

# 1

## (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta

The (Threes) Discourse on Abhibhū | **A 3.80**

Comy **(Tika) Sīha,nada Sutta** The (Threes) Lion-roar Discourse (AA 2:345,18)

Be **Cūlanikā Sutta** The Discourse on the Minor World system

or **(Ānanda) Abhibhū Sutta** The Discourse (to Ānanda) on Abhibhū

Themes: Universes & Ānanda's surety of liberation

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008, 2018

### 1 Sutta summary and highlights

#### 1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND PARAPHRASE

##### 1.1.1 Sutta summary

**1.1.1.1 The (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** (A 3.80), with its heavy miraculous, even futuristic, tone, records the Buddha speaking of Abhibhū, the right-hand monk of the past buddha **Sikhī**, the 5<sup>th</sup> buddha from our Buddha Gotama and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 7 buddhas.<sup>1</sup> According to **the Mahā'padāna Sutta** (D 14), he lived 31 aeons (world-cycles) ago<sup>2</sup> [§2.2].

**1.1.1.2** Under special conditions [1.3], says the Buddha, Abhibhu's voice can be heard throughout the universe [1.1.2]. The Buddha's voice, on the other hand, can be heard over a far greater extent of the universe. The Buddha then explains what we would today understand as the various "quadrants" of the universe [§§11-12]. While the voice of an arhat disciple (like Abhibhū) is able to reach out over a 1,000 minor world system, the Buddha's voice can extend over the largest extent of the universe of world systems, a 1,000,000,000 great world system [§14; 1.2].

For easy apprehension, these various world systems have been defined in numerical terms, thus:<sup>3</sup>

##### literal rendition

"A thousandfold world system"

=

##### idiomatic (numerical) rendition [2.1.2]

a 1,000 (minor) world system<sup>4</sup>

[§§2.2, 11]

"A 2-thousand minor world system"

=

a 1,000,000 medium world system

[§12]

"A 3-thousand medium world system"

=

a 1,000,000,000 great world system

[§13]

**1.1.1.3** Ānanda rejoices in the Buddha's powers [§17]. When the monk Udāyī enviously dismisses Ānanda's elation [§18], the Buddha gently reminds Udāyī of Ānanda's personal greatness and potential, implying that even without basking in the Buddha's glory, he is uniquely glorious in his own way. The Sutta closes with the Buddha predicting Ānanda's self-awakening in this life itself [§20].

<sup>1</sup> On the 7 buddhas, see SD 49.8b (Table 1.0.4).

<sup>2</sup> D 14,1.4/2:2,14-16): SD 36.2 (3.4.3).

<sup>3</sup> For an intro to early Buddhist cosmology, see <https://www.facebook.com/piyatan/posts/10155351590946325>; also SD 47.8 (2.3.4-2.3.5) & SD 52.1 (2.2.1.6).

<sup>4</sup> From the Sutta context [§2.2 + §11], clearly, "a 1,000 world system" and "a 1,000 minor world system" are the same [2.1.2]. With our solar system and the "immediate" universe (a general term for outer space) as the 1<sup>st</sup> kind of world system, we have altogether 4 kinds, in terms of size. On "the thousandfold world" (*sahasadhā loka*), see **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29,2), SD 16.15.

### 1.1.2 Meaning of *sarena viññāpesi*

**1.1.2.1** The Buddha tells us that Abhibhū “while remaining in the brahma world, could make his voice known throughout a **1,000 world system** (*brahma, loka t̥hito sahaṣṣī, loka, dhātum̐ sarena viññāpesi*) [§2.2]. This is the key sentence—the most difficult, hence, easily misunderstood, sentence—which when properly construed shows that it has to do with deep meditation and psychic powers.

**1.1.2.2** Firstly, we need to apply the rule of context (or the contextuality rule)<sup>5</sup> to the noun *sāra*,<sup>6</sup> the stem form of *sarena* (instrumental, “with his voice”). Basically, this means that we need to tease out the sense of the word. The sense of *sara* as used in the context here, and what it means in the spirit of early Buddhism. *Sara* here has the dictionary meaning of “sound, voice, speech, intonation, accent.” These are the literal senses of the word; but this alone does not help us to understand how it is used here *in this context*.

**1.1.2.3** Secondly, we need to examine the verb that goes with *sara* [1.1.2.2], that is, *viññāpesi*—the aorist (past tense) of *viññāpeti*, which comes from the verb, *viññāti*, “to know.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, *sarena viññāpesi* literally reads “made known by sound.” We find this literal translation in the Thai and the Chinese:

Thai: รู้แจ้งได้ด้วยเสียง *róo jāeng dāai dūay sǎng*, “he makes it clearly known through sound”;<sup>8</sup>  
 Chinese: 他以聲音令…識知 *tā yǐ shēng yīn lìng ... shí zhī*, “he uses sound ... to make known.”<sup>9</sup>

In both these translations, there is no mention of what is being made known. Perhaps, it is the person himself that is made known but this seems to serve no good purpose, except perhaps a show of psychic power. Hence, we must assume that the “voice” of the Buddha or his disciple, Abhibhū, can only refer to the Dharma. This means that it is the Dharma that is made known by the Buddha or his disciple. When we examine the meaning of *viññāpesi* [1.1.2.4], we have additional reason for this surmise.

**1.1.2.4** Most translators render this phrase freely into English as “he (could) make his voice heard ...” or the like. Hence, we have the sense that the Buddha literally made his voice heard. Now, if this voice were literally loud, surely, it would be deafening to those nearer to the Buddha or Abhibhū is. **The Buddha’s voice** is said to have 8 qualities: it is frank, clear, melodious, pleasant, full, carrying, deep and resonant; it does not travel beyond his audience.<sup>10</sup> The voice of an awakened disciple is likely to be at least calm and soothing.

Hence, this special voice of the Buddha or of Abhibhū from the brahma world is *not a physical sound* (like that near us). It is a kind of metaphorical expression telling us that the Buddha’s teaching can be **known** anywhere in the universe, how far this teaching spreads depends on whether it is the Buddha [or

<sup>5</sup> See SD 53.5 (4.2.3).

<sup>6</sup> The dictionary meanings of *sara* are: (1) the reed Saccharum sara; (2) going, moving, following; fluid, flow; (3) a lake; (4) remembering; (5) sound, etc. The last sense applies here.

<sup>7</sup> The vb *viññāpesi* is aor causative form (to make something happen) of the vb *viññāti*, “to know.”

<sup>8</sup> Downloaded from [https://suttacentral.net/an3.80/th/siam\\_rath](https://suttacentral.net/an3.80/th/siam_rath), 22 Sep 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Tr by 莊春江 (*Zhuāng chūn jiāng*): <http://agama.buddhason.org/>. Chin parallels for Cūḷanikā Sutta (A 3.80/-1:226): SĀ 423-425; SA 425 = T99.425 (T2.111c26); SĀ 424v = T99.424 (T2.111c08); SĀ 423 = T99.423 (T2,111b25). Retrieved from SuttaCentral, 22 Sep 2018: <https://suttacentral.net/an3.80/zh/zhuang>.

<sup>10</sup> For details concerning his voice, see DA 2:452 f; MA 2:771f. See **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30,2.22.1) + SD 36.9 (4.1) mark no 28; (4.3) Table.

his disciple] who teaches. This very well fits the sense of the verb *viññāpesi*, “he taught, informed, intimated.”

Hence, the phrase *sarena viññāpesi* contextually or idiomatically means: “**he taught (the Dharma)**” that is able to reach throughout the universe—in the case of the Buddha throughout the “3,000 great world-system” (that is, the whole universe) [§14], or, in the case of Abhibhū, throughout only a 1,000 world system [§2.2]. However, even the extent of a mere “1,000 world system” is well far beyond our known universe! [2]

### **1.1.3 Thito**

**1.1.3.1** Next, we need to consider important things: the location of the voicing and the participle *thito*. It should be noted that both the Buddha and Abhibhū made their voices heard, not from earth, but in the brahma realm of Mahā Brahmā, his retinue and assembly—all these belong to **the 1<sup>st</sup>-dhyana world**. This means that the voicer or speaker is in dhyana or makes use of dhyana. But it is *not* a psychic manifestation, which has to be in the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana.

Of course, we can reason that the voicer is “located” (*thito*) in the 1<sup>st</sup>-dhyana brahma world, but they enter into the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana to manifest the psychic phenomenon of making their voice heard throughout the world system. But, then, this is *not* the point. The point is simply that such a voicing is done with the help of dhyana. This is the first point to note. The next connected point concerns the word *thito* [1.1.3.2].

**1.1.3.2** Most translators render *thito* literally as “standing.” Traditionally—in the suttas, anyway—it is more likely that the Buddha or a monk would be seated to give a Dharma teaching, especially to such a respectful and traditional audience (the seniors amongst them are thousands of celestial years old!).

More than this, *thito* here actually must be taken in an idiomatic sense of “remaining” in meditation, in the sense of “having attained, he dwells” (*upasampajja viharati*) in dhyana.<sup>11</sup> *Thito*, however, has a broader sense of the voicer getting into dhyana; then, emerging, and using the momentum of the dhyanic state to emanate his “voice.”<sup>12</sup>

This is no ordinary sound (*sara*) but the “voice of meditation,” or more specifically, the voice (*ghosa*) of dhyana. In other words, the Buddha or his arhat disciples may use their dhyana to go anywhere in the world system that is within their power to reach to disseminate the Dhamma, or somehow to teach the Dhamma in those areas, such as by way of a mind-made or astral body.<sup>13</sup> [1.3.1]

### **1.1.4 The Buddha’s radiance**

**1.1.4.1 The (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** records the Buddha explaining to us how the Buddha lets his “voice” (*sara*) be known in a 1,000,000,000 great world system: “The Tathagata would suffuse (it) with his radiance” (*obhāsenā phareyya*), and when the light is seen, “then the Tathagata would project his voice so that it could be heard” (*atha tathāgato ghosam kareyya saddam anussāveyya*) [§16]. It should be noted here that both *ghosa* and *sara* are synonyms for “voice.”

**1.1.4.2** Ironically, it is not really remarkable if the Buddha were merely to have let his voice be heard through the 1,000,000,000 great world system—this would merely be one-time act, as it were. People tend to forget the true significance of such a phenomenon, even a miracle, over time, is taken for granted.

<sup>11</sup> See SD 8.4 (5.1.1.2(3)).

<sup>12</sup> On *thita* as meaning “remaining, existing, present,” see DP 319.

<sup>13</sup> On the mind-made body or astral travel, see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,87-88), SD 8.10.

Worse, over time, people tend to misremember such key moments and build theologies, religions and superstitions around them. In significant ways, this has already happened to Buddhism: we have today so many divergent forms of Buddhism, many of which contradict each other in basic teachings of the 3 jewels of early Buddhism, to say the least.

We may see this aberration as something like children collecting fallen dead leaves from a grand old tree, still fruitful and shady, and making patterns and things with them, and proudly showing them off to others, even receiving praise and wonder from adults. They would soon cut down the old tree and build some ornate structure to house a bigger crowd in its place.<sup>14</sup>

**1.1.4.3** The sentence “**the Tathagata would project his voice so that it could be heard**” (*tathāgato ghoṣaṃ kareyya saddam anussāveyya*)<sup>15</sup> [§16] is very significant and needs some explanation. Put into modern lingo, we may say that the Buddha broadcasted his voice radio-like, so that he can be heard—that is, his teachings are heard—everywhere in the universe. It is not unimaginable that the Buddha, in his immense wisdom, would know of such a possibility.

But the point is that the Buddha, in his teaching efforts, is ensuring that the Dharma would continue to be heard not only over a great expanse of space, but also **would be heard** (*anussāveyya*) over time, at least, right down to our time. The fact that we have this Sutta, translating it, reading it, and practising the Dharma, is witness enough for us to this wonderful miracle that the Buddha has performed. The Buddha Dharma can still touch us when we diligently reach out towards it.

### **1.1.5 Time and space in early Buddhism**

**1.1.5.1** Now, a brief note on the notion of **time and space** in early Buddhist cosmology, especially its conception of world systems. First of all, we should note that the 1<sup>st</sup>-dhyana brahma world [1.1.3.1] is just “above,” that is, outside of our physical universe. It is as if we are taking a high vantage point to broadcast a teaching transmission to the physical world. We may imagine that, in some way, the brahma world has the “technology,” the most effective ways and means to disseminate the Buddha Dhamma to the inhabited universe.

It should be recalled that the brahmas, especially their leader, **Mahā Brahmā** himself, are personally concerned with the world’s welfare, although he is neither empowered (not awakened) nor inclined (he is enjoying dhyanic bliss) to spiritually minister to the material world. However, he is magnanimous enough to invite the newly awakened Buddha to teach the Dharma to the world for its lasting good and happiness.<sup>16</sup>

**1.1.5.2** Secondly, according to early Buddhist cosmology, the inhabited world (*satta,loka*) is three-fold,<sup>17</sup> hence, it is known as **the 3 worlds**, thus:

(1) **The sense-world** (*kāma,loka*), which is dependent on the 6 sense-faculties (*saḷ-āyatana*) and, hence, limited by them. This is a physical world with beings of variable lifespans: the humans are amongst

<sup>14</sup> Further see **Cult Buddhism**, SD 34.5.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that *ghoṣa* (“voice”) and *sadda* (“sound, word”) are used in the same sentence, clearly synonymously.

<sup>16</sup> On Mahā Brahma (Sahampati), see SD 12.1 (2.3.4).

<sup>17</sup> Comy speaks of the 3 worlds (*loka*) as those (1) of space (*okāsa,loka*); (2) of beings (*satta,loka*); and (3) of formations (*saṅkhāra,loka*) (Vism 7.37/204 f; DA 1:173 f; MA 1:397, 2:200): see SD 15.7 (3.5(2)). The other 2 worlds are mentioned below and in (1.1.5.3).

those with the shortest lifespan. However, buddhas arise only in this world amongst humans who, because of their experience of both joy and pain are capable of learning, changing and attaining awakening.

(2) **The form world** (*rūpa,loka*), purely mental realm pervaded by dhyanic bliss and long-lived brahmas is characterized by beautiful radiance: essentially, they are beings of light. The lifespan of the 1<sup>st</sup> level brahma-world, however, does not exceed that of the life of the physical universe itself, of which they are clearly aware and with which they sometimes interact [1.1.5.1].

(3) **The formless world** (*arūpa,loka*), forming the 4 highest stages of the early Buddhist psychocosmography, are generally invisible to all the beings in the other two worlds. They have neither body nor form, and may be described as beings of pure energy. They, too, live profoundly blissful lives fed by the bliss of the formless dhyanas.

**1.1.5.3 Time and space**—at least as we understand them—apply only to the physical sense-world (*okāsa,loka*), where whatever is physical is theoretically measurable, and in that sense, limited. Time apparently runs progressively more slowly (so to speak) as we ascend through realms of the form world and of the formless world. For example, while Mahā Brahma’s lifespan is an aeon (a world-cycle),<sup>18</sup> that of the beings in the highest formless world (those of the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception) is 84,000 aeons.<sup>19</sup> This is a universe of a different dimension—the “**vertical world system**” [2.1.2.3].

Space, too, takes on a less limiting but more plastic dimension in the form world and formless worlds. These existentially higher beings are able to manipulate space commensurate to their level of non-physical existence. However, like humans and other beings of the sense-world, they, despite their astronomically long life-spans, have no real power over time. Whatever exists is subject to time; thus, they change, become other, die, and are recycled in samsara, the grand stage of these 3 worlds.<sup>20</sup>

## 1.2 ABHIBHŪ

**1.2.1 Abhibhū** was the right-hand chief disciple of Sikhī Buddha<sup>21</sup> [§2.2]. In **the Aruṇa,vatī Sutta** (S 6.14), it is said that Sikhī Buddha brought him along to the brahma world and, at the Buddha’s request, did so with various psychic displays (SD 54.17). While remaining in the brahma world, he transmitted his teaching audibly to reach the monks of his monastery back on earth.

In fact, it is said that his teaching can thus reach out throughout a 1,000-world-system [§2.2], that is, well beyond our own world system.<sup>22</sup> The verses uttered by Abhibhū recur, in **the Thera,gāthā**, ascribed to the elder Abhibhūta (Tha 1147 f), which is probably another form of his name.<sup>23</sup>

**1.2.2 The (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** records Ānanda asking the Buddha about the range of Abhibhū’s powers in comparison to those of the Buddha Sikhī himself [§2]. The Buddha replies that Abhibhū<sup>24</sup> was only a disciple (*sāvaka*), and goes on to describe the immeasurable powers of a buddha [§14]. While a disciple’s mental powers can reach out across a 1000 minor world system [§2.2, 11], that of a buddha can reach throughout a 1,000,000,000 great world system [§13].

<sup>18</sup> On the aeon (*kappa*), see SD 2.19 (9); SD 49.8 (15.2).

<sup>19</sup> See the diagram of the whole inhabited cosmos: SD 1.7 (App).

<sup>20</sup> See M M J Marasinghe, “Loka,” Ency Bsm esp 6:343-345.

<sup>21</sup> The left-hand disciple was Sambhava. D 14,1.9/2:5; J 1:41; B 21.20.

<sup>22</sup> See **Aruṇa,vatī S** (S 6.14,16), SD 54.17.

<sup>23</sup> PmA 663-666 gives an account of Abhibhū, similar to that in **Aruṇa,vatī S** (S 6.14), SD 54.17.

<sup>24</sup> On other senses of *abhibhū*, see DPPN sv.

**1.2.3** In the *Aruṇa, vatī Sutta* (S 6.14), the Buddha always addresses Abhibhū as “brahmin” (*brāhmaṇa*). This word is sometimes used by the Buddha to mean a monk who is a true practitioner, especially an arhat.<sup>25</sup> This appellative then serves as a sort of marker to highlight the fact that Abhibhū is an arhat, whom the Buddha is addressing. Such a usage of “brahmin” is a natural adaptation by the Buddha so that its class bias is neutralized, and the person’s spiritual state—not his birth or social status—is highlighted.<sup>26</sup>

The *Buddhavaṃsa Commentary* (BA 244,18) tells us that both Abhibhū and Sambhava (both being Sikhī’s 2 foremost disciples) are said to be “royal princes” (*raja,putta*). Hence, they are kshatriya (*khattiya*), those from the noble or warrior class by birth. Hence, the Buddha is here highlighting their spiritual attainment rather than their social status.

**1.2.4** During the time of Sikhī Buddha [§2.2], the elder **Adho,pupphiya**, a hermit in the Himalayas, offered flowers to the Buddha’s chief disciple, Abhibhū (ThaAp 84.1 = Ap 1:128,18 f).<sup>27</sup>

### 1.3 ABHIBHŪ’S POWER OF TRANSFORMATION

#### 1.3.1 The power of transformation defined

**1.3.1.1** The *Paṭisambhidā,magga*,<sup>28</sup> its commentary and the *Visuddhi,magga* explain Abhibhū’s psychic wonder as that of **the power of transformation** (*vikubbana,iddhi*), that is, the ability to locate oneself in another place at the same time (bilocation) or in many places at the same time (multilocation).<sup>29</sup> Details of this process are, for example, given in the *Vikubbana Niddesa* (explanation on the power of transformation) of the *Paṭisambhidā,magga Commentary*.<sup>30</sup>

**1.3.1.2** We are told that this power is different from that of the mind-made body (*mano,maya kaya* or *mano,may’iddhi*), which basically allows self-multiplication and astral travel.<sup>31</sup> Both these powers are respectively the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the list of 10 psychic powers listed in the *Paṭisambhidā,magga* and the *Commentaries*.<sup>32</sup>

#### 1.3.2 Developing the power.

**1.3.2.1** The meditation-method for attaining the power of transformation is described in *Upatissa’s Vimutti,magga* (*Vimm*),<sup>33</sup> on which, evidently, *Buddhaghosa* based his magnum opus, **the *Visuddhi,mag-***

<sup>25</sup> Sn 622, 643, 646 (SD 37.1); also *Dhammapada*: Dh 388, SD 36.14(3.3); Dh 390, SD 17.8a(12.4); Dh 392, SD 36.14(3.4); Dh 395, SD 36.14(3.2); Dh 396-423, SD 37.1; Dh 396, SD 10.8(6.2) = SD 36.14(3.5); Dh 399, SD 45.5(2); Dh 402, SD 17.14(1); Dh 407, SD 34.7(3.1.2.1); Dh 412, SD 18.7(9.1); Dh 414, SD 32.8(4.5); Dh 421, SD 8.9(5) = SD 12.4(6.3) = SD 44.17(1.2) = SD 48.10(2.1.4.3); Dh 422, SD 22.10b(2.7).

<sup>26</sup> On the Buddha’s use of natural adaptation, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

<sup>27</sup> On Abhibhū, further see B 244-247; tr B:H 348-352.

<sup>28</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> of the 15 books of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.

<sup>29</sup> Pm 22.23/2:210 (tr Pm:Ñ 381); PmA 664-666 (which qu *Vism*); *Vism* 12.137 f/405 f (tr *Vism*:Ñ 444). For def, see SD 27.5a (6.2).

<sup>30</sup> PmA 664,23-666,4. For a def, see also SD 27.5a (6.2).

<sup>31</sup> On *mano,mayā iddhi*, see SD 27.5a (6.3). On the difference between the two, see *Vimm* ch 9 (tr *Vimm*:ESH 218); *Vism* 12.137-139/405 f (tr *Vism*:Ñ 444 f).

<sup>32</sup> On the 10 powers and their details, see SD 27.5a (6).

<sup>33</sup> *Vimm*:ESH p217 (ch 9). \**Vimutti,magga* is an Indian Abhidharma treatise attr to *Upatissa*, composed prior to 5<sup>th</sup> cent, perhaps in north India. It exists only in Chinese tr (解脫道論 *jiě tuō dào lùn*, 505 CE, by *Sanghapāla* of *Funan*). Both *Vimm* and *Vism* are structured on the 3 trainings (*sīla, samādhi paññā*, SD 21.6), but the former is older and

ga. Both these passages are apparently based on the **Paṭisambhidā,magga** [1.3.1]. Here is a paraphrase from the two works, with extra notes from Vimm put within [square brackets].

The worker of the power of transformation (*vikubbana,iddhi*) [cultivating the 4 bases of success]<sup>34</sup> should first resolve the form that he wishes to assume: a boy, a serpent (*nāga*), a harpy (*supaṇṇa*), an asura, Indra (king of the devas), Brahma, or as the sea, or a rock, or an animal, or chariot, or a foot-soldier, or even a military array (Pm 2:210).

Having made the resolve, he should then use a meditation-device (*kasīṇa*), such as the earth-kasina and so on.<sup>35</sup> [He should cultivate bliss and lightness, and dwell in it, until his body is exceedingly pliant, like a red-hot iron ball that can be shaped into any object. He goes on to attain the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana.]

Emerging from that dhyana, he makes it as the basis for direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) (that is, the power he wishes). Then, cultivating the dhyana again, he adverts to his appearance as a boy, etc. He should keep on doing this repeatedly and resolving, “Let me be a boy of such a kind ... ,” in the manner done by Devadatta.<sup>36</sup> This same method applies to whatever object he wishes to manifest himself as. This is called the power of transformation.<sup>37</sup>

**1.3.2.2** The commentator **Mahānāma**, in his Paṭisambhidā,magga Commentary (*Saddhamma-p,pakāsīnī*), adds that he should cultivate **the blue kasina**, that is, use the blue meditation-device. We are told that he developed the blue meditation-device (*nīla,kasīṇa*) to direct his attention to the world systems. Apparently, this kasina empowers the meditator to project darkness within the range of his power. The Commentary explains that this is a means of attracting the attention of beings within that range.<sup>38</sup>

He should also cultivate **the light kasina** (*āloka,kasīṇa*)—the simpler practice of which is known as the perception of light (*āloka,saññā*). The essential principles of practice are the same. Apparently, light here refers to radiance as opposed to the darkness of the blue kasina. This interaction of darkness and light is apparently a skillful means to attract the attention of both devas and humans as a prelude to the Dharma teaching. Notably, this interesting approach is not found in the suttas but a point made in the Paṭisambhidā,magga Commentary.

## 2 Early Buddhist cosmology

### 2.1 LOKA,DHĀTU (WORLD SYSTEMS)<sup>39</sup>

#### 2.1.1 Early Buddhist conception of the world and universe<sup>40</sup>

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shorter. Buddhaghosa putatively based his Vism on Vimm without attribution; longer than Vimm, it gives more citations and examples. While Vism reflects the views of the Mahāvihāra sangha, Vimm represent the views of its rival, the Abhaya,giri, said to be influenced by Mahāyāna. Eng tr *The Path of Freedom* (Vimm:ESH) by Ehara, Soma & Kheminda, [1936] 1961, repr 1977. See Hinüber 1996:123-126.

<sup>34</sup> The 4 *iddhi,pāda*: (1) will (*chanda*); (2) effort (*virīya*); (3) mind (*citta*); and (4) investigation (*vīmaṃsā*): SD 10.3.

<sup>35</sup> On *kasīṇa* meditation, see *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (9.2); on colour ~, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16,3.29-32), SD 9; SD 15.1 (1.5-1.8).

<sup>36</sup> V 1:185; DhA 1:139.

<sup>37</sup> Paraphrased: Vism 12.137 f/405 f (tr Vism:Ñ 444 f).

<sup>38</sup> PmA 664,31. On the blue kasina meditation, see SD 15.1 (9.2.1).

<sup>39</sup> My thanks to physicist Ng Xin Zhao of Malaysia for assisting with the physics (scientific aspects) in this section.

<sup>40</sup> It is helpful, as preliminary reading, to see **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29,2/5:59), SD 16.15. On other universes, see also KvU 13.1/476.

**2.1.1.1** Although the early Buddhist cosmology seems to vaguely accept some kind of a flat-world system, it seems more like a partial description of a habitable world than of a whole planet. The conception of the earth as a planet is a modern one. Of the pre-modern cosmologies, then, the early Buddhist cosmology, despite its incompleteness (or because of it) is closer than other ancient or religious ones to the modern scientific awareness of the cosmos.

**2.1.1.2** The early Buddhist conception of the extraterrestrial cosmology, however, is even closer to our modern conceptions of the cosmos. **The (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** (A 3.80), for example, describes “world systems” (*loka, dhātu*) which we may also call a “star system,” since the sun is a star. The ancient Buddhists do attribute the sun some kind of giver of light and life. The Buddha, for example, is said to be the “kinsman of the sun” (*ādicca, bandhu*).<sup>41</sup>

The term *cakka, vāḷa*, for example, is found in **the Buddha, vaṃsa** (B 5), a late canonical work. This reflects an awareness of the cycles or orbits of the heavenly bodies. However, we have no clear mention of any heliocentric system. “Solar system” (*suriya cakka, vāḷa*) is a neologism (found in modern Thai and other SE Asian languages). It is a modern term not found in the suttas or even the commentaries. The point, however, remains that early Buddhism seems to be in some way aware of cyclic paths or orbits of the sun and moon. [2.1.2.4]

## 2.1.2 The 4 kinds of world systems

**2.1.2.0** The 4 kinds of world systems mentioned in **the (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** (A 3.80) are: [1.1.1.2]

- (1) our immediate world system [2.1.2.2]: “**the universe**” (*cakka, vāḷa*) [2.1.2.3] of the early Buddhists;
- (2) the 1,000 “minor” world system (*sahassī cūḷanikā loka, dhātu*), 1000x larger than (1) [2.1.2.4];
- (3) the 1,000,000 “medium” world system (*dvi, sahassī majjhimika loka, dhatu*), 1000 x (2) [2.1.2.5];
- (4) the 1,000,000,000 “great” world system (*ti, sahassī mahā, loka, dhātu*), 1000 x (3) [2.1.2.6].

World system (1) is our solar system and its quadrant as imagined by the early Buddhists, known simply as “the universe” (*cakka, vāḷa*), that is, our “immediate” universe.

World system (2) is also simply called the thousandfold world system (*sahassī cūḷanikā loka, dhātu*), which is 1,000x larger than our immediate universe (1)

World system (3) is a kind of “mega” universe, larger than (2) by 1,000<sup>2</sup>;

World system (4) is a kind of “giga” universe, larger than (3) by 1,000<sup>3</sup>.

**2.1.2.1** The ancient Indians—including the Buddhists—probably used the term **loka**, “world,” broadly to refer to the earth (as they imagined it), as well as to the rest of the visible or imaginable universe. It is not certain whether they were aware of “thousandfold world or world system” and beyond, that is, until the Buddha had spoken about them.

One thing is clear. When the Buddha speaks of such “worlds” (in the suttas at least), very often he does so in terms of meditative experience. Indeed, we must surmise that the Buddha’s knowledge of such a universe must have come from his meditations and ascertained by his awakening. After all, he is said to be “a world-knower, or knower of worlds” (*loka, vidū*), an important sense of which refers to such a cosmological knowledge.

<sup>41</sup> *Ādicca* (Skt *āditya*) lit, “the burning”: D 2:287,21\*; S 1:192,6\* = Tha 1237d; D 3:197,14\*; Sn 915a; V 2:296,17\* = A 2:84,8\*. See CPD: *ādicca-bandhu*.



**2.1.2.2 In the (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** (A 3.80), Ānanda speaks of “a 1,000 world system” (*sahassī loka, dhātu*) [§2.2]. This term clearly refers to the wider world or universe, *loka* [2.1.2.1], imagined by the Indians of the Buddha’s time (or at least by the early Buddhists). We may refer to this kind of world as the “immediate universe,” what we today know as the “solar system.”

An older form of *loka* is probably simply “a thousandfold world” (*sahassadhā loka*), which the Buddha uses in **the Kosala Sutta 1** (A 10.29). They are both defined in the same way.<sup>42</sup> Both “a thousandfold world” and “a 1,000 world-system” refer to the same idea of the “extended universe,” as mentioned in **the (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** (A 3.80) and the Kosala Sutta 1.

**2.1.2.3** A term later than *loka* is *cakka, vāḷa* (literally, “a wheel-ring”), often rendered as “universe.” It originally referred to a mythical mountain-range that encircled the “world,” that is, the 4 continents of *this* world or of the “immediate universe.” The earliest canonical use of this term is found only in late canonical works like the Buddha,vaṃsa<sup>43</sup> and the Apadāna;<sup>44</sup> but became more common in the Commentaries.<sup>45</sup>

We may broadly apply the late term *cakka, vāḷa* to encompass either the “immediate universe” or the “extended universe” or both of them as contiguous space [2.1.2.2]. Together, they form what we may call a “horizontal world system.” This is basically the sense-world, the universe that we are able to traverse in, say, a suitable spaceship.

Then, there is a “vertical world system,” comprising the form world and the formless world, or both as a contiguous whole. It is difficult, if not impossible for those of the lower realms in such worlds to ascend into the higher realms without special methods (such as meditation), powers (psychic ability) or help (being teleported there by superior beings); but those in the higher world do visit or communicate with those of the lower realms. [1.1.5.2-1.1.5.3]

**2.1.2.4 The (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** describes 3 kinds of world systems<sup>46</sup> (*loka, dhātu*)<sup>47</sup> [§§11-13] other than our own solar system or physical universe, which serves as the model for a progressively more extensive conception of greater world systems or star systems. Beyond our “world in which the sun and the moon turn and light up the quarters with their radiance” [§11], there is the 1,000 world system [§2.2], also called **the “1,000 minor world system”** (*sahassī cūḷanikā loka, dhātu*)<sup>48</sup> [§11].

Since the Buddha is not talking science, and with respect for the ancient Indian idea of numbers,<sup>49</sup> we must assume “thousand” and other such numerical terms as “close estimates” rather than scientific precision—we are talking Buddha Dharma here, not scientific cosmology. Even then, such ancient wisdom does show a remarkable affinity for modern science.

Basically, the Buddha seems to state that our earth is not the only habitable world, and that there is a more extensive world system, presumably encircling our own, called (conservatively) **a 1,000 “minor**

<sup>42</sup> See A 3.80,11 (SD 54.1) & A 10.29,2 (SD 16.15).

<sup>43</sup> B 28.7/102 (*cakkavāḷa, paramparā*).

<sup>44</sup> ThāAp 466.10 = Ap 2:411; ThīAp 30.12 = Ap 2:593,5 (*cakkavāḷa, girim*).

<sup>45</sup> Occurrences of *cakka, vāḷa*: DA 2:434 (~*pabbate*), 585 (~*girim*); MA 2:254 (~*pabbatā*); SA 1:116 f (~*lokassa*); AA 3:87 f; J 1:53, 203, 6:330; Vism 205, 207, 367, 421; SnA 1:50, 278, 442 f; BA 288 (~*koṭṭiyam*); DhA 297; DhA 1:310, 313, 3:438; VvA 68.

<sup>46</sup> Hence, the location of the Sutta in the *Tika Nipāta* of the Aṅguttara Nikāya. I have chosen to use “world system” for *loka, dhātu* rather than universe (*cakka, vāḷa*) to avoid the technicalities of the scientific term that “universe” entails. “World system” is perfect in its generality to flexibly refer “star systems” of varying dimensions, but also to all habitable spaces. On the use of non-technical terms in early Buddhism, see SD 51.8 (3.2.1.1).

<sup>47</sup> A rare but older term is prob simply *loka* (instead of *loka, dhātu*), as in *sahassadhā loka*: see eg **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29,2), SD 16.15.

<sup>48</sup> Also described in **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29,2), SD 16.15.

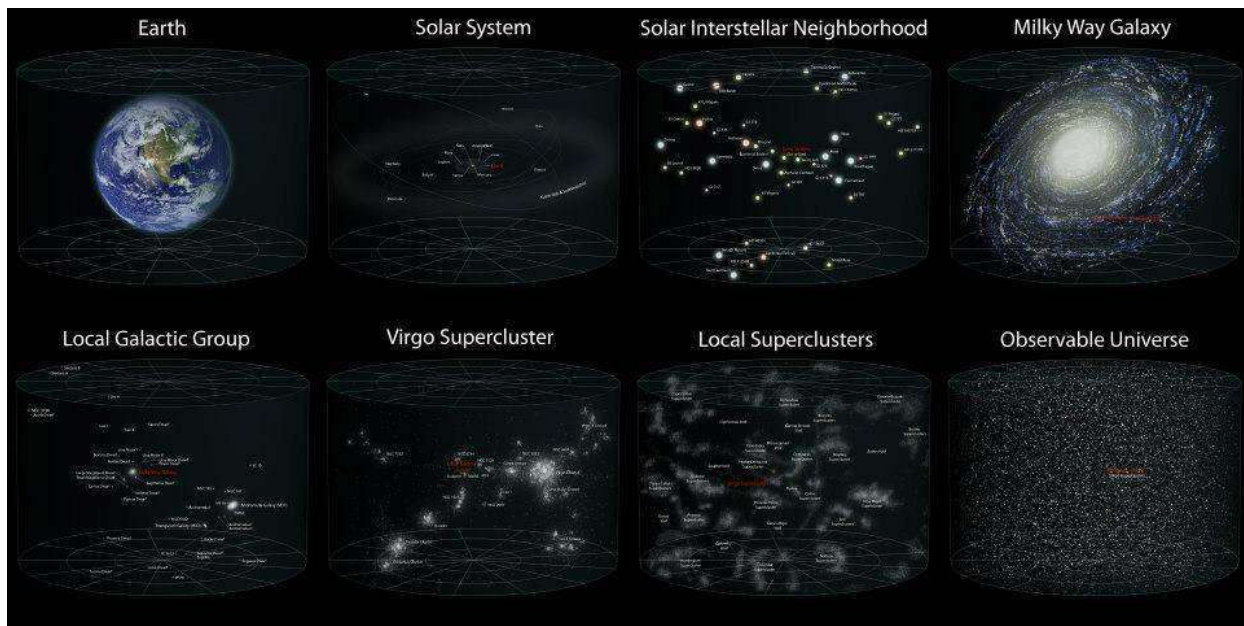
<sup>49</sup> On the ancient Indian conception of numbers, see SD 49.8b (16).

**world system**” or “lesser star systems” (*sahassī cūḷanikā loka, dhātu*)—a kiloworldsystem—out there in space, with 1,000 suns, moons, Sinerus (galactic axis), earth-like planets and heavens [§11]. Such a system, then, has a thousand single worlds, like our solar system.<sup>50</sup>

In other words, this 2<sup>nd</sup> kind of world system is a **1,000 minor world system** [§§8+11], that is, a system of a “thousand” times more of other habitable systems, forming a galaxy like ours.<sup>51</sup> In short, our earth or world system is not unique—there are other habitable world systems. In this sense, the (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta is futuristic, at least, in its cosmology. However, this interpretation is subject to our current understanding of the universe, which may change in time, when we will need to revise our views.

**2.1.2.5** The Buddha, in the (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta, then, goes on to describe a third kind of world system, one that is larger by “2,000” (*dvi, sahasī*). However, the Buddha clearly defines this as “a thousand times a 1,000 minor world system” (*dvi, sahasī majjhimika, loka, dhātu*) [§12], that is, one that is 1,000<sup>2</sup> (1,000 squared: 1,000 x 1,000) more extensive—a system that is 1,000,000 (a million) times larger, a **1,000,000 [million] medium world system**.

**2.1.2.6** Finally, there is an even larger 4<sup>th</sup> kind of “world system,” that is, by “3,000” (*ti, sahasī*) times larger, that is, “a 1,000 times a 2,000 medium world system” [§13]. This is “a triple-1,000 **great world system**” (*ti, sahasī mahā, loka, dhātu*) [§13]. This “great world system” is not 3 times a minor world system, but 1,000<sup>3</sup> (1,000 cubed: 1,000 x 1,000 x 1,000) or 1,000,000,000 (a billion) times the size of a medium world system, that is, a **1,000,000,000 [billion] great world system**.<sup>52</sup>



**Chart 1.2:** The earth compared to the universe.

Source: <https://goo.gl/images/zKuL7m>

<sup>50</sup> Sadakata 1997:94.

<sup>51</sup> See Sadakata 1997:94.

<sup>52</sup> Older scholars have used the dated terms “small chiliocosm” for the 1,000 world system; “middle chiliocosm” for the 2,000 medium world system; and “trichiliocosm” for the 3,000 great world system: see Kloetzli 1983:53 f; Sadakata 1994:93 f. For further reading, see Punnadhammo 2018: ch 1.18; Ency Bsm 6:340-345 sv Loka.

## 2.2 A LATE SUTTA?

### 2.2.1 What is made known?

**2.2.1.1 The (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** is a canonical Pali sutta. Taken literally, the (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta may seem to betray an inclination towards an idea of deifying the Buddha, one who is omnipotent, and his disciple with superpowers, able to have his voice “heard” throughout the universe. However, applying the “rule of context” [1.1.2.2], we see how the key phrase, “*sarena viññāpesi*”, shows that the notion of “hearing” is not evident here at all; but rather that of “making known” (*viññāpeti*), as in disseminating the teaching.

**2.2.1.2** Again, while we may imagine the Buddha making *himself* known, this is unlikely to be the case with the disciple, Abhibhū. When we speak of the Buddha “making himself known,” surely it is *not* the person of the Buddha but what he embodies, that is, the Dharma that is made known.<sup>53</sup> And this amazing feat of spreading the Dharma is done through **meditation** or more specifically, dhyana (*jhāna*), as we have noted [1.1.2.3-1.1.2.4].

### 2.2.2 Post-Buddha developments

**2.2.2.1** Ideally, we need a mastery of Buddha Dhamma in Pali, dhyanic meditation and modern mathematics and physics to fully understand the import of **the (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta**. Even when we know, wordwise, what the Buddha is *saying*, we still have to decipher (at least here) what he really means. We must invoke the wisdom of **the Neyy’attha Nīt’attha Sutta** (A 2.3.5+6) to understand when the Buddha is speaking in parables, and teach out his import (SD 2.6b).

Why doesn’t the Buddha speak his mind and say what he means, we may ask. Indeed, he sometimes does, close to it, anyway—by using Dharma terms like truth, precept, path, aggregate, *dhamma* and so forth. But he can only teach those who are right and ready for the path and awakening: the Buddha only points out the way but we have to take the path ourself (Dh 276).

In this case—in the (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta—the Buddha has, in a sense, codified teachings that are well beyond the understanding of his time, but which stir the imagination of his audience. Today, with ever better understanding of the cosmos, we have a better idea of what the Buddha is teaching here.

**2.2.2.2** Down through the ages, the Buddha’s teachings have been well understood by those who follow his instructions carefully: keep the precepts, cultivate moral virtue; calm and clear the mind to prepare it for mental purity and focus; work for the wisdom that frees and awakens us unconditionally. Such conduct is well exemplified in the lives of the forest monastics to live unburdened by worldliness and society—and yet benefitting society in a spiritual way.

Down through the ages, too, and in our own times, there are those (and many of them) who, for various reasons, disregard these essential instructions of the Buddha. Influenced by the world—but more so their own worldliness—they have chosen to “privatize” the truths that are meant to free us. The suttas are read—if they are read at all—with blinkers and coloured lenses—and interpreted in individualistic and worldly ways, and used for worldly profit and dominance.

Perhaps, the post-Buddha theologians and teachers, taking this Sutta, for example, as a point of departure, deified the Buddha and created eternal Paradises. Such deification of the Buddha is recorded

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<sup>53</sup> Cf the Buddha’s famous remark: “One who sees the Dharma sees me; one who sees me, sees the Dharma”: **Vakkali S** (S 22.87), esp SD 8.8 (1.3).

in Mahāyāna works like the polemical Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra and the philosophical Pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sutra (or Mahāprajñāpāramita Sutra).<sup>54</sup>

**2.2.2.3 The (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** uses mythical language<sup>55</sup> to help us imagine the power of Buddhist meditation (that is, dhyana), and uses metaphors and mathematics to help his audience imagine the immensity of the world, that this world of the senses is not our only world but there is a boundless cosmos of “world systems” out there with unimaginable possibilities. Even today, we are just beginning to fathom the little that we know and the more of what we do not. The Buddha speaks of the space of our mind—this is the true and real “final frontier” of life, existence and knowledge.

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## (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta

### The (Threes) Discourse on Abhibhū

A 3.80

[The PTS paragraph numbering is given in square brackets.]

#### Ānanda asks about Abhibhū

**1** Then, the venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down [227] at one side. Sitting at one side, the venerable Ānanda said this to the Blessed One:

**2** “Bhante, before the Blessed One himself I heard this; before the Blessed One himself I learned this:<sup>56</sup>

2.2 ‘Ānanda, **Abhibhū**, a disciple of the Blessed One **Sikhī**,<sup>57</sup> while remaining in the brahma world, could make his voice known throughout a **1,000 world system**.<sup>58</sup>

2.3 But, bhante, how far can the Blessed One, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one let his voice be known?”<sup>59</sup>

**3** “He was a disciple, Ānanda. The Tathāgatas are immeasurable.”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See SD 36.9 (4.6). For details of such deification or eternalization of the Buddha’s, see Routledge Ency of Buddhism, 2007:37-43 (Archetypal Buddhas and Bodhisattvas), 104 f (Bodies of the Buddha). For a rejection of the “deification/apotheosis” thesis, see Nitta, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> On Buddhist mythology, see **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1; **Buddha as myth** SD 36.2; also SD 2.19 (1); SD 51.11 (3.1.1).

<sup>56</sup> *Sammukhā m’etaṃ bhante bhagavato sutam, sammukhā paṭiggahitaṃ.*

<sup>57</sup> Sikhī was the 5<sup>th</sup> past buddha from our Gotama Buddha and arose 31 aeons ago: see (1.1.1.1).

<sup>58</sup> Lit, “a thousandfold world system” (*sahassī,loka.dhātu*). *Bhagavato ānanda sikhissa abhibhū nāma sāvako brahma,loke thito sahassī,loka.dhātuṃ* (vl *sahassi-*) *sarena viññāpesīti*. The underscored phrase is fully explained in PmA 663-666, incl an account of Abhibhū. See (2.1.2.4).

<sup>59</sup> *Bhagavā pana bhante arahaṃ sammā,sambuddho kīvatakaṃ pahoti sarena viññāpetun’ti*. In **Aruṇa,vatī S** (S 6.14), *sarena viññāpesi* seems to be literally, “communicated with (his) voice” (SD 54.17).

<sup>60</sup> *Sāvako so ānanda, appameyyā tathāgatā’ti*. Comy: The Buddha said this intending thus: “Ānanda, what are you saying? He was a disciple, too, established in limited knowledge (*padesa,ñāṇe*). But the Tathagatas, having fulfilled the 10 perfections and attained omniscience, are immeasurable. The range, sphere and power of a disciple is one

4 For the second time, the venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, before the Blessed One himself I heard this; before the Blessed One himself I learned this:

4.2 ‘Ānanda, Abhibhū, a disciple of the Blessed One Sikhī, while remaining in the brahma world, could make his voice known throughout a 1,000 world system.

4.3 But, bhante, how far can the Blessed One, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one let his voice be known?”

5 “He was a disciple, Ānanda. The Tathāgatas are immeasurable.”

6 [2]<sup>61</sup> For the third time, the venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, before the Blessed One himself I heard this; before the Blessed One himself I learned this:

6.2 ‘Ānanda, Abhibhū, a disciple of the Blessed One Sikhī, while remaining in the brahma world, could make his voice known throughout a 1,000 world system.

6.3 But, bhante, how far can the Blessed One, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one let his voice be known?”

7 “He was a disciple, Ānanda. The Tathāgatas are immeasurable.”

### The 1,000 minor world system

8 “Ānanda, have you heard of the 1,000 minor world system [the thousandfold minor world system]?”<sup>62</sup>

9 “This is the time, Blessed One! This is the time, Sugata [Well Gone One]. The Blessed One should speak on it. Having heard it, the monks will bear it in mind.”<sup>63</sup>

“Then, listen, Ānanda, pay close attention to it, I will speak.”

10 “Yes, bhante,” the venerable Ānanda replied to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said this:

11 [3] “Ānanda, a thousand times the world in which the sun and the moon turn and light up the quarters with their radiance<sup>64</sup>—this, Ānanda, is called a **1,000 minor world system** (*sahassī cūḷanikā loka, dhātu*).<sup>65</sup>

In that 1,000 minor world system,<sup>66</sup> there are:<sup>67</sup>

a thousand moons,

a thousand suns,

a thousand Sinerus, kings of the mountains, (the world-hubs),

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thing, those of the buddhas are another. It is like comparing a bit of dirt in your finger-nail with that of the great earth itself!” (AA 2:339,23-30)

<sup>61</sup> This numbering in [italicized square brackets] is that of the Pali Text Society (PTS).

<sup>62</sup> *Sutā te ānanda saḥassī cūḷanikā loka, dhātūti.*

<sup>63</sup> *Etassa bhagavā kālo etassa sugata kālo, yaṃ bhagavā bhāseyya, bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressantīti.* This is stock. For a longer one, see eg **Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 136,6) + SD 4.16 (3.1.1). Cf **Aruṇa, vatī S** (S 6.14,17), where the Buddha makes such a request (SD 54.17).

<sup>64</sup> *Yāvatā ānanda candima, suriyā* (Ce Ee Ke Se; Be *candima, sūriyā* throughout) *pariharanti disā bhanti virocānā, tāva saḥsadhā loko.*

<sup>65</sup> See (2.1.2.4). Comy: This is the range of a disciple (*ayaṃ sāvakassa visayo*, AA 2:341,1).

<sup>66</sup> See (2.1.2.2+2.1.2.4).

<sup>67</sup> All these up to the Para, nimmita Vasa, vatti heaven, constitute our “physical” universe, or, the “sense world” (*kāma, loka*). The brahma worlds mentioned here constitute only the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 4 form worlds (*rūpa, loka*), which are all dhyanic in nature. For their locations in the early Buddhist cosmology, see SD 1.7 (App).

a thousand Jambu,dīpas <sup>68</sup>	(the Indian subcontinent),
a thousand Aparā,go.yānas	(the Western Ox-wains),
a thousand Uttara,kurus	(the Northern Kurus),
a thousand Pubba,videhas	(the Western Videhas),
a thousand 4 great oceans,	
a thousand heavens of the Cātu,māha.rajīkas	(of the 4 great kings),
a thousand Tavatimsā heavens	(of the 33 devas), [228]
a thousand Yāma heavens	
a thousand Tusita heavens	(of the contented devas),
a thousand Nimmāṇa,ratī heavens	(of devas who delight in creation),
a thousand Para,nimmita Vasa,vattī heavens	(of those who lord over others' creations),
and a thousand brahma worlds.	

This, Ānanda, is called a 1,000 minor world system.

### The larger world systems

**12** Ānanda, a world that is a 1,000 times a 1,000 minor world system<sup>69</sup>—this, Ānanda, is called a **1,000,000 [million] medium world system** (*dvi,sahassī majjhimika,loka.dhātu*).<sup>70</sup>

**13** Ānanda, a world that is a thousand times a million medium world system<sup>71</sup>—this, Ānanda, is called a **1,000,000,000 [billion] great world system** (*ti,sahassī mahā,loka.dhātu*).<sup>72</sup>

### The Tathagata's power of teaching

**14** [4] Ānanda, the Tathagata, if he wishes, may let his voice be known as far as he wants in the 1,000,000,000 great world system.<sup>73</sup>

**15** “But, bhante, how does the Blessed One let his voice be known in the 1,000,000,000 great world system as far as he wishes?”

**16** “Here, Ānanda, the Tathagata **would suffuse with his radiance** a 1,000,000,000 great world system.<sup>74</sup> When those beings perceive the light, then the Tathagata would project his voice so that it could be heard.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *Jambu,dīpa* is the textual name for the ancient Indian subcontinent. It is the southernmost of the 4 great continents (the next 3), surrounded by the 4 oceans. See SD 16.15 (3). For descriptions, see KhpA 123; SnA 2:443; DhsA 298.

<sup>69</sup> *Yāvat'ānanda sahasī cūlanikā loka,dhātu, tāva sahasadhā loko*. Astronomically, this is a 1,000,000-fold or 1,000<sup>2</sup> medium world system. See (2.1.2.4).

<sup>70</sup> Lit, “a 2,000 medium world system” or “2-thousandfold medium world system.” *Ayam vuccat'ānanda dvi,sahassī majjhimikā loka,dhātu*. On this world system, see (2.1.2.5).

<sup>71</sup> Astronomically, this is a 1,000,000,000-fold or 1,000<sup>3</sup> medium world system. See prec n.

<sup>72</sup> Lit, “a 3-thousandfold great world system.” *Ayam vuccat'ānanda ti,sahassī mahā loka,dhātu*. In practical terms, this refers to our universe at its greatest reach. In other words, the Buddha's teaching may reach through the whole of our universe. See (2.1.2.6).

<sup>73</sup> *Ākañkhamāno ānanda tathāgato ti,sahassī,mahā,sahassī,loka,dhātuṃ\* sarena viññāpeyya, yāvatā pana ākañkheyyā'ti*. \*Be; Ee *ti,sahassī,mahā,sahassī,loka,dhātuṃ*; Ke Se *ti,sahassīm mahā,sahassīm loka,dhātuṃ*. See (2.1.2.3).

<sup>74</sup> *Idh'ānanda tathāgato ti,sahassī,mahā,sahassī,loka,dhātuṃ obhāsenā phareyya*.

<sup>75</sup> *Yadā te sattā taṃ ālokaṃ sañjāneyyurū, atha tathāgato ghosam kareyya saddam anussāveyya*. The last

In this way, Ānanda, the Tathagata would make his voice known as far as he wants in the 1,000,000,-000 great world system.

### Ananda's future

**17** [5] When this was said, the venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One:<sup>76</sup>

“What a gain! What a fortunate gain! That my teacher is of such great power and such great might!”<sup>77</sup>

**18** When this was said, the venerable Udāyī<sup>78</sup> said to the venerable Ānanda:

“What is there for you, avuso [friend] Ānanda, that your teacher is of such great power and such great might?”<sup>79</sup>

**19** When this was said, the Blessed One said to the venerable Udāyī:

“Say not so, Udāyī! Say not so, Udāyī!<sup>80</sup> If, Udāyī, Ānanda were to die without being free from lust, then, because of his mind of faith, he would seven times wield divine kingship amongst the devas, and would seven times be emperor [maharajah] over this Jambu,dīpa.<sup>81</sup>

**20** However, Udāyī, Ānanda will here and now attain final nirvana.”<sup>82</sup>

— evaṃ —

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half of the sentence, lit: “Then the Tathagata would make his voice (*ghosa*) that would let the sound (*sara*) be heard.” We can also take *ghosa* and *sara* as synonyms. See (1.1.4.3).

<sup>76</sup> *Evaṃ vutte āyasmā ānando bhagavantam* (Ce; Be adds: *āyasmantam udāyīm*; Ee Ke Se Comy omit) *etad avoca*.

<sup>77</sup> *Lābhā vata me, suladdham vata me, yassa me satthā evaṃ mah’iddhiko evaṃ mahā’nubhāvo’ti*.

<sup>78</sup> Comy: This was the elder Lā’udāyī (who has the habit of saying the wrong things). It is said that in the past, he resented the elder Ānanda for being appointed as the Buddha’s attendant. He seized his opportunity at the end of the Buddha’s lion-roar in an attempt to hurt the elder Ānanda’s faith, as if putting out a burning candle, hitting a stray bull’s snout, or inverting a bowl full of food. (AA 2:344,26-345,2). See SD 46.1 (feigns to teach Dhamma) & SD 47.15 (he contradicts Sāriputta).

<sup>79</sup> *Kiṃ tuyh’ettha āvuso ānanda yadi te satthā evaṃ mah’iddhiko evaṃ mahā’nubhāvo’ti*.

<sup>80</sup> Comy: The Buddha says this, like a kind man were to repeatedly say to another man precariously perched at the edge of a precipice, “Come this way! Come this way!” (AA 2:345,3-7)

<sup>81</sup> *Mā h’evaṃ udāyi, mā h’evaṃ udāyi. Sace udāyi ānando avīta,rāgo kālarṃ kareyya, tena citta-p,pasādena satta-k,khattuṃ devesu deva,rajjarṃ kāreyya, satta-k,khattuṃ imasmim yeva jambu,dīpe mahā,rajjarṃ kāreyya*.

<sup>82</sup> *Api ca udāyi ānando diṭṭh’eva dhamme parinibbāyissatīti*.