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Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta

The Greater Discourse on the Lion-roar | M 12,17-19 + 32-43 (excerpts)¹

For full translation, see SD 49.1

Theme: The Buddha's knowledge of the worlds

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003; rev 2010

Introduction

1.1 The Sutta opens with Sāriputta telling the Buddha that Sunakkhatta,² who had recently left the order, has been going around claiming that the Buddha “does not have any superhuman state,³ any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones”⁴ [2]. Sunakkhatta, as such, claims that the Buddha teaches a doctrine that he has merely thought out rather than one that he has realized through transcendental wisdom. Apparently, for him, the acquisition of miraculous powers is superior to the knowledge and experience of the uprooting of suffering.

1.2 As a direct rebuttal, the Buddha expounds on the following in this Sutta:

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| the 10 powers of the Tathāgata | <i>tathāgatassa dasa,bala</i> | [§§9-21], |
| his 4 kinds of intrepidity | <i>cattāro vesārajja</i> | [§§22-28], |
| his knowledge of the 8 assemblies | <i>aṭṭha parisa</i> | [§§29-30], |
| the 4 kinds of birth | <i>catasso yoni</i> | [§§32-34], |
| the 5 destinies and nirvana | <i>pañca gati</i> | [§§35-43] and |
| the Bodhisattva's austerities | <i>atta,kilamath'ānuyoga</i> | [§§44-64], |

all of which entitle him to “roar his lion's roar in the assemblies.”

1.3 The sutta excerpts [§§17-19, 32-43] here however are meant for study in connection with **the Pātāla Sutta** (S 36.4), and **the (Pañca) Gati Sutta** (A 9.68), both of which deal with types and levels of existence.

A full translation of **the Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (M 12) is found elsewhere [SD 49.1].

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¹ For full sutta, see SD 49.1.

² The teachings of **Sunakkhatta S** (M 105) were expounded to Sunakkhatta, a man of wrath and folly, apparently before he joined the Order. The **Pāṭika S** (D 24) gives an account of his dissatisfaction and subsequent forsaking the Order because the Buddha would not perform any miracles for him or explain to him the beginning of things.

³ The superhuman states (*uttari manussa,dhamma*) are qualities and attainments beyond those of an ordinary human, comprising the ten wholesome course of action (M 9.6/1:47; elaborated at M 41.12-14/1:287 f). They also include the Absorptions (*jhāna*), the 3 direct knowledges (*abhiññā*), and the paths and fruitions (*maggā,phala*).

⁴ “any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones” (*alam ariya,ñāna,dassana,visesa*) is stock signifying all higher degrees of meditative knowledge characteristic of the noble saint. MA says that here it specifically refers to the supramundane path (*lok'uttara magga*) that Sunakkhatta claims the Buddha lacks.

The Greater Discourse on the Lion's Roar

M 12,17-19⁵

[68] 1 Thus have I heard.

The threefold knowledge

1.2 At one time the Blessed One was staying in the dense forest outside the city of Vesālī to its west...

[70] 17 (8) “Again, Sāriputta, the Tathagata **recollects his manifold past lives**, that is, one birth, two births, three births, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand, many aeons of cosmic contraction, many aeons of cosmic expansion, many aeons of cosmic contraction and expansion, [recollecting],

‘There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of joy and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of joy and pain, such my life-span. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.’ Thus he recollects his manifold past lives in their modes and details.

That too, Sāriputta, is a Tathāgata’s power that a Tathāgata has by virtue of which he claims to be a lordly bull [leading the spiritual herd], roars his lion-roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the divine wheel (*brahma, cakka*).⁶

18 (9) Again, Sāriputta, by means of the divine eye [clairvoyance],⁷ purified and surpassing the human, the Tathāgata sees **beings passing away and reappearing**, and he understands how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, **faring according to their karma**:

‘These beings—who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, and mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the body’s breaking up, after death, [71] have reappeared in a state of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, and mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the body’s breaking up, after death, have reappeared in a happy destination, in heaven.’

Thus, by means of the divine eye, he sees beings passing away and reappearing, and understands how they fare according to their karma.

That too is a Tathagata’s power...

19 (10) Again, Sāriputta, the Tathāgata right here and now, having realized for himself through direct knowledge, after attaining, dwells in the freedom of mind and the freedom by wisdom⁸ that are influx-free with **the destruction of the mental influxes**.⁹

⁵ These are excerpts. For the full sutta, see SD 49.1.

⁶ *Brahma, cakka*. Comy explains that the Divine Wheel is the supreme, best, most excellent wheel, the Wheel of Truth (*dhamma, cakka*) in its twofold meanings: the knowledge that penetrates the truth (*paṭivedha ñāṇa*) and the knowledge of how to expound the teaching (*desanā ñāṇa*) (MA 2:27 f). AA adds that former is supramundane (*lok’-uttara*) and the latter mundane (*lokiya*). Both knowledges together however are unique to the Buddha.

⁷ *dibba, cakkhu*, clairvoyance, not to be confused with the Dharma-eye (*dhamma, cakkhu*), which is a term for “entering the stream” (Stream-winning).

⁸ “Freedom of mind (*ceto, vimutti*)... freedom by wisdom (*paññā, vimutti*).” Freedom of mind is so called because the mind is freed, by way of concentration, from lust. Freedom by wisdom is so called because the mind is freed, normally through insight, from ignorance. When they are coupled and described as influx-free (*anāsava*), they jointly result from the destruction of the mental influxes by the supramundane path of arhathood.

⁹ The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), canker, corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, bad (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the influx of (1)

That too, Sāriputta, is a Tathāgata’s power that a Tathāgata has by virtue of which he claims to be the lordly bull [leading the spiritual herd], roars his lion-roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the Divine Wheel.

[M 12,32-43]¹⁰

Four kinds of birth

[73] 32 Sariputta, there are these **four kinds of birth** (*yoni*). What are the four?

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|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) The egg-born [oviparous] birth | (<i>aṇḍa,jā yoni</i>), |
| (2) The womb-born [viviparous] birth | (<i>jalābu,jā yoni</i>), |
| (3) The moisture-born birth | (<i>saṃseda,jā yoni</i>), |
| (4) The spontaneous birth | (<i>opapātikā yoni</i>). |

33 What, Sāriputta, is the **egg-born birth**?

There are, Sāriputta, these beings born by breaking out of the egg-shell—this is called the egg-born birth.

What, Sāriputta, is the **womb-born birth**?

There are, Sāriputta, these beings born by breaking out from the caul—this is called the womb-born birth.

What, Sāriputta, is **moisture-born birth**?

There are, Sāriputta, these beings born in a rotting fish, in a decomposing corpse, in decaying broth, in a cesspool, or in a sewer—this is called moisture-born birth.

What, Sāriputta, is **spontaneous birth**?

There are gods,¹¹ hell-beings, certain human beings and some beings in the lower worlds—this, Sāriputta, is called spontaneous birth.

These, Sāriputta, are the four kinds of birth.

The Buddha’s direct knowledge

34 Sāriputta, when I know and see thus, should anyone say of me: ‘The recluse Gotama does not have any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones; the recluse Gotama teaches a Dharma that he has put together through reasoning, through his own insight following his own investigations’¹²—

unless, Sāriputta, he gives up this talk, gives up this state of mind, renounces this view, it would be for him as if he were cast into hell.¹³

sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) [43] 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 under āsava.

¹⁰ These are excerpts. For the full sutta, see SD 49.1.

¹¹ The gods of the Pure Abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*), the five highest heavens of the Form World (*rūpa,loka*) are all non-returners, living out their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha (“non-declining”), Atappa (“Unworried”), Sudassā (“Clearly Visible”), Sudassī (“Clear-visioned”) and Akaṇiṭṭhā (“Highest”) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

¹² “Through his own insight, following his own investigation,” *vīmaṃsā’nucaritam sayam paṭibhānam*; cf “following his own line of inquiry as it occurs to him” (M:ÑB 167). Recurs at §43.

¹³ The phrase *yathā,bhatam nikkhitto evam niraye* is difficult sentence (M 1:71; S 4:325; A 1:8, 105, 292, 297, 2:71, 83; It 12, 14, 26), and here is rendered following the Comy gloss: “He will be cast into hell as if carried off and put there by the wardens of hell.” (MA 2:32). Alt tr “according to his deserts he will be, as it were, dropped off in hell” (S:B 1346::S 42.9/4:325). “Although such a fate may sound excessively severe merely for verbal denigration, it should be remembered that he is maligning a Fully Awakened Buddha with a mind of hatred, with the intention of discouraging others from entering upon the path that could lead them to complete freedom from suffering.” (Ñāna-

34.2 Sāriputta, just as a monk possessed of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom would here and now attain [enjoy] final knowledge, so, too, Sāriputta, I speak of this accomplishment.

Unless he gives up this talk, gives up this state of mind, renounces this view, it would be for him as if he were cast into hell.

The 5 destinies and nirvana (in brief)

35 Sāriputta, there are these **five destinies** (*gati*). What are the five?

Hell, the animal womb, the realm of the departed, humans and gods.

36 (1) Sāriputta, I understand **hell**, and the path and way leading to hell, too. And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, with the body's breaking up, after death, reappear in a state of misery, a bad destination, a suffering state, in hell.

(2) Sāriputta, I understand **the animal womb**, and the path and way leading to the animal womb, too. And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, with the body's breaking up, after death, reappear in the animal womb.

(3) Sāriputta, I understand **the realm of the departed [the pretas]**, and the path and way leading to the realm of the departed. And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, with the body's breaking up, after death, reappear in the realm of the departed.

(4) Sāriputta, I understand **human beings**, and the path and way leading to the human world. And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, with the body's breaking up, after death, reappear among human beings.

(5) Sāriputta, I understand **the gods**, and the path and way leading to the world of the gods. And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, with the body's breaking up, after death, reappear in a state of joy, a happy destination, in heaven.

(6) Sāriputta, I understand **nirvana**, and the path and way leading to nirvana. [74] And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, here and now enter upon and abide, influx-free, in the freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom, with the destruction of the mental influxes.

The 5 destinies and nirvana (in detail)

37 (1) THE HELLS. Sāriputta, by fully grasping (another's) mind with (my own) mind, I understand that¹⁴ person thus: 'This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, with the body's breaking up, after death, *would* reappear in a state of misery, a bad destination, a suffering state, in **hell**.'

And then later, with the divine eye, that is purified and surpasses the human, I saw that with the body's breaking up, after death, he *had* reappeared in a state of misery, a bad destination, a suffering state, in hell, experiencing extremely painful, racking, piercing feelings.¹⁵

PARABLE OF THE FIERY COAL PIT. Suppose, Sāriputta, there were a fiery coal pit deeper than a man's height, full of glowing coals with neither flame nor smoke; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a one-way path leading directly¹⁶ to that same fiery coal pit.

Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: 'This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, will come to this same fiery coal pit'; and then later on he sees that he has fallen into that fiery coal pit, experiencing extremely painful, racking, piercing feelings.

moli *The Lion's Roar: Two Discourses of the Buddha* (WH 390/391), rev ed Bhikkhu Bodhi. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1993 n17)

¹⁴ "That," *ekacce*, lit "a certain (person)." In view of the amplified tr here, "that" gives better sense here,

¹⁵ "Experiencing extremely painful, racking, piercing feelings," *ek'anta, dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā vediyamānam*, ie unending, continuous pain and suffering (MA :37). Cf [§§38-39nn].

¹⁶ "By a one-way path leading directly," *ekāyanena maggena*. See SD 13(3.2).

So too, Sāriputta, by fully grasping (another's) mind with (my own) mind, I understand that¹⁷ person thus: 'This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, after death, when the body has broken up, *would* reappear in a state of misery, a bad destination, a suffering state, in hell.'

And then later, with the divine eye, that is purified and surpasses the human, I saw that with the body's breaking up, after death, he *had* reappeared in a state of misery, a bad destination, a suffering state, in hell, experiencing extremely painful, racking, piercing feelings.

38 (2) THE ANIMAL WOMB. Sāriputta, by fully grasping (another's) mind with (my own) mind, I understand that person thus: 'This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, with the body's breaking up, after death, *would* reappear in **the animal womb**.'

And then later on, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw that with the body's breaking up, after death, he *had* reappeared in the animal womb, experiencing painful, racking, piercing feelings.¹⁸

PARABLE OF THE CESSPOOL. Suppose, Sāriputta, there were a cesspool deeper than a man's height full of filth; and then a man [75] scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a one-way path leading directly to that same cesspool.

Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: 'This person behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, will come to this same cesspool'; and then later on he sees that he has fallen into that cesspool, experiencing painful, racking, piercing feelings.

So too, Sāriputta, by fully grasping mind with mind, I understand that person thus: 'This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, after death, when the body had broken up, *would* reappear in the animal womb.

And then later, with the divine eye, that is purified and surpasses the human, I saw that with the body's breaking up, after death, he *had* reappeared in a state of animal womb, experience extremely painful, racking, piercing feelings.

39 (3) THE REALM OF THE DEPARTED. Sāriputta, by fully grasping (another's) mind with (my own) mind, I understand that person thus: 'This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, after death, when the body has broken up, *would* reappear in **the realm of the departed [the pretas]**.'

And then later on, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw that after death, when the body has broken up, he *had* reappeared in the realm of the departed, experiencing much painful feeling.¹⁹

PARABLE OF THE TREE ON UNEVEN GROUND. Suppose, Sāriputta, there were a tree growing on uneven ground with scanty foliage casting a dappled shade; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a one-way path leading directly to that same tree.

Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: 'This person behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, will come to this same tree'; and then later on he sees that he is sitting or lying in the shade of that tree, experiencing much painful feeling.

So too, Sāriputta, by fully grasping mind with mind, I understand that person thus: 'This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, after death, when the body had broken up, *would* reappear in the realm of the departed [the pretas].

And then later, with the divine eye, that is purified and surpasses the human, I saw that with the body's breaking up, after death, he *had* reappeared in the realm of the departed, experiencing much painful feeling.

¹⁷ "That," *ekacce*, lit "a certain (person)." In view of the amplified tr here, "that" gives better sense here,

¹⁸ "Experiencing painful, racking, piercing feelings" (*dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā vediyamānam*), with *ek'anta* omitted, ie, the suffering here is not as bad as in the hells [§37n].

¹⁹ "Experiencing much pain," *dukkha, bahulā vedanā vediyamānam*, signifying great suffering, but sometimes with a little happiness (MA 2:38 f). Cf [§36n]

40 (4) HUMANS. Sāriputta, by fully grasping (another’s) mind with (my own) mind, I understand that person thus: ‘This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, after death, when the body has broken up, *would* reappear among **human beings**.’

And then later on, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw that after death, when the body has broken up, he *had* reappeared in he had reappeared among human beings, experiencing much pleasant feeling.

PARABLE OF THE TREE ON EVEN GROUND. Suppose, Sāriputta, there were a tree growing on even ground with thick foliage casting a deep shade; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a one-way path leading directly to that same tree.

Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: ‘This person behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, will come to this same tree’; and then later on he sees that he is sitting or lying in the shade of that tree, experiencing much pleasant feeling.

So too, Sāriputta, by fully grasping mind with mind, I understand that person thus: ‘This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, after death, when the body had broken up, he *had* reappeared among human beings, experiencing much pleasant feeling.

[76] 41 (5) THE HEAVENLY WORLD. Sāriputta, by fully grasping (another’s) mind with (my own) mind, I understand that person thus: ‘This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, after death, when the body has broken up, *would* reappear in a happy destination, in **the heavenly world**.’

And then, later on, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw that after death, when the body has broken up, he *had* reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world, experiencing extremely pleasant feelings.

PARABLE OF THE MANSION’S UPPER CHAMBER. Suppose, Sāriputta, there were a mansion’s upper chamber, plastered within and without, protected from the wind, secured with bars, with windows shuttered, and in it are a couch spread with long-furred rugs, embroidered white woollen sheets, choice rugs of Kadalī deer hide, spreads with red canopies, and crimson double rests [crimson pillows and bolsters] for the head and feet,²⁰ and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, comes by a one-way path leading directly to that same mansion.

Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: ‘This person behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, will come to this same mansion’; and later on he sees that he is sitting or lying in that upper chamber in that mansion, experiencing extremely pleasant feelings.

So too, by fully grasping mind with mind I understand, I understand that person thus: ‘This person, behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, after death, when the body had broken up, had reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world, experiencing extremely pleasant feelings.

42 (6) DESTRUCTION OF THE MENTAL INFLUXES. Sāriputta, by fully grasping (another’s) mind with (my own) mind, I understand that person thus: ‘This person behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, here and now *would* enter upon and dwell in the freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom that are influx-free with **the destruction of the mental influxes**.’

And then later on I saw that by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, he here and now *had* entered upon and dwelt in the freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom that are influx-free with the destruction of the mental influxes, experiencing extremely pleasant feelings.²¹

PARABLE OF THE CLEAR POOL. Suppose, Sāriputta, there were a pond with clean, agreeable, cool water, transparent, with smooth banks, delightful, and nearby a dense wood; and then a man scorched and

²⁰ *ubhato,lohitaḥpadhāno*, alt tr “crimson rests at both ends (of the couch).” See **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1.15/1:7) & **Venāga S** (A 3.63.3b/1:181) = SD 21.1, for a more detailed list.

²¹ Comy: Even though the description here is the same as that of the heavenly happiness, the meaning is different. For the happiness of heaven is not really extremely pleasant because the fevers of lust, etc are still present there. But the bliss of nirvana is extremely pleasant in every way through the subsiding of all fevers. (MA 2:40)

exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a one-way path leading directly to that same pond.

Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: ‘This person behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, will come to this same pond’; and then later on he sees that he has plunged into the pond, bathed, drunk and relieved of all his distress, tiredness and fever, and has come out again and is sitting or [77] lying in the dense forest, experiencing extremely pleasant feelings.

So too, Sāriputta, by fully grasping mind with mind I understand, I understand that person thus: ‘This person behaving thus, conducting himself thus, having taken such a path, by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, here and now *would* enter upon and dwell in the freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom that are influx-free with the destruction of the mental influxes.’

And then later on I saw that by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, he here and now *had* entered upon and dwelt in the freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom that are influx-free with the destruction of the mental influxes, experiencing extremely pleasant feelings.

These, Sāriputta, are the five destinies.

The teaching’s significance

43 Sāriputta, when I know and see thus, should anyone say of me: ‘The recluse Gotama does not have any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones; the recluse Gotama teaches a Dharma that he has put together through reasoning, through his own insight, following his own investigations²²—unless, Sāriputta, he gives up this talk, gives up this state of mind, renounces this view, it would be for him as if he were cast into hell.

Sāriputta, just as a monk possessed of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom would here and now enjoy final knowledge, so it would be in this case, I say, Sāriputta, that unless he gives up this talk, gives up this state of mind, renounces this view, it would be for him as if he were cast into hell.²³

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²² “Through his own insight, following his own investigation,” *vīmaṃsā’nucaritam sayam,paṭibhānam*. Recurs at §34 (qv).

²³ These are excerpts. For the full sutta, see SD 49.1.