1 Sutta summary and parallels

1.1 SUMMARY

1.1.1 The Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta, the lesser discourse on the destruction of craving, relates Sakra to asking the Buddha for a brief explanation on the question of how awakening is attained [§3]. Moggallāna then visits Sakra to verify if he has understood the lesson. At that time, Sakra is enjoying himself, listening to a large musical ensemble playing celestial music [§1-7].

1.1.2 When Sakra is asked by Moggallāna to recite what he has learned from the Buddha, he, at first, evades it by declaring that he is busy with various duties, especially with the newly built Vejayanta palace. Then, he invites Moggallāna on a tour of the huge palace [§§8-13].

1.1.3 Noticing Sakra’s distraction, Moggallāna rouses samvega in him by making the whole palace shake. Sakra is impressed and relates to him the Buddha’s teaching as he has heard it. Moggallāna, satisfied, leaves and sees the Buddha. Meanwhile, Sakra informs the devas that Moggallāna is his fellow brahma-farer [§§14-22]

1.1.4 Moggallāna asks the Buddha if he recalls having instructed a certain “yaksha” (his term for Sakra). The Buddha answers that he does recall and repeats the teaching to Moggallāna. This is the 3rd cycle of the teaching. [§§23-27]

1.2 ĀGAMA PARALLELS

1.2.1 Differences and difficulties

1.2.1.1 The Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta has two Chinese parallels, found in the Sarīyukta Āgama (SĀ 505) and in the Ekottarika Āgama (EĀ 19.3). While in M 37, the sutta venue is the mansion of Migāra’s mother, outside Śāvatthī, SĀ 505 locates it in Rājagaha, and EĀ in Jeta’s grove.

1.2.1.2 EĀ 19.3 is problematic in giving differing accounts of the central teaching of the Sutta, that is, the one given by the Buddha to Sakra (T2.593.c18), the one repeated by Sakra to Moggallāna in Tāvatiṃsa (T2.594b12), and the one repeated by the Buddha to Moggallāna (T2.594c3). Yet, they are actually the
same instruction. The instruction in EĀ 19.3 thus “substantially differs from the Pāli.” This is especially true of the 1st instruction (T2.593.c18).

1.2.2 Similarities

1.2.2.1 Both M 37 and EĀ 19.3 begin by relating that Sakra visits the Buddha and asks how, briefly, a monk destroys craving to gain nirvana [§2.2]. According to M 37, the Buddha replies that a monk, who sees that nothing is worth clinging to, gains direct knowledge, and then contemplates the 3 kinds of feelings in terms of impermanence, fading away, cessation and relinquishment. Contemplating thus, he goes beyond clinging and mental agitation, and then attains nirvana.

1.2.2.2 The two Chinese versions [1.2.1.1] agree with M 37 by stating that Moggallāṇa visits Sakra in Tāvatīṃsa to ascertain that he has understood the lesson from the Buddha. All the 3 versions tell us that Moggallāṇa asks Sakra to repeat the teaching he has learned, but he evades doing so, claiming that he is busy with much work.

Only SĀ 505 relates that Sakra artfully suggests that Moggallāṇa should ask the Buddha himself so that, having heard it from the teacher himself, he would remember it accordingly! The subtle humour is clear humour here, along with Sakra’s use of a stock passage on the Buddha as our teacher whose teaching we aspire to remember. However, since Moggallāṇa is a monk respected by Sakra, it is highly unlikely that he would make such a dismissive suggestion. Moreover, the other versions do not have such an episode.

2 Sakra’s question

2.1 Background to the question

2.1.1 Sakra’s reason for asking his question [§2.2] goes back to an earlier meeting with the Buddha recorded in the Sakka,pañha Sutta (D 21), an interesting dialogue between Sakra and the Buddha. Sakra asks the Buddha a number of questions which the Buddha answers to his satisfaction. Sakra relates that he has asked other forest-dwelling recluses and brahmans similar questions but it ends up instead with him teaching them and they becoming his pupils. To these holy men, Sakra declares himself as a “stream-winner,” that is, as one who has attained the 1st path (sotāpatti, magga).

2.1.2 Sakra’s understanding. Hearing the Buddha’s answers evokes profound joy in him [2.1.1]. When asked by the Buddha, Sakra replies that he has previously experienced this same joy (veda) after defeating the asuras in battle, and reflecting that, having defeated the asuras, the devas could now enjoy the divine foods (oja or ojā) both of the devas and of the asuras.

Then, he realizes that such happiness “on account of blows and wounds [rod and sword]” (sa, danḍā-vacaro sa, satthāvacaro), does not conduce to revulsion, fading away (of defilements), ending (of suffer-
ing), stilling (of the mind), to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana.\textsuperscript{10} However, he does not understand the spiritual significance of these words beyond merely saying them, nor does he ask for clarification about them.\textsuperscript{11}

\subsection*{2.1.3 The Sakka Pañha Sutta (D 21)} closes with Sakra showing his gratitude to \textit{Pañca,sikha}, the divine minstrel, for introducing him (Sakra) to the Buddha and receiving teachings from him. He gratefully tells Pañca,sikha that he (Sakra) will be a father to him, he makes him lord of the gandharvas (the heavenly musicians and guardians of the great king Dhata,raṭṭha, the protector of the eastern quarter, and gives him Bhaddā Suriya,vaccasā in marriage.

Then, Sakra, to seal his words, touches the earth with his hand and calls out thrice, “Homage to the Blessed One, the arhat, the fully self-awakened!” (\textit{namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammū,sambuddhassa}). It is during this conversation that the stainless spotless Dharma-eye arises in him, that is, he becomes a full-fledged streamwinner (\textit{sotāpatti,phala}), highlighted by his udana.\[2.1.1\]

\subsection*{2.1.4 The (Saṁyutta) Sakka,pañha Sutta (S 35.118) records Sakra visiting the Buddha (clearly after the visit recorded in D 21)\[2.1.3\] and asking him why some attain nirvana in this life itself, and some do not.\textsuperscript{12} The same teachings of S 35.118 are recorded as the \textit{Panca,sikha Sutta} (S 35.119), the gandharva Pañca,-sikha’s only sutta in the Pali canon.\textsuperscript{13}

\section*{2.2 The \textit{accanta,niṭṭha} question}

\subsection*{2.2.1 Now, the Sakka Pañha Sutta (D 21,2.6/2:282 f) relates that earlier on, Sakra asks the Buddha: “Sir, are all the recluses and brahmins those who have reached the utter end,\textsuperscript{14} reached the total security from bondage, reached the highest in the holy life, reached the ultimate goal?” (\textit{sabb\textsuperscript{e}va nu kho mārisa sama-ṇa,brāhmaṇā accanta,niṭṭhā accanta,yoga-k,khemī accanta,brahmacārī accanta,pariyosa ṇā’ti}). The Buddha replies that they are not. When asked who are those of such qualities, the Buddha replies that they are those who “have been freed by the destruction of craving” (\textit{taṇhā,saṅkhaya,vimutta}). Sakra rejoices in the answer but does not question further on how this freedom (\textit{vimutti}) of awakening is gained.

\subsection*{2.2.2 It is at another meeting, recorded in the Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 37), that Sakra specifically asks the Buddha about what is meant by this \textit{accanta,niṭṭha} teaching and the Buddha answers him [§§2-4]. Elsewhere, the Buddha gave a slightly longer answer to Mahā Kaccāna, that is, in the Hāliddakāni Sutta (S 22.4) [3.5]. In fact, this \textit{accanta,niṭṭha} question—as we shall call it—is such a significant one that it has quite an interesting developmental history. It centres on the \textit{accanta,niṭṭha pericope} [3].

\section*{3 The \textit{accanta,niṭṭha} pericope}

\subsection*{3.1 What the pericope\textsuperscript{15} defines.} The Sutta’s \textit{accanta,niṭṭha pericope}, which defines one “freed by the destruction of craving” (\textit{taṇhā,saṅkhaya}), refers to “one who has reached the utter end, reached the total

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasāmāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati: Sakka,pañha S (D 21,2.7.13), SD 54.8.}
\textsuperscript{11} D 21/2:263-289 (SD 54.8). On the last statement, see D 21,2.7/2:285,10-19.
\textsuperscript{12} For summary and \textit{nn}, see SD 54.8 (3.6).
\textsuperscript{13} S 35.119/4:103 (SD 74.1(***)).
\textsuperscript{14} “Who has reached utter end,” \textit{accanta,niṭṭha} (mfn): see §2.2 n.
\textsuperscript{15} A \textit{pericope} (pa’\textit{r}kapi), an extract, often self-contained, from a text, especially a sutta, presenting some key teaching or stock passage.
security from bondage, reached the highest in the holy life, reached the ultimate goal—the best of gods and humans” (accanta, niṭṭha accanta, yoga-k, khemī accanta, brahma-cāri accanta, pariyosāno settho deva, -manussānam) [§§2.2, 3.9, 19.9]. This is the extended pericope—with the closing phrase, “the best of gods and humans.” The more common standard accanta, niṭṭha pericope, also called the “full pericope,” omits this closing phrase.

3.2 The Standard accanta, niṭṭha Pericope

3.2.1 First mention. The earliest teaching on the accanta, niṭṭha (the standard pericope) [3.1] is probably given by the Buddha to Moggallāna just before his awakening, as recorded in the Pacalā Sutta (A 7.58). This teaching is given to Moggallāna after the Buddha has taught him the 8 ways of overcoming drowsiness (A 7.58,2-9), followed by teachings on the conditions conducive to mental concentration (A 7.58,10). In fact, the accanta, niṭṭha teaching is the climax and close of the Sutta. This teaching is identical to that given to Sakra in the Cūḷa Taṇhā, saṅkhaya Sutta (M 37).

3.2.2 Hence, Moggallāna is familiar with the teaching [§3], even as he listens to the Buddha teaching it to Sakra [§3]. This also explains Moggallāna’s special interest in wishing to know whether Sakra has well understood it. Moreover, Sakra only asks the Buddha to give a “brief” answer [2.2]. Hence, he visits Sakra in Tāvatiṁsa to find this out [§§7-21].

3.3 The Sakka Pañha Sutta (D 21). Apparently, Sakra first asks the Buddha the accanta, niṭṭha question (the last of his 5 questions) in the Sakka, pañha Sutta (D 21): “Sir, have all recluses and brahmans reached the utter end, reached the total security from bondage, reached the highest in the holy life, reached the ultimate goal?” The Buddha replies no.

When Sakra asks why, the Buddha briefly answers that “only those who are freed by the destruction of craving” have done so. Then, the dialogue takes a different tack. At the end of the teaching, Sakra becomes a streamwinner.

A fuller answer to this important question is given to Mahā Kaccāna, as recorded in the Hāliddakāni Sutta (S 22.4) [3.5], which quotes the question from D 21. It is this very same question that Sakra asks the Buddha again in M 37 [3.4].

3.4 The Cūḷa Taṇhā, saṅkhaya Sutta (M 37) records Sakra asking the Buddha the same question—that is, “In what way … in brief, is a monk freed by the destruction of craving, one who has reached the utter end, reached the total security from bondage, reached the highest in the holy life, reached the ultimate goal—the best of gods and humans?” [§2.2]. This time the Buddha gives a fuller answer.

In fact, the whole Sutta centres on this question and its answer—constituting the accanta, niṭṭha teaching—which is repeated thrice. First, the Buddha teaching it [§3]; then, Moggallāna ascertaining that Sakra understands the answer [§19]; and thirdly, the Buddha repeats it to Moggallāna [§§25]. The significance of the teaching being repeated thrice should be well noted [3.8.1].

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16 A 7.58,11/4:88 (SD 4.11).
17 Sabbe va nu kho mārisa samana, brāhmaṇa accanta, niṭṭha accanta, yoga-k, khemī accanta, brahma-cāri accanta, -pariyosanā’ti (D 21,2,6/2:282,32-283,2), SD 54.8.
18 D 21,2.6.9/2:283 (SD 54.8).
19 D 21,2.10/2:289 (SD 54.8).
20 “Who has reached the utter end,” accanta, niṭṭha (mfn): accanta (Skt atyanta) = aṭi + anta, “reached the end or limit” of absolute perfection; niṭṭha (Ved niṣṭhā, niṣṭhā) = nis + thā (from -thā, “end, conclusion, perfection, height, summit, object, goal”), as in niṭṭham gata = niṭṭhān gata, “who has attained the goal, perfection” (= pabbajitānāṁ arahattāṁ patta), S 3:99; A 2:175, 3:450, 5:119 f; Dh 351; Pm 1:81, 161; DhA 4:70.

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3.5 **A FULL EXPLANATION** on the *accanta,niṭṭha* (extended pericope) is also found in the *Hāliddakāni Sutta* 2 (§ 22.4), where Hāliddakāni, a householder of Kuraraghara (in Avantī), mentions the Sakka, pañha by name to Mahā Kaccāna and asks him to give a detailed explanation of the *accanta,niṭṭha* teaching.

Mahā Kaccāna answers in terms of the 5 aggregates. Each of these aggregates is called an “element” (*dhātu*), which should be relinquished altogether. When all these aggregates are thus relinquished, the mind is said to be well freed, and that person is said to be *accanta,niṭṭha* and so on, that is, “a monk freed by the destruction of craving, one who has reached the utter end, reached the total security from bondage, reached the highest in the holy life, reached the ultimate goal—the best of gods and humans.”

3.6 **THE (TIKA) MORA,NIṆĀPA SUTTA** (A 3.140) gives the standard *accanta,niṭṭha* pericope [3.1], taught to the monks at the peacock feeding-ground. This Sutta has 3 parts, which forms 3 separate suttas in the Burmese canon. The *accanta,niṭṭha* teaching is found in the 1st part (A 1:291,22-33), where it is defined as the fulfillment of the 3 trainings (*sikkha*-t, taya). The 2nd part adds 3 more qualities, that is, the 3 kinds of miracles; those of (1) psychic wonders, (2) mind-reading and (3) education (A 1:291,34-292,4). The 3rd part lists the 3 culminating qualities of (1) right view, (2) right knowledge and (3) right liberation (A 1:291,5-10).

3.7 **THE (EKĀDASAKA) MORA,NIṆĀPA SUTTA** (A 11.11) contains the same teachings as given to the monks in the (Tika) Mora, nivāpa Sutta teaching plus 2 more, that is, (10) true knowledge and (11) conduct (*vijjā*, carana). Thus, the Sutta comprises a set of 11 qualities, making it the longest exposition on the *accanta,niṭṭha*.

3.8 **THE 3-CYCLE TEACHING IN M 37**

3.8.1 **The 3 Teachings**

3.8.1.1 **The Cūla Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** records the well-known *accanta,niṭṭha teaching* [3.1, 3.4] as being given thrice [3.4], as follows:

(1) 1st cycle: the Buddha teaches it to Sakra, while Moggallāna, sitting nearby, witnesses this [§§3-5];
(2) 2nd cycle: Moggallāna invites Sakra to repeat it to him [§8], and Sakra ultimately does [§§19-20];
(3) 3rd cycle: Moggallāna reports to the Buddha [§§23-34], who repeats it to Moggallāna [§§25-26].

3.8.1.2 At least one scholar has found that Moggallāna’s “request” for the Buddha to repeat the *accanta,niṭṭha* teaching “puzzling, since ... he had been sitting close to the Buddha when Sakka came and received this instruction in the first place.” This is actually a non-problem, since Moggallāna, upon returning from Tāvatīmsa and reporting to the Buddha, *does not* request the teaching from the Buddha. He only asks whether the Buddha recalls teaching “in brief on the freedom by the destruction of craving to a certain renowned and mighty yaksha (that is, Sakra)” [§23]. In fact, as we shall see, this triple repetition of the teaching is highly significant in didactic terms [3.8.1.3].

3.8.1.3 Note that it is clear here that Moggallāna is very familiar with the *accanta,niṭṭha* teaching, and for good reasons, too. It is taught to him just before his own awakening [3.2]. Yet, there is an important reason for the Buddha repeating this important teaching in full before Moggallāna—this 3rd recital is *for our sake!*

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21 S 22.4/3:12 f (SD 70.15). See also SD 54.8 (1.1.3.2(1)).
22 A 3.140/1:291 f.
23 A 11.11/5:326-328.
Indeed, the 3 cycles of the teachings [3.8.1.1.] follow a well-known and vital aspect of the early Buddhist oral tradition to repeat important teachings (called “stock passages” or pericopes), not only for the benefit of the audience (those who listen to the teaching), but also so that, through the repetition, we are more likely to remember it. This, of course, is more effective and efficacious when we wisely attend to the teaching.

4 Sakra as a brahmafarer

4.1 “FELLOW BRAHMAFARER”

4.1.1 After Mogallāna’s departure from Tāvatiṃsa, the devas ask Sakra if Mogallāna is Sakra’s teacher, the Buddha [§22.1]. This remark suggests that these devas (not all the Tāvatiṃsa devas) have never seen the Buddha. Sakra replies that Mogallāna is his “fellow brahmafarer” (sa, brahma,cārī) [§22.2]. However, while Mogallāna is a monk and celibate arhat, Sakra is still a pleasure-loving streamwinner [4.1.3].

4.1.2 Technically, a brahma,cārī (literally, “divine liver”) is a practitioner who abstains from sensual pleasures, that is, a celibate monastic or a celibate layperson—such a lifestyle is called brahma,cariya, “the holy life,” whose goal is that of living a morally virtuous life of cultivating the mind for attaining liberating wisdom for the ending of suffering and attaining nirvana. Its synonyms are dhamma,cārī, “dharmafarer,” and dhamma,cariya, “the Dharma-life” (that is, living in keeping with the Buddha Dharma, a Dharma-centred life).

A rule of thumb is that “brahmafarer” (brahma,cārī), when used to describe a monastic or one following the celibacy rule (including a lay practitioner), especially as a sustained practice, refers to a celibate practitioner. The term “dharmafarer” (dhamma,cārī) refers to anyone who practises the Buddha Dharma, whether monastic or lay, celibate or not, that is, keeping to at least the 5 precepts.

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25 On Sakra’s streamwinning, see SD 54.8 (1.2.4).
26 Brahma,cārī: V 3:43,5; M 1:492,14+23, 493,1+7+11+13+19+21,2:188,23; S 1:102,28*, 5:16,29; A 2:44,5*, 5:18,6 sa, “; Dh 168; Vv 32.11; Tha 303; C 2.3.2.
28 Dhamma,cārī (adj); n; M 1:291,25 a-; Dh 168c, 169c; J 5:266,11.
29 Dhamma,cariya: (fem): D 2:28,31, 2:28,31; A 2:5,7*; Khp 5,6; Sn 274; Dha 4:42,19*.
30 The celibacy rule entails no bodily sexual action of any kind. Its purpose is to cultivate and prepare the mind for sustained and deep meditation to weaken, if not uproot, the latent tendency (anusaya) of lust. See Anusaya, SD 31.3, esp (2).
31 The “5 precepts” (pañca,sīla) are those against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicants and addictives: see Dīgha,jānu S (A 8.54,13), SD 5.10; VeLu, dvāreyya S (S 55.7), SD 1.5 (2); Sīlānussati, SD 15.11 (2.2); SD 21.6 (1.2); SD 37.8 (2.2).
4.1.3 However, we have noted that, towards the end of the Cūḷa Taṇhā, saṅkhaya Sutta, Sakra declares that he and Moggallāna are “fellow brahmāfarers” [4.1.1.]. However, while Moggallāna is a monk and celibate arhat, Sakra is still a pleasure-loving streamwinner. The Commentary explains that Sakra refers to Moggallāna as a “fellow brahmāfarer” (sa, brahma, cāri), that is, as companions in the holy life, because he himself has earlier gained streamwinning (sotāpatti)—as stated in the Sakka, pañha Sutta (D 21).32

As a saint of the path, a streamwinner (sotāpanna) is a noble disciple (ariyā, sāvaka) bound for the same awakening that Moggallāna has already attained (MA 2:304, 27–30). In other words, brahma, cāri here refers to one who is on the path of awakening, including the arhat. It is a broad term distinguishing the noble individuals from the “outsiders” (bahīra or bāhīraka). Both Moggallāna (an arhat) and Sakra (a streamwinner) are saints of the path: they are the true “insiders,” practitioners of the true teaching.33

4.1.4 Lay practitioners who are streamwinners (like Sakra) or once-returners have only overcome the first 3 fetters—those of self-identity view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.34 In other words, sensual lust (kāma, rāga) still exists to some significant level in a streamwinner.35 Hence, on account of sensual lust, Sakra enjoys heavenly pleasures of the senses by way of heavenly sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches [§7]. Those who have sensual lust also have its attendant opposite, aversion (patīgha). Hence, Sakra is not too keen to repeat what he has learned from the Buddha when asked to do so by Moggallāna [§8].

4.2 STREAMWINNERS WHO ENJOY SENSE-PLEASURES

4.2.1 However, as a streamwinner, a noble disciple of the path, Sakra's worldliness is well moderated and restrained by moral virtue, that is, he diligently keeps to at least the 5 precepts [4.1.2]. He is the kind of lay disciple who is said to be “one who enjoys sense-pleasures” (kāma, bhogī),36 and yet leads a Dharma-spirited life.

4.2.2 Such a person is described in the Rasiya Gāmaṇi Sutta (S 42.12) and the Kāma, bhogī Sutta (A 10.91) as follows:

Here, having sought wealth rightfully, without violence, he enjoys sensual pleasures. Thus, he makes himself happy and pleased; he offers his share in giving and does deeds of merit. And he uses his wealth unattached to it, not infatuated with it, not blindly absorbed in it, seeing its danger, understanding the escape.37

32 D 21.2.10/2:289 (SD 54.8).
33 See SD 54.8 (1.2.4.3).
34 These are, respectively, (1) sakkāya, ditthī, (2) vicikicchā, and (3) sila-b, bata parāmāsa: see SD 3.3 (5). Technically, a streamwinner (sotāpanna) has broken all these 3 fetters [SD 10.16 (1.6.6)], while a once-returner (sakad-āgāmi) has progressed further by weakening the 3 unwholesome roots (akusala,mūla) of lust, hate and delusion [SD 10.16 (1.6.6.7)].
35 Lust is, however, overcome by the non-returner (anāgāmi), who, as a once-returner, goes on to break the 4th and 5th fetters, too—respectively, those of (4) sensual lust (kāma, rāga) and (5) aversion (patīgha). These are the 5 “lower fetters” (oram, bhāgiya samyojana): SD 10.16 (1.6.7).
36 On kāma, bhogī, see Mahā Vaccha, gotta S (M 73,10/1:491), SD 27.4.
38 S 42.12/4:332, 31–333, 3 (SD 91.3) & A 10.91/5:178+181 (SD 100.8).
4.2.3 The Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta (M 73) gives a slightly longer definition of lay-disciples who enjoy sense-pleasures (kāma,bhogī). Vaccha,gotta asks the Buddha about the lay disciples “who enjoy sense-pleasures,” thus:

“Other than master Gotama, 
other than the monks, 
other than the nuns, 
other than the laymen, householders dressed in white, brahmacharis [celibates], 
is there any one layman, ...  
is there any one laywoman, 
a disciple of master Gotama, a householder dressed in white,
who enjoys sense-pleasures,⁴⁹  
who is a doer of the teaching,  
follower of instructions,  
crossed beyond doubt,  
become free of uncertainties,  
gained fearless confidence,  
and independent of others, dwells in the teaching?”⁴⁰

In reply to Vaccha,gotta, the Buddha gives this slightly longer definition of such a liberated disciple, beginning thus:

“Not just one, Vaccha, nor 100, nor 200, nor 300, nor 400, nor 500, but far more laymen, who are my disciples, householders dressed in white, who enjoy sense-pleasures, ...” (M 73,10/1:491), SD 27.4

4.3 The nature of a streamwinner

4.3.1 Being a streamwinner is the very 1st stage of the path, one that makes us true practitioners of Buddha Dharma. We are no more “outsiders” [4.1.3], and, as true practitioners, we are assured of self-awakening and liberation within 7 lives at the most.⁴¹ The suttas and Commentaries tell us that there are countless numbers of humans and devas who are streamwinners (sotāpanna).⁴²

In the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16), the Buddha is recorded as declaring that there are 500 laymen in the village of Nādika who have died as streamwinners.⁴³ At the end of the Sakka Pañha Sutta (D 21), we

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⁴⁹ “A householder ... enjoying sense-pleasures,” gīhī odāta,vasano kāma,bhogī. See SD 47.1 (1.1.2.4); SD 52.11 (1.2.3.3).
⁴⁰ “Gone beyond doubt ... in the Teacher’s teaching,” sasana,karo ovāda-p,paṭikāro tiṇha, vicikiccho vigata,kath-am,katho vesārajja-p,patto aparā-p, paccayo satthu, sāsane viharati, which refers to the once-returner and the streamwinner, who may be celibate laypersons (but keeping to the 5 precepts): as in Ambāṭṭha S (D 3/1:110), Kūṭa,danta S (D 5/1:148), Cūḷa Saccaka S (M 35,24/1:234 f), Upāli S (M 56/1:380), Mahā Vaccha,gotta S (M 73/1:491), Dīgha,nakha S (M 74/1:501), Brahmāyu S (M 91/2:145), (Licchavi) Siha S (A 8.12/4:186), Uggā S 1(A 8.21/4:210), Uggā S 2(A 8.22/4:213), Suppabuddha Kuṭṭhi S (U 5.3/50). A longer pericope —diṭṭha, dhammo patta, dhammo vidita, dhammo pariyogo, dhammo tiṇha, vicikiccho vigata, kathā, katho vesārajja-p, patto aparā-p, paccayo satthu, sāsane (“having seen, mastered, known, immersed and himself in the Dharma, ...”)—is found in ref to: Yasa’s father (Mv 7.10c @ V 1:16), SD 11.2(7), & the brahmin Pokkharā, sāti (Ambāṭṭha S, D 3,2.22/1:110), SD 21.3.
⁴¹ On this “7-life” teaching, see Sa,upādi,sesa S (A 9.12, 8-10), SD 3.3(3).
⁴² SnA 2:587 (on Ajita Māṇava Pucchā, Sn 5.1), 589 = NcA 10 (on Tissa Metteyya Māṇava Pucchā, Sn 5.2), SnA 590 = NcA 18 (on Puṇṇaka Māṇava Pucchā, Sn 5.3)
⁴³ D 16.2.7/2:93 (SD 9).
are told that when Sakra became a streamwinner, 80,000 devas, too, attained the same state. The brahmin Piṅgīya and his 1,000 matted-hair ascetic (jatila) followers, too, became streamwinners (NcA 83). At the end of the teaching of the Cūḷa Rāhul’ovāda Sutta (M 63) and of the Rāhul’ovāda Sutta (S 35.121), many thousands of deities attain streamwinning.

Other lay streamwinners include the parents of Sigāla (Sigāla,mātā and Sigāla,pitā) and of Nakula (Nakula,mātā and Nakula,pitā), king Bimbisāra, Anātha,piṇḍika, the brahmīns Pokkhara,sāti, Kūṭa,danta and Brahmāyu, the wanderer Dīgha,nakha, the Licchāvi Upāli, general Sīha and the leper Suppabuddha. Of the 500 monks present on the day of the Buddha’s passing, the least of them are streamwinners.

4.3.2 Many of the streamwinners mentioned [4.3.1], it should be noted, are laymen, both humans and gods. Hence, it is not surprising to find Sakra, lord of the devas, to be one, too. When listening to the Dharma from the Buddha, the streamwinner Sakra is all ears and remembers the teaching. Yet, we see Sakra enjoying sensual pleasures, even feeling reluctant to recite the Dharma to Moggallāna. Instead, Sakra invites Moggallāna on a tour of his luxurious Vejayanta palace. Sakra is not yet fully awakened.

Yet, when Moggallāna makes a point of being serious about the Dharma by causing the whole of Vejayanta palace to shake, it is sufficient to jolt Sakra back into mindfulness so that he recites the Dharma to Moggallāna as he has requested. No matter how self-indulgent or unmindful a streamwinner may be, he will remain morally virtuous and respectful of the Dharma. In short, lay streamwinners may not live or act like good monastics at all but they are morally sensible, Dharma-spirited, lay practitioners, who, despite everything, will fully awaken within 7 lives.

44 D 21.2.10/2:289 (SD 54.8).
45 See SD 49.6a (2.1.2.3).
46 M 63/3:280 (SD 5.8).
47 S 35.121/4:106 (SD 93.6).
48 See SD 4.1 (5).
49 See SD 5.4 (2).
50 Cv 1.22.9 (V 1:37).
51 Cv 6.4.5 (V 2:157).
52 Ambaṭṭha S (D 3/1:100), SD 21.3.
53 Kūṭa,danta S (D 5/1:148), SD 22.8.
54 Brahmāyu S (M 91/2:145), SD 63.8.
55 Dīgha,makha S (M 74/1:501), SD 16.1.
56 Upāli S (M 56/1:379), SD 27.1.
57 Sīha S (A 8.12/4:186), SD 71.5.
58 (Suppabuddha) Kuṭṭhi S (U 5.3/49), SD 70.4.
59 Mahā,parinibbāna S (D 16,6.6/2:155), SD 9.
Cūḷa Taṁha,saṅkhaya Sutta
The Lesser Discourse on the Destruction of Craving
M 37

1 Thus have I heard.

Sakra’s question

1.1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the mansion of Migāra’s mother in the Eastern Park [Pubb’ārama], outside Sāvatthī.

2 Then, Sakra, the lord of the devas, approached the Blessed One, saluted him and stood at one side. Standing thus at one side, Sakra, the lord of the devas, said to the Blessed One:

2.2 “In what way, bhante, in brief, is a monk freed by the destruction of craving, one who has reached the utter end,” reached the total security from bondage, reached the highest in the holy life, reached the ultimate goal—the best of gods and humans—[§§3.9, 19.9]

A brief definition of arhathood

3 “Here, lord of devas, a monk has heard that “Nothing is worth clinging to.”65
3.2 When, lord of devas, a monk has heard that nothing is worth clinging to, he directly knows66 all things.
3.3 When he has directly known all things, he is said to be freed by the destruction of craving

60 Comy paraphrases Sakra as saying: “Briefly, to what extent is he said to be freed by the destruction of craving, that is, in nirvana, the destruction of craving by the freedom of his mind that takes nirvana as (mental) object. Teach me briefly the preliminary practice by which the influx-destroyed monk is freed by the destruction of craving.” (MA 2:291.17-21)

61 “Who has reached utter end,” accanta,niṭṭha (mfn): accanta (Skt atyanta) = aṭi + anta, “reached the end or limit” of absolute perfection; niṭṭha (Ved niṣṭhā, niśṭhā) = nīs + thā (from -thā, “end, conclusion, perfection, height, summit, object, goal”), as in niṣṭhāni gata = niṣṭhāni, gata, “who has attained the goal, perfection” (= pabbojītānaṁ arahattam patta), S 3:99 (a-); A 2:175, 3:450, 5:119 f; Dh 351; Pm 1:81, 161; DHA 4:70.

62 The accanta,niṭṭha pericope [3].

63 “The best of gods and humans,” settho deva, manussānaṁ, usu used of the Buddha (eg M 99/2:209), SD 38.6, but here refers to any arhat: (Ekādasaka) Mora, nivāpa S (A 11.11/5:327) [3.7]: see also other suttas [3].

64 Kittāvatā nu kho bhante bhikkhu saṁkhittena taṁha, saṅkhaya, vimutto hoti accanta, niṭṭha accanta, yoga-k, khemī accanta, brahma-cāri accanta, pāriyośāna settho deva, manussānaṁ ti. The underlined phrase: accanta, niṭṭha ...

65 Sabbe dhammā nōḷam abhinivesāyati, lit, “all things are not fit for clinging to”: Comy says that sabbe dhammā (“all things”) refers to the 5 aggregates (paṭicca-k, khandha) [SD 17], the 12 sense-spheres (dvādas’āyatana) [S 35.23- /4:15, SD 7.1; M 137, 4+5/3:216, SD 29.5] and the 18 elements (atthārasa, dhātu) [M 115, 4/3:62, SD 29.1a] (MA 2:298.14-16 = AA 4:43,6-11). These are “not worth clinging to” by way of craving and views because they turn out actually to be other than the way they are grasped: what is grasped as permanent, as pleasurable, as self, turn out to be impermanent, to be suffering, to be non-self. See Cūḷa Taṁha, saṅkhaya S (M 37, 3/1:251×2, 19/254×2, 25/255 ×2), SD 54.9; Avijjā Pañhā S 2 (S 35.80/4:50×2); Pacalā S (A 7.58, 11.2/4:88×2), SD 4.11.

66 He “directly knows” (abhijñāni) them to be evident (nāta) as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self (MA 2:298,- 22 f = AA 4:43,12 f). On ṇāta, pariṇāṇa, see SD 49.2 (4.3.5.5); SD 3.8 (6.2).
he fully understands all things.

3.4 When he has fully understood all things, whatever feelings he feels, whether pleasant or painful or neutral, he dwells contemplating impermanence in those feelings:

- he dwells contemplating fading away [dispassion],
- he dwells contemplating ending,
- he dwells contemplating relinquishment.

3.5 He understands:

- when he is no longer agitated, he personally attains nirvana.

3.6 Thus dwelling contemplating impermanence in those feelings, he does not cling to anything in the world.

When he does not cling, he is not (mentally) agitated.
When he is not agitated, he personally attains nirvana.

3.7 He understands:

- ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what should be done is done, there is no more of this state of being.’

3.8 ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what should be done is done, there is no more of this state of being.’

3.9 To that extent, lord of devas, in brief, is how a monk is freed by the destruction of craving, who has reached the utter end, reached the ultimate security from bondage, reached the highest of the holy life, reached the ultimate goal—the best of gods and humans.”

4 Then, Sakra, the lord of the devas, rejoicing in and approving of the Blessed One’s word, saluted him, keeping him to the right [walking sunwise around him], and vanished right there.

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67 He “fully understands” (parijñānāti) them by scrutinizing (tiṭṭha) them in the same way (as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self). (MA 2:298,23 f = AA 4:43,14). On tiṭṭha,pariññā, see SD 49.2 (4.3.5.5); SD 3.8 (6.2).

68 “Contemplating impermanence,” etc, is accomplished by the insight knowledges (ñāṇa) of rise and fall (uppāda,-vaya), and of destruction and disappearance (khayato yayato). (MA 2:298,33-35)

69 “Fading away [dispassion]” (virāga) is twofold: fading away as “ending” (khaya) of defilements in the 1st round [§3.5], and as “absolute” (accanto) fading-away in the 2nd round [§3.6]. (MA 2:299,3-4)

70 “Ending” (nironna) is twofold: ending as “destruction” (khaya) of suffering in the 1st round [§3.5], and as “absolute” (accanto) ending (non-recurrence) in the 2nd round [§3.6]. (MA 2:299,9-10)

71 “Not agitated,” na paritassati. The subtlest form of this “agitation” (paritassanā) is called (mental) restlessness (uddhacca), or more specifically, “Dharma restlessness” (dhamm’uddhacca), which is found even in a non-returner: see SD 41.5 (5); SD 32.7 (2.1.4, 2.2.3); SD 41.4 (2.2.1).

72 Anupādiyaṁ na paritassati, aparitassati paccattaṁ,ñeva parinibbāyati. On paccattaṁ yeva parinibbāyati, cf Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S (M 37,3/1:251 f, by fully understanding “the all, sabba”), SD 54.9; Pacālā S (A 7.58/4:88, by contemplating “nothing is worth clinging to”), SD 4.11. Comy says that he brings himself to nirvana (ie by his own efforts) by the utter extinction of defilements (sayaṁ eva kilesa,parinibbaṇena parinibbāyati, MA 2:18,30,299,29). This is the 1st nirvana (with the 5 aggregates remaining “without clinging” [free of defilements, kilesa,nibbaṇa, ie, while he lives); the other is nirvana of these aggregates (khandha,nibbaṇa): SD 45.18 (2.5.2.4).

73 See also M 11,17/1:67 (SD 49.2); S 22.53:3:54 (SD 29.4).

74 “(Having) saluted him, keeping him to the right,” padakkhināṁ katvā: circumambulation as a gesture of respect: see Anātha,piṇḍik’ovāda S (M 143,18) n, SD 23.9.
Moggallāna’s doubt about Sakra’s understanding

5 Now at that time, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna was sitting not far away.  
5.2 Then, it occurred to the venerable Mahā Moggallāna:  
“Did that yaksha [spirit] break through into the Blessed One’s word when he rejoiced, or did he not? What now if I find out whether that yaksha did break through into the Blessed One’s word or did not?”

6 Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, just as a strong man would stretch his flexed arm or flex his stretched arm, even so, he disappeared from the mansion of Migāra’s mother in the Eastern Park and appeared amongst the devas of Tāva,tiṃsa.

Moggallāna visits Sakra

7 Now at that time, Sakra, the lord of the devas, was enjoying himself in the One-lotus Park [Eka-, puṇḍarīka Uyyāna], endowed and provided with a hundred of the fivefold musical instruments.  
7.2 Seeing the venerable Mahā Moggallāna coming from afar, Sakra, the lord of the devas, dismissed the five hundredfold divine music, approached the venerable Mahā Moggallāna and said:  
“Please come, master Moggallāna! Welcome, master Moggallāna! It’s been a long time since master Moggallāna has found the occasion to come here. Let master Moggallāna take a seat. Here’s one prepared.”

The venerable Mahā Moggallāna sat on the prepared seat. Sakra, the lord of the devas, took another, a low seat, and sat down at one side.

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75 Yakkha, an Indian mythical nature spirit: SD 21.3 (4.2.5); SD 51.11 (3.1.1.2); SD 54.2 (3.2.2.2) (4).
76 On Moggallāna’s decision to question Sakra, see (3.2.2).
77 The prec 2 lines: Atha kho bhagavā āyasmantam nandaṁ bāhāyam gahetvā seyyathāpi nāma balavā puriso sammiñjitaṁ [only Be samiñjitaṁ] vā bāhām pasāreyya, pasāritaṁ vā bāhām sammiñjeyya [only Be samiñjeyya].
78 Eka,puṇḍarīka: Comy on Tevijja Vaccha,gotta S (M 71) says that it is a “white mango tree” (set’amba, rukkha) in the wanderers’ park (MA 3:195,10). It is also the name of a wanderers’ park near Vesālī (M 71,2/1:481), SD 53.3, and of Pasenadi of Kosala’s elephant (M 88,3/2:112; MA 3:346,8), SD 49.12. There is also the Eka,puṇḍarika-t,thera Ap (Ap 1:237).
79 Tena kho pana samayena sakko devānam indo eka,puṇḍarīke uyyāne dibbehi pañcahi turiya, sathehi [only Be tūriya-] samappito samaṅgī, bhūto paricāreti. Comy explains that the 5 kinds of divine music are those of: single-sided drums (ātata), double-sided drums (vitata), strings (ātata, vitata = tanti, baddha, ponavādī), winds (susrāsa, “holed, hollow”) and percussion (ghana) (MA 2:300,17-23; Vv 5.4, 39.1; VvA 37, 257). The Chin parallel, SĀ 505, says that the music is played by 500 apsaras (accharā) (female counterparts of the gardhavas) [§9.2 n]: see Analayo 2011f:161; 2005:11.
80 “Dismissed … ,” tāni dibbāni pañca turiya, satāni paṭipannaṃetvā.
81 “Please come, … to come here,” etu kho bhante bhagavā svagatam bhante bhagavato, cirassam kho marisā imām pariyyāyam akāsi yad idam idh’agamanāya, using the 3rd imp sg etu (“Let … come!”) as a polite formality (D 25,7.1/3,39), SD 1.4. The passage is stock: Poṭṭhapāda S (D 9.5/1:179), SD 7.14; Udumbariikā Siha,nāda S (D 25,6.2/-3,39), SD 1.4 (with additional remark); Tevijja Vaccha,gotta S (M 73.4.4), SD 53.3; Mahā Sakul’udāyi S (M 77.3/2:2), SD 49.5; Gopaka Moggallāna S (M 108,3/3,7), SD 33.5. In the phrase, pariyyāyam akasī, “made it an occasion.” In the phrase, pariyyāyam akasī, “made it an occasion,” Comy glosses pariyyāya as vāra (“occasion, opportunity”) (UA 115). This is stock: D 1:90 (DA 2:369), 179 (see D:RD 1:245 n2), 2:270, 3.2, 39; M 1:252 (MA 2:300 f), 326, 481, 2.2, 30, 3.7; S 1:142; A 3:332 (AA 3:363), 4:76; U 13 (UA 115); J 3:359. In Brahma Nimanṭanikā S (M 49), Baka Brahmā says: ehi kho marisā, sāgataṁ marisā, cirassam kho marisā imām pariyyāyam akāsi yadidam idh’agamanāya (M 49-3.2), SD 11.7.
82 For a detailed discussion on devas standing or sitting in the Buddha’s presence, see Analayo 2011:248 n208.
Moggallāna questions Sakra

8 Sitting thus on one side, Sakra, the lord of the devas, said to the venerable Mahā Moggallāna: “Kosiya,83 how did the Blessed One speak to you, in brief, regarding the freedom by the destruction of craving? It would be good for us to hear even a portion of that talk.”84

8.2 “We, master Moggallāna, are busy with much duty, with much to do with our own tasks, and there’re still even more tasks for the Tāva,timsa [the 33] devas.85

8.3 Moreover, master Moggallāna, what is well heard, well learned, [253] well attended to, well remembered, does not suddenly vanish just like that!86

The Vejayanta palace

9 Once upon a time, master Moggallāna, the devas and the asuras were in the thick of battle with one another.87 In that battle, the devas won, the asuras lost.88

9.2 Having won the battle and returning from it, I had the Vejayanta [Victory]89 palace built. Master Moggallāna, the Vejayanta palace has 100 towers; each tower has 700 gabled chambers; each gabled chamber has 7 apsaras;90 each apsara has 7 maids.91

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83 Kosiya, “owl” (J 3:208), Sakra’s personal name. It means “belonging to the Kusika family.” Indra is so called in the Rg-veda, the sense of which is unknown. Rhys Davids suggests that it is likely to be a survival from the time when Indra was only the god of a Kusika clan (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. Ancient Indian clan names were often names of animals, eg “tortoise” (Kassapa = kacchapa), “yearling (calf)” (Vaccha).

84 Sādhu mayam pi etissā kathāya bhāgino assāma savanāyāti. Moggallāna is politely wondering if Sakra properly remembers what the Buddha has just taught him. Etissā is dat/gen f of dem pron etad. Assāma is 1 pl opt of attthi, “to be, is.”

85 Mayaṁ kho mārisa moggallāna bahu,kicca bahu,karaṇīyā appī eva sakena karaniyena, api ca devānaṁ yeva tāvatīṁsānam karaniyena. “Our tasks may be easy and few but the Tāvatīṁsā devas have much to do,” (MA 2:301,10).

86 Api ca mārisa moggallāna sussutaṁ yeva hoti suggahitam su-manasikatam sūpadhāritaṁ, yaṁ no khip tāvatīṁsānam karaniyena. Mayaṁ kho mārisa moggallāna bahu,kicca bahu,karaṇīyā appī eva sakena karaniyena, api ca devānaṁ yeva tāvatīṁsānam karaniyena. “Our tasks may be easy and few but the Tāvatīṁsā devas have much to do,” (MA 2:301,10).

87 “In the past,” the devas and asuras were often engaged in battle: see esp Sakka Saṁyutta (S 1:216-225), esp S 11.1 (SD 114.13), 11.2 (SD 114.14), 11.3 (SD 15.5), 11.4 (SD 54.6a), 11.5 (SD 86.22). For its origin, see SD 15.3 (3.7.1); SD 39.2 (1). On the end of this belligerence, see Na Dubbhīya S (S 11.7), SD 54.7.

88 As in Sakka,paṁha S (D 21.27/2:285), SD 54.8, but, more likely, this is (Khantī) Vepa,citti S (S 11.4,3/1:221), SD 54.6a, which records events just preceding those of M 37.

89 On Vejayanta palace, see Gahaṭṭha Vandanā S (S 11.19,5/1:234,17), SD 986.1; Moggallāna Tha (Tha 1194-96); description (DhA 2.7.7b/1:273). Veja,yanta is also the name of Sakra’s chariot: description (J 5:408 f); his charioteer is Mātali (J 1:224; DhA 1:279; J 4:335; VaA 141); goes to battle in it (J 1:20;2DA 2:481; SA 1:340; with Nimi, J 6:103; people see it, CA 57. The name of Mahā Sudassana’s chief chariot (out of 84,000): D 17.2.10.8/2:190 (SD 36.12).

90 An apsara (accharā; Skt apsaras), celestial nymph: see SD 54.3 (2.3.2).

91 Vejayantassa kho mārisa moggallāna pāsādassa eka,satta nīyūhari, ekekasmiṁ nīyūhe satta, satta kūtāgāra,- satāni, ekam,ekasmiṁ kūtāgāre satta, satta accharāyo, ekam kusākṣī accharāya satta, satta paricārikāyo.
Would you, master Moggallāna, like to see how delightful the Vejayanta palace is? The venerable Moggallāna consented by his silence.

Then, Sakra, the lord of the devas, and Vessavaṇa, the great king, letting the venerable Mahā Moggallāna lead the way, approached the Vejayanta palace.

When the maids of Sakra, the lord of the devas, saw Mahā Moggallāna coming from afar, they, feeling a sense of moral shame and moral fear, entered their chambers. Just as a daughter-in-law feels moral shame and moral fear towards her father-in-law, even so, the maids of Sakra, the lord of the devas, saw Mahā Moggallāna coming from afar, they, feeling a sense of moral shame and moral fear, entered their chambers.

Sakra’s pride in the palace

Then, Sakra, the lord of the devas, and Vessavaṇa, the great king, had the venerable Mahā Moggallāna walk and view all over the Vejayanta palace.

“See, master Moggallāna, this delightfulness of the Vejayanta palace! See, master Moggallāna, that delightfulness of the Vejayanta palace!”

“This shines as the venerable Kosiya’s merit done formerly. Whenever humans see anything delightful, they said: ‘This, sirs, indeed, shines like the devas of Tāvatiṃsa!’ This indeed shines as the venerable Kosiya’s merit done formerly.”

Moggallāna rocks the palace

Then, it occurred to the venerable Mahā Moggallāna: “This yaksha dwells much too heedlessly! What now if I were to rouse a sense of urgency in this yaksha!”

Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna performed an act of psychic wonder, so that with his toe, he made the Vejayanta palace quake, shake and tremble.

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92 Iccheyyaṁ no tvāṁ mārisa Moggallāna Vejayantassa pāsādassa rāmaneyyakaṁ daṭṭhun’ti.
93Vessavaṇa, also called Kuvera, the “great king” (mahārāja) who is guardian of the northern quarter, and lord of the yakshas. Comy says that Vessavaṇa is Sakra’s favourite, and knew each other since they were boys (vallabho, balava, viśāsiko, MA 32:302,23)
94 Addasamṣu kho sakkassa devānāṁ indassā paṭicārikāyā āyasmantaṁ mahā, moggallānāṁ dūrato’va āgacchati, disvā ottappamānā hiriyamānā sakaṁ sakam ovaṛakam pavisīsu.
95 Seyyathā’pi nāma suṇisā sasuraṁ disvā ottappati hiriyati. Cf Mahā Hatthi, padophama S (M 28,20/1:186), SD 6.16. For a discussion on the social significance of the attitudes of a daughter-in-law towards her parents-in-law, see Analayo 2011:250 n218.
96 Atha kho sokko ca devānāṁ inda vassavana ca mahā, rājā āyasmantaṁ mahā, moggallānāṁ vejayante pāsāde anucankamāpenti anuvicarāpenti.
97 Sobhati idam āyasmato kasiṇassa, yathā taṁ pubbe kato, puññassa.
98 Manussā’pi kiñcic eva rāmaneyyakam ājītthā [only Be: disvā] evam āhamsu “sobhati vata bho yathā devānāṁ tāvatiṃsānan’ti.
99 Aṭṭha bhājāṁ kho ayam yakkho pamatto viharati.
100 Yam nūnāhāṁ imam yakkhaṁ samvejeyyaṁ’ti.
101 Atha kho āyasmā mahā, moggallāno tathā, rāpam iddhiḥ abhisāṅkhāraṁ abhisāṅkhāsi [Be Ee abhisāṅkhāsi; Be:Ka abhisāṅkhāresi; Ke Se abhisāṅkhāreti]. Comy says that Moggallāna did this by getting into the dhyāna based on the water-kasina [SD 49.5b (1.2)] and then resolving, “Let the foundations of the palace be like water!” Emerging from his dhyāna, he rises into the air and strikes the palace’s corner with his big toe (MA 2:304,3-10). Samyutta Comy, however, says: After cultivating the water-kasina, he rose into the air and struck it with his big toe (SA 3:257,28-31). Moggalāna performs a similar feat in Pāsāda Kampana Moggallāna S (S 51.14,3.2) to rouse some monks, SD 27.8.
15 Then, in the hearts of Sakra, the lord of the devas, of Vessavaṇa, the great king, and of the devas of Tāvatiṣṇa, there arose awe and wonder:

“It's terrible, indeed, sirs! Amazing, indeed, sirs! Great is the power, great is the might of the recluse! That with his toe, he makes the Vejayanta palace quake, shake and tremble!”

Sakra answers Moggallāna

16 Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna knew that Sakra, the lord of the devas, was roused with a sense of urgency with his hair standing on end. He said to Sakra, the lord of the devas:

16.2 “Now, Kosiya, as regards the brief instruction on the freedom by the destruction of craving that the Blessed One spoke to you about, it would be good for us to hear even a portion of that talk.” [§8.1]

17 “Here, master Moggallāna, I approached the Blessed One, saluted him and stood at one side. Standing at one side, I, master Moggallāna, said to the Blessed One:

“In what way, bhante, in brief, is a monk freed by the destruction of craving, one who has reached the utter end, reached the total security from bondage, reached the highest in the holy life, reached the ultimate goal—the best of gods and humans?” [§2.2]

18 When this was said, master Moggallāna, the Blessed One said:

A brief definition of arhatthood (1st reprise) [§§3, 25]

19 ‘Here, lord of devas, a monk has heard that “Nothing is worth clinging to.”

19.2 When, lord of devas, a monk has heard that nothing is worth clinging to, he directly knows all things.

19.3 When he has directly known all things, he fully understands all things.

19.4 When he has fully understood all things, whatever feelings he feels, whether pleasant or painful or neutral

19.5 he dwells contemplating impermanence in those feelings:

he dwells contemplating fading away,

he dwells contemplating ending,

he dwells contemplating relinquishment.

19.6 Thus dwelling contemplating impermanence in those feelings,

dwelling contemplating fading away,

dwelling contemplating ending,

dwelling contemplating relinquishment,

19.7 he does not cling to anything in the world.

When he does not cling, he is not (mentally) agitated.

When he is not agitated, he personally attains nirvana.

19.8 He understands:

‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived,

102 On this exclamation, see Dubbaṇṇiya S (S 11.22,4), SD 54.16.

103 Mentioned in Moggallāna Tha (Tha 1194-96).

104 Comy explains “a sense of urgency” (samviggaṁ) as “agitated, afraid” (ubbīggaṁ); but adds that the hair-raising is due to both fear (or awe) and joy (clearly because Sakra and the devas know that it is Moggallāna who has performed the psychic wonder) (MA 2:304,14-19).
what should be done is done,
there is no more of this state of being.’ [§§3.8, 25.8]

19.9 To that extent, lord of devas, in brief, is how a monk is freed by the destruction of craving, who has reached the utter end, reached the ultimate security from bondage, reached the highest of the holy life, reached the ultimate goal—the best of gods and humans.’ [§2.2, 3.9]

20 Thus, master Moggallāna, the Blessed One spoke on the freedom by the destruction of craving."

21 Then, the venerable having rejoicing in and approved of what Sakra, the lord of the devas, had said, [255] just as a strong man would stretch his flexed arm or flex his stretched arm, [66] even so, he disappeared from amongst the devas of Tāva,tiṁsa and appeared in the mansion of Migā-ra’s mother in the Eastern Park.

Fellow brahmafarers

22 Then, not long after the venerable Moggallāna had left, the attendants of Sakra, the lord of the devas, said:

“Is that, sir, the Blessed One, your teacher?”

“No, sirs, that is not the Blessed One, my teacher. He is the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, my fellow brahmafarer.105”

22.2 “It’s a gain, sir, [a great gain, sir,]106 that you are the fellow brahmafarer of one with such great power, such great might. What more so, indeed, that the Blessed One is your teacher!”107

Moggallāna sees the Buddha

23 Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side. Sitting thus at one side, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna said to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, does the Blessed One recall speaking in brief on the freedom by the destruction of craving to a certain renowned and mighty yaksha?108

24 “I do recall here, Moggallāna, that Sakra, lord of the devas, approached me, saluted and then stood at one side. Standing thus at one side, Sakra, lord of the devas, said to me:

24.2 “In what way, bhante, in brief, is a monk freed by the destruction of craving, one who has reached the utter end, reached the total security from bondage, reached the highest in the holy life, reached the ultimate goal—the best of gods and humans?” [§2.2]

24.3 When this was said, Moggallāna, I said:

A brief definition of arhathood (2nd reprise) [§§3, 19]

25 ‘Here, lord of devas, a monk has heard that “Nothing is worth clinging to.”

25.2 When, lord of devas, a monk has heard that nothing is worth clinging to, he directly knows all things.

25.3 When he has directly known all things,
he fully understands all things.

25.4 When he has fully understood all things, whatever feelings he feels, whether pleasant or painful or neutral

25.5 he dwells contemplating impermanence
   in those feelings;
   he dwells contemplating fading away,
   he dwells contemplating ending,
   he dwells contemplating relinquishment.

25.6 Thus dwelling contemplating impermanence in those feelings,
   dwelling contemplating fading away,
   dwelling contemplating ending,
   dwelling contemplating relinquishment,

25.7 he does not cling to anything in the world.
   When he does not cling, he is not (mentally) agitated.
   When he is not agitated, he personally attains nirvana.

25.8 He understands:
   ‘Birth is destroyed,
   the holy life has been lived,
   what should be done is done,
   there is no more of this state of being.’ [256] [§3.8, 19.8]

25.9 To that extent, lord of devas, in brief, is how a monk is freed by the destruction of craving, who has reached the utter end, reached the ultimate security from bondage, reached the highest of the holy life, reached the ultimate goal—the best of gods and humans.’

26 Thus, Moggallāna, do I recall speaking to Sakra, lord of the devas, on the freedom by the destruction of craving.”

27 The Blessed One said this. The venerable Moggallāna, joyful at heart, approved of the Blessed One’s word.

— evam —

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