

60.8

Makhā,deva Sutta

The Discourse on Makhadeva

Be Magha,deva Sutta **The Magha,deva Discourse** | M 83¹

Theme: A good tradition that is worth perpetuating

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§23	The Buddha says that such a tradition (keeping the uposatha) only brings one to the brahma world.
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§25	The Buddha exhorts Ānanda to continue the "good tradition" instituted by him.

¹ <https://www.digitalpalireader.online/dprhtml/index.html?loc=m.1.0.0.3.2.0.m&analysis=samucchindi>.

1 Sutta introduction

1.1 A FEW KEY IDEAS AND WORDS

1.1.1 Sutta highlights

1.1.1.1 The Makhā,deva Sutta is a mythical lesson in early Buddhism, or a lesson on mythical time [1.1.2] in spiritual life. This is *not* the kind of story to be taken on faith, but one that we should carefully read or listen to, and to reflect on its meaning or let the vision of truth underlying the story appear before us—like a good story does. If you have any difficulty accepting or understanding the story, just leave it aside for the moment, and examine those suttas and teachings that help you know yourself better, and also become more familiar with the story-telling style of Dharma-spirited literature.

The Sutta starts with an account of the life of **King Makhā,deva** who lives in Mithilā in prehistoric times, in an ancient, fabulous city of Indian legends and epics. Makhā,deva is the ideal king who rules his kingdom well and wisely, and is a model of a morally virtuous person who keeps the precepts, and in old age renounces the world to cultivate the divine abodes. He instructs his descendants to do the same.

1.1.1.2 Maghā,deva’s son and descendants keep to his instructions by ruling well and wisely, keeping the precepts, and renouncing in old age. Maghā,deva’s dynasty climaxes with King Nimi, whom even Sakra and the devas of Tāvātimsa admire so much so that they bring him to visit their heaven. On his way from earth to Tāvātimsa (the 2nd of the earthbound heavens),² he has a “tourist view” of the hells and the earthbound heavens [§14.2 n].

Nimi, however, is the “last person” (*antima, purisa*) in Makhā,deva’s lineage, since his successor, King Kalāra, janaka does not keep to Makhā,deva’s instruction and does not renounce the world. Makhā,deva’s noble lineage thus ends with him.

Near the Sutta’s closing, the Buddha explains that even such a noble tradition that Makhā,deva has instituted—with its *precept-keeping, renunciation and cultivation of the divine abodes*—at best leads to rebirth in the brahma world. Only **the noble eightfold path**, as taught by the buddhas, properly practised, brings one to the path of awakening and to nirvana [§23].

The Sutta’s message then is that we should properly practise the noble eightfold path—whether we use the breath meditation or the divine abodes, whether it is *samatha, vipassanā* or *kammaṭṭhāna*³—we should do so for the cultivation of liberating wisdom. This entails the 3 trainings in moral virtue, mental concentration and insight wisdom.⁴

1.1.1.3 Another interesting point to note is that the Makhā,deva Sutta actually comprises 2 Jātaka stories [1.2.1], that is, **the Makhā,deva Jātaka** (J 9) [1.2.2] and **the Nimi Jātaka** (J 541) [1.2.3]. Makhā,deva, the first king of the Sutta, and Nimi, the last good king mentioned in the Sutta, are both past births of the Buddha himself.

In **the Makhā,deva Jātaka** (J 9), the Buddha actually states that “I was Makhā,deva at that time” [§22]. This statement highlights the ancient religious ways or the “good tradition”: the way of merit (*puñña*) (keeping the precepts or *uposatha*), renunciation and cultivation of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*): *lovingkindness, compassion, joy and equanimity*. However, such a practice at best brings one only rebirth in the brahma-world [§22].

² See §14.2 n. On the earth-bound heavens, see SD 54.3a (3.5.1).

³ See SD 60.1b.

⁴ On the 3 trainings, see **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88), SD 24.10c; **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6; SD 1.11 (5).

The purpose of the Makhā,deva Sutta is to show just this: that the best religious practice even of those times, advanced in religious ways and wisdom, leads to the heavens of this world, and keeps us within samsara (the cycle of death and rebirth). Only the proper practice of **the noble eightfold path** frees us from cyclic life to gain nirvana [§23].

1.1.2 Mythical time

1.1.2.1 The Makhā,deva Sutta is a story about a prehistoric king, Makhā,deva, said to be living in **the “first age”** (*paṭhama kappa*),⁵ that is, the beginning of an aeon or world-cycle [1.1.2.2]. The term “the first age” appears in **the Cetiya Jātaka** (J 422) in reference to the first human king, Mahā Sammatta, whose lifespan was said to be an “incalculable” (*asaṅkheyya*). This mythical and didactic conception of time in the suttas is best understood through how time—cosmic and biological—is depicted in such texts as **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27) and **the Cakka,vatti Sutta** (D 26) [1.1.2.4].⁶ [1.1.3]

1.1.2.2 In **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27), for example, an aeon (*kappa*) or world cycle is said to comprise 4 stages, that is:⁷

(1) a collapsing (contracting) universe	<i>samvaṭṭa</i>	matter disintegrates
(2) a collapsed (steady-state) universe	<i>samvaṭṭa tiṭṭhati</i>	the “big crunch” ⁸
(3) an expanding universe	<i>vivaṭṭa</i>	the universe re-evolves
(4) an expanded (steady-state) universe	<i>vivaṭṭa tiṭṭhati</i>	a stable universe: life and humans

(1) A collapsing or contracting universe is one where matter is disintegrating and everything is a physical chaos. The 5 elements (earth, water, fire, wind and space) merge into some kind of amorphous “unity.” Without the physical universe, the sense-based worlds (including our human world) cannot arise or exist. However, interestingly, the higher form worlds and formless worlds (whose beings are composed of pure light or pure energy) continue as before, unaffected by this physical chaos.

(2) A collapsed or contracted universe is a steady state where time and space as we know them do not arise. Interestingly, this cycle may affect only our universe, or any one universe, as there are many other universes or **multiverses** similar to ours. These different multiverses, each goes through their own cosmic cycle in their own time. The existence (or possibility) of such multiverses is mentioned in, for example, **the Kosala Sutta 1** (A 10.29).⁹

(3) An expanding universe is one that begins to evolve physically and to support the evolution of vegetation and then of life. It is unclear, from the texts alone, when exactly human life arises. It may be at some later stage in this expanding universe, but certainly by the beginning of the following “expanded steady-state” universe.

⁵ **Nacca J** (J 32/1:207,1). **Mandhātu J** (J 258/2:311,8) says that “In the past, during the 1st age, there was a king named Mahā,sammatta” (*atite paṭhama,kappe mahā,sammatto nāma rājā āhosi*) (J 258/2:311,8). **Cetiya J** (J 422) says that King Mahā,sammatta “lived for an incalculable period,” ie, a quarter aeon (*asaṅkheyya*) (*atite paṭhama,-kappe mahā,sammato nāma rājā asaṅkheyy’āyuko ahosi*, J 422/3:454,13). [1.1.3]

⁶ **D 27**,10-21/3:84-93 relates the re-evolution of the universe and the election of Mahā Sammatta (SD 2.19), & **D 26**,14-23/34:67-75 shows how the human lifespan fluctuated according to social conditions (SD 36.10).

⁷ **D 27**,10-21/3:84-93 (SD 2.19). This is merely a hypothetical or imaginative explanation of early Buddhist cosmology, not a scientific description.

⁸ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Crunch.

⁹ A 10.29,2 (SD 16.15). For an interesting discussion on the possible interactions amongst these multiverses, see SD 2.19 (2.6).

(4) An expanded steady-state universe is a liveable world. By this time, humans, or prehumans, have learned to live together in some kind of family or social system. They learn to build houses, gather food and keep themselves safe from various dangers. Then they learn agriculture and husbandry. When ideas of ownership of their produce and land evolve, they have to deal with dangers to such situations—called “crimes.” Some kind of codes or laws come into being, and also the idea of kingship.

Over time, humans begin to specialize in labour and “occupations” come into being. Through such labour and organization, the idea of right and wrong (for example, stealing is wrong) and morality arise. In fact, in ancient India, even before the Buddha’s time, the idea of “work” and “moral action” were seen as overlapping, as evident from the ancient term “**karma**” (P *kamma*). This 4th stage in the cosmic evolution (that of human and social realities) is described in interesting (sometime humorous) detail in **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27).¹⁰

1.1.2.3 The 4 stages of the universe’s evolution are also listed in **the (Catukka) Kappa Sutta** (A 4.156) and other Buddhist texts.¹¹ The Sutta also calls each of these 4 stages an “incalculable” (*asaṅkheyya*).¹² Simply put, even an *asaṅkheyya* is an “uncalculably” and unimaginably long period, to speak in characteristic ancient Indian hyperbole.

John Garrett Jones, in his study of the Jātakas, *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha*, gives a helpful summary of the early Buddhist conception of time (1979:190). He mentions “**the first age**” [1.1.2.1] as clearly referring to stage 4 depicted above [1.1.2.2]. It is a time when the stable universe supported life and humans, and human society began to evolve and flourish.

The first human king, Mahā Sammatta, who lived in this “first age,” had a lifespan of a whole “incalculable” (*asaṅkheyya*), as do most of the humans then. Makhā,deva, Nimi and the 84,000 generations of kings of **the Makhā,deva Sutta** (M 83) lived during such a time. These stories show that the Buddha (or the Buddhist sutta compilers) then had a vision of time and human social evolution quite advanced for their time.

1.1.2.4 The Cakka,vatti Sutta (D 26) develops the early Buddhist vision of cosmic time and social evolution to highlight the nature of human behaviour and the necessity of **dhmma** as social code, religious teaching and spiritual evolution. The Sutta describes how the human lifespan fluctuates according to personal conduct and social conditions, that is, to the extent to which political power and social justice play vital roles in keeping society wholesome or actually contributing to social failure and chaos.

The role of **the Buddha**—and every buddha who arises in such a society—is to point out:

- (1) how moral conduct (*sīla*) is the vital foundation of a human and humanizing society that supports a sustainable world;¹³
- (2) how mental cultivation (*samādhi*) is the basis for individual goodness and excellence to serve as the pillars of a productive and creative society—very simply, a “good society”; and
- (3) how insight wisdom (*paññā*) is the root of liberating knowledge that frees us from living in suffering, from inflicting suffering upon others, and the from contributing to the deterioration and destruction of the environment.

When these 3 trainings (*sikkhas*) are cultivated as an integral path of personal development, it leads to spiritual awakening that frees us from the deficiencies and unsatisfactoriness of the world. While biologi-

¹⁰ **Aggañña S** (D 27), SD 2.19.

¹¹ A 4.156/2:142 & SD 2.19 (9.4.1); Vism 13.28-30/414-422; cf D 1:14, 3:109; It 15, 99; Pug 60; Kvu 11.5/455 f; Miln 232. On other universes, see SD 2.19 (9.4).

¹² On *asaṅkheyya*, see SD 2.19 (9.3).

¹³ D 26,14-23/34:67-75 (SD 36.10).

cal evolution advances the human species, this **spiritual evolution**, beginning with the Buddha, provides the path of higher evolution, that leading to awakening (*bodhi*).

1.1.3 Ancient conception of numbers

1.1.3.1 According to the **Neyy’attha Nī’t’attha Sutta** (A 2.3.5+6), when studying the suttas, the rule is that we should first ascertain whether the teaching is one “whose sense is (or has been) drawn out” (*nī’t’attha*) or if it is one “whose sense is to be drawn out” (*neyy’attha*).¹⁴ We should examine *how* the teaching is taught, that is, whether in worldly or conventional manner (that is, relatively or *pariyāyena*), or in direct or spiritual terms (that is, ultimately or *nippariyāyena*).¹⁵

A teaching that makes use of experiential terms and ideas (impermanence, suffering, nonself, consciousness, peace, awakening, nirvana), is a teaching **whose sense has been drawn out** (*nī’t’attha*). Such a teaching should be taken *as it is*, and understood as a universal and timeless truth. It has *directly* to do with the path of awakening and nirvana.

When stories (such as those in which individuals are named) or concepts (such as numbers) are used, the teaching is one **whose sense is to be drawn out** (*neyy’attha*). In such cases, the Buddha or the narrator or commentator of the teaching, is making use of some worldly ideas or conventions to illustrate some point or vision of ultimate truth. Hence, included here are worldly language, stories, metaphors, numbers and various literary devices to highlight the Dharma as teaching, as path and as awakening.

Clearly, in the suttas, and especially in the Commentaries, **numbers** are a didactic device used by the Buddha, the sutta narrator or commentator to illustrate some point of Dharma. They are merely a literary tool and not the ultimate teaching itself. They are like a map to a certain destination, a map filled with various placenames, landmarks and symbols representing places and where to go. As interesting as all this may be, the map is not the territory. We must use the map to safely and quickly get to the destination.

1.1.3.2 Now, in the Jātakas—such as **the Cetiya Jātaka** (J 422)—it is said that the first human king, Mahā,sammatta, lived for an “incalculable” (*asaṅkheyya*) [1.1.2.1]. This time-period is certainly longer than Makhā,deva’s lifespan of 84,000 years, or even the total time of all the 84,000 generations that follow him! The idea of such unimaginable time is just that: they are meant to be “incalculable.” They are to boggle our minds and hold our attention the way the sounds, colours and depictions in a modern movie hold our attention and captivate our imagination forever.

Mathematically, **an incalculable** (*asaṅkheyya*) is said to be a unit of 1 followed by 140 ciphers, as noted in Ñāṇamoli’s *A Pali Glossary of Technical Terms* (1994).¹⁶ Mathematically, this is either ten quinquadragintillion (10^{139}) or one hundred sexquadragintillion (10^{140}), ie, 1 with 141 zeroes (US method).¹⁷ This is itself, at best, a fanciful word and not a very useful one. No scientist or mathematician today is likely to use such terms anyway.

Modern science uses a shorthand for big numbers; for example, writing one million as 10^6 or 10^6 (read as “ten to the power of six”), and 1 followed by 140 zeros as 10^{140} or 10^{140} . However, the number for *asaṅkheyya*, mentioned above, is not 1 followed by 140 zeros. A sutta Friend, Dr Jonathan Lilly, a Senior Scientist and researcher at the Planetary Science Institute (Tucson, AZ, USA),¹⁸ explains that it is actually 1 followed by 155 zeros. These are really enormous numbers (but not helpful ones!).

¹⁴ A 2.3.5+6/1:60 (SD 2.6b).

¹⁵ See SD 2.6b (1).

¹⁶ Ñāṇamoli, *A Pali Glossary of Technical Terms*, Kandy, 2nd ed 2007:132. He does not quote any sources.

¹⁷ [English names of the first 10000 powers of 10 - American System without dashes \(lcn2.github.io\)](https://github.com/lcn2/english-names-of-the-first-10000-powers-of-10).

¹⁸ <https://www.psi.edu/>. <https://www.psi.edu/staff/>.

Lilly adds:

(1) The age of the universe, with everything we know from observing the cosmos, is about 14 billion years. That's 14,000,000,000 or 14, followed by nine zeros. (By comparison, the human population of the earth is about 8 billion.) If the entire lifetime of the known universe occurred one million times in succession, the number of years that would take would be about 14 followed by fifteen zeros. The numbers you are writing above are vastly larger than even that; so large they are very hard to relate to. Each time you add a zero you get ten times bigger! Even the number of atoms in the universe is much smaller, something like one followed by 82 zeros.

(2) I am glad you mentioned that you think the ancient religions were using numbers symbolically to mean “unimaginably big.” I think this is exactly right. A good example is in the Tao Te Ching, in which “10,000 things” is used repeatedly to mean “myriad” or “countless.”

Another point worth mentioning is that these days, we have the concept of infinity, which is something that is so large, it is bigger than anything you can imagine. Mathematicians these days have ways of dealing with infinities, even saying that there are different sizes of infinities! But historically, that was not the case, so if you wanted to come up with a number that was unimaginably big, you had to pick a specific number that was so big no one could wrap their head around it.

(Jonathan Lilly, personal communications, (1) 24 Nov 2023, (2) 26 Nov 2023)

1.1.4 King Makhā,deva

1.1.4.1 King Makhā,deva was a past life of Gotama Buddha, which is also related in **the Makhā,deva Jātaka** (J 9) [1.2.2]. He was the son of Upacara, in the direct line from Mahā,sammata, “the great elect,”¹⁹ the first ruler of civilized society. Makhadeva was a great, wise and compassionate ruler, and his sons and grandsons, 84,000 in number, reigned in Mithilā. This primordial lineage of Makhā,deva is the one mentioned in M 83.

As a good king, Makhā,deva kept the uposatha and, in old age, renounced the world to cultivate the divine abodes. He instituted this “good tradition” (*kalyāṇa vaṭṭa*) and instructed his successors and descendants to practise it. This good tradition continued unbroken for 84,000 generations, ending with the great King **Nimi**.

1.1.4.2 Nimi's son, according to the Sutta, was **Kaḷāra,janaka**, who, however, did not keep to Makhā,deva's good tradition; he neither renounced nor cultivated the divine abodes.²⁰ His dynasty ended with him and was followed by that of King **Okkāka**, the first ancestors of the Sakyas and the Koliyas.²¹ Prince Siddhattha (who became our Buddha) was from the Sakya clan, while Yasodharā, who married Siddhattha, was from the Koliya clan.²²

1.1.5 Mithilā

1.1.5.1 As evident from the Makhā,deva Sutta, **Mithilā** was a very ancient city, and, according to **the Mahā Govinda Sutta** (D 19,36/2:235),²³ was founded by Mahā Govinda, steward of King Reṇu (son and

¹⁹ SnA 352,13.

²⁰ MAT 29; Dīpv 3.34f; Mahv 2.10. Other Comys say that Kalawas the son of Upacara (DA 1:258 & SnA 1:352).

²¹ See **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3/1:92), SD 21.3. DA 1:258; SnA 1:352,15. The Skt sources confuse Ikṣvāku with his ancestor Sujāta (Mvst 1:348). For a Skt genealogy of the Sakyas: (tr) W W Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, 1884:9-13.

²² On genealogical connections between the Sakyas and the Koliyas, see H Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha*, Tokyo, 2000:32-40. On the marriage between Siddhattha and Yasodharā, see SD 52,1 (6.2).

²³ SD 19,36/2:235 (SD 63.4).

successor of King Disampati of Benares). The Makhā,deva Sutta also tells us that it was the capital of King Makhā,deva² and his 84,000 generations of descendants.²⁴ Although these numbers refer to human years, they are not arithmetical but mythical, that is, symbolic of a deeper reality, as in the great ancient legends and popular fairy tales [1.1.2].

Mithilā was also the ancient capital of various other kings mentioned in the Jātaka stories, such as Aṅgatī (J 544),²⁵ Ariṭṭha Janaka (J 539),²⁶ Mahā Janaka (J 539),²⁷ Nimi (J 408),²⁸ Videha (J 160),²⁹ Videha (J 546),³⁰ Sādhīna (J 494),³¹ and Suruci (J 489).³² The size of the city was frequently given as 7 leagues (*yojana*) in circumference, and the city was highly praised in **the Mahā Janaka Jātaka** (J 539).³³ There was a road leading from Campā to Mithilā, a distance of 60 leagues (J 6:32). According to **the Ummagga Jātaka** (J 546), there were 4 market-towns, one at each of the 4 gates of Mithilā, each bearing the same name of Yava,majjhaka (that is, located to the east, the south, the west and the north).³⁴

1.1.5.2 The Buddha is mentioned as having stayed in Mithilā and having taught there **the Makhā,deva Sutta** (M 83)³⁵ and **the Brahm'āyu Sutta** (M 91).³⁶ It is also in Mithilā that the young mother **Vāsiṭṭhī** (or **Vāseṭṭhī**)—mad with grief at the loss of her only infant son—first meets the Buddha, who heals her; she then joins the sangha.³⁷ After the Buddha's death—says **the Buddha,vaṁsa** (B 28.11)—the fire-stick that lit the Buddha's pyre was enshrined in Mithilā, while the Buddha's water-strainer was enshrined in Videha.³⁸

In the time of **Koṇāgamana Buddha**,³⁹ Mithilā was the capital of King Pabbata, and Koṇāgamana visited it and taught there.⁴⁰ **Padum'uttara Buddha**⁴¹ gave his first discourse to his cousins, Devala and Sujāta (who became his pair of chief disciples), in the park of Mithilā,⁴² and later to King Ānanda and his retinue in the same spot.⁴³

Mithilā is generally identified with Janaka,pura, a small town in Nepal near the border with India, north of where the Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga districts meet.⁴⁴ In the Indian Epics, Mithilā is chiefly famous as the residence of King Janaka.⁴⁵

²⁴ M 83/2:75-83 (SD 60.8); MAṬ:Ce 129, Be 12:220; Dīpv 9, 29, 35.

²⁵ Mahā Nārada Kassapa J (J 544/6:220).

²⁶ **Mahā Janaka J** (J 539/6:30).

²⁷ **Mahā Janaka J** (J 539/6:30 f).

²⁸ **Kumbhakāra J** (J 408/3:378).

²⁹ **Vinīlaka J** (J 160/2:39).

³⁰ **Mahā Ummagga J** (J 546/J 6:330).

³¹ **Sādhīna J** (J 494/4:355).

³² **Suruci J** (J 489/4:315).

³³ J 539/6:46 f.

³⁴ J 546/6:355 f, 365,25*,366 (7); cf 330,28*.

³⁵ M 83/2:75-83 (SD 60.8).

³⁶ M 91/2:133-101 (SD 64.8).

³⁷ Thī 135; Divy 60.

³⁸ B 28.11. **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,6.22-28) however makes no mention of the Videhas getting any bodily relics of the Buddha (SD 9).

³⁹ Koṇāgamana is the 2nd buddha before Gotama: SD 36.2 (3.4.3, the 28 buddhas, (5.9) the past 6 buddhas, SD 49.8b (1.0.4.5) the 7 buddhas.

⁴⁰ BA 260 f.

⁴¹ Padum'uttara is the 15th buddha before Gotama: SD 36.2 (3.4.3) of the 28 past buddhas.

⁴² B 11.23; BA 192. No other details are given about "Mithilā garden," *mithil'uyyāna* (BA 193,24).

⁴³ BA 192 f.

⁴⁴ Cunningham's *Ancient Geography of India* [CAGI], ed S Majumdar, Calcutta, 1924:718.

⁴⁵ Eg Rāmāyaṇa 1.48.

1.1.5.3 Historically, **Mithilā** was the capital of Videha country, whose people were known as Videhā; it was one of the 16 great states (*mahā jana,pada*) of ancient India.⁴⁶ Videha was one of the 2 principal clans constituting the Vajjī confederacy: the other clan was that of the Licchavī. It was located just north of the Ganges, with the kingdom of Magadha across the great river.⁴⁷ Adjacent to it were the kingdoms of Kāsi and Kosala.

1.2 JĀTAKA STORIES CONNECTED WITH MAKHĀ,DEVA

1.2.1 Jātaka

1.2.1.1 The term *jātaka* (from *jāti*, “birth”) means “a birth-story,”⁴⁸ specifically a story narrating an episode in a past life of the Buddha. The Jātakas (the stories) seem to have originally totalled 550,⁴⁹ but we now have only 547 (based on some 2500 verses (J), almost all canonical). The canonical verses form the 10th volume of the Khuddaka Nikāya. The stories are actually commentaries to the verses and are found in the Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā (JA) (Jātaka Commentary), or fully, **Jātak’atṭhakathā,vaṇṇanā** (“a survey of the meaning of the birth-stories”). Such stories, especially the shorter ones, are usually called **fables** or moral apologues. Alternative versions of some of the longer Jātaka stories are found in **the Cariyā,piṭaka**.⁵⁰

The anthology of some 550 stories in the Pāli language—including many non-canonical Jātakas (such as the “50 Jātakas” of Southeast Asia) is preserved by the Theravāda. Jātaka stories focus on the Buddha as an awakened visionary and storyteller, and illustrate moral lessons (similar to those of Aesop’s fables and some modern cartoon fantasies), the workings of karma, or the perfections (*pāramī*) cultivated for the attainment of buddhahood.

1.2.1.2 Individual jātakas are found amongst the suttas, such as **the Makhā,deva Sutta** (M 83) [1.1.1.3], and they are thus called “canonical jātakas,” that is, birth-stories connected with the Bodhisattva (the historical Buddha-to-be). Other canonical jātakas include or are found in:

⁴⁶ They were located mostly in the central Gangetic plain of northern India and its surrounding areas. SD 4.18 App SD 9 (16): map (16.3); **Mahā Assa,pura S** (M 39), SD 10.13 (1); **(Tad-ah’) Uposatha S** (A 3.70,18), SD 4.18 & App SD 57.8 (3.2.2.1); SD 6.1 (1).

⁴⁷ See eg **Cūḷa Gopālaka S** (M 34,2/1:225), SD 61.3; MA 2:265 f.

⁴⁸ The full Jātaka stories are told in the comy (JA), based on the verses and small sections of prose (J), which are canonical: the PTS ed of text and comy are in 6 vols: **Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births** (J:C), ed E B Cowell with various translators. This tr however is too free to be useful for a Pali student, and awaits a new critical tr. Freely accessible at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/index.htm>. The long intro, Nidāna,katha, is the most important comy source on the Buddha legend, tr N A Jayawickrama, **Story of Gotama Buddha**, Pali Text Soc, 1990. See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 261/1:160-175), SD 1.11(1), & Hinüber 1996: §316.

⁴⁹ Culla,niddesa and comys actually mention only “500 Jātakas” (*pañca,jātaka,satāni*, Nc:Be 164; VA 1:28; AA 3:6; DhsA 26), but as noted by K R Norman, this “is probably nothing more than a ‘round number,’ and should not be taken as evidence that at the time of the composition of that text the Jātaka collection was smaller than we possess now.” (1983:79 n316). The SE Asian Buddhists also have their own set of 50 prob apocryphal Jātakas known as **Paṇṇāsa** (or **Paññāsa**) Jātaka.

⁵⁰ **Cariyā Piṭaka** (C), the 15th and last book of the Khuddaka Nikāya (Kh), comprises 35 Jātaka-like stories in 3 chapters (*vagga*), illustrating each of the 10 perfections (*pāramī*). Of the 35 accounts, 32 can be directly related to the Jātaka collection; another, **Mahā Govinda C** (C 1.5), cf Mahā Govinda S (D 19/2:220-251), SD 63.4; another, **Mahā Loma,haṃsa C** (C 3.15), cf Mahā Sīha,nāda S (also titled Loma,haṃsa Pariyāya (M 12/1:68-83), SD 49.1: see C:H viii f. On C, see Norman 1983b:94- f.

- **Mahā Govinda Jātaka** J 534 in the **Mahā Govinda Sutta** D 19,29-60/2:230-251 SD 63.4;
- **Velāma Jātaka** (J 40)⁵¹ in the **Velāma Sutta** A 9.20,4-5/4:393-396 SD 16.6;
- **Makhā,deva Jātaka** J 9 in the **Makhā,deva Sutta** M 83,3-6/2:75 f SD 60.8;
- **Nimi Jātaka** J 541 in the **Makhā,deva Sutta** M 83,12-19/2:80-82 SD 60.8.

1.2.1.3 Besides their widespread presence in the suttas, jātika stories have been depicted at Buddhist stūpas and temples since before the start of the Common Era. There is also evidence suggesting that the jātika genre played an important role in the formation and dissemination of ideas about buddhahood, merit and karma, and the place of the Buddha in relation to other buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The place of jātikas in the Buddha’s sacred biography gives them a special symbolic value, depicted in local stories, art and ritual. **The Vessantara Jātaka** (J 547), which, in Theravāda tradition, records the Buddha’s penultimate human birth and exemplifies his perfection of generosity, plays a salient role in symbolic, artistic, dramatic, ritual, and festive contexts to this day.

Themes from jātika stories are today frequently seen depicted on temple walls and edifices and continue to be retold in books (especially children’s books), replayed on videos and depicted in television and social media. Huge roadside depictions during the Sri Lankan celebration of Vesak, as well as long public recitations and dramatizations in Southeast Asia, are testament to the enduring popularity of the jātikas.⁵²

1.2.2 Makhā,deva Jātaka (J 9)

1.2.2.1 In early Buddhism, the term *bodhisatta*, or its anglicized form “bodhisattva,” refers to the Buddha Gotama and similar past buddhas, from the time they first aspired to become a self-awakened buddha themselves until their respective great awakenings. When we use the special term with its initial capital—**the Bodhisattva**—we refer to Gotama Buddha. Broadly speaking, the term refers to the past lives of Gotama Buddha as far back as can be remembered, so that we know him better as a being who was “bound for awakening” in an evolutionary sense.

In the ancient past, **the Bodhisattva** was once born as Makhā,deva or Magha,deva (in the Burmese texts), king of Mithilā, [1.1.5] the capital of Videha. For 4 successive periods of 84,000 years, he respectively lives as a (normal) playful boy, ruled as viceroy, reigned as king and, in old age, lived as a **renunciant**. The last stage of his life is prompted by the discovery of grey hairs on his head [§4].

Significantly, this first sighting of the king’s grey hair is called a “**divine messenger**” (*deva, dūta*). Elsewhere in the suttas and commentaries—especially in relation to the Bodhisattva’s last life—is that of sighting the 4 divine messengers: an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a renunciant. Prince Siddhattha felt religious angst (*samvega*) or spiritual urgency on seeing the first 3 sights—embodiments of decay, disease and death—and was relieved that one can be happily free from them, as embodied in the 4th sight, that of *the renunciant*. The Makhā,deva Sutta metaphor of the divine messenger represents these 4 sights.

1.2.2.2 The 4-stage life-cycle is another theme of the Sutta. These fourfold life passages were probably a common practice even before the Buddha’s time. The Makhā,deva Sutta uses this motif (its unify-

⁵¹ See **Khadiraṅgāra Jātaka** (J 40/1:226-234): Velāma mention at J 1:228.

⁵² Further on “**jātaka as fable**,” see SD 36.1 (3.4.4). For *jātaka* as text, see K R Norman, *Pali Literature*, 77-84. For a study of Jātaka as Buddhist literature, see Naomi Appleton, *Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism: narrating the Bodhisatta path*, Farnham (UK) & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010. See also Appleton’s article on “**Jātaka**,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias* (online), 2016, 2019. K T S Sarao, “Jātaka,” in (edd) Sarao & Long, *Ency of Indian Religions: Buddhism and Jainism*, Springer, 2017:587-590. On Jātikas in other traditions, see K C Lang, “**Jātikas** and other narrative collections,” in (edd) Keown & Prebish, *Routledge Ency of Buddhism*, 2007:426-428.

ing theme) to highlight the idea of a spiritually meaningful life—that one who has enjoyed worldly power and pleasure, should, in due course, turn to enjoying divine power and pleasures [4.4].

From the perspective of the “life-cycle” theme, the Makhā,deva Sutta depicts the ideal worldly life: that of a powerful yet good king who has a happy childhood; his youth prepares for his future role as king; as an adult, he rules wisely; finally, at the first sign of old age or decay, he rewards his barber with a revenue village for the barber’s services and for pointing out his grey hair, which marks the last stage of his life, that of a renunciant, when he cultivates the 4 divine abodes.

Having lived another 84,000 years, the king dies and is reborn in the brahma heaven. In due course, he is reborn as Nimi, the last great king of the line. In that life, too, he lives through the 4 stages of life. The Makhā,deva Jātaka (J 9), in its conclusion, records the Buddha as identifying the barber with **Ānanda** and the prince with **Rāhula**. The story was related to some monks who were talking one day about the Buddha’s renunciation.⁵³

1.2.2.3 In the Makhā,deva Sutta, the teaching of **the 4 stages of life**, as exemplified by King Makhā,-deva, was not the ideal spiritual life: it did not bring one the freedom of nirvana [§22]. The 4-stage life related in the Sutta acts merely as *a foil* for the Buddha’s own ideal of the noble eightfold path, which is the one and only way to awakening and nirvana. The Sutta teaching is also an exhortation by the Buddha that we should practise the Dharma to reach the path of freedom.

It seemed that the imperious brahmins, fearing that Buddhism would overtake them religiously and socially, pilfered the scheme of the 4 stages of life⁵⁴ to counter the popularity of monastic renunciation of early Buddhism.⁵⁵ By the 4th century BCE, the system was recorded in Dharma Śāstra literature.⁵⁶ The *aśrama,dharma*, it was traditionally known, may be translated as the four “stages of the religious life” of the male devotees, that is, the brahminical tutelage (5-24) as (1) a celibate student (*brahma,cāri*), (2) the “householder” (Skt *grhastya*) (25-49), when the youth takes a wife and lives a family life,⁵⁷ (3) the “forest dweller” (Skr *vana,pastha*) (50-74), a life of solitude, and (4) the “mendicant” (Skt *samnyāsin*) (75-100), a life of renunciation and religious practices leading to release (Skt *mokṣa*) in brahminical terms.⁵⁸

1.2.3 Nimi Jātaka (J 541)

1.2.3.1 The last good king of the Makhā,deva lineage described in the Makhā,deva Sutta is **Nimi** [§§12-19], another past incarnation of the Buddha, related in **the Nimi Jātaka** (J 541). Once, the **Bodhi-sattva** was born as the son of the king of **Mithilā**, in Videha country. He was the reincarnation of King Makhādeva, who came down among men from the brahma world to bring the number of his family, who renounced the world, up to 84,000. And because the boy was born to round off the family, *like the hoop of a chariot*, he was called Nimi (*nemi* = hoop).

On his father’s renunciation, Nimi came to the throne and engaged himself and all his subjects in righteousness and generosity. Once, when doubt arose in his mind as to which was more fruitful—holy life or giving alms—Sakra himself appeared before him to answer and encourage him.

1.2.3.2 Nimi’s reputation spread to Tāvatiṃsa, and when the devas desired to see him, Sakra sent his chariot, driven by Mātali, to fetch Nimi. On the way to Tāvatiṃsa, Mātali showed Nimi the hells and

⁵³ J 1:137-139; cf M 83,21 f & J 6:95. See E J Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha*, 3rd ed 1949:127.

⁵⁴ See Chāndogya Upaniṣad 2.23.1: SD 36.14 (1.2.3).

⁵⁵ Cf P Olivelle, *The Asrama System: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*. NY: Oxford Univ Press, 1993:7 & passim.

⁵⁶ Olivelle 1993:102.

⁵⁷ S C Crawford, *The Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideals*. Honolulu: Univ of Hawaii Press, 1982:61-70.

⁵⁸ See SD 36.14 (1.2.3).

the heavens and the palaces of various devas. Arriving at the Sudhammā Hall, Nimi discoursed to the assembled gods. After staying in Tāvatiṃsa for 7 days, he returned to Mithilā to tell his subjects about what he had seen.

When, later, Nimi's barber told him of the appearance of the first white hair on his head, Nimi, like all his predecessors, handed over the throne to his son and became a renunciant. His son, Kālārajanaka, who failed to renounce, was the last of the 84,000 kings of Makhādeva's dynasty.

This story was told by the Buddha when he visited Mithilā. He smiled when he came to the site of Makhādeva's palace, and, when asked why he smiled, he related Makhādeva Sutta (M 83), whose narrative is elaborated as the Makhādeva Jātaka (J 9) and the Nimi Jātaka (J 541). In the Nimi Jātaka, **Anuruddha** is identified with Sakra and **Ānanda** with Mātali.⁵⁹ Nimi's story is also preserved in the Cariyāpiṭaka.⁶⁰

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Makhādeva Sutta

The Discourse on Makhādeva

M 83

1 Thus have I heard.⁶¹

At one time, the Blessed One was dwelling in Makhādeva's mango grove, outside **Mithilā**.⁶²

2 Then at a certain place, the Blessed One smiled.

It then occurred to the venerable Ānanda:

“What now is the reason, what is the cause for the Blessed One's smile? Tathagatas smile not without a reason.⁶³”

King Makhādeva

3 “Once upon a time, Ānanda, in this very same Mithilā, there was a king named **Makhādeva**, a righteous Dharma-rajah,⁶⁴ a great king who ruled by the law, stood in the Dharma [the law and justice], lived by the Dharma [the moral code]

⁵⁹ J 541/6:95-129; Dīpv 3.35.

⁶⁰ C 1.6/76 (verses, C 40-44); CA 51-57.

⁶¹ King Makhādeva [**Makhādeva J**, J 9] and King Nimi [**Nimi J**, J 541] were previous lives of the Buddha [§12, §22].

⁶² The grove was originally cultivated by Makhādeva and remained so named after him.

⁶³ Ce Ee na akāraṇena [Be Se na akarāṇe] tathāgatā sitaṃ pātukarontī ti. On the Buddha smiling for similar reasons: in Kosala, (**Majjhima**) **Ghaṭikāra S** (M 81,2/2:45), story of Joti,pāla and Ghaṭī,kāra in Kassapa Buddha's time (SD 49.3); in a sal forest in Kosala, **Gavesī S** (A 5.180,3/3:214), story of Gavesī in Kassapa Buddha's time, SD 47.16 (qv); in Nigrodha's park, Kapilavatthu, **Kaṇha J** (J 440/4:6 f), story of the sage Kaṇha.

⁶⁴ *Dhammiko dhamma,rājā dhamme ṭhito mahā,rājā dhammaṃ carati*. This phrase is repeated 5 times in the Sutta: §§3, 12, 13.1, 13.4, 15.1. I interpret this as meaning that he is “a just ruler who rules by law, he himself keeping to the law, and is himself established in the 10 courses of good karma (abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct; from false speech, divisive speech, harsh talk, frivolous chatter; from covetousness, ill will and wrong view), ie 3 bodily karma, 4 verbal karma and 3 mental karma: eg, **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,11-14), SD 5.7; they bring good rebirth: (**Saddha**) **Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 10.177,3), SD 2.6a. Cf Comy that glosses “standing in the law” (*dhamme ṭhito*) as **dhamma,kusala,kamma.pathe ṭhito** (MA 3:310,5-8). In **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26), such a king is called a “world monarch” (*cakka,vatti*) (SD 36.10).

amongst brahmins and houselords, amongst townfolk and countryfolk;

he kept the precept days [uposatha], [75] on the 14th, the 15th and the 8th of the (lunar) fortnight.⁶⁵

4 Now, Ānanda, with the passing of many years, many hundred years, many hundred thousand years,⁶⁶ King Makhā,deva addressed his barber thus:

‘Good barber, when you see any grey hairs growing on my head, please tell me.’

‘Yes, your majesty,’ Ānanda, replied the barber to King Makhā,deva.

4.2 Ānanda, after the passing of many years, many hundred years, many thousand years, the barber saw grey hairs growing on King Makhā,deva’s head.

4.3 When he saw them, he said this to King Makhā,deva:

‘The divine messengers have appeared, your majesty; grey hairs are growing on your head.’

‘Then, good barber, pull out those grey hairs carefully with tweezers⁶⁷ and put them in my palm.’

‘Yes, your majesty,’ Ānanda, replied the barber to King Makhā,deva, and he pulled out those grey hairs carefully with tweezers and put them in the king’s palm.

Makhā,deva instructs the crown prince

4.4 Then, Ānanda, King Makhā,deva gave a boon village to his barber, and summoning his eldest son, addressed him thus:

‘Dear prince, the divine messengers have appeared: grey hairs are seen growing on my head. I have enjoyed human sense-pleasures; it is time that I go in quest of divine sense-pleasures.

Come, dear prince, carry on this kingship. I shall shave off hair and beard, don the yellow robe, and go forth from home into homelessness.⁶⁸

4.5 Now, dear prince, when you, too, were to see grey hairs growing on your head, then, after giving a boon village to your barber and after carefully instructing the prince, your eldest son, in kingship, shave off hair and beard, don the yellow robe, and go forth from home into homelessness.

4.6 Continue this good tradition I have laid down, and do not be my last man.

Dear prince, when there are only two men living, he under whom there is a breach of this good tradition, he is the last man of my line.⁶⁹

Therefore, dear prince, I say thus:

Continue this good tradition [76] I have laid down, and do not be the last man (of my line).⁷⁰

⁶⁵ The *uposatha* is an ancient religious observance day of the Indians assimilated by the Buddhists. The Indian year is divided into 3 seasons (*utu*) (the cold, Oct/Nov-Jan/Feb; the hot, Feb/Mar-May/Jun; and the rains (Jun/Jul-Sep/Oct) [SD 1.1 (1.2)] of 4 months (*māsa*) each. The 4 months are divided into 8 fortnights (*pakka*), the 3rd and the 7th have 14 days and the others 15 days. Each fortnight, the full moon night and the new moon night (either the 14th or 15th) and the night of the half-moon (the 8th) are regarded as especially auspicious. These are the *uposatha*, observance days. On the full moon and new moon days, monastics assemble for the Pātimokkha conclave, and the laity listen to Dharma teachings and meditate.

⁶⁶ According to Buddhist cosmology, human lifespan evolves between a minimum of 10 years to as long as 80,000 years [Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S (D 26,14-23), SD 36.10]. Makhā,deva lived at a time when the lifespan was very long.

⁶⁷ *Sanḍāsa* [*saṃ + daṃsa*, from *ḍasati*] (long) pincers, tweezers (A 1:210; J 1:223, 3:138; used to pull out hair, M 2:75; V 2:134).

⁶⁸ This episode of the king’s grey hairs echoes the Bodhisattva’s visions of the 4 sights (an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a renunciant), leading to Siddhattha’s great renunciation.

⁶⁹ *Yena me idaṃ kalyāṇaṃ vaṭṭaṃ nihitaṃ anuppavatteyyāsi. | Mā kho me tvaṃ antima,puriso ahoṣi. || Yasmim kho tāta kumāra, purisa,yuge vattamāne eva,rūpassa kālyāṇassa vaṭṭassa samuccheda hoti, so tesam antima,puriso hoti.*

⁷⁰ *Taṃ tāhaṃ tāta kumāra, evaṃ vadāmi: | ‘yena me idaṃ kalyāṇaṃ vaṭṭaṃ nihitaṃ anuppavatteyyāsi, mā kho me tvaṃ antima,puriso ahoṣi ti.*

5 Then, Ānanda, King Makhā,deva, after giving the boon village to his barber and having carefully instructed the prince, his eldest son, in kingship, in the Makhā,deva mango grove, shaved off hair and beard, donned the yellow robe and went forth from home into homelessness.

THE 1ST DIVINE ABODE REFRAIN: MAKHĀ,DEVA

- (1) He dwelled with a heart of **lovingkindness**, suffusing one quarter; so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone,⁷¹ he dwelled suffusing all the world with lovingkindness that is vast, grown great [exalted],⁷² immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.⁷³
- (2) He dwelled with a heart of **compassion**, suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone, he dwelled suffusing all the world with compassion that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.
- (3) He dwelled with a heart of **gladness**, suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone, he dwelled suffusing all the world with gladness that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.
- (4) He dwelled with a heart of **equanimity**, suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone, he dwelled suffusing all the world with equanimity that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

6 For 84,000 years, Ānanda, King Makhā,deva played boyish [children’s] games; for 84,000 years, he was vice-regent (*uparāja*); for 84,000 years, he ruled as king (*rāja*); after shaving hair and beard, donning the yellow robe and going forth from home into homelessness, he lived the holy life in this very Makhā,deva mango grove for 84,000 years.

By cultivating the 4 divine abodes, with the breaking up of the body, after death, he reached the Brahma-world.

King Makhā,deva’s son

7 Now, Ānanda, at the end of many years, many hundred years, many thousand years, **King Makhā,deva’s son** addressed his barber:⁷⁴

‘Good barber, when you see any grey hairs growing on my head, please tell me.’

‘Yes, your majesty,’ Ānanda, replied the barber to King Makhā,deva’s son.

⁷¹ *Iti uddham adho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya*. Here “everyone” means “all beings, including myself,” and “all kinds of beings,” incl whatever state I am in. On the tr of *sabbattatāya*, see D 13,76 n, SD 1.8; SD 60.2 (4.2.3.1).

⁷² The mind “grown great” (*maha-g,gatā*) or exalted perception refers to the mind in dhyana, ie in the form sphere (*rūpāvacara*). See **Catuttha Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.4), SD 24.14 (4).

⁷³ See §5 (1) ad loc n.

⁷⁴ From here to end of §9, *mutatis mutandis* as at §4-6.

7.2 Ānanda, after the passing of many years, many hundred years, many thousand years, the barber saw grey hairs growing on King Makhā,deva's son's head.

7.3 When he saw them, he said this to King Makhā,deva's son:

'The divine messengers have appeared, your majesty; grey hairs are growing on your head.'

'Then, good barber, pull out those grey hairs carefully with tweezers and put them in my palm.'

'Yes, your majesty,' Ānanda, replied the barber to King Makhā,deva's son's, and he pulled out those grey hairs carefully with tweezers and put them in the king's palm.

8 Then, Ānanda, King Makhā,deva's son gave a boon village to his barber, and summoning his eldest son, addressed him this:

'Dear prince, the divine messengers have appeared: grey hairs are seen growing on my head. [77] I have enjoyed human sense-pleasures; it is time that I go in quest of divine sense-pleasures.

Come, dear prince, carry on this kingship. I shall shave off hair and beard, don the yellow robe, and go forth from home into homelessness.

8.2 Now, dear prince, when you, too, were to see grey hairs growing on your head, then, after giving a boon village to your barber, and after carefully instructing the prince, your eldest son, in kingship, shave off hair and beard, don the yellow robe, and go forth from home into homelessness.

8.3 Continue this good tradition I have laid down, and do not be my last man.

Dear prince, when there are only two men living, he under whom there is a breach of this good tradition, he is the last man amongst them.

Therefore, dear prince, I say thus:

Continue this good tradition I have laid down, and do not be the last man of my line.'

9 Then, Ānanda, King Makhā,deva's son, after giving the boon village to his barber and having carefully instructed the prince, his eldest son, in kingship, in the Makhā,deva mango grove, shaved off hair and beard, donned the yellow robe and went forth from home into homelessness.

THE 2ND DIVINE ABODE REFRAIN: MAKHĀ,DEVA'S SON

(1) *He dwelled with a heart of **lovingkindness**, suffusing one quarter;*

so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;

thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone,⁷⁵

*he dwelled suffusing all the world with **lovingkindness***

that is vast, grown great [exalted],⁷⁶ immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.⁷⁷

(2) *He dwelled with a heart of **compassion**, suffusing one quarter,*

so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;

thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone,

*he dwelled suffusing all the world with **compassion***

that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

⁷⁵ *Iti uddham adho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya.* Here "everyone" means "all beings, including myself," and "all kinds of beings," incl whatever state I am in. On the tr of *sabbattatāya*, see D 13,76 n, SD 1.8; SD 60.2 (4.2.3.1).

⁷⁶ The mind "grown great" (*maha-g,gatā*) or exalted perception refers to the mind in dhyana, ie in the form sphere (*rūpāvacara*). See **Catuttha Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.4), SD 24.14 (4).

⁷⁷ The recurrence of these last two phrases—"without hate, without ill will"—attests to the fact that lovingkindness is the basis for all the other three abodes, ie, they are actually a refinement of lovingkindness applied on deeper and broader levels.

- (3) *He dwelled with a heart of **gladness**, suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone, he dwelled suffusing all the world with gladness that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.*
- (4) *He dwelled with a heart of **equanimity**, suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone, he dwelled suffusing all the world with equanimity that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, [78] without ill-will.*

10 For 84,000 years, Ānanda, King Makhā,deva’s son played boyish games; for 84,000 years, he was vice-regent; for 84,000 years, he ruled as king; after shaving hair and beard, donning the yellow robe and going forth from home into homelessness, he lived the holy life in this very Makhā,deva mango grove for 84,000 years.

By cultivating the 4 divine abodes, with the breaking up of the body, after death, he reached the Brahma-world.

King Makhā,deva’s lineage

11 Now, Ānanda, the descendants of King Makhā,deva, 84,000 kings in succession in his lineage,⁷⁸ after shaving off hair and beard, and donning the yellow robe, went forth from home into homelessness in this very Makhā,deva mango grove.

THE 3RD DIVINE ABODE REFRAIN: MAKHĀ,DEVA’S DESCENDANTS

- (1) *They dwelled with a heart of **lovingkindness**, suffusing one quarter; so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone, they dwelled suffusing all the world with lovingkindness that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.*
- (2) *They dwelled with a heart of **compassion**, suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone, they dwelled suffusing all the world with compassion that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.*
- (3) *They dwelled with a heart of **gladness**, suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone, they dwelled suffusing all the world with gladness that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.*

⁷⁸ “Now ... in his lineage,” *rañño kho pan’ānanda,makhā,devassa putta-p,paputtakā tassa paramparā catur-āsīti,-khattiya,sahassāni*. The cpd **putta-p,paputtaka** (M 2:78,8) is resolved as putta, “sons” + paputta (Skt *praputta* + ka), “grandsons”; Comy glosses as “sons and grandsons” (*puttā ca paputtā cā ti*, MA 3:312,13), ie, descendants.

(4) *They dwelled with a heart of **equanimity**, suffusing one quarter, so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth; thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone, they dwelled suffusing all the world with **equanimity** that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.*

12 For 84,000 years, Ānanda, they played boyish games; for 84,000 years, they were vice-regents; for 84,000 years, they ruled as kings; after shaving hair and beard, donning the yellow robe and going forth from home into homelessness, they lived the holy life in this very Makhā,deva mango grove for 84,000 years.

By cultivating the 4 divine abodes, with the breaking up of the body, after death, they reached the Brahma-world.

King Nimi

13 Nimi⁷⁹ was the last of these kings, *a righteous Dharma-rajah, a great king who ruled by the law, stood in the Dharma [the law and justice], lived by the Dharma [the moral code] amongst brahmins and house lords, amongst townfolk and countryfolk, (and) who kept the precept days, on the 14th, the 15th and the 8th of the (lunar) fortnight.* [S3]

14 Once upon a time, Ānanda, when the gods of Tāva,tiṃsa [the 33] **[79]** gathered together and were seated in the Sudhamma Assembly, this talk arose amongst them:

‘What a gain, sirs, for the people of Videha! What a great gain for the people of Videha! Their King Nimi is *a righteous Dharma-rajah, a great king who rules by the law, standing in the Dharma [the law and justice], living by the Dharma [the moral code] amongst brahmins and house lords, amongst townfolk and countryfolk, (and) who keeps the precept days, on the 14th, the 15th and the 8th of the (lunar) fortnight.*’

The Tāvatiṃsa devas wish to see Nimi

14.2 Then, Ānanda, Sakra, lord of the devas, addressed the gods of Tāva,tiṃsa, ‘Good sirs, do you want to see King Nimi?’ ‘Good sir, we wish to see King Nimi.’

14.3 Now at that time, it being the precept day of the 15th, King Nimi had washed his head and gone up to the roof-terrace of the royal palace,⁸⁰ where he was seated for the precept-day observance.

Then, Ānanda, just as a strong man might stretch his arm out or bend it back, Sakra, lord of the devas, disappeared from amongst the Tāvatiṃsa devas and reappeared before King Nimi.

⁷⁹ Gotama Buddha’s past life as Nimi is related in **Nimi J** (J 541/6:95-129) [1.2].

⁸⁰ *Upāri, pāsāda, vara, gato*, here *vara* (“best”) is tr as “royal,” a common phrase: V 1:345,23, 4:112,2, 158,15; **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,1.2/1:47,8), SD 8.10; **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17,1.7/2:172,15×2), SD 36.12; **Pāyāsi S** (D 23,9/-2:325,8), SD 39.4; **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26,4.3/3:61,24+30), SD 36b.10; **Mahā Go,siṅga S** (M 32,6/1:213,28), SD 44.12; **Makhā Deva S** (M 83,13/2:79,11), SD 60.8; **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129,34/3:172,15×2), SD 2.22; **(Piyā) Mallikā S** (S 3.8/1:75,3+14 = U 5.1/47,4+14), SD 38.7; VA 4:880 (def); DA 1:140 (def), 2:517; MA 2:254 (“7- or 9-storied”), 4:214; SA 3:21; AA 1:292, 316, 451; KhpA 172; SnA 1:278; UA 273 (def); CA 55; PvA 75, 105,25, 216, 279. See PED: vara¹.

14.4 Then, Ānanda, Sakra, the lord of the devas, said this to King Nimi:

‘It’s a gain, sir, for you, maharajah [great king]! The devas of Tāvatiṃsa were seated together, sire, in the Sudhamma Assembly, praising you thus:

“What a gain, sirs, for the people of Videha! What a great gain for the people of Videha! Their King Nimi is a righteous Dharma-rajah, a great king who rules by the law, standing in the Dharma [the law and justice], living by the Dharma [the moral code] amongst brahmins and houselords, amongst townsfolk and countryfolk, (and) who keeps the precept days, on the 14th, the 15th and the 8th of the (lunar) fortnight.”

14.5 Maharajah, the devas of Tāvatiṃsa want to see your majesty. I shall send a chariot yoked to a thousand thoroughbreds to fetch you, maharajah. Maharajah, mount the divine chariot without any hesitation.’⁸¹

Ānanda, King Nimi consented by being silent.

14.6 Then, Ānanda, Sakra, lord of the devas, understanding King Nimi’s consent, just as a strong man might stretch his arm out or bend it back, disappeared before King Nimi and reappeared before the devas of Tāvatiṃsa.

15 Then, Ānanda, Sakra, the lord of the devas, addressed the charioteer Mātali:

“Come, good Mātali, having yoked a thousand thoroughbreds to the chariot, approach King Nimi and say this to him:

‘Maharajah, this chariot yoked to a thousand thoroughbreds has been sent by Sakra, lord of the devas. Please mount the divine chariot, maharajah, **[80]** without any hesitation.’

‘As you wish, my lord!’⁸² the charioteer Mātali replied to Sakra, lord of the devas.

Having yoked the thousand thoroughbreds to the chariot, he approached King Nimi, and said to him:

15.2 ‘This chariot yoked with a thousand thoroughbreds, maharajah, has been sent by Sakra, lord of the devas. Please mount the divine chariot, maharajah, without any hesitation.

But, maharajah, by which route shall I drive you:

by that on which evil-doers experience the fruits of bad karma,

or by that on which the good-doers experience the fruits of good karma?’

‘Drive me by both routes, Mātali.’⁸³

16 Then, Ānanda, Mātali brought King Nimi before the Sudhamma Assembly.

Sakra, lord of the devas, saw King Nimi coming in the distance and said to him:

⁸¹ Abhiruheyāsi mahārāja dibbaṃ yānaṃ avikampamāno ti. Avikampamāno (“not being shaken”) = a + vi + √KAMP, “to tremble”; pres part med of kampaṭi.

⁸² Idiomatic, *bhaddan, tavā ti = bhadda* (“august, auspicious, lucky, good”) + *tuvaṃ*, “you,” nom sg of *tumha*). Also *bhaddan te, bhaddaṃ vo*, “Good fortune to you! Please! As you wish!”; voc “Sir! Lord! My lady! Sirs!” D 2:259,13 *samayo dāni ~an te (~an tava hotu, DA 689,30); 263,20 evaṃ ~an tavā ti kho devā tāvatiṃsā sakkassa devānam indassa paccassosurā ≈ S 1:216,13; M 2:80,1 evaṃ hotu ~an tavā ti kho ānanda ...* . See DP 3:622e.

⁸³ Comy: Mātali first took Nimi through the hells, then he turned back and led him through the heavenly world. (MA 3:316-318). Since Mātali is from the 2nd highest of the earthbound heavens (Tāvatiṃsa) [SD 54.3a (3.5.1); SD 57.10 (1.4.2.1)], we must imagine that he should have no difficulty showing Nimi the hells, but they could only view the nearer of the higher heavens. Then again, we should not lose the mythical lesson of the whole story that, by one’s moral virtue, one knows hell and heaven, which are really states of mind more than just places “out there.” On Buddhist mythology, see SD 2.19 (1), SD 51.11 (3.1.1), SD 60.1c (1.16.1). On the evolution of the Buddhist hells: SD 2.23 (3).

‘Come, maharajah; welcome, maharajah. The devas of Tāva,tiṃsa, maharajah, were seated together, sire, in the Sudhamma Assembly, praising you thus:

“What a gain, sirs, for the people of Videha! What a great gain for the people of Videha! Their King Nimi is a righteous Dharma-rajah, a great king who rules by the law, standing in the Dharma [the law and justice], living by the Dharma [the moral code] amongst brahmins and house lords, amongst townsfolk and countryfolk, (and) who kept the precept days, on the 14th, the 15th and the 8th of the (lunar) fortnight.’

16.2 ‘Enough, good sir. Let the charioteer drive me back to Mithilā. There I will live by the Dharma [the moral code] amongst brahmins and house lords, amongst townsfolk and countryfolk; I will keep the precept days, on the 14th, the 15th and the 8th of the (lunar) fortnight.’

17 Then, Ānanda, Sakra, lord of the devas, addressed the charioteer Mātali: ‘Come, good Mātali, having yoked a thousand thoroughbreds to the chariot, take King Nimi back to Mithilā.’

‘As you wish, my lord!’ the charioteer Mātali replied to Sakra, lord of the devas. Having yoked the thousand thoroughbreds to the chariot, he took King Nimi right back to Mithilā. And there, indeed, Ānanda, King Nimi lived by the Dharma [the moral code] amongst brahmins and house lords, amongst townsfolk and countryfolk; and kept the precept days, **[81]** on the 14th, the 15th and the 8th of the (lunar) fortnight.’

18 Now, Ānanda, with the passing of many years, many hundred years, many hundred thousand years, **King Nimi** addressed his barber thus:

‘Good barber, when you see any grey hairs growing on my head, please tell me.’
‘Yes, your majesty,’ Ānanda, replied the barber to King Nimi.

18.2 Ānanda, after the passing of many years, many hundred years, many thousand years, the barber saw grey hairs growing on King Nimi’s head.

18.3 When he saw them, he said this to King Nimi:
‘The divine messengers have appeared, your majesty; grey hairs are growing on your head.’
‘Then, good barber, pull out those grey hairs carefully with tweezers and put them in my palm.’
‘Yes, your majesty,’ Ānanda, replied the barber to King Nimi, and he pulled out those grey hairs carefully with tweezers and put them in the king’s palm.

Nimi instructs the crown prince

18.4 Then, Ānanda, King Nimi gave a boon village to his barber, and summoning his eldest son, addressed him thus:

‘Dear prince, the divine messengers have appeared: grey hairs are seen growing on my head. I have enjoyed human sense-pleasures; it is time that I go in quest of divine sense-pleasures.

Come, dear prince, carry on this kingship. I shall shave off hair and beard, don the yellow robe, and go forth from home into homelessness.

18.5 Now, dear prince, when you, too, were to see grey hairs growing on your head, then, after giving a boon village to your barber, and after carefully instructing the prince, your eldest son, in kingship, shave off hair and beard, don the yellow robe, and go forth from home into homelessness.

18.6 Continue this good tradition I have laid down, and do not be my last man.

Dear prince, when there are only two men living, he under whom there is a breach of this good tradition, he is the last man amongst them.

Therefore, dear prince, I say thus:

Continue this good tradition I have laid down, and do not be the last man (of my line).'

19 Then, Ānanda, King Nimi, after giving the boon village to his barber and having carefully instructed the prince, his eldest son, in kingship, in the Makhā,deva mango grove, shaved off hair and beard, donned the yellow robe and went forth from home into homelessness.

THE 4TH DIVINE ABODE REFRAIN: NIMI

(1) He dwelled with a heart of **lovingkindness**, suffusing one quarter;
so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;
thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone,
he dwelled suffusing all the world with lovingkindness
that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

(2) He dwelled with a heart of **compassion**, suffusing one quarter,
so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;
thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone,
he dwelled suffusing all the world with compassion
that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

(3) He dwelled with a heart of **gladness**, suffusing one quarter,
so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;
thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone,
he dwelled suffusing all the world with gladness
that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

(4) He dwelled with a heart of **equanimity**, suffusing one quarter,
so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;
thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone,
he dwelled suffusing all the world with equanimity
that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

20 For 84,000 years, Ānanda, King Nimi played boyish games;
for 84,000 years, he was vice-regent;
for 84,000 years, he ruled as king;
after shaving hair and beard, donning the yellow robe and going forth from home into homelessness, he lived the holy life in this very Makhā,deva mango grove for 84,000 years.

By cultivating the 4 divine abodes, with the breaking up of the body, after death, he reached the Brahma-world.

21 Now, Ānanda, King Nimi's son was a prince named **Kalāra, janaka**.
He did not go forth from home into homelessness.
He broke the good tradition. He was the last man amongst them.

22 Now, Ānanda, you might think thus:
'Certainly, at that time someone else was King Makhā,deva, who instituted the good tradition.'
But it should not be regarded thus.

23 I was King Makhā,deva at that time. I instituted the good tradition, and later generations continued the good tradition instituted by me. But that kind of good tradition does *not* lead to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to nirvana, but only to the reappearance in the Brahma-world.

The Buddha's good tradition

24 But there is this kind of good tradition that has been instituted by me now, which leads to complete revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to nirvana. And what is that good tradition (*kalyāṇa,vaṭṭa*)?

It is this **noble eightfold path**, that is,
right view, right intention;
right speech, right action, right livelihood; **[83]**
right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

This is the good tradition that has been instituted by me now, which leads to complete revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to nirvana.

25 Ānanda, I say to you:
continue this good tradition instituted by me, and do not be my last man.
Ānanda, when there are two men living, he under whom there occurs a breach of the good tradition—
he is the last man amongst them.
Therefore, Ānanda, I say to you:
*continue this good tradition instituted by me, and do not be the last man (of my line)."*⁸⁴

26 This is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Ānanda, joyful at heart, approved of the Blessed One's word.

— evaṃ —

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⁸⁴ Comy: The good tradition is broken when a virtuous monk thinks: "I cannot attain arhathood" and does not exert effort. It has been broken by one who is immoral. It is being continued by the 7 learners (*sekha*). It has been continued by the arhat. (MA 3:318 f). The 7 learners and the full-fledged arhat are said to be the "8 individuals" (*aṭṭha purisa,puggala*): see SD 15.10a (1.0.4); SD 16.7 (1.1.2.1).