

19

Sakka,nāma Sutta

The Discourse on Sakra's Names | S 11.12

Ce **Dutiya Devā (Satta Vatapada) Sutta** The Devas Discourse (on the 7 vows)

Ee Se **Dutiya (Sakka) Devā Sutta** The (Sakka) Discourse on Devas 2

Theme: On Sakra's 7 names and 7 vows

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2019

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY. In the **Sakka,nāma Sutta** (S 11.12), as the title suggests, the Buddha relates the origins of Sakra's 7 names [§4], and Sakra's 7 vows [§§5-10] that are the karmic basis for his attaining his Sakra-state or Sakrahood. While the origins of his 7 names, as a set, are unique to this Sutta, the 7 vows are also found in the **Vatapada Sutta** (S 11.11), SD 54.12.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 Sakra's commonest names

1.2.1.1 Sakra's 7 names are: Maghava or Magha, Purin,dada, Sakka, Vāsava, Sahass'akkha, Sujam,-pati and Devānam-inda [§4]. The first 4 of these names relate to his past good karma, while the last 3 names relate to his present state of Sakra. The 3rd name is the most common, since this is the name by which he is usually known. Then, comes the 7th or last name, which is actually his title, since, as a rule, it follows as a stock passage as **sakka devānam inda**, "Sakra, lord of the devas" [§4 etc].

1.2.1.2 His best known name, **Sakra** (*sakka*), comes from the fact that he is not only a generous giver, but he gives offerings in an assiduous (*sakkacca*) manner. He gives respectfully, carefully, thoroughly and happily. The word *sakka* also mean "able,"¹ which is a well-known derivation for the name of the Buddha's clan, the Sakyas (spelt *sakka*, *sakyā*, *sākiyā*).

1.2.2 Significance of Sakra's names. Sakra's various names testify to his diverse qualities and virtues, human and divine, past and present. Sakra does not arise in Tāvātimsa from nothing, but through his various public-spirited endeavours when he was a human being before his birth as Sakra. His wholesome public acts also include 33 other youths who are just as diligent and virtuous, led by him as their prime example.

Hence, Sakra's names testify to his personal wholesomeness and his qualities as a good leader in efforts that benefit the masses. The efforts of Sakra and his 33 friends are expressions of **the divine abodes** (*brahma,vihāra*):

- lovingkindness (*mettā*): they work for the benefit of everyone else;
- compassion (*karuṇā*): they do not retaliate even when jealous powerful people try to damage their reputation or destroy their work;
- gladness (*muditā*): they rejoice in the fact that others benefit from their works; and
- equanimity (*upekkhā*): they are undiscouraged by difficulties and failures.

¹ SnA 1:354.

1.2.3 Sakra's other names

1.2.3.1 Maghava or Magha is the name as a brahmin youth (*māṇava*) of Magadha, in his previous life, when, with his 30 or 33 friends, led public-spirited lives providing all kinds of amenities for travellers. The Commentary to **the Mahāli Sutta** (S 11.13) gives a brief account of how the youth Magha and his 33 friends labored in public deeds of merit. Having fulfilled the 7 vows [§7], they are reborn in Tāvātimsa, the heaven of the 33 devas (SA 1:348,12-26).²

1.2.3.2 Vāsava is another of Sakra's names originating from his public-spirited life as Magha. It plays on the word *āvāsatha*, "a resthouse," which he and his 33 friends built for the benefit of tired and parched travellers.³ This is related in **the Magha Vatthu**, the story of Magha (DhA 2.7).⁴

There is another etymology of Vāsava, found in the late **Mahā,samaya Sutta** (D 20), where Sakra is said to be "Vāsava, the best of the Vāsus" (*vasūnam vāsavo seṭṭho*).⁵ From this Sutta, it is clear that **Vāsu** is another name for the 33 gods (*tāva,timsa*). Note also that in **S 876b*** (S 11.4), Mātali familiarly addresses Sakra as "**Vāsava**," "lord of the Vasus."⁶

1.2.3.3 Purin,dada is the Buddhist form of his old name Purin,dara or Puran,dara, "the destroyer of forts or strongholds," when he was a warlike god of the belligerent Aryans. He was then called **Indra** (P *inda*). After his conversion to the Buddha's teaching, *inda* is part of his stock name, but it simply means "lord, leader."⁷

The word **pura** is polysemic and can mean either (n) "city" or (adv) "before." Both senses apply here: Sakra is one "who gives to city after city" or "who has given often before" (*pure pure dānam adāsi*) [§4.2]. However, the former sense reflects the mythical reality of Sakra's story, as the opposite of his old Vedic name of Purandara.

1.2.3.4 Sahass'akkha means "the one with a thousand eyes," but the Sutta explains this as meaning that he "thinks of a thousand matters in a moment" (*sahassam pi atthānam muhuttana cinteti*). There is a play (*śleṣa*) or homonymy on *akkha*, which has at least 5 senses: an axle, a die or a game, a sense-organ or faculty, the eye (also as *-akkhi*, only in the ending of a compound), and as *akkhā*, the aorist of *akkhāti*, "made known, announced, teach."⁸

The last 3 meanings can be applied to *sahass'akkha*, giving it these senses:

- (1) the one with a thousand faculties (whose mind is versatile and discerning);
 - (2) the one with a thousand "eyes" (that is, able to read situations broadly, rapidly and effectively);
 - (3) the one who "makes known" in a thousand ways (who is adept in problem-solving and teaching).
- Since all these 3 senses are those of *akkha/akkhā*, we can take them all as applicable to *sahass'akkha*, the one "who thinks of a thousand matters in a moment." This is a case of Pali polysemy.⁹

² See DhA 2.7a/1:264 + SD 54.22 Contents + (4.3). See also **Mahali S** (S 11.13), SD 99.11; **Kulāvaka S** (S 11.6), SD 66.22; cf **Kulāvaka J** (J 31).

³ Vāsava, "the giver of dwellings": **Sakka,nāmā S** (S 11.12/1:229), SD 54.19; DhA 1:264.

⁴ DhA 2.7,32 (SD 54.22).

⁵ D 20,14i (42.2a*), SD 54.4. See also D 2:260, 274; S 1:221, 223, 229 f, 234-7; Sn 384; DA 2:690; DhA 3:270; J 1:65; called Vasu,devata (DAT 2:307).

⁶ See **Vepa,citti S** (S 11.4) @ SD 54.6 (2.1.2.2).

⁷ SED: *pur* → *puram* gives *puramda* and *puramdara*—both meaning "destroyer of strongholds." See **Upāli (Gaha,pati) S** (M 56,26 (6d) n on "the capable destroyer of cities"), SD 27.1; also SD 54.22 (4.2.5.2).

⁸ **Akkhāti**, 3 sg (Skt *ā* + √KHYĀ, to see; its suppletive verb is *ācikkhati*: CPD qv), Sn 87, J 4:197,22*; 2 sg *-āsi*, J 4:42,-7*, 6:507,30*; 1 sg *-āmi*, Sn 172,S 1:123,17*; 1 pl *-āma*, J 6:518,3*. See CPD sv.

⁹ On Pali polysemy, see SD 1.1 (4.4.5); SD 10.16 (1.3.1-1.3.2; 2.2); SD 54.3b (2.1.1.4).

The Commentary says Sakra is able to deal with a thousand matters at once (in contemporary terms, multitask). Holding on to a single word he sorts out a thousand people or a thousand statements, and decides, “This means this, that means that (*ayaṃ imassa attho, ayaṃ imassa attho’ti*).” (SA 1:348,3-6). The Porāṇa Ṭīkā adds that he has “a thousand eyes of wisdom” (*sahassam paññā, akkhīni*) (SAPṬ:Be 1:337). In simple terms, Sakra has a mind that is able to process “a thousand things” at a time.

Sahass’akkha is one of Sakra’s names as a Buddhist deity. Another of his name that is synonymous to this is **Sahassa,netta** [2.1]. When he was a Vedic deity, he had the name *sahasra,cakṣus* (*sahasra,cakṣas*) or *sahasra,netra* (P *sahassa,netta*), “the thousand eyed.” The story behind this name is a humorous one.¹⁰ [2.1]

1.2.3.5 Sujam,pati is the 4th, and probably the youngest, of the wives¹¹ of Sakra as Maghava. She was also the least diligent of them. As such, when Maghava is reborn as Sakra, she was reborn as a crane. Deeply devoted to her, Sakra coached her to keep the precepts and make merit so that she was reborn in Tāvātimsa. However, she was reborn as a woman in Benares, and Sakra had to look for her again. Finally, she is reborn as the “asura maiden” (*asura,kaññā*), Sujā¹² or Sujātā,¹³ daughter of Vepacitti, lord of the asuras and Sakra’s sworn enemy! In a clever scheme, Sakra is able to find her in the midst of an asura betrothal gathering and she willingly eloped with him!¹⁴

2 Sakra’s other names

2.1 SAHASSA,NETTA. According to Vedic mythology, **Indra** (Sakra) (a sort of Indian Apollo) had a lecherous appetite. Once a powerful seer caught him trying to seduce his wife. The furious seer cursed Indra so that his whole body was covered by a thousand female organs (*yoni*)! Hence, he was called **Sa,yoni**, “the wombed one.” In due course, the seer, out of compassion, changed these embarrassing marks into “eyes”; hence, his name *sahasra,cakṣus* (or *-cakṣas*) or *sahasra,netra*.¹⁵ As a Buddhist deity, he is known as *sahassa,akkhi*, “the thousand-eyed.” [1.2.3.4]

2.2 KOSIYA

2.2.1 Another name of Sakra, not so well known, is **Kosiya**, “owl,” which is his clan or gotra (*gotta*) name (J 3:208). Etymologically, it means “belonging to the Kusika family.” Indra is so called in the Ṛgveda, the sense of which is unknown. T W Rhys Davids suggests that it is likely to be a survival from the time when Indra was only the god of a Kusika clan.¹⁶ Ancient Indian clan names were often names of animals, such as “tortoise” (Kassapa = *kacchapa*), “yearling (calf)” (*Vaccha*).

¹⁰ On *sahass’akkha* and similar names, see SD 54.8 (6.3.1.2).

¹¹ Sakra’s 4 wives are Sudhammā, Nandā, Cittā and Sujā: see SD 54.8 (6.3). Their story is related in **Magha Vatthu** (DhA 7b/1:274-280), SD 54.22.

¹² On *sujā*, see eg DhA 1:428,5.

¹³ On *sujātā*, see eg U 3.7/29, SD 71.3.

¹⁴ For details on Sujā, see SD 54.8 (6.3.5).

¹⁵ See SD 54.8 (6.3.1).

¹⁶ D:RD 2:296 f; C E Godage, “Place of Indra in early Buddhism,” *Univ of Ceylon Review* 3,1 1945:53). See also Divy 632; Mvst 3:200, 315, 403.

The name **Kosiya** is used a number of times in reference to Sakra, thus:

by the Buddha	Pañca,sikha Sutta	D 21,1.9/2:270	SD 54.8
by Mahā Moggallāna	Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta	M 37,8/1:252	SD 54.9
by Mahā Kassapa	(Sakka) Kassapa Sutta	U 3.7/30,5; UA 200,9; DhA 1:429,1	SD 71.3
by Guttilla	Guttilla Jātaka	J 423/2:252,8	

— — —

Sakka,nāma Sutta

The Discourse on Sakra’s Names

S 11.12

1 At one time the Blessed One [229] was residing in Anātha,piṇḍika’s park in Jeta’s grove outside Sāvattihī.¹⁷

2 There, the Blessed One addressed the monks, “Bhikshus!”
“Bhante!” (*bhadante*), the monks replied.

3 The Blessed One said this:

Sakra’s 7 names

- 4 “Bhikshus, in the past, **Sakra**, lord of the devas, when he was a human being, was a youth named Maghava.¹⁸ Hence, he is called **Maghava**.¹⁹
- 4.2 Bhikshus, in the past, Sakra, lord of the devas, *when he was a human being*, gave offerings in city after city.²⁰ Hence, he is called **Purin,dada**, City-giver.²¹
- 4.3 Bhikshus, in the past, Sakra, lord of the devas, *when he was a human being*, gave offerings assiduously. Hence, he is called **Sakka** [Sakra].²²
- 4.4 Bhikshus, in the past, Sakra, lord of the devas, *when he was a human being*, gave a resthouse.²³ Hence, he is called **Vāsava**.²⁴
- 4.5 Bhikshus, Sakra, lord of the devas, thinks of a thousand matters in a moment. Hence, he is called **Sahass’akkha**.²⁵

¹⁷ *Ekam samayam bhagava savatthiyam viharati jetavane anatha,piṇḍikassa ārāme*: only in Ce, Se. Be has only *Sāvattiyam jeta,vane*; Ee *Sāvatti jetavane*.

¹⁸ On Maghava or Magha, see (1.2.3.1).

¹⁹ *Sakko bhikkhave devānam indo pubbe manussa,bhūto samāno magho nāma māṇavo ahoṣi, tasmā “magha-vā’ti* vuccati. *Only Ce māgho. [1.2.3.1]*

²⁰ On the polysemy of the underscored, see (1.2.3.3)

²¹ *Sakko bhikkhave devānam indo pubbe manussa,bhūto samāno pure pure* dānam adāsi, tasmā “purin,-dado’ti vuccati.*Ce Ee Ee2 so. Be Se pure. [1.2.3.3]*

²² *Sakko bhikkhave devānam indo pubbe manussa,bhūto samāno sakkaccam dānam adāsi, tasmā “sakko’ti vuccati. [1.2.1]*

²³ The story of the resthouse (*āvasatha*) is at DhA 1:269 f (DhA:B 1:317 f). See **Magha Vatthu** (DhA 2.7), SD 54.22.

²⁴ *Sakko bhikkhave devānam indo pubbe manussa,bhūto samāno āvasatham adāsi, tasmā “vāsavo’ti vuccati. [1.2.3.2]*

²⁵ *Sakko bhikkhave devānam indo sahasam pi atthānam muhuttana cinteti, tasmā “sahass’akkho’ti vuccati. [1.2.3.4]*

4.6 Bhikshus, the wife of Sakra, lord of the devas,
is the asura maiden named Sujā.²⁶

Hence, he is called **Sujam,pati**.²⁷

4.7 Bhikshus, in the past, Sakra, lord of the devas, rules
and lords with supreme authority over the Tāvatiṃsa devas.

Hence, he is called **Devānam-inda**.²⁸

Sakra's 7 vows²⁹

5 Bhikshus, in the past, Sakra, lord of the devas, when was a human being,³⁰ undertook and fulfilled³¹ 7 vows. From this undertaking, Sakra came to his Sakra-state.³²

6 What are **the 7 vows**?³³

Sakra's 7 vows³⁴

- 7 (1) As long as I live, may I support my parents.
(2) As long as I live, may I respect the family elders.
(3) As long as I live, may I speak gently.
(4) As long as I live, may I not speak divisively.
(5) As long as I live, may I dwell at home with
a heart free from the stain of miserliness, devoted
to charity, open-handed, delighting in giving, devoted
to charity, delighting to have a share in giving.³⁶
(6) As long as I live, may I speak the truth.
(7) As long as I live, may I be free from anger,
and, should anger arise in me,
may I quickly dispel it.

*yāva,jīvaṃ mātā,petti,bharo assaṃ*³⁵
yāva,jīvaṃ kule jeṭṭhāpacāyī assaṃ
yāv,jīvaṃ saṇha,vāco assaṃ
yāvajīvaṃ apisuṇa,vāco assaṃ
yāva,jīvaṃ vigata,mala,maccherena
cetasā agāraṃ ajjhāvaseyyaṃ
mutta,cāgo payata,pāṇi vossagga,rato
yāca,yogo dāna,samvibhāga,rato
yāva,jīvaṃ sacca,vāco assaṃ
yāva,jīvaṃ akkodhano assaṃ
sace'pi me kodho uppajjeyya,
khippam eva naṃ paṭivineyyan'ti

8 Bhikshus, in the past, Sakra, lord of the devas, when he was a human being, undertook and fulfilled 7 vows. From this undertaking, Sakra came to his Sakra-state.

²⁶ On how Sakra won Sujā, Vepacitti's daughter, see DhA 1:278 f (DhA:B 1:323); J 1:206. See also SD 54.8 (6.3.5). See (1.2.3.5).

²⁷ *Sakkassa bhikkhave devānam indassa sujā nāma asura,kaññā pajā,pati, tasmā "sujam,pati'ti vuccati.* [1.2.3.5]

²⁸ *Sakko bhikkhave devānam indo devānaṃ tāvatimsānaṃ issariy'ādhiccaṃ rajjaṃ kāreti, tasmā "devānam indo'ti vuccati.*

²⁹ This whole section on "Sakra's 7 vows" recur as **Vata,pada S** (S 11.11), SD 54.12.

³⁰ In his previous life as the youth Māgha and his 33 friends: see SD 54.12 (1.1).

³¹ "Undertook and fulfilled" (*samattāni samādinnaṇi*), see SD 54.12 (2.2).

³² The whole para: *Sakkassa bhikkhave devānam indassa pubbe manussa,bhūtassa satta vata,padāni samattāni samādinnaṇi ahesuṃ, yesaṃ samādinnaṇā sakko sakkattaṃ ajjhagā.* On *vata,pada*, see SD 54.12 (2.1).

³³ On *vata,pada*, see SD 54.12 (2.1). Cf Miln 90 where a different set of 8 vows are given in detail: SD 54.12 (2.1.2).

³⁴ For comys on these **7 vows**, see SD 54.12 (1.3.2).

³⁵ *Assaṃ* is 1 sg pot of *atthi*, "it is."

³⁶ This is stock: also in **Nakula,māta S** (A 8.48/4:268 f) = (**Agata,phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.6/3:287 = SD 15.3). At **Dīgha,jānu S** (A 8.54.14/4:284), this serves as the def for "the accomplishment in charity" (*cāga,sampadā*). Commented upon at Vism 7.101-106.

The closing verses³⁷

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---|
| <p>9 <i>Mātā,petti,bharam jantum
kule jeṭṭhâpacāyinaṃ
saṇhaṃ sakhila,sambhāsaṃ
pesuṇeyya-p,pahāyinaṃ</i></p> | (S 906) ³⁸ | <p>A person supports his parents,
respects the elders in the family,
gentle and courteous in speech,
refrains from divisive speech,</p> |
| <p>10 <i>macchera,vinaye yuttaṃ
saccaṃ kodhâbhibhuṃ naraṃ</i></p> <p><i>taṃ ve devā tāvatimsā
āhu sappuriso itī</i></p> | (S 907) ³⁹ | <p>devoted to removing his meanness,
a truthful man, who vanquishes anger—</p> <p>him, the devas of Tāvatiṃsa
call “a true person.”</p> |

— evaṃ —

190525 190526 190903

³⁷ Recurs in **Magha Vatthu** (DhA 2.7,10), SD 54.22 & **Kula,vāka J** (J 31/1:202,2-6). See SD 54.12 (2.1.1).

³⁸ = S 904 (S 11.11), SD 54.12.

³⁹ = S 905 (S 11.11), SD 54.12.