

15

Bakkula Sutta

The Discourse on Bakkula or “Bakkula’s Lion-roar” | M 124

Theme: The post-Buddha ideal monk

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003, rev 2010

1 Introduction

1.1 BAKKULA

1.1.1 The Bakkula Sutta (M 124) is an early glorified account of the arhat monk Bakkula, recounting in detail his qualities and conduct as being worthy of emulation. The Sutta has a counterpart in the Madhyama Āgama translated into Chinese towards the end of the 4th century by the Kashmiri monk **Gautama Saṅghadeva**, “from what appears to have been a Prākṛit original transmitted by a Sarvāstivāda tradition.”¹ A higher criticism² and comparative study of the Sutta has been done by **Analayo** (2007).

1.1.2 Buddhaghosa, in his Visuddhi,magga, briefly mentions Bakkula’s origins:

When the venerable Bakkula was an infant, while being bathed in the river [Yamunā] on an auspicious day, he fell into the currents on account of his careless nurse. A fish swallowed him up and brought him to a ford at Bārāṇasī. There it was caught by a fisherman and sold to a seth’s³ daughter. She loved the fish and thinking of cooking it herself, she slit it open. Having done so, she saw a child like a golden image inside the fish. “I’ve found a son!” she cried out in delight. Thus the venerable Bakkula’s healthy condition while in the fish’s belly in his last birth is due to “the power of pervasive knowledge” (*ñāṇa, vipphāra iddhi*), that is, “by the power of the impending arhat path and knowledge due to him” (*paṭilabhitabba arahatta, magga, ñāṇa, - dassanānubhāvena*) in that life. But the story should be told in detail.⁴ (Vism 12.27/379)

On learning of his origins, she asked permission of his parents to keep him. The king decided that the two families should have him in common. Hence his name Bā,kula or Ba-k,kula (“two families”).⁵ After a prosperous life, at the age of 80, he heard the Buddha teaching and decided to renounce the world. On the eighth day, he gained awakening. Later, the Buddha declared Bakkula to be foremost of the monks who has good health (A 1:25).⁶ His freedom from illness is said to be due to the deeds of healing he did under the past Buddhas, Anoma,dassī (AA 1:304) and Vipassī (AA 1:305 f).

¹ Analayo 2007: 2. On the language of the Madhyama Āgama MS, cf Bapat 1969: 5; Enomoto 1986: 20 and Hinüber 1982: 250. On its school affiliation, cf Enomoto 1984; Lü 1963: 242; Mayeda 1985: 98; Thich Minh Chau 1991: 27; Waldschmidt 1980: 136; and Yin-shun 1983: 703.

² J A Cuddon: “In biblical studies **higher criticism** is concerned with the date and composition of the Scriptures, their authorship, their-inter-relationship and their cultural and historical backgrounds. This critical technique has its roots in the University of Göttingen late in the 18th cent. During the 19th cent it was extended far beyond biblical studies and adopted as a discipline.” (*The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd ed, 1992. The “**lower**” or **textual criticism** is the study and analysis of extant texts in order to determine authorship and authenticity and, where there is a multiplicity of texts of one work, to determine which one is the original or the best reading, often with the purpose of reconstructing the original text.

³ “Seth” is the modern Indian cognate for *setṭhī*, and an anglicized term found in OED.

⁴ Bakkula’s story is found in MA 4:190; AA 1:304 ff; ThaA 2:87 ff.

⁵ MA 4:190 ff. See JPTS 1886:94 ff for an explanation of *bakkula* as a word (not a proper name).

⁶ For a problem in this connection, see Miln 215 ff.

1.1.3 During our Buddha's time, Bakkula was one of the four who had great superknowledge (*mahā-bhiñña-p, patta*), the others being Sāriputta and Moggallāna, and the nun Bhaddā Kaccāna (AA 1:376). Bakkula is often mentioned as an example of a monk who practises asceticism without teaching it to others.⁷ Bakkula's three verses spoken just before he passed away is found in the Thera, gāthā.⁸

1.1.4 Each of the 35 declarations of Bakkula here is followed by a refrain ending with "... this (too) we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula" that MA 4:193 says is inserted by the elders at the Dharma Recital (Buddhist Council). The same Commentary also notes that "this discourse was included in the second saṅgaha" (*idam pana suttam dutiya, saṅgaha saṅgahitam*, MA 4:197). It is likely that the word *saṅgaha* here means "recension" or "Council," that is, the Second Buddhist Council (held at Vesālī 100 years after the Buddha's passing). It is also interesting that the Buddha is not mentioned at all in this Sutta.

1.2 ACELA KASSAPA

1.2.1 In the narrative framework, the Majjhima version gives the name of Bakkula's visitor as **Acela Kassapa** (Kassapa the naked ascetic)⁹ and reports that Bakkula's declaration has such an impact on Kassapa that he decides to go forth and eventually becomes an arhat [§39]. This episode is totally missing from the Madhyama Āgama version.

That Acela Kassapa goes forth on account of Bakkula and becomes an arhat is problematic because a number of other suttas record that his arthood occurs after hearing a different discourse by another speaker. **The Kassapa Sīha, nāda Sutta** (D 8, also called Mahā Sīhanāda Sutta) says that an exposition on asceticism by the Buddha himself inspires Acela Kassapa to join the order. He undergoes 4 months' probation (which is incumbent on those of other sects joining the order), and in due course becomes an arhat.¹⁰

According to **the Acela Kassapa Sutta 1** (S 12.17), the Buddha teaches Kassapa on whether pleasure and pain are caused by oneself, others, or both, or neither, as a result of which he is inspired to go forth and eventually become an arhat.¹¹

According to another Saṃyutta discourse, **the Acela Kassapa Sutta 2** (S 41.9), however, Acela Kassapa joins the order and becomes an arhat after meeting a former friend, the householder Citta, and discovering that Citta has progressed further than Kassapa has been able to do as a wanderer.¹²

Analayo thus concludes that

Unless one were to assume that the name Acela Kassapa refers to four different persons,¹³ the above Pali passages contradict one another. The Chinese parallels to the abovementioned discourse do not associate these different events with the same person. The Dīrgha-āgama parallel to the Kassapasīhanāda-sutta introduces its protagonist just as a Kassapa;¹⁴ and the Saṃyukta-āgama version of the meeting of the householder Citta with his former friend refers to the latter just as a naked ascetic (*acela*) and heterodox wanderer, without giving his name.¹⁵ Only the Chinese and Sanskrit fragment parallels to the discourse on the causation of pleasure and pain

⁷ For example MA 2:138; Vism 2.82/81.

⁸ Tha 225-227.

⁹ He is prob Acela(ka) 2: see SD 18.5 (1.2). On the term *acela*, see SD 18.15 (1.1).

¹⁰ D 8,24/1:176 f (SD 73.12). See **Pañca, vaggiya Pabbajjā** (Mv 1.6.32) n at "going forth," SD 1.1(9).

¹¹ S 12.17/2:18-22 (SD 18.5).

¹² S 41.9/4:302,10. Cf also von Hinüber 1997: 68.

¹³ On the 4 naked ascetics named Kassapa, see SD 18.5 (1.2).

¹⁴ DĀ 25 at T I 104c12: 迦葉.

¹⁵ SĀ 573 at T II 152a24: 阿耆毘外道.

introduce the wanderer that heard this exposition as Acela Kassapa,¹⁶ though according to them he became only a stream-enterer during the discourse and was afterwards killed by a cow. Since the Madhyama-āgama parallel to the Bakkula-sutta does not identify Bakkula's visitor (nor reports that he became an arahant), the presentations in these different Āgama discourses do not conflict with one another. (Analayo 2007:7, emphases added)

With such textual evidence, it is possible that, a certain Acela Kassapa meets the householder Citta, and inspired by Citta's teachings, and he goes on to hear the Buddha's personal teaching to him, joins the order, and in due course becomes an arhat. It is also likely that there were more than one wanderer here called Kassapa (this was a clan name, not a personal name).¹⁷

2 The ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*)

2.0 Bakkula is an example of a monk who observes some of the ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*) for the whole duration of his monk-life of 80 years. The Dīgha Commentary, for example, gives the following list of early monks who at some time at least did not lie on a bed (*nessajika*): Mahā Kassapa (120 years); Bakkula (80 years); Anuruddha (55 years); Sāriputta, Moggallāna and Bhaddiya (30 years); Soṇa (18 years); Ānanda (15 years), Raṭṭhapāla, Rāhula (12 years); and Nālaka (until his parinirvana) (DA 3:736).

The ascetic practices are all mentioned in the Pali Canon but never together in one place (except in the Parivāra, a late work).¹⁸ Some of them are given in the Vinaya, the Nikāyas and the Commentaries.¹⁹ They are discussed in some detail in Buddhaghosa's **Visuddhi,magga**,²⁰ which gives the following list of 13 ascetic practices divided into 4 groups²¹ (Vism 2/59-83):

2.1 THE 13 ASCETIC PRACTICES

A. Connected with robes

- (1) The practice of wearing dust-heap robes (*paṃsukūlik'āṅga*), which one takes up with the resolution: *gahapati,cīvaram paṭikkhipāmi, paṃsukūlik'āṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject the householder's robes; I take upon myself the practice of wearing the dust-heap robes.)
- (2) The practice of wearing (only) the 3 robes (*te,cīvarik'āṅga*), which one takes up with this resolution: *catuttha,cīvaram paṭikkhipāmi, tecīvarik'āṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject the fourth robe; I take upon myself the practice of wearing (only) the three robes.)

B. Connected with almsfood

- (3) The practice of the almsfood eater (*piṇḍapātik'āṅga*), which is taken up with the resolution: *atireka,-lābham paṭikkhipāmi, piṇḍapātik'āṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject the extra acquisitions; I take upon myself the practice of the almsfood eater.)
- (4) The practice of faring house-to-house (for almsfood) (*sapadāna,cārik'āṅga*), which is taken up with the resolution: *loluppacāram paṭikkhipāmi, sapadāna,cārik'āṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject faring according to what is desired; I take upon myself the practice of the house-to-house farer.)

¹⁶ SĀ 302 at T II 86b3; T 499 at T XIV 768c20; and fragment S 474 folio 14 R2 in Tripāṭhī (1962: 47); cf. also SHT V 1133 aA3 in Sander (1985: 128).

¹⁷ See §3 for further discussion on Bakkula S's historical problem.

¹⁸ V 5:131, 194.

¹⁹ V 3:15, M 1:30, 3:40 ff (items 1, 3, 5, 8-13); A 3:220 (items 1, 5-7, 9, 10-13), 5:219 (items 1, 5-13); B 1:59; Nm 188 (items 1-4, 7, 8, 12, 13); J 3:342, 4:8; Miln 133, 348, 351; Vism 59, 65, 72, 80; SnA 494; DhA 1:68, 2:32, 4:30.

²⁰ Vism ch 2/59-83; also Miln ch 6.

²¹ Vism 2/59-83 (Dhutaṅga,niddesa).

- (5) The practice of eating at one sitting (*ek'āsānik'aṅga*), which is taken up with the resolution: *nānāsana, bhojanam paṭikkhipāmi, ek'āsānik'aṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject eating at various sittings; I take upon myself the practice of the one-sitting eater.)
- (6) The practice of the eating almsfood from a bowl (*patta, piṇḍik'aṅga*), which is taken up with the resolution: *dutiya, bhājanam paṭikkhipāmi, patta, piṇḍik'aṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject a second vessel; I take upon myself the practice of eating from an almsbowl.)
- (7) The practice of refusing further food (*khalu, pacchā, bhattik'aṅga*), which is taken up with the resolution: *atiritta, bhojanam paṭikkhipāmi, khalu, pacchā, bhattik'aṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject the extra vessel; I take upon myself the practice of the seconds-refuser.)

C. Connected with dwelling

- (8) The practice of dwelling in the forest (*araññik'aṅga*), which is taken up with the resolution: *gāmanta, sen'āsanaṃ paṭikkhipāmi, araññik'aṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject dwelling on the fringe of a village; I take upon myself the practice of the forest-dweller.)
- (9) The practice of dwelling at the foot of a tree (*rukkha, mūlik'aṅga*), which is taken up with the resolution: *channaṃ paṭikkhipāmi, rukkha, mūlik'aṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject a covered place; I take upon myself the practice of dwelling under a tree.)
- (10) The practice of the dwelling in the open (*abbhokāsik'aṅga*), which is taken up with the resolution: *channañ ca rukkha, mūlañ ca paṭikkhipāmi, abbhokāsik'aṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject a closed place and the foot of a tree; I take upon myself the practice of the open-air dweller.)
- (11) The practice of dwelling in a cemetery (*sosānik'aṅga*), which is taken up with the resolution: *asusānaṃ paṭikkhipāmi, sosānik'aṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject what is not a cemetery; I take upon myself the practice of the cemetery-dweller.)
- (12) The practice of being satisfied with whatever dwelling (*yathā-santhatik'aṅga*), which is taken up with the resolution: *senāsana, loluppaṃ paṭikkhipāmi, yathā, santhatik'aṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject dwelling according to what is desired; I take upon myself the practice of being satisfied with any dwelling.)

D. Connected with effort

- (13) The practice of the sleeping (only) in the sitting posture (*nesajjik'aṅga*) which is taken up with the resolution: *seyyam paṭikkhipāmi, nesajjik'aṅgam samādiyāmi* (I reject the lying posture; I take upon myself the practice of the sitter.)

2.2 ANALYSIS OF THE ASCETIC PRACTICES

2.2.1 In terms of dependence (*nissaya*), the 13 ascetic practices can be divided into 2 categories:

- (1) dependence on the supports of life (*paccaya*), ie the first 12 practices, and
- (2) dependence on effort (*virīya*), ie the last item.

The 13 ascetic practices can also be categorized according to the kind of practitioner: monks (all of them); nuns (8 kinds: 1-6, 12, 13); novices (all except 2); women probationers and women novices (identical with those of the nuns' except for 2); lay disciples (5 & 6). Practices nos 9 & 10 can only be observed outside the rains-retreat.

2.2.2 The 13 practices may be summarized into 8 types divided into 2 groups:

- (1) **Principal practices** (*sīs'aṅga*), that is, the house-to-house farer (includes the almsfood eater); the one-sitting eater (includes bowl-food eater and the seconds-refuser); and the open-air dweller (makes obsolete the practice of dwelling at the foot of a tree and of being satisfied with any dwelling).
- (2) **Individual practices** (*asambhinn'aṅga*), that is, the last 5 of the 13.

The ascetic practices can be observed on 3 levels: the strict, the medium, and the mild. In the case of the forest-dweller, for example, one who is strict must always meet the dawn in the forest. The medium one is allowed to live on the village fringe for 4 months of the rains (ie living in the forest for 8 months only); and the mild one, for the cold months, too (ie living in the forest for 4 months only).

2.3 OPTIONAL PRACTICES

These ascetic practices are optional and only recommended where they help in overcoming various defilements. In cases where they may aggravate one's defilements, they should not be practised. The wrong reasons for their practice (such as for the sake of charisma or status) are deprecated in **the Cūḷa Assaṅga Sutta** (M 40).²²

Readings on *dhutaṅga*

Visuddhi, magga

1979 [Vism:Ñ] *The Path of Purification*, tr Ñāṇamoli. (Vism: Ñ) **The Path of Purification**, tr Ñāṇamoli [1956] 2nd ed, Colombo: A. Semage, 1964. 3rd ed Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975. 4th ed BPS, 1979 [with corrections by Douglas Stevens, Canada: errata at the end]. xlx 885pp hb. ch 2.

Khantipalo [Laurence Mills]

1965 *With Robes and Bowl*, Kandy: BPS, Wheel series 82/83.

1979 *Banner of the Arahants*, Kandy: BPS, 1979:110 ff.

3 Higher criticism of the Sutta

3.1 The Bakkula Sutta raises some interesting questions in the study of early Buddhism.²³ Both the Pali and the Āgama versions of the Sutta reveal that, though their main thrust is similar, several differences can be found in their details. We have already discussed the problem of Acela Kassapa's identity [1.2]. A unique feature of the Bakkula Sutta is that each of Bakkula's qualities is by the following acclamative refrain:

(That the venerable Bakkula <has such and such a quality>—this we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.) [§§3 etc]

3.2 As noted by Analayo, this statement is “rather unusual for discourses found in the Āgamas or Nikāyas (2007: 13). In fact, this is the *only* place where such a statement is found. Analayo concludes,

These repeated acclamations reveal that, from the perspective of the reciters, Bakkula's mode of conduct was considered highly praiseworthy, that for them he was a model arahant.

Another noteworthy point is that this depiction of Bakkula as a model arahant does not belong to the earliest stages of the history of the Buddhist order. (Analayo 2007:13 f)

The Sutta commentary supports this conclusion: it says that the Bakkula Sutta was included in the canonical collection only at the Second Council (MA 4:197).²⁴

²² M 40/1:281-284 and the Parivāra (V 6); cf PED: dhuta.

²³ This section is mostly a summary of the findings of **Analayo**, 2007. [1]

²⁴ *Idam pana suttam dutiya, saṅgahe saṅgītaṃ*. The 2nd Council (the Council of Vesālī) was held 100 or 110 years after the 1st Council (the Council of Rājagaha) which is traditionally said to have been held 3 months after the Buddha's passing.

3.3 A further puzzling point is that all the praiseworthy qualities of Bakkula acclaimed by the Council elders (as found in the Sutta) point to the notion that Bakkula is living the life of a hermit. Yet in both the Pali and the Āgama versions, he readily addresses other monks during his discussion with his visitor, and also announces his impending death to other monks [§40]. Of course, it is possible that Bakkula meets his visitor very shortly before he (Bakkula) dies, and knows that his time is near, he returns to the monastic fold.

3.4 Be that as it may, the qualities that the second council elders attributed to Bakkula as being worthy of emulating are not regarded so in the early Suttas. Analayo points out the following discrepancies between some of Bakkula’s qualities and those taught in the Suttas:

Text	Bakkula Sutta (M 15)	Early Suttas
§21	“I do not recall ever having taught the Dharma to a woman, even as a four-line stanza ... ”	Vinaya: the Buddha sends Ānanda to instruct king Pasenadi’s harem (V 4:158); and also the king’s wives (S 55.6/5:351).
§§23-25	“I do not recall ever having taught the Dharma to a nun ... a female probationer ... a female novice ... ” [General] [Not teaching others]	Nandak’ovāda Sutta: the Buddha instructs monks to take turns to teach the nuns (M 146/3:270; SĀ 276 = T2.73c25); an offence otherwise (V 2:264). Aparihānāya Dhammā Sutta 1-2 admonishes 7 qualities (respect for the 3 Jewels, the training, mental concentration, amenability, spiritual friendship) that one should cultivate and encourage in others, too (A 7.33-34/4:29-31). Mahā Gopālaka Sutta: one should admonish others (M 33/1:221; A 2.8/5:349; SĀ 1249 = T2.343a5; EĀ 49.1 = T 2.794b8 & T123 = T2.546b15).

3.5 Furthermore, **the Dhammaññū Sutta** (A 7.34) compares those concerned only with their own welfare to those who are concerned with both their own welfare and that of others, clarifying that the latter is more praiseworthy.²⁵ **The Ratha,vinīta Sutta** (M 24) and its Āgama parallels highlight that Puṇṇa Mantāṇi,putta is praiseworthy not only because he possesses various good qualities himself, but also because he teaches others how to develop the same qualities.²⁶

3.6 Even a monk like **Revata Khadira,vaniya**, the acacia forest dweller, renowned for his solitary life-style,²⁷ would still make a point of proclaiming that he feels himself a friend and comrade to all, being compassionate towards all beings.²⁸

²⁵ A 7.64,9/4:115 f (SD 30.10).

²⁶ M 24/1:145; MĀ 9 = T 1.430a10; EĀ 39.10 = T2.734a9. On the importance of benefitting others amongst the early disciples, see Aronson 1980:11-23.

²⁷ A 1.14/1:24, where Revata is stated to be foremost of those who live in forests (*āraññika*). Cf M 32/1:213; MĀ 184 = T1.727b3; EĀ 37.3 = T2.710c24; T154 = T3.81a27, which record his praises in favour of living in seclusion.

²⁸ In **Revata Khadira,vaniya Tha**, he declares that he is “a friend to all, a companion to all, compassionate to all beings, | And I cultivate a heart of lovingkindness, always delighting in being free from anger “ (*sabba,mitto sabba,sakho sabba,bhūtānukampako | mettāṃ cittaṃ ca bhāvēmi avyāpajjha,rato sadā*, Tha 648).

3.7 For those monastics who lack teaching skills, they could always help out in various monastic tasks. To assist fellow monastics in their tasks is commendable, as it leads to harmony and concord.²⁹ **The Vinaya** gives the famous case of **Dabba Malla,putta**, who having become an arhat at a young age, reflects that he could render service to the monastic community. He becomes an allocator of lodgings (*senāsana,paññāpaka*) and assigner of meals (*bhatt'uddesaka*), that is, as a monastic steward, a decision approved by the Buddha himself.³⁰

3.8 The Buddha himself is known to have personally attended to sick monks, nursing them before teaching them the Dharma, and admonishing that those who would serve him, would serve the sick.³¹ The Dhammapada Commentary on Dh 41³² tells a story of how the Buddha attends to the dying Pūti,gatta Tissa, whose body was festering with sores.³³

3.9 From all these internal evidence, Analayo makes some important observations and conclusions:

In the light of the above passages, it seems that the image of the arahant Bakkula praised in the two versions of the Bakkula-sutta differs considerably from the ideal conduct of an arahant, or even of a monk in general, depicted in other discourses. Whereas the ideal arahant monk in other discourses is one who helps others and is willing to teach and guide, the arahant eulogized in the Pali and Chinese versions of the present discourse is concerned only with himself. Apart from his claim to having reached final liberation within a very short time after ordination, neither the Pali nor the Chinese version devotes any space to Bakkula's meditative development or to his insight and wisdom. The emphasis in both versions is instead on a display of externally flawless and ascetic conduct.

As the Bakkula-sutta and its parallel are evidently later discourses, they testify to a stage in the development of the conception of an arahant where the earlier more altruistic ideal was gradually being replaced by a growing emphasis on austere external conduct,³⁴ a shift of perspective during which the arahant's detachment becomes increasingly understood as a form of indifference.³⁵ Perhaps it is no wonder that such an ideal did not offer a lasting inspiration to the growing Buddhist community in ancient India and that eventually the search for a different ideal began, an ideal that instead emphasized altruism and concern for others.³⁶ (Analayo 2007:19 f)

This apparent shift towards monastic reclusiveness could be seen as a return to the rhinoceros-horn-like solitary ideal of very early Buddhism, but more likely it is that, as **George Bond** notes, that "the *arahant* concept seems to have developed from an ideal readily attainable in this life ... into an ideal considered re-

²⁹ D 33.3.3(1)/3:267; A 10.50/5:90.

³⁰ V 3:158.

³¹ *Yo bhikkhave maṃ upaṭṭhaheyya so gilānaṃ upaṭṭhaheyya*, V 1:300-302; see Piya Tan, **The Buddha and His Disciples**, 2004: 5.2.

³² "In no long time, this body will lie on the ground, | Depised, with consciousness departed, like a useless log."

³³ DhA 3.7/1:319 ff: see Piya Tan, **The Buddha and His Disciples**, 2004: 5.1.

³⁴ Horner (1979: 191) comments that "it seems that the seeds of altruism, planted with foresight by Gotama at the beginning of his ministry ... smothered during the passage of time."

³⁵ Katz explains that in the early discourses "the detachment of the arahant ... is not a bland neutrality or indifference ... Buddhist detachment means the non-reference of feeling to self, not merely the cultivation of a hedonic or emotively banal neutrality." (1979: 56)

³⁶ Har Dayal suggests that when the originally more altruistic arahant ideal came to be neglected in favour of an increasing self-centredness, "the bodhisattva doctrine was promulgated ... as a protest against this lack of ... altruism among the monks of that period." (1970: 3)

mote and impossible to achieve in one or even many lifetimes.” (1984: 228). It is more likely that this reclusive attitude was more idealistic than real, that the monks tended to be more cloistered to their monasteries rather than living solitary forest lives (although there would be such bona fide forest monks whose lineages go back to the Buddha’s time and down to our own times).

The Bakkula Sutta, notes **Analayo**, gives an example of how the arhat ideal was gradually overshadowed by **the Bodhisattva ideal** in Sanskrit Buddhism. That is to say, this displacement was partly a reaction to the growing of reclusiveness of the mainstream monastic system so that it became less connected with society especially by way to teachings (2007:1 f).

— — —

Bakkula Sutta

The Discourse on Bakkula

M 124

1 Thus have I heard.

Acela Kassapa’s questions

1.2 At one time the venerable Bakkula was staying in the Squirrels’ Feeding-ground in the Bamboo Forest near Rājagaha.

2 Then Acela Kassapa [the naked ascetic],³⁷ a former comrade of Bakkula when he was still a householder, [125] approached him, exchanged salutations and greetings with him, and sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, Acela Kassapa said this to the venerable Bakkula:

3 “How long since, avuso Bakkula, have you gone forth?”

“It has been 80 years,³⁸ avuso Kassapa, since I went forth.”

3.2 “In those 80 years, avuso Bakkula, how often have you indulged in sexual intercourse?”

“Avuso Kassapa, you should not ask me such a question, ‘In those 80 years, avuso Bakkula, how often have you indulged in sexual intercourse?’ Instead, avuso Kassapa, you should ask: ‘Avuso, Bakkula, in those 80 years, how many times have the perception of sensual desire arise in you?’”

3.3 “So, avuso Bakkula, in those 80 years, since you went forth, how many times have the perception of sensuality arisen in you?”

BAKKULA’S LION-ROAR

Wholesome perception

3.4 (1) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall the perception of sensuality to have ever arisen in me.”³⁹

³⁷ He is prob Acela(ka) Kassapa 2. On his identity, see (1.2).

³⁸ MA 4:191 says that Bakkula became a monk when he was 80, which would make him 160 at the time of his passing.

³⁹ The Madhyama Āgama version states that Bakkula first declares that he has no conceit (*māna*) about having ordained for 80 years, and then pointed out that during that time he has never experienced a perception of sensual desire (MĀ 34 = T1.475b4). For a comparative list of Bakkula’s qualities, see Analayo 2007:8-13.

[Council elders:] (That the venerable Bakkula does not recall the perception of sensuality to have ever arisen in him—this we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)⁴⁰

4 (2) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall the perception of ill will (*vyāpāda, saññā*) to have ever arisen in me.”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

5 (3) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall the perception of violence (*vihimsā, saññā*) to have ever arisen in me.”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

Right thought

6 (4) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall the thought of lust [sensuality] (*kāma, vitakka*) to have ever arisen in me.”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

7 (5) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall the thought of ill will (*vyāpāda, vitakka*) to have ever arisen in me.”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

8 (6) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall the thought of violence (*vihimsā, vitakka*) to have ever arisen in me.”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.) [126]

Ascetic practices: robes

9 (7) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having accepted a robe from a householder ...”⁴¹

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

10 (8) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having worn a robe from a householder ...”⁴²

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

11 (9) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having cut a robe with a knife ...”⁴³

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

12 (10) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having sewn a robe with a needle ...”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

13 (11) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having dyed a robe with dye ...”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

14 (12) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having sewn at *kathina* time ...”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ This is spoken by the elders of the Vesāli Council, convened 100 years after the Buddha’s passing: see Intro (1) & (3).

⁴¹ This practice and similar ones that follow show that Bakkula keeps to the *dhutaṅga* (ascetic) practices, and lives alone as a forest monk, that is, until his impending passing. See Intro 2 above.

⁴² This is an oblique way of saying that he depends on the ascetic practice of collecting rag-clothes and wearing them, as attested by his previous and following two statements.

⁴³ “Knife,” *sattha*, MA 4:193 glosses *satthena* as *pipphalikenā*, probably meaning “with scissors” (cf DA 1:70).

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

15 (13) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having joined in a communal robe-making session ...”⁴⁵

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

Ascetic practices: meals

16 (14) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having accepted an invitation to a meal ...”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

17 (15) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having given rise to the thought, ‘May someone invite me to a meal’ ...”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

18 (16) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having sat down inside a house⁴⁶ ...”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

19 (17) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having eaten inside a house ...”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

⁴⁴ *Kaṭhina* is the robe ceremony held at the end of traditional rains retreat, ie in the month of Kattikā (Oct-Nov), in which a robe (*cīvara*) or even a piece of cloth is offered to a monk who is found poor in respect of his robes and who has lived righteously during the retreat (V 2:116; V:H 5:158 ff). How does Bakkula obtain his robes without accepting material from householders, and without cutting nor sewing them? MA4:193 explains that he is well known in two towns and that the people make and dye the robe-material for him and then hang it out while he is bathing. He then clothe himself. So he obtains things as easily as the elder Nigrodha from Asoka. See Upasak 1975: Kaṭhina.

⁴⁵ “Communal robe-making session,” *sa, brahmacārī, cīvara, kamma. Cīvara, kamma* or robe-making is alluded to in a number of places (V 2:218, 3:60, 240, 4:118, 151; A 5:328 f; DhA 3:342; PvA 73, 145). Ānanda is said to be very skilled in making robes from various pieces of cloth, making seams and hemming robes so that the edges do not fray so quickly (V 1:187). **The Mahā Suññata S** (M 122 @ SD 11.4) opens with an account of how Ānanda was preparing for a communal robe-making (M 122.2-3/3:110), for discussion of which see my lecture 6, “Buddha’s Image and Shadow” in the 10-lecture series *The Buddha & His Disciples*, 2002:6.29a.

⁴⁶ “Inside a house,” *antara, ghare*. CPD defines *antara, ghara* as “the place before a house, or between the houses (of a village)” (V 4:176; VA 2:34). Comy on V 3:263 glosses it as *anto, ghare*. “inside a house” (VA 730 f). As such, in a specific sense, it means “inside a house,” and more broadly as “amongst houses,” depending on the context. MA says that in Mahā Sakul’udāyī S (M 77; MA 3:240) *antara, ghare* means from the village post (*inda, -khīla*), but here it means from “where the water drops from the eaves” (*nimbodaka, patana-ṭ, ṭhāna*), that is, the elder simply went up to the doors of the houses with his almsbowl and the people filled his bowl with foods of various flavours (MA 4:194 f). [Grateful thanks goes to Nina van Gorkom of the Netherlands for pointing out the Thai translation of *nimbodaka, patana-ṭ, ṭhāna*.]. Childers’s DPL which I received soon after this discussion further confirms this: “*nibbarāṃ*: the eaves of a roof.”

A monk's proper conduct towards women⁴⁷

20 (18) "In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having grasped at signs and features of a woman ... "

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

21 (19) "In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having taught the Dharma to a woman, even as a four-line stanza ... "⁴⁸

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

22 (20) "In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having gone to a nuns' quarters ... "⁴⁹

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

23 (21) "In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having taught the Dharma to a nun ... "

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

24 (22) "In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having taught the Dharma to a female probationer⁵⁰ ... "

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

25 (23) "In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having taught the Dharma to a female novice⁵¹ ... "

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

Proper conduct: contentment

26 (24) "In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having given the going-forth ... "⁵²

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

27 (25) "In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having given the higher ordination ... "⁵³

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

28 (26) "In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having given tutelage ... "⁵⁴

⁴⁷ In **Mahāparinibbāna S** (M 16), the Buddha advises Ānanda in this connection thus: "Bhante, how are we to conduct ourselves towards women?" "Do not look at them, Ānanda." "But if we see them, bhante, how should we behave?" "Do not speak to them, Ānanda." "But if they speak to us, bhante, how should we behave to them?" "Then, Ānanda, be mindful!" (D 16,5.9/2:141)

For a more general statement, see (**Piṇḍola**) **Bhāradvāja S** (S 35.127/4:110 f), and also Intro (3) above.

⁴⁸ The Vinaya prohibits monks from teaching Dharma to women beyond 5-6 lines or sentences (V 4:21). MA says that Bakkula refrained from doing this even though it is allowable, and although practically all of the elders depended on families did so (MA 4:195).

⁴⁹ This is actually allowable when a monk is asked by a sick nun (V 4:57 = Pāc 23).

⁵⁰ "Female probationer," *sikkhāmānā*, a female novice who has completed the *sāmaṇerī* stage, and is undergoing a 2 year probation before becoming a *bhikkhunī*.

⁵¹ "Female novice," *sāmaṇerī*: see prec n.

⁵² See foll n.

⁵³ To have ordained anyone is to be responsible for their personal discipline and spiritual development as one's pupils. There is also the benefit of prestige, even wealth, from having many pupils, since property is generally communal in the sangha, with the preceptor or teacher having the final say over such matters.

⁵⁴ Rules for giving tutelage (*nissaya*) or guidance are given at V 1:60 ff.

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

29 (27) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having had a novice wait on me ...”⁵⁵

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

Proper conduct: restraint

30 (28) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having bathed in a hot-house ...”⁵⁶

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

31 (29) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having bathed using chunam [lime soap] ...”⁵⁷

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

32 (30) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having undertaken the work of massaging the limbs of my spiritual companions ...” **[127]**

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

Good health

33 (31) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having had an illness for even as long as it takes to milk a cow ...”⁵⁸

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

34 (32) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having taken medicine, even as much as a piece of myrobalan ...”⁵⁹

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

⁵⁵ Novices as attendants, see V 1:62 ff.

⁵⁶ “Hot-house,” *jantā,ghare*, or sauna. What Bakkula means is probably that he washes in the open (away from people) using natural water (ie without warm water, etc). The proper way of washing is given at V 1:47.

⁵⁷ “Chunam,” *cuṇṇa* (Skt *cūrṇa*, Tamil *cuṇṇam*), ie lime used esp with betel leaf to make pan. The proper way of washing and using chunam are given at V 1:47.

⁵⁸ “For even as long as it takes to milk a cow,” *gaddūhana,mattam̃*. Comys explain it as the time it would take to get one drop of milk by pulling a cow’s teat (*goduhana,mattam̃*); alternatively, they gloss it as *gandha,ūhana,mattam̃* (lit “the extent of a scent-sniff”), ie the time it take for a single sniff of a piece of incense nipped between two fingers (MA 4:195 = SA 2:224 = AA 4:195). Cf Skt *dadrūghna*, a small measure of time. Bakkula’s exceptional health is said to be due to the deeds of healing he did under the past Buddhas, Anoma,dassī (AA 1:304) and Vipassī (AA 1:305 f). The expression also occurs in **Okkha S** (S 20.4/2:264) & **Velāma S** (A 9.20/4:395) in connection with the moment it takes to cultivate lovingkindness as praised by the Buddha.

⁵⁹ “Myrobalan,” *haritakī* = Skt for *āmaṇḍa* (M 120.12/3:101), “the *āmalaka* [or *āmalaki*] or emblic myrobalan” (CPD foll MA 4:147); “castor-oil seed” (Monier Williams; Childers; DP); “myrobalan” (M:ÑB ad loc). Pali for the castor-oil plant (*Ricinus communis*) is *eraṇḍa* (ts). Among the Indian vernacular names for this are *amanakkam* and *amadam*, George Watt, *Commercial Products of India*, London, 1908:915 (qu Horner, M:H 3:140 n3). The Indian myrobalan or yellow myrobalan (Skt *haritākī, haritāka*) is *Terminalia chebula*, hence it is also called the Chebulic myrobalan. By the best common denominator, I have rendered *āmaṇḍa* with the general term “myrobalan.” Monks are allowed to take this small astringent fruit when they are ill (V 1:201; cf V 1:206).

Ascetic practices: sleep

35 (33) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having used a reclining board ...”⁶⁰

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

36 (34) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having lain down on a bed ...”⁶¹

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

Solitude and liberation

37 (35) “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having entered upon the rains retreat in a dwelling next to a village ...”⁶²

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

38 “For seven days, avuso, after going forth, the venerable Bakkula ate the country’s almsfood as a debtor (*sāṇo*).⁶³ On the eighth day, final knowledge arose.”

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

Acela Kassapa’s going forth

39 [Acela Kassapa:] “May I receive the going-forth, avuso Bakkula, in this Dharma and Vinaya; may I receive the higher ordination!”

And the Acela Kassapa received the going-forth and the higher ordination.⁶⁴

39.2 THE FULL ARHATHOOD PERICOPE.⁶⁵ Then, the venerable Kassapa, dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute,

in no long time at all, right here and now, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge, attained and dwelled in the supreme goal of the holy life,

for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

26.2 THE ARHAT’S REVIEW KNOWLEDGE. He directly knew:

“Birth is destroyed,

⁶⁰ “(Do not recall) ever using a reclining board,” *apassenakam apassetā*, that is, to sleep at an angle of 45° or higher, not lying prone on a bed. The reclining board is allowed at V 2:175. See foll n.

⁶¹ *Seyyam kappetā*, alt tr “having made a bed.” That is, he had not slept lying down: he slept in a sitting posture (a *dhutaṅga* called *nesajjika*). See Intro above 2.1(13).

⁶² *Gamānta, senāsane*, alt tr, “on the fringe of a village.” Cf Anaṅgaṇa S (M 5), where a virtuous monk may be a “village dweller, an acceptor of invitations, a wearer of robes given by householders” (M 5.30/1:31).

⁶³ *Yam p’āyasmā Bakkulo sattāham eva sāṇo raṭṭha, piṇḍam bhuñji*. This sentence is spoken by Bakkula in the 3rd person, reflecting the deeply spiritual nature of his statement, just as the Buddha would use the reflexive term *Tathāgata* when referring to himself as the embodiment of the Dharma. **Mahā Kassapa** (S 16.11/2:221 @ SD 34.16) makes a similar statement and Comy *ad loc* lists four ways of using the requisites: (1) as a thief (*theyya, paribhoga*, lit eating by theft), by a morally depraved monastic; (2) as a debtor (*ina, paribhoga*), the unreflective use by a virtuous monk; (3) as an heir (*dayajja, paribhoga*), by the 7 types of learners (*sekha*); and (4) as an owner (*sāmi, paribhoga*), by an arhat (SA 2:199). MA 4:196 glosses *sāṇa* as *sa, raṇa* [= *sa + araṇa*, desire, passion, fault] = *sa, kilesa*. SA 2:199 reads *sāṇo ti sa, kilesa, sa, iṇo* [with a debt] *hutvā*. Cf *a, raṇa* (“without conflict,” M 139.13-14/235-237) = *arajo* (freedom from dust), *nikkilesa* (freedom from defilement) (MA 5:32).

⁶⁴ Although Bakkula himself neither initiates nor ordains others, he has this done by other monks (MA 4:196).

⁶⁵ For details, see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2+56.3), SD 7.14.

the holy life has been lived,
done what is to be done,
there is no more of this state of being.”⁶⁶

And the venerable Kassapa became one of the arhats.

40 Then, later, the venerable Bakkula took his cell’s key and went from cell to cell, saying:
“Come along, bhante! Come along, bhante! Today I shall attain final nirvana.”⁶⁷

(... this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.) **[128]**

41 Then, seated in the midst of the community of monks, the venerable Bakkula attained final nirvana.⁶⁸

[Council elders:]

(That seated in the midst of the community of monks, the venerable Bakkula attained final nirvana—this too we recall as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the venerable Bakkula.)

— evaṃ —

Reading

Analayo Bhikkhu

2007 “The arahant ideal in early Buddhism—the case of Bakkula.” *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 8 2007:1-24. [download](#) (reprinted in *Madhyama-āgama Studies*).

2010 “Once again on Bakkula,” *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 11 2010:1-28. [download](#)

031031 rev060320 070614 08122 090710 091002 100223 111111 120301 131005 141027 150322 171001 180703
180910

⁶⁶ On this para and the next (the attainment of arhathood), see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2/1:203) n, SD 7.14.

⁶⁷ *Ajja me parinibbānaṃ bhavissati*. Bakkula thinks that all his life he has never made himself a burden to the other monks, so, too, he does not want his body to be a burden after his death. Then he enters into the fire element (*tejo, dhātu*) [through the meditation on the fire element (*tejo kasina*)] and attains nirvana by causing his entire body—skin, flesh, blood, etc—to be consumed by the flames, leaving only the relics (MA 4:196). See foll n.

⁶⁸ “Attained final nirvana,” *parinibbāyi*. In keeping with the explanations of E J Thomas 1933 & K R Norman 1995, I have simply rendered this word as such. “*Pari-* compounded with a verb converts the verb from the expression of a state to the expression of the achievement of an action. *Nirvāṇa* is the state of release; *parinirvāṇa* is the attaining of that state. The monk *parinirvāti* ‘attains *nirvāṇa*’ at the time of enlightenment as well as at death” (Thomas 1933: 121 n4). There are 2 ways of tr *parinibbāyati*: I use “attain final nirvana” to mean “to awaken or become awaken,” and “attain final nirvana,” or even “enter (final) nirvana,” to refer to the final passing away, ie, without any more rebirth. However, it is perfectly proper to use such expressions as “final nirvana” to refer to an arhat’s passing, even if this is idomatic English for a specific event (an arhat’s passing). See SD 50.1 (2.2.3); also SD 9 (15): Aspects of (*pari*)*nibbāna*.