Why do you ask? Of course they exist.” He then asks: “Are they, because of pre-eminent deva nature, assured of rebirth as deva or better, or is there a chance that they will be reborn as men?” The Buddha replies that if they have performed bad deeds they will fall from their position as adhidevas. (Norman 1981:152)

Pasenadi’s son, Viḍuḍabha, then asks about the superiority of the *adhidevas* in a different way:

“Venerable sir, can those gods who are still malevolent and who return to this [human] state topple or banish from that place those gods who are no longer malevolent and who do not return to this [human] state?” [14a]

Ānanda answers the question by pointing to the different meanings of *deva*, in a manner similar to the Buddha’s answer to Saṅgārava’s question in **the Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 90.42/212 f). In the Pāli Canon, kings are often addressed as *deva*,⁴⁸ that is, a deva by convention (*sammuti, deva*). Since Pasenadi is the king (*mahā, rāja*) of Kosala with subordinate kings (*anurāja*) under him, he is as such a “superior king” (*adhi, deva*), who naturally hold sway over his realm, with the power to expel both the good and the evil. However, despite his power, he holds no sway outside his realm. Similar, as a deva by convention, he has no power over the devas by birth (*upapatti, deva*); in fact, he cannot even see them. Even so, Ānanda answers Viḍuḍabha, *adhidevas* who are malevolent have no power over other devas, whom they cannot even see.

Following Norman’s reconstruction of the Buddha’s questions, we then see Pasenadi asking the Buddha about the existence of the *adhi, brahmā*. Again, the Buddha counter-questions him, wondering whether the question refers to himself. Again Pasenadi clarified that he is referring to a heavenly Brahmā, and he asks whether the nature of a “superior Brahmā” will keep him from rebirth as a man. As before, the Buddha replies that it will depend on his karma. However, before Pasenadi could go on to ask about the power that an *adhi, brahmā* has over other Brahmās, a servant approaches and announces that the king’s coach is ready for his departure.

In conclusion, from Norman’s studies, we may say that in the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta (M 90), the Buddha merely conceded that there were “superior devas” (*adhidevā*) by birth (*upapatti, devā*), “but he refuted (or rather Ānanda, speaking on his behalf, refuted) the idea that their pre-eminent nature was of any importance” [14] (Norman 1981b:154). In **the Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100),⁴⁹ on the other hand, the Buddha, “so far from conceding the existence of the brahmanical devas as Saṅgārava presumed, was merely saying that there were in the world earthly princes who were by convention called devas, but there were others, Buddhas like himself, who were superior to these” (Norman 1977:336).

5.2 Analayo’s findings. Analayo, in his comparative study of the Majjhima Nikāya, however, finds that **the Madhyama Āgama** as preserved in the Chinese translations does not support Norman’s reconstructions of the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta. In both the Pāli version⁵⁰ and the Chinese Āgama⁵¹ version of the sutta, king Pasenadi asks if “there are devas”—*atthi devā* (M 90.13) and 有天耶 *yǒu tiān ye* (MĀ 212)—which leads Analayo to conclude:

⁴⁸ This common vocative form is used as “your majesty,” D 1.47 passim (17x, 2:16 passim (170x), 3:59 passim (17x); M 2:65 passim (6), 3:132 passim (8x).

⁴⁹ See following sutta = SD 10.9 (2005).

⁵⁰ M 90.13/2:130,13.

⁵¹ MĀ 212 = T1.794c8.

Thus the Chinese version does not support the emendation to *atthi adhideva* suggested by Norman [1981b]. The same is also the case for M 90 at M 2:132,2: *atthi Brahmā*, where MĀ 212 at T1.795a20 reads: 有梵耶 [yǒu fàn ye], thus not supporting Norman's emendation to *atthi adhibrahmā*. While M 90 at M 2:132,26+29 reports king Pasenadi using the expressions *adhideve* and *adhibrahmānam* when expressing his appreciation of the Buddha's replies, according to the corresponding passage at MĀ 212 at T1.795b9 Pasenadi did not refer to his discussion on devas at all, but in relation to the discussion on the Brahmās he again spoke of 有梵 [yǒu fàn]. This suggests that the Indic original based on which MĀ 212 was translated had in this instance the same wording as in the actual question earlier, a wording corresponding to *atthi brahmā* in Pāli. (Analayo 2005 at M 2:130n)

Analayo then discusses **Marasinghe's** view expressed in his *Gods in Early Buddhism*, Marasinghe suggests that

the difference between the two questions is too clear to escape the attention of an intelligent reader. While the first one questions the validity of the belief in gods itself, the second as it is, inquires as to whether the gods come to be reborn in the human world, thus accepting that the gods are there, this being the very basic premise that was required in the first one.

(Marasinghe 1974:125)

To this **Analayo** responds:

Yet Marasinghe himself draws attention to [**the Yañña Sutta**] S 3.9 at S 1:75,31, according to which king Pasenadi once prepared a great sacrifice, which suggests that he did believe in the existence of gods. Moreover, according to the same Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta, king Pasenadi and his general went along without objection when Ānanda brought up the example of the gods of the thirty-three, a passage which suggests that though they had never seen the devas of the thirty-three, they both accepted their existence. Perhaps the discrepancy between the two questions is not as strong as Marasinghe believes, since if Pasenadi had wanted to question the validity of the belief in gods, there would seem to be no reason why he should not have expressed this when the Buddha asked him to clarify what his question was about. (Analayo 2005 at M 2:30n)

6 The four classes

6.1 Social system. Sometime after early 2000 BCE, a group of nomadic tribe began to migrate southward from ancient Iran, through the Hindu Kush into the Indus valley. These Āryas or Aryans spoke the Old Indo-Aryan (or Sanskrit) dialects. By the time of the Buddha (the 5th century BCE), the Aryans had been in India for perhaps a thousand years and their cultural influence extended down to the central Ganges plain.

Two aspects of the brahmanical vision are of particular importance, namely an understanding of society as reflecting a[n] hierarchy of ritual “purity,” and a complex system of ritual and sacrifice. From the brahmanical perspective society comprises two groups: the Āryas and the non-Āryas. (Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 1998:12)

The ancient Aryan society comprised three hereditary **classes** (*varṇa*)—the brahmins (*brāhmaṇa*), the nobles and warriors (*kṣatriya*, *khattiya*, Skt *ḥṣatriya*), and the merchants (*vaishya*, *vessa*, Skt *vaiśya*)—in the descending order of purity. The brahmins had the prerogative and duty to teach and keep the Vedic tradition.⁵² The three classes regarded themselves as “twice-born” (*dvija*) and confirmed this by having

⁵² **The Vedas**, the original literature of the brahmins, comprised of the Three Vedas: the Ṛg-veda (the oldest of which go back to 1500 BCE), the Sāma-veda, and the Yājur-veda. After the Buddha's time, a fourth—the Atharva-veda—was added. By the Buddha's time, Vedic literature comprised several different classes: the four collections (*samhitā*) of verses attributed to ancient seers (*isī*, Skt *ṛṣi*), the ritual manuals (*brāhmaṇā*) on the elaborate Vedic

their youths undergo an initiation (*upanayana*) into a period of Vedic study under the supervision of a teacher. At the end of this tutelage, the young man's duty was to maintain household sacrificial fires, and with the help of brahmins, carry out various Vedic sacrificial ritual.

The non-Aryans formed the fourth class—the workers, helots or shudras (*sudda*, Skt *śūdra*)—who basically serve the other three classes.⁵³ Besides these, there were those, due to their polluting nature of their work (road sweepers, scavengers, etc) who formed the “fifth” (*pañcama*) non-class, or the “out-castes” (*caṇḍāla*).

While it is important not to confuse these four classes (*varṇa*) and the countless castes (*jāti*) of later Indian society, it is none the less the ideology of the relative ritual purity of the classes that underpins the medieval and modern Indian “caste system.” (Gethin 1998:13)

Both the ideas of class (*vaṇṇa*, Skt *varṇa*) and caste (*jāti*) are found in the early Buddhist texts. As such, we have to understand their usage. **Uma Chakravarti**, in her historical study of the “social stratification as reflected in the Buddha texts,”⁵⁴ makes these useful definitions:

“Caste” is used in the sense of an ascribed status group which is a component in a[n] hierarchical arrangement of groups. “Class,” on the other hand, represents the relative importance of a group controlling the means of production.”

(Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Buddhism*, 1987:94)

It is interesting to note that the Pali/Sanskrit term *jāti*—for what we now understand as “caste”—also means “birth,” and *vaṇṇa* (Skt *varṇa*), “class” (*vaṇṇa*, literally means “colour,” that is, skin colour). Indeed, both caste and class are by definition decided by one's birth in such a social system.

Over the years Indian social actuality going back many centuries has seen not just four but hundreds of castes (*jātis*) and sub-castes. If we try and relate class to caste, *varṇa* to *jāti*, class is classical Brahmanic ideology while caste is historical and modern actuality. They are different. The *varṇa* system is what the Brahmanic authors wanted to see, and to the extent that Brahmins were the dominant group in society the *varṇa* ideology provided a template for what they sought to realize.

(Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 2000:14)

As evident from such texts as **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27), the four classes were originally occupational, not hereditary.⁵⁵ And in the Buddha's time, the feeling amongst the anti-brahmin-ical ascetics (*samaṇa*, Skt *śramaṇa*) was that they should go back to the old system again, which would mean that they would cease to be classes in the brahminical sense. In fact, according to the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta, any one could become an ascetic, regardless of class origin, and attain Nirvana, if they take upon themselves “the five factors of exertion” (*padhaniyaṅga*) [10-12].

The Buddha was critical of the intrinsic supremacy of the Brahmins, and with it the ideology of *varṇa*. But it would be misleading from this to infer, as some modern writers do, that the Buddha was “anti-caste.” First, a criticism of the *varṇa* system is not in itself a comment on *jāti*, caste, although it could be transposed to the ideology that nevertheless underlies caste. For his

sacrificial rituals, and the “forest books” (*āraṇyaka*), explaining the esoteric meanings of such rituals. The Upanishads (*upaniṣad*), the last class of Vedic literature, containing further esoteric commentary on the rituals, were still in the formative stage. On the Vedas, see AL Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, 1989: 27 f. On whether the Buddha knew the Vedas, see **Tevijja S** (D 13) = SD 1.8 Intro (2) (2003).

⁵³ The four classes (*vaṇṇa*, Skt *varṇa*) and their duties (*dhamma*, Skt *dharma*) are prescribed in the post-Maurya work, **Mānava Dharma,śāstra** (attr to Manu). Despite its lateness, it probably reflects the brahminical worldview and legal concepts. See Rāja,dharma (7.1-2) and Jāti,dharma (10.1-2). On the division of the classes according to the service they had to provide, see Warder 1970:177.

⁵⁴ Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Buddhism*, 1987:94-121 (ch 4).

⁵⁵ D 27.22-25/3:93-95.

part the Buddha spoke of the true brahmin as one who had spiritual insight and who behaves accordingly (see the famous *Dhammapada* Ch 26). In this sense the Buddha affirmed a[n] hierarchy not of birth but of spiritual maturity. It is not obvious that the Buddha would have any comment to make about a brahmin who is *also* spiritually mature (understood in the Buddha's sense). The Buddha was not offering social reform. And this is what one would expect. The Buddha was himself a renouncer of society. (Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 2000:244 n5)

6.2 The Buddha's statements on class and caste. As mentioned earlier [5.1], both caste and class are by definition decided by one's birth in such a social system. Such social aberrations and injustices are often addressed by the Buddha in such classics as **the Madhurā Sutta** (M 84) and **the Vāseṭṭha Sutta** (Sn 3.9 = M 98).⁵⁶ In other words, the Buddha both denigrates to the ideology of caste as well as provides a way out of the painful reality of the class system.

The Madhurā Sutta (M 84) points to the social reality that class (at least not class alone) is not always the determining factor for social status. Often enough, wealth determines one's social status, in which case, one cannot speak of one class as higher than another:

“What do you think, maharajah [the rajah Avantī,putta of Madhura]? If a noble... a brahmin ... a merchant... a worker prospers in wealth, grain, silver or gold [money], will there be *those of his own kind* who rise before him and retire after him, who are eager to serve him, who seek to please him, who speak pleasantly to him. And will there also be *members of the other classes [nobles, brahmins, merchants, workers]* who rise before him and retire after him, who are eager to serve him, who seek to please him, who speak pleasantly to him?”

“There will be, master Kaccāna.”

“What do you think, maharajah? If that is so, then are these four classes all the same, or are they not, or how does it appear to you here?”

“Surely, if that is so, master Kaccāna, then these four classes are all the same: there is no difference between them at all that I see.” (M 84.5/2:84-86; paraphrased)

In the next section, Mahā Kaccāna, explains to the rajah Avantī,putta of Madhurā that one's karma bears fruit in the same manner no matter which class one belongs to (M 84.7-8/2:87 f). And finally, that if one were to renounce the world, one would be equal to other renunciants, no matter which class one came from (M 84.9/2:89). From this text, “it seems that despite a tendency to rigidification, the Indian caste class system was at the time considerably more elastic than the later caste system that evolved from it.” (M:NB 1291 n 185).

In **the Vāseṭṭha Sutta** (Sn 3.9 = M 98) deals with more spiritual matters. The Buddha resolves a dispute between two young brahmins over the qualities of a true brahmin. This important sutta can be summarized as follows:

1. Sn p115 f: Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja discuss what constitutes a true brahmin;
2. Sn p116 & Sn 594-579: they approach the Buddha;
3. Sn 600-606: the diversity of species in nature (the members of a species are physically identical);
4. Sn 607-611: the unity of mankind;
5. Sn 612-619: human beings are known by the work or deeds (*kamma*) they do;
6. Sn 620-647 = Dh 396-423: the true brahmin (with refrain “Him I call a brahman!”):

I call him not a brahmin	who is born of a womb or a mother.
He is just a “sir”-caller (<i>bho, vādī</i>)	if he is full of worldly worldly clings.
One who has nothing, without grasping—	him I call a brahmin. (Sn 620 = Dh 396) ⁵⁷

⁵⁶ For more related suttas, see **Aggañña S** (D 27) = SD 2.19 Introd.

⁵⁷ *Na cāhaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ brūmi yonijaṃ matti, sambhavaṃ | bho, vādī nāma so hoti, sa ce hoti sakiñcano | akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ, tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ.*

bha (Skt Virūdhaka), which the rajah thought was an old family name. When Viḍūḍabha was quite young, he was made a general (*senāpati*),⁶³ thinking that this would please the Buddha (who was a Sākya himself).

When Viḍūḍabha was 16, he visited his Sākya relatives and discovered his lowly birth. His mother, Vāsabha, khattiyā, was Māhanāma the Sākya's daughter by a slave woman named Nāga, muṇḍa (J 1:133). Having discovered this deceit, Viḍūḍabha vowed vengeance. Pasenadi, on learning of this deceit, deprived both Vāsabha, khattiyā and Viḍūḍabha of their rank and privileges, and he lost his claim to the throne. Thenceforth, they never left the palace. When the Buddha heard of this, he visited the rajah and delivered **the Kaṭṭhahāri Jātaka** (J no 7), and their position and privileges were restored.⁶⁴

7.2 In the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta, we see Viḍūḍabha as a general [6, 14, 16]. He asks a question about the powers of devas [14] and Ānanda answers it. The sutta contains a curious episode where apparently Viḍūḍabha accuses the brahmin Sañjaya of the Ākāsa clan (*Ākāsa, gotta*)⁶⁵ of misrepresenting the Buddha, but Sañjaya replies that it was Viḍūḍabha who has uttered the false view [16]. No further details are given and the Commentaries are silent here.

As such, it is difficult to exactly time the events of this sutta. It is possible that the story here occurred after Viḍūḍabha had been reinstated (and before Pasenadi's death)—on the flimsy evidence that Pasenadi does not come to Viḍūḍabha's defence or make any public show of his affection for Viḍūḍabha. In fact, Pasenadi is totally silent in the face of the controversy [16].

It is interesting to note the nature of Viḍūḍabha's question, which clearly centres around power and conquest:

Venerable sir, can those gods who are still malevolent and who return to this [human] state topple or banish from that place those gods who are no longer malevolent and who do not return to this [human] state?
(M 90.14/2:130)

It probably reflects Viḍūḍabha's troubled mind patiently waiting for the moment to wreak vengeance on the Sākyas, which he does after Pasenadi dies.

7.3 Pasenadi died a tragic death at the betrayal of Dīgha, kārāyaṇa,⁶⁶ and Viḍūḍabha became king. He remembered his grudge against the Sākyas that began when he discovered that his mother, the Sākya Vāsabha, khattiyā, was actually of low birth and that his late father, Pasenadi, was unaware of this fact

⁶³ As seen here [6, 16] and in **Piya, jātika S** (M 1:110.26/2:110).

⁶⁴ **The Kaṭṭhahāri J** relates how once the Bodhisattva was born as a love child of the rajah Brahmadata of Benares, and in due course was nicknamed "No-father" (*nippitika*). He later won his birthright through the mother's act of truth. His mother threw him in the air, asseverating that he would remain in the air if he were truly Brahmadata's son. On Brahmadata's death, the Bodhisattva became the rajah Kaṭṭha, vāhana (J 7/1:133-136; 4:148; DhA 1:349). This story has some connection with that of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā, as given in the Mahābhārata and later amplified in the drama, "Śakuntalā" or "The Lost Ring" (full title, *Abhijñāna Śakuntalā*, "The Recognition of Śakuntalā") by Kālidāsa (c 5th cent) (see *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1884).

⁶⁵ Sañjaya Ākāsa, gotta is nowhere else mentioned in the Canon or Commentaries. However, a physician of Rājagaha, named Ākāsa, gotta, is mentioned in the Vinaya, as making fun of his having lanced a monk's fistula. The Buddha then declared such a performance as entailing a grave offence (*thullaccaya*) (V 1:215 f).

⁶⁶ While the 80-year-old Pasenadi was conversing with the Buddha (as reported in **Dhamma, cetiya S**, M 89/2:118-125) [17], Dīgha Kārāyaṇa (Skt Dīrgha Cārāyaṇa) thought, "Previously, after conferring in private with the recluse Gotama, the king arrested my uncle and his 32 sons. Perhaps this time he will arrest me." Dīgha, who was in secret collusion with Pasenadi's son, Viḍūḍabha, then absconded with the retinue and the royal insignia entrusted to him. The royal insignia, which included the fan, parasol and sandals, were rushed to the capital, Sāvathī, where Viḍūḍabha was enthroned (MA 3:352; J 4:151; DhA 1:356).

Meanwhile, the forlorn Pasenadi, left only with a horse and a female servant, rushed to Rājagaha to seek the help of his nephew, Ajātasattu. It was rather late when he arrived at Rājagaha and the city gates were closed. Exhausted, he lay down in a hall outside the city, and died of exhaustion and exposure in the night. Ajātasattu arranged for him a grand funeral but did nothing to Viḍūḍabha who had just ascended the throne. (MA 2:753 f; J 4:131).

when he married her. Viḍūḍabha then marched out to Kapilavatthu with a large army to exterminate the Sākya.

The Buddha perceiving Viḍūḍabha's plans and the impending doom of the Sākya, appeared under a tree with poor shade just within the Sākya border. Just on the other side was a large banyan tree with cool shade. When Viḍūḍabha invited the Buddha over to the banyan's shade, the Buddha replied:

“Be not concerned, maharajah, the shade of my kinsmen keeps me cool!”

Viḍūḍabha took the broad hint, but returned three times, each time meeting the Buddha in the same manner. On the fourth occasion, the Buddha knew that the Sākya had to face the fruition of old karma. In a past life, they had poisoned the river.⁶⁷ It is said that the Buddha's exposure to the sun on these occasions caused him **headaches** (*sīsa, dukkha*) that lasted for the rest of his life.⁶⁸

Viḍūḍabha was said to have massacred 77,000 Sākya and enslaved 8,000 children.⁶⁹ The Chinese records say that he took 500 Sākya maidens into his harem, but had them killed when they disparaged him.⁷⁰ He however spared the family and followers of his grandfather Mahānāma. Viḍūḍabha's easy but bloody victory was possible mainly because the Sākya, probably out of remorse and guilt, did not give a fierce fight. He then set up camp on the dry bed of the river Aciravatī. However, during the night, a sudden swelling of the waters drowned him and a large part of his army, washing them out to sea.

Viḍūḍabha was succeeded by his son, **Uttara, sena**, who claimed a part of the Buddha's relics along with other claimants. Later legends say that those who escaped Viḍūḍabha's massacre founded towns and kingdoms in the Himalayas, on the banks of the Ganges, or in Northwest India. According to Xuanzang, four Sākya fled into the “Snowy Mountains”: one became king of Bamiyan, one of Udyāna, one of Himatala, and one of Śāmbi (Kauśāmbī?).⁷¹ In the 6th century, the monk Vimokṣa, prajñā or Vimokṣa, sena claimed to be a descendent of a Sākya who had been saved from the massacre.

8 Types of followers

The Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta's commentary, in closing, says that it is an example of a discourse given to those who need guidance (*neyya, puggala*) (MA 3:361). In terms of learning ability, the Nettippakaraṇa employs a classification system dividing persons into four types, a system also found in the Aṅguttara and the Puggala, paññatti:⁷²

- (1) The intuitive learner or one who learns from a condensed or brief teaching (*ugghaṭitaññū*).
- (2) The intellectual or one who learns from a teaching that is elaborated (*vipañcitaññū*).
- (3) The guidable or one who learns through guidance (*neyya*).
- (4) The rote learner or one who merely masters the letter of the text [without knowing its meaning] (*pada, parama*). (A 2:135; Pug 41; Nett 7, 125)

Interestingly, the fourth—the rote learner (one who masters only the letter of the text)—is not mentioned in the Nettippakaraṇa list. This is probably because the Netti sees the necessity of mastering both the letter and the spirit of the text.

9 When did the Buddha first meet Pasenadi?

The Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta and its Madhyama Āgama parallel open by saying that king Pasenadi has sent a messenger to announce his impending visit to the Buddha. There are suttas that suggest having one's visit announced in this way is the decorum when one meets for the first time. **The Sakka, pañha**

⁶⁷ U 265; Ap 1:300; DhA 1:346-349, 357-361; cf J 1:133, 4:146 f, 151 f. This could be construed as “group karma.” But see James P McDermott, “Is There Group Karma in Theravāda Buddhism?” *Numen* 23,1 1976:67-80. See also **Group karma?** = SD 39.1.

⁶⁸ Ap 387,24/1:300; UA 265.

⁶⁹ See *Avadāna Kalpalatā*, 11th pallava.

⁷⁰ S Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, 1884 2:11 f.

⁷¹ S Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, 1884 2:21.

⁷² For details, see **Pubba, koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44/5:220-222) = SD 10.7 Intro 2-3.

Sutta (M 21) and the **Brahmāyu Sutta** (M 91), for example, describe how Sakra⁷³ and the brahmin Brahmāyu⁷⁴ in a similar way send a messenger to announce their impending arrival. In either case, it is their first meeting with the Buddha.

Towards the conclusion of the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta, king Pasenadi wishing to praise Ānanda (the Buddha's personal attendant) on his "joyful" wisdom, does not know his name [15]. Pasenadi's not knowing Ānanda is further evidence that this is an early sutta or even that this is Pasenadi's first meeting with the Buddha. Pasenadi again show his profound courtesy to the Buddha before leaving, by listing the answers given by the Buddha and approving of them, each time saying, "We approve of that and accept it, and so we are satisfied [joyful]" (*tañ ca pan'amhākaṃ rucati c'eva khamati ca, tena c'amhā attamanā*) [17].⁷⁵

The **Madhyama Āgama** version of the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta supports the possibility that this is the first meeting between the Buddha and Pasenadi by stating that Pasenadi addresses the Buddha by his personal name Gotama, the manner of those who do not consider themselves the Buddha's disciples. The Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta itself, however, records Pasenadi as addressing the Buddha as "venerable sir" (*bhante*) and "Blessed One" (*bhagavā*) [§4], forms of address indicating that he considers himself a disciple of the Buddha.

In the Pali Canon, it is only in the **Dahara Sutta** (S 3.1) that we find king Pasenadi addressing the Buddha by his personal name—*bho Gotama*.⁷⁶ The sutta Commentary says that this is their first meeting: "not having seen the Tathagata before" (*ito pubbe Tathāgatassa adiṭṭhatā*, SA 1:129). Bodhi, in his Saṃyutta translation, *Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, remarks that "his cordial (as distinct from reverential) manner of greeting the Blessed One indicates that he has not yet acknowledged the Buddha as his master."⁷⁷ The sutta closes with Pasenadi taking refuge, becoming a lay follower.⁷⁸

However, in the **Saṃyutta Āgama** version of the Dahara Sutta, king Pasenadi addresses the Buddha respectfully as "Blessed One" (*bhagavā*) (世尊, shizūn),⁷⁹ which suggests (at last in the Saṃyukta context) that Pasenadi is already the Buddha's disciple at the time of the Dahara Sutta. As such, the Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan versions of the Dahara Sutta only report him as rejoicing in the discourse, without mentioning his conversion.⁸⁰ The Madhyama Āgama records king Pasenadi's going for refuge in **Piya-jātika S** (M 87).⁸¹

⁷³ D 21.1.4/2:265.

⁷⁴ M 91.26/2:141.

⁷⁵ MĀ 212 = T1.795b5 too reports that Pasenadi expressed his approval by listing the answers he has received, but without the *attamanā* statement above.

⁷⁶ S 3.1/1:68.

⁷⁷ S:B 399 n199.

⁷⁸ S 3.1/1:70.

⁷⁹ SĀ 1226 = T 2.334c17; SĀ2 53 = T2.391c5. 世尊, Skt *bhagavat*, "Blessed One"; sometimes also *loka,jyēṣṭha*, "eldest in the world." This is popularly rendered as "world-honoured one."

⁸⁰ Skt in Gnoli 1977:183; SĀ 1226 = T 2.335b7; SA2 53 = T 2:392a24; Tib: Kumāra, dṛṣṭānta Sūtra = gzohn nu dpe'i mdo, no 296 in D^c-K 71.593.1, tr in Feer 1883:138. According to the Tib Mūla, sarvāstivāda **Vinaya, vastu**, however, Pasenadi is indeed converted in Dahara S, D^c-K 1.254.5: *bcom ldan 'das kyis ko sa la'i rgyal po gsal rgyal gzhon nu'i dpe'i mdo sdes btul bat*; cf Feer 1874:300. See Analayo 2005 at M 2:126 n.

⁸¹ MĀ 216 = T 1.802a4; cf **Piya-jātika S** (M 87.29/2:111 f) where he thrice exclaims *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā, sambuddhassa* at the end of the discourse.

The Discourse at Kaṇṇaka-t,thala (M 90/2:125-133)

1 Thus have I heard.

Pasenadi visits the Buddha

At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Deer Park,⁸² near Ujuṇṇā.

2a Now at that time, the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala had arrived in Ujuṇṇā on a certain business. Then he told a man:

“Come, my good man, go to the Blessed One and bow your head at the Blessed One’s feet on my behalf, and wish him good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort;⁸³ then say thus:

‘Venerable sir, the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala, bows his head at the Blessed One’s feet, and wishes him good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort,’ and then say:

‘Venerable sir, today the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala will come to see the Blessed One after has had his breakfast.’”

“Yes, sire,” the man replied in assent to the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala.

2b Then he went to the Blessed One, and after saluting him, sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, he said this:

“Venerable sir, the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala, bows his head at the Blessed One’s feet, and wishes him good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort, and he says thus:

‘Venerable sir, today the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala will come to see the Blessed One after has had his breakfast.’”

The two sisters

3 Now the sisters Somā and Sakulā⁸⁴ heard:

“Today [126] the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala will go to see the Blessed One after he has had his breakfast.”

Then, while the meal was being served, the sisters Somā and Sakulā went to the rajah and said, “Maharajah, pay homage to the Blessed One in our name and bow your head at the Blessed One’s feet on our behalf, and wish him good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort; then say thus:

‘Venerable sir, the sisters Somā and Sakulā bow their heads at the Blessed One’s feet, and wish him good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort.’”

4 Then, when he had finished his breakfast, the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala went to the Blessed One, and after saluting him, he sat down at one side and *delivered the message of the sisters Somā and Sakulā to the Blessed One.*

⁸² **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala** was a deer sanctuary in Ujuṇṇā, a town and district in Kosala (MA 3:356). The word **kaṇṇaka** (fr *kaṇṇa*, “ear”) has 2 meanings (DP): (1) [cf Skt *karṇika*] a (small) animal (with long ears?), perhaps a rabbit (J 5:406, 6:277, 416); *~(ā),lakkhaṇa*, signs of health or omen on a rabbit(?) (D 1:9; cf DA 94, Nm 382). (2) [Skt *karṇaka*] fungus, mould, mildew (Vism 250; VA 765, 849; SnA 167). The word **thala** has 2 meanings (PED): (1) (nt) dry ground, viz high, raised (opp low) or solid, firm (opp water) (S 4:179); as plateau opp to *ninna* (low-lying place) (Sn 30; SnA 42 = *ukkūla*); Dh 98; It 66 = S 1:100 (*megho thalam ninnā ca pūreti*); PvA 29 (= *unnata, padesa*); as dry land, terra firma opp to *jala* (Dh 34; J 1:107, 222; Pv 4.1.12; PvA 260); as firm, even ground or safe place (D 1:234; Sn 946); cf j 3:53, 4:142; Vism 185. (2) (nt) [prob dialectic form of *tharu*] the haft of a sword, the scabbard (J 3:221, reading uncertain).

Once, when the Buddha is staying at Kaṇṇaka-t,thala, Acela Kassapa visit him, as recorded in **Kassapa,sīhanāda S** (also called Mahā Sīha,nāda S, D 8/1:161-177).

⁸³ *App’ābādham app’ātānkam lahu-t,thānam balaṃ phāsu,vihāram...pucchā*, lit “ask (if) he is free from sickness, free from illness, in a state of lightness, having strength, dwelling in comfort.” This is stock: D 1 204, 2:72; M 2:91, 108, 125, 141.

⁸⁴ Comy says that the two sisters were the rajah’s wives (MA 3:356).

“But, maharajah, could not the sisters Somā and Sakulā find another messenger?”⁸⁵

“Venerable sir, the sisters Somā and Sakulā heard:

‘Today [126] the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala will go to see the Blessed One after he has had his breakfast.’

Then, while the meal was being served, the sisters Somā and Sakulā came to me and said,

‘Maharajah, pay homage to the Blessed One in our name and bow your head at the Blessed One’s feet on our behalf, and wish him good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort; then say thus:

“Venerable sir, the sisters Somā and Sakulā bow their heads at the Blessed One’s feet, and wish him good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort.”’

“May the sisters Somā and Sakulā be happy, maharajah!”

Is omniscience possible?

5 Then the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala said to the Blessed One:

“Venerable sir, I have heard this:

‘The recluse Gotama says, “There is neither recluse nor brahmin who is omniscient and all-seeing who can claim to have total knowledge and vision—this is impossible.”’⁸⁶

Venerable sir, do those who speak thus [127] say what has been said by the Blessed One, and not misrepresent him with what is contrary to fact? And do they explain (the matter) in accordance with the Dharma so that there arises no reasonable ground for disputation or censure?”⁸⁷

“Maharajah, those who speak thus do not say what has been said by me, but misrepresent me with what is untrue and contrary to fact.”

6 Then the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala addressed general Viḍūḍabha,

“General, who introduced this talk into the palace?”⁸⁸

“It was Sañjaya, maharajah, the brahmin of the Ākāsa clan.”

7 Then the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala told a man [worker]:

“Come, my good man, in my name tell Sañjaya, the brahmin of the Ākāsa clan, ‘Reverend sir, the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala summons you.’”

“Yes, sire,” the man replied. He went to Sañjaya, the brahmin of the Ākāsa clan, and told him, “Reverend sir, the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala summons you.”⁸⁹

8 Meanwhile, the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala said to the Blessed One,

“Venerable sir, could something else have been said by the Blessed One in that connection, and the person misunderstood it? How does the Blessed One recall making such an utterance?”⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Comy says that the Buddha asks this question to free Pasenadi from public censure that he was running errands for the women (MA 3:356).

⁸⁶ *Samaṇo Gotamo evam āha: N’atthi so samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā yo sabbaññū sabba,dassavī aparisesaṃ ñāṇa,dassanaṃ paṭijānissati—n’etaṃ ṭhanaṃ vijjati ti.*

⁸⁷ *Kacci te bhante bhagavato vutta,vādino, na ca bhagavantaṃ abhūtena abbhācikkhanti, dhammassa cānu-dhammaṃ vyākaraṇti, na ca koci saha,dhammiko vādānuvādo gārayhaṃ ṭhānaṃ āgacchatī ti.* This is stock: D 1:161; M 1:368 f; M 2:127; S 3:6, 4:330, 340 x2; A 1:161, 2:190, 4:182. Cf D 3:115 x2; M 2:77, 222, 233, 243, 3:77, 78, 3:139, 140; S 2:33 x2, 34, 36 x2, 38 x2, 39, 41 x2, 3:33, 41 x2, 4:51, 54, 4:326 x2, 381, 382, 5:7 x2; A 3:4 x2. The term *saha,dhammika* has at least four important senses: (1) a follower of the same Dharma (doctrine) (M 1:64); (2) (adj) just, justified, legitimate, reasonable (S 4:299 f); (3) in accordance with the Dharma (M 1:482; Dhs 1327); (4) regarding the Dharma (V 1:134; D 1:94, 161; M 1:368). The context above points to sense (2). On *saha,dhammika*, see BHSD: sahadhārmika & S:B 747 n72.

⁸⁸ *Ko nu kho senāpati imaṃ kathā,vatthum rāj’ antepure abbhudāhāsi ti.* “Introduced,” *abbhudāhāsi*, aor 3rd sg of *abhi + udāharati* (he utters, announces, declares; recites, quotes, cites). See §16 below.

⁸⁹ This episode follows on in §16 below.

⁹⁰ *Siyā nu kho bhante bhagavatā aññad eva kiñci sandhāya bhāsitaṃ, tañ ca jano aññathā pi paccāgaccheyya? Yathā,kathaṃ pana bhante bhagavā abhijānāti vācaṃ bhāsitaṃ ti.* The word *sandhāya*, ger of *sandahati* (“he puts together, connects, fits, arranges”); *sandhāya* is fig, “with reference to, regarding, concerning (M 1:503; J 1:203, 274, 2:177; PvA 87, 89, 110).

“I recall having actually made the utterance in this way, maharajah: ‘There is neither recluse nor brahmin who knows all, who sees all, at the same time [simultaneously]—this is not possible.’”⁹¹

“Well-reasoned is what the Blessed One said, based on good reason is what the Blessed One said,⁹² that ‘There is neither recluse nor brahmin [128] who knows all, who sees all, at the same time—this is not possible.’”

The four castes

9 There are these four castes, venerable sir—the nobles [kshatriyas], the brahmins, the merchants [vaishyas], and the workers [shudras]. Is there any distinction or difference amongst them?”

“There are these four castes, maharajah—the nobles, the brahmins, the merchants, and the workers. Two of them, that is, the kshatriyas and the brahmins, are held to be superior since men pay homage to them, rise up for them, and show them reverence, salutation and proper conduct.”

10a “Venerable sir, I am not asking about this present life. I am asking about the life to come.⁹³ There are these four castes, venerable sir—the nobles, the brahmins, the merchants, and the workers. Is there any distinction or difference amongst them?”

The five factors of exertion

10b “Maharajah, there are these **five factors of exertion [striving]**⁹⁴ [for the destruction of mental influxes].⁹⁵ What are the five?

(1) Here a monk has faith;⁹⁶ he has faith in the Tathāgata’s awakening thus,

⁹¹ *N’atthi so samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā yo sakid eva sabbaññassati sabbam dakkhīti—n’etaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati ti.* The phrase *sakid eva* or *sakim eva* = “at once, at the same time; once only.” Comy says that no one can know all and see all—past, future and present—with one act of mental adverting, with one act of consciousness. As such, this problem is discussed in terms of a single conscious act (*eka, citta*) (MA 3:357). See “Omniscience,” Intro (2) above.

⁹² “Well-reasoned...based on good reason,” *hetu, rūpaṃ...sahetu, rūpaṃ*, alt tr, “seems reasonable...seems to be based on reason.” M:ÑB: “appears reasonable ...appears to be supported by reason.”

⁹³ Pasenadi is not asking about their social status, but about their future spiritual progress and attainment.

⁹⁴ The 5 factors of exertion (*padhāni-y-aṅga*): as at **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.1(16)/3:237), **Bodhi Rāja, kumāra S** (M 85.58/2:95), **Padhāniyaṇa S** (A 5.53/3:65), **Patthāna S** (A 5.135/3:152-154), and **Senāsana S** (A 10.11/5:15). See Intro (1) above.

⁹⁵ “Mental cankers,” *āsava*, lit “inflow, outflow,” fr *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously tr as taints (“deadly taints”, RD), cankers, corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the canker of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjā’āsava*) (D 16.2.4; Pm 1.442, 561; Dhs §§1096-1100; Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 cankers (omitting the canker of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

⁹⁶ Comys here mention 4 kinds of faith:

(1) faith through attainment (*āgamanīya, saddhā*, other Comys: *āgamana, saddhā*), that is, the faith of the “omniscient” Bodhisattva [one bound to become a fully self-awakened one] by mastering it since his firm resolve (to become Buddha) (*sabbaññū, bodhisattānaṃ saddhā abhinīhārato paṭṭhāya āgatattā*);

(2) faith through realization [understanding] (*adhigama, saddhā*), that is, the attainment of the noble saints through realization [understanding] (*ariya, sāvakānaṃ paṭivedhena adhigatattā*);

(3) faith by conviction (*okappana, saddhā*), that is, conviction by way of unshakability [unshakable faith] when it is said [when he hears the words], “Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha” (*Buddho dhammo saṅgho ti vutte acala, bhāvena okappanaṃ*);

(4) faith of calm joy [“confidence of trust” (Gethin 2001:115 n51)] (*pasāda, saddhā*), that is, the arising of calm and joyful faith (*pasād’uppatti*). (DA 2:529; MA 3:325 f = AA 3:257)

See **Pubba, koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44/5:220-222) = SD 10.7 Intro (1) (2005).

‘Such is he, the Blessed One, an arhat, the fully self-awakened one, accomplished in wisdom and conduct, well-farer, knower of worlds, peerless guide of tamable persons, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.’

(2) He is free from illness and affliction, possessing a good digestion that is neither too cool nor too warm but medium, and able to bear the strain of exertion.

(3) He is honest and sincere,⁹⁷ and shows himself as he really is to teachers, the wise and companions in the holy life.

(4) He dwells energetic in abandoning unwholesome states, in promoting wholesome states, steadfast, resolute in his effort and not shirking from the task of cultivating wholesome states.⁹⁸

(5) He is wise: he possesses wisdom regarding the arising and falling away (of things) that is noble and penetrative, and that leads to the complete destruction of suffering.

These are the five factors of exertion.

10c There are these four castes, maharajah—the nobles, the brahmins, the merchants, and the workers. Now if they possessed these five factors of exertion, it would be for their welfare and happiness for a long time.”

Differences amongst the castes

11a “Venerable sir, there are these four castes, venerable sir—the nobles, the brahmins, the merchants [129] and the workers. Now if they possessed these five factors of exertion, would there be any difference amongst them here in this respect?”

“Here, maharajah, I say that the difference amongst them would lie in the diversity of their exertion.

Suppose⁹⁹ there were two tamable elephants or tamable horses or tamable oxen that were well tamed and well disciplined, and two tamable elephants or tamable horses or tamable oxen that were untamed and undisciplined.

What do you think, maharajah? Would the two tamable elephants or tamable horses or tamable oxen that were well tamed and well disciplined, being tamed, assume the nature of the tamed, would they attain to the level of the tamed?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“And would the two tamable elephants or tamable horses or tamable oxen that were untamed and undisciplined assume the nature of the tamed, would they attain to the level of the tamed, like the two tamable elephants or tamable horses or tamable oxen that were well tamed and well disciplined?”

“No, venerable sir.”

11b “Even so, maharajah, it is not possible that what can be achieved by one who has faith, free from illness, honest and sincere, energetic, and wise, could be achieved by one who has no faith, has much illness, fraudulent, deceitful, lazy, and unwise.”

12a “Well-reasoned is what the Blessed One said, based on good reason is what the Blessed One said.

There are these four castes, venerable sir—the nobles, the brahmins, the merchants, and the workers. Now if they possessed these five factors of exertion, and if they were to make the right exertions,¹⁰⁰ would there be any difference amongst them here in this respect?”

“Here, maharajah, I say that among them there is no difference, that is, between the liberation of the one and the liberation of the others.

⁹⁷ *Asaṭho amāyāvī*, “not fraudulent, no deceitful” (A 3:65, 153; S 4:298; cf 299).

⁹⁸ *Āradḍha, viriyo viharati akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ upasampadāya thāma-vā dalha, parakkamo anikkhitta, dhuro kusalesu dhammesu.*

⁹⁹ Cf M 3:130.

¹⁰⁰ *Te c’ assu samma-p, padhānā*, ie (1) the effort towards the non-arising of unarisen evil unwholesome states (*samvara-p, padhāna*); (2) the effort towards the abandoning of arisen evil unwholesome states (*pahāna-p, padhāna*); (3) the effort towards the arising of unarisen wholesome states (*bhāvana-p, padhāna*); the effort towards the maintenance of arisen wholesome states (*anurakkhana-p, padhāna*) (D 3:221; M 2:11; S 5:244; A 2:15/4:462; Vbh 208). See (**Cattāro**) **Padhāna S** (A 4.14/2:16 f) = SD 10.2 (2005).

The firewood simile

12b Suppose¹⁰¹ a man takes dry teak [sāka] wood,¹⁰² lights a fire and produces heat. Then another man takes dry sal wood, lights a fire and produces heat. [130] Then another man takes dry mango wood, lights a fire and produces heat. Then another man takes dry wood of the glomerous fig tree [udumbara], lights a fire and produces heat.

What do you think, maharajah?

Would there be any difference amongst these fires lit with different kinds of wood, that is, between the flame of the one and the flames of the others, or between the colour of the one and the colours of the others, or between the radiance of the one and the radiance of the others?"

"No, venerable sir."

"So too, maharajah, when a fire is kindled by energy, lit by exertion, there is, I say, no difference, that is, between the liberation of the one and the liberation of the others."

What gods are there?

13 "What the Blessed One has said seems reasonable, what the Blessed One has said seems to be based on reason.

Now, venerable sir, **what gods are there?**"¹⁰³

"Maharajah, why do you ask, 'Now, venerable sir, what gods are there?'"

"Venerable sir, I am asking whether those gods return to this (human) state or whether they do not."¹⁰⁴

"Maharajah, those gods who are still malevolent¹⁰⁵ return to this (human) state, those gods who are no longer malevolent do not return to this (human) state."¹⁰⁶

14a When this was said, general Viḍḍabha asked the Blessed One,

"Venerable sir, can those gods who are still malevolent and who return to this [human] state topple or banish from that place those gods who are no longer malevolent and who do not return to this [human] state?"

Then the venerable Ānanda thought,

"This general Viḍḍabha is the son of the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala, and I am the son of the Blessed One. This is the time for one son to talk with the other."

He said to the general Viḍḍabha,

"General, I shall ask you a question in return. Answer it as you please.

General, what do you think? As far as the realm that the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala has conquered, where he wields lordship and sovereignty, [131] can the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala topple or banish from there any recluse or brahmin, regardless whether that recluse or brahmin has merit or not, and whether he leads the holy life or not?"

¹⁰¹ Cf M 2:152, 183.

¹⁰² IB Horner thinks *sāka* is probably teak, *Tectonia grandis* (M:H 2:311 n1).

¹⁰³ *Kim pana bhante atthi devā ti?* Comy gives a list of devas (MA 3:359); See A 1:210, 3:287, 313, 516, 5:331, 334. See Intro (5).

¹⁰⁴ It is possible here that Pasenadi is asking about non-returners (*anāgāmi*). Analayo: According to **MĀ 212** = T1.794c9, in his question Pasenadi asks if afflicted devas are reborn in this world and devas free from affliction are beyond being reborn in this world. Thus, MĀ 212 attributes to Pasenadi's question what according to M 90 was the Buddha's answer (2005 at M 2:230 n). See Intro 3 above.

¹⁰⁵ *Savyāpajjhā*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ye te mahārāja devā savyāpajjhā* [Be v1 *sabyābajjhā*], *te devā āgantāro itthattāni*. *Ye te devā abyāpajjhā* [Be v1 *abyābajjhā*], *te devā anāgantāro itthattāni*. Comy's explanation of this reply (MA 3:359 f) suggests that the former class of gods are non-returners (*anāgāmi*), while the latter class are gods who have not attained the status of non-returners. The same applies to the question on the Brahmas [15] below. See "Non-return," Intro 3 above.

“Sir, as far as the realm that the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala has conquered, where he wields lordship and sovereignty, he can topple or banish from there any recluse or brahmin, regardless of whether that recluse or brahmin has merit or not, and whether he leads the holy life or not.”

“General, what do you think? As far as the realm that the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala has not conquered, where he does not wield lordship and sovereignty, can the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala topple or banish from there any recluse or brahmin, regardless whether that recluse or brahmin has merit or not, and whether he leads the holy life or not?”

“Sir, as far as the realm that the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala has not conquered, where he does not wield lordship and sovereignty, he *cannot* topple or banish from there any recluse or brahmin, regardless of whether that recluse or brahmin has merit or not, and whether he leads the holy life or not.”

“General, what do you think? Have you heard of the gods of the Thirty-three?”

“Yes, sir, I have heard of them. And the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala, too, has heard of them.”

“General, what do you think? Can the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala topple the gods of the Thirty-three or banish them from there?”

“Sir, the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala cannot even see the gods of the Thirty-three, so how could he ever topple them or banish them from there?”

14b “Even so, general, those gods who are still malevolent and who return to this [human] state cannot even see those gods who are no longer malevolent and who do not return to this [human] state. So how could they topple them or banish them from there?”

What Brahmas are there?

15 Then the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala asked the Blessed One:

“Venerable sir, what is this monk’s name?”¹⁰⁷

“His name is Ānanda, maharajah.”

“He is truly Ānanda [joyful], venerable sir, and he appears as Ānanda [joyful]. What **[132]** the venerable Ānanda has said seems reasonable, what the venerable Ānanda has said seems to be based on reason. Now, venerable sir, **what Brahmās are there?**”

“Why do you ask, ‘Now, venerable sir, what Brahmās are there?’?”

“Venerable sir, I was asking whether those Brahmas return to this [human] state or whether they do not.”

“Maharajah, those Brahmas who are still malevolent return to this [human] state, those Brahmas who are no longer malevolent do not return to his [human] state.”¹⁰⁸

Sañjaya and Viḍḍabha

16 Then a man [worker] announced to the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala,

“Maharajah, Sañjaya, the brahmin of the Ākāsa clan, has come.”

The rajah Pasenadi of Kosala asked Sañjaya, the brahmin of the Ākāsa clan,

“Brahmin, who introduced this talk into the palace?”

“Maharajah, it was the general Viḍḍabha!”¹⁰⁹

General Viḍḍabha (then) said thus,

“Maharajah, it was Sañjaya, the brahmin of the Ākāsa clan!”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ On Pasenadi’s not knowing Ānanda, see Intro (9).

¹⁰⁸ On the connection this para has with non-return (*anāgāmi*), see §13 n. Up to this point, we surmise that Pasenadi is delighted with the Buddha’s answer. Marasinghe, however, thinks that the Buddha and Ānanda are at cross-purposes with Pasenadi and Viḍḍabha, but he consequently gives no explanation for Viḍḍabha’s strange question and Ānanda’s equally strange reply (Marasinghe 1974:126).

¹⁰⁹ This episode follows up from §6. It is interesting note the psychological undercurrents here, suggestive of **Viḍḍabha**’s restless mind: see his story in Intro 7.

¹¹⁰ See §6 above where Viḍḍabha first says it is Sañjaya who made the wrong statement.

Pasenadi takes leave

17 Then a man [worker] announced to the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala,¹¹¹
 “Maharajah, it is time to depart.”¹¹²

The rajah Pasenadi of Kosala said to the Blessed One:¹¹³

“Venerable sir, we have asked the Blessed One about omniscience, and the Blessed One has answered about omniscience. We approve of that and accept it, and so we are satisfied [joyful].

We have asked the Blessed One about purification in the four castes, and the Blessed One has answered about purification. We approve of that and accept it, and so we are satisfied [joyful].

We have asked the Blessed One about the <superior> devas,¹¹⁴ and the Blessed One has answered about the <superior> devas. We approve of that and accept it, and so we are satisfied [joyful].

We have asked the Blessed One about the <superior> Brahmas,¹¹⁵ and the Blessed One has answered about the <superior> Brahmas. We approve of that and accept it, and so we are satisfied [joyful].

Whatever we asked the Blessed One, that the Blessed One has answered. We approve of them and accept them, and so we are satisfied. [133]

And now, venerable sir, we depart. Many are my duties, much there is to be done.”

“Please, maharajah, do as you deem fit here.”¹¹⁶

The rajah Pasenadi of Kosala, joyfully approving of the Blessed One’s words, rose from his seat, bowed down to him, and, keeping the Blessed One to his right, departed.

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¹¹¹ This “man” (*aññatari puriso*, “a certain person”) is clearly a courtier who, sensing a dispute brewing, tactfully suggests their departure.

¹¹² *Yāna, kālo mahārājā ti*. According to our sutta here, the Buddha has already fully answered king Pasenadi’s question, but according to Chinese **Āgama** version (MĀ 212 = T1.795a24) this messenger arrives before the Buddha could give a full reply.

¹¹³ On the significance of Pasenadi’s reply to the Buddha, see Intro (4).

¹¹⁴ “About the <superior> devas,” *adhiveve*, see Intro (4).

¹¹⁵ “About the <superior> Brahmās,” *adhībrahmānaṃ*, see Intro (4).

¹¹⁶ *Yassa dāni tvam mahārāja kālam maññasī ti*, lit “Please do what you think it is now the time to do.” This is stock: **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.103/1:85 = SD 8.10); **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.6/2:104 = SD 13), **Sekha S** (M 53.3/1:354 = SD 21.14), **Kaṇṇaka-t, thala S** (M 90.17/2:132 f = SD 10.8); **Puṇṇ’ovāda S** (M 145.6/3:269 = S 35.88/4:62,31 = SD 20.15), **Avassuta S** (S 35.243/4:183,15,30), **Khemā Therī S** (S 44.1/4:379,29), **Vesālī S** (S 54.9/5:321,16,17) & **Thapatayā S** (S 55.6/5:348,27). See Joy Manné, “On a departure formula and its translation,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 10, 1993:27-43.

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