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(Koṭi,gāma) Arahanta Sutta

The (Koṭi,gāma) Discourse on the Arhat | S 56.24

Theme: All buddhas awaken on account of the 4 truths

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1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

1.1.1 The (Koṭi,gāma) Arahanta Sutta (S 56.24) is a short discourse stating that all buddhas—those of the past, the future and the present—awaken by way of breakthrough into the 4 noble truths. In other words, full awakening is the full understanding of the 4 noble truths.¹ While **the Koṭi,gāma Suttas 1** (S 56.21) and **the Koṭi,gāma Sutta 2** (S 56.22)² highlight the 4 truths, the (Koṭi,gāma) Arahanta Sutta highlights the unique individuals who first attain them in any epoch, that is, the fully self-awakened buddhas.³

1.1.2 The buddhas are the most evolved of beings who, having awakened to the liberating truth during that epoch, will declare it for the benefit of others who would become **arhats**, who are liberated just like the Buddha, or who at least become **streamwinners**, that is, will become arhats within 7 lives at the most.⁴

1.2 THE BUDDHAS OF THE 3 TIMES

1.2.1 The past buddhas.

1.2.1.1 Of the past buddhas, the Pali Canon mentions only 6, that is, in the list of the 7 buddhas, namely, Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa and our present historical Buddha Gotama.⁵ They are also mentioned in the Vinaya, in the first Pārājika chapter,⁶ in a series of seven short Saṃyutta discourses named after each of them (S 12.4-10),⁷ in the Sarabhaṅga Thera,gāthā,⁸ in **the Mahā-padāna Sutta** (D 14),⁹ and in **the Khandha,vatta Jātaka** (J 203).¹⁰ One of the stories of the Dhammapada Commentary, **the Ānanda-t,thera Pañha Vatthu** (DhA 14.4), describes how the past 7 buddhas keep their observance (*uposatha*) day.¹¹

¹ See SD 53.34 (1.1.2.3).

² Respectively, SD 53.34 + 53.35.

³ See **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10; **Pavāraṇā S** (S 8.7), SD 49.11.

⁴ On the 4 kinds of saints (ariya)—the arhat, the once-returner, the non-returner and the streamwinner, see SD 10.16 (11-14); **(Catukka) Samaṇa S** (A 4.239), SD 49.14.

⁵ SD 49.8b (1.0.4.5).

⁶ In Pār 3.8, Gotama says that the first 3 of the past buddhas neither taught the Dharma in detail (ie, they did not ensure that the texts were handed down) nor instituted the Pāṭimokkha, while the latter buddhas did, so that their dispensations lasted long (V 3:7,34-37; cf V 1:1,10-16).

⁷ S 12.4-10/2:5-10.

⁸ Tha 490 f, cf Tha 1240.

⁹ D 14/2:1-54 (SD 49.8).

¹⁰ J 203/2:147 f, but reference is only to “the 7 buddhas,” without naming them; cf Cv 5.6 = V2:108 f.

¹¹ DhA 14.4/3:236 f. This story records the Buddha’s answer to Ānanda’s question, and is connected with Dh 183-185, which are those of the “admonitory code” (*ovāda pāṭimokkha*): see **Dīgha,nakha S** (M 74) @ SD 16.1(6): Māgha Pūja.

1.2.1.2 Of the 7 past buddhas, Kassapa Buddha appeared to be the most significant for the early Buddhists. This is reflected in different Vinaya accounts concerning his worship.¹² Strong notes that this might well reflect the actual practice during the period when these Vinaya passages came into being (2004:32-39). In other words, the cult practice was a late, post-Buddha, development. It is also likely to precede the popular worship of the Buddha, especially with the introduction of anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha around the 1st century CE.¹³

According to Roth, “it appears that in the earliest period of the spread of Buddhism in India, say during the fourth and third centuries BC, the worship of the shrine of the Śākyamuni Buddha had not yet become a common practice. Instead of this, the shrines of Śākyamuni’s predecessors, as of Kāśyapa Buddha ... are reported to be worshipped” (1987:292). Kassapa is sometimes represented in ancient reliefs under the tree where he awakened, with the words: *bhagavato Kasapasa bodhi*.¹⁴

1.2.1.3 The worship of past buddhas has no basis in the suttas at all. In fact, even the historical Buddha rejected any kind of worship of himself. In **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), he declares that the “supreme worship” (*paramā pūjā*) is in our practice of the Dhamma for the sake of awakening.¹⁵ The worship of any buddha, whether past, future or present, is a post-Buddha innovation where cultism and ritualism have supplanted the actual practice of the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma.¹⁶

1.3 THE PRESENT BUDDHA.

1.3.1 A buddha-period. Just as we need neither to reinvent the wheel nor to rediscover fire, we need and can have only one buddha to arise in an epoch, that is, a period of human history during a world-cycle (while the universe exists). It is clearly stated in the suttas that only 1 buddha will appear during a “buddha-period” (*buddha,kāla*).¹⁷ The Majjhima Commentary says that the arising of another Buddha is impossible from the time the Bodhisattva takes his final conception until his dispensation (*sāsana*) has completely disappeared (MA 4:113).¹⁸

1.3.2 Our fortunate aeon. The world-cycle we are now inhabiting is said to be a “fortunate aeon” (*bhadda,kappa*), since we have the maximum number of 5 buddhas appearing successively—Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa, our Buddha Gotama, and the future Buddha, Metteyya. [1.4]. The question arises as to how come we have no historical records of the buddhas before Gotama? A possible answer is that the three buddhas before Gotama lived millions of years ago.¹⁹

¹² Bareau, 1960:257-261; Schopen, 1985:29.

¹³ See SD 36.9 (6.1.5).

¹⁴ Barua, 1934:4; Coomaraswamy, 1956:66 (pl 23 fig 60); Lüders, 1963:86 (no 760); Tsukamoto, 1996:571 (no 75).

¹⁵ D 16,5.3.2 + SD 9 (7.2).

¹⁶ On the past buddhas, see SD 1.10 (2.1): Dharma-ending age; SD 36.2 (3), names & qualities (details).

¹⁷ **Mahā Govinda S** (D 19,13/2:224); **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28,19/3:114); **Bahu,dhātuka S** (M 115,14/3:65); **Aṭṭhāna Vagga** (A 1.15,10/1:27 f); Vbh 335.

¹⁸ For a discussion, see Miln 236-239. See also SD 52.13 (1.3.2.3).

¹⁹ On our “fortunate aeon” (*bhadda,kappa*) and its 5 buddhas, see SD 49.8b (15.2.2). On the present Buddha, SD 36.2 (2).

1.4 THE FUTURE BUDDHA

The future buddha is mentioned only twice in the suttas, that is, as a prophecy, in **the Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 26)²⁰ and at the end of a late work, **the Buddha,vaṃsa**, as the fifth buddha of this aeon (B 27.19).²¹ The only canonical details we have of the future buddha are found here. These discourses were probably composed or reached their final form during Asokan times. Although these Suttas contain prophetic statements,²² their avowed purpose is not a threat of an impending global cataclysm and end of days, but that of *liberation here and now*.²³

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(Koṭigāma) Arahanta Sutta

The (Koṭi,gāma) Discourse on the Arhat

S 56.24

1 At Sāvattihī.

The buddhas of the 3 times

2 Bhikshus, those arhats, fully self-awakened ones, who fully self-awakened to true reality **in the long distant past**,²⁴

they all fully self-awakened to the 4 noble truths according to true reality. [434]

3 Bhikshus, those arhats, fully self-awakened ones, who will fully self-awaken to true reality **in the long distant future**,²⁵

they all will fully self-awaken to the 4 noble truths according to true reality.

4 Bhikshus, those arhats, fully self-awakened ones, who fully self-awaken to true reality **now**, they all fully self-awaken to the 4 noble truths according to true reality.²⁶

The 4 noble truths

5 What are the 4 noble truths?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| (1) The noble truth that is | suffering. |
| (2) The noble truth that is | the arising of suffering. |
| (3) The noble truth that is | the ending of suffering. |
| (4) The noble truth that is | the path leading to the end of suffering. |

²⁰ D 26/3:58-79 (SD 36.10).

²¹ B 27.19/101.

²² However, see **The Dharma-ending age**, SD 1.10.

²³ On the future buddha, see SD 36.2 (6).

²⁴ *Ye hi keci bhikkhave atītam addhānaṃ arahanto sammā,sambuddhā yathā,bhūtaṃ abhisambujjhimsu.*

²⁵ *Ye hi* keci bhikkhave anāgatam addhānaṃ arahanto sammā,sambuddhā yathā,bhūtaṃ abhisambujjhissanti.*
Se ye'pi hi.

²⁶ *Ye hi keci bhikkhave etarahi arahanto sammā,sambuddhā yathā,bhūtaṃ abhisambujjhanti, sabbe te cattāri ariya,saccāni yathā,bhūtaṃ abhisambujjhanti.*

6 Bhikshus, those arhats, fully self-awakened ones, who fully self-awakened to true reality in the long distant past,

they all *fully self-awakened* to the 4 noble truths according to true reality.

7 Bhikshus, those arhats, fully self-awakened ones, who will fully self-awaken to true reality in the long distant future,

they all *will fully self-awaken* to the 4 noble truths according to true reality.

8 Bhikshus, those arhats, fully self-awakened ones, who fully self-awaken to true reality now, they all *fully self-awaken* to the 4 noble truths according to true reality.

Reflection on the truths

9 Therefore, bhikshus,

You should devote yourself (to the reflection):²⁷ “This is suffering.”

You should devote yourself (to the reflection): “This is the arising of suffering.”

You should devote yourself (to the reflection): “This is the ending of suffering.”

You should devote yourself (to the reflection): “This is the path leading to the ending of suffering.”

— evaṃ —

180819 180830 181207 181211

²⁷ *Idaṃ dukkhan’ti yogo karaṇīyo.*