

The Buddha & His Disciples

Profiles and perspectives

in self-discovery

a documented research

by

Piyasīlo Tan Beng Sin

Contents

1. **Why We Are Not Enlightened.** Life of the Buddha up to the Prelude to the Four Sights. The benefits of knowing the life of the Buddha, both as history and as legend. Who wrote the life of the Buddha?
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10. **Was the Buddha Poisoned?** Overview of the Discourse on the Great Final Nirvana. The final instructions of the Buddha. How did the Buddha die?

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The Sutta Discovery (SD) series started with the NUS Buddhist Society weekly Sutta Study Group (SSG) classes (with its own website) in February 2002, and the Buddhist Fellowship SD series started in February 2003. Since then both classes have gone on with only a few breaks. This is a small record for an ongoing activity, especially Sutta study.

Piya Tan, who works on these Suttas and notes, and teaches them, was a former Theravada monk of 20 years. Today he is a full time lay Dharma teacher specializing in early Buddhism. He was consultant and regular lecturer to the Buddhist Studies Team (BUDS) that successfully introduced Buddhist Studies in Singapore Secondary Schools in the 1980s. After that, he was invited as a visiting scholar to the University of California at Berkeley, USA. He has written many ground-breaking and educational books on Buddhism (such as *Total Buddhist Work*) and social surveys (such as *Buddhist Currents* and *Charisma in Buddhism*). He is a full-time Dharma teacher who runs regular Buddhist, Sutta and Pali classes like the basic Pali course series, the Sutta Study Group (NUSBS), Dharma courses (the Singapore Buddhist Federation), Sutta Discovery classes (Buddhist Fellowship and elsewhere), and Sutta-based (including meditation) courses (Brahm Education Centre), besides running his own full-time Pali translation and research project, the Pali House, and doing a comparative study of the Pali Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas. As a Theravāda monk, he learned the insight method from Mahasi Sayadaw himself in the 1980s. As a lay teacher, he learned the forest method from the Ajahn Brahmavamso himself. He has run numerous meditation courses and retreats for students and adults (incl non-Buddhists) since 1980s. In 1992, he taught meditation at the University of California at Berkeley, USA. He has taught at BP, JP Morgan, the Defence Science Organization, GMO, HP and SIA. He is doing all this for the love of Dharma and of Ratna and their 2 children.

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KEEPING BUDDHISM CENTRED

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As people today become more aware of Buddhism, many seek the simple original teachings of the Buddha. For over two decades now, Piya Tan has been inspired by this ideal. In this connection, he has set up the Minding Centre (Bukit Batok) and Pali House (Jurong East).

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To order, please contact Piya Tan (dharmafarer@gmail.com), or the Minding Centre (8211 0879: ask for Ratna Lim).

Sutta website: <http://dharmafarer.org>

For Wiki Piya: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piya_Tan

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1

WHY WE ARE NOT ENLIGHTENED Life of the Buddha up to prelude to the Four Sights

1. WHY STUDY THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA?

(a) Vālkali (Vakkali)

Once the Blessed One was staying in the Squirrel Sanctuary of the Bamboo Grove at Rājagṛha (Rājagaha). Now at that time, the Venerable Vakkali was dwelling in a potter's shed, gravely ill. Then the Venerable Vakkali requested his attendants to convey his respects to the Buddha (since he had come to meet the Buddha):

“The bhikkhu Vakkali is gravely ill. He pays homage to the Blessed One with his head at his feet.”

When the Buddha received the message, he consented by his silence to visit Vakkali.

On seeing the Buddha coming, Vakkali stirred on his bed (out of respect).

[B.] Enough, Vakkali, do not stir on your bed. There are seats ready, I will sit down.

Vakkali, I hope you are getting better.

[V.] Venerable sir, I am not getting better; it is getting worse.

[B.] I hope then, Vakkali, that you're not troubled by remorse or regret.

[V.] Venerable sir, I have quite a lot of remorse and regret.

[B.] I hope, Vakkali, that you have nothing for which to reproach yourself in regard to virtue.

[V.] I have nothing, venerable sir, for which to reproach myself in regard to virtue.

[B.] Then, Vakkali, why are you troubled by remorse and regret?

[V.] For a long time, venerable sir, I have wanted to come to see the Blessed One, but I haven't been fit to do so.

[B.] *Enough, Vakkali! Why do you want to see this foul body? One who sees the Dharma sees me; one who sees me sees the Dharma.*

Then the Buddha instructs Vakkali on the perception of impermanence.

(S 3:119-121; It 91 f.; abridged)

(b) Two levels of language

In this Vakkali Sutta, we clearly see that the Buddha, in his admonition to Vālkali, is referring to two levels of language [4:1] in communicating the Dharma to others. In modern terms:

<i>One who sees the Dharma, sees me.</i>	Logos	The level of the letter: conventional language.
<i>One who sees me, sees the Dharma.</i>	Mythos	The level of the spirit: ultimate language.

Because myths speak of extraordinary events without trying to explain or justify them, there is the wrong opinion that myths are simply unprovable and false stories, and thus they have made the word “myth” a synonym for fable (from the Latin *fabula*, which originally has a similar meaning as *mythos*, but today means a fictitious story with a moral). It is important to note the difference between myth and fable in the study of religion.

(1) Sutras of direct meaning and indirect meaning

In the Pali Canon, the Buddha speaks of the two kinds of sutras, that is, the *nīt'attha* (Skt. *nītārtha*) [√NĪ, to infer + *artha/attha* = meaning], “those of direct meaning,” and the *neyy'attha* (Skt. *neyārtha*), “those of indirect meaning” (D 3:127 f.; A 1:60).¹

The Pali Commentaries illustrate the two kinds of sutras, thus: “A sutta of the form ‘There is a person, O monks’, ‘There are two persons, O monks’, ‘There are three persons, O monks’...etc., is a sutta of indirect meaning. Here although the Perfectly Enlightened One speaks of ‘There is one person, O monks,’ etc., its sense has to be inferred since there is no person in the absolute sense (*param'atthato*)... One

¹ See *Abhidharma,kośa* ch. 9, Poussin vol. 9, p. 247 = Pruden 1324 & n43; *Vyākhyā* ad 3:28.

1. Why we are not enlightened

should speak of a sutta of direct meaning (as of the form), ‘This is impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self.’...” (AA 2:118; also AA 1:94, KvuA:JPTS 1889: 34).

The dangers of misquoting the Buddha and the importance of distinguishing these two types of teaching are clearly stated in the Chapter on the Fool (Bāla, vagga) of Aṅguttara Nikāya:

Monks, these two misrepresent the Tathāgata. What two?

One who proclaims, as utterances of the Tathāgata, what he has never uttered, and one who denies what has been uttered by the Tathāgata.

Monks, these two do not misrepresent the Tathāgata. What two?

One who denies, as utterance of the Tathāgata, what he has never uttered, and one who proclaims what has uttered by the Tathāgata.

Monks, these two misrepresent the Tathāgata. What two?

One who proclaims a discourse of indirect meaning (*neyārtha sūtra/neyy’attha sutta*) as a discourse of direct meaning (*nītārtha sūtra/nīt’attha sutta*); and one who proclaims a discourse of direct meaning as a discourse of indirect meaning.

Monks, these two do not misrepresent the Tathāgata. What two?

One who proclaims a discourse of indirect meaning as a discourse of indirect meaning; and one who proclaims a discourse of direct meaning as a discourse of direct meaning. (A 1:60)

(2) Teachings in terms of persons and in terms of ideas

The Buddhist Commentaries and Compendia (like the Nettippakaraṇa) give a useful classification of the Buddha’s teaching method: teaching in terms of persons (*puggalādhīṭṭhāna*) and teaching in terms of ideas (*dhammādhīṭṭhāna*) (MA 1:24; PsA 449 where 4 types are given; Nett 164 f.). A teaching in terms of persons is this Udāna verse:

I visited all the quarters with my mind
But found not any dearer than myself;
Likewise is self dear to everyone
Who loves himself will never harm another. (U 47)

In the Kasī Bhāradvāja Sutta, the Buddha meets a ploughman and presents the Dharma in terms of ideas, that is, agricultural terms:

Faith is the seed, discipline the rain,
Wisdom is my yoke and plough,
Moral shame the pole, the mind my yoke’s tie,
Mindfulness the ploughshare and goad. (Sn 77)

Such metaphors bridge conventional truth (*sammutti, sacca*) with ultimate truth (*param’attha, sacca*), allowing the listener to make a quantum leap from a lower reality of the world to the higher reality of the Dharma (AA 1:95; KvuA 34).²

In this connection, the Buddha declares that the Tathāgata is sometimes given the designation (*adhi-vacana*) of Dharma-body (*dhamma, kāya*) (Aggañña Sutta, D 3:84).³ Those who cannot swim need this boat or bridge to reach the other shore. Or at least, they need to be inspired to the spiritual life through stories. As one insightful scholar puts it, “The earth may go around the sun, but stories will continue to refer to the sun rising because this is how we experience it.” (Graeme MacQueen in a personal communication.)

² See also Buddhadasa, *Two Kinds of Language*. Tr. Bhikkhu Ariyananda. Repr. “Everyday Language and Dhamma Language” in Donald K. Swearer, 1971b. Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, 1974.

³ See Bhikkhu Bodhi’s note, S:B 1081 n168.

(c) How to benefit from studying the life of the Buddha

The Buddha arises in the world to proclaim the Dharma that liberates being from existential suffering. It is the Dharma that makes the Buddha. The *Gāraṇa Sutta* (or *Uruvelā Sutta* 2) recounts how the newly-arisen Buddha, finding no other being that he could respect as a teacher, declares: “Let me then honour and respect and dwell in dependence on this very Dharma to which I have fully awakened” (S 1:139 = A 2:20) [4.1]. For this reason, too—that the Buddha is Dharma-centred—he has spoken very little about his personal life, and what we do know from the early Canon about his life are episodes expedient in the clarification of some important teaching.⁴

Neither the Pali Canon nor the Pali Commentaries have any complete life of the Buddha. The first most “complete” life of the Buddha only appeared in the *Buddha, carita* [2e] by Aśva, ghoṣa.⁵ Kevin Trainor comments:

There is increasing consensus among modern European and American scholars that the biographical traditions preserved in the texts of the various Buddhist communities cannot provide much historically reliable information about the details of the Buddha’s life.⁶ Modern scholarship has turned from the nineteenth century quest for the historical Buddha and his original teaching to the task of outlining the evolution of the Buddha biography.⁷ (1997:4)

For our present purposes, this should set the spirit with which we look at the life of the Buddha. At least, I hope to approach our study of the Buddha in this spirit. That is to say, as expression of the head (intellectual approach) and as experience of the heart (spiritual approach), as history and as mythology.

What we cannot convey in words, we need to express in stories and other artistic expressions of our senses. In order to understand and profit from studying the life of the Buddha and his disciples, we have to think as well as feel the events and stories we hear.

In speaking of the life of the Buddha, I am speaking about myself, since whatever I speak of is my opinion. And yet, nothing of what I speak is new or original: they have been spoken and written by others before me, those who have understood the subject better than I have. Moreover, this work is meant to be a student’s guide to inspire an interest into taking up Buddhist Studies and delve deeper into the Buddha’s teachings for a better self-understanding.

This critical analysis of the Buddha’s biography or more correctly biographies is useful and important because, like the biographies of other famous religious teachers, they are not written by the founders themselves, but by believers living decades, generations and centuries later. Often enough, such accounts reflect the social conditions and thoughts of the writers’ times.

In many ways, too, as you will discover in the course of these lessons, there is nothing new in the Buddha’s teaching. Other Buddhas have come before him, and more will come in due course. Yet, the Buddha taught his teachings to serve as reminders so that we can work to get out of our sufferings or, at least, we can become better people. Moreover, deep piety often coloured and magnified such biographies so that they grew into epics, reflecting both truth and imagination. All this have two main purposes: education and inspiration.

2. HISTORY AND MYTH

⁴ See esp **Ariya, pariyesanā S** (M 26/1:163-173) [3].

⁵ **Aśvaghōṣa** (2nd-1st cent BCE), an early Sarvāsti, vāda master in Ayodhyā (P Ayojjhā) (on the Ganges in Uttar Pradesh). He was a court poet of the Kusāna king, Kaniṣka (however it is uncertain whether this was Kaniṣka I or II). Of the 17 cantos that survive in the original, only the first 13 are by Aśvaghōṣa, the remaining four being added in the 19th century and extending the narrative as far as the Buddha’s return home after his awakening. However, all the 28 cantos are preserved in Chinese (5th cent) and Tibetan translations. See *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Keown): *Buddhacarita*.

⁶ This is the position of Étienne Lamotte in his frequently cited article “La Légende du Bouddha,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 133, 1947:37-71. Lamotte identified a five-stage evolution in the biographical tradition.

⁷ Frank E Reynolds provides an overview of 20th century research on the Buddha biography in his article “The Many Lives of the Buddha: A study of sacred biography and Theravāda tradition,” in *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, ed Reynolds & Capps, 1976:37-61.

1. Why we are not enlightened

(a) Levels of communication

The Buddha first taught his Dharma to an elite group of people—those who had the time, the inclination and ability to understand the teaching and realize the liberating truth. In due course, his spiritual community grew and attracted all those who hear about him or his teaching. As Buddhism grows into a popular religion, the direct bright light of the Dharma has to be shaded and dimmed so that the less ready and more worldly masses could understand and benefit from the Dharma.

Story-telling has always been an important means of entertainment and education in Indian society (indeed, in all ancient civilizations). In most cases, there is almost no dividing line between entertainment and education in such traditional story-telling (which include a wide range of visual arts and performing arts). The most palpable and famous examples of such a visual aids are the carvings and bas-reliefs of the ancient Indian stupas (at Sāñcī, Bhārhut, etc.).

In Buddhist literature, stories fall under the category of “conventional truth” (*saṃvṛti, satya/sammuti-sacca*), serving as a conveyance for the more abstruse “ultimate truth” (*paramārtha, satya/paramattha-sacca*). As such, we find in the Buddha biographies, many aspects of his teachings have been dramatized into actual human actions. This presentation is “person-based” (*puggalâdhiṭṭhāna*).

This artistic licence is founded on statements by the Buddha himself, such as: “As I say, so I do; as I do, so I say.” (*yathā, vādi tathā, kāṛi yathā, kāṛi tathā, vādi*, A 2:24 = It 122). The three great evils of life—decay, disease and death—for example, are graphically represented as actual events involving an aged person, a sick man, a dead man which Prince Siddhārtha personally encounters.

This is not to say that all the events of the Buddha life are not historical. He had certainly personally experienced most of the events that later Buddhist story-tellers introduced. However, since the Buddha placed the Dharma above himself, as attested in the Gāṛava Sutta (S 1:139 = A 2:20), he did not give much personal details of his personal life. As such, it is left to later commentators and story-tellers to use the Buddha himself as a medium of conveying the Dharma to the masses. [4:3]

As you listen to the life of the Buddha, both as history and as myth, I hope you will be able to identify with some if not all of the wonderful aspects of the greatest events to have occurred in this world cycle: the life of the Buddha—because the life of the Buddha is ultimately the story of your own life!⁸

(b) Canonical biography and Sinhalese tradition

When studying the biography of the Buddha, it is important to note that there are two somewhat disparate sources: the canonical and the traditional. The Pali Canon records valuable episodes of the Buddha’s life presenting the spiritual side of his life. The traditional accounts of the Buddha, that is, the popular legends that most Buddhist grow up with are mostly from the Sinhalese Commentaries, especially the works of Buddhaghosa (who was northern India living in late-4th century Sri Lanka).

A good example of the “Sinhalization” of the Buddha biography is the tradition of cross-cousin marriage said to commonly occur amongst the Śākya. According to Sinhalese tradition, for example, Siddhārtha and Yaśodharā, were said to be first cousins: Yasodharā was the daughter of Amitā (Siddhattha’s paternal aunt) and Suppabuddha (Mahv 2:14-24; DhA 3:44). There is no such account in the Pali Canon, the Pali Commentaries, the Mahāvastu, the Lalita, vistara, the Tibetan Vinaya or the Dīpavaṃsa.⁹

(c) The Pabbajjā Sutta

The Pabbajjā Sutta (Sn no. 27; cf. V 1:36), one of the oldest document on the Buddha’s life, gives an important insight into his spiritual aspirations, albeit without the legendary colours of later times.

Introduction [Ānanda:]

1. I shall sing the praises of going-forth
As the One with the Eyes¹⁰ went forth,
As he, trying it out (for himself),

⁸ On how to read the life-story of the Buddha, see eg Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 2000:21-34.

⁹ See Trautmann 1981: ch. 5, esp. pp. 320-330.

¹⁰ See Chapter 4:3n.

Was well-pleased with the going-forth. [405]

2. “This household life is stifling.
A world of dust,” he thought.
“But open and free is the going-forth!”
Seeing this, he went forth, [406]

3. Having gone forth, he kept away from
Evil action through the body;
Giving up evil conduct through speech,
He purified his way of life. [407]

Siddhârtha in Rājagṛha

4. The Buddha, endowed with excellent marks,¹¹
Went to Rājagṛha,
To the Giribbaja of the Magadhī.
Seeking almsfood. [408]

5. Standing in his palace,
Bimbisāra saw him.
Seeing the one endowed with the marks,
He uttered this wish: [409]

6. “Look at this one, sirs!
He is handsome, of good build, fair-skinned¹²,
Endowed with good demeanour, too,
And he looks ahead only a plough’s length. [410]

7. “With downcast eyes, mindful;
This is not like one from a lowly family.
Dispatch the royal messengers:
Find out where the monk is going!” [411]

8. The royal messengers, sent out,
Followed behind him, (wondering:)
“Where will the monk go?
Where will (his) dwelling be?” [412]

9. Walking from door to door,
With the sense-doors guarded, well-restrained,
He quickly filled his bowl,
Attentive and mindful. [413]

10. Having walked the almsround,
Having gone out of the city, the sage
Left for Paṇḍava,
(Thinking:) “Here will my dwelling be.” [414]

Siddhârtha meets Bimbisāra

11. Having seen him go into the dwelling,

¹¹ i.e. bodily marks.

¹² lit. pure (P. *suci*).

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The messengers then sat down;
But one messenger went back
And informed the rajah: [415]

12. “That monk, maharajah,
Is seated on the eastern side of Paṇḍava,
Seated like a tiger or a bull—
Like a lion in a mountain cave!” [416]

13. Hearing the word of the messenger,
The kshatriya, in the state carriage,
Then set out with the utmost haste
Towards Paṇḍava Rock. [417]

14. Going as far as the ground was suitable for vehicles,
The kshatriya then got down from the carriage,
Made his approach on foot,
And on reaching him, sat down. [418]

15. Having sat down, the rajah thereupon
Exchanged friendly greetings and courteous words.
Having exchanged greetings, he
Uttered this wish: [419]

16. “You are young and tender of age,
In the first youth, a stripling,
Endowed with good complexion and build,
Like a kshatriya of good birth [420]

17. Who beautifies the van of the army,
At the head of a company of elephants.¹³
I offer you wealth and pleasures (*bhoge*), enjoy them!
And tell us, when asked, your origins (*jātim*).” [421]

Siddhārtha on his origins

18. Straight on [*pointing*], there is a country, O rajah,
On the slopes of the Himalayas,
Endowed with wealth and strength,
An inhabitant of Kosala. [422]

19. They are “Āditya” by lineage,
“Śākya” by birth,
From that family I went forth, O rajah,
Not longing for sense-pleasures. [423]

20. Having seen the peril of sense-pleasures,
Having seen security in renunciation,
I shall go on to strive:
In this my mind delights. [424] (Sn 405-424)

¹³ Sn 421ab. These 2 lines are problematic: *sobhayanto anīk’aggaṃ / nāga,saṅgha,purakkhato* (Sn 421a). The BHS has *udagro tvam asi rājñah / aśvāroho’va selako* (Mvst 2:199) = “You are a joyful king, | like (the hero) Selako mounted on a horse,” which is cryptic. Senart (Mvst 2, ed. 1890) gives a tentative reconstruction as ...*rājyam aśvārohaṃ saṅghaṃ* which Jones translates as “[I offer thee] a kingdom with an army of cavalry” (Mvst:J 2:190 &n2).

(d) Mahāvastu

This is a narrative ballad/dialogue of great antiquity (in most parts anyway). The first three verses (Ānanda's introduction) of the Pabbajjā Sutta (SnA 381 ascribes the sutra to him), however, are late, probably added later by the Councillors (*saṅgītikarā*). These three verses are not found in the Mahāvastu account (Mvst 2:198 ff), where instead a short prose sentence states that the Bodhisattva leaves Ārāḍa Kālāma and heads for Rājagṛha. Sn 413 is missing from the Mahāvastu. (Jayawickrama PBR 3,1:5)

Rājagṛha was connected with the Buddha's early career and, as such, was one of the earliest centres of Buddhism. Pāṇḍava rock was situated in the line of hills that formed a natural fortification to the city, giving it the name Girivraja (Giribbaja). The Śākya are spoken of as a family of the Āditya clan inhabiting the Himālaya sector of Kośala. Legend has not grown around them yet making them an all-powerful clan. They are merely a *kula* (family) in Kośala. All this supports the general antiquity of the poem (Jayawickrama PBR 3,1:6). In the Aggañña Sutta, the Buddha says that "the Sakyans are vassals of the king of Kosala" (D 3:83).

Although the dialogue between Bimbisāra and the Buddha are more condensed in the Mahāvastu, it does not end where the Pabbajjā Sutta ends, but continues with two more stanzas in which Bimbisāra solicits the Buddha's promise to visit him at Rājagṛha first after the awakening (SnA 2:386; cf. V 1:36 where Bimbisāra's 5 wishes are mentioned). [4:20]

It is possible that the Mahāvastu account preserves an older version of this text (Jayawickrama, PBR 3,1:6). Nevertheless, the Pabbajjā Sutta (Sn st 3,1), together with Padhāna Sutta (Sn st 3,2) and the Nālaka Sutta (Sn st 3,11) "are precious remnants of that ancient sacred ballad-poetry from which later epic version of the life of the Buddha grew, in the same way as the heroic epic grew out of the secular ballads or Ākhyānas" (Winternitz 1933:96 & n2).

(e) Aśvaghoṣa's Buddha,carita

It is interesting to note that the Pali Canon nowhere mentions the Buddha's royal birth as traditionally presented in his modern biographies. In fact, the earliest text appears to be Aśvaghoṣa's Buddha,carita¹⁴, in which "the Buddha's royal birth, connections, and status are highlighted almost to the point of absurdity" (Walters 1993:275). Apparently, Aśvaghoṣa had good reasons (and ability) to attribute royal status to the Buddha. Aśvaghoṣa is believed to have worked in the court of the Kushan emperor Kanishka.

It is even more interesting to note that the Buddha,carita became the model for classical Sanskrit court poetry, which, remarks Walters, because it is "rare to have Buddhist classical Sanskrit at all, especially weird because this biography became definitive of a genre of theist court poetry" (1993:275 f.). Walters further notes that Aśvaghoṣa,

...a converted Brahmin, as far as I know the first biographer to draw explicit parallels to the Rāmāyāna, to justify apparent Buddhist deviance from Vedic precedents with an appeal to different Vedic precedents, and to diffuse the "God begs Buddha to Preach" segment by having Indra come down instead of Brahmā, more as a sort of friendly call than as a charge to preach (Aśvaghoṣa's Bodhisattva already knows he is going to preach). (Walters 1993:275 f)

Such a work would give Aśvaghoṣa "a sharp social edge...while adding a level of aesthetic quality and completeness to the Buddha biography that had never been achieved before." (Walters 1993:276)

3. THE ARIYA,PARIYESANĀ SUTTA

(a) Core story

In 1993, Jonathan S. Walters published an important article on his analysis of the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta (M 26), entitled "Suttas as History: Four approaches to the *Sermon on the Noble Quest* (The Ariyapariyesana-sutta)" (*History of Religions* 38,3 1993:247-284). An American Academy of Religion-sponsored collaboration on "Pāli Texts in New Contexts" (a conference held in Chicago, May 1998), says

¹⁴ Buddhacarita: partial ed. & tr. E.H. Johnston, *The Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha*, 2 vols. Calcutta, 1936, repr 1972, 1978. Chinese: Fo suo hsing tsan ching (T 192). Tibetan: mdo.'grel (skyes.rab) (nge), 1-124b; ed. Friedrich Weller, *Das Leben des Buddha von Aśvaghoṣa*, parts 1 (1926) and 2 (1928), Leipzig. For complete list, see main Bibliography.

1. Why we are not enlightened

Walters, “forced me to confront the problem of reading suttas as history in the light of...the Ariyapariyesanasutta, or Sermon on the Noble Quest.” (1993:249).

The Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta contains an abbreviated autobiography that the Buddha uses to illustrate his own spiritual journey as a progression from the ignoble to the Noble Quest. According to Walters, this autobiography forms the core or “seed” that is “repeated almost verbatim at other points in the Tipiṭaka” (1993:253), in three other suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya. According to Lamotte,¹⁵ whom Walters quotes, four suttas repeat and complement one another which “all tell us of an important phase in Śākyamuni’s life, namely the period which extends from the flight from Kapilavastu until the Awakening.” The four suttas are:

The Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta (M 1:163-173; T 26, 204:56 pp776b-778c)

The Dvedhā,vitakka Sutta (M 1:117)

The Bhaya,bherava Sutta (M 1:17-23; T 125:23 pp665b-666c)

The Mahā Saccaka Sutta (M 1:240-249)

Another parallel to the Ariya,pariyesana Sutta is found in the Vinaya (V 1:4-10 || M 26.19-28), that is, from the section from the hesitation to preach his newly-found Dharma up to just before the Dhammacakka-pavattana Sutta.¹⁶ The “ignoble quest” section of the sutra is found in the Aṅguttara as the Anariya,pariyesanā Sutta (A 4.252 = 2:247 f.) [15b].

(b) Buddha narrative sequence

The Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta is a critically important biographical text which contains an easily defined sequence of the Buddha narrative that Walters charts as follows: (1) unenlightened state, (2) encounters with Ālāra and Uddaka, (3) fulfillment of the Noble Quest, (4) the decision to preach / God’s [*sic*] plea and subsequent boast [*sic*], (5) encounter with Upaka, and (6) meeting with the Group of Five. Thus the ancient structure of the early Buddha narrative is as follows, with discrete events indicated by letters and the “chorus” of references to the teachers of the *jhānas* indicated by asterisks:

(a) the Bodhisatta in his unenlightened state (“Even I, O monks....”)

* encounters with Ālāra and Uddaka/mastery of the *jhānas*

(b) fulfillment of the Noble Quest/Awakening

* Awakening involves a progression through and outside of the *jhānas*

(c) decision to preach/God’s plea and subsequent boast

* Buddha wants to teach Ālāra and Uddaka; discovering them dead, he goes to Benares

(d) encounters with Upaka the Ājīvaka

* Buddha’s self-declaration as Teacherless Teacher

(e) meeting with the Group of Five

* Buddha becomes teacher of *jhānas* (and beyond) to the Group of Five (who happen to be former followers of Uddaka?) (Walters 1993:270 f)

Walters argues that these core episodes form “the seeds of a fuller, supplemented Buddha biography”:

...in the phrase “wives and sons are destined for birth” we might find the source for the stories of Yasodharā and Rāhula; “slaves and slavegirls are destined for birth” supplies the Bodhisatta’s attendants and harem; “goats and sheep...cocks and pigs...elephants and cows and hroses and mares...silver and gold are destined for birth” [M 1:162] intimates the opulence of the palace. Continuing through the ancient autobiographical fragment: “being a young man with very black hair” may have been the source for the stories about the Bodhisatta’s beauty, skill, agility, and so forth; “while my parents” in the plural (Mahāpajāpati as second wife/surrogate mother of the Buddha) “were weeping and wailing” (the opposition of the king and the whole cycle that explains it); “recognizing the danger in that which is destined for death...old age...disease” (the first three signs); “isn’t it the case that I ought to quest after the unborn, unsurpassed, perfectly peaceful Nirvana?” (the fourth sign) [M 1:163]. Likewise, “This group of five monks was very

¹⁵ Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 1988:648 f.

¹⁶ Jonathan Walters’ comparative study of the two texts is found in his “Rethinking Buddhist Missions” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1992:228-230).

helpful to me, who assisted me in my resolution to strive” (the six years’ asceticism) [M 1:170]; whatever sermon about Māra is attached to the end of this fragment, as here the heap of snares (the battle with Māra); the initial reflection on the subtlety of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (the emergence of Buddhahood over the three watches of the night). It is possible to read all of these details as already there in the original text; the supplements work. (Walters 1993:277)

The Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta, as such, is “a carefully structured piece of literature designed to bring the readers/hearers face to face with the Buddha. It is the core of traditions of biographical supplementation that span Buddhist history, and this sutta therefore helps us identify the stages in the development of the Buddha biography” (Walters 1993:282), from which the mediaeval Commentators, especially Buddhaghosa, built up a Buddhological vision far removed from “the historical Buddha” as conceived in recent centuries.

4. SOCIOPOLITICAL CONDITIONS

(a) Common terms

Before proceeding, let us first get down to the basics:

- (1) The founder of Buddhism is called the “Buddha,” which comes from √BUDH, “to know.” This is not a proper name, but a generic title, meaning “the Enlightened One,” that is, one who has realized the true nature of life by his own effort and is liberated thereby.
- (2) Buddhism share many important terms with Jainism [4:3d], for example, both their leaders are described with the same epithets: Buddha, Jina, Mahāvīra, Araṇṭa:

Buddha. For example, according to the Jaina text, the *Isibhāsīyām*, the forty-five sages (*ṛṣi*) are “all *buddhas* who will not return to this world.”

Jina (spiritual conqueror) often used by Mahayanists for the Buddha is used by the Jainas to refer to their founder, Mahāvīra. As such, the religion is called “Jainism.”

Araṇṭa (BHS) or *arahanta* (P) (worthy) is another term common to both Buddhism and Jainism. It is an especially important term in Jainism whose followers are called *ārḥata* (*Sarvadarśanasāṅgraha* §3: Arhatadarśanam).

Others common terms are words like *muni* (sage), *bhagavā* (lord).

(b) Urbanization

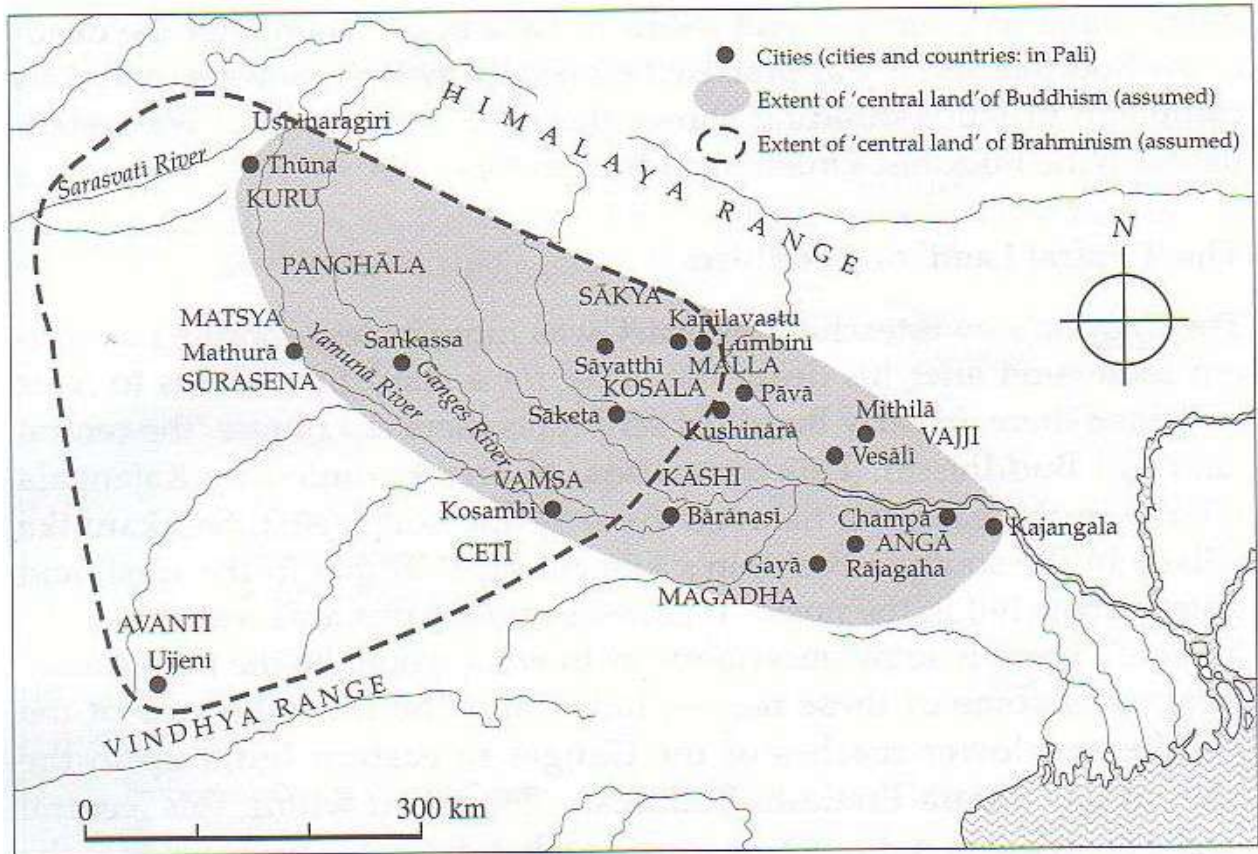
A specialist scholar of early Indian archaeology and history, G Erdosi, writes that by the 6th-4th centuries BCE, “the technological base of the economy in this period [had] already reached a level not to be significantly exceeded until the 20th century.” (Erdosi, *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*, 1988: 112). The rise of urban centres in this period and the production of food surplus are closely connected.

Rice as *vāhi* (Skt *vāri*) (*Oryza sativa*), or broadcast rice, had its origins in India around 3000 BCE and was certainly known to later Vedic people. It was a rainy season crop ripening in autumn but whose yield was limited. This form of rice when cooked is called *odana* (ts), ie boiled rice. The change came when the people learned and used the art of paddy transplantation or wet paddy production, which was grown as a winter crop. This better quality rice was known as *sālī* (Skt *śālī*) (R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, 1983:96, 161f).¹⁷ This is the surplus that created the institutions of kings (Collins, 1993:309).¹⁸

¹⁷ Today, *sālī* or transplanted rice is the predominant rice crop in NE India occupying about 70 per cent area and contributing 75 per cent to the production. It is sown between June-July and harvested around Nov-Dec; hence it is known as winter rice. It is generally grown in shallow rain-fed lowland, irrigated, and shallow flood-prone lowland.

¹⁸ For other socioeconomic factors of the Ganges Plain during the Buddha’s time, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) = SD 2004 Introd (7).

1. Why we are not enlightened



The 'central land' of Buddhism and Brahminism

(c) The Middle Country

Around the 5th century BCE, northern India was politically divided into 16 major states (*mahā.janapada*). Among these countries, the Buddhists distinguished between two kinds of territories: the Middle Region (*madhya.deśa*), where the Buddhist discipline is vigorously applied, and the frontier regions (*pratyaṇṭa.janapada*) which are allowed some concessions (V 1:197).

The Middle Region or Middle Country, which roughly corresponded to the ancient Āryāvarta, comprised 14 of the major states with its 7 principal towns: Śrāvastī, Sāketa, Campā, Vārāṇasī, Vaiśālī, Rājagṛha and Kauśāmbī (D 2:146).

(d) The 16 great states

Some of these sixteen great states (*soḷasa mahā.janapadā*), such as Kāśī, Kośala, Kuru-Pāñcala, Matsya, Gandhārā and Kambojā, had existed long before and were mentioned on the Vedic literature. The rest, such as Aṅga, Magadha, Vṛjī, Malla, Ceḍī, Vatsā, Śūrasena, Āsmaka and Avantī, were new states that arose from declining old ones or more areas coming into prominence.¹⁹

Country/State	Capital & towns	Modern districts
1. Aṅga	Campā (Bhagalpur) Bhadrikā (P, Bhaddiyā) Aśvapura (P, Assapura)	Bengal
2. Magadha	Rājagṛha or Girivraja (Rajgir)	Southern Bihar
3. Kāśī/Kāśī	Vārāṇasī (Banaras)	Banaras/Vārāṇasī
4. Kośala	Śrāvastī (Saheth Maheth) Sāketa (Ayodhyā)	Oudh
5. Vṛjī/Vājji	Vaiśālī (Besarh) of the Licchavis Mithilā (Janakpur) of the Videhas	Northern Bihar
6. Malla (<i>Mallo</i>)	Pāvā (Padaraona)	Gorakhpur

¹⁹ For other political factors of the Buddha's time, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) = SD 2004 Introd (7).

7. Caitya/Ceḍi	Kuśinagara (Kasia; P, Kusinārā) Śūktimati Sahajati Tripurī	Bundelkhand
8. Vatsā/Vaṃsā	Kauśāmbī (Kosam; P. Kosambī)	Allahābād
9. Kuru	Indraprastha (Delhi) Hastinapura	D. of Thānesar, Delhi & Meerut
10. Pañcāla	N. Ahicchatra (Rāmnagar) S. Kāmpilya (Kampil)	Rohilkhand Central Doāb
11. Matsya/Maccha	Virāṭa (Bairāt)	Jaipur
12. Śūrasena	Mathurā	Mathurā (Muttra)
13. Aśmaka or Aśvaka/ Assaka (<i>Assakenus</i>)	Potali or Potana (Bodhan)	Nizam
14. Avantī*	Ujjayinī (Ujjain), (P, Ujjeni) Māhiṣmati	Mālwa & Nimār
15. Gandhārā or Yonā*	Takṣaśilā (P, Takka, sīlā)	D. of Peshāwār & Rawalpīṇḍi
16. Kambojā		S.W. Kāśmīr & Kāfiristān

(A 1:213 = 4:252 f. = Nc 247) [See Lamotte, 1988:8]

See table: The names in *italics*, eg *Malloi*, are those found in ancient Greek writings.

A name with an asterisk (*), eg “Avantī*” denotes that it was outside the Middle Country.

The Middle Country of the Buddhists was about the size of Malaysia or England and Wales.

(e) The autocratic monarchies.

The autocratic monarchies (*rājya/raja*) were Kośala, Magadha, Vatsa and Avantī. Kośala had annexed Kāśī; Magadha had annexed Aṅga; Vatsa had annexed Ceḍi; and Avāntī had annexed Aśmaka.

(f) The great person (mahā,puruṣa).

Under such unstable and fragmented social conditions, some waited for the wheel-turning monarch (*cakra,vartī/cakka,vatti*), that is, a universal ruler, who would rule, not by armed force, but by virtue. Others longed for the appearance of the Buddha who would bring universal spiritual salvation.

5. THE ŚĀKYAS

(a) Śākyan background

- (1) The historical Buddha was often referred to as Śākyamuni (the sage of the Śākyas). Śākyā was the name of his tribe (*jāti*).
- (2) Scholars often refer to the Buddha as Gautama Buddha. “Gautama” was his clan (*gotra/gotta*). Such an epithet is helpful when he is contrasted with other Buddhas such as past Buddhas Dīpaṅkara (Dīpaṅkara) and Kaśyapa (Kassapa), and future Buddha Maitreya (Metteyya).
- (3) There were 500 Śākyan families in the Buddha’s time. The capital city of the Śākyas: Kapila,vastu (Kapila,vatthu) was owned by the Gautama clan.
- (4) Livelihood: mostly rice farming—note names: Śuddhodana (*śuddha*, “pure” + *odana*, “rice”); the ploughing festival further attested to the predominance of rice cultivation in the region.

1. Why we are not enlightened

(b) The Śākya

The Śākya were a small *kṣatriya* (aristocratic warrior caste) clan who lived on the borders of India and Nepal. Contrasted against the absolute monarchy of Kośala and of Magadha, the Śākya clan (like the Vṛjī/Vajjī) was an “aristocratic republic” (*gaṇa,saṅgha*) led by an elected and alternating *gaṇa,rāja* (chief). They conducted their administrative affairs in the mote hall (*santhāgāra*) at Kapilavastu (D 1:91). They had another council hall at Cātumā (M 1:457). The Mallas had theirs in Kuśinagara (D 2:164), and the Licchavis in Vaiśālī (V 1:233; M 1:228).

(c) Śākya & Kośala

Although the Śākya governed themselves, they were not completely independent since they were dominated by Kośala in the south [8:11]. The Pabbajjā Sutta provides some valuable information on the Śākya:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 18. Straight on, there is a country, O rajah,
On the slopes of the Himalayas,
Endowed with wealth and strength,
An inhabitant of Kosala. | <i>Ujū janapado rāja
Himavantassa passato
dhana, viriyena sampanno
Kosalesu nīketino</i> | [Sn 422] |
| 19. “Āditya” by lineage,
“Śākya” by birth,
From that family I went forth
Not longing for sense-pleasures. | <i>Ādicca nāma gottena
Śākiyā nāma jātiyā
tamhā kulā pabbajito
na kāme abhipatthayaṃ</i> | [Sn 423] |

Two important points should interest us here. First, the Bodhisattva’s description of his homeland as “(a country) endowed with wealth and strength” is likely an allusion to the prosperity of the Śākya agricultural economy. Declaring himself “an inhabitant of Kośala” is a broad hint that the Śākya were under the hegemony of that state.

(d) Parents

(1) The Buddha’s father, Śuddh’odana (Suddhodana), was one of the leaders of the Śākya. No kingship of Śuddhodana is mentioned in the Pali Canon itself.

(2) The Buddha’s mother was named Mahā Māyā. In ancient India, *māyā* meant “mysterious spiritual power of a deity.” In later Indian philosophy, it came to mean the source of the visible universe, but it would be inappropriate (anachronistic) to apply this later meaning to her name.

Because she died seven days after the birth of the Bodhi,sattva (Bodhisatta), he was raised by her younger sister, Mahā Prajā,patī Gautamī (Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī), whom Śuddhodana also married. Nanda was his younger half-brother.

(3) The Buddha’s personal name is generally said to have been Siddhārtha (Siddhattha) or Sarvārtha-siddha (Mvst 3:111, 176), meaning “one who has achieved his purpose.” This name however does not appear in the earliest writings, so a question arises as to whether it was a later addition (Nakamura, 2000:47). This name only appears in the Jātaka (esp. the Nidāna,kathā) and the Sinhalese chronicle, Dīpa,vaṃsa (Dīpv 3:47, 19:18). However, as no other name is suggested anywhere else, there is no positive reason to reject this tradition.

6. MAHĀ MĀYĀ

(a) Conception of the Bodhisattva

The oldest artistic depiction of Māyā’s dream is a medallion found at Bhārhut (Bharhut stupa, central India, 2nd century BCE) now on display at the Indian Museum, Calcutta. Māyā is lying on her right side on a couch in the centre of the picture. A large albino elephant is descending from the top. Two female attendants sit in front of the queen, one fanning her with a whisk, to cool her and to keep insects away, the other sitting with her palms together, apparently venerating the imminent conception. A burning lamp is depicted at Māyā’s feet, indicating that it is night. An old woman appears in the upper left, the palms of her hands together, watching intently. An ancient inscription in Brahmī script above the medallion reads: *bhagavato ūkranti* (“The Blessed One descends,” i.e. is conceived.).

(b) Māyā's dream

[J 1:50-52, tr. N.A. Jayawickrama, 1990:66 f.]

At that time, it is said, the festival of the asterism of Āsālhī was proclaimed in the city of Kapilavatthu...she rose early in the morning of the seventh day [of the full moon, having performed various acts of charity and keeping the precepts, she retired to her chamber]. Falling asleep as she lay on the royal couch she dreamt the following dream:

She felt as though the four Guardian Deities of the world lifted her up with her bed and taking her to the Himālaya mountain placed her beneath a great Sāla tree (*Shorea robusta*) seven yojanas in height growing on a plateau of red arsenic sixty yojanas in extent, and stood on one side. Then their consorts came forth and taking the queen to the lake Anotatta bathed her to rid her of her human stains, and clothed her in heavenly garments, anointing her with divine perfumes and decking her with heavenly flowers.

Not far from that place there was a silver mountain and within it was a golden abode. In it, they prepared a heavenly couch with its head towards the East and made her lie upon it. Then the Bodhisatta, who in the form of a lordly white elephant²⁰ was wandering there on the neighbouring golden mountain, descended from it and climbed the silver mountain; and coming from the northern direction carrying a white lotus in his trunk which had the lustre of a silver chain, he trumpeted.

Then entering the golden abode he went reverentially round the mother's bed thrice and appeared as though to have entered the womb making an opening on her right side.²¹ Thus did he take conception under the descendent asterism of Āsāḷha. (J 1:50-52)

(c) Interpretation of the dreams

According to the Tibetan Dulva (fol 452a), Māyā had altogether four dreams: (1) She saw a six-tusked white elephant enter her womb. (2) She moved in space above. (3) She ascended a great rocky mountain. (4) A great multitude bowed down to her. (Rockhill, 15; cf. Bigandet, 28 f).

On waking up, the queen went into a grove of ashoka (*Saraca indica*) trees and sent for king Śuddhodana. She related her dreams to the king who summoned 64 eminent brahmins, showed them honour, and gave them excellent food and other presents. After that he asked the brahmins to interpret the dream. The brahmins said, "Be not anxious, O king, you will have a son. If he dwells in a house he will become a universal monarch (*cakravartī*); if he leaves the house and goes forth from the world, he will become a Buddha who will remove ignorance." (J 1:51)

In real life, a six-tusked white elephant is rare and symbolic of royal power. The Buddha is a rare and unique being whose advent into our world, like that of a royal albino elephant, brings untold blessings. The elephant's six tusks represent the consummation of the Bodhisattva's six Perfections.

7. VASUBANDHU'S INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM

In later times, people expressed doubt about the veracity of the myth. Indian commentators such as Vasubandhu (320?-400?) discussed the possible meaning of the Bodhisattva entering his mother Māyā's womb in the shape of an elephant and whether in fact he did indeed assume such a shape. Here is an excerpt from the *Abhidharma,kośa* where Vasubandhu gives his arguments:

...we know that the mother of the Bodhisattva saw in a dream a small white elephant enter her side. This was only an "omen," because for a long time the Bodhisattva has been disengaged from animal rebirth. King Kṛkin also saw ten dreams: an elephant, wells, a pole, sandalwood, a park, a young elephant, two monkeys, cloths, and contests, which were omens. Furthermore, intermediate beings do not enter into the womb by splitting open the side, but rather by the door of birth...

(Abhk ed. P. Pradhan 128,26-27; ed. Poussin 3:13a-b; T 29:47b ; Pruden's tr.1988:390 F)

²⁰ T.W. Rhys Davids remarks (D:R 2:116n) that the use of such a figure (that of the white elephant) is not confined to India. In one of the Apocryphal Gospels, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the incarnation of the divine gentleness and love is expressed by saying that a dove from heaven "entered into" the human form (cf. Matt 3:16, Luke 3:22; John 1:32).

²¹ This is the only mention in the Pali texts of Māyā's "right side" in connection with the Bodhisattva's birth story.

1. Why we are not enlightened

In his book, *Gotama Buddha* (2000), Nakamura remarks that Vasubandhu's comments represent a demythologizing process taking place over 1,500 years ago in India. "Then why was the myth of a white elephant created?" Nakamura asks.

The mounting rain clouds of the monsoon season in India remind us of an elephant. Kālidāsa, the fourth- or fifth-century poet and dramatist, describes clouds being transformed into young elephants and falling down into the gardens of the mansions of the *yakṣas* [*Meghadūta* 2]. In this, he may have been influenced by the Buddhist legend. Elephants were close to the Indians; they were employed in both war and peace and were thought to give life to both human beings and animals by calling on the rain clouds and so bringing about a successful harvest.

(Nakamura, 2000:58 quoting Zimmer, 1960 1:160)

8. PRELUDE TO THE NATIVITY

(a) The child in Māyā's womb

For ten lunar months queen Mahā Māyā bore the Bodhisattva like oil in a bowl (J 1:52). Mahayana texts go on to say that during the Bodhisattva's "gestation period," Mahā Māyā had the power to heal the sick and confer happiness on others. It is said that the child sat in the womb in a cross-legged posture, covered by a beautiful canopy. According to the late 19th-century Siamese Supreme Patriarch Vajira, -*ñāṇa*, varorasa, this means that although the Bodhisattva would be surrounded by luxury in the palaces, he would not be drowned by them (*Life of the Buddha*, 102).

(b) Journey to Devadaha.

As the time approached for Māyā to give birth to the Bodhisattva, she told king Śuddhodana that she wished to go to her parents' house in Devadaha, the capital of the Kraḍya (also Kroḍya, Koḍya; P. Koliya). The king approved and ordered the road from Kapilavastu to Devadaha to be made smooth and adorned with vessels filled with plantains, flags and banners. When everything was ready, the king seated her in a golden palanquin borne by a thousand courtiers, sent her off with a great retinue.

Between the two cities lay a grove of sal trees called Lumbini Park which belonged to the inhabitants of both the cities. Although it was not the right season, the trees were in full bloom and the whole place was alive with birds and bees. When the queen saw this, she felt a desire to sport in the grove.

The courtiers brought the queen into the grove. She went to the foot of a great sal tree and desired to seize a branch. The branch, like the tip of a supple reed, bent down and came within her reach. Stretching out her hand, she seized the branch. Thereupon she felt the pangs of birth. The courtiers set up a curtain around her. While standing right there, holding the branch and looking up at the sky, she delivered her child on the full-moon day of Vaiśākha, 623 BCE.

(c) Lumbinī & Kapilavastu.

One or two centuries later, when emperor Aśoka went on a pilgrimage of the holy sites, he visited Lumbinī and had a stupa and a pillar erected there. About 8 centuries later, the pilgrim Xuanzang visited the site.

The pillar was discovered in 1896 and the inscription on it was deciphered, identifying a site in the modern village of Rummindei (in Nepal) as the birth-place of the Buddha. We also know approximately where the Śākya territory—Kapilavastu—was located. However, there are two claims: the Nepalese and the Indian. The Nepalese claim that it is Tilaurā Kot in the Nepalese Terai, 24 km from Rummindei.

In the late 19th century, Indian archaeologists unearthed an urn containing the relics of the Buddha at Piprahwa (in Uttar Pradesh, India), about 500 km east of New Delhi and about 15 km from Rummindei. Between 1970 and 1976 further excavations uncovered brick structures including a Kushan-period monastery, a stupa, and part of a palace. The objects discovered include two talc reliquaries, three pots and 40 terra-cotta seals. On a pot lid found there is found this inscription: "This monastery was built by Deva-putra Kaniṣka, for the Sangha of Kapilavasthu." [Nakamura, 2000:48-54.]

(d) Earthquakes

When the Bodhisattva was born, it is said that the earth quaked and numerous miracles followed. In the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta, the Buddha explains that there are eight causes of earthquakes:

1. Tectonic instability (“mighty atmospheric disturbances occur, the [subterranean] ‘waters’ [magma] are agitated; with the agitation of the waters, the earthquakes”).
 2. When an ascetic or deva develops intense power of concentration.
 3. When the Bodhisattva is conceived.
 4. When he is born.
 5. When he attains Awakening.
 6. When he gives the first discourse.
 7. When he renounces the remainder of his lifespan (instead of living out the whole cycle).
 8. When he attains Final Nirvana. (D 2:107)
- [10:9b]

Earthquakes are seldom mentioned in other myths and they are usually associated with disasters (believed to be the action of demons). In Buddhist mythology, however, earthquakes take on a positive role. It is probable, suggests Har Dayal that “the Buddhists meant only a slight tremor as a gesture of delight and approval on the part of the devatā of the earth.” (1932:298).

9. THE BUDDHA’S BIRTHDATE

A number of different theories have been advanced regarding the Buddha’s birthdate.

(a) Mahā Parinirvāṇa.

The Buddha is said to have died at 80. Thus, most theories are based on calculations that work backwards from this date. The tradition of the Buddha’s age of 80 is mainly based on the Buddha’s statement in the Mahāparinibbana Sutta to Subhadra (Subhadda) that he was 29 when he renounced the world and that the event happened *vassāni paññassa samādhikāni* (D 2:151 verse), which T.W. Rhys Davids (in agreement with traditional translations) renders as “fifty years and one year more” (D:RD 2:167). This was said immediately before the Buddha passed away, perhaps on the day itself (Upadhyaya, 1971).

(b) Sinhalese chronicles.

One of the most widely accepted theories is based on the Sinhalese chronicles, the Dīpavaṃsa (The Island Chronicle) and the Mahāvaṃsa (The Great Chronicle). The Buddhists calculate this date by correlating those of the Mahāvaṃsa to ancient inscriptions (eg the Gal-vihāra Inscription of Polonnaruva). The Mahāvaṃsa gives the dates of coronations of the Sinhalese kings Parākrama Bāhu I as 1696 AB²², that is, 1153 CE, and that of Parākrama Pāṇḍya as 1589 AB, that is, 1046 CE.

On the basis of these chronicles, Wilhelm Geiger calculated that the Buddha died in 493 BCE and consequently had been born in 563 BCE. (Mahv:G ix-lxiii).

Herman Jacobi, using the same method and sources, maintained that the Buddha died in 484 BCE (“Buddhas und Mahāvīras Nirvāṇa,” 1930:322-332).

(c) East Asian tradition

The Japanese scholar Kanakura Enshō arrived at the same date (*Indo Kodai seishinshi* 338 f.). The “dotted record” transmitted along with the Chinese translation of the Samanta, pāsādikā (T 1462), the Theravada commentary of the Vinaya, also indicates a similar date. At the conclusion of each rains retreat after the Buddha’s death, a dot was added to this text. A total of 975 dots had been added to the text as of the year 490 CE. As such, the Buddha’s death would have thus occurred 975 years prior to 490 CE, in 485 BCE according to the dotted record (Kanakura ib; Fei Ch’ang-fang, *Li-tai san-pao chi*, T 49:95b).²³

²² AB = *Anno Buddhae* (The Year of the Buddha) or *After the Buddha*, that is, after the Parinirvāṇa

²³ For further discussion, see Akira, 1990:22 f.

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(d) The traditional birthdate.

The traditional date for the Buddha's Nativity is 486 BCE and the Mahā Parinirvāṇa is 544 or 543 BCE (sometimes 566 BCE). The Indians and Sinhalese favour the former (by counting 1 for the moment of Parinirvana, that is, at the beginning of the year). The south-east Asian Buddhists start their count from the end of the first year of the Parinirvana. To get the current Buddhist years, one simply adds the number 544 (in the case of south Asia) or 543 (in the case of south-east Asia) to the Common Era. In keeping with this tradition, the years 1956-57 were celebrated by most Buddhist countries and groups as the Buddha Jayanti (the anniversary of the Buddha's Parinirvana). [According to the Thai system, the year 2002, for example, would be the Buddhist Era 2545.]

The exact dates of the Buddha's life are still a matter of scholarly conjecture. In recent years, Indologists generally place the Buddha's passing closer to 400 BCE.

(d) Festivals.

In Southern Buddhist countries, Vesak Day (full-moon day of April-May) commemorates the birth, awakening, and final Nirvana of the Buddha, all on the same day. East Asian Buddhists, however, celebrate them on separate days: 8 April, the birthday; 8 December, the awakening day; and 15 February, the Final Nirvana.

10. THE NATIVITY

(a) Miraculous birth

While other beings when born come forth stained with impure matter, not so the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva, like a Dharma teacher descending from the Dharma-seat, like a man descending a flight of stairs, stretched out his two hands and feet, standing unsoiled and unstained by any impurity, shining like a jewel laid on Benares cloth, descended from his mother.

The devas were the first to receive him. Indra and Brahma took him in their hands and wrapped him in fine silk which was not soiled at all. Then, human beings received him on a silk cushion. When he was freed from human hands, he stood on the earth and looked to the east. Devas and humans worshipped him with scented garlands. Having examined all the various directions he finally faced the north and, while Mahā Brahmā himself held a white parasol over the child, and the devas followed with other symbols of royalty in their hands.

(1) The Seven Steps

According to the Tibetan Dulva (fol 458), Indra caused a violent rain to fall and a great wind to blow, which dispersed all the crowd of attendants. Assuming the appearance of an old woman, he went to receive the new-born child in his lap. The Bodhisattva, however, ordered him back, and then took seven steps in each of the four quarters.

Looking to the east, he said:	"I will reach highest Nirvana!"
To the south, he said:	"I will be the first of all beings"
To the west, he said:	"This will be my last birth!"
To the north, he said:	"I will cross the ocean of existence!"

Then, two streams of water, one warm and one cool, issued from the sky and washed him. At the very spot where he was born there appeared a spring in which his mother bathed (Rockhill 16). According to Vajirañāṇavarorasa, the warm stream represents the Bodhisattva's trial of self-mortification while the cool stream stands for his own spiritual efforts (*Life of the Buddha*, 102). While the present author agrees to the former interpretation, he is inclined to regard the cool stream as representing the sensual life of the Prince in the palace. The seven steps would then represent the "Middle Way."

(2) The lion roar

The Pali Commentaries mention that the extraordinary infant took seven steps northwards. Stopping at the seventh step, he declared:

I am the chief in the world!

aggo'ham asmi lokassa

I am the eldest in the world!	<i>jeṭṭho 'ham asmi lokassa</i>	
I am the foremost in the world!	<i>seṭṭho 'ham asmi lokassa</i>	
This is the last birth!	<i>ayam antimā jāti</i>	
There is now no more rebirth!	<i>n'atthi dāni punabbhavo</i>	(DA 2:437)

(b) Commentarial interpretation

In the centuries that followed the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, there were attempts at explaining the various miraculous events that attended the Bodhisattva's birth. The Sumaṅgala, vilāsinī, for example, gave an elaborate interpretation (*pubba, nimitta*) of the Nativity, event by event, thus:

Standing on the earth	=	His attaining of the 4 paths of accomplishment (<i>iddhi, pada</i>) ²⁴ .
Facing the north	=	His winning over (spiritual conversion) of the multitudes.
The seven steps	=	His attaining of the 7 limbs of awakening (<i>satta, bojjhaṅga</i>) ²⁵ .
The white parasol	=	His winning the "umbrella" of spiritual liberation (<i>vimutti</i>).
The fivefold regalia ²⁶	=	His attaining the 5 liberations ⁴ (<i>pañca, vimutti</i>).
Looking all around	=	His attaining the unobstructed knowledge (omniscience) (Pm 1:131).
The majestic words ²⁷	=	His turning of the Wheel of Truth (<i>dhmma, cakka-p, pavattana</i>).
The lion-roar ²⁸	=	His attaining the final nirvāṇa without remains. (DA 3:439 f)

(c) Modern interpretations

(1) *Vajirañāṇavarorasa*

According to *Vajirañāṇavarorasa*, the seven steps represent the seven main states wherein the Buddha's Message would dominate, namely, Kāśī-Kośala, Aṅga-Magadha, Śākya, Vṛjī, Malla, Vatsā and Kuru. The Bodhisattva stopped at the end of the seventh step because he would attain Final Nirvana after the Dharma had been firmly established in all the seven states (Life of the Buddha, 101 f).

(2) *Minoru Hara*

The Japanese scholar, Minoru Hara, in his article "Birth of Extraordinary Persons: The Buddha's Case" (Werner, 1989:69-81), attempts to explain the miraculous nature of the Buddha's birth in relation to the notion of *janma-duḥkha* (suffering of birth) in Indian religious literature, such as Kauṇḍīnya's *Pañcārtha, bhāṣya* (a commentary on the Pāśupata Sūtra) and the *Purāṇas*.

The Buddhist sources Hara quotes are: the *Acchariya-b, bhuta Sutta* (M), the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* (D), *Nidāna, kathā* (J), *Mahāvastu* (Mahv), *Lalitavistara* (Lalv), *Buddha, carita* (Buc) and their Chinese equivalents (T 1:1 ff.). The account of miraculous birth of the Buddha can be summarized thus:

The Bodhisattva was born out of the right side (dakṣiṇa pārśva) of his mother. When the Bodhisattva was born, gods received him first and then human beings. Prior to his touching the ground, four deities received him (M, J). According to J, four pure-minded (suddhacitta) deities brought a golden net upon which they received the Bodhisattva. He came forth stainless (visada) from the womb of his mother, undefiled (amakkhita) by liquid (udda), mucus (semha) or blood (ruhira). Completely immune from uncleanness, the Bodhisattva and his mother are compared to a gem laid on Benares muslin, the one does not stain the other, but both embellish the other by their purity.

Nevertheless, two streams of water issued from the sky, one cold and one hot, for the deities to do the necessary bathing of the Bodhisattva and his mother. According to J, four kinds received the Bodhisattva from the hands of the four deities who had received him in the golden net on a

²⁴ *iddhi, pada*: the will to attain mental absorption, the effort to attain it, the mind to enjoy it, the investigation of that mental absorption (D 2:213, 3:78).

²⁵ *satta, bojjhaṅga*: mindfulness, investigation of mental states, effort, zest, calm, concentration, and equanimity (D 3:251, 282; Vbh 277).

²⁶ *pañca, rāja, kakudha, bhaṇḍāna* (J 5:264): royal fan, diadem, sword, sun-shade, slippers.

²⁷ *ābhivācābhāsanam*, that is, all the words spoken by the new-born child Siddhārtha.

²⁸ *ayam-antimā jāti* = "This is my last birth!"

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cloth of antelope skin soft to the touch. A large, white parasol was held over him and a pair of chowries (cāmara) were fanned to keep insect away from him.

The Bodhisattva then surveyed all the quarters and in a lordly voice, proclaimed: “I am the chief in the world; I am the eldest; I am the foremost. This is my last birth. There is now no more rebirth.”

(d) Janma,duḥkha

In summary, the Indian religious texts explain what happens at the birth of an ordinary human being in this manner:

It is the *janma-duḥkha*, the severe pains one experiences at the time of birth that causes one to lose one’s memory (*smṛti*) and knowledge (*viññāṇa*) which the embryo is supposed to possess until the last moment inside the mother’s womb. This pain is caused by mother’s bodily processes, by the tightness of the birth-passage, and the encounter with powerful winds both inside and outside of the mother’s womb. Because of this suffering at birth, the ordinary human being becomes *bāla*, meaning both “stupefied” and “a child.” This is also the starting point of further suffering caused by ignorance.

(Kaunḍinya’s *Pañcārtha,bhāṣya* & *Viṣṇu,purāṇa*, summarized by Hara 1989:72 f)

(1) Nature of the nativity

Let us now compare the Bodhisattva’s nativity with the birth of an ordinary human being:

Consciousness. First, ordinary human beings are said to pass through five stages of embryonic development (Vism 236) [see Hara 80 n29]. It is toward the end of the prenatal period that the embryo is endowed with consciousness (*caitanya*) and knowledge (*jñāna*).

The Bodhisattva, on the other hand, is said to possess consciousness and knowledge from the very beginning (Abhk 3:16). He makes the five investigations [time, country, family, mother, her life-span, J 1:49-50] from the Tuṣita heaven, enters Māyā’s womb, stays there and issues forth, all the while conscious and mindful (*sata sampajāna*).

Comfortable. Second, the ordinary embryo experiences pain while it resides in its mother’s womb. It is confined in a dark, doorless chamber which is often compared to hell (Vism 501; Abhk 3:15). Not only is it tormented by its mother’s actions, but it torments her, too.

The Bodhisattva, however, stays in his mother’s womb comfortably without giving her any pain.

Purity. Third, the ordinary embryo is troubled by all sorts of impurities (*mala*) both of its prenatal state and at the time of delivery. The baby newly born out of its mother’s womb is often compared to a worm falling from a foul-smelling sore (Vism 500; Abhk 130).

The Bodhisattva is immune from impurity (*amrakṣita*). He and his mother’s womb are compared to a gem placed on Benares muslin: both are pure and embellish each other.

Divine reception. Fourth, when an ordinary being is born, he falls to the ground like a worm onto excrements. Bereft of free will, he is left in complete dependence on others for cleanliness and nourishment.

The Bodhisattva is received by the *deva,putras* before he reaches the ground and is bathed with two jets of water issuing from the sky.

Divine attendance. Fifth, an ordinary baby is laid on a dirty bed and is unable to turn around. Insects bite him but he cannot scratch or drive them away.

The Bodhisattva was laid on a beautiful bed with canopies guarded by the four guardian deities with Brahma holding a parasol over him, and nāgas fanning him with their chowries to protect him from insects.

Miraculous deeds. Sixth, the Purāṇas describe the new-born babies’ inability to move, walk or speak anything other than inarticulate loud cries.

The Bodhisattva takes seven steps (from which lotus blossoms spring forth), and he makes various famous proclamations.

(2) The Bodhisattva's *ayonija* birth

The most important point of all is that the Bodhisattva is born *ayonija*, “not through the birth-passage,” but issues forth from the mother’s right side. We have the impression that such stories may well have been designed to release the Bodhisattva from the suffering of birth (*janma-duḥkha*).

If the Bodhisattva is *ayonija*, he is free from *janma,duḥkha* which normally brings about stupefaction. He is therefore privileged to preserve the memory of his previous births (*smṛti*) and the sublime thoughts (*matī, jñāna*) which the embryo holds in his prenatal state.

Here, the Bodhisattva recalls the suffering of rebirth, and is disgusted (*nirveda*) with it. He determines not to repeat the same. This determination, obliterated in ordinary babies at birth, is retained in the infant Bodhisattva thanks to his *ayonija* state so that he can proclaim after his birth: “I am the chief in the world; I am the eldest; I am the foremost. This is my last birth. There is now no more rebirth for me.”

These points, Hara claims, may illustrate some peculiarities of devices used by the Buddhist authors of the Buddha biographies for his mythification. This process of mythification is strongly tinged with the general cultural background of India as revealed in the Indian religious literature. Such devices, however, are much more commonly found in Buddhist Sanskrit texts (Mahāvastu, Lalita, vistara, Buddha, carita and their Chinese translations) than in the Pali texts.

11. AFTERMATH OF THE NATIVITY

(a) The Connatals

On this day, too, seven other things, the connatals (*satta, saḥajātāni*), came into existence: the Bodhi tree (*Ficus religiosa*), Rāhula’s mother (his future wife), the four pots of treasure, the royal elephant, his horse Kaṇṭhaka, his charioteer Chandaka (Channa), and his trusted counsellor Kālūdayī, the minister’s son. (DA 2:425; J 1:54, 6:489; BA 131, 276, 298). [It is said that Ānanda (DA 2:425; ApA 58, 358; J 1:63) and Prasenajit (Pasenadi) [8:11], the future king of Kośala, too, were born in the same year.]²⁹

A week after the Bodhisattva’s birth, Mahā Māyā passed away and was reborn in Tusita heaven as Māyā Devaputra. It is said in the *Jātaka, mālā* that she was so virtuous that she should not continue to live as an ordinary wife, or because she must be spared the pain of seeing her son’s renunciation later on.

(b) Asita the black

The sage Asita “the black,” Kālādevala, who dwelt in the Himalayas was well-acquainted with king Śuddhodana’s family. On the day of the Bodhisattva’s birth, he saw the devas in the heaven of the Thirty-three rejoicing greatly. After inquiring of them the reason for their joy, they told him that the Bodhisattva had been born in the human world amongst the Sākyas in Lumbini Park, and that he would turn the Wheel of Truth in the Deer Park at Benares.

Asita joyfully went to the dwelling of Śuddhodana and asked to see the extraordinary boy. On seeing the wonderful child, he was delighted and smiled. He recognised in the baby the 32 marks of the Great Man (D 2:17-19; M 2:136 f.), and declared, “Supreme is he, the highest of men!”

Then, remembering his own impending death, he wept. The Sākyas anxiously asked if there would be any misfortune for the child. Asita replied:

“No misfortune will befall him. He, for certain, will become Buddha.”

“Then, why do you weep?”

“I will not get the opportunity to see a person his like, when he becomes Buddha. Great will be my loss. Bewailing my condition I weep.” (J 1:55)

Asita was pained—since his own life was drawing short, he would not be able to hear the Dharma.

(c) Nālaka

After leaving the palace, Asita for his nephew, Nālaka (or Naradatta, according to the *Lalita, vistara*). He told Nālaka that as soon as he hears of the Buddha, he should look for him and live the holy life with him. Nālaka lived with guarded senses in expectation of the Enlightened One, and when the time came, he went to the Buddha and asked him about the state of the true sage (*munī*). This is a summary of what is probably the oldest version of the story of Asita as given in the *Nālaka Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*.³⁰

²⁹ See BA:H xliii-xlix for discussion on the connatals.

³⁰ See Jayawickrama PBR 3,1:3, 13-19.

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Nālaka or Naradatta is sometimes identified as Mahā Kātyāyana (Mahā Kaccāna), the future missionary in Avantī (Sn 679-723; J 54 f; Buc 1:81, Lalv 101-8; Mvst 2:30-45). In that case, Asita came, not from the Himālayas, but from the Vindhya mountains situated to the south of Avantī.³¹

Another canonical account is given in the Nidāna-kathā (Introduction to the Jātaka). The account is similar to the one given in the Nālaka Sutta except for a few details. When king Śuddhodana tried to make the child pay homage to the sage Asita, the child's feet turned and placed themselves in the sage's matted hair. The sage Asita then rose from his seat and stretched out his clasped hands to the Bodhisattva. The king, seeing this marvel, himself, showed respect to the child. This was the first time that king Śuddhodana worshipped the Bodhisattva. Then followed the smile-and-weep episode by Asita.

12. LIFE IN THE PALACE

(a) The 3 lotus pools and 3 palaces

When Prince Siddhārtha was seven years old, the king had his men dug within the palace grounds three ponds in which were grown various kinds of lotuses. The Buddha gives the following account of his luxurious life as a prince in his own words:

I was delicate, O monks, extremely delicate, excessively delicate. In my father's dwelling lotus-pools were made, one of blue lotuses (*utpala*), another of red lotuses (*padma*), and another of white lotuses (*puṇḍarīka*), all for my sake. I used no sandalwood that was not of Benares, my dress was of Benares cloth, as were my tunic, my under-robe and cloak. Night and day, a white parasol was held over me so that I should not be touched by cold or heat, by dust or weeds or dew.

(A 1:146; cf D 2:21, M 1:504; Mvst 2:115 f)

When Prince Siddhārtha was 16 years old, the king built three palaces for him. In his own words, the Buddha describes them:

I had three palaces, one for the cold season, one for the hot season, and one for the rainy season. Through the four rainy months, in the palace of the rainy season, entertained by female minstrels, I did not come down from the palace; and as in the dwellings of others food from husks of rice was given to the slaves and workmen together with sour gruel, so in my father's dwelling rice and meat were given to the slaves and workmen.

(A 1:146; J 1:58; cf D 2:19, M 1:504; Mvst 2:115 f)

(b) Life of pleasure

To the handsome heir, the rajah, besides providing him with the three palaces—the first nine storeys high, the second seven and the third five, for the three seasons—furnished him with the five capital pleasures of the time: first, dancing, consisting in the Indian manner of a sequence of more or less stylized poses combined so as to represent certain legendary dramas; second, singing, probably the high-pitched tonality that delights Orientals; third, music solos, which makes string or wind instruments, such as flutes or harps, “speak”; fourth, orchestral music with the sustained rhythm of drums that accompanied the dancing; and fifth, women.

The ancient scribes mention little about the sensual luxuries of the prince. It is evident, however, that the prince's life had been one of the Arab's harem or the Indian *antahpura*. The Jātaka Nidāna, for example, mentions that there were 40,000 dancing girls attending to him, and Rāhula's mother was his chief consort. (J 1:58)

When the three palaces were ready, the king thought that the 16-year-old prince Siddhārtha should get married and become his heir. The king ordered that a proper bride be found for the prince. The seeker did not have to go far in his quest, for he found in Yaśodharā (Yashodharā), the daughter of Suprabuddha (Suppabuddha), the living example of the prince's feminine ideal.

Despite all these sensuality, the Bodhisattva never ceases to be observant and thoughtful. This life of the prince immersed in sensuality plays a vital role in proving the futility of one extreme (*antā*)—that of sensual pleasures.

³¹ See Lamotte, 1988:674.

13. SPIRITUAL ENCOUNTERS

(a) Devadatta

Prince Siddhārtha had a wicked cousin named Devadatta [Chapter 7]. Once, when they were hardly twelve years old, Devadatta saw a royal swan (*hamsa*) flying over the garden where he was and shot it down with an arrow. It fell in the Bodhisattva's garden, who took it, and having extracted the arrow, nursed the wound.

Devadatta tried to claim the bird, but the Bodhisattva would not give it up, saying that it belonged not to him who had attempted to take its life, but to him who had saved it. And this was the first quarrel between the two.

(b) The ploughing festival

Although Prince Siddhārtha was well-trained in academic subjects and martial arts, he was inherently a very thoughtful and observant child, as evident from the episode of the ploughing festival (*vāpya-maṅgala/vappa,maṅgala*) (MA 2:290; J 1:57-58).

On a certain day of the year, usually in May, the king himself led the ploughing of the field. There were a thousand ploughs, a hundred and eight of which were of silver for the courtiers, except one golden one for the king. The farmers ploughed with the rest.

The Mahāvastu gives some interesting details: the Bodhisattva was watching the soil being tilled and saw the ploughs threw up a snake and a frog. A young boy took the frog away for food but threw the snake away. The young Bodhisattva was deeply stirred by what he saw and quietly retired under the shade of a jambu tree (*Eugenia jambolana*).

This episode in the Bodhisattva's life is immortalized in Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879):

But looking deep, he saw
The thorns which grow upon this rose of life:
How the swart peasant sweated for his wage,
Toiling for leave to live; and how he urged
The great-eyed oxen through the flaming hours,
Goading their velvet flanks; then marked he, too,
How lizard fed on ant, and snake on him,
And kit on both; and how the fish-hawk robbed
The fish-tiger of that which it had seized;
The shrike chasing the *bulbul*, which did chase
The jeweled butterflies; till everywhere
Each slew a slayer and in turn was slain,
Life living upon death. (*The Light of Asia*, Book the First)

(c) The first absorption

The young prince was taken and placed on a couch within a screen beneath a jambu (rose-apple) tree. The nurses left him, and he sat up cross-legged, practised meditation on in-and-out breathing, and attained the first level of meditative absorption (*dhyāna/jhāna*).

When he was deep in the first absorption, the shade of the tree did not leave him although the sun had moved (Mvst 2:45). The Tibetan Dulva and the Divyāvadāna, however, insert this account between the four sights and the Renunciation (Rockhill 22; Dvy 391).

When the nurses saw this amazing event of the 7-year-old meditating child under the jambu tree, they informed the king. When the king saw the miracle, he did reverence to him saying, "This is my second salutation to you!"

This episode of child Siddhārtha's meditating under the jambu tree reveals a very interesting symbolic aspect of meditation. The movement of shadows here represents the passage of time and the world. In meditating, prince Siddhārtha transcends the world represented by the ploughing festival. At the same

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time, when one is concentrated in meditation, one also transcends time. Above all, meditation is the most natural thing to do—even a child could do it!³²

14. MARRIAGE

(a) Yaśodharā

King Śuddhodana came up with a plan to get Siddhārtha marry the right woman. Having made beautiful ornaments, he sent word throughout his capital that in seven days the prince would receive at court and present jewels to the young Śākya girls. As each of them came before him, Siddhārtha handed her a jewel, but his heart yearned for none of them. And they, incapable of beholding the brilliance of the Bodhisattva, withdrew rapidly, taking their presents with them.

At last, Yaśodharā arrived with her retinue, and she alone was able to look at the prince without blinking. But, by then the stock of jewels was exhausted. Yaśodhara approached the prince and the following conversation ensued:

[Y.] Your Highness, what have I done that you disdain me?

[S.] It is not that I disdain you but that you came last.

And removing from his finger, a most valuable ring, he handed it to her:

[Y.] May I really accept this present from you, Your Highness?

[S.] This jewel is mine, accept it.

[Y.] No, our aim is not to remove any adornment from the prince, but rather to become an adornment to him.

Having spoken thus, she withdrew.

(b) The tournament

The palace agents heard the gracious conversation and reported it to the king. The king believed that the affair was settled, but against all expectation his plan backfired. The princess' family, however, asserted that the prince was incapable of any athletic sports as no one had ever seen him participate in any. On discovering this setback, Prince Siddhārtha persuaded his father to challenge in his name all the young Śākyas of his age. He was probably about 16 years old then (Lamotte 1988:15).

Five hundred well-trained young athletes responded and Yaśodharā, by common accord, was named the "Prize of Victory," to be awarded to the victor of three contests: fencing, archery and wrestling. The prince easily outbeat his opponents. The climax of the competition was the archery contest when all the bows broke as twigs in his hands.

He then asked his father if there was any other stronger bow. His father replied that there was one, that of his grandfather, Simhahanu, too heavy to be lifted by anyone, much less to string it. Prince Siddhārtha easily managed it and surpassing all his rivals, pierced target after target. They still had enough strength, after hitting the most distant target, to bury themselves into the ground right up to the feather.

(c) Marriage

Nothing and no one now stood in the way of Siddhārtha's marriage. Nothing much is mentioned in the Scriptures about the prince's wedding ceremony. However, two essential rites are known to us: the joining of hands and the triple circling of the fire by the bride and groom. He was 16 when he married (J 1:58 ff.)

15. SOURCES OF THE BUDDHA LEGEND

The oldest sources of the Buddha life comes from the early Canon (the four Nikāyas). Around these early stories, grew a spiritual drama of cosmic proportions. In his monumental work, *History of Indian Buddhism* (tr. Sara Webb-Boin, 1988:648-682), Etienne Lamotte proposes five successive stages in the development of the Buddha legend:

1. Biographical fragments incorporated into the Sūtras: Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta (M 1:163-73) [3], Dvedhā, vitakka Sutta (M 1:117), Bhaya, bherava Sutta (M 1:17-23) and Mahā Saccaka

³² On this first dhyana's significance, see **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36.31/1:246) = SD 1.12; cf Chinese version, T1428.781a-11.

Sutta (M 1:240-9). The Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 2:72-168) is entirely devoted to the last days of the Buddha.

2. Biographical fragments incorporated into the Vinaya: the Skandhaka of the Sthavira,vāda (V 1:1-44), the Mahīśāsaka (T 1421 101a 10-110c 10) and the Dharma,guptaka (T 1428 779a 5-779b 24).

3. Autonomous but incomplete “Lives.” Towards the beginning of the Common Era, the life of the Buddha became more prominent than the Doctrine and Discipline. Two Sanskrit works have survived: the Lalita,vistara (ed. S. Lefmann, Halle, 1902) and the Mahāvastu (ed. E. Senart, Paris, 1892-97).

4. Complete lives of the Buddha. Only in the 2nd century, do we see complete biographies of the Buddha (from Tuṣṭita through to his Parinirvāṇa and funeral rites). These were the works of king Kanishka’s contemporaries: Saṅgharakṣa of Śūrāśtra (Buddha,carita) and Aśvaghoṣa of Sāketa (Buddhacarita) [2e]. There is a third complete Buddha biography in verse but is today only found in the Chinese translation, *Fo pen hsing jing* (T 193) translated by Pao Yun (between 427-449).

5. Sinhalese compilations. The ancient Sinhalese inherited ancient Commentaries on the Pali Canon, such as Buddhaghosa’s Nidāna,kathā, the Introduction to the Jātaka Commentary, which gives an account of the Buddha from the time of his birth as Sumedha right up to the donation of Jetavana to the Sangha. Buddhaghosa’s contemporary, Buddhadatta (southern India), in his Commentary to the Buddha,vaṃsa listed 30 important episodes comprising the Buddha’s life (BA 298 f.; cf. Lamotte, 1988:405) and also compiled accounts of the first 20 years of the Buddha’s ministry (BA 3). The first 20 years list is also given by Buddhaghosa (AA 2:125), but treated in full in the Jina,kāla,mālī (Jink 29-35), a 16th century Siamese work.

In the Theravada tradition, Buddhaghosa’s Nidāna,kathā to his Commentary on the Jātaka (Jātak’attha-kathā) (5th century CE) is the first continuous narrative of the life of the Buddha, including his former lives. “The narrative brings together episodes from the life of the Buddha found in the Pali Canon, such as his enlightenment and his post-enlightenment teaching, with cycles of legends that had probably developed around major Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India.” (Swearer, 1995:541)

16. THE EVOLUTION OF THE BUDDHA LEGEND

Lamotte goes on to give 6 reasons for the development of the Buddha legend (1988:662-685). Such causes contributing to the growth of the Buddha legend are: (a) the need to justify certain details in Buddhist tradition, (b) the influence of holy places on the development of the texts, (c) the incidence of religious imagery on the written tradition, (d) the borrowing from outside sources, (e) the claim of regions that were not converted until late that they had been visited by the Buddha and (f) the desire of the great families to be connected with the Śākya lineage. To this we should add, another important source for the growth of the Buddha legend: (g) the stupa keepers.

(a) Justification of detail

When a given source is in contradiction with a universally accepted tradition over a point of detail, the ancient biographers had to think of ways to explain the contradiction.

Rāhula

According to the Nidāna,kathā (J 1:62) and the Buddha,carita (B 2:46), Yaśodharā gave birth to Rāhula 7 days before the Bodhisattva’s renunciation. The Bodhisattva then trained under Ārāḍa and Udraka for a year, and leaving them, went on to practise self-mortification for 6 years before finally attaining Awakening. Then after spending the 3-month rains retreat in Vārāṇasī, 3 months in Uruvilvā, 2 months in Rājagṛha, and 2 months on the road—altogether a total of some 7 years and 10 months—the Buddha reached Kapilavastu, his native town.

At his mother’s instigation, young Rāhula³³ who was more than 7 years old, asked for his inheritance due from the Buddha. However, the Buddha’s only reply was to have Śāriputra confer the going-forth (*pravrajya/pabbajjā*) on him (V 1:82).

³³ For details on this Rāhula case, see Lamotte 1988:662-665.

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However, according to the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, the Buddha's first visit to Kapilavastu did not occur until the 6th year of the Ministry (T 1450 12 159a 8-9). In that case, Rāhula would have been initiated at the age of 12. In order to resolve this problem, the Mahāvastu, for example, recounted that Yaśodharā carried Rāhula in her womb, not for 9 months, but for 6 years (Mvst 2:159).³⁴

(b) The influence of the holy sites

As A. Foucher (1949:108) correctly remarks, it is not possible to separate the biography of the Buddha from the sacred geography of Buddhism. Since the tours of Aśoka, pilgrimages to the holy places increased in number, which incited the guides to perfect their pattern and recall new "memories."

This, they said, is the "Elephant Hole," caused by the fall of the animal which was thrown over the walls of Kapilavastu by Prince Siddhārtha. Here is the "Arrow Well," where the arrow shot by Prince Siddhārtha stuck in the ground. Here again is the shrine of "Chandaka's Return," where the Bodhisattva laid aside his precious clothing and took leave of his charioteer.

Pilgrim guide books existed from which certain "Lives" of the Buddha were based. The Lalitavistara, for example, is presented as an enlarged—and badly corrected—edition of several pilgrimage guide books placed end to end.

(c) The incidence of religious imagery

Before the first centuries of the Common Era, the Buddha was represented only aniconically, that is, symbolically. At the beginning of the Common Era, through the rise of the Gandhārā school of Buddhist art, the Buddha began to be represented anthropomorphically, that is, in human form in the classical Greek style. Such representations of the Buddha were given in great detail, especially in the bas-reliefs, becoming more complicated and innovative than the early depictions on the stupas of Bhārhut and Sāñcī.

An old Indian belief, probably earlier than any carved representation of the Buddha, claim that perfectly enlightened Buddhas and Cakravarti kings are endowed with the 32 physical marks of the "Great Man" (*mahā, puruṣa, lakṣaṇa*) (D 2:17-19, 3:143 f.; M 2:136 f.). In terms of one of these marks, the Buddha is *jālāṅguli, hasta, pāda*, i.e. his hands and feet are marked like a net. However, in several lists, the *jāla* (net) is taken to mean, not a venous network, but a membrane "like a royal swan the digits of whose feet are linked by a membrane" (Lamotte, 1944-70 1:271 n2).

Similarly, the turban which adorns the head of a statue was interpreted as being a cranial protuberance (*uṣṇīṣa*), and the precious stone set in the middle of the brow passed for a natural tuft of white hair (*umā*) between the eyebrows.

(d) Borrowing from outside sources

The early Sūtras contain considerable sections of the life of the Buddha repeated in part and completed in the Vinayas. While the later Vinayas (such as that of the Mūla, sarvāstivāda) added greatly to the Buddha legend, the Pali texts are the most restrained of them all, remaining in line with the early biographical sūtras.

Under the Mauryas and Śuṅgas, Buddhism made a spiritual conquest of all ancient India and, in the north-west, the Buddhists came into prolonged contact with Western civilizations represented by the Greek (Macedonian) conquerors, the Seleucid officials and the Indo-Greeks in Bactria and the Punjab. The ancient Buddhists also made important sustained contact with the Śaka-Pahlavas who replaced ended the Greek occupation of north-west India.

As such, Indian Buddhism was open to a rich tapestry of influences from Greek, Serindian (Central Asian) and Iranian cultures and religions. The first three centuries of the Common Era, under the Kushans, were a particularly rich period of inter-cultural contacts and influences.

It was precisely during this period that the "Lives" of the Buddha proliferated which, while repeating earlier facts, embellished the account of new details and unprecedented episodes. Without the slightest concern for historical truth, they invented or welcomed anything that could

³⁴ Cf. Mvst 3:172-5 for a Jātaka where a king—Rāhula in the past—remained in his mother's womb for 6 years for 500 lives due to a bad karma.

glorify the person of the Master, both during his last life as well as throughout his former existences. (Lamotte, 1988:668)

(e) The distant journeys of the Buddha

There is another powerful cause contributing to the Buddha legend: the desire of distant regions, which did not come under the influence of Buddhism until late, to have been visited by the Buddha as well. To judge from the early sources, the farthest that the Buddha ever reached in the west was *Verañjā*, a small village near Mathurā (V 3:1-11; A 4:172; DhA 2:153). Later, however, many journeys were attributed to the Buddha, both in India and abroad.

(1) *Gandhārā* claimed to have been the setting of former lives of the Bodhisattva. Then it was claimed that the Buddha went there in person.

(2) *Kaśmīr*. In the course of a journey in Kaśmīr, the Buddha converted the ṛṣi Revata.

(3) *Śūrpāraka*, the capital of northern Konkan (on coastal Mahārāshtra, western India), to which the Buddha flew with 500 disciples, and stayed in a sandalwood pavilion built by Pūrṇa. On his return, he converted the nāgas of the Narmadā and left the imprint of his feet on the banks of the river. (MA 5:90-2; SA 2:378-9; Divy 46-55; Mūlasarv. Vin. T1448, 3 14b-17a 21)

(4) *Sri Lanka*, which the Buddha visited three times (Dīpv ch. 1-2; Mahv ch. 1). It is interesting to note that during these visits, the Buddha no longer sought to recruit monks and limited his teachings to a strict minimum. He was more interested in the construction of stupas and monasteries. He addressed nāgas and yakṣas rather than human beings. "He is no longer the ascetic Gotama of the early days, but a living advertisement for accompanied pilgrimages." (Lamotte, 1988:681)

(f) The lineage of the Śākya

If the new Buddhist lands considered it indispensable grant "citizenship" to the Buddha, the ruling families sought to include him in their family tree and claimed to be blood relations of the Śākya family. The Mahāvamsa Subcommentary, for example, declares that the Mauryas were related to the Buddha's family (Mahvṛ 181). Candragupta, the founder of the Maurya empire, belonged to the kṣatriya clan of the Mauryas, a small republic, whose capital was Pippalavana on the borders of the Nepalese Terai, was given a share of the Buddha's relics (D 2:166).³⁵

The glorious lineage of the Sinhalese kings also goes back, at least in part, to the Śākya family. If we believe the legend (Dīpv 10:1 f; Mahv 8:18 f), the second king Paṇḍu Vāsudeva (447-417 BCE) married the Śākyan princess Bhadda, kaccanā, the daughter of Paṇḍu, first cousin of the Buddha.³⁶

(g) Stūpa keepers

Unlike the monastic practitioners whose spiritual life centre around the Dharma, the less spiritually committed Buddhists (lay and monastic alike) generally need a more palpable object of worship and inspiration in their busy and uncertain worldly life. The life of the Buddha serves as a powerful source of faith and inspiration for the spirituality of the lay Buddhist.

An important development in post-Buddha history is the greater involvement of monastic Buddhists in worship and rituals (especially the "transference of merits").³⁷ This development is clearly evinced in the pioneering works of Gregory Schopen, especially *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected essays on the archaeology, epigraphy and texts of monasticism in India*.³⁸

³⁵ See Lamotte, 1988:218 ff.

³⁶ See Lamotte, 1988: 682-685.

³⁷ On the growing laicization of the Mahayana monastics, see Piya Tan lecture, *History of Buddhism* (2004): "Buddhism in India" §22. On the "transference of merit," see esp *Jāṇussoṇi S* (A 10.177/5:269-273) = SD 2.6.

³⁸ Studies in Buddhist Tradition series. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997. xvii+299 pp. Reviews: John Powers, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25,3-4 1998:396-399; JC Holt, *The Journal of Religion* 78,3 July 1998:486 f; S Collins, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67,3 1999:706-706; Arnold Dan, *Philosophy East and West* 50,4 Oct 2000: 620-623.

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The closest physical connection which lay followers can have with the deceased Buddha is with his relics enshrined in the stupas. Understandably, after the Buddha's passing, stupa worship grew in popularity with both the monastics and the laity.³⁹

The stupa keepers' roles evolved into those of curator and teacher. In the beginning, these stupa guides explained the stories (and perhaps doctrines) behind the art (mostly bas-reliefs and carvings) around the stupa. Most of such art depict the last life of the Buddha and his past lives. In due course, such stories evolved in complexity and the stupa guides became more confident of their subject.

17. WHY WE ARE NOT ENLIGHTENED

All good teachings are pointers to higher truths. One of the most popular and effective ways of teaching is through stories. At the beginning of this Chapter, I mention the two languages of *logos* and *mythos*, the literal approach and the spiritual approach. Stories belong to the language of *mythos* in the sense that they should not be taken literally, or at least, they are not spiritually "useful" in that sense. After all, they are stories about someone else, even if it is the Buddha.

Such stories become "useful," that is, spiritually liberating, or at least, they inspire us with joy, when we identify with their characters. This process of identification with the Buddha story goes through three stages. First, we feel mentally inspired, a sense of joy and zest in rejoicing in the compassion and wisdom of the Buddha as told in the stories.

Then, we allow the inspiring energies from the Buddha stories to settle into our daily thoughts and lives. We act them out in our speech and actions or allow them to inspire our words and deeds. At first, this takes some effort simply because we are not Buddha, and maybe we are not used to doing those wonderful deeds the Buddha does. As we allow ourselves to be Buddha-hearted, such compassionate and wise actions become second nature. Then we are ever nearer to spiritual liberation.

Our lives are largely guided by the kind of role model we adopt, whether consciously or unconsciously. As such, we have to examine who really are the people whom we take after or pattern our personal habits and daily lives. If they are negative people, then we would have assumed negative ways, which by such self-examination exposes them through our wisdom, just as Māra is routed simply by pointing him out with our wisdom.

Since we are privileged to have a living memory of the Buddha, the most evolved of beings, it would logically be to our greatest advantage to take him as our role model and refuge. Why stand in the burning and blinding sun of suffering and ignorance when we have the cool shade of the Bodhi tree?

Even then, we have yet to be enlightened. To be enlightened to see, that is, to rightly see, the true nature of life. Prince Siddhārtha saw four common sights that we would have simply dismissed, but he gave them second thoughts and he looked deep. That is why he was enlightened. We will examine the consequences of his extraordinary vision in our next Chapter. □

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2

THE BUDDHIST THEORY OF EVOLUTION

The Four Sights and the Search for Awakening

1. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

One of the greatest problems that fascinates as well as plagues philosophers and religionists since time immemorial is that of evil. While some thinkers try to solve this problem by way of a God-idea, the Buddha looks at the problem *in itself* without having to defend the problems of the God-belief.

The Buddha's method is comparable to a doctor who, instead of explaining "who" caused a certain disease, diagnoses and explains "how" it arises and passes away. Instead of looking for that cause outside oneself, the Buddha traces the cause --and the solution--within oneself, namely, the mind.

The three great evils

What makes it necessary for Buddhas to appear in this world is the need for someone to get rid of the three great evils common to all life: old age, disease and death. The earliest texts record that the Buddha himself told his disciples that it was the reflection on these three evils that had made it impossible for him to share the world's indifference to them. This reflection also stifled the intoxicating joys of youth, of health, and of life (A 1:145 f).

Instead of the legendary Four Sights (*nimittāni*), the Sukhumāla Sutta of the Pali Canon records a reflection on the three evils:

The three palaces

1 I was delicate [in my youth], monks, supremely delicate, exceedingly delicate. In my father's house, lotus ponds were made just for my benefit: in one *utpala* [blue lotuses] bloomed, in another *padma* [red and white lotuses],⁴⁰ and in a third *puṇḍarīka* [white lotuses].

I used only sandalwood powder from Kāsī [Benares] and my turban, jacket, undergarment and tunic were made of Kāsī [muslin] cloth. Night and day, a white parasol was held over me, so that cold, heat, dust, litter or dew would not touch me.

I had three palaces: one for the hot season, one for the cold season and one for the rains. In the rains palace, during the four months of the rains, I was waited upon by only female musicians,⁴¹ and I did not come down from the palace during those months.

While in other people's houses, slaves, workers and men received a meal of broken rice with sour gruel, in my father's house they were given (choice) rice⁴² and meat.

The threefold pride

2 (a) Monks, amidst such splendour [and prosperity]⁴³ and because of such an excessively delicate living, this thought arose in me:

⁴⁰ "Red lotus," *paduma*. There are 2 kinds of *padumā*, ie the red (*ratta, paduma*, VvA 191; PvA 157) and the white (*seta, paduma*) (J 5:37; SnA 125). Also mentioned is the "five coloured lotus" (*pañca, vaṇṇa, paduma*, J 1:222, 5:337, 6:341; VvA 41). They are further classified as 100-petalled (*sata, patta*) and 1000-petalled (*sahassa, patta*) (VvA 191) (*patta* here lit tr as "leaves"); the usual word for "petal" is *dala*, which can also mean "leaf". In other words, the ponds mentioned here are filled with lotus of more than three colours.

⁴¹ "By only female musicians," *nippurisehi turiyehi*, lit "musicians who were not men".

⁴² According to R.S. Sharma, although rice as *vrihi* was known to later Vedic people, it was a rainy season whose yield was limited. The change came when the people learned and used the art of paddy transplantation or wet paddy production, which was grown as a winter crop. This kind of rice was known as *sāli* (*sāli*) (R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, 1983:96, 161f.). This is the surplus that created and supported the institutions of kings (S Collins, "The Discourse on What is Primary," in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 21 1993: 309). The new rice, *sāli*, as such, was regarded as choice food.

⁴³ "Splendour [and prosperity]," *iddhi*.

“An uninstructed ordinary person, though sure to age himself and unable to escape ageing, feels distressed, ashamed, disgusted when seeing an old or aged person, being forgetful of himself [his own situation].

Now I, too, am sure to age and cannot escape ageing. If, monks, when seeing an old or aged person, I were to feel distressed, ashamed, disgusted, that would not be proper for one like myself.”

When I reflected thus, monks, all my (intoxicating) pride in youth vanished.

(b) (Again I reflected:)

“An uninstructed ordinary person, though sure to become ill himself and unable to escape illness, feels distressed, ashamed, disgusted when seeing an ill person, being forgetful of himself.

Now I, too, am sure to become ill and cannot escape illness. If, monks, when seeing an ill person, I were to feel distressed, ashamed, disgusted, that would not be proper for one like myself.”

When I reflected thus, monks, all my (intoxicating) pride in health vanished.

(c) (Again I reflected:)

“An uninstructed ordinary person, though sure to die himself and unable to escape dying, feels distressed, ashamed, disgusted when seeing a dead person, being forgetful of himself.

Now I, too, am sure to die and cannot escape dying. If, monks, when seeing a dead person, I were to feel distressed, ashamed, disgusted, that would not be proper for one like myself.”

When I reflected thus, monks, all my (intoxicating) pride in life vanished. (A 1:145 f = A 3.38)

2. SOMETHING MORE PEACEFUL

As long as one is intoxicated, consciously or unconsciously, with youth, health or life, there is the will to live and the fear of death. The preoccupation with these three intoxications is further enhanced by our lifestyle and social customs. We tend to speak of aging, illness and death in euphemistic terms, or even avoid talking about them altogether. The greatest hindrance to seeing beyond youth, health and life is that one does not see something higher than these three intoxicants. This is clearly stated in the Cūḷadukkha-khandha Sutta (M no. 14):

Before my awakening, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisattva, I too clearly saw it as it really is with proper wisdom how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them, but as long as I still did not attain to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, I recognized that I could still be attracted to sensual pleasures.

But when I clearly saw it as it really is with proper wisdom how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them, and I attained to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, I recognized that I was no longer attracted to sensual pleasures. (M 1:93)

In many ways, we are all still children, narcissistically running after personal, material and immediate goals. Our experiences are limited merely to our physical senses, or rather we are controlled in some ways at least by the physical senses of others. All we have are our sense-experiences, but whose true nature simply eludes us. And yet, in these very physical senses lie the tools for our own self-understanding. That is, when we understand their true nature. Often enough we are confronted with such revelations of the true nature of life, but they remain revelations, something awe-inspiring but nevertheless remaining external to our being. Revelations are only spiritually useful when we understand and internalize them, making them our realization. This was what happened when Prince Siddhārtha saw the Four Sights.

3. THE FOUR SIGHTS

Although the Pali Canon does not make any reference to the legend of the Four Sights, it contains the story of Vipassīy (Vipassī), a past Buddha, who before his awakening, while still a prince, rode in his chariot out of the palace. On his way to the pleasure garden, he saw the Four Sights. This is what happened in the words of the Mahāpadāna Sutta (D no. 14):

And as he was being driven to the pleasure-park, Prince Vipassīy saw an old man, aged, crooked as a roof beam, bent double, leaning on a walking stick, tottering, frail, youth long gone. At the sight,

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he said to the charioteer: "Charioteer, what is the matter with this man? His hair is not like other men's, his body is not like other men's?"

"My prince, that is what is called an old man."

"But why is he called an old man?"

"He is called old, my prince, because he has not long to live."

"But am I liable to become old, too, and not exempt from old age?"

"Both you and I, my prince, are liable to become old and are not exempt from old age."

"Well then, charioteer, that will do for today with the pleasure-park. Return now to the palace."

...and back at the palace, Prince Vipasyin was overcome with grief and dejection, crying: "Shame on this thing called birth, since one who is born must grow old!"

After many years, Prince Vipasyin (again) ordered his charioteer to harness the chariot. And as he was being driven to the pleasure-park, Prince Vipasyin saw a sick man, suffering and gravely ill, lying fouled in his own excrement and urine, lifted up by some and set down by others. At the sight, he said to the charioteer: "Charioteer, what is the matter with this man? His eyes are not like other men's, his voice (*saro*) is not like other men's?"

"My prince, that is what is called ill."

"But why is he called ill?"

"He is called ill, my prince, because he can hardly recover from his illness."

"But am I liable to become sick, too, and not exempt from illness?"

"Both you and I, my prince, are liable to become ill and are not exempt from illness."

"Well then, charioteer, that will do for today with the pleasure-park. Return now to the palace."

...and back at the palace, Prince Vipasyin was overcome with grief and dejection, crying: "Shame on this thing called birth, since one who is born must suffer illness!"

After many years, Prince Vipasyin (again) ordered his charioteer to harness the chariot. And as he was being driven to the pleasure-park, Prince Vipasyin saw a large crowd gathering, clad in many colours, and carrying a bier. At the sight, he said to the charioteer: "Charioteer, why are those people doing that?"

"My prince, that is what is called a dead man."

"Drive me over to where the dead man is." And Prince Vipasyin gazed at the dead man. Then he said to the charioteer:

"Why is he called dead?"

"He is called dead, my prince, because now his parents and other relatives will not see him again, nor he them."

"But am I liable to die, too, and not exempt from dying?"

"Both you and I, my prince, are liable to die and are not exempt from dying."

"Well then, charioteer, that will do for today with the pleasure-park. Return now to the palace."

...and back at the palace, Prince Vipasyin was overcome with grief and dejection, crying: "Shame on this thing called birth, since one who is born must die!"

After many years, Prince Vipasyin (again) ordered his charioteer to harness the chariot. And as he was being driven to the pleasure-park, Prince Vipasyin saw one who has gone forth, shaven-headed, wearing a saffron robe. At the sight, he said to the charioteer: "What is the matter with this man? His head is not like other men's, and his clothes are not like other men's."

"My prince, he is called one who has gone forth."

"Why is he called one who has gone forth?"

"My prince, by one who has gone forth we mean one who truly follows Dharma (universal law), who truly lives in peace, does good deeds, performs acts of merit, is harmless and truly has compassion for living beings."

"Charioteer, he is well called one who has gone forth...Drive the chariot to where he is."

And Prince Vipasyin questioned the man who had gone forth.

"My prince, as one who has gone forth I truly follow the Dharma...and have compassion for living beings."

Then Prince Vipasyin said to the charioteer: “You take this chariot and return to the palace. But I shall stay here and shave off my hair and beard, put on the saffron robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness.” (D 2:22-30)

4. THE DIVINE MESSENGERS

Nowhere in the early Pali texts is there any mention of the Four Sights (*nimittāni*) in connection with Prince Siddhārtha. Apparently, later Buddhists patterned the Siddhārtha legend following this beautiful story about Vipasyin. We find such a story, with some modification, in the Nidāna,kathā, the introduction to the Jātaka Commentary (which actually quotes the Mahāpadāna Sutta). Since this is going to be a drama of cosmic significance, the devas were given this important role of dramatizing the truth of the Three Great Evils and a hint of their solution. They came to be called the “divine messengers” (*deva, dūta*).

If this is an innovation on the part of the Commentators, one might rephrase the great modern artist Picasso’s famous statement: “We all know that religion is not truth. Religion is a lie that makes you realize truth.....”⁴⁴

In the Nidāna,kathā story, Prince Siddhārtha saw each of the Four Sights over four consecutive days. Attended by his charioteer Chandaka, Siddhārtha left Kapilavastu by the east gate for his pleasure park. His father had given orders that nothing unpleasant be allowed to offend the Prince’s eyes. But, the devas of the Pure Abodes who were watching over the Bodhisattva’s vocation, frustrated the precautions of the king and his ministers.

As a result, Siddhārtha suddenly found himself facing an old man, white-haired with age, wrinkled, toothless, and bent over his stick. Upon being told that this is a universal truth and that he, too, would not be spared, the Prince gave up his outing and turned backed.

The second time, the same scene was enacted outside the south gate of the city, where he encountered a sick man, lying in his own filth, attended to by others.

The third time, leaving by the western gate, the Prince encountered a funeral procession with a corpse simply wrapped in a shroud and carried on a stretcher followed by his parents, crying and moaning, their hair disheveled and beating their breasts.

At once, all life’s pleasures lost their appeal for the young Prince and to complete the conversion, the watchful devas needed to produce only one more episode. In the course of a fourth outing, there appeared an ascetic, bowl in hand, serene, eyes cast down, decently robed, and showing by his whole exterior the complete peace of his inner personality. This sight consoled the Prince by indicating to him the way of life, and from then he was ready for the religious vocation.

5. THE LORD OF DEATH

The statement of three evils in Sukhumāla Sutta (A 1:145 f.) [1] apparently became the nucleus for the Devadūta Sutta (M no. 130), which adds the figure of King Yama, the god of death, as an interlocutor with one newly reborn in his realm, questioning him regarding the 5 divine messengers:

Then King Yama presses and questions and cross-questions him about the first divine messenger: “Good man, did you not see the first divine messenger appear in the world...a young tender infant, lying prone, fouled in his own excrement and urine?”

“Did it never occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, that ‘I too am subject to birth, I am not exempt from birth: surely I had better do good through body, speech and mind’?”

“Good man, did you not see the second divine messenger appear in the world...a man or a woman, eighty, ninety or a hundred years, aged, crooked as a roof beam, bent double, leaning on a walking stick, tottering, frail, youth long gone, with broken teeth, gray-haired, scanty-haired, bald, wrinkled, with limbs all blotchy?”

“Did it never occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, that ‘I too am subject to old age, I am not exempt from old age: surely I had better do good through body, speech and mind’?”

⁴⁴ Original quote: “We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth...”. Quoted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art*. Berkeley: Univ. of Berkeley Press, 1968:264.

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“Good man, did you not see the third divine messenger appear in the world...a man or a woman, afflicted, suffering and gravely ill, lying fouled in his own excrement and urine, lifted up by some and set down by others?”

“Did it never occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, that ‘I too am subject to illness, I am not exempt from illness: surely I had better do good through body, speech and mind’?”

“Good man, did you not see the fourth divine messenger appear in the world, when a robber is caught, kings having many kinds of tortures inflicted on him: having flogged him with whips (and so on)...and having his head cut off with a sword?”

“Did it never occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, that ‘Those who do evil actions have such tortures of various kinds inflicted on them here and now; what more in the hereafter? Surely I had better do good through body, speech and mind’?”

“Good man, did you not see the fifth divine messenger appear in the world...a man or a woman, dead for a day, for two days, for three days, bloated, livid, and oozing with impurities?”

“Did it never occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, that ‘I too am subject to death, I am not exempt from death: surely I had better do good through body, speech and mind’?”

(Abridged. M 3:178 ff; A 1:138 f; cf DhA 1:107, AA 1:36, the Makhadeva Jātaka)

6. THE FOUR SIGHTS IN PERSPECTIVE

It may seem difficult to understand why the Bodhisattva reacted so traumatically to the seeing of the three evils because we know that most people become accustomed or immune to seeing them from childhood on. One explanation is that his reaction is the ironic result of Śuddhodana’s over-protective efforts to shelter Siddhārtha from the realities of life. Haunted by the predictions that his son, the crown prince, might enter the religious life, Śuddhodana had apparently succeeded in keeping such sights from him until his manhood.

(a) Siddhārtha’s spiritual maturity

If we accept the traditional account, then we could say that for Siddhārtha, at the mature age of 29, and looking at the four “divine messengers” for the first time, surely would be a traumatic experience. Two reactions from such encounters are possible—one would be that of repression, that is, that of an initial great shock followed by a subconscious forgetting of all the traumatic incidents.

The second reaction, and a historical one, confirming what the thoughtful Prince had suspected all along, is that of a feeling of spiritual urgency or disillusionment (*saṃvega*) (as described in the Devadūta Sutta) which would spur a thinking compassionate person on to find out the cause and cure for those ills. These encounters (or, if one were to take the four sight metaphorically—the thoughtful reflection on them) marked the turning point in the Bodhisattva’s career.

The Milinda, pañha contains an important remark regarding spiritual realization, put into the mouth, not of Nāgasena, but of king Milinda himself:

...there is no awakening when knowledge is not mature; when knowledge is mature, it is not possible to wait for even a moment: a mature mind cannot be denied. (Miln 194)

In short, when a spiritually mature person sees the truth or realizes the true nature of life, he adjusts his life according to it, and so becomes a new person. Wisdom has arisen in him. When he shares this wisdom with others to benefit them, compassion has arisen in him. Such a person is called a “True Person” (*sat, puruṣa/sappurisa*, M 1:287, 3:23).

(b) Purpose of life

On a deeper level, we can ask ourselves the question: what is the purpose of life? All living beings, indeed all living things, grow old, but very few grow up. That is to say, most of us simply go through our life cycle, little different from a mosquito or a cockroach. We are born, we go through fragile infancy, and we reach adulthood; we seek for food and other supports of life; we reproduce; and we die. Then the whole cycle starts all over again. This is growing old without growing up.

Man is a highly evolved being, but mostly in the context of a species. This is a group development, physical and cultural at best. It has taken million of years for us to evolve in this way, but it is still a

collective event as it were. As such, it is at best a lower evolution. There comes a point where this lower evolution leaves you contented, not wanting to grow further, through a false feeling of self-satisfaction.

Eventually, at one time or another, we get flashes of insight that reveal in our personal wisdom, how in reality alone we are; that we are really different from others, that we have inner goodness. But this true self cannot be realized because of external realities. This self-awareness, however, when cultivated more constantly and deeply leads one to a higher evolution. This is the arising of reflexive consciousness, true self-awareness.

When we realize that we are going through repeated cycles of habitual tendencies, especially negative tendencies, we want to break out of them. This is almost always difficult, if not impossible, to do so because of our environment, the company we keep; above all, our mindset. When we seriously make an effort to break out like the proverbial chicken that pecks its way through the egg-shell (V 3:3-5; M 1:104 = 357 = S 3:153), then we have begun on the path of higher evolution towards spiritual awakening [22; 3:14]. This was what made Prince Siddhârtha renounce the world.

7. RĀHULA

Realizing the futility and dangers of sensual pleasures and worldliness, Prince Siddhârtha decided to follow the way of the serene ascetic, the fourth sight he encountered. While he was mentally debating the idea of renunciation, he was abruptly interrupted by the news of the birth of a son. Contrary to expectation, he was not happy about it, exclaiming, “A fetter is born; a bond is born!” (P. *rāhulaṃ jātaṃ, bandhanaṃ jātaṃ*). When the king heard this, he decided that his grandson be named Rāhula meaning “impediment” or “fetter.”

On Siddhârtha’s way home through the streets of Kapilavastu, the women of the city leaned out of their windows to admire him as he drove by in his chariot. One of them, Kṛṣṇā Gautamī, a cousin (daughter of his father’s sister), filled with admiration, sang the following *nibbuta* verse (*nirvṛta, pada/ nibbuta, pada*):⁴⁵

Happy indeed is the mother,	<i>nibbutā nūna sā mātā</i>
Happy indeed is the father,	<i>nibbuto nūna so pitā</i>
Happy indeed is the wife,	<i>nibbutā nūna sā nārī</i>
Who has such a lord as this!	<i>yassāyaṃ īdiso patī.</i>

(DhA 1:85; J 1:61; ApA 65; DhsA 34)

The maiden was actually praising the Bodhisattva, trying to win his heart. However, he thought differently:

When the fire of passion is extinguished, the heart is happy; when the fire of hate and the fire of ignorance are extinguished, it is happy; with the extinction of pride, false views and all the corruptions and pains, that is what is called happy.

The words of Kṛṣṇā Gautamī brought some peace of mind and a worthy lesson to him. “This woman has taught me where true happiness is to be found,” he thought (DhA 1:85). In gratitude, he gave her his pearl neck-lace, saying “Let this be a teacher’s present!” (J 1:61).

So we see here one of the interesting lesser known details in the Buddha’s life: it was this incident that probably gave Siddhârtha the hint that his problem was a spiritual one. The following event would confirm this notion.

8. THE SLEEPING WOMEN

On reaching home, Prince Siddhârtha found that his father had gathered together some of the most beautiful female dancers in the country to cheer him up. Female musicians played the sitar, the flute and the tambourine. They, however, only succeeded in putting the Prince into an uneasy sleep.

In the middle of the night, he suddenly awoke in a great spiritual agony “like a man who is told that his house is on fire” (J 1:61). And what he saw around him totally disgusted him: the sight of the musicians and dancers sprawling in their sleep in various indecorous postures. All those girls were

⁴⁵ The Pali term *nibbuta* (Skt. *nirvṛta*) is used here in its early original sense to mean “happiness, bliss, rest, ceasing”. For a discussion in this term, see K.R. Norman, “Mistaken Ideas about *Nibbāna*,” *The Buddhist Forum III*, 1995:222 f.

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supposed to be the prettiest and most charming in the country. Only a little while before, they had been posing enchantingly before him.

Now, they were scattered about the floor, some snoring like pigs, some with their mouths gaping wide open, some with spittle oozing from the corners of their mouths and dripping down onto their bodies and dresses, some grinding their teeth like hungry demons. Since sleep is not unlike death, the Prince felt as if he was in a charnel ground surrounded by corpses. He had only one thought: to flee from there.

At that moment, according to the Nidāna, kathā of the Jataka Commentary, the Bodhisattva stopped and thought, "I must see my son!" According to the Old Jātaka Commentary (in Elu or Old Sinhalese), quoted by Buddhaghosa, Rāhula was seven years old at that time (J 1:62).

Rising from his couch, he went to Yaśodharā's residence. She was asleep with her hand on Rāhula's head. With one foot in the doorway, the Bodhisattva stopped and looked for his newborn son whom he had yet to see. "If I were to lift the Princess' hand to take my son in my arms, she would wake and hamper my departure. When I have reached my goal, I shall return to see him." This is truly an insight into the compassionate nature of the Bodhisattva.

9. THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

The Jātaka Nidāna says that the Bodhisattva renounced the world when Rāhula was only seven days old (J 1:62). Although most later legends say that Siddhārtha renounced the world at 29, all the canonical stock passages on the renunciation say that he left the house

...while young, my hair coal-black, possessed of radiant youth, in the prime of life, though my mother and father wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the saffron robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness.

(Ariya, pariyesanā Sutta, M

1:164; Mahā Saccaka Sutta, M 1:240; Bodhi, rāja Kumāra Sutta, M 2:93; Saṅgārava Sutta, M 2: 212).

(a) Māra

It is difficult for us to fathom another person's mind, least of all, the mind of the Bodhisattva as he leaves the palace in quest of spiritual truth. There are however numerous attempts at reflecting the challenges that confront such superhuman efforts, superhuman in the sense that their results affect future generations with promise of spiritual liberation. The shadow is darkest where the light shines brightest. In the light of Siddhārtha's spiritual renunciation, a very dark shadow appears. According to legend, Māra the evil one attempts to prevent Siddhārtha from leaving the palace.

At that very moment, Māra came with the intention of making the Bodhisatta turn back; and standing in the sky, he said, "My lord, do not go forth. On the seventh day from today the treasure-wheel (*cakka, ratanam*) will appear to you. You will reign over the four great continents with their two thousand surrounding islands. Turn back, my lord!"

"Who are you?"

"I am Vasavatti."

"Māra, I know full well that the treasure-wheel will appear to me, but I have no desire of sovereignty. I will become a Buddha causing the ten thousand world-systems to resound."

Then Māra thought, "From now on, the moment you think a thought of lust, illwill or malice, I will know of it"; and followed him closely, sticking like his shadow, waiting for some slip.

(J 1:63)

This is the first of Māra's many appearances to Gautama. Indeed, with this event, begins an interesting area of Buddhist studies, that of demonology, which is dominated by a single figure—that of Māra the evil one (Ling, 1962:43).

Some of this teaching [especially in the Majjhima, Aṅguttara and the Saṃyutta] [are] given in openly didactic form; elsewhere it occurs in semi-disguised form of legend, that is, stories of encounters with Māra by the Buddha and his followers. This legendary material nevertheless may seem to have a didactic import...

(Ling 1962:43)

In this Chapter, we shall generally look at the figure of Māra on the level of *mythos*, that is, the language of mythology, as presented in the legends connected with the Buddha's life. In the next Chapter, we shall examine Māra on the level of *logos*, that is, a scriptural analysis of his nature and function in the Buddha story.

(b) The river Anomā

On the full-moon day of the month of Āṣādhā/Āsaḥā (June-July), 594 BCE, Prince Siddhārtha leaves the palace and his life of luxury in search of the Truth. His charioteer Chandaka accompanies him on the horse Kaṇṭhaka and they ride through three countries: the lands of the Śākya, the Kraud̥yas (Koliyas) and the Mallas. By daybreak they have journeyed a distance of 30 leagues.⁴⁶ Reaching the river Anomā, they leap over it and land on the farther bank (DA 1:57, 77; J 1:64, 4:119; SnA 382; DhA 1:85; UA 54; ThīA 2; VvA 314; DhsA 34).

The river Anomā has been identified by Cunningham as either the Aumi River, which flows through the Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh, or the Kudawa River, which flows through the Basti district of the same state (1871:486 ff.). Malalasekera, however, thinks that the word *anomā* (*na* + *oma*, “not shallow; glorious”) does not refer to an actual river, but merely descriptive of the river (DPPN 1:103). To support his notion, Malalasekera quotes the Jātaka Commentary story, where the Bodhisattva asks Chandaka the name of the river and Chandaka replies: “It is Anomā.” “Good,” says the Bodhisattva, “my renunciation shall also be *anomā*.” (J 1:64; cf. Thomas, 1949:61)

Judging that he had gone a sufficient distance to separate him from the Śākya courtiers sent out in pursuit by his father, Prince Siddhārtha stopped on the far bank of the Anomā. Giving his ornaments to his charioteer, he took his sword and cut off his long princely hair. It was then reduced, according to legend, to a two-finger length and curling rightwise, clung to his head, and like his beard, remained so throughout his life. He threw his hair and beard cuttings into the sky. They rose a league high and remained there, giving a sign that he would become the Buddha.

10. SIDDHĀRTHA THE ASCETIC

Śakra the king of the devas appeared, caught the hair and beard and placed them in the Cūḷa,maṇī shrine in the Heaven of the Thirty-three. Then the ascetic Siddhārtha received the eight requisites of a monk—three robes, a bowl, a razor, a needle and thread, a girdle and a water-strainer. Some say that a Mahā Brahma, who had been his friend Ghaṭikara in former life, came and gave him these requisites. According to another source, when the ascetic Siddhārtha had cut off his hair, he exchanged his princely garments for the tattered rags of a hunter.

All the actions of Prince Siddhartha in transforming himself from a layman into an ascetic (*śramaṇa/samaṇa*) were witnessed by Chandaka his charioteer, for it was important for someone to be able to testify before king Śuddhodana that the sacrifice had been completely consummated and that there was no hope of seeing the prince again until he had attained his goal.

As for the horse Kaṇṭhaka, it knelt on its forelegs and licked its master's feet with its tongue and shed hot tears. When the Bodhisattva sent Chandaka back, Kaṇṭhaka was listening to their talk, and thinking that it would never see its master again, died of a broken heart, and was reborn as a *deva,putra* (ministering deity) in the Heaven of the Thirty-three (J 1:64 f.).⁴⁷

11. REFORM MOVEMENT

(a) Axial age

According to Karl Jaspers, the 6th century BCE was the “Axial Age,” i.e. a turning point in human history. There was a great upsurge in intellectual and religious turmoil, and ideas and discussions were widespread. As there were neither books nor established centres of learning in ancient India, intelligent men and women sought and shared knowledge wherever crowds gathered—market-places, city gates and even highways.

⁴⁶ League (*yojana*). A *yojana* is the yoke of an Indian plough (J 6:38, 42). As distance, it is as far as can be covered by one yoke of oxen (about 7 miles or 1.6 km) (DhA 1:108, 2:13).

⁴⁷ The devaputra Kaṇṭhaka tells his story in the Vimāna,vatthu 81, vv. 15-22.

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The Buddha lived at a time when new confraternities or religious orders confronted the old brahminical system in the central Gangetic plain. Theologically, the brahminical religious establishment was known as *astikā* (lit. “those who think there is”), i.e. the “orthodox” establishment that affirmed the existence of such ideas as the Creator God and the priesthood of the brahmins as intermediaries between the human and the divine. The reform movement, in contrast, was known as *nāstika* (lit “there is not”) or the heterodox, since they reject the Vedas and the priesthood of the brahmins, and advocating direct experience of spirituality through insight.

In terms of practice, the members of the ascetic reform movement were generally known by the term *śramaṇa* (*samaṇa*). They rejected the teachings of the orthodox religious establishment, the brahmins or **brāhmaṇa**. These factions were not only well known as religious groups but were also the intellectual nucleus around which Indian theology, metaphysics and science were built. While the brahmins were mostly sedentary and a hereditary corporation with their traditional mantras, rites and rules, the *śramaṇas* constituted a strong reform movement, peopled mainly by the kshatriyas (members of the aristocratic warrior class) who (unlike the brahmins) did not maintain that religious knowledge was the exclusive privilege of any particular caste.

The members of this reform movement, also known as “wanderers” (*parivrājaka*/*paribbājaka*) or “ascetics” (*śramaṇā/samaṇa*) were not householders but eremites. They rejected the Vedas, abhorred brahminical rituals and were, as a rule, non-theistic. Since many of them who were celibate recluses, they could also be called “monks” [fr. late Greek *monakhos* ← *monos*, “alone”] but they did not lead cloistered lives. Some of them lived in the forest, either in huts or at the foot of trees or in the open, but most of the year, excluding the three-month rains-retreat, was spent wandering.

(b) Adaptations

An example from the Dhammapada would show, in interesting contrast, how the Buddha (representative of the reform movement) reinterprets an orthodox doctrine and practice of his day:

Not by silence is one a sage,	<i>na monena muni hoti</i>	
Who is confused and ignorant.	<i>mūḥharūpo aviddasu</i>	
Like one holding up a pair of scales,	<i>yo ca tulaṃ ‘va paggayha</i>	
The wise chooses the good.	<i>varaṃ ādāya paṇḍito.</i>	(Dh 268)

The *muni* belonged to a class of Vedic shamans or medicine men, specially associated with the god Rudra (a sinister god of illness) (Basham, 1989:16). The term *muni* literally means “silent sage,” and was used in later times to refer to ascetics of special sanctity. It was a term taken up especially by the Jains. The Vedas sometimes refer to the *muni* as being one “clothed in mind,” meaning they were naked (to express their non-attachment to the world).

In the Dhammapada verse, the Buddha plays on the etymology of the term *muni*, originally derived from √MAN, “to think” or √MUN, “to know.” While asserting that true spirituality is not one of ritual form (maintaining silence), but hiding one’s delusion and ignorance, the Buddha derives the term *muni* from √MĀ, “to measure,” hence the figure of the scales; that is, to measure or choose the good and reject the evil.

12. PROBLEM OF RENUNCIATION

In social terms, nothing is more against the stream (*paṭisotā, gāmī*, S 1:136; A 2:6, 214 f) of urban society (that centres around sexuality and family life) than renunciation, the voluntary commitment to a life of celibate asceticism. When Buddhism came to East Asia (especially China), the Buddhists often had to answer challenges against the question of renunciation. Even to this day, there is strong resistance to the idea of abandoning one’s family for the life of a celibate monastic.

“Is there any significance in renouncing the world? Was not the Buddha cold towards his wife and new-born child?” Such criticisms have been raised in the past by Hindus, particularly by those of the Mīmāṃsā school, which tends to value lay life; by Chinese Confucianists, whose life centre around the family and a structured society; and by Japanese nativist scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries.

(a) The 4 stations of life

The Buddha was born at a time of great spiritual ferment in India (c. 500 BCE). It was a time when many intelligent young people went forth into homeless life to seek spiritual truth and solace. The brahmins were alarmed at this development since its freelance nature would erode their religious authority and that they were also losing their own sons to this new heterodox (*nāstika*) movement, that is, those who rejected the Vedas to seek for truth beyond traditional rituals and scriptures.

To counter what were viewed as anti-establishment tendencies among the young, the orthodox (*astika*) brahminical teachers devised the doctrine of the 4 stations of life (*āśrama*), which divided the life of the twice-born (brahmins, *kṣatriya* and *vaiśya*) after initiation into four stages: the *brahmacārī* (celibate religious student), the *gṛhastha* (married householder), the *vānaprastha* (forest hermit) and the *sannyāsin* (wandering ascetics). The purpose of this doctrine was to keep asceticism in check and to confine it to men of late middle age. It was, however, never followed universally.

(b) Economic considerations

The economic background of Siddhārtha's renunciation must also be considered. At least one scholar has argued that in ancient India only those who could ensure that their families would not be economically deprived were permitted to leave home to become wandering ascetics and religious. This would mean, therefore, that ancient Brahmanism and Buddhism belonged only to the propertied class and that Gautama Buddha was a representative of this social stratum (Walter Ruben 1954:121).

Nakamura argues that this criticism is not valid in regard to Siddhārtha's leaving home: "As his *saṅgha* grew in size, however, many troubled people not of the propertied class were admitted without distinction. The *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā* clearly describe this." (2000:106 f.)

(c) Spiritual reason

From a strategic viewpoint, even if Siddhārtha had remained in the palace, the fate of the Śākyas would probably have been no different. Had Siddhārtha remained a prince and become a universal ruler (*cakravartī*), this would mean that he had to battle many other kingdoms and armies, causing the loss of uncountable lives and widespread hardships. Siddhārtha's greatness lies in the fact that, between the fate of his own clan, the Śākyas (who were later annihilated by Kausāla), and the fate of humankind, he chose not to turn the wheel of the empire, but instead turned the Wheel of Truth. According to the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, the Buddha, at the end of his life, told Subhadra (Subhadda), the last convert:

Twenty-nine years was I
When I went forth to seek the good.
Now over fifty years have passed
Since the day that I went forth. (D 1:151)

This clearly suggests that Siddhārtha left home to resolve his question of what is good (*kiṃ, kusala, -gāvesī*, M 1:163, 165, 166), "which means that in a sense his concern had a very large ethical component." (Nakamura, 2000:107).

As mentioned in the quote from the Milinda, pañha earlier on [6], king Milinda himself declared that "...there is no awakening when knowledge is not mature; when knowledge is mature, it is not possible to wait for even a moment: a mature mind cannot be denied" (Miln 194). Once the truth is seen, it cannot be unseen. In the case of Siddhārtha, he was moved out of spiritual agony to discover the liberating truth and later, out of compassion, to declare it to the world.

13. BIMBISĀRA

According to Pali tradition, the Bodhisattva was 29 when he renounced the world. However, if we are to consider the lifestyle of the nobles and elite of ancient India—and the canonical *ipsissima verba* of the Buddha that "while young, my hair coal-black, possessed of radiant youth, in the prime of life, I...went forth..." [9],—it is more likely that the Bodhisattva left home at around the age of 14 to 16.

The Bodhisattva is then said to have spent seven years in a spiritual quest. The seven years were divided into two unequal periods: one year of study, six years of self-mortification. According to the Jātaka account, before his period of study, the Bodhisattva, after spending seven days at Anupiya, went on foot to Rājagṛha, the capital of Magadha.

2. The Buddhist theory of evolution

In Rājagṛha, the Bodhisattva began to collect almsfood and came to the notice of the young prince (*kumāra*) Śreṇiya Bimbisāra (V 1:36). Historians say that he ascended the throne at 15 (around 543 or 546 BCE) [8:2a]. As such, Bimbisāra could not have been any older when he first met the ascetic Bodhisattva. Since the Bodhisattva is said to be five years older than Bimbisāra [8:4], the Bodhisattva must have been 20 or more likely a few years younger at their first meeting.

At dawn the next day, the young prince Bimbisāra visited the Bodhisattva who was staying at Pāṇḍava hill. The prince was impressed by the young Bodhisattva's calmness and majesty, and on learning that the latter was of royal blood offered him a high position in his court. The Bodhisattva declined the offer saying that he was searching for awakening.

The prince then wished Bodhisattva success in his quest and requested the Bodhisattva to return to Rājagṛha after he had attained awakening to teach him (Bimbisāra) the Dharma for his own salvation (Mvst 2:199 f.) [4:20]. Such was the origin of a long friendship that was to last until the king's tragic end [Chapter 9]. This important incident is also recorded in the Pabbajjā Sutta (Sn no 27) [1:2].

14. ĀRĀDA AND UDRAKA

From Rājagṛha, after his first meeting with Śreṇiya Bimbisāra, the Bodhisattva went forth in search of spiritual teachers. He approached Ārāḍa Kālāma (Ālāra Kālāma) and imbibed all that he taught. From him, the Bodhisattva learnt to develop the seventh formless Attainment (*arūpa, dhyāna*), the Base of Nothingness (*akiñcaṇ'āyatana*). The unenvious teacher, delighted at the pupil's success, placed him on a level with himself. But the Bodhisattva was still unsatisfied as he had not found the answer to the true nature of life and the end of suffering.

Leaving Ārāḍa Kālāma, the Bodhisattva approached Udraka (or Rudraka) Rāma,putra (Uddaka Rāmaputta) to study the meditation method of his deceased father, the ascetic Rāma.⁴⁸ Before long, the Bodhisattva attained the final stage of mental concentration, the Base of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception (*naiva saṃjñā n'asaṃjñā'ayatana*). This was the highest stage in worldly concentration when consciousness becomes so subtle and refined that it cannot be said whether consciousness exists or not.

This was as far as any of the ancient sages could reach. Rāma's son, Udraka Rāmaputra, was happy over the Bodhisattva's achievement and offered him the full charge of all his disciples. However, the Bodhisattva, still searching for the cause of suffering and the end of suffering, was not satisfied and took leave.⁴⁹

15. SELF-MORTIFICATION

(a) The Five Ascetics

The Bodhisattva then made his way south with five companions towards the city of Gayā. The Bodhisattva and the group of Five Ascetics (*bhadra, vaggiya/pāñca, vaggiya*) reached the village of Uruvilvā/Uruvelā and decided to stay in the pleasant grove beside the river Nairāñjanā/Nerañjarā. There, he practised various forms of self-mortification which were then deemed to be of great spiritual value.

Who were the Five Ascetics? According to the Lalita, vistara, the Bodhisattva met them at Udraka Rāmaputra's hermitage and they followed him when he left Udraka. The Tibetan tradition say that they

⁴⁸ Some translators (incl IB Horner in M:H) fail to distinguish the father (Rāma) from the son (Rāma,putta). This has been pointed out by EJ Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha* (3rd ed.), London, 1949:63 and Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (M:NB 258 n303). Peter Skilling discusses it in detail in "Uddaka Rāmaputta and Rāma," *Pāli Buddhist Review* 6,2 1981-82a:99-105.

⁴⁹ The Bodhisattva's visits to Ārāḍa and to Udraka are recorded in **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36), **Bodhi Rāja, -kumāra S** (M 85) and **Saṅgārava S** (M 100). Some scholars who think that the tradition of the two teachers' instructing the Bodhisattva was a fabrication include: André Bareau, *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha dan les Sūtrapitaka et les Vinaya anciens I* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1963), Tilmann Vetter, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1988) & Johannes Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1986; New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993). Those who have proven the two teachers episode to be historical are Ghirgo Zafirovulo, *L'illumination du Buddha: de la quête à l'annonce de l'Éveil: essais de chronologie relative et de stratigraphie textuelle* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1993) & Alexander Wynne, "How old is the Suttapitaka?" (St John's College, 2003:22-28 Internet ed).

were at the head of the three hundred (3 ascetics) and two hundred (2 ascetics) men sent by the Bodhisattva's father and father-in-law, respectively, to attend to him when he renounced the world.

According to the *Jātaka Nidāna, kathā*, the five companions were led by none other than Kaundinya (Koṇḍañña), the youngest of the 8 leading brahmins out of the 64 brahmins who predicted that Prince Siddhartha would discover the Truth [1:6c]. The other 7 having died, he tried to rile their sons to follow him to attend to the Bodhisattva, but only 4 complied (Thomas, 1927:80). These four ascetics were the brahmins Bhadrīka (Bhaddiya), Vāṣpa or Daśa, bala Kaśyapa (Vappa), Mahānāma Kulika and Aśvajit (Assaji).

(b) Mahā Saccaka Sutta

In the Mahā Saccaka Sutta (M no 36), the Buddha describes various forms of self-mortification he practised. He bit his teeth together and pushed his tongue tightly to the palate until sweat streamed down from the arm-pits. The pain was so intense that it was like a strong man grasping a weak man by the head or throat and pressing tightly. Despite the great pain, he kept his mind detached and persisted in his effort.

However, seeing that such practices would not lead him to awakening, he stopped and tried another way. Then, he gradually controlled his breath until it was unable to pass through the nostrils and mouth forced its way through the ears with a terrible sound causing excruciating pain in the head and the stomach along with an oppressive heat all over the body.

When this, too, failed, the Bodhisattva went on to try another method: he reduced his food, sometimes gradually diminishing the amount and at other times taking only a very fine kind, until his body withered and his complexion sallow. When he touched his belly, he could feel his spine! When he tried stroke his body, the hair with rotten roots fell off!

16. FUTILITY AND DANGER

(a) Dangers of sensual pleasures

The Bodhisattva realized that self-mortification is not the way to salvation and three similes occurred to him in this connection. Firstly, those who have not detached themselves from sensual pleasures and whose minds still delight in them would not attain awakening whether or not they experience intense pain: they are like pieces of wood fresh with sap and submerged in water. They will never produce fire by rubbing against each other.

Secondly, those who have detached their bodies from sensual pleasures but whose minds still delight in them are again never in a position to attain awakening no matter what pain they go through: they are like pieces of wood still fresh with sap. Though far away from water they would not produce fire.

Thirdly, those who have detached themselves from sensual pleasures and do not delight in them, they are in a position to attain awakening whether or not they experience great pain: they are like pieces of dry wood without any sap and which have been taken out of the water. A person can produce fire by rubbing them together.

(b) The emaciated Gandhāra image

There are at least three well known statues of the Buddha looking very emaciated⁵⁰ as described in the Mahā Saccaka Sutta:

Because I ate so little, my body reached a state of emaciation. Because of eating so little, my limbs became like segments of vine stems or bamboo stems. Because of eating so little, my backside became like a camel's hoof. Because of eating so little, the projections on my spine stood forth like beads on a string. Because of eating so little, my ribs jutted out like the rafters of an old roofless barn. Because of eating so little, the gleam of my eyes sank far down in their sockets, looking like the gleam of water that has sunk far down in a deep well. Because of eating so little, my scalp shrivelled and withered as green bitter gourd shrivels and withers in the wind and sun. Because of eating so little my belly skin adhered to my backbone, so that if I touched my belly skin I touched my backbone and if I touched my backbone, I touched my belly skin.

⁵⁰ The image from Sikri now located in the Lahor Museum; the image from Takht-i-Bahi now in the Peshawar Museum; and the Jamalgarhi image now in the British Museum. (Brown 1997:108-110)

2. The Buddhist theory of evolution

Because of eating so little, if I urinated or defaecated, I fell over on my face right there. Because of eating so little, if I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair, rotted at its roots, fell from my body as I rubbed. (M 1:246 f)

Robert L. Brown wrote a paper⁵¹ about Gandhāra images of the emaciated Buddha where he reminds us that there are two episodes of the Buddha where he fasts for long periods, for six years as a Bodhisattva, and for 49 days immediately following the Great Awakening. He admits that

The texts make clear that the Buddha had practiced such austerities to greater and more masterful extremes than any of the ascetics, and his rejection of these practices thus comes from one who has the moral authority of an insider who has mastered them. (Brown, 1997:106)

However, he goes on to argue that although most people think that these images depict the Bodhisattva at the height of his self-mortification, on closer examination of the details on these images, they actually represent the Buddha fasting during the 49 days following the Great Awakening (Brown 1997:106, 112). Brown, however, fails to note perhaps the clearest evidence that it is the Buddha, not the Bodhisattva, who is represented in the Sikri and the Jamalgarhi images (and very likely in the Takht-i-Bahi image, too—namely, the presence of the halo or aureole behind the image's head.

Xuanzang, in his journals, reports that “Both in old times and now, among the better classes and the poor, those who suffer from disease are accustomed to anoint the figure with scented earth, on which they get cured in many cases” (Xiyuji tr. Beal 128). These images, however, occur almost entirely in one small geographical area and from a short period of time (first four centuries BCE), that is, the Gandhāra area of what is now Pakistan (although there is one such image from Pagan in Burma in the 12th-13th century CE) (1997:105, 113). Brown however admits that “I do not know why the Gandhāran artists were drawn to the emaciated Buddha, but it may relate to their interest, shared with Greco-Roman artists, in artistic naturalism” (1997:114).

The image of pain and death, characteristic as they may be of the Bodhisattva's life, have little appeal to the Buddhists. As such, one possible reason for the almost total absence of such images in south and southeast Asia “is because it represents the Buddha embodying the very concepts of pain and death which he had overcome” (Brown, 1997:112).

(c) Siddhārtha collapses

After six long years of practising self-mortification, the ascetic Siddhartha still did not realize his goal. One day, while walking up and down deep in meditation, he was suddenly overcome by severe pain. He fainted and fell. (J 1:67)

The five ascetics rushed to Siddhārtha's aid—two of them propped him up, another massaged his legs, the third fanned him, and the fourth, not knowing what to do, wept.

It is said that even the devas panicked thinking that Siddhārtha had died. They raced to Kapilavastu and announced to King Śuddhodana, “Your son is dead!” But the king refused to believe it, remembering how, even as a child, Siddhārtha had meditated under the jambu tree.

17. THE MIDDLE WAY

(a) Parable of the lute

Realizing the futility and danger of self-mortification, the Bodhisattva decides to try a different way. On reflection, he recalls his luxurious life in the palaces that is not conducive to spiritual growth. On the other hand, six years of self-mortification does not bring him spiritual insight either. The answer, as such, must lie somewhere in between—this is his first glimpse of the middle way (cf. V 1:181 f; A 3:374 f).

It was at this point, traditional legends have it, that Śakra, the king of the devas, rushes down from his heaven with a divine lute and appears before the ailing Bodhisattva. The lute has three strings: one very loose, one very tight, and the middle one well-tuned. When the loose string is touched, it makes a weak discordant noise. The tight string bursts at the touch. The middle well-tuned string sang a sweet sound.

⁵¹ “The Emaciated Gandhāran Buddha Images: Asceticism, Health and the Body.” In *Living a Life in Accord with Dhamma*, edd. Eilenberg et al. 1997:105-115.

This dramatic simile of the lute is immortalized in the words of *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold (1879):

*“Fair goes the dancing when the sitar’s tuned;
Tune us the sitar neither low nor high,
And we will dance away the hearts of men.*

*The string o’erstretched breaks, and the music flies;
The string o’erslack is dumb, and music dies;
Tune us the sitar neither low nor high.”* (The Light of Asia, Book the Sixth)

The use of the simile of the lute to point to the middle way is found in several places in the Canon itself though never in the context of the Bodhisattva’s struggle for awakening. The best known lute story is the Buddha’s admonition of the over-zealous practitioner Śroṇa Koṭṭi, viṃśa (Soṇa Kōḷivisa), who was a musician before he became a monk (V 1:182 f.; A vi,55 = 3:373; cf. another simile of the lute, S 4:197 f.).

(b) Siddhārtha gives up self-mortification

The Bodhisattva then recalls when, as a child, he meditates under a jambu tree during the Ploughing Festival and attains the first level of meditational absorption (*dhyāna/jhāna*). He then realizes that the secret of salvation lies in the development of the mind, and not through bodily torture. This momentous spiritual moments are recorded in the Mahā Saccaka Sutta (M 36):

I considered: “I recall that when my father the Sakya was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first absorption, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with zest and pleasure born of seclusion. Could that be the path to awakening?” Then, following on that memory, came the realization: “That is the path to awakening!” (M 1:246 f)

He describes the actual turning-point in his spiritual quest in these words:

I thought: “Why am I afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasure and unwholesome states?” I thought: “I am not afraid of that pleasure since it has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states.”

I considered: “It is not easy to attain that pleasure with a body so excessively emaciated. Suppose I ate some solid food—some boiled rice and bread.” And I ate some solid food—some boiled rice and bread. Now at that time five monks were waiting upon me. Thinking, “If our recluse Gotama achieves some higher state, he will inform us.” But when I ate the boiled rice and bread, the five monks were disgusted and left me, thinking: “The recluse Gotama now lives luxuriously: he has given up his striving and reverted to luxury.” (M 1:246 f)

At the time when the Bodhisattva needed their assistance most, the Five Monks left him for the Deer Park at Benares. But the Bodhisattva was not discouraged. He struggled on alone. One has to face the truth of reality all alone, if it needs be.

18. THE BODHISATTVA’S LAST MEAL

(a) Sujātā

A rich woman of Senānī village (near Uruvilvā) named Sujātā had offered a prayer before a banyan tree asking the tree deity to give her a son as her firstborn. When she did get a son, she rejoiced and prepared herself to make an offering to the deity.

When her maid Puṇḍā saw the Bodhisattva sitting under the banyan tree, she thought that he must surely be the tree deity who had come to claim his offering. Both Sujātā and Puṇḍā came and offered the Bodhisattva some milk-rice in a golden bowl.

2. The Buddhist theory of evolution

(b) Act of truth

The Bodhisattva received the food. Then he went down to the Supraṭiṣṭhita Ford on the Nairāñjanā to bathe. After that, he dressed himself for his meal. He made all the rice into 49 small balls and ate them without any water. This was the Bodhisattva's last meal before the Awakening and the only one for the next 49 days.

After his meal, the Bodhisattva made an "act of truth" (*satya, kriya/sacchikiriya*) saying: "If I will today become a Buddha, let this bowl go upstream; if not, let it go downstream!" Then he cast the golden bowl into the water and immediately it shot upstream into the middle of the river.

The bowl then sank into a whirlpool and went to the palace of Kāla Nāga, rāja (the Black Serpent King). It struck against the bowls from which the three previous Buddhas of this world-cycle had eaten, made them sound "Killi-killi!" and stopped at the lowest of them. The Serpent King, hearing the noise, said: "Yesterday, a Buddha arose, today another has just arisen!" Then, he stood singing praises to him.

19. THE BODHISATTVA'S DREAMS

The night before the Awakening, the Bodhisattva had five dreams, clarifying that he would become Buddha. The Scriptures list the five dreams as follows:

- (1) The world appeared as a great couch, and the Himalayas as the pillow. His left hand was plunged into the eastern ocean, his right in the western, and his feet in the southern. This means that he would attain supreme Awakening.
- (2) A plant called *tīriya* (i.e. *kuśa* grass) grew out from his navel, and rose and touched the sky. This means that he would discover the noble eightfold path which he would proclaim to human as well as heavenly beings.
- (3) White worms with black heads crept up as far as his knees and covered them. These were white-robed lay followers who find lifelong refuge in the Buddha.
- (4) Four birds of different colours came from the four quarters, and falling at his feet became entirely white. These are the four castes who, leaving the household life to join the Sangha, became the Buddha's disciples and realize the highest freedom.
- (5) He was walking to and fro on a mountain of dung but was not smeared by it. This meant that he would receive the four basic requisites of a monk (food, robes, shelter, medicine) and enjoy them without being attached to them. (A 3:240; Mvst 2:136)

20. THE BODHISATTVA'S DETERMINATION

(a) Svastika the grass cutter

Having passed the day in a grove of sāl (Pali, *sāla*) trees, the Bodhisattva went in the evening towards the Bodhi tree. Along the way, he met a grass-cutter named Svastika (Sotthiya) who, seeing the Bodhisattva's majesty, offered him eight handfuls of kuśa grass which the Bodhisattva took and spread out under the Bodhi tree on the east side. [Some say that Svastika was Śakra in disguise. (Abhiniṣkramaṇa Sūtra; Abhns:B 196)]

Then sitting down cross-legged and upright, the Bodhisattva firmly resolved:

Skin, sinew, and bone may dry up; my flesh and blood may dry up in my body, but without attaining complete awakening, I will not leave this seat! (J 1:71)

(b) Māra's temptation

Then, according to the Padhāna Sutta, Māra the Evil One appeared before the Bodhisattva and, pretending to be concerned, said:

A thousand parts (of you) belong to death,
Only one of you is life;
Live, good sir! Life is better—
Living, you can do meritorious deeds!

From living the holy life
And making sacrifices to the sacred fire,
Much merit will be heaped up by you—
What can you do with mental exertion? (Sn 427 f)

Here, we see Māra as the preserver of the *status quo* in the negative sense. He tries to discourage those who are seeking personal development and entices them to keep to the "old ways." This Padhāna Sutta account is the first of two actual confrontation of the Buddha by Māra (the other is recorded in the Mahā Saccaka Sutta). [3:13]

In the Padhāna Sutta (Sn no. 28), Māra pursues the Bodhisattva for seven years like a dark hungry bird hovering "around a stone that looks like a piece of fat" (Sn 447 f.) but fails to discourage him. Then, he leaves the Bodhisattva in disgust. Overcome with grief, he lets his lute, the Bilva, paṇḍu Vinā, slip from his arm (*tassa sokaparetassa vīṇā kacchā abhassatha*, Sn 449a). It is said that Śakra picked up the lute and gave it to Pañca, sikhā (SnA 394). The lute is so huge and powerful, it is said, that a sound it produces could reverberate for four months in earthly time!

The Mahāvastu counterpart of the Padhāna Sutta, however, has no equivalent of Sn 446-448, but has an interesting version of Sn 449, the closing stanza of the Sutta Nipāta, which has: "The lute fell from his arm-pit." Jayawickrama says that this "suggests a confusion of a legend, the origin of which seems obscure." Despite the Sn Commentary's explanation, it does not solve the question of how Māra came by a vīṇā. The Mahāvastu parallel to Sn 449a reads: *tasya śokapārītasya vinūśaṃ gacchi ucchriti*, "overcome with grief, his pride was all shattered" (Mvst 2:240), which probably expresses the original idea that may have existed prior to the importation of the vīṇā from the developed legend which speaks of his daughters playing instrumental music as a part of their wiles. (Jayawickrama PBR 3,1:12).

21. MARA'S ATTACKS

(a) The nine storms

Later accounts tell us that when the Bodhisattva was sitting under the Bodhi tree just before his Awakening, Māra appeared bearing a thousand arms, each holding a weapon, and seated on the fierce elephant Girimekhala said to be 150 leagues high. Surrounding him was a great and fearful demonic army which furiously attacked him with nine storms, one after another.

First, Māra stirred up a raging whirlwind that could uproot trees, destroy mountains and wipe out towns. But the wind died out when it reached the Bodhisattva—it did not even stir the hem of his robe.

2. The Buddhist theory of evolution

Then Māra caused great clouds to gather and a torrential rain-storm to pour down causing a great flood which drowned the trees. But the waters did not reach the Bodhisattva—his robe was not wet even the size of a dewdrop.

Māra followed up with a storm of rocks, spitting fire and smoke. But as they reached the Bodhisattva they changed into heavenly garlands.

Then Māra raised a storm of deadly weapons—one-edged swords, two-edged swords, spears and arrows, smoking and flaming through the sky—to fall on the Bodhisattva. They became divine flowers and fell at the Bodhisattva's feet.

Then, came a rain-storm of glowing coal that shot through the sky like red *kin̄suka* flowers, but they scattered at the feet of the Bodhisattva like divine flowers.

Then Māra raised a storm of burning embers that shot through the air exceedingly hot, but they fell at the Bodhisattva's feet as sandalwood powder.

Then he caused a storm of fine sand that smoked and flamed through the air, but it fell as divine flowers before the Bodhisattva.

Then Māra raised a storm of smoking and flaming lava to fall from the sky, but it changed into divine unguent at the Bodhisattva's feet.

Māra thought that he could terrify the Bodhisattva with a thick blinding darkness that he made fourfold (like the 14th day of the waning moon, a thick forest, a dark cloud and midnight combined). But when it reached the Bodhisattva, it disappeared just like darkness before the brightness of the sun.

(J 1:72 f)

(b) Final victory over Māra

Finally, the enraged Māra tried a desperate ruse. He used his last weapon—the terrifying flying bladed discus (*cakr'āvudha*) that could cleave a pillar of solid rock as if it were tender bamboo shoot. But, when he hurled it at the Bodhisattva, it hovered over him like a canopy of flowers. He challenged the Bodhisattva to get up from the seat under the Bodhi tree. Māra claimed that the seat was his and not the Bodhisattva's. The Bodhisattva replied that he had practised all the ten perfections at three different levels and made the five great sacrifices (of wife, children, kingdom, limb and life, J 6:552) and had perfected the way of good—therefore the seat belonged to the Bodhisattva. This is called the “Thunderbolt Throne” or “Diamond Seat” (*vajr'āsāna*).

When all his efforts were in vain, Māra challenged the Bodhisattva to prove his claim to awakening. Thereupon, the Bodhisattva touched the earth with his right hand. The earth shook and rumbled, and Sthavarā (Thavarā), Mother Earth, emerged from underneath in witness of his unsurpassed virtues. Some say that Māra's evil host sank into the ground; others say that Sthavarā wrung her long hair from which a great flood emerged and washed the demons away. Māra himself, surprised and terrified, fled.

This event is often commemorated in two common ways, ritually and iconographically. Among the Theravāda Buddhists of Thailand, it is commemorated when, after the conclusion of a merit-making ceremony, the water of dedication (*dakṣiṇ'odaka*) is poured away at the root of a tree. Iconographically, the Buddha's final victory over Māra (*māra, vijaya*) is depicted in the Buddha images showing the Earth-touching Gesture (*bhūmi, sparśa mudra*), the most famous of which is the Phra Buddha Jinarāj image in Phitsanulok, Thailand.

22. THE PERFECT SELF-AWAKENING

(a) The Great Awakening

On the full moon day of the month of Vaiśākha (Vesākha, April-May) in the year 588 BC (or according to modern scholars, c. 528 BCE), the Bodhisattva, then only 35 years old, attained the Perfect Self-awakening. Seated under the famous pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*, thenceforth known as the Bodhi tree) at Buddha, gayā, he developed various true knowledges or superknowledges (*abhijñā/abhiññā*).

The Buddha describes his experience of awakening in these words as preserved in the Mahā Saccaka Sutta (M 36):

I thought: “Why am I afraid of the pleasure (*sukha*) that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states?” I thought: “I am not afraid of the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states.”⁵²

Now when I had eaten solid food and regained my strength, then quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first absorption, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with zest and pleasure born of seclusion. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

With the stilling of applied and sustained thought, I entered upon and abided in the second absorption.... With the fading away of zest as well...I entered upon and abided in the third absorption... With the abandoning of pleasure and pain...I entered upon and abided in the fourth absorption... But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives...This was the first true knowledge . (M 1:246-248)

It was during the first watch of the night (6.00-10.00 pm) that the Bodhisattva developed the first true knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the recollection of past lives. In the middle watch (10.00 pm-2.00 am), he developed the second true knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the perception of the arising and passing away of beings which enable him to see the cycles of death and rebirth of other beings faring according to their karma. And, in the last watch of the night (2.00-6.00 am), he developed the third true knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the destruction of passions. Understanding the nature of things as they truly are, finally he attained the Perfect Awakening and Nirvana.

(b) The first Buddha Word

Among the first words of the Buddha, spoken after his Awakening, are those found in this famous Verse of Uplift (*udāna, gāthā*):⁵³

Through many a birth in this cycle of lives,
I’ve wandered,
Seeking but not finding
The builder of this house.
Painful is repeated birth.
O house-builder, you are seen!
You shall not build a house again!

All your rafters are broken
And your ridgepole shattered!
My mind has reached the Unconditioned!
The end of craving has been attained! (Dh 153-154)

This verse is very interesting and important. First of all, it confirms the doctrine of rebirth. Secondly, it denies the Creator-idea. Thirdly, the fact of suffering is realized to be universal. All these are affirmed through personal experience.

The second part of the verse gives the first summary of the Buddha’s Teaching. First, there is the affirmation of his supreme discovery: “O house-builder, you are seen!” The term “house-builder” (*gaha-kāraka*) has two meanings: the Commentaries interpret it as “craving” but it can also be taken as the Creator (*īśvara, nirmāṇa*) idea.

The word “house” (*geha*) refers to this world itself physically and spiritually to the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). The “rafters” (*phāsuka*) are the passions that make one cling on to this world. The “ridgepole” (*gaha, kūṭa*) is ignorance, the cause of karma.

⁵² On the two kinds of pleasures, see for example the Araṇa, vibhaṅga Sutta, M 139.9 = 3:233.

⁵³ The famous verse is found at Dh 153 f; Tha 183 f; J 1:756; BA 8; referred to at UA 208; qu by VA 17, DA 16, KhpA 12, DhsA 18. See V:H 4 Introd vii for further refs.

2. The Buddhist theory of evolution

Finally, the Buddha announces his Perfect Awakening with the words “My mind has reached the Unconditioned! The end of craving has been attained!” The Unconditioned (*visaṅkhāra*) is a synonym for Nirvana. In the Vinaya, the Buddha compares his awakening to a chick breaking out of an egg:

“Brahmin, it is like a hen with eight or ten or twelve eggs on which she sat properly, properly warmed and properly hatched. Is that chick which should win forth safely, having first of all pierced through the egg-shell, having first of all pierced through the egg-shell with the point of the claw on its foot, or with its beak, to be called the eldest or the youngest?” he said.

“He is to be called the eldest, good Gotama, for he is the eldest of these,” he said.

“Even so I, brahmin, having pierced through the shell of ignorance for the sake of creatures going in ignorance, born of eggs, covered over, am unique in the world, utterly enlightened with unsurpassed awakening, I myself, brahmin, am the world’s eldest and highest.”

(V 3:3 f; cf. D 2:15)



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3

WHY BUDDHISTS WORSHIP TREES

Buddhist mythology of evil and the Great Awakening

1. INTRODUCTION

What is a shadow? It is a darkness that is shaped like the person or object that stands before some light. It is a part of you, yet it is not you. It disappears when the light is dimmed, but it is not altogether gone. Each of us have our own shadow, but its cause is outside of ourselves.

It is darkest where the light is brightest. With his awakening, the Buddha became the light of the universe. This is the brightest of all lights, and in such light, anything that is not transparent would cast a dark shadow. The darkest shadow is cast perhaps by a mysterious figure that is found nowhere else in the history of religion, except in Buddhism.

2. TWO LANGUAGES

(a) Mythos and logos

The Abhidharma tradition speaks of two levels of languages on which the Dharma is transmitted—the conventional (*sammati/sammutti*) and the ultimate (*paramârtha/paramattha*), those of the world and of the Dharma. The Commentarial tradition mentions a further two methods of teaching (*desanā*)—in terms of persons (*pudgalādhiṣṭhāna/puggalādhiṣṭhāna*) or the symbolic and in terms of Dharma or ideas (*dhammādhiṣṭhāna*) (PmA 449). The Abhidharma uses mainly ultimate language, that is, in terms of ideas.⁵⁴

In modern terms, the person-based approach and the idea-based approach to teaching and communication are found in the concepts of *mythos* (tale) and *logos* (word) respectively [1:1]. *Mythos* or the story is the presentation of ideas on the level of human emotion, that is, the application of personal feelings and imageries. *Logos* or the word is the presentation of ideas on the level of human language, that is, the application of logic and reasoning.

(b) Conventional language

The conventional or “people” language is used, for example, in the Alagaddûpama Sutta (M no. 22, that contains the parables of the water snake and of the raft) and the Dāru-k,khandha Sutta (S 4:179 f, the parable of the floating log). Examples of post-canonical collections of “people”-oriented teachings are the well-known Jataka stories, and the legends of the Peta Vatthu (Stories of the Departed) and the Vimāna Vatthu (Stories of the Heavenly Mansions).

The Dārukkhandha Sutta (The Discourse of the Floating Log)

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Kosambī on the bank of the river Ganges. The Blessed One saw a great log being carried along by the current of the river Ganges, and he pointed it out to the monks.

“If, monks, that log does not veer towards the near shore, does not veer towards the far shore, does not sink in mid-stream, does not get cast up on high ground, does not get caught by human beings, does not get caught by nonhuman beings, does not get caught in a whirlpool, and does not become inwardly rotten, it will slant, slope and incline towards the ocean. Why? Because the current of the river Ganges slants, slopes and inclines towards the ocean.

“So too, monks, if you do not veer...you will slant, slope and incline towards Nirvana. Why? Because Right View slants, slopes and inclines towards Nirvana.”

When this was said, a certain monk asked the Blessed One: “What, venerable sir, is the near shore...the far shore...sinking in mid-stream...getting cast up on high ground...getting caught by human beings...getting caught by nonhuman beings...getting caught in a whirlpool...inward rottenness?”

The near shore = the 6 internal sense bases.

⁵⁴ On the two levels of language, see for example Buddhadasa’s *Two Kinds of Languages*, Bangkok, 1974.

3. Why Buddhists worship trees

The far shore	=	the 6 external sense bases.
Sinking in mid-stream	=	harbouring delight and lust.
Getting cast up on high ground	=	harbouring the conceit "I am."
Getting caught by human beings	=	associating with the joys and sorrows of lay life. ⁵⁵
Getting caught by nonhumans	=	living the holy life with the hope to gaining heavenly rebirth.
Getting caught in a whirlpool	=	enjoying the five cords of sensual pleasure (of the 5 physical senses).
Inward rottenness	=	false claims to living the holy life.

Now at that time, Nanda the cowherd was standing near the Blessed One. He then said to the Blessed One: "venerable sir, I will not veer towards the near shore, I will not veer towards the far shore, I will not sink in mid-stream, I will not get cast up on high ground, I will not get caught by human beings, I will not get caught by nonhuman beings, I will not get caught in a whirlpool, and I will not become inwardly rotten. May I receive the going-forth under the Blessed One, may I receive the ordination?"

In that case, Nanda, return the cows to their owners."

"The cows will go back on their own accord, venerable sir, out of attachment to the calves."

"Return the cows to the owners, Nanda."

The Nanda the cowherd returned the cows...and was ordained. And soon, not long after his ordination, dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, ardent and resolute, attained to that supreme goal of the Holy Life, for the sake of which those of the families rightly go forth home into homelessness. He knew by his own knowledge: "Birth is destroyed; lived is the Holy Life; done is what had to be done; there is no more for this state of being." And the Venerable Nanda became of the arhats.

(S 4:1769 ff. abridged)

(c) Ultimate language

Traditional examples of the use of ultimate or Dharma language--or *logos*--are found, for example, in the exposition of the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path in the First Discourse, or in the verse spoken by Aśvajit to Śāriputra the first time they met. Often enough the Buddha would follow up with analogies and illustrations what he has expressed in the Dharma language (eg Assu Sutta, S 2:180).

The Assu Sutta (The Discourse on Tears)

At Sāvatti. "Monks, this cycle of life and rebirth (*saṃsāra*) is without a discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. What do you think, monks, which is more: the stream of tears that you have shed as you roamed and wandered in through this long course, weeping and wailing from being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable--this or the waters in the four great oceans?"

"As we understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, venerable sir, the stream of tears we have shed as we roam and wander in through this long course, weeping and wailing from being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable--this alone is more than the waters in the four great oceans."

"Good, good, monks! It is good that you understand the Dharma taught by me in such a way. This stream of tears...is more than the waters in the four great oceans. For a long, monks, you have experienced the death of a mother,...the death of a father,...the death of a brother,...the death of a sister,...the death of a son,...the death of a daughter,...the loss of relatives,...the loss of wealth,...loss through illness; as you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the four great oceans.

"For what reason? Because, monks, this cycle of life and rebirth is without a discoverable beginning.... It is enough to experience revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them." (S 2:180)

⁵⁵ Also at S 3:11.

The experiential part of the Discourse on Tears (“weeping and wailing...”) is in the ultimate language because the truth reference is a direct one, that is, the discourse relates personal experience. The imagery portion (“the four great oceans...,” “death of a mother...”) uses conventional language of the world.

3. CONCEPTUAL LANGUAGE

Even the ultimate or Dharma language, however, is at best “conceptual” to the uninitiated or unenlightened, especially the intellectually-inclined. Indeed, when the Buddha teaches using Dharma language, it *sounds* the same to all his listeners but it *means* different a thing to each of them (due to “mental diffuseness,” *prapañca/papañca*)! There is the remarkable example of the weaver’s daughter of Ālāvī (DhA 3:170 ff) who, when the Buddha gazed at her, intuitively knew that he wanted her to approach him, and the following dialogue (called the Four Questions) ensued before the congregation:

Buddha:	Where do you come from, young girl?	
Girl:	I know not, venerable sir.	
Buddha:	Where are you going?	
Girl:	I know not, venerable sir.	
Buddha:	Do you <u>not</u> know?	
Girl:	I know, venerable sir?	
Buddha:	Do you <u>know</u> ?	
Girl:	I know not, venerable sir.	(DhA 3:172 f)

The four questions respectively mean:

“Where were you before you were reborn here?”
“Where will you be reborn?”
“Do you know that you will surely die?”
“When will you die?”

No one in the crowd who “listened” to the Buddha only conceptually understood his words—but the weaver’s daughter understood him intuitively, answered the questions correctly and gained the Eye of Wisdom (*prajñā, cakṣu/paññā, cakkhu*) that sees things on the ultimate (*paramārtha/param’attha*) level.

4. INTENTIONAL LANGUAGE

The Tibetan tradition has preserved for us the lives, legends, songs (*doha*) and teachings of at least 84 Siddhās (grub-thob, “accomplished ones”) who are renowned for their psychic abilities. Their remarkable teachings and songs were written in a special language that is known in India as *sandha, bhāṣā* (Tib. dgongs-pa; “intentional language”) or *saṃdhyā, bhāṣā* (lit. “twilight language”).

The intentional language is neither symbolic in the conventional sense (for then even a non-Buddhist intellectual could “translate” it) nor is it ultimate (insofar as it has been written down and therefore subject to mere intellectual interpretation). It is a “third” language, a *tertium quid*, between the conventional expression and the ultimate understanding of the Dharma.

The intentional or “twilight” language is not only a protection against the profanation of the sacred through intellectual curiosity and professionalism, and misuse of yogic methods and psychic forces by the ignorant and the uninitiated, but has its origin mainly in the fact that everyday language is incapable of expressing the highest experiences of the spirit (which could at best be hinted at through similes and paradoxes) (Govinda 1960:53, 102).

In the intentional language of the Siddhas, experiences of meditation are transformed into external events, inner attainments into visible miracles and similes into quasi-historical events. If, for example, a certain Siddha is said to have stopped the sun and the moon in their courses, or that they have crossed the Ganges by stopping its flow, then it has nothing to do with the heavenly bodies or the Indian river, but with the unification, sublimation and liberation of “solar” and “lunar” currents of psychic energy in the Buddhist yogi’s body. (Govinda ibid)

5. EXPRESSING THE INEXPRESSIBLE

Intentional language is a new language in the sense that new or special senses are conveyed by the words and expressions used. They may or may not make logical sense to the uninitiated and as such easily misconstrued by them. Intentional language is a “shock” language in the sense that it aims at knocking us

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out of our conventional way of thinking and understanding to look beyond words and sounds, to read between the lines and beyond the confines of conventional language.

A number of verses of the Dhammapada illustrate the Buddha's use of intentional language. Two remarkable examples are:

Having slain mother and father,
And the two kshatriya kings;
Having destroyed the country with its tax collector—
Ungrieving goes the brahman! (Dh 294)

Having slain mother and father,
And the two brahmin kings;
Having destroyed the tiger as the fifth—
Ungrieving goes the brahman! (Dh 295)

Here the “mother” represents craving while the “father” conceit.⁵⁶ The two “kshatriya kings” and “brahmin kings” each symbolizes the extreme views of eternalism and of nihilism. The “country” is an analogy for the sense-organs and sense-objects; its “tax-collector,” attachment and lust. The “tiger” represents the five mental hindrances, and the “brahman” is the arhat.

Another famous example of intentional language (this time in graphic form) is found in the episode of 7-year-old Prince Siddhārtha during the Ploughing Festival when he meditated under a jambu tree. It is said that the shadow of the jambu tree did not move away from him even though it was well past midday! This illustrates the transcendence of time during meditation. Similarly, in Tibetan sacred art, the sun and the moon are often depicted together to represent the timelessness of the Dharma.

6. MEETING OF TWO LANGUAGES

Both the terms *sandha* and *saṃdhyā* have to do with “intimate union” or “holding together.” The latter term is of special interest, for it also means “union, junction, juncture, especially that of day and night, morning or evening, twilight” (Monier-Williams, SED). The intentional or twilight language represents a meeting of the “daylight” language of conventional perception and the “night” language of ultimate reality.

The day represents what is easily seen and evident for all those who care to see. In the night, special care and guidance are needed—not to mention a special kind of sight is needed so that one does not stumble or shrink back with fear because of the dark. The night is also a time of peace and regeneration.

The three watches of the night [15] have been used by the Buddha as an analogy for the three stages of life (Dh 157). The wise one is “wide awake amongst the slumbering” (Dh 29). The hidden language of the “night” (symbolism and mythology) is linked to the daylight language of words and conventions by the “twilight” of intentional language.

If any of the world religions is deprived of its mythology—symbolism, analogies, myths and intentional language—it would cease to be a spiritual system or even a religion. It would degenerate into a cold mass of meaningless dogmas, rules and rituals that has to be enforced only through “faith” and the spiritless word, and not through direct knowledge and compassion. Furthermore, most people would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to look directly into the Eye of Truth when they still have some dust in their own eye!

7. POSITION OF MĀRA

I mentioned something about the “darkest shadow” at the start of this chapter. Who or what is this darkest shadow? Like the Devil in Western religious thought, Māra stands as the lone figure that dominates the Buddhist doctrine of evil. Māra is regarded as the arch-enemy of those in quest of personal growth and spiritual development. Though some traits of Māra parallel the yaksha myth, he is not mentioned in pre-Buddhist traditions. Māra is, in other words, uniquely a Buddhist conception.

Unlike the demons (*piśāca*, *yakṣa*, *rakṣaṣa*, *asura*, and *nāga*) that are a peripheral feature of the Scriptures, Māra is at the very core of the Buddhist mythology of evil from the earliest times (eg the Padhāna Sutta of the Sutta Nipāta) to the Commentarial period. His importance is attested by the stock

⁵⁶ The Buddha's use of mother-father imagery here rings a modern note echoed in modern psychology, eg Erich Fromm. *The Forgotten Language*. NY: Grove Press, 1951.

phrase: “this world, with its devas, Māra and Brahmas, recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans” (eg M 3:60; Sn 4:24).

This important stock phrase implies a distinction between the Bodhisattva’s inability before awakening and the Buddha’s ability after the Awakening, to discern intrinsic features of the cosmos:

So long, monks, as I did not directly know as they really are the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of these four elements⁵⁷, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect awakening in *this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmas, recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans*. But when I directly know all this as it really is, then I claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect awakening in this world with...its devas and humans.

(S 1:170)

It is for this reason that the Buddha is described as “world-knower” (*loka, vidū*), and after him, the arhats, too. As such, only those who are enlightened can truly see that, among the realities of the universe, there is that which is called Māra.

In his study of *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*, T.O. Ling observes that from the extent of the discourses mentioned alone, “it is clear that the Pali Canon is by no means lacking in mythology; even though it may not be so elaborate in its detail as that of the Mahāyāna” (1962:43 f). He agrees with E. Windisch who himself says that “I agree with Senart in believing that the mythological belongs to the essence of Buddhism, and cannot be separated from it. For, even if the historical Buddha was simple an ordinary human being there has probably never been a Buddhism completely devoid of mythology.” (1895:182)

Māra and yaksha

The Māra mythology runs closely with the popular yaksha mythology. The yaksha (yakṣa/yakkha) belongs to a class of Indian nature spirits generally benevolent towards human beings. They are among the earliest of deities to be depicted in religious art where they usually appear as colossal in size, slightly pot-bellied and taut with physical energy. His female counterpart, the *yakṣī* or *yakṣiṇī* (*yakkhiṇī*), often appear as nude or semi-nude fertility figures decked in jewelry.

In later Buddhist literature, they were degraded to the figure of fierce red-eyed ogres of both sexes who ate flesh and blood, and devoured corpses and even human beings. Māra is sometimes referred to in the Pali texts as a yaksha (eg M 1:338, S 2:122, Sn 449; cf. V 1:21 f). The Mahāvastu calls him the “great yaksha” (Mvst 2:260, 261). T.O. Ling has made a comprehensive comparison between Māra and the yaksha (1962:45).

8. SOURCES ON MĀRA

The main canonical sources of the Māra mythology are the Padhāna Sutta (Sn no. 28), the Māra Saṃyutta, the Bhikkhuṇī Saṃyutta, the Māra Tajjaniya Sutta (M no. 50), the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D no. 16), and the Mahavagga of the Vinaya. In all these sources, Māra appears to the unenlightened as an archetypal image of primordial evil, that is, a personification of the dark side of the Unconscious or the Shadow (to borrow a Jungian term). In the case of the Buddha and the arhats, it is Māra the deity himself who appears. [12b]

Māra appears in many discourses, such as the Mahā Samaya Sutta (where he is called Namuci) (D no. 20), the Brahma, nimantanika Sutta (where, unlike the Brahma Sahampati, he discourages the Buddha to teach) (M no. 49), and the Nānā, titthiyā Sutta (where, as Namuci, he advocates self-mortification and heavenly rebirth) (S 1:165 ff). In such texts, Māra appears in connection with divine beings, or in “a supramundane context,” to borrow Ling’s term.

Māra in the Nikāyas

Māra is sometimes used in the Nikāyas as a didactic tool representing a quality to be avoided. In the Parable of the Deer in the Dvedhā Vitakka Sutta, Māra represents those not desiring their own good (M 1:118). In the Cula Gopālaka Sutta, the Buddha claims that he knows what is or is not Māra’s realm

⁵⁷ The four elements: earth, water, heat, air, Vism 364-70 = Vism:Ñ11:85-117.

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which the Commentary says extends over the whole threefold sentient universe: the sense-world, the form world and the formless world (MA 2:266; SnA 2:506; cf. A 4:228).

The *Kāya,gatā,sati* Sutta says that Māra gains easy access to one in whom Mindfulness of the Body has not been developed (M 3:95). In the *Mahā Suññatā* Sutta, the Buddha declares that the reflection of inward emptiness (“as though alone even though sitting in a crowd,” MA 4:160) and checking one’s mind against any unwholesome state will put one beyond the range of Māra (M no 122).

In the Parable of the Crops in the *Nivapa* Sutta, Māra is the sower of crops (the five types of sensual pleasures) (M 1:155). In a similar parable, that of the Deer, in the *Ariya,pariyesanā* Sutta, Māra is a deer trapper (M 1:173 f). In both these places, Māra is blinded and kept away by one attaining to any of the 8 levels of mental absorption (*dhyāna/jhāna*), which “cast darkness around Māra.” [13]

A detailed analysis of Māra as he appears in the other sections of the *Nikāyas* has been done by Ling (1962: Appendix).

9. MĀRA THE DISTRACTOR

Māra is often represented in the Scriptures as using every way and wile to prevent the knowledge of Awakening from being transmitted to others. Soon after the first Rains Retreat, Māra appears before the Buddha and discourages him from teaching the monks regarding the highest liberation (V 1:22). In the Commentaries, Māra (known there as *Vasavatti*) is said to have tried to prevent the Bodhisattva’s renunciation by promising him universal sovereignty in seven days (J 1:63).

The *Māra Saṃyutta* contains many episodes describing how Māra tries to tempt the Buddha by attacking him with doubts of his Awakening; with feelings of fear and dread; appearing before him in various forms and disguises (as an elephant, cobra, etc.); making the rocks of Vulture Peak crash down; making him wonder if he should ever sleep; suggesting that there is no haste to live the Holy Life as human life is long; and by dulling the intelligence of his audience (S 1:103 ff).

The *Piṇḍa* Sutta speaks of an incident where Māra influences the whole village of *Pañca,sālā* in *magadha* not to offer alms to the Buddha who returns with an empty bowl and has to starve. Then, Māra tries to get the Buddha to go a second time, but he refuses (S 1:113; DhA 3:257 ff). Māra repeats this evil feat at *Verañjā* (V 3:1 ff.) [7:20a]. The *Vinaya* records that Ānanda does not respond to the Buddha’s broad hint whether he should remain for the rest of the cycle (*kalpa/kappa*) because Ānanda’s “mind was possessed by Māra” (*mārena pariyuṭṭhita,citto*) (V 2:288).

10. MASTER OF DISGUISES

Māra could assume any shape he wishes, even that of the Buddha himself. In fact, Māra appears in the form of the Buddha to the monk *Upagupta* who is eager to see the Buddha’s person (Divy 356-364). A similar story is related in the Pali texts of the layman *Sura Ambaṭṭha* but there Māra tries to confuse him by giving a contrary statement to what the Buddha has earlier taught (DA 864; AA 1:215).

In the *Nānā,titthiyā* Sutta, the deva *Veṭambarī* spoke against asceticism, but Māra stealing up to him, makes him say another verse contradicting the first (S 1:66). Once when the Buddha is teaching, Māra disguised as a peasant interrupts the discourse to ask if anyone has seen his oxen (S 1:114). When the Buddha was speaking with *Dhaniya* the herdsman, Māra subtly adds a sly remark to mislead both *Dhaniya* and his wife (SnA 44; cf. J 1: 231 f).

Once Māra entered *Maudgalyāyana*’s belly and caused him some discomfort. *Maudgalyāyana* recognized the fiend and declared that he was himself formerly a Māra called *Dūsī* and that the present Māra was the son of his erstwhile sister *Kālī* (M 1:333 ff). Only the Buddha and the enlightened ones can know of Māra’s presence and can see through all of his guiles and disguises (S 1:103-128 = *Māra Saṃyutta*, eg 1.5, 9, 10, 2.2, 4 etc.).

Māra often tries to frighten the monks and nuns who are intent on their training. Once in the village of *Sīlavaṭī*, Māra appears in the guise of a venerable aged brahmin and told some monks, bent on their study not to abandon the things of this life. He even influences the monk *Godhika* to commit suicide after which he appears in the form of a dark cloud looking for the monk’s consciousness (SA 1:145).

11. NAMES OF MĀRA

The word *māra* is derived from the root √MR, “to die” (cf. Latin *mors*, death). He is so called because he brings death (*mareti*) to those who try to get away from his power (DA 689). As a bringer of

death, he is also called Antaka (“end-maker,” eg V 1:21; S 1:72). Māra’s standing epithet is “the Evil One” (*pāpimā*, eg S 1:103 ff; Nm 439; DhA 4:71).

He is known as Vasavatti or Adhipati (Nm189, 489; Nc 227, 507) because he has power over all (*sabbesaṃ upari vasaṃ vattati*; SA 1:158). All those who are heedless come under his power as he is their kinsman (*pamatta, bandhu*; S 2:123, 128; Sn 430; cf. Dh 21).

He is called Namuci (originally the name of an *aśura* in the Rig Veda) because he does not release (*na muñcati*) his victims (SnA 386; Nm 455). In the Mahāsamaya Sutta, Namuci is mentioned as one of the asuras present in the assembly (D 2:259).

Another Pali name for Māra is Kaṇha (the “Dark One”; D 2:262, M 1: 377, Sn 355, Tha 1189) which is an ancient synonym for *pisāca* (“goblin,” D 1:93). The Sanskrit equivalent of Kaṇha is Krishna (*kṛṣṇa*) who appears in the Bhagavad Gītā where he justifies war and encourages Arjuna to kill his enemies. Though it is anachronistic to compare Māra with Krishna (for the latter is a later arrival), there are some interesting parallels between them on a doctrinal level. [Cf. Nyanamoli, 1972:19 n 3]

In the Lalita, vistara, Māra is the god of desire and lust (*kāmādhīpati*, Lalv 130.8). Āśvaghoṣa (Buddha Carita 13:2) and Kṣemendra (Bodhisattvāvadāna Kalpalatā ii, 583.61) identify him with Kāma-deva (Cupid). The Divyāvadāna says that after the meeting between Māra and Upagupta, they parted good friends; it is even said that Māra was converted (Divy 357, 361, 363). But then again he could have just pretended (Perfection of Wisdom in 100,000 Lines, 1186).

12. TYPES OF MĀRA

(a) Māra’s Army

Māra’s army (*māra, sena*) is said to comprise ten evil forces: Sensual Pleasures, Aversion, Hunger and Thirst, Craving, Sloth and Torpor, Fear, Spiritual Doubt, Hypocrisy, and Obstinacy (Sn 436). This is a kind of provisional list mentioned, not by the Buddha, but by the Bodhisattva. He also has a host of terrible demons like those who attacked the Bodhisattva under the Bodhi tree.

Māra is said to have three daughters: Tṛṣṇā/Taṇhā (Craving), Arati (Aversion) and Rāga (Passion) [17] to tempt the Buddha when everything else fails (Sn 835). The three, however, are said to be allegorical. In the Perfection of Wisdom in 100,000 Lines (71), Avadāna Śataka (i, 215.7) and the Śikṣā, samuccaya (244.4), Māra is said to be the leader of the Māra, kāyika devas (cf. Kv 164 f; DhA 3:102). All of them, however, are powerless against the Buddha and the enlightened ones.

(b) Number of Māras

The Commentaries often mention four kinds of Māra (KhA 155; SnA 201; ItA 136): Skandha Māra (*khandha*, the Aggregates; S 3:195), Kleśa Māra (*kilesa*, defilements; DhA 1:289), Abhisamāskāra Māra (*abhisamākhāra*, karmic accumulation; UdA 216) and Devaputra Māra (the deity; A 2:17; SnA 44).

The four Māras mentioned in the Mahāyāna texts (Mvst 3:281, Lalv 354.11, 224.8, Daśa, bhūmika Sutta 54.17, Karuṇā Puṇḍarīka 127.7, Śikṣā, samuccaya 198.10 and Dharma Saṅgraha sect 80) have, in place of Abhisamāskāra, Mṛtyu Māra (*maccu, māra*, Death personified; A 4:228; SnA 44) who is often mentioned alone (eg S 1:156; Sn 357, 587; Dh 21, 47 etc).

All these five Māras are also listed together by the Commentators (Vism 211; UA 216; ThaA 2:16, 46). They are, however, a later scholastic schematization of the “dark forces” that hinder one’s spiritual progress.

13. HOW MĀRA IS DEFEATED

Although Māra often appears to the Buddha and his disciples, trying to distract them from their spiritual practice or simply as a transcendental nuisance, there are only two cases of actual confrontations between the Buddha and Māra. These confrontations are recorded in the Padhāna Sutta and the Mahā Saccaka Sutta.

In the Padhāna Sutta (Sn no. 28), Māra pursues the Bodhisattva for seven years like a dark hungry crow hovering “around a stone that looks like a piece of fat” (Sn 447 f.) but fails to discourage him [2:20]. The Mahā Saccaka Sutta contains an account of the events in the night of the awakening at Uruvilvā. Here the conflict is not described in mythological terms, but in the abstract terms of Buddhist doctrine.

After the declaration of each of the three knowledges (of the recollection of past lives, of the karma of beings, and of the cessation of defilements), the Buddha repeats the refrain:

3. Why Buddhists worship trees

Ignorance was dispelled, true knowledge arose. Darkness was dispelled, light arose. So it is with him who abides vigilant, strenuous and resolute. (M 1:248-249)

Ling suggests that alongside this refrain may be placed the Buddha's words in which he is represented (in the Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta) as telling the monks that only by great effort could Māra be overcome: "I consider no power, O monks, so hard to subdue as the power of Māra" (D 3:77).

In his first words after the Awakening, the Buddha declares that he has "seen" (*dīṭṭho'si*) (Dh 154; Tha 184) the House-maker which can be taken as a reference to Māra who is usually exposed with Right View or spiritual vision (cf. A 2:17).

On separate occasions, Māra appears to various nuns [9:10ab, 11], and tries to confuse them with speculative questions, such as those about man's creator but the nuns (*Śāilā/Selā* and *Vajrā/Vajirā*) respond with the right answers and Māra leaves disappointed with the words "The nun...knows me!" Māra is defeated with knowledge: "Fight Māra with the weapon of wisdom" (Dh 40).

The practice of meditation, especially the four Stations of Mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna/satipaṭṭhāna*) keeps Māra at bay (S 5:146). Although Māra rules over all the universe, the mind concentrated in any of the eight absorptions "cast darkness around Māra" (A 4:432). [8]

The Buddha is sometimes known as *Mārâbhibhū*, the Overcomer of Māra (Sn 545 = 571).

Symbolic adaptation

Legends of demons and discarnate beings have always fascinated the masses. Through the Māra myth, the Buddha "converts" the indigenous demon beliefs into a skilful means for personal development. The Māra myth concretizes the dark elusive spectres of the human Unconscious and resolves the problem of evil, not by just giving them a name, but also understanding that Māra underlies all of life itself—as defined in the first Noble Truth.

The figure of Māra is not a mere poetic fancy, for it points to real human problems—of pain, disease, decay and death. Māra stands for all that Nirvana is not. Māra, like the Buddha, of which he is the anti-thesis, is not a permanent figure; for he, too, dies and is reborn. Like Maudgalyāyana (who was Dūsī in a past life), Māra, too, has a chance to become an arhat, of becoming enlightened like the Buddha.

14. WHO IS A BUDDHA?

The conception of Buddhahood is best understood in terms of evolution, that is, to say, spiritual evolution [2:6]. This is the gradual process of self-perfection through conscious interaction with the outside world and the internal focus of one's spiritual energies. The Buddha, in other words, is the highest evolved being within our world system over a significantly long period of time, usually a world-cycle.

The Buddha is complete with noble qualities, just as with the coronation or enthronement of a king, he is conferred sovereignty over the whole nation (MA 1:54 f.). The Puggala,paññatti describes the Supreme Buddha as follows:

Now in things never heard before, one understands by oneself the truth, and one therein attains omniscience, and gains mastery in the spiritual powers. Such a one is called a Perfect Self-enlightened Buddha. (Pug 29)

The attainment of Buddhahood or awakening is explained in the Pali texts as the realization of the truth of dependent arising (*pratītya,samutpāda/paṭicca,samuppāda*) (V 1:4-5; M 1:167) and as the attainment of Nirvana (M 1:167). The doctrine characteristic of the Buddhas and each time rediscovered by them and fully explained by them to the world consists in the four noble truths.

THE 7 WEEKS AFTER AWAKENING

15. THE FIRST WEEK

After his awakening, the Buddha fasted for 49 days. During the first week, he spent all his time meditating in the lotus posture (*padm'āsana*) under the Bodhi tree, experiencing the bliss of Release (*vimutti,sukha*), i.e. Nirvana. At the end of the week, the Buddha reflected on the law of dependent arising. During the first watch of the night (6-10 pm), he reflected on this law in direct order, thus:

When this (cause) exists, this (effect) is;
With the arising of this (cause), this (effect) arises.

In the middle watch of the night (10 pm-2 am), he reflected on the same law in reverse order, thus:

When this (cause) does not exist, this (effect) is not;
With the stopping of this (cause), this (effect) stops.

In the third and last watch of the night (2-6 am), he reflected the same law in direct and reverse order, thus:

When this (cause) exists, this (effect) is;
With the arising of this (cause), this (effect) arises.
When this (cause) does not exist, this (effect) is not;
With the stopping of this (cause), this (effect) stops.

16. THE SECOND, THIRD AND FOURTH WEEKS

During the 2nd week after his awakening, the Buddha gazed at the Bodhi tree with the motionless eye as a mark of gratitude to it for having sheltered him during his struggle for awakening. The emperor Aśoka was said to have built the “Shrine of the Unblinking Eye” (*animisa, cetiya*) to mark the sacred spot (UA 52; MA 2:184; J 1:77).

During the 3rd week, he mindfully paced up and down on the “jewelled promenade” (*ratana caṅka-maṇa*) near the Bodhi tree. The Buddha had made this promenade using his psychic power to convince some skeptical devas that he had actually attained Awakening.

During the 4th week, the Buddha sat meditating on the Abhidharma (Higher Doctrine)⁵⁸ in the “jewelled chamber” (*ratana, ghara*). His mind and body were so pure that he radiated the Buddha aura or rays of the five colours, namely, blue, yellow, red, white, orange, and pure radiance (*pabhassara*). Blue stands for confidence, yellow for holiness, red for wisdom, white for purity, orange for detachment, and the pure radiance represents all these noble qualities. From then on, the Buddha radiated these colours whenever he desired to. These colours are incorporated into the international Buddhist flag officially adopted at the meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Colombo, Śrī Lanka, in 1950.

17. THE FIFTH WEEK

From the narrative point of view, the 5th week after the Great Awakening was a very turbulent one. The Buddha spent this period in meditation under the Goatherd Banyan tree (*āja, pāla nigrodha*). According to the Saṃyutta Nikāya, Māra appears to the Buddha and invites him to pass away. When Māra fails in his effort, his three daughters, then tries six times to tempt the Buddha (S 4.25/1:124 f; cf A 5:46, J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f). At the end of the week, a conceited brahmin approached the Buddha.

(a) The Satta, vassāni Sutta

The Satta, vassāni Sutta (the Discourse on the Seven Years) (S 4.24) of the Māra Saṃyutta tells us that during 5th week after the Awakening, Māra the Evil One appears to the Buddha who is sitting under the Goatherd Banyan Tree, and fervently persuaded the Buddha to pass into final Nirvana soon after the attainment of the Awakening, since his search for the truth has been accomplished, asking him for what purpose would he want to teach the Dharma to others. In this case, the Buddha is reminded of the futility of teaching the Dharma.

[Māra:] Is it because you are sunk in sorrow
That you meditate in the woods?
Because you have lost wealth or pine for it?
Or committed some crime in the village?
Why don't you make friends with people?

⁵⁸ **Abhidharma.** Traditionally, it is said that the Buddha here reflected on the Paṭṭhāna, the 7th and last book of the Abhidhamma. The Paṭṭhāna is a book of “causation,” dealing with the 24 *paccayā* or modes of relations between mental and material states. While the other Abhidhamma texts take the analytical approach, this is the only Abhidhamma text that takes the synthetical approach. It is also important to note that what the Buddha is meditating on here in the method of Abhidhamma, not the Seven Texts, which were compiled very much later (between the 2nd and 3rd Councils). [Chapters 4 & 6.]

3. Why Buddhists worship trees

Why don't you form any intimate tie?⁵⁹

[Buddha:] Having dug up entirely the root of sorrow,
Guiltless, I meditate free from sorrow.
Having cut off all greedy urge for existence,
I meditate taintless, O kinsman of the heedless!

[Māra:] That of which they say, "It's mine,"
And those who speak in terms of "mine"—
If your mind exists among these,
You won't escape me, ascetic!

[Buddha:] That which they speak of is not mine,
I'm not one of those who speak so.
You should know thus, O evil one:
Even my path you will not see.

[Māra:] If you have discovered the path,
The secure way leading to the Deathless,
Be off and walk that path alone;
What's the point of instructing others?

[Buddha:] Those people going to the far shore
Ask what lies beyond Death's realm.
When asked, I explain to them
The truth free from basis for rebirth (*yaṃ saccaṃ taṃ nīrūpadhiṃ*).

The Buddha then declares to Māra that he will not pass away until the fourfold community (*catvāri pariṣad/cattāro pariṣā*)—monk disciples, nun disciples, layman disciples and laywoman disciples—who are “accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, well-versed in Dharma, trained in accordance to the Dharma, correctly trained and walking the path of the Dharma, who will pass on what they have gained from their own teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyze it, make it clear: until they shall be able by means of the Dharma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma accompanied by wonders (*sapṛātihārya dharma/sappāṭihāriya dhamma*) (D 2:112/16.3.34 f) [10:9a].

Māra then admits that he is defeated like a crab whose claws have been removed and crushed by playful children and left stranded on high ground, unable to move or return to its pond. “So, too, venerable sir, all those distortions, manoeuvres, and contortions of mine have been cut off, broken, and smashed to bits by the Blessed One. Now, venerable sir, I am unable to approach the Blessed One again seeking to gain access to him.”

Then Māra makes his famous confession comparing himself to “a crow that walked round a stone that looked like a lump of fat” and finding nothing tasty there, leaves disappointed. (S 1:122-124). [3:17a]

(b) The Māra,dhītā Sutta

The Māra,dhītā Sutta details the Buddha's encounter with Māra's daughters. Māra, having failed to stop the ascetic Siddhārtha from gaining awakening, expressed his disappointment in these verses:

There was a crow that walked around
A stone that looked like a lump of fat.
“Let's find something tender there,” it thought,
“Perhaps there's something nice and tasty.”

But because it found nothing there,
The crow departed from that spot

⁵⁹ This same verse would later be used by Rāgā, Māra's daughter in her attempt to confuse the Buddha [3:17].

Just like the crow that attacked the stone.
Disappointed, we leave Gotama. (S 1:124)

Then Māra went away to a spot not far away from the Buddha. There he sat down cross-legged, “silent, dismayed, his shoulders drooping, hanging his head, downcast and bewildered, scratching the ground with a stick.” Then Māra’s daughters, noticing his indisposition, approached him. Having heard the reason for Māra’s disappointment, the daughters decided to cheer their father up by approaching the Buddha themselves.

Having approached the Buddha, Māra’s daughters suggestively proposed: “We serve at your feet, O ascetic!” The Buddha paid no attention. Then the daughters discussed amongst themselves: “Men’s taste are diverse. Suppose we each manifest ourselves in the form of a hundred young women.”

Six times Māra’s daughters appeared each time in the form of a hundred women before the Buddha. The first time, as a hundred young maidens, they approached and made the same proposal again. The Buddha paid no attention. Again they met and discussed a new strategy.

The second time, they appeared as a hundred young women who have not yet given birth. Again they failed.

The third time, they appeared as a hundred women who have given birth once...

The fourth time, they appeared as a hundred women who have given birth twice...

The fifth time, they appeared as a hundred women of middle age...

The sixth and final time, they appeared as a hundred old women, proposing to the Buddha: “We serve at your feet, O ascetic!” The Buddha paid no attention to them each time.

Since the direct approach did not work, they then decided a more subtle approach. This time, each of the daughters approached the Buddha with a question:

Trṣṇā asked the Buddha [the Kumāri,pañha, the maiden’s question].⁶⁰

Is it because you are sunk in sorrow
That you meditate in the woods?
Because you have lost wealth or pine for it?
Or committed some crime in the village?
Why don’t you make friends with people?
Why don’t you form any intimate tie?

The Blessed One:

Having conquered the army of the pleasant and agreeable,
Meditating alone, I discovered happiness,
The attainment of the goal, the peace of the heart.
Therefore I don’t fraternize with people (*janena na karomi sakkhin*),
Nor do I fall into any intimacy (*sakkhī na sampajjati kenaci me*).

Then Aratī addressed the Blessed One in verse:

How does a monk here often dwell
That, five floods crossed, he has crossed the sixth?
How does he meditate so sensual perceptions
Are kept at bay and fail to grip him?

The Blessed One:

Tranquil in body, in mind well liberated,
Not generating (new karma), mindful, homeless,

⁶⁰ In the Kālī Sutta, Mahā Katyāyana gives a commentary on this Kumāri,pañha, where he mentions various *kaśiṇa* (device) meditation methods, saying that the Buddha had successfully used the “consciousness device” (*viññāṇa kaśiṇa*). (A 5:46).

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Knowing Dharma, meditating thought-free,
He does not erupt (with anger), nor drift (with lust), nor stiffen (with delusion).

When a monk here often dwells thus,
The five floods⁶¹ crossed, he here has crossed the sixth.
When he meditates thus, sensual perceptions
Are kept at bay and fail to grip him.

Then Rāga addressed the Blessed One in verse:

He has cut off craving, faring with his group and order;
Surely many other beings will cross (*tarissanti*) (to liberation).
Alas, this homeless one will snatch many people,
And lead them away beyond the King of Death.

The Blessed One:

Truly the Tathāgatas, the great heroes,
Lead by means of the true Dharma,
When they are leading by means of the Dharma,
What envy can there be in those who understand? (S 1:127 f.)⁶²

In this episode, the daughters of Māra are evidently the deities personifying three of the ten forces of Māra's army [6].

(c) The conceited brahmin

At the end of the seven days, a conceited (*huhuika*) brahmin came and asked him who is a brahmin. The Buddha answered, saying:

The brahmin who is free from evil things,
Not conceited, pure and self-controlled,
Perfect in knowledge, and living the Holy Life
Can rightly call himself a "brahmin"
If he is proud of nothing in the world.

From this statement and other similar words, we can see that the Buddha is against the caste system. To him, one does not become a brahmin or a high class person because of birth. Whether one is a "high class" or a "low class" person depends on one's own actions: one who does good is a brahmin, one who does evil is not.

In the Buddha declares to Āgneya/Aggika Bhāradvāja that "actions make the man," not birth or status:

Not by birth is one an outcaste,
Not by birth is one a brahman;
By one's deeds, one is an outcaste,
By one's deeds, one is a brahman. (Sn 142)

⁶¹ Comy. *The five floods crossed* (*pañcôgha,tiṇṇo*): one who has crossed the flood of defilements in the five sense-doors. *The sixth*: he has crossed the 6th flood of defilements, that pertaining to the mind door. Or alternatively: by the mention of five floods: the 5 lower fetters are meant; by the 6th, the five higher fetters.

Tranquil in body (*passaddhi,kāyo*): this comes about with the tranquillizing of the in-and-out breathing in the 4th absorption (see A 2:41). *In mind well liberated* (*suvimutta,citto*): well liberated by the liberation of the fruit of arhatship. *Not generating* (*asaṅkhārāno*): not generating the 3 types of volitional formations (in the sense, form, and formless worlds). *Meditating thought-free* in the 4th absorption. *He does not erupt* (*na kuppati*) because of hate, *nor drift* (*na sarati*) because of lust, *nor stiffen* (*na thīno*) because of delusion. Or alternatively: by the first term the hindrance of illwill is intended; by the second, the hindrance of sensual desire; by the third, the remaining hindrances.

⁶² This verse occurs at V 1:43 in a different context, that is, in connection with Saṅjayin, the erstwhile teacher of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana.

18. THE SIXTH WEEK

During the 6th week, the Buddha stayed under the Mucalinda tree (*Barringtonia acutangula*), enjoying the bliss of Nirvana. A sudden storm with torrential rain and violent winds raged throughout the week. On the onset of the storm, the serpent-king Mucalinda emerged from his underground abode and coiling around the Buddha's body seven times, spread his hood over the Buddha to protect him from the rain, cold, heat, insects, and other discomforts.

At the end of the seventh day, the serpent-king uncoiled himself. Turning himself into a handsome young man, he paid his respects to the Buddha. The Buddha then said these words to him:

Solitude is happiness for one who is contented, who has heard the Dharma, who sees
Happy is goodwill in the world, and restraint towards living beings.

Happy is detachment in the world, having transcended sense desires;
But to be free of the conceit "I am"—that is the greatest happiness of all. (V 1:2)

19. THE FIRST LAY DISCIPLES

During the 7th week, the Buddha meditated under the Rājāyatana tree (*Buchania latifolia*). At the end of the seventh day of the seventh week, he emerged from his meditation, completing 49 days of fasting. At that time, that is, the 8th week, the merchants, Trapuṣa (Tapussa) and his younger brother Bhallika, were travelling by the road from Utkala (Ukkala, modern Orissa).

A certain deity who had been their relative in a former life told them that the newly enlightened Buddha was staying at the foot of the Rājāyatana tree, and that they should go and make some offerings to him for their own welfare and happiness. They took some rice cake and honey to the Buddha.

The Vinaya account relates that when the Buddha had nothing to receive the food with, the Four Guardian Kings brought four crystal bowls from the four quarters and offered them to the Buddha.

After the Buddha had partaken of this meal, the two merchants took the Twofold Refuge (*dve, vācika saraṇa*) (A 1:26). They thus became the first Buddhist disciples (*dve, vācika upāsaka*) by declaring:

We go to the Blessed One and the Dharma for refuge. As from today, let the Blessed One regard us as followers who have gone to him for refuge for as long as life lasts.

They took only the "Twofold Refuge" (*dve, vācika saraṇa, gamana*) because the Sangha or Buddhist Order was not yet founded. The Twofold Refuge was used only in the pre-Sangha days and consisted in taking Refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma.⁶³

As they were simple merchants, the Buddha did not teach any profound doctrine to them, but according to the Lalita, vistara, he recited a blessing bestowing on them wealth and good fortune in the four quarters and under the twenty-eight constellations.

According to the Jātaka Commentary, when they asked the Buddha for an object of veneration, the Buddha gave them a bit of his hair and nails. The merchants then erected stupas over these relics. It is said that the hair relic is still enshrined in the famous Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon, Burma.

Later on, after listening to the Buddha in Rājagṛha, Trapuṣa became a stream-winner and Bhallika joined the Order and became an arhat (V 1:3 f; AA 1:382 ff; ThaA 1:49 ff; J 1:80).

THE BODHI TREE

20. BUDDHAS AND BODHI TREES

(a) The 24 Buddhas

The expression "Bodhi tree" (*bodhi, vṛkṣa/bodhi, rukkha*) is a generic name for the tree under which a Buddha sits and attains awakening (*bodhi*). According to the Nidāna, kathā, the Jātaka Introduction, different Buddhas have different trees of their choice and each of the is described as the Bodhi tree of his

⁶³ The first Threefold Refuge lay-disciple (*te, vācika upāsaka*) was Yaśa's father, and his (Yaśa's) mother together with the rest of the family later became the first female lay-disciples (*te, vācika upāsikā*), Vin 1:15 ff; DhA 1:72; JA 1:80 f.

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dispensation (J 1:29 ff.). This is a list of the 24 Buddhas of the past and their respective Bodhi trees, according to the Buddha.vam̐sa Commentary:

(A) Taṇhāṅkara	<i>sattapaṇṇi</i> (Skt <i>saptapaṇa</i>). The 7-leaved <i>Alstonia scholaris</i> .
(B) Medhāṅkara	<i>palāsa</i> (Vedic <i>palāśa</i>). <i>Buttea frondosa</i> , Judas tree. Popular name: <i>kiṃsuka</i> .
(C) Saraṇāṅkara, 19. Vipassī	<i>pāṭali</i> , <i>Bignonia</i> (or <i>Stereospermum</i>) <i>suaveolens</i> .
1. Dīpaṅkara	<i>pīpphalī</i> (Skt <i>pīpphala</i>). <i>Ficus religiosa</i> ; the holy fig tree; same as <i>assattha</i> (Skt <i>aśvattha</i>).
2. Koṇḍañña	<i>sāla, kalyāṇi</i> , “the auspicious sāla tree”; probably the same as <i>sāla</i> .
3. Maṅgala, 4. Sumana, } 5. Revata, 6. Sobhita } 7. Anomadassī	<i>nāga</i> (Skt <i>nāga, keśara</i>). <i>Mesua ferrea</i> Linn.; the iron-wood tree).
8. Paduma	<i>ajjuna</i> (Skt <i>arjuna</i>). <i>Terminalia</i> (or <i>Pentaptera</i>) <i>arjuna</i> ; same as <i>kakudha</i> (see Piyadassī).
9. Nārada	<i>soṇa</i> or <i>mahāsoṇa</i> (Skt <i>śyona</i>). <i>Oroxylum indicum</i> or <i>Calosanthus indica</i> , Trumpet flower.
10. Padumuttara	<i>mahāsoṇa</i> . See under Paduma. Bv Comy says this is the <i>ratta, soṇa</i> (red trumper flower).
11. Sumedha	<i>salala, salala</i> (Skt <i>sarala</i>) <i>Dipterocarpus indicus</i> , a sweet-scented tree, perhaps a pine, <i>Pinus longifolia</i> . (J 1:37 gives <i>sāla</i> , <i>Shorea robusta</i>).
12. Sujāta	<i>mahānīpa</i> . <i>Anthocephalus cadamba</i> .
13. Piyadassī	<i>mahā, veḷu</i> , “the great bamboo,” probably the elephant bamboo, <i>Dendrocalamus brandisii</i> .
14. Atthadassī	<i>kakudha</i> . <i>Terminalia</i> (or <i>Pentaptera</i>) <i>arjuna</i> . (J 1:39 reads <i>piyaṅgu</i> , Panic seed, <i>Panicum italicum</i>)
15. Dhammadassī	<i>campaka</i> . <i>Michelia champaka</i> , the champak.
16. Siddhattha	<i>bimbi, jāla</i> or <i>ratta, kuravaka</i> , the Red Amaranth tree.
17. Tissa	<i>kaṇikāra</i> . <i>Cochlospermum religiosum</i> or <i>Pterospermum acerifolium</i> .
18. Phussa	<i>asana</i> . <i>Pentaptera</i> or <i>Terminalia tomentosa</i> .
20. Sikhī	<i>āmaṇḍa</i> , Emblic myrobalan, <i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> . (J 1:41 gives <i>āmalaka</i> ; MA 4:147 says they are identical.)
21. Vessabhū	<i>puṇḍarīka</i> , Fragrant or white mango, <i>Mangifera</i> spp. Also called <i>setambha</i> (BvA 247; DA 416).
22. Kakusandha	<i>mahā, sāla</i> , the great sāla tree, <i>Shorea robusta</i> . See under Padumuttara.
23. Koṇāgamana	<i>siṇṇa</i> . <i>Acacia sirissa</i> , <i>Albizia lebbek</i> . J 1:42: <i>mahāsīṇṇa</i> .
24. Kassapa	<i>udumbara</i> . <i>Ficus glomerata</i> , a species of fig tree.
25. Gotama	<i>nigrodha</i> . Banyan tree, <i>Ficus bengalensis</i> or <i>indica</i> .
	<i>assattha</i> (Skt <i>aśvattha</i>). Pipal tree, <i>Ficus religiosa</i> .

The first three Buddhas mentioned here (A-C) are those of the distant past before Dīpaṅkara, under whom Sumedha (our Bodhisattva) first made his resolve and aspiration to become Buddha. Since then 23 other Buddhas have arisen.⁶⁴

At Bhārhut, Cunningham has identified the Bodhi trees of six different Buddhas, namely, Vipāśyi/Vipassī, Viśvabhū/Vessabhū, Krakucchanda/Kakusandha, Kanakamuni/Koṇāgamana, Kāśyapa/Kassapa and Śākyamuni (Cunningham, 1879:101). The pīpal tree, Gautama’s Bodhi tree, has been regared as

⁶⁴ For Gautama Buddha’s past lives under the various Buddhas and other details, see B:H (Chronicle of Buddha) Introd, esp. xlix-lit.

sacred long before his time (see M.S. Randhawa, *The Cult of Trees and Tree Worship in Buddhist-Hindu Sculptures*, Delhi, 1964.)

(b) The pipal tree

Gautama's Bodhi tree is the *Ficus religiosa* or holy fig tree, known as the *aṁvattha* (*assattha*) (V 1:8; M 1:170), that is, the *pipphali/pipphala*, commonly known in India as the pīpal tree. It is a tall semi-deciduous tree belonging to the family Moraceae. It is a *glabrous* tree (having no hairs, i.e. smooth bark, leaves, etc.), growing naturally often as an *epiphyte* (growing on another plant or structure for support but not nutriment).

The leaf is *coriaceous* (tough like leather in texture). The upper surface is shiny and the under-side is *minutely tuberculated* (with a network of tiny swellings) when it is dry. It has a long petiole (leafstalk). The shape of the leaf is *ovate-rotund* (rounded with oval base tapering at the end, that is, heart-shaped) and narrowed upwards. The apex produces a *linear lanceolate* tail (long, narrow and tapering at the end). The edges of the leaf are *entire and undulate* (that is, smoothly unbroken and slightly bending wavelike). The leaves are lustrous when young, and suspended on their long flexible petioles rustle in the slightest breeze.

The colour of its bark is grey and nearly half an inch (12.7 mm) thick. Its wood is grayish-white and moderately hard, having narrow bands of soft tissue that alternate with broader bands of firmer substance. The tree produces deep-purple fig-like berries in axillary pairs (from inside the leafstalks' "armpits"). Its small fig-like fruit is a favourite with birds and bats. Its tiny seeds, spread through bird droppings and guano, can often be seen sprouting on other trees, on walls or on roofs.

The young tree extends aerial roots as it grows and eventually is able to wind its roots around a nearby building or tree, causing the building to collapse or the tree to wither. Under good conditions, the tree may grow to a height of about 100 feet (30.5 m). Both Buddhists and Hindus regard the tree as sacred.

(c) The Bodhi tree in the early Sūtras

The earliest sūtras (eg the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta, M no. 26) that refer to the awakening of Gautama Buddha do not mention the Bodhi tree. The earliest Pali reference to the Bodhi tree is probably found in the Vinaya, where the Buddha is described, shortly after the awakening, as sitting cross-legged for seven days at the foot of the Bodhi tree experiencing the bliss of spiritual liberation (V 1:1).

The Jātaka Nidāna, kathā, too, refers to the Bodhi tree, with an account of how the Bodhisattva, having selected an auspicious spot under the tree, spreads a handful of grass he had received from Svastika (Sothiya) and sits there facing the east, resolving not to rise until he has attained awakening. The Jātaka also graphically describes Māra's confrontation with the Bodhisattva, challenging him of his worthiness to sit under the Bodhi tree, and how the Earth herself bears witness to the Bodhisattva's past good deeds (J 1:71 ff.).

The Vinaya mentions that the Buddha spent the first seven days after the awakening meditating at the foot of the Bodhi tree. The Jātaka Nidāna, kathā adds that the Buddha spends the second week standing in front of the tree, gazing at it with unblinking eyes as a mark of gratitude.

21. EARLY REPRESENTATION OF THE BUDDHA

In the case of Gautama Buddha, the Bodhi tree sprang up on the same day as he was born (DA 2:425; J 1:54, 6:489; BA 131, 276, 298) [1:11a]. After his Awakening, he spent a whole week in front of it, standing with unblinking eyes, gazing at it in gratitude. A shrine was later erected on the spot, north of the Bodhi tree, where he stood, and was called the Shrine of the Unblinking Eye (P. *animisalocana cetiya*) (J 1:77). The spot was made into a shrine even in the Buddha's lifetime, the only shrine that could be so used.

While the Buddha was yet alive, he allowed the planting of a Bodhi tree in front of the gateway of Jetavana in Śrāvastī, so that people could make their offerings in the name of the Buddha when he was away. For this purpose, Maudgalyāyana (Moggallāna) took a fruit from the tree at Gayā as it dropped from its stalk before it reached the ground. It was planted in a golden jar by Anāthapiṇḍada (Anātha-piṇḍaka) with great pomp and ceremony. A sapling, it is said, immediately sprouted forth, fifty cubits⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Cubit (*hattha*, lit. "hand, arm") (J 1:34, 233), an arm's length (V 4:221, 230) or the length measured from the tip of the middle finger to the elbow (about 17-22 inches or 4.3-5.5 cm).

3. Why Buddhists worship trees

high, and in order to consecrate it, the Buddha spent a night meditating under it. Since this tree was planted under the direction of Ānanda, it came to be called the Ānanda Bodhi (J 4:228 ff).

22. WHY BUDDHISTS LOVE TREES

Historically, Buddhists do not worship trees, but have a great love for trees and nature from the fact that the Buddha was enlightened under the Bodhi tree and spent a week meditatively gazing at it and living most of his life outdoors. Moreover, the Bodhi tree is the only object that the Buddha actually allowed to represent him so that offering could be made in his absence.

While the Buddha lived, devotees would bring offerings and place them before his Fragrant Chamber (*gandha, kuṭi*) when he was away. The Introduction to the Kālīṅga, bodhi Jātaka (J 4:228) records that Ānanda questioned the Buddha regarding what, like the Fragrant Cell, could constitute a “basis worthy of worship” (*pūjāniyasthāna/pūjāniyaṭṭhāna*) during his absence. In his reply, the Buddha spoke of three kinds of shrines (*cetiya*):

- (1) the bodily or analogous forms (*saṅrika cetiya*)—including relics, hair, and footprint;
- (2) shrine by use or chrematomorphic forms (*paribhogika cetiya*), eg a robe, an almsbowl, a Dharma-seat and the Bodhi tree; and
- (3) memorial forms: shrine by dedication or association (*uddesika cetiya*), eg the *dharma, cakra*, the trident (*triśula* or *nandī, pada*), the stupa, and the Buddha image. (J 4:228)

The Bodhi tree is a “shrine by use” (*paribhogika cetiya*), since it sheltered the Buddha in his quest for awakening. As such, for Buddhists, the Bodhi tree represents the Bodhisattva’s unrelenting effort towards self-perfection and the Buddha’s enlightened wisdom. By extension, Buddhists venerate all trees. After all, every Buddha has his own Bodhi tree (BA 297). In this sense, trees are sacred to Buddhists even before the green movement arose in recent times. [See Kinnard, 1999:66 n100.]

An often used epithet of the Buddha is that of *āditya, bandhu/ādicca, bandhu*, “kinsman of the sun” (D 3:197; Sn 1128; Tha 26, 158, 417). In the Saṃyutta, the Buddha speaks of the sun as *pajam mama* (my child) (S 1:51; S:B 388 nn158-159), which Buddhaghosa explains as meaning “disciple and spiritual son” (SA 1:86). The Vimāna, vatthu Commentary says that the sun (*āditya/ādicca*) belonged to the Gautama clan (*gotama, gotta*), as did the Buddha; hence his epithet (VvA 116).

In our universe, the sun is the ultimate source of all life, since without it life as we know it would cease to exist. In terms of the food chain, we ultimately get our energy from the sun, that is, through plants acting as solar transformers, converting and storing solar energy in forms digestible to us. Trees are our halfway houses of life, standing between the raw nuclear power of the sun and the fragile terrestrial life. The Bodhi tree, as such, reminds us how interconnected our life is with everything else around us.

Cut down the forest, but not the tree
From the forest arises fear
Having cut down forest and growths
O monks, you are forest-free!

*vanam chindatha, mā rukkham
vanato jāyati bhayaṃ
chetvā vanañ ca vanathañ ca
nibbaṇā hotha bhikkhavo* (Dh 283)

In this sense, Buddhists worship trees.



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4

THE SECRET OF THE BUDDHA'S SUCCESS

The Buddha's First Discourse and the Founding of Buddhism

Why the Buddha "Hesitated" To Teach

Events leading up to the First Discourse

[Source: Piya Tan, "The Buddha and His Disciples" lecture series, Singapore,
©2002; rev ed ©2005]

BRAHMĀ SAHAMPATI

1. Someone to show respect to

Ancient Indian teachers, especially the brahminical gurus, were generally reluctant to teach others. Where these ancient teachers did give their teachings, they would usually hold something back by way of the "teacher's fist" (*ācariya.muṭṭhi*) (D 2:100 = S 5:153).⁶⁶ As such, it is natural for the Buddha not to immediately declare his newly-realized truth, as it were. He is merely keeping to the religious convention of his times.

The Gāraṇa Sutta (or Uruvelā Sutta 1) (A 4.21) gives important insight into the Buddha's "hesitation" to teach, revealing a humble and sensitive side of the Buddha. This event occurred during the fifth week after the Great Awakening while the Buddha is sitting under the Goatherd Banyan Tree, when this thought arises in the newly awakened Buddha: "One dwells in suffering if one is without reverence and deference. Now what ascetic or brahmin can I honour and respect and dwell in dependence on?"⁶⁷

With this thought, the Buddha reflects to whom he should turn as teacher to fulfill any unfulfilled virtue...any unfulfilled concentration...any unfulfilled wisdom...any unfulfilled liberation...any unfulfilled knowledge and vision of liberation...but he found no one more accomplished in these qualities than he himself, and as such found no one to honour and respect.

Let me then honour and respect and dwell in dependence on this very Dharma to which I have fully awakened. (S 1:139 = A 2:20)⁶⁸

The Aṅguttara version of the sutta closes with an interesting remark put into the Buddha's mouth: "Moreover, monks, since the Sangha too has attained to greatness, I also have deep reverence for the Sangha" (A 4.21/2:21). Considering the fact that this event occurred only 5 weeks after the Great Awakening (before the Sangha was formed), it is likely that this last sentence was interpolated much later by redactors.

2. The Buddha's decision to teach

(2a) Why the Buddha hesitated to teach

It is said that soon after his awakening, the Buddha hesitates to make known his newly-discovered Dharma, as it would be difficult for a world that is filled with lust and hate to understand. There are three reasons for the Buddha's hesitation--the intellectual, the moral and the historical. The Dharma is deep and thus requires an extreme concentration of the mind before one can understand it. And since it insists

⁶⁶ See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.2.25a/2:100) = SD 9.

⁶⁷ A 4.21/2:20 f; AA 3:24; BA 13, 291; J 81. For a study, see Étienne Lamotte, "The Gāraṇa-Sutta of the Saṃyutta-nikāya and its Mahāyānist Developments," *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 9, 1981:127-144.

⁶⁸ The **Arājaka S** (A 3.14/1:109 f) says that just as a world monarch rules with his "regent" (the Dharma or justice), so too the Buddha as "king of Dharma" shows respect to the Dharma (the liberating truth),

upon the extinction of all desires, it therefore demands complete self-control.

An average person, when he is a victim of unceasing desires and untrained in mind, would find it extremely difficult to understand or follow the Dharma. The individualistic “intellectual” would find it beyond his capacity, and the morally weak worldling would be thoroughly discouraged. These sentiments are recorded in a number of places in the Pāli Canon with these stanzas:

Enough with declaring the Dharma
That even I found hard to reach;
For it will never easily awakened to
By those lost in lust and hate.

Those dyed in lust, wrapped in darkness,
Will never discern the Dharma
That goes against the current,
Profound, deep, hard to see, and subtle.

Considering thus, monks, my mind inclined to inaction rather than to teaching the Dharma.

(V 1:4 = M 1:169 = S 1:136; D 2:37 Vipassī Buddha; Mvst 3:315)

At this point, it is said that the Brahmā Sahampati, the seniormost of the High Gods,⁶⁹ perceiving the Buddha’s thought, becomes alarmed and cries out, “The world is lost!” Fearing that the world might perish through not hearing the Dharma, he entreats the Buddha to teach the Dharma as there are ...beings with little dust in their eyes who are falling away because they do not hear the Dharma. There will be those who will understand the Dharma.

(V 1:5-7 = M 1:169 = S 1:138 f)

(2b) Past Buddhas too hesitated

Gotama Buddha is not alone in his hesitation to teach the newly found Dharma. According to the Mahāpadāna Sutta (D 14), all the six past Buddhas before Gotama—Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa—hesitated to mull over this choice (D 14.3.1-7/2:35-40). Martin Wiltshire, in his unpublished paper, “The great hesitation,” stresses the clearly optional [supererogatory] nature of the Buddhas’ decision to teach:

If he had taught automatically and without hesitation as the natural consequence of his awakening, then the act of teaching would not have been seen as *distinct achievement*. As it was, by representing a state of affairs in which it was possible to make a negative choice, the Buddha’s decision to teach would be seen as a definite act of compassion.

(Wiltshire 1983:17, original emphasis)

The Vinaya account of the period immediately following the great awakening says that the Buddha “surveys the world with the Buddha-eye out of compassion for beings” (V 1:6). This initial hesitation and subsequent decision by the Buddha to teach

can be seen as emblematic of the new scale of values introduced by Buddhism into the contemporary religious scene. It is a precedential action which establishes a new ideal of human perfection: mystical knowledge by itself is no longer enough but must henceforth be coupled with action inspired by a consciousness of moral good. By hesitation the Buddha signals his recognition of alternative conceptions of human good, and by his choice he indicates his evaluation of one of them as superior. The reverberations of this paradigmatic choice were felt throughout the tradition, and the twin ideals of insight and teaching as a manifestation of moral concern seem to have been emulated by the Buddha’s immediate disciples.

(Keown 1992:42)

(2c) Waiting for Brahmā

(1) The Buddha’s “inner conflict”? Some modern scholars regard the story of the Brahmā Sahampati’s entreaty to the Buddha to teach the Dharma for the benefit of the world as “a symbolic and psychological description of the Buddha’s inner conflict.”⁷⁰ The implication here, some scholars argue, is

⁶⁹ “The seniormost of the High Gods,” *jeṭṭhā mahābrahmā* (DA 2:467).

⁷⁰ T Endo, *Buddha in Theravada Buddhism*, 1997:90, also 331:n127.

4. The secret of the Buddha's success

that Brahmā has to request the Buddha to teach because the Buddha is inclined towards not teaching the Dharma.

The Majjhima Commentary on the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta stanzas raises the question why, when the Bodhisattva had long ago made an aspiration to reach Buddhahood in order to liberate others, was his mind now bent towards inaction? The reason, the commentator says, is that only now, after reaching awakening, does he fully realize the strength of the defilements in people's minds and of the profundity of the Dharma. Moreover, he wants Brahmā to entreat him to teach so that beings who venerate Brahmā would recognize the precious value of the Dharma and desire to listen to it and have respect for it (MA 2:176 f).⁷¹

Even without Brahmā's entreaty, however, the Buddha, in all his infinite wisdom, would have been able to convince his audience, and it is needless, therefore, for him to have hesitated. Moreover, in modern times, Brahmā's entreaty could be misinterpreted as a divine intervention by a higher being to bestow charisma or prophethood upon the Buddha.

Where the first problem is concerned, one must remember that no one is obliged to teach the truth that one has discovered. Had the Buddha decided not to declare the Dharma, he would have lived and died just like any other enlightened saint. But, the fact that he has decided to teach, and that he has the ability to do so, makes him "the Perfectly Self-awakened Buddha" (*sammā,sambuddha*).

(2) Buddha's theophany? As for the second problem, about the likelihood of misinterpreting Brahmā's entreaty as a theophany (divine manifestation in the world), it should be borne in mind that even the highest of the Brahmā Gods have not attained to nirvana, whereas the Buddha has. The ancient Indians, especially the brahmins, looked up to Brahmā as the Supreme Lord and Creator. The fact that Brahmā himself comes down and humbly entreats the Buddha to teach the Dharma obviously means that the Buddha's message is a vital one worthy of listening to and following (DA 2:467).

(3) Siddhattha's personal quest. The episode of the Buddha's hesitation to teach and the Brahmā Sahampati's invitation is a universal Buddhist tradition, found even outside the Pali tradition.⁷² As such, it cannot be a late sectarian invention. However, it appears difficult to resolve the Buddha's hesitance with the universal Buddhist tradition that he has prepared himself for countless aeons for Buddhahood [2c(1)].

The Commentarial argument that the Buddha waits for Brahmā to invite him to teach so that people have respect for the Dharma (MA 2:177) is not convincing. In the Brahmā Nimantanika Sutta (M 49), the Buddha declares to Māra:

Evil one, if the Tathagata [Thus Come] teaches the Dharma to disciples, he is such [*tādiso*]; and, evil one, if the Tathagata does not teach the Dharma to disciples, he is such [*tādiso*].

Evil one, if the Tathagata [Thus Come] guides disciples, he is such [*tādiso*]; and, evil one, if the Tathagata does not guide disciples, he is such [*tādiso*]. (M 49.30/1:330)

This statement means that whether the Buddha teaches or not, he remains the Buddha [awakened], Tathagata [Thus Come]. His liberation is intact whether he teaches or not, and he is not obliged to teach. So why does he decide to teach the Dharma?

It is important to remember Siddhattha's original purpose of leaving home, which is clearly stated in this excerpt from the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta (M 26):

Monks, before my awakening, while I was still only an unawakened Bodhisattva,⁷³ I, too, being myself subject to birth, sought what was also subject to birth; ...subject to ageing; ...subject

⁷¹ Also at Lalita Vistāra, tr Lefmann 1902:395.

⁷² **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26/1:169 f); (**Uruvelā**) **Āyācanā S** (S 6.1/1:136-138); EĀ 19.1=T2.593a-b (tr in Bareau 1988:78; cf Bareau 1980:5); individual trs: T186 = T3.527c23, T187 = T3.603a10, T189 = T3:642c-643a, T190 = T3.806a3, T191 = T952c-953a (cf Waldschmidt 1967g:173); Catuspariṣat Sūtra (DĀ) in Waldschmidt 1957:108-120; Lalita Vistāra in Lefmann 1902:392; **V 1:4-7**; Dharmaguptaka Vinaya T1428 = T22.786b-787b (tr Bareau 1963:138 f); Lokottaravāda Vinaya (Mahāvastu): tr Senart 1897:314, tr Jones 1978:302; Mahīśāsaka Vinaya T1421 = T 22.103c-104a; tr Bareau 1963:136-138; Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya: Chinese T1450 = T24.126b (tr Waldschmidt 1957:109-121), Skt in Gnoli 1977:128-130, Tib in Waldschmidt 1957:109-121, tr Feer 1883:14-16.

⁷³ *Pubbe va sambodhā anabhisambuddhassa Bodhisattass'eva sato*, as at **Bhaya,bherava S** (M 4.3/ 1:17), **Dvedhā,vitakka S** (M 19.2/1:114), **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36.12/1:240), **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 85.10/2:93),

to sickness; ...subject to death; ...subject to sorrow; being myself subject to defilement, sought what was also subject to defilement.⁷⁴

Then, monks, I thought thus:

“Why, being myself subject to *all these unwholesome states*, also seek what are subject to them?

Suppose that, being myself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, were to seek the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nirvana.

Suppose that, being myself subject to ageing...subject to sickness...subject to death...subject to sorrow, subject to defilement, were to seek the undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nirvana.”

Monks, later, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, though my mother and father wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the saffron robe, and went forth from the household life into the homeless life.
(M 26.13-14/1:163)

There is clearly no mention here, nor anywhere else in the texts, of the Bodhisattva’s intention to teach others or start a new religion: it is *personal quest*. The young Siddhattha, emotionally traumatized by the sufferings he sees around him, decides to find the answer and way out of all these conditions.

(4) **Brahmā Sahampati**.⁷⁵ One of the most enigmatic episodes in the Buddha story is the renunciation of his life-formation (*āyu, saṅkhāra*),⁷⁶ mentioned in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) and in cognate passages elsewhere.⁷⁷ There is a vital significance to the Buddha’s renunciation of his life-formation. The Buddha’s awakening does not depend on a God-idea, the gods, or any teacher. The Buddha’s awakening, too, does not entail that he should declare it to others, but when later requested by the Brahmā Sahampati, he teaches the Dharma for our benefit.

And when the Buddha teaches, he does so with such wisdom and compassion that he veritably founds the world’s first missionary religion, and he does not passing away until the fourfold company—his monk disciples, nun disciples, laymen disciples and laywomen disciples—is well-established.⁷⁸

Brahmā Sahampati plays a vital role in inviting the Buddha to declare his awakening to the world. However, Sahampati is not merely a High God, but one closely connected with the dispensation of Gotama Buddha. He is present at the Nativity and, at the Great Awakening, he holds a white parasol three yojanas across over the Buddha’s head (BA 287).⁷⁹

Sahampati’s status as a non-returner (*anāgāmi*) is attested to in the Brahmā Sahampati Sutta (S 48.57), where the Buddha, while in retreat, reflects on the five spiritual faculties.⁸⁰ Reading his mind, the Brahmā Sahampati appears before the Buddha and declares his approval, saying that he [Sahampati] too had cultivated the spiritual faculties during the time of the immediate past Buddha Kassapa,⁸¹ when he [Brahmā] was a monk named Sahaka. Having destroyed all desire for sense-pleasure, he was reborn in the Brahmā world, and was thereafter called Sahampati.⁸² Here “having destroyed all desire for sense-

Saṅgārava S (M 100.9/2:211), but different contexts. See also S 2:5, 10, 104, 170, 3:27, 4:7, 8, 97, 289, 5:263, 281; A 1:258, 3:240-242 (passim), 4:439; Pm 2:109; Miln 235.

⁷⁴ The **Sukhumāla S** (A 3.38/1:145 f) and **Mada S** (A 3.39/1:146 f) form the prelude to this section.

⁷⁵ See SD 12.2-4, esp 12.2 Introd.

⁷⁶ **Satta, vassāni S** (S 4.24/1:122-124); A 5:46; J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f; **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.3/ 2:103 & 16.3.10/ 2:107) = SD 9.

⁷⁷ *Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra* in Waldschmidt 1951:204; DĀ (Chinese): T1 = 1.15b24; T5 = 1.65a13; T6 = T1.180b20; T7 = T191b19. DĀ 2 tr in Weller 1939:78 f; T5 in Puini 1909:36; T6 & T7 Waldschmidt 1944:98 f.

⁷⁸ **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.7-10/2:105 f).

⁷⁹ This episode has been sculpted in the Relic Chamber of the Mahā Thūpa in Sri Lanka (Mahv 30.74); cf J 4:266.

⁸⁰ “The five spiritual faculties” (*pañc’indriya*) are: (1) faith (*saddhā*); (2) effort (*virīya*); (3) mindfulness (*satī*); (4) concentration (*samādhi*); (5) wisdom (*paññā*) (D 3:239; A 3:10; Vbh 342). These faculties are to be balanced in a meditator in these pairs: faith and wisdom, effort and concentration, and the balancing faculty is mindfulness. See SD 10.4.

⁸¹ There were six past Buddhas before Gotama—Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa (D 14.3.1-7/2:35-40).

⁸² (**Sahampati**) **Brahmā S** (S 48.57/5:232 f; SA 1:199).

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pleasure" (*kāmesu kāma-c, chandaṃ virajetvā*) clearly refers to being a non-returner.⁸³ In fact, the Commentaries actually state that he is a non-returner (*anāgāmi*) Brahmā born in the Suddhāvāsā⁸⁴ (SnA 2:476), there to pass a whole aeon (*kappa*),⁸⁵ because he had developed the first dhyana as a monk (BA 12).

Sahampati visits our Buddha Gotama on a number of occasions. On such visits, he approves of the Buddha's decision to take the Dharma as his teacher⁸⁶ and of the Buddha's teachings themselves, such as the five faculties (*indriya*),⁸⁷ and the focusses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*).⁸⁸ He shows great interest in the welfare of the Sangha, such as extolling an arhat monk on almsround,⁸⁹ reproaching Devadatta for his evils,⁹⁰ and intervening to reconcile the Buddha with some unruly monks.⁹¹ The Brahma,deva Sutta (S 6.3) relates how he admonishes a brahminee, a Brahmā devotee, to stop making meaningless offerings to Brahmā and instead give alms to her own son, the monk Brahma,deva.⁹² Just as he has welcomed the infant Siddhattha into the world, Sahampati is present at the Buddha's parinirvana, where he utters a verse of eulogy.⁹³

During the eighth week of the Great Awakening, as the Buddha sits under the [Aja,pāla Nigrodha](#) [Goatherd Banyan], hesitating to teach the Dharma, the non-returner Brahmā Sahampati appears before him and beseeches him to open the "doors of deathlessness" to the world (J 81; BA 13, 291). Sahampati reports to the Buddha that there are those "with little dust in their eyes" [3a] who, not listening to the Dharma, would fall away. Seeing this to be true, the Buddha decides to teach the Dharma.⁹⁴ In so doing, Sahampati has linked together the past Buddha Kassapa's dispensation with that of our present Buddha Gotama's dispensation.

There is another important point regarding the Buddha's hesitance to teach. In the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16), when Ānanda fails to invite him to extend his life-span to continue teaching, he renounces the life-formation and passes into final nirvana.⁹⁵ In other words, when invited the Buddha teaches; when he sees his work is done, he takes his leave. This gentle unobtrusive spirit of compassion and wisdom is at the heart of Buddhist mission, where one should not (and cannot) force the truth upon another, but like nourishing food, it can only be gently and wisely offered to others, but they must themselves partake of it.

(2d) The decision to teach

The most important reason for the Buddha to teach the Dharma is given in Brahmā's words as

⁸³ The stock passage describing a non-returner is this: *pañcannaṃ oram, bhāgiyānaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ parikkhayā opapātikā tattha parinibbāyino anāvatti, dhammā tasmā lokā*, "with the destruction of the five lower fetters [connected with the lower realms of existence], are spontaneously reborn [in the Pure Abodes] and there attain final nirvana, without ever returning from that world" (M 118.10/3:80). The 5 lower fetters (*oram, bhāgiya*) are: (1) Personality view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*). See **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118) = SD 7.13.10 n (the 10 fetters).

⁸⁴ **The Pure Abodes** (*suddh'āvāsa*), ie, the five highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa, loka*) inhabited only by non-returners who assume their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha ("Non-declining"), Ātappa ("Unworried"), Sudassā ("Clearly Visible"), Sudassī ("Clear-visioned") and Akaṇiṭṭhā ("Highest") (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

⁸⁵ **"Aeon," kappa**, technically *mahā, kappa* (great aeon), that is, one full cycle or age of the world (V 3:109; D 1:14, 3:109; S 2:185 = It 17; A 2:126, 142; Miln 108, 232; DA 1:162; PvA 21), described as comprising of four stages—expanding, stable, contracting, stable—of a pulsating universe (A 2:142). For similes on the aeon's length, see S 2:181; DA 1:164 = PvA 254.

⁸⁶ **Gārava S** (S 6.2/1:138-140); **Uruvelā S 1** (A 4.21/2:20).

⁸⁷ **(Sahampati) Brahmā S** (S 48.57/5:232; SA 1:199).

⁸⁸ **(Ekāyana) Brahmā S** (S 47.18/5:167 f); **(Sahampati) Magga S** (S 47.43/5:185 f).

⁸⁹ **Andhaka, vinda S** (S 6.13/1:154).

⁹⁰ **(Sahampati) Devadatta S** (S 6.12/1:153 f).

⁹¹ **Cātumā S** (M 67.8-12/1:458); **(Sahampati) Piṇḍolya S** (S 22.80/3:91).

⁹² **Brahma,deva S** (S 6.3/1:140 f) = SD 12.4.

⁹³ **Parinibbāna S** (S 6.15/1:157 f).

⁹⁴ The Brahmā Sahampati also appears in **(Sahampati) Vandanā S** (S 11.17/1:233 f), **(Sahampati) Piṇḍolya S** (S 22.80/3:91-94) and **Brahmā Sahampati S** (S 48.57/ 5:232 f).

⁹⁵ D 16.3.3/2:103 & 16.3.10/2:107 = SD 9.

recorded in the Āyācanā Sutta (S 6.1), and in identical passages in the Vinaya, the Dīgha (Vipassī Buddha), the Majjhima and the Saṃyutta (with BHS parallel in the Mahāvastu),⁹⁶ thus attesting to its importance. The Saṃyutta Commentary says that this event occurred in the eighth week after the Great Awakening.⁹⁷

The Āyācanā Sutta shows the Buddha sitting under the Goatherd Banyan Tree reflecting on the profundity of the newly-realized Dharma, his hesitation to teach it and Brahmā's entreaty. What Brahmā says following this serves as the rationale for the Buddha to declare the newly-found Dharma to the world:

In the past there has appeared (until now) in Magadha
An impure Dharma devised by those still tainted.
Throw open this door to the Deathless!
Let them hear the Dharma discovered by the Stainless One!

Just as one standing on a mountain peak
Might see below the people all around,
So, O wise one, Universal Eye,⁹⁸
Ascend the palace of the Dharma!
Being yourself free from sorrow, behold the people
Drowned in sorrow, oppressed by birth and decay.

Arise! O Hero! Victor in battle!
O Caravan Leader, debt-free one, wander in the world!
Teach the Dharma, O Blessed One!
There will be those who will understand.

(V 1:4-7; M 1:167-69; S 1:136-39; D 2:36-40
Vipassī Buddha; Mvst 3:314-19; cf S 1:234)

In the past there has appeared (till now) in Magadha / An impure Dharma devised by those still tainted. In dialectical terms, this is the thesis, the real but unsatisfactory state of things stated by Brahmā on behalf of sentient beings as it were. In social terms, this statement clearly refers to the brahminical system of philosophy and practices, that is, the *āstika* system.⁹⁹

Throw open this door to the Deathless! / Let them hear the Dharma discovered by the Stainless One. This is the antithesis to Brahmā's earlier request. The first statement was a definition of the problem, and this second statement is a proposal for its solution.

3. The lotus pond simile

(a) Three kinds of beings

Then the Blessed One, having understood Brahmā's request, out of compassion for beings, surveys the world with the Buddha eye.¹⁰⁰ As he does so, the Blessed One sees beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and difficult to teach, and a few who

⁹⁶ S 6.1/1:137 = V 1:4 ff = D 14/2:36 ff = M 26/1:169 = S 48.7/5:232 respectively; Mvst 315 (Senart 1897). The Chinese Āgama version at DĀ 1 = T1.8b21.

⁹⁷ SA 1:199; see also J 81; BA 13, 291.

⁹⁸ "The 5 eyes" (*cakkhu*). **The Buddha eye** (*buddha, cakkhu*) is a name for the knowledge of the degrees of maturity in the faculties of being (*indriya, paropariyatta, ñāṇa*) and the knowledge of the dispositions and underlying tendencies of beings (*āsayānusaya, ñāṇa*). The knowledge of omniscience is called the **Universal Eye** (*samanta, cakkhu*). The knowledge of the three lower paths is called the **Dharma Eye** or "Dharma vision" (*dhamma, cakkhu*). Together with the **Divine Eye** or clairvoyance (*dibba, cakkhu*) and the **physical eye** (*maṃsa, cakkhu*), these make up the "five eyes" of the Buddha (Nc 235).

⁹⁹ See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.6.4) = SD 9 & Piya Tan, "The Buddha and His Disciples" 2004b: §§10:20b, 11a.

¹⁰⁰ On the "five eyes," see 2c n above & SD 9 Introd (7f).

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dwelt seeing blame and fear in the next world.

Just as in a lotus pond of the blue or white or red lotuses,¹⁰¹ some lotuses might be born in the water, grow up in the water, and thrive while submerged in the water, without rising out of the water; some lotuses might be born in the water, grow up in the water, and stand up at an even level with the water; some lotuses might be born in the water and grow up in the water, but would rise up from the water and stand up in the water without being soiled by the water—

So, too, surveying the world with the Buddha Eye, the Blessed One sees beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and difficult to teach, and a few who dwelt seeing blame and fear in the next world.

Having seen this, he answers Brahmā Sahampati in verse:

Open are the doors to the Deathless

For those who would hear! Let them declare their faith! [abandon blind faith!]¹⁰²

Foreseeing trouble, O Brahmā, I did not speak

The refined, sublime Dharma among humans.

Then, Brahmā Sahampati, thinking, “I have created the opportunity for the Blessed One to teach the Dharma,” pays homage to me, departed right there

(V 1:7; M 1:170; S 1:138; D 2:39 Vipassī Buddha;
Mvst 3:318; cf. S:B 1:233 n372; also Sn 1146c)

(b) The parable of the fields

In due course, the Buddha uses another analogy for the kinds of audience he would teach. In the Desanā Sutta (S 4.42), the Buddha gives the parable of the fields:

Now what do you think, headman? Suppose a farmer here has three fields, one excellent, one moderate, and one poor, hard, salty, of bad soil. Now what do you think, headman? When that farmer wants to sow his seeds, which field would he sow first: the excellent field, the moderate field, or the one that is poor...?

“The farmer, venerable sir, wishing to sow his seeds, would first sow the excellent field, and having done so he would sow the moderate one. Having done so, he might or might not sow the field that is poor.... Why is that? Because in any case it might do for cattle-food.”

Well, headman, just like that excellent field are my monks and nuns. I teach them the Dharma that is good in its beginning, good in its middle and good in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the holy life that is wholly perfect and pure. Why is that? Because, headman, these people abide with me for their island, with me for their cave and shelter, with me for stronghold, with me for their refuge.

Then, headman, just like that moderate field are my laymen disciples and laywomen disciples. I teach them the Dharma that is lovely... I make known to them the holy life... Why is that? Because, headman, these people abide with me for their island... for their refuge.

Then, headman, just like that field that is poor, hard, salty, of bad soil, are my followers of other religions, recluses, brahmins and wandering ascetics.¹⁰³ To them, too, I teach the Dharma that is good... I make known to them the holy life... Why is that? Because if it be that they understand but a single sentence of it, that would be their benefit and happiness for a long time to come.

(S 42.7/4:315 f)

¹⁰¹ *uppala* (Skt (*utpala*), *paduma* (*padma*) and *piṇḍarīka* respectively.

¹⁰² “declare their faith,” *pamuñcantu saddham*, lit, “give up the faith.” This is a difficult sentence. Dīgha Subcomy glosses as *saddham pavedantu*, “let them declare their faith”; Woodward: “renounce the creed ye hold” (Woodward 1973:7); Horner: “let them renounce their faith” (V:H 1:9); “abandon other faiths” (Nakamura 2000:462); Walshe: “put forth faith” (D:W 215); Bodhi: “release faith” (S:B 1:233); cf Norman: “declare your faith” (Sn 1146). See also Sn:N n1146 and Nakamura 2000:461 f n 53.

¹⁰³ *mayham añña, titthiyā samaṇa, brāhmaṇa, paribbājaka*, alt tr: “my recluses, brahmins and wandering ascetics, those of other religions.”

(c) Teaching the masses

The Buddha's purpose in arising in this world is to teach the Dharma for the upliftment and liberation of beings from spiritual ignorance and suffering. Through his boundless compassion, the Buddha declares the Dharma to the world. It is a general rule that nothing happens in the life of a Buddha which has not already happened in the lives of his predecessors or will not happen to his successors.

When contemplating on a lotus pond, the Buddha notices that some of the lotus buds are still immersed in the muddy waters while others have risen well above the waters. Still others are obscurely trying to reach the light, close to opening, just floating on the surface. Surveying the world with his divine eye, the Buddha sees that human beings fall into three categories: those who have sunk completely into error, those who already have reached the Truth or are ready for the Truth, and those who still float between error and truth.

The first kind of lotus—drowned in the dark and murky waters—represents those with much dust in their eyes, with dull faculties, with bad qualities, difficult to teach, not seeing blame and fear in the next world. For such beings, there is little hope, at least for the time being, of bringing them out of the darkness of their ignorance and delusion. They are like the poor field that would be cultivated only after the better ones have been cultivated.

Then there is the second, in-between, group (the lotuses bobbing up and down on the water surface), hesitating between the true and the false, wavering between good and evil. They would either be saved or be lost, depending on whether or not they hear the Dharma. This is the moderate field waiting for cultivation by the wise farmer.

The third group (the lotuses standing high above the waters and open in the sunlight) is the best audience since they have good roots, that is, enjoying the fruit of their past good deeds and excellent present conditions. They are those with very little dust in their eyes, with keen faculties, with good qualities, easy to teach, seeing blame and fear in the next world. They are like the rich field, heavy with crop, ready for harvest and celebration.

It is for the sake of the rich fields, for the love of the medium fields and for the thought of the poor fields that the Buddha resolves “to set the Wheel of Truth in motion.” In aspiring to declare the Dharma to all, the Buddha sees the world as a single mission field, not as an artificially stratified society, divided by race, religion and status.

The Buddha's decision to openly teach the Dharma is a revolutionary event in the history of Indian religion (indeed, in this time-cycle). In his book, *Gotama Buddha*, Hajime Nakamura remarks:

In India at that time it was rare for religious teachers to instruct the people at large.

Philosophers in the *Upaniṣads* are depicted as teaching only a limited group of students: their own children or perhaps people with high qualifications.¹⁰⁴ It was Gotama who broke down such customary restrictions on teaching; to do so, however, required resolution and courage, which he may have gained by means of such psychological phenomena as quelling Māra and hearing Brahmā's encouragement. (Nakamura 2000:235; see also 228 f)

The decision is made: “In this blind world, I will beat the Drum of Deathlessness!” the Buddha proclaims.¹⁰⁵ To whom shall the Buddha teach first, who will understand the Dharma quickly? He thinks of his former teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. A deva informs him that both of them have passed away (a week before and a day before respectively). Then he thinks of the five monks who have attended to him during his period of self-mortification. Through his divine eye, he sees that they are residing in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares.

UPAKA

4. Upaka meets the Buddha

Satisfied with his stay at Uruvelā, the Buddha sets out for Benares to look for the five monks. Between Buddha, gayā and Gayā, the Buddha meets the naked ascetic, Upaka,¹⁰⁶ who, struck by the Buddha's radiant personality, utters,

¹⁰⁴ Cf Yājñavalkya (Bṛhad Up IV, 3, 33); Satyakāma (Chānd Up IV, 10); Raikva (Chānd Up IV, 2, 3); Prajāpati (Chānd Up VIII, 7 f); Yama (Kāth Up I, 21 f).

¹⁰⁵ V 1:8; M 1:171; J 1:81; DhA 4:71.

¹⁰⁶ Also known as Kāla, probably a nickname for his dark complexion (Thi 309), or Upaganena (Divy 393).

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“Serene are your senses, friend! Clear and bright is your complexion. Under whom have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?”

[Buddha:]

All have I overcome, all do I know,
From all am I detached, all have I renounced,
Through the stopping of craving, I am freed,
Having understood all by myself, whom shall I call teacher?

No teacher have I,
An equal to me there is none.
In all the world, with its gods, there is no rival to me.
Indeed, an arhat am I in this world.

An unsurpassed Teacher am I.
Alone am I the All-awakened One,
Quenched, whose fires are all extinguished.
I'm going to Kāśī to set the Wheel of Truth in motion.
In this blind world, I shall beat the Drum of Deathlessness!

“Then, friend, you admit that you are a Conqueror of the Endless (*ananta,jina*)?” Upaka asks.
The Conquerors like me are those whose impurities have been destroyed.
All the evil things I have conquered.
Therefore, Upaka, am I called Conqueror!

“It may be so, friend,” Upaka wryly remarks and shaking his head [in lukewarm approval or ambivalence],¹⁰⁷ turns into a path and leaves.
(V 1:8; M 1:171; J 1:81; DhA 4:71 f; cf Miln 235; UA 54; Kvu 289; Mvst 3:326)

The importance of this meeting is that the Buddha for the first time proclaims from his own mouth and before another person his new and supreme dignity—the first public statement of his awakening—as well as his determination to liberate the world. This is what is important to the simple follower. Whether Upaka understands his privilege or not is of little consequence. In fact, the *Dīgha Commentary* says that the Buddha walks all the way (about 7 km) from Gayā to Isipatana, instead of teleporting himself, so that Upaka would meet him (DA 2:471).

5. Upaka's return

After meeting the Buddha, Upaka heads for Vaṅga or Vaṅkahara country. There he meets and falls in love with Cāpā (or Chāvā), a huntsman's daughter, who looks after him. Desperately in love with her but failing to win her, he goes on a hunger strike for seven days. In the end, he succeeds in persuading the huntsman to give Chāvā to him in marriage.

Upaka supports her by hawking the meat brought in by the huntsman and in due course the couple have a son, named Subhadda. Whenever he cries, Cāpā sings to him, “Upaka's son, ascetic's son, game-hawker's boy, don't cry!” thus mocking her husband. The exasperated Upaka then proudly speaks of his friend, the “Ananta,jina” (the Buddha) but Cāpā still does not stop teasing him. Consequently, despite her attempts to keep him back, he leaves her behind at Nala (his birthplace), a village near the Bodhi Tree, and goes to the Buddha at Sāvattihī (ThiA 225).

The Buddha, seeing him from afar, instructs that anyone asking for “Ananta,jina” should be brought to him. Having listened to Upaka's plight, the Buddha has him admitted into the Order. As a result of his meditation, Upaka becomes a non-returner and is reborn in the Avihā Heaven of the Pure Abodes (Suddhāvāsa),¹⁰⁸ where he immediately becomes an arhat (MA 1:190). Later, Cāpā, too, goes forth and becomes an arhat nun.

¹⁰⁷ This is Indian body language: when the head is moved sideways (left-right) in a conversation, it denotes an “oriental yes,” where it means something like “I understand what you are saying, but I am not sure about it.”

¹⁰⁸ MA 2:189-91; ThiA 220 ff; cf S 1:35, 60. See §2b(4) n above.

In reference to Upaka's attainment of the fruit of non-return (*anāgāmi,phala*), the Buddha's declaration is recorded in the fifth verse of the Muni Sutta:

Overcoming all, knowing all, truly wise,
Unattached to all things,
Giving up all, completely released in the destruction of craving—
Him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.

*Sabbâbhibhum sabba, vidum sumedham
Sabbesu dhammesu anūpalittam
sabbam, jaham taṇha-k, khaye vimuttam—
yam vā 'pi dhīrā munim vedayanti.* (Sn 211)

THE BUDDHA'S SKILLFUL MEANS

6. Antecedental terminology

A successful teacher is a good communicator. To communicate his teachings, the Buddha (and the Buddhists) not only introduced new terms (such as *pratisam vid/paṭisambhidā*)¹⁰⁹ but even more so adopted numerous old terms (Buddha, arhat, dharma, karma, nirvana) giving them new senses. Both these categories need to be clearly defined.

In his article, "Theravāda Buddhism and Brahmanical Hinduism: Brahmanical Terms in a Buddhist Guise" (1991), KR Norman investigates the terminology used by the Buddha to show how he copes with this problem. Norman discusses the Buddha's usage of brahminical terms in three categories (here listed with a few examples):

(a) Terms and structures taken over by the Buddha

deva. They are accepted as merely superhuman and not allowed any causal role in the universe.¹¹⁰

Myths and fables. In the Brahmajāla Sutta (D 1), the Buddha humorously shows how Mahā Brahmā comes to think that he has created other beings, and he alludes to the creation myth in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. In his comments in the Aggañña Sutta (D 27) on the way in which brahmins are born, the Buddha satirizes the Puruṣa, sūkta of the Ṛgveda.¹¹¹

(b) Terms taken over by the Buddha but used with new senses

aggi. Following the Vedic tradition of *āhitāgni*, the brahmin keeps three fires burning. The Buddha declares that there are three fires that should not be served but should be abandoned, namely, the fires of lust, hate and delusion (*rāg'aggi dos'aggi moh'aggi*).

amata. In Brahmanism, *amṛta* (Skt for *amata*) is the world of immortality, heaven, eternity, or the nectar (ambrosia) which confers immortality, produced at the churning of the ocean. The Buddha however uses the word as an epithet of nirvana, which is described as the *amataṃ padam* (the path where there is no death). This is not, however, an immortal place, but the state where there is no death. Elsewhere Norman points out a common error in the usage of the terms *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna*.¹¹²

brahman.¹¹³ The word *brahma* (uncompounded neuter), in the Upaniṣadic form *brahman* is not found in Pali, but the word *brahma* is used in the compounds apparently in the sense of "excellent, perfect" [and I might add "supreme," as in *brahma, daṇḍa*].¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Here given as Skt/Pāli.

¹¹⁰ See **Kaṇṇakaṭṭhala S** (M 90) = SD 8 & **Sanṅārava S** (M 100) = SD 9. On the 3 types of devas (Nc 307; KhA 123) see KR Norman, "Devas and Adhidevas in Buddhism," JPTS 9 1981:154.

¹¹¹ R Gombrich, "Recovering the Buddha's Message" in T Skorupski (ed), *The Buddhist Forum* 1, 1990:13 ff and 14 n25.

¹¹² KR Norman, "Mistaken Ideas about Nibbāna," *The Buddhist Forum*, vol. 3, 1995:211-225. See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) = SD 9 Introd (15): Aspects of (*pari*)*nirvāṇa*.

¹¹³ For the occurrences of *brahman* in the Pali Canon, see K Bhattacharya, "Brahman in the Pali Canon and in the Pali Commentaries," *Amalā Prajñā: Aspects of Buddhist Studies*, Delhi 1989:91-102.

¹¹⁴ *Brahma, daṇḍa*, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.6.4/2:154) = SD 9.

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brahma, cariya. In its basic brahmanical sense, this means “the practice of a *brāhmaṇa*,” that is, to live a celibate life, learning the Vedas. The Buddha uses the term in the more general sense of “to live a holy, celibate life (or in the case of married couples, a chaste and moral life).”

brahma, vihāra.¹¹⁵ The term literally means “dwelling in or with *brahman* or *Brahmā*,” and it perhaps show a trace of its original meaning in the *Tevijjā Sutta* (D 3:235-253), but it should be noted that this means only being born in the same heaven as *Mahā Brahmā*, not union with the Upaniṣadic *brahman*.

brāhmaṇa. In Brahmanism, a *brahman* (√*br̥ṇh-*, “to be strong”) is a brahmin by birth and is a kinsman of *Brahmā*. This idea is known to the Buddha,¹¹⁶ but by adopting a different etymology (√*br̥ṇh-*, “to destroy”), he is able to justify the view that a brahmin is one who has destroyed evil.¹¹⁷

I might add that another etymology—from *bahi*, “outside”—in the sense of “keep outside, ward off” (*bāheti*) is used for *brahman* in the *Aggañña Sutta* and elsewhere, that is, a brahmin is “one who wards off evil” (D 3:94; S 1:141; Sn 510 = Nc 464a; Dh 267).

jhāna. The Sanskrit *dhyāna* (and English “dhyana”) is “religious thought, meditation.” For the Buddha, *jhāna* applies to a very specific type of meditation absorption, and is rarely applied in a wider sense.¹¹⁸

khetta, jina (Sn 523 f). The Commentary here is uncertain of its meaning, which on the face seems to mean “conqueror of the field(s).”¹¹⁹ Norman proposes that the second element of the compound is actually *-jñā* (knowledge), not *-jina*, pointing to its connection with *kṣetra-jñā* (one who knows the field/s) (*Manu* 12:12).

uposatha. In Brahmanism, the *upavasatha* is a fast day, the day of preparation for the Soma sacrifice. In Buddhism, the fast day itself is the day of reciting the *Pātimokkha* (*Skt Prātimokṣa*) (for monks and nuns), and of listening to the Dharma and keeping religious observances (for the laity), that is, it is no longer part of a ritual for purity, but the occasion for a confession of moral and ethical transgression, and for spiritual observance.

veda. This is used in Buddhism in its general sense of “knowledge,”¹²⁰ instead of as a title of brahmanical texts. The term *veda, gu*, which in its brahmanical sense means one who has gained competence in the Vedas, is interpreted as one who has gained knowledge of release from cyclic existence (*saṃ-sāra*) (*ThaA* 2:85:17-19 ad *Tha* 221).

(c) Terms referred to but rejected

There are ideas that the Buddha referred to but rejects, but in such a way that the reasons for the objection could only be understood by those who know the brahmanical terminology:

attā. The Buddha's rejection of the existence of *attā* (*Skt ātman*), that is, his view that everything is *anattā* (“not self”), is based upon the brahmanical belief that *ātman* is *nitya* and *sukha*. Hence, the Buddha refutes this by pointing out that the world is in fact *anicca* (“impermanent”) and *dukkha* (“unsatisfactory”).

(d) Common religious terminology?

KR Norman concludes:

Besides the convenience of taking over terms which were already known to his audience, albeit in a different sense, the Buddha possibly had other reasons for acting in this way. In part it may have been due to his desire to show that Brahmanical Hinduism was wrong in its [basic] tenets: a Brahmanical *brāhmaṇa* was *suddhi*, etc. If a teacher takes over his rivals' terms and repeat them often enough in his own meaning, he gives the impression that he is using them in the correct sense, and the original owners are wrong in their usage.

It must be made clear that we cannot prove that the Buddha (or the Buddhists) was the first to make use of these Brahmanical terms in a new sense, since there is a possibility that such a use of some of these terms was also common to other contemporary religions. Some of the terminology

¹¹⁵ EJ Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha* (3rd ed), London, 1949:126.

¹¹⁶ See Buddha's remark regarding **Aṅgaṇika Bharadvāja** (*ThaA* 2:85,4-5 ad *Tha* 221).

¹¹⁷ *ThaA* 2:85,5-6 ad *Tha* 221; cf. Dh 383-423.

¹¹⁸ LS Cousins, “Buddhist *jhāna*: Its nature and attainment according to the Pali sources.” *Religion* 3,2 1973:116.

¹¹⁹ See Norman 1991:197 n25 & Norman, “Notes on the *Sutta-nipāta*,” 106 (ad Sn 423 f.).

¹²⁰ For example, *veda, sampanno ti ñāṇa, sampanno* (*ThaA* 3:169,20 ad *Tha* 1170).

of Buddhism is held in common with Jainism, eg Buddha, *pratyeka, Buddha, jina, nirvāṇa, tathāgata, bhāvanā, dhuta, yoga, kevalin, āsrava, karman, gati, mokṣa, śramaṇa, pravrajyā, pravrajita, tapas, ṛṣi, tā(din), phāsu(ya)*, and also certain epithets of the Buddha and the Jina [4]. It is possible therefore that the use of Brahmanical terms in a non-Brahmanical sense was taken from the general fund of vocabulary of *śramaṇical* [ie non-brahmanical] religions.

(KR Norman, 1991:199f.; emphasis mine)

(7) Language: a skillful means

In the Araṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta (M 139), the Buddha advises his followers to use language in a wholesome communicative manner, reaching out to the level of the audience:

“You should not cling to a regional language; you should not reject common usage.” So it is said. In what connection is this said?

How, monks, is there clinging to a regional language and rejection of common usage?¹²¹

Here, monks, in different regions, they call a “bowl” *pāti, patta, vittha, serāva, dhāropa, poṇa* or *pisīla*. So whatever they call it in such and such a region, they speak accordingly, firmly adhering (to the words) and insisting, “Only this is right; everything else is wrong.”

This is how, monks, there is clinging to a regional language and rejection of common usage.

And how, monks, is there no clinging to a regional language and no rejection of common usage?

Here, monks, in different regions, they call a “bowl” *pāti, patta, vittha, serāva, dhāropa, poṇa* or *pisīla*. So whatever they call it in such and such a region, without adhering (to the words), one speaks accordingly.

This is how, monks, there is no clinging to a regional language and no rejection of common usage.

So it is with reference to this that it is said, “You should not cling to a regional language; you should not reject common usage.”

(M 139.12/3:234 f)

The Vinaya reflects the same spirit of skillful communication in its account where two monks complain to the Buddha that other monks of various origins are distorting the Buddha’s Teaching in using their own dialect (*sakāya niruttiyā*) and propose that the Teaching be transmitted in Vedic verse (*chandaso*). The Buddha refuses to do so and declares: “I allow you, monks, to learn the Buddha Word in your own dialect.” (*anujānāmi bhikkhave sakāya niruttiyā Buddha, vacanaṃ pariyāpuṇiṭṭum*, V 2:139).¹²²

The Dharma that the Buddha has awakened to is the ineffable truth of personal liberation: it is inexpressible in human language, since words are only symbols and signs, but awakening is a personal experience. As such, the Buddha has to resort to skillful means by using language as pointers, maps and travellers’ tips and tales to guide and inspire the pilgrim. Understandably, language is best and most common tool there is for communicating the idea of awakening to an unawakened world. When the journey is done and the sleeper awakes, he disembarks and leaves the vehicle behind.¹²³ On language and words, the Buddha declares in the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (D 9), thus:

For, Citta, these are merely common names, common expressions, common usages, common designations in the world that the Tathāgata [Thus Come] uses without attachment to them.” (*Loka, samāññā loka, niruttiyo loka, vohārā loka, paññattiyo yāhi Tathāgato voharati aparāmasan ti*).¹²⁴

(D 9.53/1:202)

¹²¹ The Vinaya relates an incident where two monks complained to the Buddha that other monks of various origins were distorting the Buddha’s Teaching in using their own dialect (*sakāya niruttiyā*) and proposed that the Teaching be transmitted in Vedic verse (*chandaso*). The Buddha refused and declared: ‘I allow you, monks, to learn the Buddha Word in your own dialect.’ (*anujānāmi bhikkhave sakāya niruttiyā Buddha, vacanaṃ pariyāpuṇiṭṭum*, V 2:139; Geiger, PLL 1968:6 f).

¹²² See W Geiger, *Pali Language and Literature*, 1968:6 f.

¹²³ See the parable of the raft in **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22.13/1:135 f) = SD 3.13.

¹²⁴ This important reference to the two truths is mentioned in **Sumaṅgala, vilāsini**, the Dīgha Commentary, as “conventional speech” (*sammuti, kathā*) and “speech of ultimate meaning” (*param’attha, kathā*). See **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9) = SD 7.14 Introd (4).

THE FIRST MONKS

8. Vārāṇasī

The second most important event in the Buddha's life is the First Discourse. Understandably, such an event should occur in an auspicious place, which would be Vārāṇasī (modern Benares), or to be exact, the Deer Park (*mṛga,dāya,vana/mīga,dāya,vana*). The Buddha chooses to go to the Deer Park for two good reasons: it is a popular gathering-ground for ascetics and religious, and his erstwhile companions, the Five Ascetics, are there. "For the Buddha to go to Vārāṇasī to expound his ideas was something like a modern scholar presenting a new theory at a national conference" (Nakamura 2000:242).

The fact that the Buddha specifically chooses to teach the Five Ascetics first and not to evangelize his message in an open assembly indicates that

Buddhism was not originally an open religion that appealed suddenly and directly to ordinary people but a teaching that developed gradually among specific ascetics.

(Nakamura 2000:242; my emphasis)

A more important reason, I think, is simply that before the Buddha can effectively spread his message around, he needs to multiply his voice and body. The Dharma can only grow when there are those who are liberated like the Buddha himself. As such, he has to select the best candidates for this vital role of attracting the right people for the task.

9. The Deer Park

After practising self-mortification for six years, the Bodhisattva Siddhārtha fails to discover the Truth. After abandoning self-mortification [2:15], he decides to follow the "middle way" by first regaining his strength by taking some food. When this happens, the Five Ascetics, thinking that he has given up his struggle for awakening, leave him. They go to the Deer Park at Rṣipatana, near Vārāṇasī, where they lead a life common to other contemporary ascetics: going about their affairs peacefully, doing their chores in the open, cutting wood, cooking rice, washing or rubbing themselves with ashes, reciting or meditating, and sometimes practising such austerities as standing immobile in unnatural poses, lying on spikes, or sitting among the "five fires" (a fire at each cardinal point with the hot sun as the fifth).

After meeting Upaka, the Buddha continues his journey to Vārāṇasī by stages and finally reaches Rṣipatana (modern Sarnath), about 7 kilometres north of Vārāṇasī. It should be noted that it is some 200 km from Gayā to Vārāṇasī, and by road the distance is about 250-300 km, which will take some 10 days by foot (Nakamura, 2000:241). As is the custom, he rests in the outskirts of Vārāṇasī and waits until morning to enter the city. Having collected his almsfood, taken his wash and eaten his meal, he heads straight for the hermitage where the Five Ascetics were.

As the Buddha approaches the Five Ascetics, all their antagonism is aroused. Seeing him from afar they resolve not to show him any respect, as they think that the Buddha has given up his spiritual quest. But as the Buddha draws near, his magnetic personality automatically compels them to salute him. They rise from their seats and address him by name and the title *āvuso* (friend), a form of address applied generally to juniors. The Buddha advises them not to address him thus as he has attained awakening.

10. The first discourse

All the Buddhist texts agree on the events that follow. The Buddha thereupon discourses to the Five Monks on what he has discovered. He admonishes them to avoid the two extremes of sensual pleasures and of self-mortification, and to keep to the "middle way," that is, the noble eightfold path. He discourses on the four noble truths and announces his Perfect Awakening (V 1:10 ff; S 5: 420 ff).

This discourse, the Buddha's first public formulation of his Awakening, is called the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (The Turning of the Wheel of Truth) in the Commentaries (eg J 82; DA 1:2; AA 1:69).¹²⁵ It is delivered by the Buddha on the night of the full moon day of the month of Āṣāḍha/Āsāḍha (June-July), 588 BCE—Āsāḍha Pūja or Dharmacakra Day—to the Five Monks (*pañca,vargika bhikṣū/pañca,vaggiya bhikkhū*), namely, Kauṇḍinya (Koṇḍañña), Bhadrīka (Bhaddiya), Vāṣpa (Vappa or sometimes, Daśa,bala Kaśyapa), Mahānāma Kulika and Aśvajit (Assaji) in the Deer Park near modern Sarnath

¹²⁵ See for example Rewata Dhamma, *The First Discourse of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1997.

in north central India. (V 1:10 ff; S 5:420 ff.; Mvst 3:330 f; Lalv 540(416) f).

The Buddha's first discourse serves three purposes: firstly, the Buddha clears up the unfortunate misunderstanding that came between himself and his former colleagues. The discourse refutes the constant criticism by rival sects of the alleged laxity of the Buddhist monastic rules. It also warns novices in advance of the dangers of extremes in practice, and to keep to the Middle Way. In short, it deals with:

- (1) The exhortation on the avoidance of the extremes of sensual indulgence and of self-mortification;
- (2) The proclamation of the Middle Way, i.e. the noble eightfold path;
- (3) The statement of the four noble truths;
- (4) The declaration of the Buddha's Supreme Awakening; and
- (5) The exultation of the devas.

These four Truths are succinctly stated in the extant early texts, but there are innumerable places in the early Buddhist scriptures where they are explained again and again, with greater detail and in different ways.

The four noble truths are the briefest synthesis of the entire teaching of the Buddha, since all those manifold doctrines of the Pali Canon are, without any exception, included therein. If we study the four noble truths with the help of the various references and explanations in the early Buddhist Scriptures, we get a fairly good and accurate account of the essential teachings of the Buddha according to the early texts.

11. Analysis and synthesis

(a) Basic teachings

Why does the Buddha in the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta present his teachings in that way? In the introduction to the Sutta, the Buddha declares that he rejects the 2 extremes of (a) self-mortification (*ātmakīlāmathānuyoga/atta,kiḷamathānuyoga*) and (b) self-indulgence (*kāmasukh'allikānuyoga*). The purpose of this "opening gambit" is to address the two basic viewpoints common in the India of the Buddha's days, that is:

- (1) Self-mortification is founded on eternalism (*śāśvata,vāda/sassata,vāda*), connected with the Creator idea;
- (2) Self-indulgence is founded on nihilism (*uccheda,dr̥ṣṭi/uccheda,dīṭhī*), connected with materialism.

Jainism and Brahmanism believe that God and soul are eternal (*śāśvata*). To them there are two kinds of souls: the individual soul, which is impure, and the universal soul, which is eternal. To get rid of the individual soul, they torture the body, which is an accumulation of karma, and a prison for the soul. Once they have "purified" the body, the individual soul reunites with the universal soul.

The term *uccheda* (ts) means "total destruction." Nihilism is the belief that this is our only life, and that there is no afterlife; nor is there heaven or hell. So, a nihilist's main objective is to enjoy life here and now. In ancient India, the nihilist school is known as Cārvāka, who are said to "word their philosophy beautifully": since there is no future life, they can say anything and do anything. They criticize other religions (like Buddhism) as being negative.

(b) The Buddha's criticism of the extremes

Self-mortification is "painful, ignoble, useless" (*duḥkha anārya anartha/dukkha anariya anatta*). Self-indulgence is "lowly, common, worldly, ignoble, useless" (*hīna grāmya prthagjanika anārya anartha/hīna gamma pothujjanika anariya anatta*) (V 1:10; S 5:421). Self-mortification, however, is not condemned as "lowly, common, worldly" (*hīna grāmya prthagjanika*) because it may be painful but does not break the Precepts.

The Buddha uses 2 methods to reject the extremes:

Self-mortification is overcome by the method of analysis.

Self-indulgence is overcome by the method of synthesis.

(1) The analysis method

A "person" is analyzed as being made up of the 6 senses (internal organs) and 6 external sense-objects. All these 12 senses are impermanent; as such, they are unsatisfactory. Analyzed in this way, they ultimately come to void, as such, they are not "self" or have no unchanging entity.

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The 5 Aggregates

Matter (<i>rūpa</i>)	— Body
Feelings (<i>vedanā</i>)	} Mind
Perception (<i>saṃjñā/saññā</i>)	
Disposition (<i>saṃskāra/saṅkhāra</i>)	
Consciousness (<i>viññāna/viññāṇa</i>)	

Feelings are based on the senses.

Perception is based on feelings or “signs.” The sign is kept in mind.

This sign (*nimitta*), eg emptiness (*sūnyatā*), can be wholesome and used in meditation.

When there are signs, *reflection* arises.

This method of analysis is for countering both the theory of eternalism and the practice of self-mortification. However, analysis *in itself* is negative, as it leads to pluralism or nihilism. It is only a tool to be rejected once it has been effectively used.

(2) The synthesis method

The method of synthesis is the process of conditionality (causes + effects): when the eye comes into contact with form, eye-consciousness arises, etc. This is more fully explained in discourses like the Mahānidāna Sutta (D no. 15) and the Madhupiṇḍika Sutta (the Honeyball Discourse, M 18). In the latter, the Buddha first gives an instruction in brief, thus:

If, O monks, one neither delights in, nor asserts, nor clings to, that which makes one subject to “concepts characterized by the proliferating tendency” (*prapañca, saṃjñā, saṃkhyā/papañca, -saññā, saṅkhā*), then that itself is the end of the proclivities to attachment, views, pride, ignorance and attachment to becoming. That itself is the end of taking the stick, of taking the weapon, of quarrelling, contending, disputing, accusation, slander and lying speech. Here it is that all these evil unskilled states cease without residue. (M 1:109)

Then, Mahā Kātyāyana (Mahā Kaccāna), on the monks’ invitation, gives a commentary on the abbreviated Buddha’s Word:

*Cakkhuñ c’āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca
upapajjati cakkhu, viññāṇaṃ
Tinnam saṅgati phasso
Phassa, paccayā vedanā
Yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti
Yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi
Yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti*

*Yaṃ papañceti tatonidānaṃ purisaṃ
papañca, saññā, saṅkhā samudācaranti*

*aṭṭhānāgata, paccupannesu
cakkhu, viññeyyesu rūpesu*

Sotañ c’āvuso paṭicca sadde ca...

Friends, dependent on the eye and forms,
Eye-consciousness arises.
The meeting of the three is contact.
Depending on contact, there is feeling.
Whatever one feels, one perceives it.
Whatever one perceives, one thinks about it.
Whatever one thinks about, one mentally
proliferates it.
Owing to what a person has mentally proliferated,
perceptions and notions tinged by mental
proliferation¹²⁶ beset one
with respect to past, future and present
forms cognizable through the eye.

Dependent on the ear and sounds....

¹²⁶ Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda: “concepts characterized by the prolific tendency” (*Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*. Kandy: BPS, 1971: 8 passim. See esp. ch. 1 which discusses this term.) Bhikkhu Bodhi: “Perhaps the key to the interpretation of this passage is Ven. Mahā Kaccāna’s explanation of the Bhadd’ekaratta verses in M no. 133. There too delight in the elements of cognition plays a prominent role in causing bondage, and the elaboration of the verses in terms of the three periods of time link up with the reference to the three times in this sutta [Madhupiṇḍika Sutta].” (M:Ñ 1204 n232).

<i>Ghanañ c'āvuso paṭicca gandhe ca...</i>	Dependent on the nose and smells....
<i>Jivhañ c'āvuso paṭicca rase ca...</i>	Dependent on the tongue and tastes....
<i>Kāyañ c'āvuso paṭicca phoṭṭhabbe ca...</i>	Dependent on the body and tangibles....
<i>Manañ c'āvuso paṭicca dhamme ca uppajjati mano, viññāṇaṃ Tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso Phassa, paccayā vedanā Yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti Yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi Yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti</i>	Dependent on the mind and mind-objects, mind-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. Depending on contact, there is feeling. Whatever one feels, one perceives it. Whatever one perceives, one thinks about it. Whatever one thinks about, one mentally proliferates it.
<i>Yaṃ papañceti tatonidānaṃ purisaṃ papañca, saññā, sañkhā samudācaranti</i>	Owing to what a person has mentally proliferated, <u>perceptions and notions tinged by mental proliferation</u> ¹²⁶ beset one
<i>atītānāgata, paccupannesu mano, viññeyyesu dhammesu</i>	with respect to past, future and present forms cognizable through the mind.
	(M 1:111 f.; cf. S 2:73)

Life is conditional, a series of interacting causes and effects:

Death (cause) → rebirth (effect) → rebirth (cause) → life (effect) → life (cause) → death (effect).

While the first 5 books of the Abhidhamma all use the analysis method, only the 6th and last book, the Paṭṭhāna, uses the synthesis method in terms of the 24 causal formulae. This latter method counters nihilism.

The Buddha advises us to avoid both eternalism and nihilism. This does not mean that Buddhism is somewhere “in between”; rather that it rises above both of them.

12. Ājñātā Kaundinya

At the end of the discourse, Kaundinya attains to the knowledge that everything which is subject to arising is also subject to cessation, and reaches the first stage of Sainthood. Tradition has it that the news that the Wheel of Truth has been turned by the Buddha is acclaimed in relay by the terrestrial devas, and carried from rank to higher rank of devas *pari passu* up to the world of Brahmā. Finally, the Buddha exclaims:

Kaundinya has indeed attained the knowledge (*ājñāsi/annāsi*); Kaundinya has indeed attained the knowledge!

Henceforth he is known as Ājñātā Kaundinya (Aññātā or Aññā Koṇḍañña), “Kaundinya who has attained the knowledge!”

Kaundinya then requests for the going-forth (*pravrajā/pabbajā*) and the ordination (*upasampadā*). The Buddha admits him with the words:

Come, O monk! Well-proclaimed is the Doctrine of the Blessed One; live the Holy Life for making a complete end of suffering (*ehi bhikkhu, svākkhāto bhagavato dhammo, cara brahmacariyaṃ sammā dukkhassa antakiriyāya*).
(V 1:12)

This is Kaundinya’s ordination and the earliest form of ordination conferred by the Buddha. After further instruction, Vāṣpa and Bhadrīka attains the first-stage Sainthood (stream-winning) and are admitted as monks; and, in due course (on the same day, according to the Vinaya), Mahānāma Kulika and Asvajit,

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too, become stream-winners and are ordained. (V 1: 11 f; J 1:82; DA 1:2; AA 1:100; Lalv 540 (416) f; Mvst 3: 330 f).

13. Discourse on not-self

Five days after the First Discourse, the Buddha gives the Discourse on the Not-self, the Anatta, lakhaṇa Sutta (V 1:13 f.; S 3:66; cf. M 3:19). It denies the existence of an unchanging soul or permanent entity in any of the Five Aggregates of Existence, namely, Form, Feeling, Perception, Disposition, and Consciousness.

The argument is that whatever part of the “individual” is taken, whether physical or mental, we cannot point to any one element in it as permanent, and when the individual is free from any passion or craving (which leads these elements to be reborn), he is liberated. On hearing this discourse, all the Five Monks attained the highest stage of Sainthood, that of arhat.

And so there are 6 arhats in the world: the 5 Monks and the Buddha. The Sangha has arisen and the Dispensation established. Buddhism has been founded.

THE PROBLEM OF YAŚĀS

14. Yaśas

At that time, a young man named Yaśas (Yasa), son of a wealthy treasurer, is living in luxury in Vārāṇasī. Waking up suddenly one night, he finds his female attendants and musicians asleep in unseemly postures, and with the same cry of disgust that Prince Siddhartha has uttered on leaving the world, goes out from his house and the city to the Deer Park, exclaiming, “Alas! What distress! Alas! What danger!”

At dawn, he meets the Buddha who sees him in the distance and calls to him, “Come, Yaśas, here is neither distress nor danger!”

Yaśas eagerly listens to the Buddha who teaches him a graduated discourse, after which Yaśa attains to realization of the Dharma. When Yaśas’ father comes in search of him, the Buddha makes Yaśa invisible and then discourses to the father. At the end of the discourse, he acknowledges himself as the Buddha’s follower, thus becoming the first layman to take the Three Refuges (*te, vācika upāsaka*).

15. Yaśas’ family

On hearing the Buddha’s teaching to his father, Yaśas attains full awakening. Then the Buddha makes him visible again, and Yaśas’ father asks him to return home. The Buddha then explains to Yaśas’ father that one whose mind has become quite free from attachment to the world cannot return to it again.

Yaśas then asks for the going-forth and the ordination from the Buddha, who admits him with the words: “Come, O monk! Well-proclaimed is the Doctrine; live the Holy Life!” (*ehi bhikkhu, svākkhāto bhagavato dhammo, cara brahmacariyam*) (V 1:16 f). The last phrase “.....for making a complete end of suffering” is omitted because Yaśa has already attained arhathood. Yaśas thus becomes the seventh member of the Order.

After Yaśas’ father becomes a stream-winner, he invites the Buddha and Yaśas to his house for alms. Hearing the Buddha teach, Yaśa’s mother and his former wife take the Threefold Refuge and become the first lay women disciples (V 1:19; cf A 1:26, J 1:68 If, SnA 154, D 2:135; AA 1:401 ff).

The Anguttara Commentary (by Buddhaghosa) says that Yaśa’s mother is Sujātā (AA 1:403). This raises a problem—for Yaśas is converted on the day of the Buddha’s first discourse, that is, the full-moon day of Āśāḍha (DhA 1:88). If we follow the Anguttara Commentary, Yaśa would then be only 3 months old! It is possible that she is only a namesake, a different Sujātā, since the name is not rare. [15]

Yaśas’ sensational conversion starts a whole train of others. Yaśas’ four intimate friends—Vimala, Subāhu, Pūrṇajit and Gavāmpati—follow his example, and soon fifty more of his companions follow suit (V 1:17 f). After listening to the Buddha’s instruction, they all become arhats of which there now total 60. Then the Buddha feels that all is ready for the sending of the first missionaries to announce the Dharma to the world at large.

16. A curious story

While I was doing his monastic training in Thailand, I came across a curious story behind the birth of

Yaśa. His father, the city treasurer, is distressed because he has no child. At his wife's instigation, the city treasurer turns to the spirit of a large Indian fig tree who is known to grant all requests made to him. The man promises to build the spirit a shrine in exchange for the fulfillment of his wish; but the desperate barren wife threatens to chop down the tree if she fails to get a child!

The poor tree spirit finds himself in a dilemma, for the request is beyond his power. Fearing what a vindictive and superstitious woman might do, he turns to Śakra, leader of the devas, who reassures him of his help. There happens to be among the Thirty-three devas, one who is reaching the time for rebirth. As long as he has to fall from the deva state, he might as well be reborn in the womb of the treasurer's wife.

After some hesitation, this comes about and the birth takes place in the treasurer's family, amidst great joy, and the child is brought up in the lap of luxury. His mind, purified from his previous life, does not allow him to be stained by this new sensual existence, the vanity of which he soon perceives. Many experiences similar to those of the Bodhisattva are attributed to him, and he, too, leaves home under the cover of darkness.

Śakra, remembering his promise made to Yaśas before the latter's rebirth, then leads him to the Buddha's retreat on the far side of the river Vānarā. The young man leaves his golden slippers on the near bank, fords the river and falls at the feet of the Buddha. The rest of the story is as found in the Vinaya, which, however, does not mention the name of Yaśas' mother (V 1:18 ff). It is also not mentioned that she made any food offering to the Bodhisattva. Furthermore, the story of Sujātā's offering as given in the Jātaka Commentary (by Buddhaghosa), too, does not mention Yaśa (J 1:68 ff).

17. Who offered the Bodhisattva's last meal?

Earlier [13], I mentioned that the Anguttara Commentary says that Yaśa's mother was Sujātā (AA 1:403), which is historically problematic. The Mahāvastu, an early Mahayana text, mentions that the Bodhisattva has a meal of soup made from beans, pulse and peas that gradually brings back his strength (Mvst 2:131, 205). Later on, Sujātā offers him some milk-rice under the banyan tree. The Mahāvastu also mentions that Sujātā has been the Bodhisattva's mother for a hundred lives (Mvst 2:205).

Most other Mahāyāna sources, however, say that the donors of the Bodhisattva's last meal know who he really is—namely, the ascetic Siddhārtha, “the Śākya prince of the Kapilavastu Śākyas” (Rockhill 30) –and feels honoured to make the offering. The Dulva and the Divyāvadāna throw new light on the Yaśas problem: it is not Sujātā, but the two sisters Nandā and Nandabalā who offer the “milk-soup” (Rockhill 30; Divy 392). The Lalita-vistara mentions nine girls offering food to the Bodhisattva during his self-mortification (Lalv 334-7(267 f)). The Chinese Abhinīskramaṇa Sūtra says they were Nandā and Balā, daughters of the brahmin “Senayana” (Ans:B 191) or the village lord “Sujata” (*sic*), i.e. Sujātā (Ans:B 193). [The feminine form of the name Sujāta has a long final vowel “a”: *Sujātā*.]

It is possible that the two sisters are not identical to Sujātā and Pūrṇā. Moreover, the name of the donor of the Bodhisattva's last meal is not mentioned in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta where the two foremost meals of the Buddha are listed (D 2:135 f) [10:15b]. It is also probable that a different Sujātā offered the last meal to the Bodhisattva. In that case, one might conclude that the Anguttara Commentary account of Sujātā and Yaśas (AA 1:403) is a later fabrication.

18. Who was Yaśas?

Though Yaśas is converted immediately after the Awakening of the Five Monks, and is one of the 60 missionaries, he does not figure prominently in the Canon. He is not even mentioned in the list of foremost disciples (*agra, śrāvaka/agga, sāvaka*) in the Eka Nipāta (Book of Ones) of the Aṅguttara Nikāya. In fact, he is hardly mentioned in the Pali Tripitaka except in the Vinaya story (V 1:15 ff) and the Theragāthā. In the latter, he is listed as elder (*thera*) no. 117 (Tha 117) with a very brief standard native gloss (Tha 1:243 f) where it is also hinted that he is identical with Sabba, dāyaka of the Apadāna (Ap 1:333 f).

The Commentaries usually refer to Yaśas as a “youth” (*dāraka*, eg AA 1:100, 147) or young man of family (*kula, putta*, eg DhA 1:88; BA 19; V 1:15 ff). He is obviously a very young man but perhaps not younger than 20 for that is the minimum age for ordination (V 4:130), though the rule was made later.

The seventh chapter of the Mahā Khandhaka of the Pali Vinaya Piṭaka called the “Recital on the Going-forth” (P. *pabbajjā kathā*) contains the details of Yaśas' luxurious life and his subsequent renunciation (V 1:15 ff). T.W. Rhys Davids and Herman Oldenberg are of the opinion that “a well-known scene of the Bodhisatta has evidently been represented after the model of this story.... Nowhere in the Pali Piṭakas

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is the story told about the Bodhisatta himself." (V:RDO 1:102 n 2)

The account is indeed a stereotype passage, but it is found in the Pali Piṭakas in reference to the Bodhisattva (M 1:504; A 1:146; Mvst 2:115 f) and also in the Commentaries (eg J 1:58). Therefore, it is not true to say that Yaśas' luxurious life is a model superimposed onto the life of the Bodhisattva (*pace* Thomas 1949:90 n 1). The Buddha also uses this stock passage in describing the life of the past Buddha Vipāśyi (D 2:21).

One might now to ask whether the Vinaya account of Yaśa's life was modelled along that of the Buddha. This seems more probable for we find the stock passage again in relation to Aniruddha's early life (V 2:180).

Though Yaśas is only mentioned a couple of times in the Canon, it would be wrong to conclude that he never existed. On the contrary, one might ask why he is mentioned at all in the Canon especially with such scanty details about him. It is very likely that some Canonical accounts of him have been lost. For, complete as the Pali Canon may appear to be, it does not contain all the accounts of the Buddha's 45 years of public ministry.

THE FIRST MISSIONARIES

19. The great commission

With the conversion of the Five Monks, and Yaśas and his 54 friends, there were sixty Perfect Saints (*arhat/arahanta*), excluding the Buddha. It is then that the Buddha commissions his first sixty disciples with these immortal words:

Free am I, O monks, from all bonds, whether divine or human. You, too, O monks, are free from all bonds, whether divine or human.

Go forth, O monks, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world; for the good, the gain and the welfare of gods and man.

Let not two go the same way. Teach, O monks, the Dharma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end. Declare the Holy Life, both in the spirit and in the letter, altogether complete, wholly pure.

There are beings with little dust in their eyes who, not hearing the Dharma, would fall away. There will be those who will understand the Dharma.

I, too, O monks, will go to Uruvilvā in Senānigama, to expound the Dharma.

(V 1:20 f.; S 1:105 f.; Mvst 3:415 f.)

Exhorting thus, the Buddha dispatches the first 60 monks in 60 different directions. This is the Buddha's first and famous commission to the first 60 monks to go forth and spread the Dharma. The *Saṃyutta* Commentary adds an interesting detail. Immediately after the Buddha has commissioned the monks, Māra appears to him. The Commentary remarks that Māra approaches the Buddha, thinking: "Like one directing a great war, the ascetic Gotama enjoins the sixty men to teach the Dharma. I am not pleased even if *one* should teach, let alone *sixty*. Let me stop him!" (SA 1:173)

Then Māra the Evil One approaches the Blessed One and addresses him in verse:

You are bound by all the snares,
Both celestial and human;
You are bound by the great bondage:
You won't escape me, ascetic!

[Buddha:] I am freed from all snares,
Both celestial and human;
I am freed from the great bondage:
You're defeated, End-maker!

Then Māra the Evil One, thinking: "The Lord knows me, the Well-farer knows me," pained, afflicted, vanished there and then. (V 1:20; S 1:107)

We are told that the first sixty missionaries brought back so many converts for admission into the Order that the Buddha decides to allow the monks themselves to perform the ceremony. It consists of removing the candidate's hair, his putting on the saffron robes, and then reciting three times the Three Refuges (*tisaraṇa, gaman'upasampadā*). This is the second form of ordination introduced by the Buddha (V 1:21).

20. The thirty good friends

As the rainy season has arrived, the Buddha spends his first Rains Retreat (*varṣa/vassa*) at Rṣipatana near Vārāṇasī. When it is over, he leaves for Uruvilvā. On the way, he rests at the foot of a tree in a silk-cotton grove (P. *kappasika vana, saṇḍa*) where a group of thirty good friends (*bhadra, varṅika saḥāyakā/ bhadda, vaggiya saḥāyakā*), except one, are amusing themselves with their wives. As the one has no wife, he brings along a female social escort (P. *vesī*).

While they are all enjoying themselves, this female escort absconds with their valuables. As soon as they discover this, the young men go in search of the treacherous woman. Meeting the Buddha, they inquire whether he has seen a woman pass him.

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The Buddha calmly replies: “Which is better (*varaṃ*, lit. “noble, best”), young men (*kumārā*)—seeking a woman, or seeking oneself (*attānaṃ gaveseyyātha*)?” [Lit. “Young men, would it noble if you were to seek a woman or if you were to seek the self?”]

“Seeking oneself is better, O Lord!” reply the young men. The Buddha's words settle their destiny. Giving up their sensual frolic, they listen attentively to his Dharma, and soon all attain the “Eye of Truth” (*dharma, cakṣu/dhamma, cakkhu*), a term referring to any of the three lower Stages of Sainthood. Upon their request, they receive ordination into the Order. (V 1:23 f; DhA 2:33 f; J 1:82; AA 1:100, 147; ThiA 3)

21. The Kāśyapa brothers

At Uruvilvā there live a matted-hair ascetic, Uruvilvā Kāśyapa (Uruvelā Kassapa) with 500 disciples. Further down the river live his brothers, Nadī Kāśyapa (Kāśyapa of the River) with 300 disciples, and Gayā Kāśyapa (of the village of Gayā) with 200. The members are identifiable by their large mop of hair and their garments made of bark. They live with their respective flocks in huts built of branches at the edge of the jungle.

They are practically self-sustained and, withdrawn in the forest, they practise their sacrifices, study and meditate in their own way. They thus form a sort of brahminical colony or outpost in a country still poorly Aryanised. Their austerities, complicated rites, mythological and cosmogonic traditions, along with their literary and grammatical knowledge of the “perfect language” (Sanskrit), quickly bring them popular veneration.

The Buddha visits Uruvilvā Kāśyapa and stays the night where the sacred fire is kept, in spite of Kāśyapa's warning that the spot is inhabited by a fierce *nāga* (serpent or dragon). The Buddha, through his psychic powers, overcomes, first this *nāga* and then another, both of whom belch fire and smoke. Kāśyapa being pleased with this exhibition of psychic power, undertake to provide the Buddha with his daily food.

Meanwhile the Buddha stays in a grove nearby waiting for the right time when Kāśyapa is ready for conversion. He spends the whole rainy season there, performing in all, 3500 miracles of various kinds, splitting firewood for the ascetics' sacrifices, heating stoves for them to use after bathing in cold weather, etc. Still Kāśyapa persists in the thought, “The great ascetic has great magical powers, but he is not an arhat like me.”

Finally, the Buddha decides to startle him by declaring that he (Kāśyapa) is not an arhat and neither does the way he follows lead to arhathood. Thereupon, Kāśyapa admits defeat and reverently asks for ordination. The Buddha asks him to consult his pupils, and together they cut off their hair and throw it along with their sacrificial utensils into the river and are all ordained.

Alarmed by the sight of the ascetic debris floating down the river, Nadī Kāśyapa and Gayā Kāśyapa come to inquire what has happened, and on understanding the Buddha's Teaching, they, too, along with their pupils, join the Order. At Gayā Head, the Buddha teaches them the Fire Sermon (*Āditta, pariyāya Sutta*), and they all attain arhathood (V 1:33 f.).

22. Bimbisāra

According to the Pabbajjā Sutta [1:2c], the ascetic Siddhārtha, newly renounced, meets prince (*kumāra*) Bimbisāra in Rājagṛha (V 1:36) [Chapter 8]. Turning down the prince's offer of a comfortable and pleasurable life, Siddhārtha assents to the prince's request to visit him first once he has gained awakening. [2:13]

From Gayā Head (Gayā, śīrṣā/Gayā, sīsa) the Buddha goes to Rājagṛha with the Kāśyapa brothers and their pupils. In the presence of king Bimbisāra and the assembled populace, Uruvilvā Kāśyapa declares his allegiance to the Buddha (V 1:36). The Buddha then teaches the graduated discourse (on generosity, morality, heavenly existence, the disadvantages of sensual pleasures, and the benefits of renouncing sensual pleasures) followed by the four noble truths. In the gathering of King Bimbisāra's retinue, eleven persons out of twelve obtain the Eye of Dharma, the rest having their faith established in the Three Jewels.

The king then makes known his former wishes to the Buddha, saying, “Formerly, when I was still young prince (*kumāra*), having not ascended the throne, I made five wishes (P. *assāsakā*): firstly, that I may ascend the throne of the country of Magadha; secondly, that an arhat, being self-enlightened, may come to my country during my reign; thirdly, that I may have the opportunity to approach the arhat;

fourthly; that the arhat may deliver to me a discourse; and fifthly: that I may realize whatever there is to be realized in the arhat's Doctrine." (V 1:36)

Then the king praises the Buddha's discourse and declares himself a lay-follower. After that, he invites the Buddha and the monks for a meal in the palace. The king serves the Buddha with his own hands, and at the end of the meal, he donates the Bamboo Grove (Veṇuvana/Veḷuvana) to the Buddha and the Sangha [8:2b]. Thus for the first time, the wandering finds itself as the owner of a residence (*vihāra*) where the monks can always be sure of finding shelter.

In the Bamboo Grove at Rājagṛha, the Buddha is to spend the following rainy season, and where during his long teaching career he frequently comes back and stays for lengthy periods. Soon he will have, as we shall see, similar resting places on the edge of most of the large cities of the Central Ganges plains of India.

23. Reasons for the Buddha's success

By the time the Buddha passed away, he had a huge following known as the "fourfold assembly"—monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen—that included a cross-section of Indian society then [10:9]. There were kings and royalty, priests and philosophers, merchants, workers, and lowly outcastes. In every major city of the day, there were Buddhist monasteries and orders. In fact, Buddhism became one of the most popular religions of the times, if not the most successful. We can give five reasons for the Buddha's success:

(a) The Buddha converted the Brahminical gods.

Even before the Buddha began preaching, it is said that Brahmā, the highest of the brahminical gods humbly appeared before him, inviting him to teach the newly-found Dharma [2]. This grand opening is a divine blessing and cosmic authentication of sorts, giving the Buddha the licence, as it were, to declare his Dharma for the whole world. The people had no excuse not to listen to the Buddha as he preached no new gods, but spoke in terms of the familiar old ones.

(b) He used the local language and terminology.

The Buddha was a great communicator who spoke in the language and languages of the people (see for example his remarks concerning the eight assemblies, D 2:109 f.) [10:9c]. He used at least two levels of communication: the worldly and the spiritual, so that he appealed to the simple and the sophisticated, and reached out to everyone. Most of the religious terms he used were already current in the established religions (especially Brahmanism and Jainism), so his audience could immediately relate to him as he elaborated on the new meanings that he wished to convey to them. [4:3]

(c) He chose the right people as his first disciples.

The original core of the Buddha's spiritual disciples were enlightened masters who were themselves religious practitioners (the Five Monks), wealthy learned brahmins (Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyāna, Mahā Kāśyapa), high-caste royalty (Ānanda, Aniruddha), and even a king (Mahā Kapphina). He started the Order of Nuns which was regarded as novel in those days since the position of Indian women was still lowly and uncertain. [9:4-5]

The Buddha's lay followers came from a cross-section of society. Among the mighty were kings like Bimbisāra [8:2], Ajātasatru [8:6] and Prasenajit [8:12, 18], and their queens. The wealthy patrons included Anātha,piṇḍada and the lady Viśākhā. Drove of people (like the Kālāmas of Kesputta and the Mallas of Kuśinagarī) who listened to the Buddha or his disciples would take refuge in the Three Jewels and become material supporters of the Order.

(d) The Buddha's personality.

There were those like Mahā Kāśyapa [6:13] and Vāḷkali [1:1a] who converted and joined the Order by merely meeting the Buddha and marveling at his charisma. Even Upatīśya converted at his first meeting with Aśvajit, one of the first five monks [5:11]. There is the remarkable case of Ugra (Ugga), the **householder of Vaiśālī**, who declared: "When I first saw the Blessed One, even from afar, my heart, r, at the mere sight of him became tranquil" (A 4:209) [cf. 10:13b]. If his 80 chief disciples (DhA 1:14, 19) were foremost in special qualities, the Buddha himself had all of them, including psychic powers. Above all, the Buddha and his disciples were great teachers and educators.

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One of the most winning characteristics of the Buddha is his profound yet subtle sense of humour,¹²⁷ as evident in numerous discourses. In such discourses as the Brahmajāla Sutta, Tevijjā Sutta, Vāseṭṭha Sutta and the Aggañña Sutta, he shows his humorous genius in debunking the established brahminical claims. His teachings are full of subtle wordplay [3:2-6], that one can only marvel at upon appreciating them. And yet all this humour have the serious purpose of pointing to a higher liberating truth.

(e) His message itself: the Dharma.

The most important reason for the Buddha's success is simply because he is self-enlightened. He has understood the profound Dharma for himself. Having overcome his defilements, he taught others how to do the same. Having known the liberating truth regarding reality, he taught others to be free. Despite all this, he never claimed to be a divine prophet or cult leader, leaving each disciple to be "an island" taking only the Dharma as refuge, that is, to work for one's own salvation.

Underlying all this spiritual exhortation is the living warmth of spiritual friendship [5:3] which the Buddha regarded as the whole of the spiritual life. Although he speaks highly of the solitary life of the forest wanderer, he also extols this universal friendliness when in the company of others. In short, the true teaching can only be transmitted in the spirit of true friendship, such as that the Buddha shared with Ānanda. [6:3, 17a]

(f) Incidental conditions

Historians and others might attribute royal patronage and support of the wealthy as a major reason for the Buddha's success. However, these are incidental occasions that brought material success to Buddhism. On a number of occasion, we actually find the Buddha showing his concern about such successes. For example in response to Śāriputra's request, the Buddha answered that he would only introduce the training-rules and the Prātimokṣa after the Order "has attained long standing...has attained great gains..." (V 3:9 f.) [5:27].

The history of Buddhism is unequivocal in witnessing that whenever and wherever the rulers patronize Buddhism, it becomes fossilized into a state dogma to serve the agenda of the powerful. In East Asia, we find monastic members becoming militant and materialistic through state patronage. Indeed, when Buddhism (or any religion) is associated with power (worldly or divine) it falls victim to the rise and fall of their patrons.¹²⁸

The continuing spread and growth of Buddhism has less to do with state patronage than its own protean propensity for assimilating and adapting the systems of new regions and cultures wherever it takes root. While this may be a strength where the meditation culture is strong, it is its great weakness where this expedience has hidden agenda and worldly ambitions. The ultimate strength of Buddhism lies in the spiritual friendship of those "islands" who take the Dharma as their only refuge. [10:7b]

24. The Buddha's day

The traditional texts speak of the "Buddha duties" (*Buddha,kicca*), a general pattern that comprises the Buddha's daily life during his public ministry. It is important to note here that even the Buddha, having interacted with the world, giving teachings and showing his compassion, goes into solitary retreat himself, twice a day (once at dawn and again at dusk).

(1) The five periods

The Buddha's day is divided into five periods: the forenoon, the afternoon, the first watch, the middle watch, and the last watch. Rising early (ie about 4-5 am), the Buddha rouses in himself the attainment of great compassion (*mahā, karuṇā, samāpatti*) and surveys the world with his divine eye to see whom he can help.

During the early hours of dawn, the Buddha attends to his bodily needs and toilet. Then he sits down in solitary meditation or retreat (*paṭisallāna*) until it is time for the almsround. When it is time, he changes his lower robe and dresses himself. Then, taking his bowl, he enters the village or town for alms.

¹²⁷ See for example my lecture on "The Buddha's Smile: A study of Buddhist humour," National University of Singapore Buddhist Society, Singapore, 2001.

¹²⁸ See for example my lectures on Buddhism in China, in Japan and in Korea, The Buddhist Library, Singapore, 2002.

Sometimes he goes alone, sometimes with a retinue of monks. Sometimes he enters the alms area in a natural manner; sometimes he displays some wonders (like revealing the six-coloured aura or causing beautiful flowers to materialize in the air forming a canopy, etc). The Commentaries say that the weather will always be fine when the Buddha goes on his alms round (DA 1:45).

(2) Forenoon (pre-lunch) activities

When the Buddha goes on his almsround, the people make offerings to him and often invite a chapter of monks with the Buddha at its head for a meal offering. Before noon, he finishes his meal. Immediately after that, he surveys the mental dispositions of his audience and delivers a discourse, advising them on the Dharma and its practice, and establishes them in the Refuges and the Precepts. Some of them attain the fruits of sainthood (stream-winning, once-return, non-return and arhathood) and often enough the Buddha admits disciples into the order.

Having completed his morning activities, the Buddha returns to the monastery where he sits down on a special seat prepared for him in the pavilion and waits until the monks finish their meal. When the attendant informs him that the monks have finished their meal, the Buddha retires to the Fragrant Cell.

(3) Afternoon activities

After the noon meal, the Buddha sits down in the ante-chamber of the Fragrant Cell and washes his feet. Then, standing on the steps of the jewelled stairs of the Fragrant Cell (or, according to some, standing on a foot-stool), he exhorts the monks to “strive on heedfully” reminding them of the rarity of the appearance of a Buddha, of attaining a human birth, of meeting the right spiritual conditions, of the going-forth into homelessness, and of the opportunity of hearing the true Dharma.

Some order members then request for a subject of meditation and the Buddha accordingly assigns to them an appropriate subject. When all of them have retired to their individual day quarters and night quarters, the Buddha enters the Fragrant Cell and, if he wishes, mindfully lies down for a short while on his right side, in the lion posture (usually in the north-south direction).

Having refreshed himself, he passes the second part of the afternoon surveying the world with his divine eye, checking especially on the monks engaged in solitary retreat and other disciples to give them appropriate advice.

During the third part of the afternoon, towards evening, the people dwelling nearby, who have given alms in the morning, having dressed and groomed themselves, and bringing perfumes, garlands and other offerings, assemble in the monastery. The Buddha sits on his special seat in the assembly hall and teaches the Dharma in a way fitting to the occasion and audience.

(4) The night sessions

After his afternoon activities, the Buddha bathes or washes if he wishes to. The attendant also prepares the Buddha’s seat in the Fragrant Cell. Having put on a fresh well-dyed lower robe and dressed himself, the Buddha returns to his cell to spend a period of solitary retreat.

The first watch of the night (*paṭhama-* or *purīma,yāma*), extending from 6 to 10 pm, is exclusively reserved for the instruction of the order members who have arrived from various directions to attend upon the Buddha. Some ask questions, some inquire about points of Dharma, some request meditation subjects. After the order members have dispersed, during the middle watch (*majjhima,yāma*), extending from 10 pm to 2 am, heavenly beings approach the Buddha to consult him. They ask whatever questions that may occur to them, even one that is only four syllables long. The phrase “when the night was far advanced” (*abhikkantāya rattiya*) refers to the end of the first watch and the beginning of the middle watch (ie around 10 pm).

The last watch (*pacchima,yāma*), lasting from 2 to 6 am, is divided into two sessions (DA 147). Because his body aches from sitting for long periods since early morning, the Buddha spends the first portion of the last watch mindfully pacing up and down (*caṅkamana*) to dispel the discomfort.

During the second part of the last watch (ie around 3 to 5 am), the Buddha enters the Fragrant Cell and mindfully sleeps, experiencing nirvanic or dhyanic bliss. In other words, the Buddha sleeps only about two hours daily.

Finally, during the third part of the last watch, just before dawn, he rises, takes a seat and rouses in himself the attainment of great compassion. Cultivating thoughts of lovingkindness towards all beings, he

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surveys the world with his Buddha-eye and seeks out those who have observed their duties (eg giving alms and keeping to the Precepts in the presence of past Buddhas) and to whom he can assist spiritually.

- references → DA 1:45 ff, SnA 1:131 f.
- Buddha's daily life → DPPN 2:301 sv Buddha.

READING:

- (1) Bodhi, *The All-embracing Net of Views*, BPS, 1978:103 ff. [Tr of DA 1:45 f].
- (2) Piyasilo, *Life of the Buddha*, 1987d:ch 21.

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5

TRUE FRIENDSHIP

Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana

1. THE BUDDHA'S COMPASSION

According to the Commentarial tradition, the Buddha would each day survey the world twice with his Buddha Eye: once at dawn, looking from horizon inwards towards his Fragrant Chamber, and in the evening looking from the Fragrant Chamber outwards to see who was ready for admonition and conversion. One day, the Buddha saw that a young sick monk was ready for instruction.

The young monk, named Tiṣya (Tissa), came from a rich Śrāvastī family. Not long after his ordination, he suffered from boils that broke out and festered as open sores all over his body. After a while, his bones began to disintegrate. Due to his sickness, he was called the Elder Pūti,gātra Tiṣya (Pūti,gatta Tissa, Tissa of the Festering Body), and he was left unattended and alone by the monks.

The Buddha, knowing that Tiṣya was ready for arhathood, thought to himself: "This monk has been abandoned by his colleagues. At present he has no other refuge than me." Pretending to be making his rounds of the monastery, the Buddha went to Tissa's quarters. There he prepared some hot water and was preparing to nurse Tiṣya.

When the monks noticed the Buddha doing such menial tasks, they quickly approached and took over the nursing of Tiṣya. The Teacher then instructed them how Tiṣya should be nursed. First, he had some warm water sprinkled over Tiṣya to loosen his soiled robes that had stuck to his festering body. The upper robe was thoroughly washed in warm water and then dried.

When the upper robe had dried, the Teacher had Tiṣya's lower robe removed and after his body was carefully washed and dried, he was dressed in the clean dry upper robe. The soiled lower robe was then washed and dried. When the lower garment was ready, he was fully dressed with his body refreshed and mind tranquil.

The Teacher, knowing that Tissa had not long to live, stood by Tissa's pillow and said to him: "Monk, consciousness will depart from you, your body will become useless and, like a log, will lie on the ground." So saying, he pronounced this stanza:

In no long time, this body will lie on the ground,
Depised, with consciousness departed, like a useless log. (Dh 41)

At the end of the lesson, the Elder Pūti,gātra Tiṣya attained arhathood and passed away into Nirvana. The Teacher performed the last rites over his body, and taking the relics, caused a shrine to be erected. (DhA 1:319 ff)

2. THE MONK WITH A STOMACH DISORDER

The Vinaya records a similar story of the Buddha's compassion. This event is so significant that it is actually the occasion (*nīdāna*) for the Buddha to introduce Vinaya rules regarding monks taking care of one another. We have here a good example of how a Vinaya rule is introduced.

The sick monk

At one time, a certain monk had a stomach disorder (*kucchi,vikār'ābādhā*), probably dysentery. He lay fallen in his own excrements. The Blessed One, as he was touring the monastic lodgings (*sen'-āsana*) with the venerable Ānanda as his attendant (*paścā-c,chrāmaṇa/pacchā,samaṇa*), approached the monks' dwelling (*vihāra*). Then the Blessed One saw that sick monk lying fallen in his own excrements. Seeing him, he approached that monk, and spoke thus to him:

"What is your sickness, O monk?"

"I have a stomach disorder, venerable sir."

"But, O monk, don't you have an attendant (*uppaṭṭhāka*)?"

"No, venerable sir."

"Why don't the monks tend you?"

"I, venerable sir, am of no use to the monks, therefore the monks do not tend me."

Tending the sick monk

Then the Blessed One addressed the venerable Ānanda: “Go, Ānanda, bring some water. We will wash this monk.”

“Yes, venerable sir,” said the venerable Ānanda assented. When he had brought the water, the Blessed One sprinkled the water over the monk’s body, and then the venerable Ānanda washed him.

Then the Blessed One took him by the head, the venerable Ānanda by the feet, and having raised him up, they laid him down on a couch.

Investigating the Order

Then the Blessed One, on that occasion, in that connection, having assembled the Order of Monks, asked the monks:

“Is there, monks, in such and such a dwelling-place a monk who is ill (*gilāna*)?”

“There is, venerable sir.”

“What, monks, is that monk’s illness?”

“The monk has a stomach disorder, venerable sir.”

Seeking the cause of neglect

“But, monks, is there anyone who is tending that monk?”

“There is none, venerable sir.”

“Why don’t the monks tend him?”

“Venerable sir, this monk is of no use to the monks. Therefore the monks do not tend that monk.”

Admonition

“Monks, you have not a mother, you have not a father who might tend you. If you, monks, do not tend one another, then who is there who will tend you? Whoever, monks, would tend me, he would tend the sick (*yo bhikkhave maṃ upaṭṭhaheyya so gilānaṃ upaṭṭhaheyya*).

“If he has a preceptor (*upajjhāya*), he should be tended for life by the preceptor, who should wait for his recovery.

“If he has a teacher (*ācariya*), ...

“If he has a co-resident (*saddhi, vihārika*)...

“If he has a pupil (*antevāsika*)...

“If he has a fellow preceptor (*samān’upajjhāyaka*)...

“If he has a fellow teacher (*samān’ācariya*), he should be tended by the teacher, who should wait for his recovery.

“If he has neither preceptor nor a teacher nor a co-resident nor a pupil nor a fellow preceptor nor a fellow teacher, then he should be tended by the Order.

“If one should not tend him, then it is an offence of wrong-doing (*dukkaṭa*).” (V 1:300 f.)

The above is an example of how a rule of Buddhist canon law is promulgated. The basis for this rule is compassion and fellowship. First, the Buddha questions the monk concerned regarding the personal reason for his indisposition (“What is your sickness?”), then regarding the social cause of his suffering (“Why don’t the monks tend you?”). Having established the reason, he then takes immediate measures to correct the situation—in this case, to tend to the sick monk.

Once the immediate problem has been resolved, the Buddha assembles the Order. He questions the Order if they are aware of a problem situation (“Is there, monks, in such and such a dwelling-place a monk who is ill?”) and asks the Order the reason for the problem (“He is of no use to the monks”).

Having established the case, the Buddha (in a gentle optative mood) goes on to admonish the Order on the value of fellowship, using himself as the example (“Whoever, monks, would tend me, he would tend the sick”). This is the spirit of the law. Then, he promulgates the rule: the letter of the law (“an offence of wrong-doing”). This is the basic pattern for the introduction of the monastic rules.

3. SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

It is clear from the Buddha’s personal examples cited here and many other such accounts recorded in the Buddhist Canon, that caring for one another is not only vital for community life, such as that of the

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Buddhist Sangha, but is also essential for spiritual development. The *locus classicus* or key reference for spiritual friendship is the Upaḍḍha Sutta (S 45.2) which, due to its importance, is quoted here in full:

Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was dwelling among the Sakyas, where there was a town of Sakyas named Nāgaraka.

Then the Venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down at one side, and said to him:

“Venerable sir, spiritual friendship, good companionship, good comradeship, is half of the holy life.”

“Not so, Ānanda! Not so, Ānanda! Spiritual friendship, good companionship, good comradeship, is the whole of the holy life. When a monk has a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇa, mittassa... bhikkhuno*),¹²⁹ a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop the noble eightfold path.

And how, Ānanda, does a monk who has a spiritual friend...develop the noble eightfold path?

Here, Ānanda, a monk develops right view, which is based on seclusion, dispassion and cessation, maturing in release. He develops right intention...right speech...right action...right livelihood...right effort...right mindfulness...right concentration, which is based on seclusion, dispassion and cessation, maturing in release.

It is in this way, Ānanda, that a monk who has a spiritual friend...develops the noble eightfold path.

In this way, too, Ānanda, it should be known how the whole of the holy life is spiritual friendship...:

By relying upon me as a spiritual friend, Ānanda, beings subject to birth are freed from birth, beings subject to aging are freed from aging, beings subject to death are freed from death, beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, anguish and despair are freed from them.

In this way, Ānanda, it should be known how the whole of the holy life is spiritual friendship, good companionship, good comradeship.”

(S 45.2/5:2 f.; also at S 3.18/1:87 f; cf. Śāriputra’s remark, S 5:4 [9])

The Commentary says that Ānanda thinks that the practice of an ascetic succeeds when he relies on spiritual friends and on his own personal effort, so half of it depends on spiritual friends and half on personal effort. But, as with children, it is not possible to say: “So much comes from the mother, so much comes from the father.”

The importance of this sutra is attested by the fact that it is repeated in full in the Appamāda Sutta II (S 3.18), where, at Śrāvastī, King Prasenajit shared his personal thoughts with the Buddha:

Here, venerable sir, while I was alone in seclusion, the following reflection arose in my mind: ‘The Doctrine has been well taught by the Blessed One, and that is for one with spiritual friends, good companions, good comrades, not for one with bad friends, bad companions, bad comrades.’

The Buddha replies by relating the incident of the Upaḍḍha Sutta. In this case, the Buddha applies spiritual friendship on a more mundane level for the benefit of the king, saying that through spiritual friendship, his kingdom and family would be guarded and prosper (S 1:88 f).

The Commentary says that although the Dharma is well taught for all, just as medicine is effective only for one who takes it, so the Dharma fulfills its purpose only for a compliant and faithful person with spiritual friends, and not otherwise. Elsewhere, the Buddha often mentions the importance of spiritual friendship:

¹²⁹ *kalyāṇa, mittassa... bhikkhuno*. This expression has often been mistranslated. Bodhi makes an important note here: “As an independent substantive, *kalyāṇamitta* means a good friend, i.e. a spiritual friend who gives advice, guidance, and encouragement. When used in apposition to *bhikkhu*, however, *kalyāṇamitta* becomes a *bahubbhīhi* compound, and the whole expression means “a bhikkhu *who has* a good friend.” (S:B 1890 n6).

Monks, dawn is the forerunner and harbinger of the rising sun. Even so, monks, spiritual friendship is the forerunner and harbinger of the noble eightfold path. (S 5:29)

Monks, I do not see any other thing by which the unarisen noble eightfold path arises and the arisen noble eightfold path develops to completion except through spiritual friendship. (S 5:35)

4. VITALITY OF LOVE

(a) The 4 immeasurable acts

Spiritual friendship consists of spiritual emotion. Since spiritual friendship (like any good friendship) is a kind of positive emotion, it can be developed. A basic yet vital aspect of spiritual emotion is love in connection with faith, that is, “through mere faith and love” (*saddhā, mattakena pema, mattakena*), as the Buddha puts it in the Bhaddāli Sutta (M 65), in which he exhorts the monk Bhaddāli who has difficulty keeping up the training due to a strict practice. In his compassion, the Buddha remarks:

Here some monk progresses through mere faith (*saddhā*) and love (*pema*). In this case, the monks consider thus: “Friends, this monk progresses through mere faith and love (*saddhā, mattakena vāhati pema, mattakena*).¹³⁰ Let him not lose that mere faith and love, as he may if we take action against him by repeatedly admonishing him.” Suppose a man had only one eye. Then his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, would guard his eye, thinking: “Let him not lose this one eye.” So, too, some monk progresses by mere faith and love....” Let him not lose that mere faith and love, as he may if we take action against him by repeatedly admonishing him. (M 1:444)

The Majjhima Commentary explains that the monk maintains himself by mere worldly faith (*saddhā*) and worldly love (*pema*) towards his preceptor and teacher. Because the other monks help him, he remains in the homeless life and may eventually become a great monk attained to direct knowledge. (MA 3:154)

It is interesting that the “love” mentioned here is “worldly love” (*prema/pema*) and not “lovingkindness” (*maitrī/mettā*). The point here is clear: the spirit of love nurses one to see the spirit of truth. Where spiritual training is concerned, a positive emotional state has to be encouraged at least initially and built up gradually into higher levels of spiritual emotions. Briefly, there are four stages as detailed in the Visuddhi, magga (Vism 9:108):

(1) Think love. Spiritual friendship begins with a single wholesome thought. Then one examines the good qualities that one has, rejoices in them and helps others with them. This is the true “art of loving” or lovingkindness (*maitrī/mettā*), that is, a positive attitude shown towards equals (those having good fortune like oneself) when they are not in any difficulty. Even a single thought such as “May you be well and happy!” is a profound act of lovingkindness. This thought, however, should not be limited in any way—it should include oneself, beloved ones, neutral ones, hostile ones, and all beings.

In mythological terms, the Buddha’s lovingkindness is represented by the earth deity (*mahā, pṛthivī devatā*) Sthavarā or Vasudhārā [2:21b] who emerged from below and stood witness to the Buddha’s past good deeds to merit him the seat under the Bodhi tree. She wrung her long hair from which a great torrent of water gushed forth into a great flood that washed away Māra and his demon host. The symbolism here is quite clear, Sthavarā is not only Mother Earth but also represents our own mind and spirituality that always witness all our good deeds and protects us from evil. Like the earth, our lovingkindness and past good karma supports us, especially through our trials and tribulations.

(2) Show love. One should not judge nor evaluate others by way of looks, status, sex, race, religion, species, etc. One should look at another as a being with great potential for becoming a better person. This is the true “act of loving” or compassion (*karuṇā*), this is, a positive attitude shown to beings less fortunate than oneself. It should be accompanied by appropriate actions that help alleviate or remove the sufferings or misfortunes of others.

In mythological terms, the Buddha’s compassion is represented by Mucalinda [3:18], the nāga king who, on his own initiative emerges from under the earth to shelter the Buddha from a heavy thunderstorm. Then turning himself in to a handsome youth, he worships the Buddha. Like Sthavarā or Vasudhārā, the

¹³⁰ Bodhi however translates this phrase as “by a measure of faith and love” (M:B 547 f).

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earth deity, Mucalinda, too, comes from deep beneath the earth, that is, from deep inside our unconscious or creative side (represented by his youth). To show compassion, we need to appear in a form (looks as well as actions) that would benefit others.

We can even stretch the mythology further to say that the nāga form of Mucalinda represents compassion while his form as a youth personified wisdom, from the fact that wisdom is eternal and unchanging. This dual aspect is also embodied in the Mahāyāna figure of Avalokiteśvara.

(3) Enjoy love. One should cultivate the capacity for arousing security and joy in others. When one sees another feeling secure and joyful, one also feels alike. This is the true “joy of loving” or altruistic joy (*muditā*), that is, magnanimous joy at the success of others. When someone else enjoys good fortune, one rejoices in it as if one is oneself enjoying that good fortune. This attitude counters self-consuming jealousy.

In terms of Buddhist mythology, altruistic joy is represented by Brahmā [4:1] who rejoices in the Buddha’s awakening and wishes others to rejoice in it, too. We might regard Brahmā here as the wise old man of Jungian psychology, an archetypal image of meaning and wisdom (Sharp 1991:148). In Jung’s terminology, the wise old man is a personification of the masculine spirit. In a man, the anima is related to the wise old man as daughter to father. In a woman, the wise old man is an aspect of the animus. The feminine equivalent in both men and women is the Great Mother (in this case represented by Sthavarā). In simple terms, in every human being there is the masculine and feminine aspects, both of which need to be balanced.

The wise old man also represents unconditional love, an important aspect of altruistic joy, that is, to respect people for what they are and rejoicing in their goodness. This can only be done if we regard each person, especially those we love and care about, as if we are meeting for first time each time we meet. This is like the Buddha appearing in our world each time as if for the first time even though there have been Buddhas in the past, and Buddhas to come in the future.

(4) Balance love. Despite what we do, the eight winds or worldly conditions (*loka, dharma/loka, -dhamma*: gain, loss; honour, dishonour; praise, blame; happiness, sorrow) still blow. Yet one’s love remains constant and strong to all and sundry. This is the true “end of loving” or equanimity (*upekṣā/upekṣhā*), which is a calm mirror-like state of mind that at once reflects the nature of things without any distortion. It is not an indifferent attitude, but an active response to the feelings and needs of others like a mirror that reflects the image of the object before it. Only when one’s mind is calm and peaceful can one really show this responsive wisdom.

In Buddhist mythological terms, the Buddha’s equanimity is represented by the Bodhi tree [3:16, 22], another ancient symbol of unification of opposites. The roots of the tree go deep into the ground, our humanity, but the branches and leaves reach up high into the sky, our divinity. Like the proverbial rain-cloud of the Lotus Sutra that rains on all and sundry, the good and the evil, the tree provides shade for all who come to it. It neither trembles nor bends in the eight winds.

The Bodhi tree is no ordinary tree, but a Cosmic Tree (an imagery found in most ancient mythologies). Like Jacob’s ladder in biblical mythology, the Bodhi tree is our link to a higher reality, a liberating spirituality.

In her paper “A Buddhist Inspiration for a Contemporary Psychotherapy,” Gay Watson gives a succinct summary of the vitality of these four immeasurable mental states in terms of contemporary psychology and psychotherapy:

...Buddhist therapy is based on a profound belief of ‘basic sanity’ of each person, in the clear light mind or Buddha nature, unhindered by the adventitious veils and obstructions imposed upon it. Expression of this basic sanity are found in the four immeasurable states of friendliness, compassion, joy and equanimity. (Gay Watson, 1996:271)

In other words, the four immeasurables should be our basic and sustained mental state for a healthy and productive life.

(b) The shadow

There is another important mythological figure in Buddhism we must mention: that of Māra [3:7-13]. The shadow, in Jungian psychology, is the hidden or unconscious aspects of oneself, both good and bad, which the ego has either repressed or never recognized. The shadow is composed for the most part of

repressed desires and uncivilized impulses, morally inferior motives, childish fantasies and resentments, etc—all those things about oneself one is not proud of. These unacknowledged personal characteristics are often experienced in others through the psychological defence mechanism of projection.

The shadow is, however, not only the dark underside of the personality. It also consists of instincts, abilities and positive moral qualities that have been long been buried or never been conscious (Sharp 1991:123-125). As such, unlike the Abrahamic Satan, Māra can be converted to goodness (as in the case of Maudalyāyana) [36a]. After all, Māra is our own sense-faculties, our own mind.

Before we can truly become wise, we have to face our own shadow. Just as Māra is defeated simply through recognizing him, our shadow is cleared through the light of acknowledgement, through self-knowledge. The value of spiritual friendship is that it acts as a mirror for us to gain this self-knowledge. Here, the Buddha is our best mirror.

Having said that, we can summarize that spiritual friendship is the interaction and balance of love and wisdom.

5. LIKE MILK AND WATER

A testimony of how the early monks and nuns live in spiritual friendship is found in the Dhammacetiya Sutta which records the praises of king Prasenajit (Pasenadi) of Kośāla for the monks:

...Venerable sir, kings quarrel with kings, nobles with nobles, brahmins with brahmins, householders with householders; mother quarrels with child, child with mother, father with child, child with father; brother quarrels with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, sister with sister, friend with friend.

But here I see monks living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, looking at each other with kindly eyes. I do not see any other assembly elsewhere with such concord.

Again, venerable sir...I have seen some recluses and brahmins who are lean, wretched, unsightly, jaundiced, with veins standing out on their limbs, such that people would not look at them again...

But here I see monks smiling and cheerful, sincerely joyful, plainly delighting, their faculties fresh, living at ease, unruffled, subsisting on what others give, abiding with mind [as aloof] as a wild deer's... Surely, these venerable ones have certainly realized the great and full significance of the Blessed One's teaching. (M 1:121) [8:16]

This event occurred in the last year of the Buddha's life, when both he and the king were 80 years old.

6. MISINTERPRETATION OF "SELF-RELIANCE"

Spiritual friendship is perhaps the most neglected aspect of Buddhism today—even virtually unknown to many Buddhists—mainly because of “over-interpreting” and taking out of context the Buddha's call to be self-reliant as recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta:

Therefore, Ānanda, live as an island unto yourself, with self as refuge, with no other refuge, the Dhamma as an island, the Dhamma as a refuge, with no other refuge.

Tasmā-t-ih'Ānanda atta,dīpā viharatha atta,saraṇā anañña,saraṇā, dhamma,dīpā dhamma-saraṇā anaññasaraṇā. (D 2:100 = 3:58, 77; S 3:42, 5:154, 163, 164)

Very often, this is taken to be either a carte blanche for religious licence (an oxymoron!) or an individualistic do-it-yourself private philosophy. It should be noted that immediately after making this important statement, “Live as an island unto yourself,” the Buddha explains what he means:

And how does one live as an island unto oneself...with no other refuge? Here, Ānanda, a monk abides contemplating the body as body, earnestly, clearly aware, mindful, and having put away all hankering and fretting for the world,¹³¹ and likewise with regard to feelings...mind...

¹³¹ Hankering and fretting after the world. This is a brief statement of the 5 Hindrances [10:6a].

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and mind-objects. And those in my time or afterwards live thus, they will become the highest, if they are desirous of learning. (D 2:100 = 3:58, 77; S 3:42, 5:154, 163, 164)

In short, this is the 4 stations of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna/satipaṭṭhāna*), the basis of Buddhist meditation. One of the key aspects of the practice of mindfulness or meditation is that of “skillful consideration” or “wise attention.” [10:6]

7. WISE ATTENTION

(a) Meghiya Sutta

Wise attention (*yoniso,manasikāra/yoniso,manasikāra*) is intimately interlinked with spiritual friendship. The best case study we have from the Pali Canon is perhaps that found in the Meghiya Sutta, about Meghiya, one of the Buddha’s personal attendant before Ānanda [Chapter 6]:

On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling on Cālika Hill at Cālikā. There the venerable Meghiya, who then was the Blessed One’s attendant, approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him and stood at one side:

“Lord, I wish to go to Jantu, gāma for alms.”

“You may do so as you think fit, Meghiya.” (*Yassa dāni tvaṃ Meghiya kālaṃ maññāsī ti.*)

Then the venerable Meghiya, having dressed himself in the morning and taking robe and bowl, entered Jantugāma for alms. Having made the almsround and taken his meal, he went to the bank of the Kimikālā River.

There, while walking around to stretch his legs, he saw a pleasant and beautiful mango grove. Seeing it, he thought: “Pleasant, indeed, is this mango grove; it is beautiful. Truly, it is fit for a clansman who wishes to strive in meditation. If the Blessed One allows it, I shall return to the mango grove to strive in meditation.”

Then Meghiya approached the Buddha and related to him what he had thought.

“Wait a while, Meghiya. We are now alone here. Wait awhile until another monk comes.”

But the venerable Meghiya repeated his request, saying: “Lord, the Blessed One has completed his business and has nothing further he needs to do. But I have not completed my business here and have something to do. If the Blessed One permits, I shall go that mango grove and strive in meditation.”

Again, the Buddha repeated his advice, but Meghiya persisted. After the third time that Meghiya repeated his request, the Buddha finally replied:

“As you speak of striving, Meghiya, what can I say? You may do now as you think fit.”

Then the venerable Meghiya rose from his seat, prostrated himself before the Lord, and keeping his right side towards him, went to the mango grove. Having entered the mango grove, he sat down at the foot of a certain tree for the noonday rest. But while doing so, three kinds of evil, unwholesome thoughts constantly assailed him: sensual thoughts, thoughts of ill-will and thoughts of violence.

“This is strange, it’s amazing!” he thought, “Out of faith I have gone forth from home into homelessness, and yet I am harassed by these three kinds of evil, unwholesome thoughts.”¹³²

(b) Benefits of spiritual friendship

So, the Venerable Meghiya returned to the Blessed One and told him what had occurred.

“If, Meghiya, the mind still lacks maturity for liberation, there are 5 conditions conducive to making it mature. What five?”

¹³² The Aṅguttara Commentary gives a curious explanation why these thoughts assailed Meghiya so suddenly and so strongly. In 500 successive rebirths, Meghiya had been a king. When he went out into the royal park for sport and amusement together with dancing girls of three age groups, he used to sit down at the very spot called “the auspicious slab” (*P. maṅgala, silā, paṭṭa*). Therefore, at the very moment when Meghiya sat down at that place, he felt as if his monkhood had left him and he was a king surrounded him by beautiful dancers. And when, as a king, he was enjoying that splendour, a thought of sensuality arose in him. At that very moment it happened that his great warriors brought to him two bandits whom they had arrested, and Meghiya saw them as distinctly as if they were standing in front of him. Now when (as a king) he was ordering the execution of one bandit, a thought of ill-will arose in him, and when he was ordering the manacled and imprisonment of the other, a thought of violence arose in him. So even now, as Meghiya, he became entangled in these unwholesome thoughts like a tree in a net of creepers or like a honey-gatherer in a swarm of honey bees. (AA 4:165; cf. UA 217 ff.)

1. Spiritual friendship.
2. Moral conduct in keeping with the Code of Discipline, seeing danger in the slightest fault.
3. Talk on contentment, aloofness and the spiritual life.
4. Energy in abandoning unwholesome states and promoting wholesome states.
5. The wisdom that sees the rise and fall of phenomena that leads to the complete destruction of suffering.

“When, Meghiya, a monk has a spiritual friend, it can be expected that he will be virtuous...that he will engage in talk conducive to an ascetic life and to mental clarity...that his energy will be set on abandoning anything unwholesome and promoting anything wholesome...that he will have the wisdom that leads to the complete destruction of suffering.

“Then, Meghiya, when the monk is firmly grounded in these five things, he should cultivate four other things:

Meditation on the foulness of the body for abandoning lust.

Cultivation of lovingkindness for abandoning ill-will.

Mindfulness of breathing for cutting off distracting thoughts.

Perception of impermanence for eliminating the conceit “I am.”

For one who perceives impermanence, Meghiya, the perception of non-self becomes firmly established, and one who perceives non-self eliminates the conceit “I am,” and attains Nirvana here and now.”

(A 9.3; U 4.1; abridged)

Then, realizing the significance of the teaching, the Blessed One uttered this inspired utterance (*udāna*):

Trivial thoughts, subtle thoughts,
When followed they distract the mind.
Not understanding those thoughts
The roaming mind runs back and forth.

But by understanding those thoughts
One ardent and mindful restrains the mind.
An awakened one has overcome them completely
So, they do not arise to distract the mind. (U 4.1)

The Dhammapada Commentary says that when Meghiya, after being troubled by the unwholesome thoughts returned to the Buddha, he actually chided Meghiya for abandoning him when he asked him to remain. “A monk should never lose control thus. Thoughts are flighty, and a person should always keep them under control.” So saying, the Teacher pronounced the following Dhammapada stanzas:

Thoughts, unsteady, fickle, difficult to guard, difficult to control,
A wise man makes straight, even as a fletcher straightens his arrow.

Like a fish thrown upon dry land from its watery home,
These thoughts twist and tremble in their efforts to shake off the power of Māra.

(Dh 33-34; DhA 3.1)

8. CONDITIONS FOR RIGHT VIEW

The Mahā Vedalla Sutta (M 43) mentions two conditions for the arising of right view, namely, “the voice of another” (*parato,ghosa*) and wise attention (*yoniso,manasikāra*) (M 1:294; A 1:87). The Sutta Commentary explains that wise attention is the personal skillful means of minding (*attano upāya,-manasikāra*), and that the voice of another is “the listening to conducive Dharma” (*sappāya,dhamma-s,-savana*) (MA 2:346).¹³³

The Mahā Vedalla Sutta continues by saying that Right View (pertaining to the path of arhathood) is assisted by 5 factors when it has deliverance of mind (from lust) and the deliverance by wisdom (from

¹³³ MA says that these two conditions—“the voice of another” and “wise attention”—are necessary for the disciple desiring to arrive at the right view of insight and the right view of the supramundane path. But the Individual Buddhas (*pacceka,buddha*) and the omniscient Buddhas (*sabbāññū,buddha*) arrive at their awakening solely in dependence on wise attention without “the voice of another.” (MA 2:346)

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ignorance) as goal (both referring to the fruit of arhathood). These 5 factors are: moral conduct, learning, discussion, calmness and insight. (M 1:294)

These teachings are further found in the Saṃyutta Nikāya where it is mentioned that spiritual friendship is the chief external support for spiritual development and skillful means its chief internal support (S 45.49, 55). Here, moral conduct, learning and discussion would fall under the category of spiritual friendship, while calmness and insight (that is, cultivation or meditation) come under wise attention. This analysis similarly applies to the teaching of the 5 factors given by the Buddha to Meghiya:

1. Spiritual friendship. [Here referring to faith, *saddhā*. Cf. UA 221.]
2. Moral conduct in keeping with the Code of Discipline, seeing danger in the slightest fault. [Moral conduct]
3. Talk on contentment, aloofness and the spiritual life. [Study & Discussion]
4. Energy in abandoning unwholesome states and promoting wholesome states. [Calmness]
5. The wisdom that sees the rise and fall of phenomena that leads to the complete destruction of suffering. [Insight] (A 4:357 = U 36 f.; UA 221) [7]

9. SACCA,VIBHAṄGA SUTTA

Who are the models for spiritual friendship? The Aṅguttara twice records the Buddha declaring:

Monks, the believing monk, if he would correctly aspire, should aspire thus: “May I be like Sāriputta and Moggallāna!”

Monks, they are the standard and measure (*tulā etaṃ pamāṇaṃ*) for my disciples who are monks, namely, Sāriputta and Moggallāna. (A 1:88 = 2:164)

A whole sutta is expounded in answer to the same question, that is, the Sacca,vibhaṅga Sutta (The Discourse on the Analysis of the Truths) (M 141). The sutta opens with the statement that “in the Deer Park at R̥ṣipatana near Vārāṇasī, the Tathāgata...set rolling the incomparable Wheel of the Dharma, which cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or god or Māra or Brahmā or anyone in the world,” that is, the teaching of the four noble truths. The venue of the Sacca,vibhaṅga Sutta is also the Deer Park at R̥ṣipatana near Vārāṇasī. Then the Buddha declares:

Cultivate the friendship of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, monks. Associate with Sāriputta and Moggallāna. They are wise and helpful to their companions in the holy life. Sāriputta is like a mother; Moggallāna is like a nurse. Sāriputta trains others for the fruit of stream-entry; Moggallāna for the supreme goal. Sāriputta, monks, is able to declare, teach, describe, establish, reveal, expound and exhibit the four noble truths.” (M 3:248)

According to the Majjhima Commentary, Śāriputta trains his pupils until he knows they have attained the fruit of stream-entry. Then, he lets them develop the higher paths on their own, and takes on a new batch of pupils [18]. Maudgalyāyana, on other hand, continues to train his pupils until they have attained arhathood. (MA 5:63)

After the Buddha has made the above announcement, he leaves the assembly for his dwelling. Soon after that, Śāriputra gives a detailed exposition of the four noble truths [cf. 29]. Due to the teacher, topic and context of this exposition, it is said to be “the second turning of the Wheel of the Dharma.” The whole section on the Truths are included in the Mahā Sati’paṭṭhāna Sutta, where the second and third Truths are elaborated (D 22.18-21 = 2:305-13).¹³⁴

In the Sāriputta Sutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, Śāriputra repeats the key statement the Buddha has made to Ānanda in connection with spiritual friendship: “Spiritual friendship, good companionship, good comradeship, is the whole of the holy life.” (S 5:4). The Buddha praises Śāriputra for making this statement. The Commentary says that Ānanda [3] does not make the statement correctly because he has not reached the peak of the knowledge of the disciple’s perfection but that Śāriputra has.

¹³⁴ For other definitions of birth, ageing and death, see the Sammā,ditṭhi Sutta, M 9.22, 26.

10. CHILDHOOD FRIENDS

(a) The hill-top festival

The story of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana is given in the Dhammapada Commentary (bk 1 story 8) on Dh 11-12. Before the Buddha appeared in the world, there were born on the same day two boys in two brahmin villages in India, called Upatiṣya,grāma (Upatissa,gāma) and Kolita,grāma (Kolita,gāma), both about a league (*yojana*)—about 11 km—apart, both about half a league from Rājagṛha in Magadha. Since they were the firstborn of the villages' leading families, they were respectively named after their own villages—Upatiṣya and Kolita (cf. M 1:150). It was likely that the village came to be called “Upatiṣya” or “Upatiṣya,grāma” since it was inhabited by the Upatiṣya clan (*gotra/gotta*). Other accounts say that Śāriputra's village was Nālaka or Nālānda,grāmaka (Mvst 2:56).

Upatiṣya's mother was Rūpā Śārī, his father, the brahmin Vaṅganta; Kolita's mother was Maudgalī or Maudgalyānī (Moggallī) (DhA 2:84). Their families had been close for seven generations, and the two boys grew up together. As young men, the two friends attended the annual Hilltop Festival (*giri-y-agra-samāja/gir'agga,samajjā*) at Rājagṛha. It was time of laughter and excitement with plays and dances. They attended the festival for two days, but on the third, they found that they could neither laugh or share the excitement any longer with the realization, “What is there to look at here? Before these people have reached a hundred years, they will all be dead! Shouldn't we go seek a teaching of deliverance?”

(b) Sañjayin Vairāṭi,putra

Sharing the same troubling thought, they both decided to leave home as ascetics and find a teacher. At that time a wandering ascetic (*parivrājaka/paribbājaka*) named Sañjayin Vairāṭi,putra (Sañjaya Belaṭṭhi,putta) [8:7], one of the six well-known sectarian teachers, an agnostic and skeptic, lived in Rājagṛha. The two friends, each with their own following of 500 brahmin youths joined Sañjayin, greatly increasing his reputation and support.

Sañjayin's method was not a commit himself to any answer to a philosophical or religious question. In that way, he would never be wrong. However, there was a serious note to this approach: it is likely that his standpoint was not made out of ignorance but based on the notion that knowledge was not necessary, even dangerous, for salvation. In other words, when one really knows nothing, one realizes everything.

Within a short time, they mastered whatever Sañjayin had to teach. Realizing that they had not found what they were seeking, the two friends decided to go their separate ways with the promise to meet again at an appointed time so that whoever had found the Deathless would inform the other. Shortly after this, the Buddha had completed his first rains retreat following his awakening and taken up residence at the Bamboo Grove. [4:20]

11. ŚĀRIPUTRA MEETS AŚVAJIT

Among the first 60 arhats whom the Buddha had sent forth to proclaim the Dharma [4:17] was an elder named Aśvajit or Aśvakī (Mvst 3:328), one of first Five Monks who had attended to the Bodhi-sattva during his self-mortification period and later became the first enlightened disciple. When one day Upatiṣya saw Aśvajit (or Upasena, Mvst 3:60) on the latter's almsround, he was struck by Aśvajit's dignified and serene appearance, something he had not seen before, but hesitated to approach him since it was not the proper time.

When it was time for Aśvajit to have his meal, Upatiṣya attended to him as a pupil would—spreading out his own sitting cloth for Aśvajit and offering him drinking water from his own water-pot. After the meal and having exchanged customary greetings, Upatiṣya questioned Aśvajit:

“Serene are your features, friend. Pure and bright is your complexion. Under whom have you gone forth as an ascetic? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?”

It is interesting here that Upatiṣya did not ask: “You look well-dressed, rich, and well-qualified. What are your paper qualifications? What titles do you have? How much salary do you earn a month? How many-room house do you live in? What important people do you know?” Upatiṣya was simply impressed by the inner peace exuding from the humble figure—he was not “measuring” Aśvajit; he was simply rejoicing in his joyful presence and eager to partake of Aśvajit's spiritual joy. Aśvajit, however, was to subtly test him before answering him.

“These wandering ascetics are hostile to the teaching I profess. Therefore I will show this monk the profundity of our teaching,” Aśvajit thought to himself. First, he explained that he was a mere newly-

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ordained monk (*nava*), confessing that he was unable to expound the Dharma at length, but could tell the general sense of the teaching in brief (P. *saṅkhittena atthaṃ vakkhāmi*, V 1:40).

I am Upatissa. Say much or little according to your ability. I will undertake to fathom the meaning in a hundred ways or a thousand ways.

Say little or much; tell me the essence only;
I have need of the essence only; why utter so many words?

The Mahāvastu mentions Upasena instead of Aśvajit and he said: “I have but little learning, venerable sir. I can only formulate the general sense of the teaching (*artha, mātram kalpeyaṃ/attha, mattaṃ kappeyyaṃ*).” Upatissa replied:

“I am concerned with the sense, what matters the letter? For he who teaches the sense knows the sense, and seeks to do good thereby. We, too, for many a day have borne such a profitless burden of words and text, and before this have been many a time deceived.” (Mvst 3:60 f).

In response, Aśvajit pronounced one of the most famous of Buddhist stanzas (in Sanskrit):

ye dharmā hetu, prabhavā, hetuṃ teṣāṃ Tathāgato' vadat,
*teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃ vāḍī Mahā, śramaṇaḥ.*¹³⁵

According to the Pali tradition, the verse and story run as follows:

Of all things that arise from a cause, *Ye dhammā hetu-p, pabhavā*
Their cause the Tathāgata has told. *tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha*

As soon as Upatissa heard these first two lines, he was established in the fruit of stream-winning. Then Aśvajit completed the stanza:

And also how these cease to be— *tesaṃ ca yo nirodho*
This too the great sage has told. *evaṃ vāḍī mahā, samaṇo* (V 1:40; J 1:85)¹³⁶

However, after he had attained the fruit of stream-winning, the higher excellence (P. *upari, viśesa*), i.e. any higher attainment, failed to appear (DhA 1:94). Therefore, he considered, “There must be a reason for this,” and said to Aśvajit. “Please do not elaborate your teaching any further; let this suffice. Where does our Teacher reside?”

“At the Bamboo Grove, brother.”

Śāriputra then took his leave and went to look for Kolita, who seeing that Śāriputra's face has a brightness not seen before, knew that he had found the Deathless. Śāriputra uttered the stanza and at the end of it, Kolita attained the fruit of stream-winning. Then they decided that they should meet the Buddha himself. (V 1:39 f)

12. MORE FOOLS THAN THE WISE

It was Upatissa's special quality that he always held his teachers in high respect. Therefore, he suggested, “Friend, let us inform our teacher, the wandering ascetic Sañjayin, that we have attained the Deathless. Thus, will his mind be awakened, and he will comprehend. But, should he fail to comprehend, he will at any rate believe what we say to be true. And as soon as he has listened to the teaching of the Buddhas, he will attain the Path and the Fruit.”

¹³⁵ Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, ed. Nanjio, 444; Ārya, pratītya, samutpāda Sūtra (in the Ārya Śālistamba Sūtra, ed. Śāstri, 26. See Jayatilleke, 1963: 454.

¹³⁶ After the Buddha's passing, esp during the late Gupta until the end of the Pāla period (c 600-1200 CE), this verse attained cult status as inscriptions often interred in stupas. See Daniel Boucher, “The *Pratītyasamutpādagāthā* and its role in the medieval cult of the relics,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14, 1 1991: 1-27.

The two good friends informed Sañjayin that the Buddha had arisen in the world, that Sañjayin was walking the wrong path and invited him to go together to meet the Buddha.

“You may go; I cannot go.”

When asked for the reason, Sañjayin replied:

“I have gone about as a teacher of the multitude. For me to become a pupil again would be as absurd as for a chatty (earthen jug) to go to the well. I shall not be able to live the life of a pupil.”

When pressed to see the benefit of meeting the Buddha, Sañjayin asked: “Friends, which are more numerous in the world: the stupid or the wise?”

“Teacher, the stupid are more numerous in this world, the wise are few.”

“Well, then, friends, let the wise men go to the wise monk Gotama, and let the stupid come to stupid me. You may go, but I shall not go.”

The two friends then departed with the words: “You will be a famous man, teacher!”

When the two friends left, Sañjayin’s congregation broke up, leaving the grove empty, at which sight Sañjayin vomited hot blood. Five hundred wandering ascetics accompanied to two friends for some distance. Of these 250 remained loyal to Sañjayin and turned back; the other 250 became the disciples of the two and they headed for the Bamboo Grove. The Mahāvastu, however, says that all 500 of Sañjayin’s disciples left with the two friends without any mention of his unhappy reaction. (V 1:39-44; Ap 1:24 f; J 1:85; DhA 1:90-95; SnA 1:326 ff; Mvst 3:63)¹³⁷

13. CHIEF DISCIPLES

When Upatīṣya and Kolita arrived at the Bamboo Grove, the Buddha, seated in the midst of the four-fold assembly (of monk, nuns, laymen and laywomen) was teaching the Dharma. When he saw the two wanderers approaching, he addressed the monks: “These two friends, Upatissa and Kolita, who are now approaching, will be my two chief disciples, an excellent pair.”

Having arrived, the friends prostrated before the Buddha in homage and sat down at one side. Thus seated, they said to the Buddha:

“May we obtain, Lord, the going-forth under the Blessed One, may we obtain the ordination.”

“Come, O monks! Well proclaimed is the Dharma. Live the holy life for making a complete end of suffering.”

This was the ordination of Upatīṣya and Kolita.

(V 1:42) [cf. 4:10]

Then the Blessed One continued his discourse, taking the individual temperament of audience into consideration. With the exception of Upatīṣya and Kolita, all of them attained to arhathood. They did not attain to higher paths and fruits because they needed a longer period of preparatory training to fulfil their personal destiny of serving as the Buddha’s chief disciples.

Out of respect for Upatīṣya and Kolita after their ordination, they were respectfully known by their respective metronyms (based on the mother’s names), Śāriputra and Mahā Maudgalyāyana. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the three disciples closest to the Buddha—Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana and Ānanda—did not attain stream-winning by the Buddha’s own instruction but through the guidance of others: Upatīṣya through Aśvajit; Maudgalyāyana through Upatīṣya, Ānanda through the arhat Puṇḍra Maitrayāṇī,putra (Puṇḍra Mantāni,putta). For such an attainment to be possible, Kolita needed to possess strong confidence in his friend as well as in the truth, both of which Kolita had (Nyanaponika et al 1997: 382 n5). These are classic examples of spiritual friendship.

¹³⁷ **The Mūla,sarvāstivādin Vinaya and other Mahāyāna texts** give a more favourable picture of Sañjayin. While Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana were still his disciples, Sañjayin fell ill and they cared for him. In return, he predicted to them the arrival of the Buddha and affirmed the Buddha’s sanctity, encouraging them to learn from the Buddha. When Sañjayin died, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana felt a great appreciation for their former teacher and realized that his teachings were truly marvelous. As such, in the early Mahāyāna texts, Sañjayin was not, as in the Pali texts, a hostile and tragic figure, but a generous precursor of the Buddha, somewhat like John the Baptist was to Jesus Christ. (T 1444 2:1026a-c; *Gilgit MSS* 3,4:20-25; cf. Lamotte 1988:659 ; Ray 1994:139 f.)

14. INSTALLATION AS CHIEF DISCIPLES

On the same day as they were received into the Order, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana were installed as the Buddha's chief disciples—his right-hand and left-hand disciples respectively. Some unenlightened monks and disciples were displeased, and rightly so, feeling that the Buddha should have given the positions to those who were ordained first, that is, the Five Monks headed by Kaundinya, or the group of 50 monks headed by Yaśa, or the group of 30, or the 3 Kāśyapa brothers (V 1:15-35). "The Teacher shows favouritism," they thought. When the Buddha learned of this negative reaction regarding the chief disciples, he responded:

Monks, I show no favouritism in bestowing this distinction. On the contrary, I bestow on these monks and on all others that for which each has made his aspiration. For Aññā Koṇḍañña gave the first fruits of a certain crop nine times, but in doing so did not make an aspiration for the place of chief disciple. On the contrary, in making the gift, he made the aspiration that he might be the first to win the foremost state of all, namely, arhathood. (DhA 1:97)

In the case of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, they made their aspiration to become chief disciples many aeons ago beginning in the time of Anoma, darśi (Anoma, dassi), the 18th Buddha before our own (V 1:42 f; Ap 2:31 ff; AA 1:96 ff. 124 ff; DhA 1:88 f; SnA 326 ff; Mvst 3:56).

15. MAUDGALYĀYANA'S TORPOR

For his intensive training, Maudgalyāyana went to live near a village called Kallavāla,putta (P. "liquor-dealer's son"; called Kallavāla,mutta in the Pacala Sutta, A 4:85) in Magadha. On the seventh day of his ordination, when he was engaged in meditation, he was troubled by fatigue and torpor. According to the Aṅguttara Commentary, Maudgalyāyana had been walking up and down vigorously in meditation, so when he sat down for his meditation, drowsiness overcame him.

The Buddha, with his divine eye, saw Maudgalyāyana nodding in his meditation and teleported himself and appeared before Maudgalyāyana. The Buddha taught him seven successive ways of overcoming torpor:

- (1) You should not give attention to that thought (associated with drowsiness).
- (2) Reflect on the Dharma as you have learned and mastered it, examine and investigate it closely in your mind.
- (3) Recite the Dharma in detail as you have learned and mastered it.
- (4) Pull both ear-lobes and rub your limbs with your hands.
- (5) Get up from your seat and, after washing your eyes with water, you should look around in all directions and upwards to the stars and constellations.
- (6) Practise the perception of light (*āloka,saṃjñā/āloka,saññā*), resolve upon the perception of day-time: as by day, so at night; as at night, so by day. Thus, with an open and unburdened heart, you should develop a luminous mind.
- (7) With your senses turned inward and your mind not straying outward, you should take to walking up and down, being aware of going to and fro.

The sutra is included in the Book of Sevens of the Aṅguttara because it enumerates seven ways of dispelling torpor, but it also includes as an eighth item: taking a nap when all else fails! The Buddha advised that "then, mindful and circumspect, you may lie down, lion-like, on your right side, placing one foot on the other, keeping in mind the thought of rising; and on awakening, you should quickly get up, thinking: "I must not indulge in the pleasure of resting and reclining, in the pleasure of sleep."

The Buddha went on to admonish Maudgalyāyana on humility, self-control, and conducive environment. When asked for a brief teaching on liberation through the elimination of craving, the Buddha taught him: "Nothing is fit to be clung to" (P. *sabbe dhammā n'ālaṃ abhinivesāya*), that is, by way of craving or wrong views. "All things" here refer to the 5 Aggregates, the 12 sense-bases and the 18 elements, all of which are not fit to be clung to. While listening to the Buddha expounding these teachings on the meditation of the elements (*dhātu,karmasthāna/dhātu,kammaṭṭhāna*), Maudgalyāyana won the three higher paths and the apex of a chief disciple's perfection by attaining arhathood. (A 4:85 f; AA 4:42)

16. ŚĀRIPUTRA'S AWAKENING

Śāriputra spent the fortnight after his ordination with the Teacher, living near him in the Boar's Cave (P. *sūkara,khata,leṇa*), depending on Rājagṛha for alms. At the end of the fortnight, the Buddha expounded the Vedanā,pariggaha Sutta (on the contemplation of feelings, M 74) to Śāriputra's maternal nephew, the ascetic Dīrgha,nakha/Dīgha,nakha ("Long Nails"). Śāriputra was standing behind the Teacher, fanning him and following the discourse attentively, like one "sharing a rice-meal with another." Doing so, Śāriputra gained the apex of a chief disciple's perfection and attained arhathood.

According to the Paṭisambhidā Sutta (A 4.173), reported in his own words, Śāriputra mentions that he won the four analytical knowledges (*pratisamvidā,jñāna/paṭisambhidā,jñāna*)—of meanings (*artha/-attha*), of conditions (*dharmā/dhammā*), of definitions (*nirukti/nirutti*) and of intellect (*pratibhāṇa/paṭibhāṇa*)—only six months after his ordination.

Śāriputra's awakening process is described in the Anupada Sutta (M 111), "The Discourse on One by One as they Occurred." In the discourse, the Buddha declares that "in a fortnight [that is, between his ordination and the exposition of the Dīgha,nakha Sutta], monks, Śāriputta had insight into states one by one as they occurred (P. *anupada,dhamma,vipassanā*)." The Majjhima Commentary explains that he developed insight into states in successive order by way of the meditative attainments and the absorption-factors. The minute analysis of mental states their components anticipates the methodology of the Abhidhamma, so that it is no coincidence that his name is so closely connected with the Abhidhamma literature (M:Ñ 1315 n1047).

Traditionally, Śāriputra is renowned for his great wisdom, indeed, he is second only to the Buddha himself. That being the case, why did he attain arhathood later than Maudgalyāyana? According to the Commentaries, this was because of the extensiveness of preparations required. When poor people want to go anywhere, they usually take to the road immediately; but in the case of kings, extensive preparations must be made, and these require time. So, it is in the case of the preparation for becoming the Buddha's chief disciple.

17. FUNCTIONS OF THE CHIEF DISCIPLES

The basic functions of the chief disciples are threefold:

- (1) to help the Buddha consolidate the Dharma, thereby making it a vehicle of spiritual transformation and deliverance of beings;
- (2) to serve as models for other monks to emulate and to supervise their training;
- (3) and to assist in the administration of the Sangha, particularly when the Buddha was in retreat or away on an urgent mission.

Of the two chief disciples, the right-hand one, on account of his great wisdom (*mahā,prajñā/mahā,-paññā*), is regarded as closest to the Buddha. In the case of Gautama Buddha, this was Śāriputra, whose special task in our Dispensation was the systematization of the Doctrine and the detailed analysis of its contents (a methodology later called Abhidharma/Abhidhamma).

The other chief disciple, Mahā Maudgalyāyana, who stands on the Buddha's left, is distinguished for his strength and versatility in the exercise of psychic power (*rddhi/iddhi*) [34]. This power is not a means of dominating others or for self-aggrandizement, but is the product of profound mental concentration and the experience of selflessness, founded on the mastery of mental concentration (*samādhi*). This power is used where beings cannot be reached by the conventional approach of verbal instruction.

In the Sacca,vibhaṅga Sutta, the Buddha exhorted his disciples to cultivate the spiritual friendship of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana and to associate with them. They were wise and helpful to their companions in the holy life. Śāriputra was like a mother and Maudgalyāyana was like a nurse. Śāriputra trained others for the fruit of stream-entry; Maudgalyāyana for the supreme goal (M 3:248) [9]. Let us look at some example of these qualities of the chief disciples.

18. ŚĀRIPUTRA'S TEACHING SKILL

Although we usually associate Śāriputra with wisdom, he was also famous for great patience and love. He would admonish and instruct up to a hundred or a thousand times until his pupil gained the fruit of stream-entry. Only then did he discharge him to help other students. There were a great number of those who, having received his instructions and following them faithfully, attained to arhathood.

The Majjhima Commentary states that Śāriputra would instruct his students to lead them only up to stream-entry, after which they had to progress on their own (MA 5:63). Even so, in individual cases, he

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helped various monks to gain the higher stages of spirituality. The Udāna Commentary, for example, says that “at that time, monks in higher training often used to approach the venerable Sāriputta for a subject of meditation that could help them to attain to the three higher paths” (UA 362). Such was the case of the elder Lakuṇṭika Bhaddiya (“the Dwarf”), who as a stream-winner was instructed by Sāriputta and as a result gained arhathood (U 7.1).

The most famous episode regarding Sāriputta’s teaching skill was his admonition to Aniruddha (Anuruddha) as recorded in the Anuruddha Sutta II of the Āṅguttara Nikāya (A 3.128). When Aniruddha, who was chief amongst the monks who were clairvoyant (P. *dibba, cakkhuka*) (A 1:23; Tha 916 f; Ap 35), was unable to make significant progress in his meditation, he approached Sāriputta:

Friend Sāriputta, with the divine eye that is purified, surpassing the human eye, I can see the thousandfold world-system. Firm is my energy, unremitting; my mindfulness is alert and unconfused; the body is tranquil and untroubled; my mind is concentrated and one-pointed. And yet, my mind is not freed from the cankers, not freed from clinging.

Friend Anuruddha, that you think thus of your divine eye, this is the conceit (*māna*)¹³⁸ in you. That you think thus of your firm energy, your alert mindfulness, your undisturbed body and your concentrated mind, these are the restlessness (*uddhatya/uddhacca*)¹³⁸ in you. That you think of your mind not being freed from the cankers, this is worrying (*kaukṛtya/kukkucca*)¹³⁸ in you. It will be good, indeed, if the venerable Anuruddha, abandoning these three states of mind and paying no attention to them, will direct the mind to the Deathless Element (*amṛta, dhātu/amata, -dhātu*).

Following Sāriputta’s advice, Aniruddha, living alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, with determined mind, before long, in this very life, became one of the arhats. (A 1:281 f).

19. THE CĀTUMĀ SUTTA

In historical terms, the Cātumā Sutta (M 67) is perhaps the most problematic sutra in the Pali Canon: the Buddha appears to show anger; and he declares that either he himself or that Sāriputta and Maudgalyāyana shall lead (P. *parihareyyaṃ*) the Sangha, apparently contradicting statements he had made elsewhere in the Canon. [20]

The sutra opens with the arrival in the Myrobalan Grove at the Śākya village of Cātumā of 500 visiting (*āgantuka*) “monks, newly ordained, newly arrived in this Doctrine and Discipline” (P. *bhikkhū nāvā acira, pabbajitā adhunāgatā imaṃ dhamma, vinayaṃ*), led by the chief disciples themselves, to meet the Buddha. The visiting monks “were exchanging greetings with the resident monks and were preparing resting places and putting away their bowls and outer robes, they were very loud and noisy” (M 1:456).

The Buddha commented to Ānanda that the noisy monks were like “fishermen hawking fish,” and in due course dismissed them, “Go, monks, I dismiss you! You cannot live with me!” The Śākyas of Cātumā then interceded on the monks’ behalf and beseeched the Buddha to recall them. They compared the novice monks to “young seedlings,” not getting any water, and to “a young calf,” not finding its mother, “might change or alter.” Then Brahmā Sahampati, too, interceded repeating the request that the Buddha showed his compassion “now as he used to show compassion towards the Sangha in the past” (M 1:458 f).

Responding to the pleas of the Śākyas and of Brahmā himself, the Buddha recalled the novice monks. Then he questioned Sāriputta: “What did you think, Sāriputta, when the Sangha was dismissed by me?”

“Venerable sir, I thought thus: ‘The Blessed One will now abide carefree (P. *appossukko*), devoted to pleasant abiding here and now (P. *diṭṭha, dhamma, sukha, vihāraṃ anuyutto viharissati*), and that we too shall now abide carefree, devoted to pleasant abiding here and now.’”

“Stop, Sāriputta, stop! Such a thought should not be entertained by you again.”¹³⁹
Then the Buddha asked Mahā Maudgalyāyana the same question, to which he replied:

¹³⁸ Conceit (*māna*) and restlessness (*uddhacca*) are two of the three fetters (*saṃyojana*) which are destroyed only at the stage of arhatship. Worry or scruples (*kukkucca*), however, is removed at the stage of the Non-returner (*anāgāmi*).

¹³⁹ The Majjhima Commentary remarks here that the Buddha rebuked him because he failed to recognize his duty (*bhāra-bhāva*), for the Sangha is the responsibility of the two chief disciples.

“Venerable sir, I thought thus: ‘The Blessed One will now abide carefree, devoted to pleasant abiding here and now, and that the venerable Sāriputta and I shall lead the Sangha (P. *bhikkhu,saṅghaṃ parihareyyaṃ*).’”

“Good, Moggallāna, good! Either I (*ahaṃ*) shall lead the Sangha, or Sāriputta and Moggallāna shall lead it.”

Then the Buddha went on to speak to the novice monks on the four dangers that threaten their lives as monks, inducing them to return to lay life, and he used four similes:

(1) The danger of waves (*ūmi,bhaya*). Newly ordained monks, instructed regarding proper postures and other rules of decorum, find it annoying, and as a result return to lay life out of anger and despair (*kodh’upāyāsa*).

(2) The danger of crocodiles (*kumbhīla,bhaya*). Newly ordained monks are instructed in the restraint regarding food, feel as if they have been given “a muzzle over our mouths,” and as a result return to lay life out of gluttony (*odarika*).

(3) The danger of whirlpools (*āvaṭṭa,bhaya*). Newly ordained monks go out for alms with body, speech and mind unguarded, and seeing lay people enjoying sense-pleasures, they recall their own lay lives of pleasure. As a result return to lay life because of five objects of sense-pleasures (*pañca kāma,guṇa*) [pleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch].

(4) The danger of fierce fishes (*susukā,bhaya = caṇḍa,maccha,bhaya*, AA 3:123). Newly ordained monks go out for alms with body, speech and mind unguarded, with sense-faculties unrestrained, and seeing a woman lightly dressed, lust infects them. As a result, they return to lay life because of women (*mātugāma*) [here, a euphemism for sexuality]. (M 67/1:459-463; A 4.122)

20. LEADERSHIP OF THE SANGHA

Another interesting feature of the Cātumā Sutta is that the Buddha uncharacteristically addressed himself as *ahaṃ*, instead of the standard *tathāgata*: “Good, Moggallāna, good! Either I (*ahaṃ*) shall lead the Sangha, or Sāriputta and Moggallāna shall lead it.” (M 1:459). This seems to contradict the statement the Buddha made in the Maha,parinibbāna Sutta, where he declared:

If there is anyone who thinks: “I shall take charge of the Order (*ahaṃ bhikkhu,saṅghaṃ pariharissāmi*),” or “The Order should refer to me (*mam’uddesiko bhikkhu,saṅgho*),” let him make some statement about the Order, but the Tathāgata does not think in such terms.

(D 2:100) [10:7b]

As for the Buddha’s usage of the personal pronoun *ahaṃ*, I.B. Horner, however, does not see this as a problem since “even a Buddha uses the conventional parlance of the world” (M 1:500).¹⁴⁰ The problem remains, however, with the Buddha’s statement (“Either I shall lead the Sangha, or Sāriputta and Moggallāna shall lead it” M 1:459), especially in connection with the Buddha’s rebuke of Devadatta after his proposal to take over the Sangha from the aged Buddha:

Devadatta, I would not hand over the Order of Monks even to Sāriputta and Moggallāna. How then could I hand it over to you, a wretched one, to be rejected like spittle?

(V 2:188; quoted at DhA 1:139 f; cf. M 1:393)

In her Translator’s Introduction, I.B. Horner makes an important attempt to address the problem:

Is it possible that at that time he [the Buddha] thought his chief disciples too old? He himself, according to Devadatta, was approaching the end of his life, although there may have been about eight years still to run before the *parinibbāna*. Sāriputta however seems to have been well and active at the time of this episode as he was sent to Rājagaha to carry out an Act of Information against Devadatta....

On the other hand, it is not impossible that the *Vinaya-bhāṇakas* and the *Majjhima-bhāṇakas* [the school of Sāriputta, DA 15] followed somewhat different traditions concerning the possible leadership of the Order, the former holding that only Gotama could lead, and for that reason they attribute the formulation of practically every one of the Vinaya rules to him; and the

¹⁴⁰ Cf. “He makes use of common phrases of the world without adhering to them,” *yañ ca loke vuttaṃ voharati aparāmasaṃ* (M 1:500) (M:H 2:xxix; see also M:B 1277 n737).

latter holding that others also could look after the Order, as our *Majjhima* context suggests, and as is borne out to some extent by the Discourses given by disciples and of which Gotama is recorded to have approved. However, this is a point that could only be substantiated by further research.

Again, is it possible, and perhaps it is even probable, that the episodes recorded in *M. i.459* and *Vin. ii.188* refer to different Saṅghas. For saṅgha is not necessarily a comprehensive word for the whole Order of monks, and which indeed S. Dutt [*Early Buddhist Monachism*] thinks was known as the Saṅgha of the four quarters. It can also refer, and does often refer to this Order or that, each regarded as part of the whole and bound by the same rules and regulations, but marked off from one another by virtue of the residence of monks within this *śīmā* (boundary) or that. If this is so, then Sāriputta and Moggallāna might well have been regarded as the right disciples to be in charge of some particular Saṅgha, but not necessarily of another; and, accepting this hypothesis, the apparent contradiction between *M. i.459* and *Vin. 2:188* would be resolved.

(M:H 2:xxvii f; my emphases)

Pali is a most precise instrument in many ways, and I believe that where a certain term is used it is for some definite reason and has something definite convey. It is for us to 'swelter at the task' [Dh 276] of regaining the wonderful precision of language the teachers and *bhāṇakas* of old knew so well how to employ.

(I.B. Horner, M:H 2:xxix)

21. ŚĀRIPUTRA REBUKED

According to the *Majjhima Commentary* on the *Cātumā Sutta*, Śāriputra failed in his duty (*bhāra-bhāva*), that is, that of taking charge of the newly ordained monks. Maudgalyāyana, however, answered the Buddha's question correctly, that "the venerable Sāriputta and I shall lead the Sangha," and was commended by the Buddha for that (MA 3:176). There were only two or three occasions in the Canon where Śāriputra was rebuked by the Buddha, of which this was the first.

The other occasion for the Buddha's rebuking Śāriputra is found in the *Dhānañjāni Sutta* (M 97), when he only established the dying brahmin Dhānañjāni "in the lesser, the Brahma-world" (*hīne brahma-loke*) and departed "when there was still more to be done" (P. *sati uttara, karaṇīye*), that is to say, Dhānañjāni could have been instructed so as to gain the supramundane path and destined for awakening (M 2:195; cf. M:H 2:xxix f & 378 n2). However, it should be noted that the Buddha himself teaches the only way to the Brahma-world when any higher potential is lacking in his listener, as in the case of the youth Subha Todeyyaputta (M 2:207 f) in the *Subha Sutta* (M 99).

The *Cātumā Sutta* comprises two separate sections: the first, the episode of the noisy monks, is also found in the *Yasoja Sutta* of the *Udāna* (U 24-25; cf. S 3.80), where Yasoja led the 500 monks but the venue was Śrāvastī; and the second, the four dangers to newly ordained monks, is also found in the *Ūmi Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara* (A 4.122=2:123-126). It is possible that the *Majjhima Reciters* combined these two suttas together and extrapolated the episode of the Buddha's rebuke.

The story of Śāriputra's lapse in his duty towards the newly-ordained monks is highly uncharacteristic of him if we go by his track record in the Canon. Could the *Cātumā Sutta* story be a late addition? This is unlikely since the *Majjhima Reciters*, who belonged to his lineage, have preserved a story of dispraise regarding their own teacher. Or, is it likely that Śāriputra made that one and only lapse and had learned his lesson well, not repeating it at all after that.

Śāriputra's reply to the Buddha's question about what they had thought when the Buddha dismissed the monks is interesting: it reflects a compassionate side of Śāriputta, or perhaps the *Majjhima Reciters* introduced this episode to reflect Śāriputra's compassionate side. It is highly unlikely that they did so out of political aspiration to promote their own teacher as the future Sangha leader since both the chief disciples predeceased the Buddha himself.

22. THE BUDDHA'S "ANGER" AND FOREKNOWLEDGE

(a) Was the Buddha angry?

Was the Buddha angry when he dismissed the noisy monks at *Cātumā*? Or, was he pleased when he did so (in which case the action would have been groundless and in ignorance)? The *Cātuma Sutta*, in fact, inspired two dilemmas in the *Milinda,pañha*, the first of which opens by quoting the *Dhaniya Sutta*: "I

am without anger, gone is mental barrenness” (Sn 19). Just as the great earth shows neither anger nor satisfaction should anyone fall onto it, just as the great ocean does not associate with a corpse but quickly casts it ashore, showing neither anger nor satisfaction, even so, the Buddhas are beyond approval and repugnance (P. *anunaya-papaṭṭha, vipamutta*). It was out of desire for the welfare that the Buddha dismissed the monks [i.e. as a skilful means]. (Miln 186-188)

In the lesson of the four similes, the first simile, that of the waves, warns against the danger of “anger and despair.” As such, it is clear here that the Buddha spoke against anger, and as he spoke so he acted (*yathā, vādi tathā, kāri*, D 2:224, 229; Sn 357; It 122). The Buddha’s rebuke of Śāriputra is like the father’s rebuke of his eldest son: it is a friendship based on spiritual strength, or what can be called “clay-pot friendship” [6:29], an analogy found in the Mahā Suññatā Sutta in connection with Ānanda:

I shall not treat you as the potter treats the raw damp clay. Repeatedly restraining you, I shall speak to you, Ānanda. Repeatedly admonishing you, I shall speak to you, Ānanda. The sound core will stand the test.” (M 3:118; cf. the Gandhāra Jātaka, J 3:368) [6:29]

(b) The Buddha’s foreknowledge of the two similes

The Milinda, pañha further asks whether the Buddha had foreknowledge of the two similes used by the Śākya and by Brahma, that is, the similes of young seedlings and of a young calf. If the Buddha did not know these similes, then he would not be omniscient. If he knew the similes and still dismissed the monks, then he must be lacking in compassion. Nāgasena answered using other similes, one of which is:

As, sire, a woman propitiates, pleases and conciliates her husband by means of wealth that belongs to her husband himself, and the husband approves; even so, sire, the Śākya of Cātumā and Brahmā Sahampati propitiated, pleased and conciliated the Tathāgata with the very similes that had already been known by him.” (Miln 210)

The two similes were already used by the Buddha in the Piṇḍolya Sutta (S 3.80) where the Buddha had similarly dismissed some young monks in Nigrodha’s Park at Kapilavastu, who had been noisily quarrelling over the distribution of gifts (SA 2:297). In his solitary meditation, the Buddha reflected that the newly ordained monks were like a young calf that needs its mother and like young seedlings that need water. Then the Buddha summoned the novice monks to “come to him, singly or in pairs, in a timid manner” (P. *eka, dvīhikāya sārājja, mana, rūpā*) [so that they show reverence and are tractable, SA 2:300], rebuked them and counselled them on the true purpose of renunciation (S 3:91-94).

23. ŚĀRIPUTRA’S CHARITY

In the Devadaha Sutta, the Buddha praises Śāriputra for being “wise, and a helper of his fellow monks” (S 3:5). The Commentary then gives a long account of how Śāriputra assisted his fellow monks with both their material needs (*āmiṣānugraha/āmiṣānuggaha*) and with their spiritual needs (*dharmānugraha/dhammānuggaha*) [Nyanaponika & Hecker 1997:21-25]. By way of “material help,” the Commentary says, Śāriputra did not go on almsround in the early morning as the other monks did. Instead, when they had all gone, he walked around the entire monastery grounds, and wherever he saw an unswept place, he swept it; wherever refuse had not been cleared, he cleared them; and he arranged furniture in good order. In this way, if non-Buddhist ascetics should visit the monastery, they would not see any disorderliness and show no contempt of the monks.

Then he would go to the infirmary, and having consoled the indisposed, he would ask them about their needs. If he needed to get any medicine, he would bring along some young novices and find them through almsround or from some appropriate sources. When the medicine had been obtained, he would give them to the novices, saying, “Caring for the sick has been praised by the Master [1-2]. Go now, good people, and be heedful!” After that, he would go on his almsround or take his meal at a supporter’s house.

When he went on a journey, he did not walk at the head of the procession, shod with sandals and umbrella in hand, thinking: “I am the chief disciple.” Instead, he would let the novices take his bowl and robes, asking them to go on ahead with the others, while he himself would first attend to the very old, very young and the indisposed, making them apply oil to any sores on their bodies. Only later in the day or on the next day, he would leave together with them.

Due to this maternal predisposition, Śāriputra often arrived late at his destination. On one occasion he was so late in arriving that he could not get proper quarters and had to spend the night seated under a tent made from robes. Seeing this, the Buddha assembled the monks and related the Tittira Jātaka (J 37), the story of the elephant, the monkey and the partridge who, after deciding which of them was the eldest, lived together showing respect for the most senior. Then he laid down the rule that “lodgings should be allocated according to seniority” (V 2:160 f).

24. ŚĀRIPUTRA’S RESPECT FOR OLD AND YOUNG

(a) Gratitude

The Book of Twos of the Aṅguttara Nikāya mentions 2 kinds of rare people: one who is first to do a favour (P. *pubba, kāṛī*, or one who is a previous benefactor) and one who is grateful and repays the favour done (P. *kataññū, kata, vedī*) (A1:87). Such a rare person is Śāriputra who would remember the smallest kindness rendered to him.

Before becoming a monk, Rādha was a poor brahmin neglected in old age by his children. Rādha lived with the monks and assisted in the daily monastic chores. Although the monks were kind to him, none of them was willing to ordain him. As a result, Rādha became depressed and thin.

One day, the Buddha, seeing him with his divine eye, went to him, and hearing of his wish to join the Order, summoned the monks and asked if any of them remembered any favour done by Rādha. Śāriputra answered that he had once received a ladleful of Rādha’s own food while on almsround in Rājagṛha. Śāriputra then agreed to receive Rādha into the Order. (V 1:54 f.; DhA 2:104 ff.; ThaA 2:12 f.)

Śāriputra also extended his gratitude to his lay supporters. When Paṇḍita (DhA 4:176 ff) and Sukha (DhA 3:95 ff), both 7-year-old children of different lay supporters, requested to be admitted into the Order, Śāriputra received them. Their parents rejoiced by holding week-long alms-giving celebrations.

(b) Humility

The Dhammapada Commentary here relates a story about Śāriputra’s forbearance and forgiveness towards those inimical to him. It is said that once when the Buddha was residing in Rājagṛha, some people were praising the noble qualities of Śāriputra: “Such great patience has our elder,” they claimed, “that even when people abuse him and strike him, he feels no trace of anger.”

Then a certain brahmin, holding wrong views, came along and challenged those men, claiming that he could provoke Śāriputra to anger. In the morning, when Śāriputra was on his almsround, the brahmin came up to him from behind and gave him a heavy blow on the back. “What was that?” said Śāriputra, and without so much as turning to look, he continued on his way.

The evil brahmin felt remorse burn throughout his body. Going up to the elder, he prostrated at Śāriputra’s feet and begged for forgiveness. “For what?” asked Śāriputra gently. “To test your patience, I struck you,” replied the brahmin. “Very well, I pardon you.” “Venerable sir,” replied the brahmin, “if you are willing to pardon me, please take your meal at my house.”

Bystanders who had seen the brahmin strike Śāriputra were enraged and gathered around the brahmin’s house, armed with sticks and stones, ready to kill him. When Śāriputra emerged, followed by the brahmin carrying his bowl, they cried out: “Venerable sir, order this brahmin to turn back!”

“What do you mean? Did he strike you or me?”

“You, venerable sir.”

“If he struck me, he begged my pardon. Go your way.” So saying, he dismissed the bystanders, and permitting the brahmin to turn back, Śāriputra headed for the monastery. (DhA 4:146-148)

The Dhammapada verses 389-390 were spoken by the Buddha in connection with Śāriputra:

One should not strike a brahman,
Nor should a brahman show his anger to one who strikes him.
Shame on him who strikes a brahman!
Greater shame on him who shows his anger.

For a brahman, this is no small gain,
When he holds back his mind from endearing things.
As far as one has no intent to harm,

That far does suffering subside.

(Dh 389-390)

(c) Learning from the young

There is a heartwarming story about how the master of wisdom himself was willing to learn from a young novice recounted in the Commentary on the *Susīma Sutta* (S 2.29). The events of the sutra itself occurred in Śrāvastī, where the Buddha asks Ānanda if he approves of Śāriputra. Ānanda replies:

Indeed, venerable sir, who would not approve of the venerable Śāriputta, unless he were foolish, full of hatred, deluded, or mentally deranged? The Venerable Śāriputta, venerable sir, is wise, one of great wisdom, of wide wisdom, of joyous wisdom, of swift wisdom, of sharp wisdom, of penetrative wisdom.¹⁴¹ The Venerable Śāriputta, venerable sir, has few wishes; he is content, secluded, aloof, energetic. The Venerable Śāriputta, venerable sir, is one who gives advice, one who accepts advice, a reprover, one who censures evil. Indeed, venerable sir, who would not approve of the venerable Śāriputta, unless he were foolish, full of hatred, deluded, or mentally deranged?

The Buddha approves of Ānanda's eulogy. In due course, a host of devas led by the young deva *Susīma*, an erstwhile pupil of Śāriputra's, approached the Buddha, and approves of him in the same terms. Then the Buddha spoke this verse:

He is widely known to be a wise man,
Śāriputta, who is free from anger;
Of few wishes, gentle, tamed,
The seer adorned by the Teacher's praise. (S 1:64 f).

The Commentary to the sutra relates a story showing that Śāriputra's humility was as great as his wisdom. It is said that once, through a momentary negligence, a corner of the elder's under-robe was hanging down unevenly, and a seven-year-old novice, seeing this, pointed out to him. Śāriputra stepped aside at once and arranged his robe in a proper even manner. Then he stood before the novice with palms together, saying: "Now it is correct, teacher!"¹⁴² The *Milinda,pañha* refers to this incident and quotes a verse it attributes to Śāriputra:

If one who has gone forth this day at the age of seven
Should teach me, I accept it with lowered head;
At the sight of him I show my zeal and respect;
May I always set him in the teacher's place. (Miln 397)

25. ŚĀRIPUTRA'S GRATITUDE TO HIS TEACHERS

(a) Śāriputra's gratitude to Sañjayin

From Śāriputra we can learn an important lesson in gratitude. Although Śāriputra was declared by the Buddha to be the foremost among those who possess wisdom (A 1:23), he was also renowned for his remarkable sense of gratitude. Hearing the True Dharma for first time from Aśvajit, Śāriputra attained stream-winning. Śāriputra then transmitted the True Dharma to his best friend, Maudgalyāyana, who similarly became a stream-winner.

After becoming a stream-winner, Maudgalyāyana suggested to Śāriputra that both of them went to see the Buddha at *Veṇuvana*, but Śāriputra, who always had a profound respect for his teachers, replied that they should first seek their erstwhile teacher, Sañjayin, to give him the good news and go with him to the Buddha. (AA 1:159 f; DhA 1:93 ff; ThaA 3:94 f; Ap 1:15 ff; cf. V 1:39 ff)

(b) Śāriputra's gratitude to Aśvajit

¹⁴¹ This wisdom phrase is repeated in the *Anupada Sutta*, M 3:25. The 7 kinds of wisdom here are explained in various places: Pm 2:190-202, SA 1:119-122, ThaA 3:105 f.

¹⁴² This story is also found in the *Thera, gāthā* Commentary with a few variations, ThaA 3:103.

5. True friendship

Śāriputra had the greatest respect for Aśvajit, from whom he received the True Dharma. We are told in the Commentary to the Nāvā Sutta (Sn ii,8) and the Dhammapada Commentary that from the day of their first meeting, in whatever quarter he heard that Aśvajit was staying, in that direction he would extend his clasped hands in an attitude of reverent supplication, thinking “This venerable one was my first teacher. It was through him that I came to know the Buddha’s Dispensation,” and in that direction he would turn his head when he lay down to sleep (SnA 1:328; DhA 4:150 ff).

This open devotion of his led some unenlightened monks to think, “After becoming a chief disciple, Śāriputta still worships the heavenly quarters! Even today he cannot give up his brahminical views!” When these complaints reached the Buddha, he explained the real reason, and then expounded the Nāvā Sutta (Sn 2.8), which opens with the words:

As the devas pay homage to Indra,
So should one revere the person
Through whom one has learnt the Dharma. (Sn 316)

(c) Śāriputra’s lion-roar

Śāriputra’s greatest gratitude was shown to none other than the Buddha himself, as recorded in the Sampāsadanīya Sutta (D 28). Towards the end of the Buddha’s public ministry, while he was staying at Pāvārika’s Mango Grove in Nālandā, Śāriputra declared that there has been, is and will be, no one greater than the Buddha, or wiser as regards self-awakening (*sambodhi*). This sutra is an elaborate account of the brief episode recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 2:81-83). [10:3b]¹⁴³

When questioned by the Buddha if Śāriputra had known the Buddhas of the past or of the future, or that he was able to comprehend the present Buddha’s mind with his own, Śāriputra admitted that he did not at all. However, he declared, he knew the “Dharma-lineage” (P. *dharm’avyaya*, lit. “drift of the Dharma; the flow of the truth”), that is, the retrospective knowledge (P. *avyaye nāṇaṃ* or *paccavekkhaṇā nāṇa*, S 2:58) that enabled him to deduce the qualities of past and future Buddhas. Śāriputra then went on to recount the qualities and attainments in which the Buddha is unsurpassed (D 2:82 f, 3:99 ff; M 1:69, 2:120).¹⁴⁴

26. ŚĀRIPUTRA’S GRATITUDE TO HIS MOTHER

A week before his final Nirvana, Śāriputra decided that he should pass away in his mother’s house at Nalaka, his birthplace. His mother, Rūpā Śārī, a brahminee, had still not seen the Dharma. Although a mother of seven arhats,¹⁴⁵ she was extremely disappointed that all her children had joined the Order.

While Śāriputra lay sick with dysentery in the room he was born, his mother remained in her own room. The Four Guardian Kings and Mahā Brahmā waited upon the sick Śāriputra. When the lady Śārī saw the radiant deities, she reflected upon the greatness of her son and her whole body was suffused with joy. Śāriputra then taught her the Dharma and she became a stream-winner. It was then that she asked Śāriputra why he had not admonished her earlier on.

Feeling that he had repaid his debt to his mother, he sent his attendant (and younger brother), the “Novice” (*śramaṇ’uddeśa/samaṇ’uddesa*) Cunda, to fetch the monks. When the monks arrived, Śāriputra sat up with Cunda’s help and asked if he had offended them in any way during the 44 years of his life as a monk. On receiving their assurance that he had been entirely blameless, he covered his face with his robe and lay down, and after passing through various absorptions, died at daybreak. (SA 3:181; J 1:391)

27. OUR DEBT TO ŚĀRIPUTRA

Śāriputra was deeply concerned about the life of the Buddha’s dispensation. The Vinaya records an important episode relating how Śāriputra approaches the Buddha and asks him why the dispensations of some of the past Buddhas did not last long and why some of them did. The dispensations of the Buddhas Vipasyī (Vipassī), Sikhin (Sikhī) and Viśvabhū (Vessabhū) (the 4th, 5th and 6th Buddhas before Śākya-

¹⁴³ Cf. Prasenajit’s remarks about arhats, S 3.11 [8:14].

¹⁴⁴ Cf. a similar situation over king Prasenajit’s statement on arhats [8:14].

¹⁴⁵ Śāriputra’s younger brothers are Cunda, Upasena, and (Khadira,vaniya) Revata, and younger sisters are Cālā, Upacālā and Sisūpacālā, DhA 2:188; cf Mvst 3:56 which gives different names with Upatiṣya as the youngest.

muni), for example, were short because they did not teach the Dharma “in detail...and little of the suttas,” nor did they lay down the training-rules (*śikṣā, pada/sikkhā, pada*) for their disciples, nor did they institute the recital of the Prātimokṣa (Pāṭimokkha) or monastic code of conduct. Moreover, Viśvabhū Buddha resided with his disciples in “a certain awe-inspiring jungle thicket” which terrified those still ruled by passion (V 3:8). [6:2]

The dispensations of the Buddhas Krakucchanda (Kakusandha), Kaṇakamuni (Koṇāgamana) and Kāśyapa (Kassapa) [3:14]—the three Buddhas before Śākyamuni—lasted very long because they “were diligent in giving Dharma in detail to the disciples...the training-rules was laid down, the Pāṭimokkha instituted” (V 3:9). It is as if various flowers, loose on a piece of wood, well strung together by a thread, are not scattered about or destroyed by the wind (ib.).

However, when Śāriputra requests that the Buddha introduce the training-rules and institute the Prātimokṣa, the Buddha answers that it is not the right time. The training-rules and the Prātimokṣa would only be introduced after the Order “has attained long standing...has attained great gains...when some conditions causing the cankers (*āśrava/āsava*) appear here in the Order....” Moreover, it is not the right time because at that time “the most backward (*paścimaka/pacchimaka*) of these 500 monks is one who has entered the stream” (V 3:9 f). The Buddha uses this same term *pacchimaka* in connection with Ānanda in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 2:155) and the Kusināra Sutta (A 2:80). The Commentaries on these two passages confirm that the term *pacchimaka* refers to Ānanda.¹⁴⁶

In due course, the training-rules were introduced and the weekly recital of Prātimokṣa instituted. As we shall see later, it was an initiative made by king Bimbisāra [8:4] that in due course motivated the Buddha to introduce the weekly recital of the Prātimokṣa.

28. PRESERVING THE TEACHINGS

(a) The *bhāṇaka* system

Śāriputra, being the foremost of those monks endowed with great wisdom (P. *etad-aggaṃ mahā-paññānāṃ*), understandably had the special task of systematizing the Doctrine and the detailed analysis of its contents—which latter was also the task of Mahā Kātyāyana (Mahā Kaccāna). Buddhaghosa tells us that at the First Council, the Vinaya was entrusted to Upāli and his pupils [6:27a]. Similarly, the Dīgha, Majjhima, Saṃyutta and Aṅguttara Nikāyas were entrusted to Ānanda, Śāriputra (deceased), Mahā Kāśyapa and Aniruddha respectively, and their pupils (DA 13, 15) [6:27b].

Scholars generally agree that this was probably the beginning of the system of Reciters (*bhāṇaka*) of the first four Nikāyas (Norman 1983:8), but there are also Commentarial references to the Jātaka-reciters and the Dhammapada-reciters (Adikaram 1946:24-32). There were probably also Reciters of other texts such as the Khuddaka (Miln 342). These schools of Reciters were quite independent of one another:

We may deduce from the fact that versions of one and the same *sutta* or utterance in different parts of the canon sometimes differ, that the *bhāṇakas* responsible for the transmission of each text were quite independent, and were not influenced by the traditions of the *bhāṇakas* of other *nikāyas*. This would explain why the versions of Vaṅṣa’s stanzas in the Saṃyutta-nikāya and the Theragāthā do not entirely agree.¹⁴⁷ (Norman, 1983:9)

Earlier on, we saw how a passage in the Cātumā Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya apparently contradicts similar statements in the Vinaya and Dīgha texts [19].¹⁴⁸

(b) The 6 memorable qualities

The passing away of the Jain leader, Mahāvīra or Nātha,putta at Pāvā, which was the occasion for internal strife and disunity amongst the Jains, affected the Buddhists, too, and was the occasion of at least three important suttas: the Pāsādika Sutta (M 29), the Saṅgīti Sutta (M 33) and the Sāmagāma Sutta (M 104). In the Pāsādika Sutta (M 29), the Buddha tells of the conditions of a perfect religion, and lists the characteristics of a Tathāgata and his powers. In the Sāmagāma Sutta (M 104), the Buddha declares that

¹⁴⁶ VA 195, however, is silent; but see A:W 2:89 n2.

¹⁴⁷ Compare esp. Tha 1253-62 with S 1:196, 11-21.

¹⁴⁸ For the differing opinions of the Reciters on early Buddhist history, see Norman 1983:9.

5. True friendship

“a dispute about livelihood or about the Pāṭimokkha would be trifling,” but should a dispute arise in the Sangha about the Path or the Way would be a great loss to the world. The Buddha then mentions the various disciplinary procedures for the guidance of the Sangha to ensure harmony after his passing away.

The closing of the Sāmagāma Sutta contains an important exposition on the practice of spiritual friendship, a teaching that is repeated in the Kosambiya Sutta (M 48). The teaching is known as the six memorable qualities (*sāraṇīyā dhammā*), “that create love and respect, and conduce to helpfulness, non-dispute, concord and unity,” that is to say:

- (1) Deeds of lovingkindness, both in public and in private, to fellow companions in the holy life.
- (2) Words of lovingkindness, both in public and in private, to fellow companions in the holy life.
- (3) Thoughts of lovingkindness, both in public and in private, to fellow companions in the holy life.
- (4) Sharing things, without reservation with virtuous companions in the holy life.
- (5) Sharing common virtues conducive to mental concentration, both in public and in private with companions in the holy life.
- (6) Sharing common views conducive to the complete destruction of suffering, both in public and in private with companions in the holy life. (D 3:245; M 2:250 f.; A 3:288 f.)

(c) Doctrine summaries

What concerns us directly here is the Saṅgīti Sutta (M 33), attributed to Śāriputra. As the title suggests, the sutra represents a recital of doctrines, “perhaps an attempt to provide a summary of the doctrine as a precaution against a comparable confusion arising in the Buddhist *Saṅgha* [as it did amongst the Jains following Mahāvīra’s death]” (Norman 1983:43). The nature of the text is reminiscent of the *māṭikās* of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. It is noteworthy that the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma Piṭaka has a text called Saṅgīti, paryāya, which seems to be a Commentary on the Saṅgīti Sūtra, of which fragments have been found in Turkestan. The Saṅgīti Sutta appears to be an early attempt to compile all points of doctrines, evident from the overlapping and duplication of topics (see D 3:233 f.).

Śāriputra is also credited with the Das’uttara Sutta (M 34), which “seems to be a systematic selection from the previous *sutta*” (Norman 1983:43). Some of the wording is identical with the Saṅgīti Sutta, and it follows the same pattern of sections dealing with subjects from one to ten, but has ten in each section, thus totally 100.¹⁴⁹

Śāriputra’s conversations with various monks were often occasions for profound discourses.¹⁵⁰ He was always keen to meet learned and noble monks, especially those that the Buddha had commended. A famous example of such a meeting was with the venerable Pūrṇa Maitrāyaṇī, putra (Punṇa Mantāṇi, putta), both of whom had never met before. Without revealing his identity, Śāriputra engaged him in a profound discussion on the seven stages of purity (*sapta, viśuddhi/satta, viśuddhi*) with Pūrṇa leading the discussion and Śāriputra asking the questions. Their discourse is recorded in the Ratha, vinīta Sutta (M 24), the Discourse on the Stage Coach Simile, later used by Buddhaghosa as the framework for his encyclopaedic treatise, the Visuddhimagga.

(d) Śāriputra’s works

Śāriputra’s spiritual importance is attested by the fact that he has a whole *saṃyutta* (chapter of connected themes)—the Sāriputta Saṃyutta, that is, *saṃyutta* 28 of the Saṃyutta Nikāya—to his name, where he is depicted as an adept in meditation as well (besides being the disciple foremost in wisdom). The first nine suttas of the Sāriputta Saṃyutta were composed from a stereotyped formula in which Śāriputra explains how he enters and emerges from the nine meditative attainments without giving rise to ego-affirming thoughts. Each time his reply is applauded by Ānanda. In the tenth sutta, Śāriputra replies to some provocative questions from a female wanderer and his answers win her approval.

The Niddesa Commentary, the Niddesa, according to the Saddhamma-p, pajotikā, was composed by Śāriputra (NmA 1). A.P. Buddhadatta (NmA vii), however, has pointed that if that were the case then it is curious that Śāriputra himself should give three different explanations of his own words as recorded in the Sutta Nipāta (NmA 446 *ad* Sn 955). Although it is possible that some of the explanations given in the Niddesa go back to the Buddha’s time, and were perhaps compiled by Śāriputra himself, the whole work as we have it now must have been produced at a later time. According to K.R. Norman, the attribution

¹⁴⁹ Cf. D:R 3:viii.

¹⁵⁰ See DPPN s.v. Sāriputta, and also Nyanaponika & Hecker 1997:59-66.

was probably made because the Niddesa is of the same type as the exegetical explanations attributed to Mahā Kātyāyana and Śāriputra in various canonical texts (Norman 1983:63, 65, 85)

The Paṭisambhidā, magga, the 12th book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, is another work attributed to Śāriputra (PA 1). It comprises 3 sections (*varga/vagga*), each containing 10 topics (*kathā*), and teaches the path of mental discrimination (*pratisamvidā/paṭisambhidā*). It attempts to explain the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, that is, how understanding the 4 Noble Truths leads to awakening. The Paṭisambhidā, magga is attributed to Śāriputra probably because of its close relationship to the Das'uttara Sutta (D 34), also attributed to him. [9]¹⁵¹

The Cariyā, piṭaka, the 15th and last book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, was related by the Buddha at Śāriputra's request. Each story is told in the first person, of a past rebirth, in which the Buddha practised one of the ten perfections leading to his awakening, and which are mentioned in the Buddha, vaṃsa (B 1:76). Of the 35 stories or "conducts" (*cariyā*), 32 of them can be traced to the Jātakas; one is related to the Mahā Govinda Sutta (D 19), and another to the Mahā Sihanada Sutta (or Loma, haṃso Pariyāya) (M 12) (Norman 1983:94 f; C:H viii f).

29. TWO MASTERPIECES

Śāriputra's great skill as a teacher of the Dharma is attested by his two classic discourses found in the Majjhima Nikāya, that is, the Mahā Hatthi, padōpama Sutta (M 28) and the Sammā, diṭṭhi Sutta (M 9). The Mahā Hatthi, padōpama Sutta (The Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint) opens with a statement that just as the footprint of an elephant can contain the footprints of all other animals, so the four noble truths comprise everything wholesome. [Cf. 8:15c]

He then singles out the Truth of Suffering for detailed analysis. Next, he enumerates the Five Aggregates—physical form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness—and then goes on to analyze each of them in detail in terms of the Four Elements. All these Aggregates arise interdependently. As such, quoting the Buddha, he declares: One who sees dependent arising, sees the Dharma; one who sees the Dharma, sees dependent arising.

The Sammā, diṭṭhi Sutta (the Discourse on Right View) (M 9) is a long and important discourse by Śāriputra, with separate sections on the wholesome and the unwholesome, nutriment, the four noble truths, the 12 factors of dependent arising, and the cankers. The Commentary declares: "In the Buddha Word as collected in the Five Great Collections (*pañca, mahā, nikāya*), there is no discourse other than the Discourse on Right View, wherein the four noble truths are stated 32 times, and 32 times the state of arhathood."

30. MAHĀ GOSIṄGA SUTTA

The two chief disciples often lived together in the same cell and held many dialogues for the benefit of their fellow monks. A good example of their fellowship is found in the Anaṅgana Sutta (Discourse on Without Blemish, M 5) and the Mahā Gosiṅga Sutta (The Greater Discourse in Gosiṅga, M 32). In the Anaṅgana Sutta, Śāriputra, inspired by Maudgalyāyana, speaks on the removal of "evil wishes." At the end of the discourse, Maudgalyāyana applauds Śāriputra's eloquence, comparing his discourse to a garland of flowers that one might place on one's head as an ornament.

On another occasion, recorded in the Mahā Gosiṅga Sutta (M 32), when a group of leading disciples, such as Mahā Kāśyapa, Aniruddha, Revata, and Ānanda, have gathered in the Gosiṅga Sal Grove on a beautiful full-moon night, Śāriputra asks each of them in turn to describe who they consider to be the ideal monk, "one who could illumine this forest" (M 1:212-214). When it is Maudgalyāyana's turn to answer, he says:

Here, friend Sāriputta, two monks engage in a talk as regards the Dharma (*abhidharma/abhidhamma*)¹⁵², and they question each other, and each being questioned by the other answers

¹⁵¹ See Warder's note, P:W xxxiii.

¹⁵² Abhidhamma. The term here clearly does not refer to the Piṭaka of that name, which is a post-Nikāya product. It may well indicate "a systematic and analytical approach to the doctrine that served as the original nucleus of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka" (M:B 1224 n362). In his survey of the contexts of the term *Abhidhamma* in the Canon, the Japanese scholar Fumimaro Watanabe concludes that the Buddha's own disciples formed the conception of Abhidhamma as an elementary philosophical study that attempted to define, analyse and classify *dharmas* and to explore their mutual relations (*Philosophy and Its Development in the Nikāyas and Abhidhamma*, 1983:34-36). On the etymology and usage of *abhidhamma*, see CPD, s.v. & Norman, 1983:97.

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without foundering, and their talk rolls on in accordance with the Dharma. That kind of monk could illumine this Gosiṅga sal-grove. (M 1:214; cf. Anderson 1999:156 f)

At the end of their Dharma talk, Śāriputra proposes that they go to see the Buddha, who then praises them, saying that each of them is a capable Dharma speaker, each in their own way. Then the Buddha himself gives his own answer:

Here, Śāriputta, when a monk has returned from his almsround, after his meal, he sits down, crosses his legs together, keeps his body erect, and establishing mindfulness before him, resolves: “I shall not break this position until, through not clinging, my mind is liberated from the defilements.” That kind of monk could illumine this Gosiṅga sal-grove. (M 1:219)

While the disciples, in their respective answers, hold up the spiritually accomplished monk as their ideal, the Buddha’s ideal monk is one still striving for the goal, hence underscoring the purpose of the holy life.

Later, the Buddha confirms that Maudgalyāyana is a very capable Dharma speaker, as is evident from his discourses recorded in the Canon. Examples of such discourses given by Maudgalyāyana are:

Anumāna Sutta (M 15), where Maudgalyāyana enumerates the qualities that make a monk difficult to admonish and teaches how one could examine oneself to remove the defects from one’s character.

Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 37), where he overhears the Buddha give a brief explanation to Śakra, ruler of the devas, as to how a monk is liberated through the destruction of craving. Wishing to know if Śakra has understood the meaning, Maudgalyāyana travels to the Heaven of the Thirty-three to find out.

Avassuta Sutta (S 35.243), where the Buddha, suffering from backache, asks Maudgalyāyana to give a Dharma talk, and he gives an exposition on “the corrupted and the uncorrupted” regarding restraint of the senses.

Moggallāna Sutta (S 44.7) and Vaccha Sutta (S xlv,8) where Maudgalyāyana answers the questions unanswered by the Buddha, explaining why other ascetics asks such questions.

Byākaraṇa Sutta (A 10.84), where he speaks on 10 negative conditions to be abandoned before one can grow and mature in the spiritual life.

31. MUTUAL RESPECT

The Ghaṭṭa Sutta (The Barrel Discourse, S 21.3) records an episode showing the warm friendship existing between Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. On one occasion when the Blessed One was dwelling in Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park in Prince Jeta’s Grove at Śrāvastī, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana were dwelling at Rājagṛha in a single dwelling in the Squirrel Sanctuary in the Bamboo Grove.

Emerging from his meditation retreat, Śāriputra approached Maudgalyāyana and remarked: “Friend Maudgalyāyana, your faculties are serene, your countenance is pure and bright. Has the Venerable Mahā Maudgalyāyana spent the day in a peaceful dwelling?”

“Actually I spent the day in a gross dwelling,¹⁵³ friend, but I did have some Dharma talk.”

When Śāriputra asks further, Maudgalyāyana replies that he has had some Dharma conversation with the Buddha.

“But the Blessed One is far away, friend. He is now dwelling in Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park in Prince Jeta’s Grove at Sāvasthī. Did the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna approach the Blessed One by means of spiritual power, or did the Blessed One approach the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna by means of spiritual power?”

Neither, replies Maudgalyāyana, rather “the Blessed One cleared his divine eye and divine ear element to communicate with me, and I cleared my divine eye and divine ear element to communicate with the Blessed One.”¹⁵⁴

When asked again, Maudgalyāyana replies that he has asked the Buddha what is meant by the expression “one with energy aroused” (*āradḍha, viriyo*). The Buddha replies:

¹⁵³ Saṃyutta Comy. The dwelling is called “gross” on account of its object. For he dwelt in the exercise of the divine eye and divine ear element, which takes gross objects, namely the form sense-base and the sound sense-base.

¹⁵⁴ P. *Api ca me yāvatā bhagavatā ettavatā dibba, cakkhu visujjhi dibbā ca sota, dhātū, Bhagavato ‘pi yāvatā’ haṃ ettavatā dibba, cakkhu cakkhu visujjhi dibbā ca sota, dhātū ti.* (S 2:276). Free tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, S:B 1:715 & n.

Here, Moggallāna, a monk with energy aroused dwells thus: “Willingly, let only my skin, sinews and bones remain, and let the flesh and blood dry up in my body, but I will not relax my energy so long as I have not attained what can be attained by personal strength, by personal energy, by personal exertion (P. *purisa, thāmena purisa, viriyena purisa, parakkamena*).” It is in such a way, Moggallāna, that one has aroused energy. [This teaching is also given in the Dasa, bala Sutta II, S 22.22.]

“Friend,” Śāriputra confesses, “compared to the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna, we are like a little piece of gravel compared to the Himalayas, the king of mountains. For the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna is of such great spiritual power and might that if so he wishes he could live on for an cycle (*kalpa/kappa*).”¹⁵⁵

“Friend,” replies Maudgalyāyana, “compared to the Venerable Śāriputta [in wisdom] we are like a little grain of salt compared to a barrel of salt. For the Venerable Śāriputta has been extolled, lauded and praised in many ways by the Blessed One.”

As Śāriputta is supreme
In wisdom, virtue and peace,
So a monk who has gone beyond
At best can only equal him. (S 2:276 f)

32. MAHĀ MAUDGALYĀYANA’S AWAKENING

Like Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana was an arhat “liberated both ways” (*ubhayato, bhāga, vimukta/ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*). All arhats are perfectly liberated in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain the eight deliverances (*aṣṭa, vimokṣa/aṭṭha, vimokkha*), which include the four formless Attainments and the Attainment of Cessation, are called “liberated both ways,” that is, liberated from the physical body by means of the formless absorptions, and from all defilements by the Path of arhathood.

Those who have destroyed the defilements but lack the mastery over the eight deliverances are called “liberated by wisdom” (*prajñā, vimukta/paññā, vimutta*). The differences between the two types of liberation are given in the Mahā, nidāna Sutta (D 2:70 f) and the Kūṭāgiri Sutta (M 1:477 f). Within the same week of striving, Maudgalyāyana had not only mastered the successive planes of meditative concentration but also won the “paths of spiritual power” (*ṛddhi, pāda/iddhi, pāda*), and thus had attained higher knowledge (*abhiññā/abhiññā*).

There is a whole chapter (*varga/vagga*) in the Aṅguttara Nikāya dealing with modes of spiritual progress (*pratipadā/pañipadā*) (A 4.161-170), of which four are mentioned:

- (1) painful progress with slow insight (P. *dukkhā paṭipadā dandhābhiññā*).
- (2) painful progress with quick insight (P. *dukkhā paṭipadā khippābhiññā*).
- (3) pleasant progress with slow insight (P. *sukhā paṭipadā dandhābhiññā*).
- (2) pleasant progress with quick insight (P. *sukhā paṭipadā khippābhiññā*).

(A 2:149-152, 154 f)

Of the sutras in the chapter, two are called Śāriputta Moggallāna Sutta (A 4.167-168). In the Śāriputta Moggallāna Sutta I, Śāriputra visits Maudgalyāyana and on being asked by Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana tells him that his (Maudgalyāyana’s) mode of spiritual progress was painful but with quick progress. In Śāriputta Moggallāna Sutta II, Maudgalyāyana visits Śāriputra who says that his own mode of spiritual progress was pleasant with quick progress.

Maudgalyāyana attained arhathood by swift realization (P. *khippābhiññā*), that is, in one week, but his progress was difficult (*dukkha, paṭipadā*) and needed the Buddha’s help, hence the swiftness in his insight (*khippābhiññā*) [15]. Śāriputra, on the other hand, took only slightly longer in his progress (two weeks), but his progress was smooth (*sukha, paṭipadā*) and he swiftly gained insight while listening to the Buddha exhorting Dīgha, nakha [16]. While Maudgalyāyana had the Buddha’s personal guidance in his progress, he had a lesser range in insight, whereas Śāriputra was not only independent in his progress but had a wider range of insight. Hence, Śāriputra’s superiority and supremacy in wisdom.

¹⁵⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi remarks here in his notes that although SA glosses *kappa* as *āyukappa*, meaning the full human life span of 120 years, there seems to be no textual basis for taking *kappa* in this passage as meaning anything other than a cosmic aeon, the full extent of time required for a world system to evolve and dissolve.

33. THE JUṆHA SUTTA

The “Treatise on Psychic Power” of the Paṭisambhidā, magga attributes Śāriputra with “the power of intervention by concentration” (*samādhi, vipphāra, iddhi*), that is capable of intervening in certain normal physiological processes or other natural events (Pm 2:212). The canonical basis for this attribution is a story in the Juṇha Sutta (the Discourse on the Moonlit Night) of the Udāna (U 4.4). Once, when Śāriputra was living with Maugalyāyana in the Pigeon Cave (P, *kapota, kandara*) near Rājagṛha, he sat down in meditation in the open air on a full-moon night, his head freshly shaven. A malicious yaksha who was passing overhead gave his head a mighty blow that could kill an elephant or split a mountain peak. He was so deeply engrossed in meditation that he was not bothered at all. The sutra continues:

The Venerable Moggallāna, with his divine eye purified and surpassing that of humans, saw the yaksha giving the Venerable Śāriputta a blow on the head. On seeing this, he approached the Venerable Śāriputta and said: “Are you all right, friend? I hope you are bearing up. I hope you are not in pain.”

“I am all right, friend Moggallāna. I am bearing up, friend Moggallāna, although I do have a slight headache.”

“It is wonderful, friend Śāriputta! It is marvelous, friend Śāriputta! Just now, friend Śāriputta, a certain yaksha gave you a blow on the head. And so great was the blow, it might have felled an elephant seven or seven and a half cubits high or split a great mountain peak. And yet the Venerable Śāriputta just says: ‘I am all right, friend Moggallāna. I am bearing up, friend Moggallāna, although I do have a slight headache.’”

“It is wonderful, friend Moggallāna! It is marvelous, friend Moggallāna! How great is the psychic power and potency of the Venerable Moggallāna in that he can actually see a yaksha. Now, we could not even see a dust-sprite (P. *paṃsu, piśācika*).”

Then the Blessed One, with divine hearing purified and surpassing that of humans, heard this conversation of these two “great dragons” (*mahā, nāga*). Then, seeing its significance, the Lord uttered this verse of uplift (*udāna*):

Whose mind stands unmoving like a rock,
Unattached to things that arouse attachment,
Unangered by things that provoke anger—
When his mind is cultivated thus,
How can suffering come to him? (U 40 f; verse tr. John D. Ireland, 1990)

34. MAUDGALYĀYANA’S SPIRITUAL POWERS

(a) The four paths of spiritual power

Maudgalyāyana’s psychic abilities come from his cultivation of the four paths of spiritual power or “bases of success” (*rddhi, pāda/iddhi, pāda*), which the Buddha teaches as a means of winning superknowledge, thus:

Here, monks, a monk develops the basis for spiritual power consisting in concentration due to zeal (*chanda*) and determined striving. He develops the basis for spiritual power consisting in concentration due to energy (*vīrya/vīriya*) and determined striving. He develops the basis for spiritual power consisting in concentration due to mind (*citta*) and determined striving. He develops the basis for spiritual power consisting in concentration due to investigation (*mīmāṃsāna/vīmaṃsā*) and volitional forces of striving.

(D 2:213 = M 1:103 = 2:11; D 3:221, 230; Vbh 216)

These four bases of spiritual power are mental factors related to mental absorptions (*dhyāna/jhāna*) to ascertain that these absorptions are not merely states of calm but will also serve as reservoirs of energy, each accompanied by “determined striving” (*pradhāna, saṃskāra/padhāna, saṅkhāra*). It is from this vast store of mental energy that can manifest itself as psychic power (*rddhi/iddhi*) (D 3:281; A 3:280).

Maudgalyāyana is the foremost amongst the cultivation of these four paths of spiritual power, and so is a master of psychic skills. Although there are many other monks who have amazing psychic powers, it is Maudgalyāyana who surpasses them all in this field. Let us briefly look at some examples of the manifestations of Maudgalyāyana’s psychic skills.

(b) Psychic powers

Maudgalyāyana has a wide variety of psychic powers (*ṛddhi, vidhi, jñāna/iddhi, vidhā, ñāṇa*), such as teleportation, telekinesis and metamorphosis. In the *Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta* (the Shorter Discourse on the Destruction of Craving), it is said:

Then, just as quickly as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna vanished from the Mansion of Migara's Mother in the Eastern Park and appeared among the gods of the Thirty-three.

Then, just as quickly as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, he vanished from among the gods of the Thirty-three and appeared in the Mansion of Migara's Mother in the Eastern Park. (M 1:252, 255)

1. Teleportation

In this manner, Maudgalyāyana uses his power of teleportation to go wherever he wishes in order to instruct others or to attend to the affairs of the Order. This was how he finds out for himself whether Śakra, the leader of the realm of the Thirty-three (*trāyastriṃśa/tāvatiṃsa*), has understood the teaching about the extinction of craving (M 37).

The Buddha spends the entire 7th rains-retreat in Trāyastriṃśa (Tāvatiṃsa) teaching the Abhidharma to his mother, Māyā Devaputra. During that time, it is Maudgalyāyana who shuttles between the heaven and Śrāvastī to report to the Buddha on events in the Order and receive instructions (DhA 3:216 ff; DhsA 1:15; J no. 483).

In the *Aparā,diṭṭhi Sutta* (S 6.5), a certain Brahmā holds the unwholesome speculative view that “There is no ascetic or brahmin who can come here.” Reading the Brahmā's mind, the Buddha teleports himself from Jeta's Grove to the Brahmā realm, appearing there sitting cross-legged meditating on the fire element. Maudgalyāyana, then similarly appears there, as do Mahā Kāśyapa, Mahā Kapphiṇa (Mahā Kappina) and Aniruddha successively. Maudgalyāyana then asks the Brahmā if he has changed his view as such, to which he acquiesces. (S 1:145)

The *Anguttara* has two suttas—the *Mahā Moggallāna Sutta* (A 4.34, Śrāvastī) and the *Tissa Sutta* (A 7.53, Rājagṛha)—that relates how Maudgalyāyana teleports himself before the Brahmā Tissa, a student of his who has died recently, to instruct him on stream-entry and the realization of the Deathless (A 3:331-334, 4:74-79).

Once when Śāriputra is ill and needs lotus stalks as medicine, Maudgalyāyana teleports himself to the Himalayas to obtain them (V 1:214 f, 2:140). On another occasion, when Anāthapiṇḍada wants to plant a Bodhi tree in Jetavana, Maudgalyāyana uses his psychic skill of teleportation to catch a seed from it just as it drops from the tree [3:21; 6:8].

2. Telekinesis

Maudgalyāyana also has the power of telekinesis or psychic mastery over solid matter. Once, when the Buddha is residing in the Mansion of Migāra's Mother in the Eastern Park at Śrāvastī, a number of monks on the ground floor “were restless, puffed up, personally vain, rough-tongued, rambling in their talk, muddle-minded, without clear comprehension, unconcentrated, scatter-brained, loose in their faculties” (S 5:270).

The Buddha then instructs Maudgalyāyana to teach the indisciplined monks a lesson. The Commentary relates that Maudgalyāyana goes into the meditation on the water meditation (*apas,kṛṣṇa/āpo,kasīṇa*), emerges, and determines that the ground on which the mansion stands should become water. Then he rises into the air and strikes the “water” with his toe.

Then the monks, shocked and terrified, stand to one side, wondering how when there is no wind at all, the whole building with a strong foundation could quake and tremble. Then, the Buddha admonishes the monk on the four bases of spiritual power. (S 5:269-272)

Similarly, the *Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta* relates how when Maudgalyāyana finds that Śakra and his heavenly host are frolicking mindlessly in divine pleasures, he shakes the whole of the heavenly Vaijayanta (Vejayanta) palace with his toe to awaken the gods to reality. (M 1:254)

3. Metamorphosis

Maudgalyāyana's power of metamorphosis or psychic transformation is one of his most formidable abilities. The Visuddhi, magga tells the story of how he subdues the serpent king Nandopananda (a sort of celestial dragon) who is offended when the Buddha and 500 monks, on a visit to Trāyastriṃśa heaven, passes above Nandopananda's abode. In his rage, Nandopananda seeks revenge by coiling around Mount Sineru (the world axis) and spreads his hood, enveloping the whole world in darkness.

Although various monks volunteer to subdue the serpent, the Buddha picks Maudgalyāyana, the last to volunteer, since only he has enough power and skill to defeat the serpent. Maudgalyāyana then transforms himself into a huge serpent king and engages Nandopananda in a cosmic battle of flame and smoke. Drawing upon his various powers, he assumes various shapes and sizes, the last of which is a celestial bird (*supaṃṇa/supaṇṇa*) or *garuḍa*, his mortal arch-enemy, and so defeats him. (Vism 12.106-116; ThaA 3:177 f)

(c) Clairaudience

Through clairaudience or the divine ear (*divya,śrota/dibba,sota*), Maudgalyāyana can hear events from great distances: the voices and conversations of humans as well as non-humans (divine beings, etc.) It is said, for example, a young deva (Kakuda/Kakudha the Krauḍya/Koliya who has been Maudgalyāyana's attendant before) warns him against Devadatta, who has evil intentions against the Buddha (V 2:185). This event is recorded immediately after that of Devadatta's winning over of the impressionable young Ajātaśatru by a display of his psychic powers [Chapter 7].

The Ghaṭa Sutta (The Barrel Discourse, S 21.3), as we have seen [31], records an episode where Maudgalyāyana uses his powers of clairaudience and clairvoyance to converse with the Buddha who is dwelling in Anāthapiṇḍada's Park in Prince Jeta's Grove at Śrāvastī, and Maudgalyāyana is dwelling in the Squirrel Sanctuary in the Bamboo Grove at Rājagṛha.

(d) Thought reading

Once, when the monks have assembled for the Upoṣadha (Upasatha), the weekly conclave for the recitation of the Prātimokṣa, the Buddha remains silent even after being invited to recite it. On the third invitation, when it is already dawn, the Buddha replies that there is an impure monk amidst the Assembly. Then Maudgalyāyana surveys the Assembly with his divine eye and discovering the guilty monk, takes him by the arm, throws him out and bolts the assembly hall door. (V 2:236-237; A 8.20; U 5.5)

Maudgalyāyana is able to read the minds of others through his power of telepathy or "penetration of the minds of others."¹⁵⁶ Once when the Buddha is dwelling on the Rṣi,giri (Isigili) Slope of Black Rock at Rājagṛha with 500 monks who are all arhats, Maudgalyāyana scans all their minds and confirms the fact.

Now, one of those in this assembly is the elder Vāgīśa (Vaṅgīsa), who even before he joined the Order, had the unique ability of tapping skulls (a kind of psychometry, i.e. divination regarding an object or its owner through contact with or proximity to the object) and thereby knowing where the erstwhile owners were reborn (DhA 26.37). Vāgīśa, who is so called because he is a master of the spoken word (*vāk/vacana*) (Ap 2.497 = 5.27) and declared by the Buddha as being foremost amongst the monks with ready wit (*pratibhāṇa/patibhāṇa*). Inspired by Maudgalyāyana, Vāgīśa responds with these verses:

While the sage is seated on the mountain slope,
Gone to the far shore of suffering,
His disciples sit in attendance on him,
Triple-knowledge men who have left Death behind.

Moggallāna, great in spiritual power,
Encompassed their minds with his own,
And searching [he came to see] their minds:
Fully released, without acquisitions!

Thus those perfect in many qualities
Attend upon Gotama,

¹⁵⁶ Skt. *cetaḥ,pariyāya-jñāna*, *cetaḥ,pariyāya-jñāna* or *para,citta-jñāna*; P. *ceto,pariyāyañāṇa*.

The sage perfect in all respects,
Gone to the far shore of suffering. (S 7.10 = 1:194 f. tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi)

(e) Clairvoyance

The *Juṇḥa Sutta* (U 40 f) records how Maudgalyāyana, through his clairvoyance or divine eye (*divya, cakṣus/dibba, cakkhu*) witnesses a malicious yaksha deal a heavy blow on the meditating Śāriputra's head (but not harming him) [33]. Through his divine eye, Maudgalyāyana is able to know how beings fare according to their karma. Often, for example, he sees how beings, through their evil deeds that harm other beings, are reborn among the hungry ghosts (*preta/peta*) and have to experience great suffering, and how others, who practise virtue and charity, arise in the heavenly realms.

The Dhammapada Commentary relates that each time Maudgalyāyana sees hungry ghosts, he would smile. But, when asked about why he has smiled, he replies that he would explain it in the Buddha's presence. After doing so, the Buddha adds that he too has seen those apparitions himself while meditating under the Bodhi tree, but has not spoken about them out of compassion for others. Now that Maudgalyāyana himself has seen them, he acknowledges them. (DhA 2:64 f, 70, 3:61, 3:411, 479)

Maudgalyāyana uses such episodes to illustrate the law of karma, and these stories are compiled into the *Peta, vatthu* (Stories of the Departed) and the *Vimāna, vatthu* (Stories of the Mansions), both canonical books of the Khuddaka Nikāya of the Sutta Piṭaka. Many stories of hungry ghosts are also found in the Vinaya (V 3:104-108) and in the *Lakkhaṇa Saṃyutta* (events related by Maudgalyāyana to the monk Lakṣaṇa/Lakkhaṇa, S 19.1-21 = 2:354 ff).

35. MAUDGALYĀYANA'S DEATH

(a) The Māra Dūsī

Maudgalyāyana has the power of retrocognition or the recollection of past lives (*pūrvā.nivāsānu-smṛti/pubbe, nivāsānussati*), but of his recollection of his own past lives, he only speaks once, and this is recorded in the *Māra, tājjanīya Sutta* (the Discourse on the Rebuke to Māra) (M 50). Śāriputra passes away on the full-moon day of Kartikā (Kattikā, October-November), half a year before the Buddha's final Nirvana. Soon after that, Maudgalyāyana encounters Māra in a rather bizarre way.

One night, while Maudgalyāyana is walking back and forth in meditation, Māra enters his bowels. Realizing it is Māra, Maudgalyāyana instructs him to leave him. Maudgalyāyana then relates how in the time of Krakucchanda (Kakusandha) Buddha (the first of the 5 Buddhas in this fortunate cycle, *bhadra-kalpa/bhadda, kappā*), he was the Māra named Dūsī who had a sister named Kālī, whose son was the Māra of our own age. As such, Maudgalyāyana is, in that life, the uncle of the present Māra!

The Māra Dūsī committed various evil deeds, the worst of which was to have caused hurt upon Krakucchanda's chief disciple so that his blood flowed. For this, Dūsī (Maudgalyāyana) had to suffer ten thousand years all alone in a suffering state as a being with a fish's head on a human body.

(b) Painful death

The circumstances of Maudgalyāyana's death are related in the Commentaries to the Dhammapada (Dh 137-140) and to the Jātaka (J no. 523), both of which vary in some details. It is said that in a past life, Maudgalyāyana had killed his own blind parents (or according to the Jātaka Commentary, he spared them at the last minute). For this evil deed, he suffered a very long period in a hell state, but the karma still is not yet fully exhausted, and continues even into his last life.

In his last life, Maudgalyāyana, through his psychic skills helps countless people to happier births and also related accounts of the painful rebirths of other non-Buddhist ascetics. His efforts win over a significant number of followers from other religions, which infuriate those badly affected, especially the Jain naked ascetics.

In retaliation, these desperate and jealous Jain naked ascetics hire thugs to murder Maudgalyāyana. However, each time these thugs try to kill him, Maudgalyāyana, through his psychic powers, manages to escape (once through a key-hole). When the attacks do not abate for six days, Maudgalyāyana, examining his own past lives, realizes that he has to let the momentum of his past karma run its course although he is not in any way mentally affected by them.

On the seventh day (according to the Jātaka account), the thugs enter his hut on the Rṣigiri Slope of Black Rock at Rājagṛha, knock him down and "pounded his bones until they were as small as grains of

rice.” Thinking he is dead, they throw his body behind a clump of bushes and flee to collect their reward. Summoning his psychic powers, Maudgalyāyana teleports himself to the presence of the Buddha to take his leave. (DhA 3:65 ff; J 5:125 ff)

Maudgalyāyana has won the four spiritual powers (*iddhi/iddhi*) which allows him to live on for the rest of the world-period, but he chooses to let his karma run its course. His greatest spiritual power is none other than the knowledge of the destruction of the cankers (*āsrava, kṣaya, jñāna/āśava-k, khayañāna*) that liberates him from all suffering and wins him the Deathless. The perpetrators of his tragic death, some jealous Jains, are caught by Ajātaśatru’s men and severely punished.

36. THE MEANING OF BEING FOREMOST

(a) Two roles of Śāriputra

Early Buddhism began as a forest tradition with Siddhārtha as a wandering ascetic. Even the early living quarters donated to the Buddha and the Sangha (such as the Bamboo Grove, a garden, *udyaṇa/uyyāna* in Rājgrha, V 1:38 f) [4:20] were open parks (*ārāma*), serving as residence for those “who have gone forth from the home into homelessness” (P. *agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajati*, D 1:18; M 1:161, 451, 2:55; Tha 46; Sn 274). Discourses such as the Vana, pattha Sutta (M 17) (The Discourse on the Jungle Wilderness) praise and give advice on the life of a forest wanderer.

There are two images of Śāriputra, often mutually exclusive, in the Pali Canon. In the earlier strata of the Pali Canon—in the Udāna, Theragāthā and Sutta Nipāta—he is presented as a forest saint. In the majority of the other texts, he is “the scholarly ideal and champion of settled monastic tradition” (Reginald Ray 1994:136). In this Chapter, I have presented Śāriputra mostly as the latter, a settled monastic figure. However, it is important to remember that it was his life as a wandering forest monk that led to his conversion (and that of Maudgalyāyana) when he met Aśvajit.

The story of Śāriputra does not end with his more or less complete monasticization in the Pali Canon. For, in the early Mahāyāna sutras, such as the Aṣṭa, sāhasrikā Prajñā, pāramitā, we find Śāriputra once again presented as a forest saint. We shall look at the phenomenon of urbanization and the tension between the forest tradition and the monastic tradition in early Buddhism in Chapter 9.

(b) Unique individuals

The Buddha’s disciples who were foremost (*etad-agra/etad-agga*) in various qualities were not merely specialists in those wonderful qualities attributed to them, and they did not gain these special qualities in their last life by being the Buddha’s enlightened disciples. They humbly began with a simple asseveration after being inspired by another disciple with similar qualities, and then they themselves spent countless world-cycles cultivating those qualities often meeting other Buddhas.

More importantly, in their last lives, these foremost disciples were not merely specialists in wisdom (Śāriputra), or in psychic skills (Maudgalyāyana), or in retentive memory (Ānanda), or with a sweet voice (Lakuṇṭaka Bhadrīya), but they had various wholesome and spiritual qualities that conduce to the teaching of the Dharma and to the bringing of others closer to the holy life. In some cases, their foremost qualities are historical facts witnessing how they came to realize the Deathless. Ājñāta Kaundīya (Añña Koṇḍañña), for example, was foremost amongst those monks who were of long standing; Raṣṭraāla (Raṭṭhapāla) was foremost of those monks who renounced out of faith; Bāhiya Dārucīriya was foremost of those quick to gain higher knowledge (*abhijñā/abhiññā*).

In some such monks, their foremost qualities reflected their chosen way of life: for example, Revata Khadira, vanika (Khadira, vaniya) was the foremost of those monk who were forest dwellers, and Mogha, rāja, the foremost amongst wearers of coarse robes. Such special qualities show that these great saints, although sharing the same moral conduct, the same liberating mental discipline, and the same liberating wisdom, were not cast from the same mould or mass-produced stereotypes, as it were. They were each an interesting individual in his or her own right. Yet these special qualities, in their diverse forms, serve a common function as lightning rods to attract other beings with similar inclinations as these great individuals to follow the liberating path to the Deathless.



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6

THE BUDDHA'S IMAGE AND SHADOW

Ānanda & Mahā Kāśyapa

1. BRAHMĀ & MUCALINDA

In the course of this study so far, we have come across two interesting mythical figures: Brahmā and Mucalinda. Brahmā is a celestial archetype—a sky figure—of “the wise old man” representing a compassionate father-figure concerned with the spiritual welfare of the world [4:1]. Mucalinda is a terrestrial archetype—an earth figure—of “the young genius,” even “child prodigy,” representing our ageless wisdom whose function is to enlighten and liberate [3:18].

In terms of spiritual development, Brahmā and Mucalinda are part of the same process. There is in every sentient being a capacity for knowing and a capability for liberation: this is our Mucalinda factor. When this wisdom aspect is expressed beyond self-awareness to other-acceptance, it becomes the Brahmā factor. The young genius becomes the wise old man who is also the manifestation of timeless wisdom. In this sense, the child prodigy and the wise old man are two sides of the same coin.

It is as rare to find a child genius as it is to find an aged prodigy, a wise old man. The Buddhist training produces both kinds of prodigies, as exemplified by Ānanda and Mahā Kāśyapa, one of the most revered figures in Mahayana Buddhism, and often represented as an old arhat with long pendulous eyebrows. Ānanda, highly respected in Theravada Buddhism, is always represented as a young monk, although tradition has it that he lived to 120 (DhA 2:99). Indeed, if Theravada iconography places Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana [5:14] on the right and left sides of the Buddha respectively, the Mahayana tradition (especially the Chinese) places an image of Mahā Kāśyapa on the Buddha's right and that of Ānanda on his left, since they are regarded as the first and second patriarchs of the Zen tradition.

2. MONASTIC DEVELOPMENTS

(a) Regular and secular

Buddhism started off as an eremite tradition of the forest. The Greek term *eremite* originally means “one who dwells in the desert,” that is, a solitary hermit. The early Buddhist monks are solitary forest hermits. This is the kind of life reflected in such early sutras as the *Khaddhagaviṣāṇa Sutta* (Khagga,visāṇa Sutta, Sn 1.3). They are also ascetics (*śramaṇa/samaṇa*) who support themselves on very basic necessities [15] and live a profoundly contemplative life of meditation. As they live exclusively on the alms of the faithful, they are called mendicants (*bhikṣu/bhikkhu*).

The term monk, used to described such individuals, is an accurate description of the early monks, and their lifestyle known as monasticism. However, as Buddhism became more popular and the Order grew, such monks began to live in communities. From solitary wanderers, they became small unregulated colonies of practitioners and later grew into settled communities living in sprawling parks and domiciles donated by royalty and the wealthy. From being eremites, they became cœnobites, settled communitarians.

[The] Buddha was forced to establish the first monasteries. Monks are by nature impulsive and unruly, so that monasteries inevitably requires abbots and rules and community discipline.

(Robert Brow, *Religion: Origin and Ideas*, 1996 ch. 5)

Monks must be distinguished from the clergy. Priests, pastors and rabbis are full-time professionals who are trained to work in society: they have a “religious vocation” (vocation comes from the Latin, meaning “calling”). The direction their work takes is quite different from the highly individualized lifestyle of the early monks. As such, it is more correct today to speak of the modern urban Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna *clergies*, insofar as they own land, building, cars, handphones, credit cards, etc. and are involved in some sort of organized work such as teaching, social work and businesses.

In this sense, too, we can regard the early Buddhist monastic practitioners of the Buddha's time as being regulars, that is, belonging to an order regulated by monastic discipline (Latin *regula*). The modern Buddhist clergy would then be called secular (from Latin *saeculum*, "generation, age") in the sense that monastic discipline is secondary to social expedience, meaning that they support themselves through priestly rituals, social work, businesses and such like. In Tibet, to quote an extreme example, the Khamba organized themselves into a military police (like the Japanese *sōhei* or warrior monks of the Heian period) for the protection of the higher clergy. In this sense, there is a laicization of the monastic system.¹⁵⁷

(b) Forest and monastery

In Chapter 5, we looked at Śāriputra's asking the Buddha why the dispensation of some of the past Buddhas lasted long and why some did not. The dispensations of the Buddhas Vipasyī, Śikhin and Viśvabhū (the three Buddhas immediately preceding Śākyamuni), for example, were short because they did not teach the Dharma "in detail...and little of the suttas," nor did they lay down the training-rules (*śikṣā,pada/sikkhā,pada*) for their disciples, nor did they institute the recital of the Prātimokṣa or monastic code of conduct. Moreover, Viśvabhū Buddha resided with his disciples "in a certain awe-inspiring jungle thicket" which terrified those still ruled by passion (V 3:8). [27]

Statements about the jungle thicket or remote forest as being "hard to endure" and inviting "fear and dread" are mentioned elsewhere, such as the Bhaya,bherava Sutta (the Discourse on Fear and Dread) (M no. 4). However, one reason given as to why Viśvabhū Buddha's dispensation was short was that he and his Sangha lived in "a certain awe-inspiring jungle thicket"—a statement that suggests a disapproval of the forest tradition by the Vinaya Reciters or later redactors. Interestingly, it is a *hapax legomenon*, that is, a single occurrence of a word or statement in a text, indeed, in the whole Canon.

Siddhārtha began his spiritual life as a wandering forest monk, a lifestyle that continued into the early decades of his enlightened life. As he attracted more and more saints and converts, and received a growing number of residential parks, the Sangha evolved into a more settled monastic community, a colony of cœnobites. However, in the fringes of this monastic community, there were numerous monks who were eremites, solitary wanderers of the forest tradition.

As the Sangha became more settled, the tension between forest tradition and monastic tradition inevitably became more marked. On the one hand, we have Mahā Kāśyapa (Mahā Kassapa) as the best exemplar of the solitary forest tradition, and on the other there is Ānanda, the ideal of a gregarious monastic monk. This tension between the forest tradition and the monastic tradition was a vital feature of early Buddhism, of which scholars like Reginald A. Ray (*Buddhist Saints in India*, 1994) have made in-depth studies. In this Chapter, we shall briefly survey this interesting phenomenon by way of a comparative study of the lives of Mahā Kāśyapa and Ānanda, two very important disciples of the Buddha.

We shall investigate why, for example, the Commentaries describe Mahā Kāśyapa as the "image" of the Buddha (*Buddha,paṭibhāga sāvaka*, eg SA 2:176) and Ānanda as his never-departing "shadow" (*chāyā va anapāyini*, Tha 1041-43).

3. ĀNANDA

It is said that Ānanda is born on the same day as the Bodhisattva (DA 2:425; ApA 58, 358; J 1:63) [18]. Ānanda's father, Amṛt'ōdana (Amit'ōdana) the Śākya, is Śuddh'ōdana's brother. As such, he and the Bodhisattva are first cousins. When the Buddha visits Kapilavastu in Phālguna (Phaggunā, Feb-Mar) in the second year of the Ministry, Ānanda (then 37 years old) joins the Order along with other young Śākya nobles (*kṣatriya/khattiya*): Bhadriya (Bhaddiya), Aniruddha (Anuruddha), Bhagu, Kimbila and Devadatta (V 2:182). His preceptor is Vairatṭa,śīrṣa (Belatṭha,sīsa) (V 1:202. 4:86; DA 2:418 ff.; ThaA 1:68).

After listening to Pūrṇa Maitrāyaṇī,putra (Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta) giving a discourse on the five aggregates and the notion "I am," Ānanda becomes a stream-winner (*srota,āpanna/sota,panna*) (S 3:105). Out of gratitude, Ānanda recounts his experience in the Ānanda Sutta (S 20.83). Pūrṇa is the disciple declared by the Buddha as the foremost of his disciples who are Dharma speakers (A 1:23). Ānanda has a reputation for being a fast talker. Where an ordinary person speaks one word, he could speak eight. The Buddha could speak sixteen words for each one word of Ānanda (MA 2:53).

¹⁵⁷ There are two interesting articles in this connection: (1) Robert Brow, *Religion: Origin and Ideas*, 1996 ch. 5 "Ascetics, Monks and Renunciation". (2) Anon. "Monks and Monasticism," http://ragz-international.com/monks_and_monasticism.html.

6. The Buddha's image and shadow

During the first 20 years of his ministry, the Buddha has had different monks as personal attendant (*upasthāka/upaṭṭhāka*) without any regular one. Among them are Nāgasamāla, Nāgita, Upavāna, Sunakṣatra (Sunakkhatta), the novice Cunda, Sāgata, Rādha and Meghiya¹⁵⁸ [5:7]. Not all of them are satisfactory. After 20 years, when he is 55, the Buddha announces to the Sangha that he needs a dedicated and mindful personal attendant. At once, the noble disciples volunteer, but the Buddha turns them all down.

Only Ānanda (who is said to have been 18 years in the Order then) does not volunteer, and when asked why he has remained silent, he replies that the Buddha knows best who could serve him best. When the Buddha does indeed appoint him as personal attendant, the elated Ānanda asks for eight conditions, the first four negative requests (*pratikṣepa/paṭikkhepa*) and the other four positive requests (*āyacana*):

- (1) The Buddha should never pass on to him any choice robes he has received.¹⁵⁹
- (2) The Buddha should never give him any choice almsfood he has received.
- (3) The Buddha should never appoint a separate “fragrant cell” (residence) for him.
- (4) The Buddha should never include him in any personal invitations.
- (5) If Ānanda receives an invitation, he has the privilege of transferring it to the Buddha.
- (6) If visitors come from outlying areas, he has the privilege of bringing them to the Buddha.
- (7) If Ānanda has any doubt, he can ask the Buddha for clarification at any time.
- (8) If the Buddha gives any discourse in his absence, the Buddha should repeat them to him.

(J 4:96; ThaA 3:112)¹⁶⁰

The first four requests by Ānanda are to prevent any gossip that he is the Buddha's personal attendant for some personal material gain. The other four requests are for the benefit of faithful devotees. The last request is especially significant since Ānanda is foremost amongst the disciples who have retentive memory (A 1:23): he could remember anything up to 60,000 lines upon hearing it only once. As such, he is able to memorize every teaching given to him (MA 2:336; ThaA 3:117). This special request would later be of great service to posterity when Ānanda recites the Dharma before the First Council [25].

1024. 82,000 teachings I received from the Buddha, 2,000 from the monks.
These 84,000 teachings have come to pass (*dharmā pavattino*). (Tha 1024)

Understandably, Ānanda proves to be the most faithful and diligent personal attendant to the Buddha for the rest of the Buddha's life. He follows the Buddha like a shadow, accompanying him on his rounds through the monastery (V 1:294), acting as the Buddha's messenger (V 2:125), assembling the monks at his request, sometimes even at midnight (J no. 148 = 1:501). They nurse the sick and dying together (V 1:302 f.; A 10.60, 6.58) [5:1]. He performs menial tasks for the Buddha, bringing him water and tooth-wood (for brushing his teeth), washing his feet, sweeping his cell, and so on.

In the night, with a stout staff and large torch in hand, he would go round the Buddha's Fragrant Chamber (*gandha,kuṭi*) nine times in order to keep awake if the Buddha should need anything and also to prevent the Buddha's sleep from being disturbed (summarized from AA 1:286-296.; ThaA 2:121 ff.). Above all, Ānanda is so dedicated to the Buddha, that he is ready to sacrifice his own life for him if the occasion arises, such as when Devadatta let loose the drunken elephant, Nāḷāgiri, in an attempt to kill the Buddha. Ānanda throws himself between the Buddha and the charging elephant. The Buddha, using his psychic power, gently removes him to safety. (J no. 533 = 5:333 f.)

1039. Throughout the 25 years as a Learner (*śaikṣa/sekha*), no sensual perception arose in me:
See the excellence of the Dharma!

1040. Throughout the 25 years as a Learner, no perception of illwill arose in me:
See the excellence of the Dharma!

1041. For 25 years I served the Blessed One with deeds of lovingkindness,

¹⁵⁸ SA 1:258 f; J 4:95 f; ThaA 3:112 ad Tha 1018; UA 217.

¹⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that only once did the Buddha share an offering of robes with Ānanda, that is, the offering of the robes of burnished gold cloth by Putkasa (Pukkusa), a Malla minister, which is clearly a later addition to the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, D 2:134; see D:W 573 n421.

¹⁶⁰ Cf Rockhill 57 f, for a Tibetan version on how Ānanda becomes the Buddha's attendant.

Like a shadow never leaving him.

1042. For 25 years I served the Blessed One with words of lovingkindness,
Like a shadow never leaving him.

1043. For 25 years I served the Blessed One with thoughts of lovingkindness,
Like a shadow never leaving him. (Tha 1041-43)

4. THE BĀHITIKĀ SUTTA

Ānanda is not only one of great compassion but also endowed with great learning and is a renowned teacher. The Bāhitika Sutta (the Discourse on the Cloak) (M 88) records his conversation with king Prasenajit (Pasenadi) of Kośala. The king meets Ānanda on his almsround in Śravastī and invites him for a conversation on the bank of the Aciravatī river. This is the time when some wandering ascetics, jealous of the Buddha's growing popularity and support of the masses plot to discredit him.

As a part of their devious plot to discredit the Buddha, the wandering ascetics first instructs a beautiful young female wanderer (*parivrājikā/paribbājikā*), Sundarī, to frequent the Jetavana in full public view. Then they murder Sundarī and bury her body in a ditch in Jetavana. They spread rumours about Sundarī having been seduced by the monks and then being murdered by them. After a week, the false report is exposed by the king's investigators who uncover the real story. (U 4.8 = 43-45; J 2:415-417).

Prasenajit's meeting with Ānanda occurs during the week of the investigation. He privately asks Ānanda whether the Buddha is capable of bodily and verbal wrong-doing "in a manner that would be censured by wise recluses and brahmins," to which Ānanda calmly denies. Then the king asks Ānanda what constitutes a "censurable" act. Ānanda answers by giving the five criteria of an evil action:

- (1) Unwholesomeness that underscores the psychological quality of the action, its unhealthy effect upon the mind.
- (2) Blameworthiness that underscores its morally detrimental nature.
- (3) Painful results that it is capable of producing call attention to its undesirable karmic potential.
- (4) Evil motivation that results from this karmic potential; and
- (5) Harmful long-term consequences that such an action entail for both oneself and others.

(Based on Nāṇamoli, M:Ñ 1291 n832.)

The king, impressed, then says that he would have offered his royal state elephant (*hastī, ratna/hatthī-ratana*) or his royal state horse (*aśva, ratna/assa, ratana*) or the "boon of a village" (*grāma, vara/gāma-, vara*) if they were allowable (*kalpiya/kappeyya*). That not being the case, he decides to offer Ānanda his own cloak of foreign cloth (*bāhitikā*). Ānanda, however, turns down the gifts, saying, "My triple robe is complete." The king then says:

Venerable sir, this river Aciravatī has been seen by both the venerable Ānanda and ourselves when a great cloud has rained heavily on the mountains. Then this river Aciravatī overflows both its banks. So, too, venerable sir, the venerable Ānanda could make a triple robe for himself out of this cloak, and he could share out his old triple robe among his companions in the holy life. In this way, our offering would overflow. Venerable sir, let the venerable Ānanda accept this cloak.

(M 2:117)

Ānanda then accepts the offering of the cloak. Later, Ānanda reports this event to the Buddha and offers him the king's cloak. The Buddha remarks that "it is a great gain for king Prasenajit of Kosala that he has had the opportunity of seeing and paying respect to Ānanda." (M 2:117)

5. RECYCLING ROBES

The best known "robe" story in connection with Ānanda is told in the Dhammapada Commentary in the Udena Vatthu (the story-cycle of King Udena) (DhA 2.1) where upon the request of king Udayana of Kauśāmbī (Udena of Kosambī), the Buddha sends Ānanda to instruct queen Śyāmavātī (Sāmavātī) and her attendants. One day, deeply inspired by his teaching, Śyāmavātī presents him with 500 sets of robes, emptying the royal store. When Udayana discovers this he becomes upset and goes to meet Ānanda:

Venerable sir, what will you do with so many robes?

6. The Buddha's image and shadow

I shall keep them as we require for ourselves and send the rest to those whose robes are worn out.

What will they do with their own worn-out robes?

They will give them to those whose robes are in a still worse state of repair.

What will they do with their own robes that are worse worn-out?

They will make bedspreads of them.

What will they do with the old bedspreads?

They will make foot-towels of them.

What will they do with the old foot-towels?

They will cut them into small pieces, mix them with mortar, and use them to plaster walls with.

Venerable sir, although all of these are given to your reverences, nothing is lost!

This is perhaps one of the earliest historical records of recycling. Udayana, impressed with the monks, donates another 500 sets of robes! (DhA 1:187-91, 205-225; AA 1:418 ff.; U 7.10; UA 382 f.; Vism 380 f.; cf. Divy 575 f.)

Another interesting “robe” incident connected with Ānanda is when the Buddha asks him to design a robe for monks. Recollecting the pattern of ricefields in Magadha, he uses this same pattern for the monastic robe. (V 1:287). Ānanda is a sort of patron saint of tailors because he is very skilled in the art of sewing, such as, making robes from various pieces of cloth, making seams and hemming robes so that the edges do not fray so quickly (V 1:187). However, sometimes he appears to be over-enthusiastic and so attracts the Buddha’s admonition, as recorded in the Mahā Suññatā Sutta [29a].

6. ĀNANDA AND WOMEN

(a) Ānanda’s charisma

Ānanda is said to be very good-looking and has four exceptional personal qualities: whoever comes to see him—monk, nun, layman or laywoman—are all filled with joy on just beholding him (his name *Ānanda* means “joy,” ThaA 3:111); when he preaches to them, they listen with rapture and delight that never tire (except in the case of Atula, who is not satisfied with his preaching, DhA 3:327). Shortly before his final Nirvana, the Buddha again sings loving praises of Ānanda:

Monks, all those who were arhat, Perfect Self-enlightened Buddhas in the past have had just a chief attendant as Ānanda, and so too will those Blessed Ones to come. Monks, Ānanda is wise. He knows when it is the right time for monks to come to see the Tathāgata, when it is the right time for nuns, for male lay-followers, for female lay-followers, for kings, for royal ministers, for leaders of other schools, and for their pupils.

Ānanda has four remarkable and wonderful qualities. What are they? If a company of monks comes to see Ānanda, they are pleased at the sight of him, and when Ānanda talks Dharma to them they are pleased, and when he is silent they are disappointed. And so it is, too, with nuns, with male followers and female followers. And these four qualities apply to a universal monarch: if he is visited by a company of kshatriyas, or brahmins, or householders, or of ascetics, they are pleased at the sight of him and when he talks to them, and when he is silent they are disappointed. And so too it is with Ānanda. (D 2:144 f; A 2:132, 5:229; SA 2:94 f)

The second verse refers to Ānanda’s one great quality—his charisma—but when applied to each of the four companies of followers, becomes four.

This notion of charisma is associated with the ancient Indian religious practice of *darshan*, which comes from *darśanā/dassana*, that we find in such literal usages as in *samañānañ ca dassanaṃ* (the sight of the ascetics) (Kh 5.9 = p. 3) and figurative usages as in *ariya,saccāna dassanaṃ* (the vision of the Noble Truths) (Kh 5.10 = p. 3), both found in the Maṅgala Sutta (Kh no. 5)

(b) Attitude towards women

In response to a predominantly patriarchal Indian society of his time, the Buddha addresses the men’s point of view that “woman is the ‘stain’ of the holy life” (S 1:38). In this sort of background it is easier to understand why such statements are inserted (a late one, according to some) into the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, regarding how monks should regard women:

Lord, how are we to conduct ourselves towards women?
Do not see them, Ānanda.
But if we see them, Lord, how should we behave?
Do not speak to them, Ānanda.
But if they speak to us, Lord, how should we behave to them?
Then, Ānanda, be mindful! (D 2:141)¹⁶¹

This episode is apparently an arbitrary and incongruous interpolation in the otherwise smooth narrative flow of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta [10:16d]. In fact, the lateness of this episode is attested by the fact that it is not found in the Sanskrit versions.

The root of the suffering does not lie out there or in other people, but within our own minds. As such, it is through mental cultivation that we rise above suffering.

The thought of passion is a person's sensuality:
There is no sensuality in what is beautiful (*citra*) in the world.
The thought of passion is a person's sensuality:
What is beautiful in the world remain as they are.
So here the wise remove the desire for them.¹⁶² (A 6.63.3/3:411)

An almost identical verse (without line c) is found in the Na Santi Sutta (S 1.34/1:22). The Indriya Bhāvanā Sutta (M 152) similarly teaches the mastery over one's sense-faculties rather than removing the sense-objects (which have the natural right to be where they are). When the brahmin student Uttara tells the Buddha that his teacher, Pārāsariya's method of developing the faculties is by way of not seeing forms with the eyes, and not listening to sounds with the ear, the Buddha replies:

In that case, Uttara, a blind and a deaf man would have developed faculties, according to what the brahmin Pārāsariya says! For a blind man does not see forms with the eye, and a deaf man does not hear sounds with the ear. (M 152.2/3:298)

The best way to train one's faculties is not to think in terms of like and dislike, dwelling fully aware, when the world of the senses impinges upon one (M 152.11-16/3:301). This teaching in summarized in this well known pericope, that is, the Buddha's teaching to such disciples as Bahiya Dāricīriya (U 8) and Mālunkya,putta (S 35.95):

In what is seen, there will only be the seen.
In what is heard, there will only be the heard.
In what is sensed, there will only be the sensed [smelt, tasted, touched].
In what is known, there will only be the known [cognized]. (U 8; S 35.95.13/4:73)

(c) The Order of Nuns

After Śuddhōdana's death, Mahā Prajāpatī Gautamī [9:5ab; 17] (at the head of 500 companions whose husbands have renounced the world following their listening to the Kalaha, vivāda Sutta, Sn 862-877) approaches the Buddha and thrice requests ordination, but he turns them down, replying: "Be careful, Gotamī, of the going-forth of women from home into homelessness." (V 2:253)

After the Buddha's refusal to admit them, the disappointed but undaunted Gautamī and her companions then shave off their hair and don saffron robes. Things take a turn when Ānanda, "the eye of all the world" notices these women weeping. On learning their predicament, he intercedes on their behalf by himself requesting the Buddha for the women to be ordained. When the Buddha again refuses, Ānanda applies his wisdom in a new tack:

¹⁶¹ For a more positive answer, see the (Piṇḍola) Bhāradvāja Sutta, S 35.127 = 4:110 f.

¹⁶² This verse, which explains the previous prose sentence, "plays upon the double meaning of *kāma*, emphasizes that purification is to be achieved by mastering the defilement of sensuality, not by fleeing [from] sensually enticing objects." (A:NB 1999:302 n34)

Now, Lord, are women, after having forth from home into homelessness in the Doctrine and Discipline proclaimed by the Truth-finder, able to realize the fruit of stream-winning or the fruit of Once-return, or the fruit of Non-return, or spiritual perfection? (V 2:254)

Moreover, Prajāpati is already a stream-winner even before Śuddhōdana's death (DhA 1:115). The Buddha replies that women too can win spiritual liberation in his Teaching, in which case, argues Ānanda, the women should be given the going-forth for their spiritual benefit. Moreover, he continues, Prajāpati is "the Lord's aunt, foster-mother, nurse, giver of milk, for when the Lord's mother passed away she suckled him" (M 3:253). And so through Ānanda's intercession, the Order of Nuns is formed.¹⁶³

7. SIX MEMORABLE QUALITIES

If Mahā Kāśyapa is the patriarch of the forest wanderers, then Ānanda is the champion of the monastic order, that is, the settled communal life of the Buddhist monks and nuns. The importance of Ānanda as a preserver of the monastic system is evident from the Sāmagāma Sutta (M no. 104) where the Buddha teaches Ānanda in full the six memorable qualities (*śāraṇīya, dharma/saraṇīya, dhamma*) or bases of conciliation for fraternal living "that create love and respect, conduce to helpfulness, to non-dispute, to concord, and to unity" (a teaching given in a number of other places):

- (1) Maintain bodily acts of lovingkindness (*mettā, kāya, kamma*).
- (2) Maintain verbal acts of lovingkindness (*mettā, vacī, kamma*).
- (3) Maintain mental acts of lovingkindness (*mettā, mano, kamma*).
- (4) Enjoy things in common with the virtuous (*sādhāraṇa, bhogī*).
- (5) Dwell with common virtues that conduce to mental concentration (*sīla, sāmāññatā*).
- (6) Dwell with common right view that conduces to the complete destruction of suffering (*dīṭṭhisāmaññatā*).

All these qualities should be shown both in public and private towards companions in the holy life. These qualities are called "memorable" (*saraṇīya*) because they inspire others to keep one in mind, that is, as spiritual friends. (M 2:250 f.; D 2:80, 3:245, 281; M 2:250 f.; A 3:288)

8. EMBODIMENT OF THE TEACHING

Once in Jetavana,, after speaking in praise of Ānanda, the Buddha declares that he is the foremost monk in five respects: great learning, good conduct (*gatimantānaṃ*, power of walking, according to Dhammapāla), retentive memory, resoluteness (dedication to study) and personal attention (A 1:24 f.; ThaA 3:112 ff.). Like Ānanda, many of his disciples are also very good listeners and highly learned (S 2:156; A 3:78).

Like Mahā Katyāyana (Mahā Kaccāna), the foremost monk amongst those who elaborate in great detail what the Buddha discourses in brief, Ānanda, too, is capable of elaborating in great detail the Buddha's brief teachings. Very often, after Ānanda has exhorted the monks and answered a question, the Buddha will respond: "Monks, Ānanda is wise, one of great understanding. If you had questioned me about this matter, I would have answered in the very same way that Ānanda has answered. That is the meaning, and so you should bear it in mind." (S 35.116, 117; A 10.115)

Ānanda's impressive retentive memory comes from his own spiritual ability. In the Saṅgārava Sutta, (A 5.193), the Buddha says that the only reason people forget anything is because of any or all of the five mental hindrances: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restless and worry, and skeptical doubt (A 3:229 ff.; cf. A 3:62; Vbh 378). Ānanda, although not yet an arhat, is a stream-winner, and as such, is easily able to suppress all these mental hindrances at least temporarily with the help of spiritual friendship. [Skeptical doubt is totally overcome upon one's attaining stream-winning; sensual desire, ill-will and worry, on attaining Non-return; sloth, torpor and restlessness, upon attaining arhathood.]

While Śāriputra, because of his great wisdom, is the "captain of the Dharma" (P. *dhamma, senāpati*, Tha 1083; J 1:408; DhA 3:305; Miln 343; VvA 64, 65, 158), Ānanda is the "treasurer of the Dharma" (P. *dhamma, bhaṇḍāgārika*, Tha 1048; J 1:382, 501, 2:25; DhA 3:250; PvA 2) because of his great learning, memory and teaching skills. Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana and Ānanda often work together to maintain

¹⁶³ A more detailed study of the Buddhist view of women is found in Chapter 8.

the harmony and unity of the Sangha, such as in the dispute involving the monks of Kauśambī (Bheda Sutta, A 4.241) and when Devadatta creates a schism in the Sangha (U 5.8; V 2:199 ff.).

Unlike the 80 great elders, all of them arhats, Ānanda (who is not yet one while the Buddha lives), shows great concern for Buddha's followers, whether monastic or lay, male or female, often mingling in their company. The Introduction to the Kāliṅga, bodhi Jātaka relates how, at the request of the laity, Ānanda consults the Buddha about building a shrine representing him where the lay followers could leave their offerings in his absence. The Buddha proposes that a Bodhi tree be used. Mahā Maudgalyāyana brings a Bodhi seed from the original tree at Buddha.gayā [5:34b]. Since Ānanda has initiated the whole project, it is called the Ānanda Bodhi tree (J no. 479 = 4:228-230).

Due to his great compassion for others and his wide learning, the Buddha has called him "the eye of all the world" (P. *cakkhu sabbassa lokassa*):

1030. If one wishes to understand the Dharma,
One should resort to such a one,
Who is of great learning, a Dharma-expert,
A wise disciple of the Buddha.
1031. Of great learning, Dharma-expert,
The guardian of the Great Seer's treasure,
He is the eye of all the world,
Of great learning, deserving honour. (Tha 1030-1031)

9. MAHĀ KĀŚYAPA'S ORIGINS

A few years before the Bodhisattva was born in Lumbini, Mahā Kāśyapa was born in Mahā, tīrtha (Mahātīttha), a brahmin village in Magadha, as the son of Kapila and his wife Sumana, devī. (SA 2:143). In the Apadāna, however, his father was called Kosiya, gotta (Ap 2:583 = v. 56). He was named Pippali or Pippali Māṇava. His father owned 16 villages over which he lorded like a minor rajah.

Although born in luxury, Pippali felt a longing to renounce the world even when he was young. As such, he decided not to marry. When his parents urged him to find a wife, he replied that as long as they lived, he would take care of them. When they insisted that he married, just to humour them he told them he would only marry a girl who fitted his ideals of perfection.

Pippali commissioned goldsmiths to sculpt for him a golden statue of a beautiful maiden. His wise mother thought, "Surely, my son must have done good deeds in the past, and he must have done them together with a woman whom the image represents." She then approached 8 brahmins, showered them with rich gifts and asked them to bring the image on tour in search of a maiden who had its likeness.

10. BHADRĀ KĀPILĀNĪ

The brahmins decided to first scout around the Madra (Madda) country (cf. SnA 68 f.; KhA 73), which was renowned for its beautiful women. The capital of Madra was Sāgala or Sākala,¹⁶⁴ which is identified with the modern Sialkot in the Punjab (B.C. Law 1932:53). It was the birthplace of Khemā Therī (ThiA 127; Ap 2:546; AA 1:341), Anojā, queen of Mahā Kapphīṇa/Kappina (DhA 2:16) and Bhadrā Kāpilānī (Bhaddā Kāpilānī) (ThiA 68; Ap 2:583; AA 1:176). It was the last-named, Bhadrā Kāpilānī, that the brahmins found to fit the statue's likeness. (Cf. the story of Anittha, gandha, kumāra who similarly declared that he would only marry a woman who resembled the golden figure he possessed, DhA 3:281 f.)

Bhadrā Kāpilānī was the daughter of a Kauśeya, gotra (Kosiya, gotta) brahmin named Kapila (hence, here name of Kāpilānī) and her mother was Sucīmātī (Ap 2:583 = v. 57). Having found the right woman for Pippali (who was 16), the parents on both sides arranged the marriage without consulting the couple involved. Bhadrā went to live in Pippali's house, but having realized their predicament, they decided to lead celibate lives. Every night they would lay a garland of flowers between them before turning in, resolving: "If on either side the flowers should wilt, we shall understand that the person on whose side they wilted had given rise to lustful thoughts."

¹⁶⁴ J 6:471, 473; cf. Mahābhārata 14,32: *tataḥ Sakalam abhyetvā Mādrānām puṭabhedanam*.

When Pippali's parents died, the celibate couple took charge of the vast family estate and fortune. One day, while Pippali was inspecting the fields, he saw something as if for the first time. Like young prince Siddhārtha during the ploughing festival, Pippali saw that when the farm hands ploughed the land, many birds gathered and eagerly picked the worms and insects turned up by the plough. Common as this sight was to the farm hands, it startled Pippali. It struck him with such a powerful sense of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*), that the produce of his fields, the source of his wealth, involved the suffering of so many other living beings.

Thinking this over, he asked one of his labourers, "Who bears the consequences of such an evil action?"

"You yourself, sir!" came the reply. This reply was not consistent with the Buddha's teachings, but the reflective Pippali was horrified all the same but its implications. Back home, he reflected: "If I have to carry all the burden of this killing, of what use to me is all my wealth? I would be better off giving it all to Bhadrā and going forth into the ascetic life."

11. MUTUAL RENUNCIATION

About the same time, Bhadrā had a similar religious experience. Her servants had spread out sesamum seeds in the sun, and various kinds of birds ate the insects that were attracted to the seeds. When Bhadrā asked her servants who bore the burden of responsibility for the death of so many creatures, they told her that she was the one morally responsible. "If I have committed evil to this extent," she thought, "I won't be able to lift my head in this ocean of births even in a thousand lives. When Pippali returns, I shall hand over everything to him and then go forth as an ascetic."

When both discovered that they were of one mind, they shaved their heads, donned the saffron robes and obtained a clay bowl each from the bazaar, dedicating their aspiration to the arhats of the world. Then, quietly they slipped out of the house. However, in the next village, their workers recognized them and prostrated before them, crying: "Beloved noble ones, why do you make helpless orphans of us?"

Mahā Kassapa, just before his renunciation, reflected: "We [he and Bhaddā Kāpilānī], sirs, are going forth, thinking, 'The three worlds are like a leaf-hut on fire!'"¹⁶⁵ After freeing the slaves, they went on their way. Pippali then thought that it was improper that a beautiful woman such as Bhadrā should be following him so closely behind, giving the impression that although they were ascetics, they still could not live without one another.

When they reached a crossroads, they decided that each should go their separate way. With these words, Bhadrā bade Pippali farewell: "Our close companionship that had lasted since the distant past comes to an end today. Please take the path to the right, and I will take the other." It is said that the earth trembled, thunder pealed and the mountains resounded because of their virtue.

12. BHADRĀ'S AWAKENING

The road that Bhadrā took led to Śrāvastī where she heard the Buddha's discourses at the Jetavana. As the Order of Nuns had not yet been formed, she took up residence in a non-Buddhist abode (*ṭṛthy'ārāma/titthiy'ārāma*) nearby, where she lived for five years. Since the traditional date for the formation of the Order of Nuns was the 5th year of Buddha's ministry and assuming that Bhadrā ordained as soon as it was formed, both she and Pippali renounced during the same year as the Buddha's awakening.

As a nun, Bhadrā Kāpilānī was declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of the nuns who could recollect their past lives (A 1.14). She devoted herself mainly to the training of younger nuns and their instruction in the Vinaya. Despite her dedication, or because of it, she incurred the jealousy of the recalcitrant nun Sthulā Nandā (Thulla, nandā, "the fat") who caused her various inconveniences. Once, hoping to annoy her, Sthulā Nandā and her pupils paced up and down before Bhadrā's cell, reciting loudly, leading the Buddha censure her (V 4:290). On another occasion, after arranging accommodations for Bhadrā, Sthulanandā then threw her out (V 4:292). Bhadrā, being an arhat, was in no way affected by such events. Elsewhere Sthulā Nandā insulted Mahā Kāśyapa [18b].

13. PIPPALI MEETS THE BUDDHA

The events of Pippali's religious life after he and Bhadrā Kāpilānī parted ways are recorded in the Cīvara Sutta (S 16.11 = 2:217-222) and its Commentary (SA 2:162-164). When the earth trembled at the

¹⁶⁵ *Mayaṃ bhaṇe āditta, paṇṇa, sālā viya tayo bhavāti pabbajimhā* (SA 2:195; AA 1:179; Tha 3:133; ApA 263).

parting of the two people, the Buddha knew about it and through his Buddha-eye the Buddha perceived that Pippali was ready for conversion. All by himself, the Buddha walked some 6 km (3 *gāvūtā*) to meet his future pupil, one of his deeds, amongst many others, often praised (MA 2:136, 148; J 4:180 f.)

The Buddha stopped along the highway between Rājagṛha and Nālandā and sat down under the Bahu-putraka Caitya (Bahu,puttaka Cetiya, the Shrine of Many Children) to wait for Pippali. It is said that for this occasion, he did not sit like an ordinary ascetic but displayed all the glory of a Buddha, radiating rays of light that illuminated the whole surrounding and manifesting all his 32 marks of the great man. When Pippali arrived and saw the Buddha, he at once thought: “This must be my master for whose sake I have gone forth!” He approached the Buddha, prostrated before him and declared: “The Blessed One, Lord, is my teacher, and I am his disciple! The Blessed One, Lord, is my teacher, and I am his disciple!” [18]

Henceforth, he was known as Mahā Kāśyapa (Mahā Kassapa), but no explanation has been given for this change, but it might have been his clan (*gotra/gotta*) name (DPPN 2:477 n4). As regards his title *mahā*, “the great,” the Buddhavaṃsa Commentary notes: “compared with Uruvelā Kassapa, Nadi Kassapa, Gayā Kassapa, Kumāra Kassapa, lesser and minor elders, this elder was Great; hence he is called Kassapa the Great” (AA 1:163; BA 50).

Then the Buddha said, “Kassapa, if anyone who does not know or see were to say to a disciple endowed with such sincerity as yourself, ‘I know, I see’, his head would split. But, Kassapa, knowing, I say ‘I know’; seeing, I say ‘I see’.” Then the Buddha gave Kāśyapa the following three exhortations, which the Commentaries say, constituted his going forth (*pravrajyā/pabbajjā*) and ordination (*upasampadā*):

Therefore, Kassapa, you should train yourself thus: “I will arouse a keen sense of shame and fear of wrongdoing towards monks who are elders, newly-ordained, and of middle status.” Thus should you train yourself.

Therefore, Kassapa, you should train yourself thus: “Whenever I listen to any Dharma connected with the wholesome, I will listen to it with eager ears, attending to it as a matter of vital concern, applying my whole mind to it.” Thus should you train yourself.

Therefore, Kassapa, you should train yourself thus: “I will never relinquish mindfulness directed to the body associated with joy.” Thus should you train yourself.”¹⁶⁶ (S 2:220)

14. THE ROBE

The Buddha who had been standing on the highway, then came down and went to the foot of another tree, with the intention, “I will make this monk a forest dweller, a rag-robe wearer and a one-meal eater from his very birth (as a monk).” (SA 1:199). Mahā Kāśyapa folded his patched outer robes in four and offered to the Buddha as a seat. Having sat down, the Buddha remarked: “Your outer robe of patches is soft, Kassapa.”

“Venerable sir, let the Blessed One accept my outer robe of patches, out of compassion.”

“In that case, will you wear my worn-out hempen rag-robes?”

“I will, venerable sir.”

Thus, Mahā Kāśyapa offered the Buddha his patched outer robe and received from him his worn-out hempen rag-robes.

The implications of this exchange of robes are given in the Commentary as the Buddha’s usage of “intentional language” (*sandhāya*). The Buddha exchanged robes with Mahā Kāśyapa because he wished to appoint Kāśyapa to his own position (*theraṇi attano ṭhāne ṭhapetukāmatāya*). When he asked whether the elder could wear his rag-robes he was not referring to his bodily strength but to the fulfillment of the practice (*paṭipatti,pūraṇa*). The Buddha had made this robe from a shroud that had covered a slave woman named Pūrṇā (Puṇṇā), that had been cast away in a charnel ground. When he picked it up, brushed away the creatures crawling over it, and established himself in the great lineage of the noble ones, the earth quaked and resounded, and the devas applauded. In offering the robe, the Buddha implied or intended: “This robe should be worn by a monk who is from birth an observer of ascetic practices. Will you be able to make proper use of it?” And Kassapa’s assent signifies: “I will fulfill this practice.” As soon as they exchanged the robes, the great earth resounded and shook up to its rim all around (SA 2:199).

¹⁶⁶ This is the mindfulness of the body associated with pleasure by way of the 1st absorption in the foulness meditation and mindfulness of the breath. Comy.

6. The Buddha's image and shadow

After exhorting Mahā Kāśyapa, the Buddha rose and departed. For seven days, Kāśyapa declared, he “ate the country’s almsfood as a debtor” but on the eighth day, final knowledge arose (S 2:221). The elder spoke of his use of the requisites when he was still a worldlyling as use by a debtor. The Commentary explains that there are four ways of using the monk’s requisites:

- (1) By theft (*theyya,paribhoga*), the use made by a morally depraved monk.
- (2) As a debt (*ina,paribhoga*), the unreflective use made by a virtuous monk.
- (3) As a heritage (*dāyajja,paribhoga*), the use made by the seven Learners (*śaikṣa.sekha*) (excluding one with the Fruit of arhathood).
- (4) As an owner (*sāmi,paribhoga*), the use made by an arhat. (SA 2:199)

15. THE FOUR BASIC SUPPORTS

Given the special honour of being the only one to have exchanged robes with the Buddha and by his own spirituality developed over numerous lives, Mahā Kāśyapa became the model of a disciplined and austere wandering forest meditator. The Buddha declared Kāśyapa as the foremost amongst those who observed the austere rules (*dhuta,vāda* or *dhūt’anga,dhara*, A 1:23; S 2:155).¹⁶⁷

Taking whatever scraps one finds as food, smelly urine as medicine,
The foot of a tree as lodging, a dust-heap rag as robe—
For whom these suffice, truly he is a man of the four quarters. (Tha 1057)

The expression “a man of the four quarters” means one who is satisfied with the conditions he finds wherever he lives. Here, Mahā Kāśyapa is referring to the four resources (*nīśraya/nissaya*) or physical supports of life, that is, the basic necessities for a spiritual life. These are as follows:

- (1) almsfood of scrap (*piṇḍi-y-ālopa,bhojana*);
- (2) discarded cloth as rag-robes (*pāṃśukula,cīvara/paṃsukūla,cīvara*);
- (3) dwelling at the foot of a tree (*ṛkṣamūla,sayan’āsana/rukṣa,mūla,sen’āsana*);
- (4) medicines pickled in fermented urine (*pūtimūtra,bhaiṣajya/pūtimutta,bhesajja*). (V 1:58)

During an ordination (*upasampadā*), the candidate is always instructed regarding these four resources and the four deeds to be avoided (*akaraṇīya,kṛtya/akaraṇīya,kicca*), that is:

An ordained monk should not:

- (1) indulge in sexual intercourse;
- (2) take by theft the not-given;
- (3) intentionally deprive a living thing of life, especially a human life;
- (4) lay claim to any superhuman spiritual state (that one has not attained).

This is not to be done by an ordained monk as long as life lasts. (V 1:97)

These are the four heavy rules, the transgression of which at once leaves the monk or nun “defeated” (*pārājika*), that is, losing one’s ordained status (V 3:1-109).

16. QUALITIES THAT INSPIRE FAITH

Mahā Kāśyapa possesses to the highest degree the 10 qualities that inspire faith (P. *dasa pasādamīyā dhammā*, M 3:11 f.), as listed by Ānanda in the Gopaka Moggallāna Sutta (M 108) but without mentioning any name:

(1) Virtuous in conduct (P. *śīlavā*). He dwells restrained with the restraint of the Prātimokṣa, he is perfect in conduct and resort (P. *ācāra,gocara,sampanno*), and trains himself in the training-rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults.

(2) Deeply learned (P. *bahu-s,suta*). He remembers what he has learned, and consolidates what he has learned. Such teachings as are good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end; endowed with the right spirit and letter; and which affirm the holy life that is utterly perfect and pure—

¹⁶⁷ On the *dhutaṅga* practice, s.v. *Buddhist Dictionary* and for a full treatment, see Vism ch. 2.

–such teaching as these he has learned much of, remembered, mastered verbally, investigated with the mind, and well-penetrated by view.

(3) Contented (P. *santuttha*) as regards his robes, almsfood, lodging and medical requisites.

(4) Attainer of absorption (P. *jhāna, lābhī*). He obtains at will, without trouble or difficulty, the four absorptions (*dhyāna/jhāna*) that constitute the higher mind and provides a pleasant abiding here and now.

(5) Developed in psychic powers (P. *iddhi, vidhā*). He wields various kinds of psychic powers: having been one, he becomes many; having been many, he becomes one [bilocation, multilocation]; he appears and disappears (at will) [dematerialization]; he goes unhindered through a wall, through an enclosure, through a mountain as through space [atomization]; he dives in and out of the earth as if through water; he walks on water without sinking as though it were earth; seated cross-legged, he travels through space like a bird [astral travel]; with his hands he touches and strokes the moon and sun so powerful and mighty; he wields physical mastery even as far as the Brahmā-world.

(6) Possessing the divine ear element (P. *dibba, sota, dhātu*), i.e. clairaudience. With the divine ear element, which is purified and surpasses the human, he hears both kinds of sounds, the divine and the human, those that are far as well as near.

(7) Ability to read the minds of others (P. *ceto, pariya, ñāṇa*) (D 2:300; DA 3:776 f.). He understands, as they truly are, the minds of other beings, of other persons, having encompassed them with his own mind. He understands a mind affected or unaffected by lust, by hatred or by delusion; a mind that is:

inattentive (lit. “contracted,” P. *saṅkhitta*) by sloth and torpor and the like, or

distracted (P. *avikhitta*) by restlessness and worry;

developed (P. *mah’aggata*) (lit. “grown great; exalted”), i.e. attaining to the form or formless absorptions, or

undeveloped (P. *amah’aggata*), still of the sense-sphere, i.e. not attaining any of the absorptions;

surpassed (*sauttara*), having other mental states surpassing it (i.e. undeveloped), as such still of the Sense-sphere, or

unsurpassed (*anuttara*), having no other mental states surpassing it (i.e. attaining either the form or formless absorptions);

concentrated (*samāhita*), attaining absorption, or

unconcentrated (*asamāhita*), not attaining any absorption;

liberated (P. *vimutta*), i.e. freed temporarily through insight or suppressed through absorption, both of which are equally temporary.

unliberated (P. *avimutta*).

(8) Able to recollect past lives [P. *pubbe, nivāsānussati*].¹⁶⁸

(9) Possessing the divine eye (P. *dibba, cakkhu*), i.e. clairvoyance. With the divine eye that is purified and surpassing the human eye, he sees beings passing away and reappearing, inferior or superior, fair or ugly, fortunate or unfortunate, and he understands how beings pass on according to their karma.

(10) Possessing of the knowledge of the destruction of the defilements (P. *āsava-k, khaya, ñāṇa*). By realizing for himself with direct knowledge, he here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance of wisdom that are undefiled with the destruction of the defilements. (M 3:11 f)

According to the Jātaka stories, Kāśyapa and the Buddha had been close even in previous lives. Kāśyapa had been the Bodhisattva’s father at least 6 times (J 155, 432, 509, 513, 524, 540), twice his brother (J 488, 522), and many times his friend or teacher. Ānanda’s father once (J 450), and even a murderer of his son (J 540). And in their last lives, he was Kāśyapa’s pupil. As such, when they met on the highway between Rājagṛha and Nālandā, it was like old friends meeting.

¹⁶⁸ See M 51 §24.

17. UPASSAYA SUTTA

Mahā Kāśyapa and Ānanda have great love and respect for one another. According to the Jātakas, they had been brothers in at least two lives (J 488, 535). Ānanda had been Mahā Kāśyapa's son once (J 450) and even a murderer of his son (J 540). And in their last lives, he was Kāśyapa's pupil. This last occasion is of historical interest, since it involves the Buddha's promulgation of a Vinaya rule. At one time, a certain person wishes to be ordained under Mahā Kāśyapa, who then instructs Ānanda to be the Proclaimer (*anuśrāvaṇ'ācārya/anussavaṇ'ācariya*) or second ordination teacher. However, out of deference to Kāśyapa, Ānanda is unwilling to pronounce Kāśyapa's name as part of the Ordination Act (*karma, vācā/kamma, vācā*). As such, the Buddha promulgated a rule allowing monks to proclaim the preceptor merely by his clan-name. (V 1:92)

The Kassapa Saṃyutta (S 16) is an anthology of 13 suttas related to Mahā Kāśyapa. While those suttas recording his conversations with Śāriputra understandably relate to doctrinal points, there are two accounts of his encounters with Ānanda relating to rather mundane, nevertheless educating, events relating to the nuns. In the first discourse, the Upassaya Sutta (S 16.10), Ānanda invites Mahā Kāśyapa accompany him to visit the nuns and admonish them. (The Commentary remarks that Ānanda has done this to inspire the nuns and to explain a meditation subject, thinking the would place faith in the talk of the disciple who was the Buddha's counterpart (*Buddha, pratibhāga, śrāvaka/Buddha, paṭibhāga, sāvaka*), SA 2:175.)

Kāśyapa, however, turns down the invitation, asking Ānanda to go by himself. But after Ānanda repeats his request twice (that is after the third request), Kāśyapa finally consents. When Kāśyapa has concluded his exhortation, he leaves the nunnery (*bhikkhū upassaya*). Then, Sthulā Tiṣyā (Thulla, tissā, "the Fat") expresses her displeasure: "How can Master Kassapa think of speaking on the Dharma in the presence of Master Ānanda, the Videha sage?¹⁶⁹ For him to do so is just as if a needle-peddler were to think he could sell a needle to the needle-maker!" (S 2:214 f.)

Mahā Kāśyapa overhears the remark and chides his pupil, Ānanda: "How is it, friend Ānanda, am I the needle-peddler or you the needle-maker, or am I the needle-maker and you the needle-peddler?" [Am I the teacher or you the teacher?]

"Be indulgent, venerable sir, women are foolish (*bālo matugāmo*)," Ānanda beseeches.

"Take care, friend Ānanda! Don't give the Saṅgha occasion to investigate you further," Kāśyapa warns. The Commentary explains Kāśyapa's remark as meaning: "Do not let the Saṅgha think, 'Ānanda restrained the disciple who was the Buddha's counterpart, but he did not restrain the nun. Could there be some intimacy or affection between them?'" (SA 2:176). Then Kāśyapa (or more likely the Saṃyutta Reciters or redactors speaking through him) utters the stock passage on his meditative attainment to confirm how he is the Buddha's counterpart (S 2:214-218). In his book, *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, Nyanaponika points out that

When immediately after, Kassapa stressed that it was his own meditative attainments that the Buddha had extolled, and not Ānanda's, this may be taken as pointing to the far different spiritual status of the two elders; and it may have served as a spur to Ānanda to strive for those attainment. (Nyanaponika & Hecker, 1997:128)

If that were the case (the implication that Ānanda is not yet an arhat), then, it is likely that this event occurred before, not after, the Buddha's final Nirvana as implied by the Commentary (SA 2:175) and despite the fact that they address each other respectively as "Bhante" (venerable sir) and "Āvuso" (Friend) as instructed in the Buddha's final instructions (D 2:154). Either way, it remains that this account shows the clearly contrasting attitudes of the two great disciples' attitude to women: Mahā Kāśyapa as the spiritual patriarch concerned with communal propriety and Ānanda as the spiritual champion of the nuns.

As for the indis disciplined nun, Sthulā Tiṣyā, she left the Order and returned to lay-life. It is said that after she had censured Mahā Kāśyapa, the Buddha's counterpart, even while he was admonishing Ānanda on the the 6 superknowledges, her saffron robes began to irritate her body like thorny branches or a prickly plant. As soon as she removed them and don the white clothes of a laywoman she felt at ease. (SA 2:176)

¹⁶⁹ The Videha sage. This is a play on the word *videha* which means "knowledgable, wise" (*vedena*) as well as "from Videha" (*vedeha*). The Apadāna Commentary explains that Ānanda is called *vedehi, muni* because he was a sage and the son of a mother from Videha (=Videha) country (ApA 128).

18. CĪVARA SUTTA

(a) Kāśyapa rebukes Ānanda

The second discourse, the Cīvara Sutta (S 16.11; Mvst 3:47-56) opens with Ānanda walking on a tour in Dakṣiṇā, giri (Dakkhiṇā, giri) (the Southern Hills, that is, the region surrounding Rājagṛha) together with a large company of monks. It was at this time, too, 30 mostly young monks, pupils of Ānanda, had returned to lay-life. The Commentary explains that after the Buddha's final Nirvana, Ānanda went to Śrāvastī to inform the people there. Then he left for Rājagṛha and along the way was walking on tour in Dakṣiṇā, giri (SA 1:176).

On returning to the Bamboo Grove in Rājagṛha, Ānanda went with the monks to the Squirrel Sanctuary to pay their respects to Mahā Kāśyapa. When they were seated, Kāśyapa then asked Ānanda:

Friend Ānanda, for how many reasons did the Blessed One lay down the rule that monks should not take meals among families in groups of more than three? [Pācittiya 32 (V 4:71-75).]

The Blessed One laid down the rules for three reasons, Venerable Kassapa: for restraining ill-behaved persons and for the comfort of well-behaved monks, [with the intention,] “May those of evil wishes, by forming a faction, not create a schism in the Sangha!”; and out of sympathy towards families.¹⁷⁰

As attested by Kāśyapa's beautiful verses in the Thera, gāthā, his love for solitude is proverbial [19]. In this connection, for example, there is this verse attributed to Mahā Kāśyapa:

1051. One should not wander surrounded by a crowd;
one becomes distracted, concentration is hard to obtain.
Seeing that mixing with all kinds of people is painful,
one should not approve of a crowd. (Tha 1051)

The Cīvara Sutta continues with Mahā Kāśyapa rebuking Ānanda:

Then why, friend Ānanda, are you wandering about with these young monks who are unguarded in their sense-faculties, immoderate in eating, and not devoted to wakefulness? One would think you were wandering about trampling on crops. One would think you were wandering about destroying families. Your retinue is breaking apart, friend Ānanda, your young followers are slipping away. But still this youngster does not know his measure!

Grey hairs are growing on my head, Venerable Kassapa. Still we cannot escape being called a youngster by the Venerable Mahā Kassapa. (S 2:218)

(b) Ānanda's age

The Commentarial traditions say that Ānanda was born at the same time as the Bodhisattva (DA 2:425; ApA 58, 358; J 1:63). If this were true, however, Ānanda would clearly have a head full of grey hair without Kāśyapa's needing to point it out. Various other references in the Canon also suggest that Ānanda must have been considerably younger than the Buddha, “perhaps as much as thirty years” (Bhikkhu Bodhi, S:B 1:804 n296). It is interesting that the Tibetan sources (eg the Dulva or Vinaya) says that Ānanda is the same age as Rāhula (Rockhill 57), which should be a good age for one to be the Buddha's life-long personal attendant.¹⁷¹

The Saṃyutta Commentary paraphrases the passage in a way that supports the traditional view: “Since you wander around with the newly ordained monks devoid of sense-restraint, you wander around with youngsters and thus you yourself deserve to be called a youngster” (SA 1:179). The sutra continues

¹⁷⁰ Cf. V 2:196 & 4:71 for the origin story, i.e. Devadatta's attempt at schism. The Mvst version mentions only two reasons: “the protection, safeguarding and comfort of families” and “the breaking up of cliques of wicked men” (Mvst 3:48).

¹⁷¹ On the problem of Ānanda's age, see C. Witanachchi, “Ānanda” in *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* 1:529. Also Thomas 1949:123; Rhys Davids' article on “Devadatta” in ERE; DPPN 1:268.

with another nun berating Mahā Kāśyapa, this time it is Sthulā Nandā (Thullanandā, “the Fat”).¹⁷² Having heard Mahā Kāśyapa’s rebuke of Ānanda, Sthulā Nandā in turn berates Kāśyapa behind his back: “How can Master Kassapa, who was formerly a member of another sect, think to disparage Master Ānanda, the Videha sage, by calling him a youngster?”

Kāśyapa overhears Sthulā Nandā’s remark and says:

Surely, friend Ānanda, the nun Thulla,nandā made that statement rashly, without consideration. For since I shaved off my hair and beard, put on saffron robes, and went forth from the home life into homelessness, I do not recall ever having acknowledged any other teacher except the Blessed One, the arhat, the Perfectly Self-enlightened One. (S 2:219)

Then Kāśyapa relates how he had left his luxurious home behind and renounced the world, beginning with the words:

In the past, friend, when I was still a householder, it occurred to me: “Household life is a confinement, a path of dust; going-forth is like the open air. It is not easy for one living at home to lead the perfectly complete, perfectly purified holy life, which is like a polished conch-shell. Let me then shave off my hair and beard, put on saffron robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness.

When I had thus gone forth, I was traveling along a road when I saw the Blessed One sitting by the Bahu,puttaka Shrine between Rājagaha and Nālanda. Having seen him, I thought: “If I should ever see the Teacher, it is the Blessed One himself that I would see. If I should ever see the Fortunate One, it is the Blessed One himself that I would see. If I ever see the Perfectly Self-enlightened One, it is the Blessed One himself I would see.” Then I prostrated myself right there at the Blessed One’s feet and said to him: “Venerable sir, the Blessed One is my teacher, I am his disciple. Venerable sir, the Blessed One is my teacher, I am his disciple.” (S 2:219 f)

The rest of the account is as given above [13].

19. MAHĀ KĀŚYAPA’S LION-ROAR

Mahā Kāśyapa is famous throughout the Pali Canon as a forest dweller who lives an austere life, unsurpassed by anyone. The *Jiṇṇa Sutta* (S 16.5) preserves an interesting account of how the Buddha trying, as it were, to discourage Mahā Kāśyapa from three of his austere practices:

“You are old now, Kassapa, and those worn-out hempen robes must be burdensome for you. Therefore, you should wear robes offered by householders. Kassapa, accept meals given on invitation, and dwell close to me.”

Mahā Kāśyapa’s lion-roar

*“For a long time, venerable sir, I have been a forest dweller and have spoken in praise of forest dwelling. I have been an almsfood eater and have spoken in praise of eating almsfood. I have been a rag-robe wearer and have spoken in praise of wearing rag-robes. I have been a triple-robe user and have spoken in praise of using the triple-robe. I have been of few wishes and have spoken in praise of the fewness of wishes. I have been content and have spoken in praise of contentment. I have been secluded and have spoken in praise of seclusion. I have been aloof from society and have spoken in praise of aloofness from society. I have been energetic and have spoken in praise of arousing energy.”*¹⁷³

“Considering what benefit, Kassapa, have you long been a forest dweller...and spoken in praise of arousing energy?”

¹⁷² Sthulā Nandā is frequently mentioned in the *Bhikkhūṇī Vibhaṅga* as a troublemaker in the Order of Nuns (V 4:216, 218, 223 f.). Sthulā Nandā was being sarcastic and insulting Mahā Kāśyapa from the fact that he had known no teacher or preceptor in the Buddha’s Teaching, and had put on the saffron robes himself when he renounced the world. In that sense, she insinuated that he was from another sect. (SA 2:179)

¹⁷³ Mahā Kāśyapa repeats his lion-roar albeit in more elaborate form to fit the occasion in the *Mahā Gosīṅga Sutta* (M 1:214). [5:29]

“Considering two benefits, venerable sir. For myself I see a pleasant dwelling in this very life, and out of compassion for later generations, thinking: “May those of later generations follow my example.” For when they hear: “The enlightened disciples of the Buddha were for a long time forest dwellers and spoke in praise of forest dwelling...were energetic and spoke in praise of arousing energy,” then they will practise accordingly, and that will lead to the welfare and happiness for a long time. Considering these two benefits, venerable sir, I have long been a forest-dweller...have spoken in praise of arousing energy.”

“Excellent, excellent, Kassapa! You are practising for the welfare and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, the welfare and the happiness of devas and humans. Therefore, Kassapa, wear worn-out hempen robes, walk for alms and dwell in the forest.”

(S 2:202 f.)

Mahā Kāśyapa is believed to have composed some beautiful verses reflecting his love of solitude and nature (and some verses composed on his behalf). Some of the most beautiful verses in his name are perhaps these from the Thera, gāthā:

1058. Where some are killed climbing a mountain,
There climbs Kassapa, the Buddha’s heir,
Circumspect, mindful, supported by his psychic power.
1063. A beautiful cloud-blue, water-cooled, washed by clear streams,
Cloaked with Indra, gopaka¹⁷⁴— those rocky hills delight me.
1064. Towering like a blue cloud, like a grand gabled house,
Delightfully resounding with elephants—those rocky hills delight me.
1065. The lovely rain-soaked plains, the hills enjoyed by seers.
Resounding with peacocks—those rocky hills delight me.
1070. With clear water, great crags, haunted by monkeys and deer,
Covered with dripping moss—those rocky hills delight me.¹⁷⁵ (Tha 1058-1070)

20. PATRON OF THE UNFORTUNATE

(a) The leper’s offering

Like the other great disciples close to the Buddha, Mahā Kāśyapa has a profoundly humane side. He favours only the poor and unfortunate. One of the best known stories in this connection about him, that is, his encounter with the generous leper, is preserved in his verse in the Theragāthā:

1054. Coming down from my lodging, I entered the city for almsfood;
Respectfully I stood by a leper who was eating.
1055. With his rotting hand, he offered a portion to me.
As he was throwing it (into my bowl) his finger too broke off right there.
1056. But near the foot of a wall I rested and ate that portion:
No disgust arose in me as I was eating and when I had finished the meal. (Tha 1054-56)

Once when Mahā Kāśyapa lies grievously ill in the Pippali Cave, the Buddha visits him one evening. Learning of his sickness, the Buddha discourses to him on the 7 factors of awakening (*sapta, bodhy-āṅga/satta, bojjhaṅga*) (Gilāna Sutta, S 46.14): the awakening factor of mindfulness (*smṛti/sati*), of the investigation of mental states (*dharma, vicaya/dhamma, vicaya*), of energy (*vīrya/viriya*), of zest (*prīti/pīti*), of tranquillity (*prasrabdhi/passaddhi*), of concentration (*samādhi*) and of equanimity (*upekṣā/upek-khā*).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ A red-headed cochineal insect.

¹⁷⁵ Tha 1070 = Vanavaccha Thera (Tha 113); Saṅkicca Thera (Tha 601).

¹⁷⁶ S 5:80 f.; cf. D 3:251, 282; Vbh 277; see S:B 2:1898 n52 on *bojjhaṅga*.

6. The Buddha's image and shadow

The Commentary relates that as Mahā Kāśyapa listens to the development of the awakening factors, he thinks: “When I penetrated the truths on the seventh day of my going-forth, these awakening factors became manifest.” Thinking, “The Master’s teaching is indeed emancipating!” his blood becomes clear, his bodily humours are purified, and the disease departs from his body like a drop of water fallen on a lotus leaf. (SA 3:148)¹⁷⁷

After he recovers, Mahā Kāśyapa leaves the Pippali Cave and enters Rājagṛha for almsfood, going to those streets occupied by the poor and needy, such as the street of the weavers. Noticing this, the Buddha praises him with a verse of uplift (*udāna*) (U 4).

(b) Śakra’s offering

On another occasion, recorded in the Kassapa Sutta of the Udāna (U 3.7), Mahā Kāśyapa, while residing in the same cave, sits in meditation for seven days. After emerging from his meditation, he goes into Rājagṛha on a door-to-door uninterrupted almsround (*sapadāna*). Śakra, king of the gods, wishing to offer almsfood to Mahā Kāśyapa, disguises himself as a weaver.

When Kāśyapa arrives, Śakra goes up to him and offers various kinds of excellent food and condiments. “Who is this being who has such supernormal power,” Kāśyapa thinks. Realizing it is Śakra, he chides him: “This is your doing, Kosiya!”¹⁷⁸ Do not do such a thing again.”

“We too need merit, venerable Kassapa. We too should make merit.” Then Śakra the king of the devas, having prostrated himself before Kāśyapa, keeping his right side towards him, rose into the sky. While hovering in the sky, he thrice utters this inspired utterance: “Ah! The best almsgiving! On Kassapa alms is well given!” (P. *aho dānaṃ paramaṇi dānaṃ Kassape supatīḥhitaṇ*, U 30)

The Buddha through his divine ear hears all this, and responds with his own inspired utterance:

The gods hold dear such a monk
Who collects his food on almsround,
Supporting himself and keeping no other,
Who is calm and ever mindful—
Gods are endeared to such a one. (U 31)

21. PROPHECIES

There are three Ovāda Suttas in the Kassapa Saṃyutta (S 16.6-8), where the Buddha instructs Mahā Kāśyapa thus: “Exhort the monks, Kassapa, give them a Dharma talk. Either I should exhort the monks, Kassapa, or you should. Either I should give them a Dharma talk or you should.” The Commentary here explains that the Buddha says this in order to appoint Mahā Kāśyapa to his position. Although Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana are still around, the Buddha knows,

They would not live much longer, but Kāśyapa will live until the age of 120. After my parinirvana he will hold a recital of the Dharma and the Vinaya in the Sattapaṇṇī Cave, and he will enable my Dispensation to endure for a full 5,000 years. Let me appoint him to my own position. Then, the monks will think he should be heeded. (SA 2:173)

However, it should be noted here that the Buddha is not appointing Mahā Kāśyapa as a political successor (like a pope) of some holy Buddhahood to come. The Buddha’s desire not to politicize (create a power structure of) the Sangha is clear from his last instructions as recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 2:100) and elsewhere (V 2:188). [5:20].

All three Ovāda Suttas record that Mahā Kāśyapa turns down the Buddha’s invitation for him to exhort the monks with this reply: “Venerable sir, the monks are difficult to admonish now, and they have qualities which make them difficult to admonish. They are impatient and do not accept instruction respect-

¹⁷⁷ There are 2 other suttas in the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta bearing the same name, **Gilāna Sutta**. The other two suttas repeat the text of the Mahā Kassapa Gilāna Sutta, except that the Buddha speaks to **Mahā Moggallāna** in Gilāna Sutta II and to **Mahā Cunda** in Gilāna Sutta III (S 5:81). These three suttas are included in the Sinhalese *Pirit Pota* (Book of Protection), popular amongst the laity, often recited in times of sickness.

¹⁷⁸ *Kosiya*, “the owl,” is Śakra’s clan name.

fully.” (S 2:203, 206, 208). Sixteen such negative qualities are listed in the Anumāna Sutta which records Maudgalyāyana’s admonition (M 15). [5:30, 10:7b]

In the first instance, the Ovāda Sutta I (S 16.6), Mahā Kāśyapa informs the Buddha that he has heard two monks—Bhaṇḍa, a pupil of Ānanda and Abhiñjika, a pupil of Anuruddha—boasting of their skill in preaching, saying: “Come, let us see who will preach more profusely, more beautifully and at greater length!” Having heard this, the Buddha summons the monks concerned, and after due investigation to establish the facts, he rebukes the monks, admonishing them to give up their childish conceit. (S 2:204 f.)

In the second instance, the Ovāda Sutta II (S 16.7), Mahā Kāśyapa informs the Buddha that they lack faith in the good, lack a sense of shame and fear of wrongdoing, and are slack and devoid of wisdom. Kāśyapa compares such monks, in their state of decline, to the waning moon, which daily loses its beauty (faith), its roundness (moral shame), its splendour (moral fear), its height (energy) and its width (wisdom). The Buddha applauds him and repeats the whole admonition by way of confirmation. (S 2:208-210)¹⁷⁹

In the third sutra, the Ovāda Sutta III (S 16.8), Mahā Kāśyapa again informs the Buddha that the monks are not ready. This time, the Buddha does not urge Kāśyapa to change his mind, but he himself speaks the reasons for their conduct:

Formerly, Kassapa, there were elders of the Order who were forest dwellers, almsfood eaters, rag-robbers wearers, triple-robe users, with few wishes, content, lovers of solitude, aloof from society, energetic—and they spoke in praise of these qualities.

Then, when such a monk visited a monastery, they were warmly welcomed and honoured as being dedicated to the practice of the Dharma. Then the newly ordained monks would also strive to emulate them in their way of life, and as such would lead to their welfare and happiness for a long time.

But now, Kassapa, the elders are no longer forest dwellers, nor almsfood eaters, nor rag-robbers wearers, nor triple-robbers users, nor are they with few wishes, nor are they content, nor do they love solitude, nor are they aloof from society, nor are they energetic—nor do they speak in praise of these qualities.

Now, it is the monk who is well known and famous, one who gains robes, almsfood, lodgings and medical requisites, that the elder monks invite to a seat, saying: “Come, monk. What is this monk’s name? This is an excellent monk. This monk is keen on the company of his brothers in the holy life. Come, monk, here’s a seat, sit down.” Then the newly ordained monks will also strive to emulate them, and that leads to their harm and suffering for a long time.

Kassapa, one would be speaking rightly to say: “Those leading the holy life are ruined by the ruin of those who lead the holy life. Those leading the holy life are defeated by the defeat of those who lead the holy life.” [That is to say, the decline and fall of the monks—as it is, too, in the case of lay Buddhists—by the wrong examples they emulate.] (S 2:208-210)

The prophetic tone of these discourses, especially the Ovāda Sutta III (S 2:208-210), is very clear. As Buddhism today grows in more affluent societies and attracts more affluent members, there is a tendency to associate wealth, worldly success and social status with “good karma” and religious attainment. To rephrase the Buddha’s concern to fit our own times: *“Now, it is those who are well known and famous, who are wealthy, successful and socially influential, that are respected and emulated. This leads to their harm and suffering for a long time.”*¹⁸⁰

22. DECLINE OF THE DHARMA

(a) Saddhamma Paṭirūpaka Sutta

The Saddhamma Paṭirūpaka Sutta (S 16.13) is perhaps the most important of the prophetic sutras, delivered in Anāthapiṇḍada’s Park in Jetavana at Śrāvastī where the Buddha addresses Mahā Kāśyapa’s concern regarding the decline of the Dharma:

¹⁷⁹ A more concise application of the same analogy is made by Śāriputra at A 5:123.

¹⁸⁰ On how gain and honour ruin the holy life, see M 3:116 f.

6. The Buddha's image and shadow

Venerable sir, what is the reason, what is the cause, that formerly there were fewer training-rules but more monks were established in final knowledge (*aññā/āññā*), while now there are more training-rules but fewer monks are established in final knowledge [become arhats]?

That's the way it is, Kassapa...

Kassapa, just as gold does not disappear so long as counterfeit gold has not arisen in the world, even so, the True Dharma does not disappear so long as a counterfeit Dharma does not arise in the world. But when a counterfeit Dharma has arisen in the world, then the True Dharma disappears.

*It is not the earth element, Kassapa, that causes the True Dharma to disappear, nor the water element, nor the heat element, nor the air element. It is the spiritually empty people (*moghā,-purisa*) who arise right here (in this religion) who cause the True Dharma to disappear.*

(S 2:223 f., abridged)

This same question about training-rules and attainment is asked by the monk Bhaddālin (Bhaddāli) (M 1:445 f.) to which the Buddha replies the Teacher does not introduce the training-rules or code of conduct until “certain bases for taints become manifest here in the Sangha,” that is, to say, until the Sangha has reached the peak of worldly gain, the peak of fame, the peak of learning, the peak of long-standing renown (M 1:446). The Buddha gives a similar but shorter reply to Śāriputra's request that the Buddha introduce the training-rules (V 3:8) [5:27].

The Commentary to the Saddhamma Paṭirūpaka Sutta (SA 2:201 f.) explains that there are two counterfeit forms of the True Dharma (*saddhamma,paṭirūpaka*): one with respect to attainment (*adhi-gama*), the other with respect to learning (*pariyatti*). The former is the 10 corruptions of insight knowledge, namely, with regards to illumination, knowledge, zest, calm, bliss, resolution, exertion, assurance, equanimity and attachment, explained in the Visuddhi,magga (Vism 633-638 = 20.105-128).

The latter counterfeit form comprises texts other than the Buddha Word as authorized at the three Buddhist Councils, with the exception of these five topics of discussion (*kathā,vastu/kathā,vatthu*): discussion on the elements, on mental objects, on foulness, on the bases of knowledge, on the casket of true knowledge. The counterfeit texts, according to the Commentary, include the following: The Secret Vinaya (*guḥha,vinaya*), the Secret Vessantara, the Secret Mah'osadha, the Vaṇṇa Piṭaka, the Aṅgulimāla Piṭaka, the Raṭṭhapāla Gajjita, the Ālavaka Gajjita and the Vedalla Piṭaka.¹⁸¹

The Porāṇa Ṭikā on the Commentary glosses that the “Vedalla Piṭaka” is the Vaitulya/Vetula Piṭaka, that some say was brought up from the abodes of the nagas [alluding to Nāgārjuna and the Prajñā,-pāramitā Sūtras]; others say it consists of what was spoken in debates (*vāda,bhāsita*).

The Saddhamma Paṭirūpaka Sutta continues with the Buddha saying:

The True Dharma does not disappear all at once in the way a ship sinks. There are, Kassapa, five detrimental things that lead to decay and disappearance of the True Dharma. Here the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen dwell without reverence and deference towards the Teacher, towards the Dharma, towards the Sangha, towards the training, towards concentration.

These five things, Kassapa, lead to the longevity of the True Dharma, to its nondecay and nondisappearance. Here the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen dwell with reverence and deference towards the Teacher, toward the Dharma, towards the Sangha, towards the training, towards concentration.

(S 2:225, abridged)

(b) Prophetic sutras

In the Kimbila Sutta I (A 5.201), the monk Kimbila asks the Buddha a similar question: “Lord, what is the reason, what is the cause, that when the Blessed One has passed into final Nirvana, the True Dharma does not last long?” The Buddha gives the same answer in terms of the five things as in the Saddhamma,-paṭirūpaka Sutta, except that the last item is the lack of mutual respect and deference:

¹⁸¹ An attempt to identify the texts cited by the Saṃyutta Commentary is made in the 14th century work, *Nikāyasaṅgraha*, discussed by Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, pp. 99-100. The *Nikāya,saṅgraha* assigns each text to a different non-Theravādin school. The late date of this work, according to Bhikkhu Bodhi, casts doubts on its reliability, and its method of identification is just too neat to be convincing. The Porāṇa Ṭikā's comment on the Vedalla Piṭaka suggests it may be a collection of Mahāyāna sūtras. The Mahāyāna is referred to in Sri Lankan chronicles as the Vetullavāda (Skt. Vaitulyavāda); see Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, pp. 87-90. (S:B 808 n312)

Here the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen dwell without reverence and deference towards the Teacher, towards the Dharma, towards the Sangha, towards the training, towards one another. (A 5.201/3:247)

The Kimbila Sutta II (A 6.40) give six items, and is a repeat of the first sutta, with two items—heedfulness (*appamāda*) and hospitality (*paṭisanthāra*)—replacing “concentration” as the last items:

Here the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen dwell without reverence and deference towards the Teacher, towards the Dharma, towards the Sangha, towards the training, towards heedfulness, towards hospitality. (A 6.40/3:339 f)

In the Kimbila Sutta (III) in the Book of Sevens of the Aṅguttara (A 7.56), seven reasons are given, in an apparent elaboration of the shorter Kimbila Suttas. The True Dharma will decay and disappear when the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen lack reverence and deference towards the Teacher, toward the Dharma, toward the Sangha, toward the training, toward concentration, toward heedfulness, toward hospitality. The True Dharma will grow and prosper when the fourfold company of Buddhists show respect and deference toward the Teacher, toward the Dharma, toward the Sangha, toward the training, toward concentration, toward heedfulness, toward hospitality. (A 4:84)

The Saṃyutta has two sutras—the longer Thiti Sutta (S 47.22) and the briefer Parihāna Sutta (S 47.23) —dealing with the monk Bhadra/Bhadda’s question: “What is the cause and reason why the Dharma does not endure long after the Tathāgata’s final Nirvana? And what is the cause and reason why the Dharma endures long after the Buddha’s final Nirvana?” Ānanda answers: “Friend, it is because the four stations of mindfulness are not developed and cultivated that the True Dharma does not endure long after the Tathāgata’s final Nirvana. And it is because the four stations of mindfulness are developed and cultivated that the True Dharma endures long after the Tathāgata’s final Nirvana.” (S 5:172-174).¹⁸²

23. THE BUDDHA’S PASSING

In an apocryphal story, it is said that Mahā Kāśyapa and the Buddha are once walking together. They look like split peas, and people mistake Kāśyapa for the Buddha. Out of deep respect for the Buddha, Kāśyapa decides that he should retire into the forest so that people do not mistake him for the Buddha. Since he usually lives a secluded forest life, Mahā Kāśyapa does not receive news of the Buddha’s final Nirvana until a few days later.

In fact, at the Buddha’s demise, only two prominent disciples are mentioned: Ānanda and his elder brother Aniruddha. Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana have passed away earlier that year. Mahā Kāśyapa, with a large company of monks, at that time are traveling from Pāpā (Pāvā) to Kuśinagarī (Kusinārā). During that journey, while Kāśyapa is resting under a tree by the road, he sees a naked ascetic (*ājīvaka/ājīvika*) passing by holding a coral-tree (*mandāra*) flower, which is said to grow only in the heavenly realm (cf. D 2:137). Kāśyapa realizes that something unusual has happened for such a flower to have fallen on earth. When he asks the naked ascetic regarding the coral-tree flower, the ascetic replies that the Buddha has passed away and that he has picked the flower at Kuśinagarī. [10:22c]

While the enlightened disciples remain calm and composed, the unenlightened ones fall to the ground, weeping and lamenting: “Too soon has the Blessed One passed into Nirvana! Too soon has the Eye of the World vanished from our sight!” There is, however, Subhadra (Subhadda), who has only lately gone forth in old age, who tries to console his colleagues by saying: “Enough, friends! Do not grieve, do not lament. We are well rid of the Great Ascetic. We were constantly troubled by his telling us: ‘This is proper; that is improper!’ Now, we can do what we like, and we won’t have to do what we don’t like.” [10:22c]

Mahā Kāśyapa, remaining calm, despite Subhadra’s callous remark, exhorts the monks:

Friends, enough of your weeping and wailing! Has not the Lord already told you that all things that are pleasant and delightful are changeable, subject to separation and becoming other?

¹⁸² For a further discussion on the Buddha’s prophecies, especially the 4 Anāgata, bhaya Suttas, see Chapter 10:11.

6. The Buddha's image and shadow

So why all this, friends? Whatever is born, become, compounded, is subject to decay; it cannot be that it does not decay. (D 2:162 f.)

Mahā Kāśyapa then continues his journey with the monks, heading for Kuśinagarī to pay their last respects to the Buddha. Meanwhile, in Kuśinagara, the four Malla chiefs of the Vāsiṣṭha (Vāseṭṭha) clan try to light Buddha's funeral pyre, but fail to do so. Aniruddha then informs them that the devas have held up the cremation until the arrival of Mahā Kāśyapa.

Mahā Kāśyapa arrives and pays his last respects to the Buddha by circumambulating clockwise around the pyre three times with clasped hands. Then uncovering the Buddha's feet, pays homage with his head to them. The 500 monks do likewise. And when this is done, the Lord's funeral pyre ignites of itself. (D 2:63-165).¹⁸³

24. ĀNANDA'S EMOTIONS

Ānanda is always deeply affected by the demise of those close to him. When Śāriputra, a close friend, passed away, Ānanda complains to the novice Cunda, "Venerable sir, since I heard that the Venerable Śāriputta has attained final Nibbāna, my body seems as if it has been drugged, I have become disoriented, the teachings are no longer clear to me." (S 5:162):

1034. All the quarters have become dim; the teachings are unclear to me.
My spiritual friend has gone, and everything is cast in darkness. (Tha 1034)

The Cunda Sutta (S 67.13) records how the Buddha consoles Ānanda over Śāriputra's passing by asking him if by his passing, Śāriputra has taken away any of Ānanda's virtue, to which he replies no (S 5:162 f.).

The greatest loss to Ānanda is, of course, the Buddha's passing. When a friend passes away, it is a moment of truth showing us how we relate to him or what we think of him (or her). From the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, we can see how devastated Ānanda feels at the loss of the supreme spiritual friend:

And the venerable Ānanda then went into his lodging and stood lamenting, leaning against the door-post: "Alas! I am still a learner (*śaikṣa/sekha*) with much to do! And the Teacher is passing away—he who is so kind to me! (D 2:143) [10:17a]

The Buddha in due course consoles him, reminding him of the impermanence of all things, and that he should "make the effort, and in a short time you will be free of the defilements." (D 2:144). With so many elders having passed away, Ānanda later reflects:

1036. The old ones have passed away. I do not get on with the new ones.
Today I meditate all alone, like a bird gone to its nest
(Free tr. K.R. Norman, Tha:N 94 = Tha 1036)

25. THE FIRST COUNCIL (RĀJAGṘHA)

After the Buddha's passing, Mahā Kāśyapa himself presents king Ajātasatru of Magadha with his share of the Buddha relics. Having done so, Kāśyapa turns his attention to respond to old Subhadra's callous remark [10:22c], taking it as a foreshadow of how future unenlightened monks might disregard the Dharma and the Vinaya.

When the final rites and duties regarding the Buddha's funeral have concluded, Mahā Kāśyapa convenes the Order and informs them what has happened on the highroad between Pāpā and Kuśinagarī, especially regarding the old Subhadra's contemptuous remark.

Come, venerable sirs, let us recite the Dharma and the Vinaya before what is not Dharma shines out and what is Dharma is withheld, before what is not Vinaya shines out and what is discipline is withheld; before those who speak what is not Dharma become strong and those who speak Dharma become weak, and before those who speak what is not Vinaya become strong and those who speak what is Vinaya become weak.

(V 1:285 = 2:298; quoted at DA 3, 602; VA 6)

¹⁸³ We shall look at the last days of the Buddha in some detail in the last Chapter.

The important events that follow are recorded in Ch. 11 of the Culla,vagga of the Vinaya (V 2:284-293), and are here summarized. Kāśyapa then proposes a recital of the Dharma-Vinaya—the first Buddhist Council. Due to the unstable political conditions in Kośala then, the Council is convened under the royal patronage of king Ajātaśatru of Magadha. The Commentaries and chronicles record that the Council is held in a hall erected by Ajātaśatru just outside the Sapta,parṇa Guhā (Satta,paṇṇī Guhā, the Cave of the Seven Leaves) at Rājagṛha (SA 1:9; VA 1:10; Mahv 3.19; Dīpv 4.14, 5.5; ThaA 1:92, 3:116).

For the Council, Mahā Kāśyapa then selects 500 elders, all but one of whom are arhats. That exception is Ānanda, who understandably should attend the Council since he has been the Buddha's closest personal associate and been taught all the sutras of the Buddha during the last 20 years [3]. However, since he is not yet enlightened, Aniruddha proposes that he should not be admitted into the Council. He makes this proposal well knowing that it will be an incentive to Ānanda to expedite his awakening. The Order then gives Ānanda an ultimatum that he must gain arhathood before the Council begins.

26. ĀNANDA'S AWAKENING

After the Buddha's funeral activities have ended [10:22], Ānanda, on Mahā Kāśyapa's advice, went to live in the forest of Kośala, near the Malla and Śākya countries. However, when the local lay communities hear about this popular elder being in their vicinity, they ceaselessly visit him day and night seeking consolation and wisdom. However, when Ānanda receives the instructions of the Order, he decides to apply every ounce of energy to realize Nirvana.

Throughout the night, Ānanda cultivates the four stations of mindfulness in all the four postures—sitting, walking, standing, lying down. In the early hours of the morning, as he is preparing to lie down after a full night of spiritual striving, just as he has raised his legs off the ground but not yet laid his head on his pillow, his mind is released from all defilements. Ānanda is the only disciple to have attained awakening free from all the four postures!

As the first day of the Council has arrived, a place has been reserved for him, in the hope that he will succeed in his quest. After all the monks have taken their seats, Ānanda arrives through the air and sits down on his appointed seat. Aniruddha and Mahā Kāśyapa, seeing this, know that Ānanda has attained his goal and break the good news to council, which is then declared open.

27. RECITAL OF THE DHARMA-VINAYA

(a) The Vinaya

The First Council then proceeds throughout the rains-retreat of the year 1 A.B. Mahā Kāśyapa, who presides over the Council, then proceeds with the recital of the Buddha's Teachings. The Council progresses in the manner of "question and answer" (P. *pucchā,visajjanā*) to compile the Buddha's Teachings (V 2:286 ff.; DA 1:11 f.; Mahv 3.30). Kāśyapa begins by questioning Upāli, who has earlier been declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of his disciples who are Vinaya experts (*vinaya,dhara*) (A 1:24; V 4:142). The result of this transaction is codified into what is called the Vinaya Piṭaka.

The Sutta,vibhaṅga of the Vinaya (V 3:1,7-6,13) begins with an account of a famine in Verañjā. The magical powers of Maudgalyāyana are then mentioned. Finally, Śāriputra, worrying about the life-span of the Dhamma, asks the Buddha why the teaching of the former Buddhas did not last long. The Buddha explains that they did not institute the Vinaya, and then reassures Śāriputra that he will introduce rules as soon as a monk does something wrong. This is the real beginning of the Vinaya.

It is interesting to note that rules of the Pātimokkha,sutta are not arranged chronologically but in terms of severity of offences. The Sutta,vibhaṅga, for example, opens with the first Pārājika which was introduced on account of Sudinna's breach of chastity. However, if we look at the Mahā,vagga (which is chronologically arranged), we will notice that it is Upasena Vaṅganta,putta who is the "first offender." He was only one rains (*varṣa/vassa*), i.e. one "ordination year," when he ordains another monk! (V 1:59,32; VA 194,11)

Furthermore, it is not by chance that Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana are mentioned here, for the first rules are laid down in the Mahā,vagga only after Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana have become followers of the Buddha (V 1:39,23-44,3).

(b) The Dharma

Then Kāśyapa goes on to question Ānanda on the sutras, or more exactly, on what becomes codified as the *Sūtra Piṭaka* (Sutta Piṭaka) comprising of the four Nikāyas, that is to say:

- (1) The Long Discourses (Dīrgha Āgama/Dīgha Nikāya), comprising 34 long sutras, each the size of a short modern novel. Most of these sutras record debates and discourses with followers of other sects. As such, their purpose is apparently to enhance the credibility and charisma of the Teaching now that the Teacher is no more physically present. In short, it serves to attract new followers to the Teaching. [Preserved by Ānanda and his pupils, DA 13, 15.]
- (2) The Middle-Length Discourses (Madhyama Āgama/Majjhima Nikāya), comprising 152 sutras, some of which the length of Long Discourses. Here the Buddha is presented as the Spiritual Leader, both as a real person and as an archetype (Tathāgata), with the purpose of integrating newly ordained monks into the Order and into the practice, with a close connection to the Abhidharma. In short, it is directed towards educating the Buddhist community itself. [Preserved by Śāriputra and his pupils, DA 13, 15.]
- (3) The Connected Discourses (Saṃyukta Āgama/Saṃyutta Nikāya), comprising 2,904 sutras, though Buddhaghosa states that there are a total of 7,762 (VA 1:18; DA 1:23; SA 1:2; S:B 1:23-25). It generally deals with meditation, topics conducive to meditation and digests of doctrines related to contemplative insight. The Saṃyutta, says Bhikkhu Bodhi, are "intended principally for those who had already turned for refuge to the Dharma and were deeply immersed in its study and practice" (S:B 1:32). [Preserved by Mahā Kāśyapa and his pupils, DA 13, 15.]
- (4) The Numerical Discourses (Ekōttara Āgama/Aṅg'uttara Nikāya), comprising 2344 sutras, but the traditional total is 9557 sutras (see Hinuber 1996 §48 & pp 38-41). A large section of the Aṅguttara is addressed to lay followers, dealing with mundane, ethical and spiritual concerns of life in this world. [Preserved by Aniruddha and his pupils, DA 13, 15.] [5:28a]

It should be noted here that every one of the Long Discourses and the Middle-Length Discourses have its own title or name. However, the titles of the Connected Discourses and the Numerical Discourses have not been standardized but could be deduced from the title summaries (*uddāna*) at the end of each chapter or collection, and also from the context of the discourse.

All the Long Discourses and the Middle-Length Discourses open with the words: *evaṃ me sutaṃ* (Skt *evam mayā sutaṃ*, thus I have heard), that is, referring to Ānanda's recital of the text before the First Council and its endorsement. In the case of the Connected Discourses, only the Chapter (Skt *saṃyukta*; P *saṃyutta*) opens with *evaṃ me sutaṃ*. In the case of the Numerical Discourses, each Book (*nipāta*), that is, collection of doctrines comprising the same number of items, opens with *evaṃ me sutaṃ*. This clearly reminds us of the oral tradition that has preserved these texts right down to the present day.

(c) The Abhidharma

It is interesting to note the absence of the Abhidharma (Abhidhamma) in the history of the First Council. The Sthavira, vāda (Theravāda) and the Mahā, saṅghika versions do not mention its recitation. "Since the agreement of these two schools should establish the oldest available textual tradition it appears that originally there were only two *piṭakas*." (A.K. Warder 1970:202). The other texts, such as those of the fifth Āgama/Nikāya were, as such, compiled later and canonized in the Third Council (250 BCE) held during Aśoka's time, when the Pali Canon was closed.

(d) Purāṇa of Dakṣiṇa, giri

An important episode found in the Pali Canon should be mentioned. Just after the recital portion of the Council of Rājagṛha had concluded but before the other businesses were transacted, Purāṇa, a monk from Dakṣiṇa, giri, with a group of some 500 monks, arrived in Rājagṛha. When Purāṇa met the elders of the Council, they proposed that he endorse the recital:

Venerable Purāṇa, the Dharma and Vinaya have been recited by the elders. Submit yourself (P. *upehi*) to this recital. (V 2:290, based on I.B. Horner's translation)

Purāṇa however did not endorse the recital, declaring:

Venerable sirs, well recited by the elders are the Dharma and Vinaya. However, I shall remember them as I heard them, as I received them directly from the Blessed One [i.e. in his presence]. (V 2:290)

This episode is clearly not in the favour of the Council elders, and there is no particular advantage for its inclusion. As such, it has to be a historical account, reflecting that there were many others who did not attend the Council, and apparently many other personal teachings of the Buddha were not included in the Council's recital.

28. ĀNANDA'S "TRIAL"

After the Dharma and Vinaya have been recited, Ānanda presents to the Council those matters which the Buddha has personally instructed him for deliberation. He informs the Council that the Buddha allows the lesser and minor rules (*kṣudrānuṣṭhāra śikṣāpada/khuddakānukhuddaka sikkhāpada*) to be abrogated (D 2:154), but the elders cannot come to a consensus which are the rules meant here. As such, Kāśyapa deliberates:

If now the Sangha starts abolishing rules, lay people will say that so soon after the passing of the Blessed One we have become lax. Since it is not known which rules were meant, it would be best not to abolish any of them. In that case, we shall be sure that we are not acting contrary to the Master's wishes. (V 2:287-289; Nyanaponika's paraphrase 1997:180)

The elders, however, propose that it is a breach of discipline for Ānanda not to have asked the Buddha what is meant by the lesser and minor rules. Ānanda replies: "I, venerable sirs, out of unmindfulness, did not ask the Lord... I do not see that as an offence of wrong-doing, yet out of faith in the venerable ones, I confess that as an offence of wrong-doing." (V 2:289).

Second, Ānanda is criticized for having sewn a robe for the Blessed One after having stepped on the cloth. He replies that nothing has been further from his mind than disrespect for the Blessed One. In the same spirit as in the first case, he confesses wrong-doing before the Sangha.

Third, Ānanda is criticized for allowing women to salute the remains of the Buddha first. He replies that at the time of the funeral, he had thought that this would enable the women to return home before dark and therefore he allowed them to pay homage first. (This incident is not mentioned in the Pali Canon; but see Rockhill 154.) However, again he confesses wrong-doing out of deference for the Sangha.

Fourth, Ānanda is criticized for his failure to invite the Buddha to remain for a whole cycle (*kalpa/kappa*) when he could have done so (D 2:103, 115; S 5:259; A 4:309 f.; U 62). He explains that he was then possessed by Māra, and therefore was not responsible for his actions. To this, too, however, he confesses as a wrong-doing.

Fifth, Ānanda is criticized for making an effort for the going forth of women (V 2:253). Ānanda replies that he has done so, thinking: "This Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī is the Lord's aunt, foster-mother, nurse, giver of milk, for when the Lord's mother passed away, she suckled him." Again, he does not see this as an offence, but nevertheless confesses wrong-doing out of respect for the Sangha.

29. CLAY-POT FRIENDSHIP

(a) The Mahā Suññatā Sutta

The Mahā Suññatā Sutta (M 122.2-3/3:110) records an important teaching on spiritual solitude expounded by the Buddha to Ānanda. While staying in Nigrodha's Park at Kapilavastu, the Buddha discovers that in the dwelling (*vihāra*) built by the Śākya Kāla, kṣemaka (Kāḷa, khemaka) there are numerous furniture for resting (*sayan'āsana/sen'āsana*)—beds, chairs, mattresses and mats. It looks like a club house! Ānanda then explains to him that it is robe season and the monks are making robes. For that reason there are many monks present there. The Buddha then admonishes Ānanda that it is difficult to for a monk (or anyone) to attain mental calm and release in the midst of a crowd (*gana*).

The Buddha then goes on to instruct Ānanda on how to meditate on voidness (*śūnyatā/suññatā*) after having attained the four form absorptions (*rūpa, dhyāna/rūpa-j-jhāna*). Living with such a state of mind, the practitioner is not inclined to indulge in "animal talk" (*tiraścīna, kathā/tiracchāna, kathā*, D 1:7; V 1:7,

178, 3:54; Vism 127; DA 1:89), that is, talk on worldly matters and things unrelated to spiritual development.

The Buddha then goes on to distinguish between two levels of sense-experience: that of “the five cords of sensual pleasure” (*pañca,kāma,guṇa*), the level of the worldling, and “the five aggregates of clinging” (*pañc'upādāna-k,khandha*), the level of the practitioner. The five cords of sensual pleasure have a “binding” (grasping) effect on one who enjoys them. The five aggregates of clinging, on the other hand, are natural states that arise and fall away moment to moment. If a practitioner watches this rise and fall, he would abandon the “I am” conceit, and as such be free from the grip of Māra.

(b) “Even if the teacher tells you to go away.”

Then turning to a new level of instruction, the Buddha asks a rhetorical question: “What do you think, Ānanda? What good does a disciple see that he should seek the Teacher’s company even if he is told to go away?” When Ānanda requests that the Buddha elaborate, he does so:

(1) A disciple should not seek the teacher’s company “for the sake the exposition of discourses (*suttā*) and stanzas (*geyyā*),” but only such talk that promotes spiritual development, that is, talk on “few wants, contentment, seclusion, aloofness from society, arousing energy, moral conduct, concentration, wisdom, deliverance, and the knowledge and vision of deliverance.”

(2) How does a religious teacher fail? A teacher who has gone into solitary retreat is visited by “brahmins and householders from the town and country” and as a result he becomes filled with desire, succumbs to craving and reverts to luxury. This is the failure of the teacher.

(3) How does a religious student fail? A student who, following the teacher’s example, has gone into solitary retreat is visited by “brahmins and householders from the town and country” and as a result he becomes filled with desire, succumbs to craving and reverts to luxury. This is the failure of the student.

(4) How does a religious celibate (*brahma,carya/brahma,carī*) fail? Here, a true follower of the Buddha who keeps to his teachings goes into spiritual retreat. Even when visitors from the city and country come, he does not fall from his training. But, when one follows a false or weak teacher, as a result of contact the world, one is filled with unwholesome states. This is the failure of the religious celibate, which is the worst failure of the three, even leading to great suffering.¹⁸⁴

(5) “Therefore, Ānanda, conduct yourself with friendliness towards me, not with hostility.” And how is this not done? The Buddha teaches Dharma out of compassion to the disciples, but they neither listen nor make an effort to understand, and turn away from the Teaching. This is being unfriendly with the Teacher.

(6) How do disciples conduct themselves with friendliness towards the Teacher? Here, the disciples want to hear and makes an effort to understand the Teaching, and do not turn away from it. This is being friendly to the Teacher.

“I shall not treat you as the potter treats the raw damp clay. Repeatedly restraining you, I shall speak to you, Ānanda. Repeatedly admonishing you, I shall speak to you, Ānanda. The sound core will stand the test.” (M 3:118).¹⁸⁵ The Commentary paraphrases the Buddha’s closing remarks thus:

After advising you once, I shall not be silent. I shall advise and instruct by repeatedly admonishing you. Just as a potter tests the baked pots, puts aside those that are cracked, split or faulty, and keeps only those that pass the test, so I shall advise and instruct you instruct by repeatedly testing you. Those among you who are sound (ie, the “core”), having reached the paths and fruits, will stand the test. (This test, the Commentary adds, also includes the mundane virtues as criterion of soundness.)
(MA 4:166)

This sutra is also known as the Gaṇa,bheda Sutta (MA 4:165) because it tends to break up a crowd, that is, it admonishes against the unwholesome socializing.

¹⁸⁴ The Commentary explains that by using two analogies. For a religious teacher or student outside the Teaching (a non-Buddhist) to fall from his training, only falls away from a mundane training—like one falling a donkey and is only covered in dust. However, for one who falls from the training in the Teaching (with its Path, Fruit and Nirvana), that is, who gives up the spiritual training, it is a great loss, like one falling from an elephant, incurring great suffering.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. the Buddha’s rebuke of Śāriputra [5:22a].

(c) The Gandhāra Jātaka

The analogy of the unbaked clay pot is also found in the Gandhāra Jātaka (J no. 406), where the Bodhisattva was reborn as a prince of Gandhāra. He admonishes an ascetic also named Ānanda against hoarding salt and sugar and to accept almsfood as it comes: “I will not work with you, O Ānanda, as a potter with raw clay only. I will speak chiding again and again. What is truth, that will abide.”

Were not wisdom and good conduct trained in some men's lives to grow,
Many would go wandering idly like a blinded buffalo.

But since some are wisely trained in moral conduct fair to grow,
Thus it is that disciplined in paths of virtue others go. (R.A. Neil's tr. J:C 3:224)

In the end, both ascetics, through their practice, were destined for the Brahmā world. (J 3:363-369)

Spiritual friendship, in other words, is a “fiery” friendship. Just as the primordial fire of the earth crushes coal deep underground to produce diamonds, even so the communication between spiritual friends inspires one another to higher spiritual levels, as exemplified in the lives of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana [Chapter 5], and of Mahā Kāśyapa and Ānanda, with the Buddha as their common spiritual friend.

30. ĀNANDA'S FINAL NIRVANA

The Pali Canon has no record of Ānanda's final Nirvana. Faxian, however, has an account of it, probably based on an ancient tradition (Foguoji:G 44). A similar account, with several variations, occurs in the Dhammapada Commentary (DhA 2:99 ff.). It is said that when Ānanda is 120, and realizes that his time is approaching, announces to the inhabitants of both sides of the river Rohiṇī that he will pass away in seven days' time.

When the day comes, Ānanda sits cross-legged in the air over the Rohiṇī at the height of seven palm trees witnessed by the Śākyas and the Krauḍyas (Koliyas) gather on their respective banks of the river. Since both sides have helped him equally, he decides that his relics would be equally shared by them. When he has finished giving his final discourse, he commands, “Let my body split in two; and let one portion fall on the near side and the other on the far side!”

Then he enters into meditation on the fire element and his body bursts into flames, his body splits into two, and one portion of his relics falls on the near side, and the other on the far side. The lamentation of the two tribes sounds like the earth splitting open, sounding even more mournful than the sound of the lamentation at the final Nirvana of the Buddha himself. (DhA 2:99 f.; Rockhill 165 f.)

31. MAHĀ KĀŚYAPA'S DEPARTURE

A note should be made about Mahā Kāśyapa's age. Although the Commentaries say that Mahā Kāśyapa was 120 years old at the time of the First Council (DA 2:413; SA 2:130; AA:SHB 2:596), Nyanaponika remarks that this chronology is hardly plausible, “for it would mean that he was forty years older than the Buddha and thus already an old man of at least 75 at their first meeting” (Nyanaponika & Hecker, 1997:384 n17).

It is said that throughout his spiritual life he had not lain on a bed, i.e. he slept in a sitting posture (DA 2:413, 3:736; AA:SHB 2:396). According to Mahayana sources (such as Xuanzang's Xiyuji), Kāśyapa did not die. He dwells in the Kukkuṭa, pāda Giri (Chicken's Foot Mountain) deep in samadhi, awaiting the arrival of Maitreya (Metteyya) Buddha (Beal 1884 2:142 f.; Lamotte 1988:206). A tooth of Mahā Kāśyapa, according to the Cūḷavaṃsa, was enshrined in the Bhīma, titha Vihāra in Sri Lanka (Cuv 85,81).

According to Tārānātha's *History of Buddhism in India*, when the Buddha had passed away, the teacher's office was given to Mahā Kāśyapa, who in due course, handed it over to Ānanda, who was said to have carried on the patriarchate for 40 years.

32. CONCLUSION

(a) Resolving the tension

In this study of Mahā Kāśyapa and Ānanda, two important points should be noted. Firstly, that there can be spiritual friendship despite, even because of, differences in personality and age. Secondly, that

there life can be lived to the fullest by aging gracefully. We also discussed the tension between the eremitic forest tradition and the cœnobitic monastic tradition.

Mahā Kāśyapa the eremite embodies the forest tradition of the solitary hermit. Ānanda the cœnobite represents the settled monastic communitarian. Mahā Kāśyapa represents the ideal of early primitive Buddhism while Ānanda is the ideal of the early developed Order. Yet both of them are spiritual friends. Psychologically, Mahā Kāśyapa is the part of our being that craves for silence and solitude away from the madding crowd of the urban rat-race. Ānanda is our compassionate that tries to reach out to the madding crowd of the urban rate-race hoping to transform them by our own inner peace.

In our own times, this apparent tension between spiritual silence and spiritual fellowship is best resolved in a lay practitioner or secular clergy simply because the lifestyle of a traditional monastic practitioner would be compromised in a materialistic urban setting. The lay practitioner and secular clergy, however, have to be in regular contact with the “calm eye of the storm,” that is, the living forest tradition of early Buddhism with its meditation and monastic discipline. In this sense, there is a movement centred around stillness.

A good example of a person who tried to resolve this inner and outer spiritual tension was Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), the French philosopher, theologian and musicologist who was awarded the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize. His solitary life of philosophy and theology in Lambaréné, Africa, is a sort of renunciation in the spirit of the Buddhist forest tradition while his dedication to music and working as a doctor there makes him a Renaissance man. In resolving the inner and outer spiritual tension, Schweitzer led a rich full life worthy of emulation.

(b) Living the full life

While Śāriputra and Mahā Maudgalyāyana are the ideals of spiritual friendship amongst equals [Chapter 5], Mahā Kāśyapa and Ānanda are the ideals of spiritual friendship between teacher and pupil, between old and young, and the synthesis of forest wisdom and monastic compassion. On another level, we can see the Kāśyapa-Ānanda friendship as the proper Buddhist way of aging wisely and gracefully through mental stimulation and spiritual growth. Kāśyapa is said to be 120 at the time of the Council of Rājagṛha and Ānanda dies at 120. Both are fully mindful to the very end despite their remarkably advanced age.

As we age and our bodies obey us less and less, conversely the mind should obey us more and more. This is possible through spiritual development. If this can happen within one life, this habit will catch on the next and progressively we become more skillful at mental development, so that we do not merely grow old, but also grow up.

A cursory look at some of the greatest names in human history, we will find that they are those who ceaselessly stimulate their minds. They are people who not only age gracefully but whose faculties are generally sharp until their last breath.¹⁸⁶ Titian (1488/90-1576), the Venetian painter and one of the greatest artists of the European Renaissance painted one of his finest masterpieces, “Tarquin and Lucretia,” when he was 83. Goethe (1749-1832), one of the giants of world literature and perhaps the last of the great Renaissance personalities, completed his masterpiece, *Faust*, said to contain some of the best of western poetry, when he was 82.

Hokusai (1760-1849, real name unknown), the Japanese artist, immortalized by his “Thirty-seven views of Mount Fuji,” was only a poster artist until his late fifties. After taking up meditation he went on to produce his famous Mount Fuji series at 71 and continued painting until his death at 89. Verdi (1813-1901), leading composer of Italian opera in the 19th century, wrote his greatest tragic opera, *Otello*, at 71, and *Falstaff*, an amazingly youthful comic opera, at the ripe old age of 80.

Albert Einstein (1879-1955), physicist, the greatest mind of the 20th century and one of the most creative intellectuals in human history, died at 76. On his desk lay his last incomplete statement, written to honour the Israeli Independence Day, which read in part: “What I seek to accomplish is simply to serve with my feeble capacity truth and justice at the risk of pleasing no one.” For such a man who summarized the whole of the universe in an equation, he is best remembered by his statement: “Politics are for the moment. An equation is for eternity.”

¹⁸⁶ Some of the following examples have been inspired by examples quoted by Trevor Leggett in his article “Thus Have I Heard” (*The Middle Way*, 74,1 May 1999).

Another great mind, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century, lived to a ripe old age. In 1962, at the age of 90, his energy and sense of purpose were still such that, during the Cuban crisis and the Sino-Indian border conflict, he intervened with heads of state and with U Thant of the United Nations. Later he chaired the Who Killed Kennedy Committee. In the meantime, in order to systematize his work for peace, he established, in 1963, the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and the Atlantic Trust. During the remainder of the 60's (in his mid-90s), he vehemently spoke against the US policies in the Vietnam War. During the last three years of his life, he and a few other great minds convened the International War Crimes Tribunal. He died at 98.

Bakkula (Bākula) of Kauśambī, after a prosperous life, at the age of 80, hears the Buddha teach and renounces the world. At the dawn of the 8th day, he becomes an arhat. He is a monk for another 80 years (M 3:125; AA 1:309 f.), throughout which time he lives as an ascetic without preaching about it to others—a fact for which he is often credited (eg MA 2:138). He is one of the four who have great superknowledge (*mahā 'bhijñā,prāpta/mahā 'bhīññā-p.patta*), the others being the two chief disciples and Bhadrā Kātyāyana (Bhaddā Kaccānā) (AA 1:376). Shortly before his death, Acela Kāśyapa, who has been a friend in his lay days, is ordained through his initiative.

The Buddha declares him to be the foremost of those with good health (A 1:25; Tha 225-227; cf Miln 215 ff). When he realizes that his death is near at the age of 160 (DA 2:413), he goes from cell to cell and announced it to his fellow monks who assembles around him as he sits in meditation. Thus he enters into meditation on the fire element and attains Final Nirvana by causing his entire body to be consumed by the flame, leaving only his relics (MA 4:196). All his life, Bakkula has never made himself a burden to other monks, and he does not want his body to be a burden after his death.

In short, a spiritual life is rich where even if the body decays, the mind does not decay, indeed, the mind continues to grow and be liberated. One may be born in ignorance, but one should die in wisdom,



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7

THE BUDDHA'S BAD KARMA

ĀṄGULIMĀLA & DEVADATTA

1. INTRODUCTION

Was Āṅgulimāla the brigand wearing a garland of human fingers who went around wantonly killing innocent people, or was he actually a religious cult member seeking victims for human sacrifices for his god?

According to the Buddhist texts, Āṅgulimāla was a serial killer whom the Buddha converted and reformed: what can we learn from his story that can inspire the powers that be to review our so called “modern” justice systems so that *restorative justice* takes precedence over *retributive justice*, where we heal criminals and delinquents rather than punish them?

Was Devadatta really the evil man that the Theravada Buddhists believe him to be, or was he more strict in his practice than the Buddha himself?

Besides these fascinating questions, we will also examine a very controversial text in the Apadāna that apparently managed to slip into the Pali Canon. It is the only text that deals with the Buddha's past “bad karma” and how it allegedly affects his last life. We will also examine the little known controversy whether Gautama is actually the real founder of Buddhism or if it is some other Buddha in our current history.

“The Buddha's bad karma” is a synecdoche, a contradiction in terms. We are told in Buddhist texts and stories that he is endowed with deep spirituality and various superhuman powers transcending even those of the highest god or gods. And yet we also read of the Buddha's physical pains like headaches, backaches and dysentery, and personal problems with people like Devadatta, other indisciplined monks and nuns, and members of other religions.

UNPLEASANT EVENTS IN THE BUDDHA'S LIFE

We shall first examine something close to the Buddha himself: the pains and problems he faced in his last life. I've based my study on a very interesting and rare paper written by Jonathan S. Walters¹⁸⁷ entitled “The Buddha's Bad Karma: A problem in the history of Theravada Buddhism”¹⁸⁸. Where relevant I will expand on Walter's ideas by following his own divisions of topics. In Part 1, we shall briefly survey the original records of these events, as preserved in the earliest texts of the Pali Canon. Part 2 discusses a late canonical text, the Pubba,kamma,piloti, which analyzes these events as a result of the Buddha's own previous bad karma. Part 3 examines the texts that deny this karmic explanation and the reasons for these denials. Part 4 will survey the rebuttals to these denials, which affirm the karmic explanation by answering the objections raised by other Buddhists.

The unpleasant events in the Buddha's life fall into three general categories: slanders from enemies, assaults from enemies, and physical illnesses or deprivations. These three categories will help us focus our study, but for a more beneficial approach, we have to examine the narrative details in the Buddha's life that are the grist for Buddhist apologetics and fuel for academic debates.

2. SUNDARĪ

The first category, slanders from enemies, is limited to only two incidents, that is, allegations against the Buddha by two female wanderers (*parivrājikā/paribbājikā*), Sundarī and Ciñcā Māṇavikā, both employed by non-Buddhist “heretics” (*āṭṭhaya/titthiya*). The story of Sundarī has already been mentioned in Chapter 6. She was instructed by fellow wanderers to frequent Jetavana to give the public a false

¹⁸⁷ Prof. Walters (PhD in History of Religions 1991, Univ. of Chicago) wrote this article when he was with the Divinity School, Univ. of Chicago. He is now teaching in the Department of Religion in Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington, USA. His translation of the Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī Therī Apadāna is found in *Buddhism in Practice*, 1995: ch. 9.

¹⁸⁸ *Numen* 37, 1990:70-95.

impression of “immoral activities” with the monks there, but she is then treacherously murdered by the wanderers themselves to complicate matters for the Buddhists [6:4].

When Sundarī's corpse is found, it is paraded around town to discredit the Buddhist monks. When the monks go on their almsround, they are scorned, but the Buddha remains calm. He instructs the monks to preach to their scorers regarding the evil of lying, and assures them that all the rumours will die down in seven days (U 45; J 2:415). The Commentary adds that the truth is out when the hired killers, drunkenly bragging and quarrelling, confessed to their crime and the heretics' collusion, and are brought to justice by king Prasenajit's men (UA 256 ff.; DhA 3:474 ff. SnA 2:528 ff.; J:415 f.).

3. CIÑCĀ MĀṆAVIKĀ

The case of Ciñcā Māṇavikā is alluded to in the core verses of the Jātaka (J 4:187 f.), but her full story is only found in the Commentaries (ApA 118 f.; DhA 3:178 ff.; ItA 1:69, 86). Her story is very similar to Sundarī's but suffer from some conflation. The epithet *māṇavikā* means that the female wanderer Ciñcā is a very young girl of great beauty in her early teens.

Like Sundarī, on the instructions of some jealous wanderers, she spreads rumours amongst the townsfolk that she has been sleeping with the Buddha. Feigning pregnancy before various assemblies and on public festivals, she in due course accuses Gautama of being the father and of neglecting his fiscal and social responsibilities.

This time, the Buddha does not keep his characteristic silence, but laconically addresses Ciñcā: “Sister, you and I know the truth or falsehood of what you said here.”

“Yes, great monk,” she cunningly replies, “but who are to decide between the truth and falsehood of what is only known to you and me?”

At that moment, Śakra's heavenly seat begins to heat up, reflecting that grave injustice is being machinated on earth. Realizing the cause of his discomfort, Śakra then summons four deities to set things right on earth. The deities turn themselves into little mice. With one bite of their teeth they sever the cords with which the disc of wood is fastened to Ciñcā's belly. At that moment, the wind blew up her cloak, and the disc of wood falls upon her feet, cutting off the toes of both her feet.

Thereupon the crowd cries out: “A hag is reviling the Perfect Self-enlightened One!” They spit on her head, and with clods of earth and sticks in their hands, drive her out of Jetavana. Tradition has it that as she passes out of the Buddha's sight, the great earth opens up under her feet and swallows her up, and flames shot up from the bowels of the earth, as she falls into Avīci hell. From that time, the gain and honour of the wanderers wane further but the fame and support for the Buddha increase even more.

4. CHARISMA

We can see thus far that the stories of slander far from showing the Buddha's weakness, but actually reveal his true strength and fame, that is, his own spirituality and the recognition by others. In fact, it is such events and social processes that contribute to the growing charisma of the Buddha. By charisma here, is meant *the attraction to a person who is perceived to possess virtue or power as a leader or teacher*.

The Rūpa Sutta (A 4.65) gives a good idea of the Buddhist conception of charisma. It lists four personal sources or “measures” (*pramāṇa/pamāṇā*) of charisma, that is, how one “measures” (i.e. attributes charisma to) another and becomes satisfied or “inspired” (*prasanna/pasanna*) with the person. There are, says the sutra, four kinds of persons:

- (1) One who measures by appearance (*rūpa*) and is inspired thereby.
- (2) One who measures by voice (*ghoṣa.ghosa*) and is inspired thereby.
- (3) One who measures by outward austerity (*lūkha*) and is inspired thereby.
- (4) One who measures by truth and virtue [i.e. right teachings and practices] (*dharma/dhamma*) and is inspired thereby. (A 2:71; cf. Pug 7, 53; Tha 469-472; DhA 114; SnA 242)

The first three are popular criteria but faulty and personal at best: only the fourth is the true standard for one's devotion to another. The Buddha, however, enjoys all four measures from the faithful who know him.

I have tried to explain this fascinating subject in some detail in *Charisma in Buddhism*¹⁸⁹ so shall only briefly deal with it here. The most instructive section of the sutra are the verses that are identical to those of the elder Lakunṭhaka Bhaddiya (“the dwarf”):

469. Those people who have judged me by appearance and followed me for my voice,
Overcome by desire and passion, know me not.
470. The foolish one, surrounded by (mental) hindrances, neither knows the inside
Nor sees the outside—he is indeed misled by voice. (Tha 469-472 ≠ A 2:71)

The elder Lakunṭhaka Bhaddiya, the sweet-voiced dwarf, who speaks these verses in the first person (for the most part, the same verses are reported in the 3rd person in the Rūpa Sutta), is concerned at being misjudged by his deformed looks, and at others’ being captivated by his voice.

Anyway, as far as the unthinking mob is concerned—a crowd does not think—both looks and voices are good measures of virtue and power. Hence, the use of gossips and rumours by the wanderers who are jealous of the Buddha’s success. The jealous and desperate wanderers are attempting to use gossips and rumours as a means of social control over the Buddha and his community.

DEVADATTA

5. FAME AND POWER

Knowledge is power, but charisma is greater power, especially when that power is perceived in one or attributed to one by the masses. Our second category of stories—assault by enemies—illustrate the great power of the Buddha. These stories centre around the Buddha’s jealous cousin Devadatta. Here I shall try to synthesize and then analyze the findings of John C. Meagher¹⁹⁰ in his article on “Devadatta and Buddhist Origins,”¹⁹¹ and of Jonathan Walters in terms of the early Buddhist texts and current research.

The most complete source of the story of Devadatta is found in the 7th Khandhaka (“On Schism”) of the Vinaya (V 2:180-206), of which the salient points are given here. The Devadatta story opens with the Buddha staying in the Ghosit’ārāma in Kauśambī. During his retreat, Devadatta thinks, “Who now can I influence so that I can win great gain and honour?” It dawns on him that prince Ajātaśatru is young and impressionable.¹⁹²

Having gone to Rājagṛha, Devadatta turns himself into a young boy with a girdle of snakes, sitting right on the prince’s lap. When the terrified prince realizes it is Devadatta, he is won over and becomes a wide-eyed devotee who waits on Devadatta “morning and evening with 500 chariots, and 500 offerings of rice cooked in milk.” (V 2:185; S 2:242; VA 1275; DhA 1:139). In his overconfidence and greed for gains, honours and fame, Devadatta now thinks: “It is I who will lead the Order of Monks!”¹⁹³ [5:20]. With this thought, Devadatta’s psychic powers immediately weakens (V 2:185).

According to the Devadatta Sutta I (A 2:73) [9]¹⁹⁴, preached to the monks at Vulture’s Peak, when the Buddha hears about Ajātaśatru’s support of Devadatta, he tells the monks not to be envious, for as long as Devadatta keeps on receiving Ajātaśatru’s sumptuous gifts, “only decline can be expected of Devadatta in regard to wholesome states, no growth, just as a wild dog become even wilder when they sprinkle bile over its nose.” (S 2:242; V 2:187). Using various similes, the Buddha shows how love of gains, favours and flattery will lead to Devadatta’s downfall, like the plantain tree that is destroyed because of its fruit, etc. (ib.)

¹⁸⁹ Piyasilo 1992h:81 ff. = §6.722.

¹⁹⁰ John C. Meagher, PhD (London), PhD (Princeton), PhD (McMaster), Prof. Emeritus, Historical Theology; New Testament; Christian Origins; Interdisciplinary Theology. He is currently on the Emeritus Faculty, Faculty of Theology, University of St. Michael’s College of the University of Toronto, Canada.

¹⁹¹ *Ohio Journal of Religious Studies* 3,1 Mar 1975:3-18)

¹⁹² Cf. Mahilā, mukha J no. 26 = 1:185 f.

¹⁹³ Cf. D 2:100; DhA 1:139.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. V 2:187 f. & S 2:242

6. LEADERSHIP OF THE SANGHA

When the Buddha arrives in Rājagṛha and stays there, Devadatta approaches him with a proposal: “Lord, the Lord is now old, worn, stricken in years, he has lived his span and is at the close of his life.¹⁹⁵ Lord, let the Lord now be content to live devoted to abiding in ease here and now, let him hand over the Order of Monks to me. It is I who will lead the Order of Monks.” Thrice he proposes and thrice the Buddha turns him down. After the third time, the Buddha rebukes Devadatta,

Devadatta, I would not hand over the Order of Monks even to Sāriputta and Moggallāna. How then could I hand it over to you, a wretched one, to be rejected like spittle?

(V 2:188; quoted at DhA 1:139 f; cf. M 1:393)

The Buddha's strong words (or the strength attributed by later Reciters or Redactors) are understandable from Devadatta's track record so far, now that he has shown his true colours. As Devadatta's proposal clearly portends a schism in the Sangha, the Buddha instructs the monks to carry out a formal act of Proclamation (*prakāsaṇiya, karma/pakāsaṇiya, kamma*), that is, to inform the Sangha and the public that Devadatta has changed his attitude towards the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (V 2:189; cf. DhA 1:139 f.)

Sāriputta is at first uncertain if he should make the proclamation resolved by the Sangha because “Formerly, Lord, I spoke in praise of Devadatta in Rājagaha saying: ‘Godhi's son is of great psychic power, Godhi's son is of great majesty.’ How can I, Lord, now proclaim against Devadatta in Rājagaha?” (The fact that Sāriputta addresses Devadatta indirectly by the metronym also reflects his respect for him.) The Buddha replies that if what Sāriputta has said of Devadatta is true in the past, what he is going to proclaim now is just as true in the face of the new developments. Sāriputta then assents and makes the proclamation:

Formerly Devadatta's nature was of such a kind, now it is of another kind, and that whatever Devadatta should do by action or word, in that neither the Buddha nor the Dharma nor the Order should be seen, but in that only Devadatta should be seen.

(V 2:189)

In short, from now on, whatever Devadatta does or says are his personal opinions, having no bearing on the Three Jewels. This is the closest that Buddhism ever comes to the concept of apostasy!

The public response is mixed. Those with “little faith, not believing, of poor intelligence” think that “the Śākya are jealous” (Devadatta is a Krauḍya/Koliya). The faithful and wise think, “This must be an extraordinary matter in that the Lord has made a proclamation in Rājagṛha against Devadatta.” As for Devadatta, he goes on to the next stage of his ambitious plans. He persuades Ajātasatru to kill his father, king Bimbisāra and take over the kingdom (but we shall examine at this further in Chapter 8).

7. ATTEMPTS ON THE BUDDHA'S LIFE

Meanwhile, Devadatta, frustrated in his efforts to take over the Buddha's place, intensifies his efforts. He sends 31 archers to kill the Buddha, but as they approach the Buddha, whether alone or in a group, they are enthralled by the Buddha's charisma and are converted, the first even becoming a stream-winner after the Buddha's exhortation (V 2:191 f.).

The desperate Devadatta now declares: “I myself will deprive the recluse Gotama of his life!” While the Buddha is pacing up and down in the shade of Vulture's Peak (*Gr̥dhra, kūṭa/Gijjhā, kūṭa*), Devadatta hurls down a great rock, but it lodges between two crags, a fragment of which hits the Buddha's foot causing it to bleed. Thus, Devadatta commits a karma whose fruit is immediate (*ānantarya, karma/ānantarika, kamma*), that is, whose fruit will arise in the very same lifetime.

With two major attempts on the Buddha's life, many monks in the monastery excitedly mobilized themselves to defend the Buddha's life. The Buddha calms them down, declaring: “It is impossible, monks, it cannot come to pass, that anyone could deprive a Tathāgata of life by aggression. Monks, Tathāgatas attain Nirvana not because of an attack.” (V 2:194)

When all human efforts fail, Devadatta now employs animal strategy. The Introduction to the Culla-haṃsa Jātaka (J 533 = 5:333) says that he gets the mahout to feed the bull elephant Nālāgiri with 16 pots

¹⁹⁵ V 3:2; M 1:82; Sn pp 50, 92.

of fiery toddy. The drunken elephant is then loosed on the street taken by the Buddha and his disciples on their almsround.

When Ānanda sees the impending threat to the Buddha's life, he rushes to stand between the Buddha and Nālāgiri despite protestations from the Buddha who then gently moves him aside with psychic power. Nālāgiri charges at the Buddha "with trunk uplifted, his ears and tail erect." When Nālāgiri finally comes near the Buddha, he suffuses the elephant Nālāgiri with lovingkindness, immediately calming it down. It then kneels before the Buddha who strokes gently its forehead.

8. THE FIVE DEMANDS

Having exhausted all physical strategies to destroy the Buddha, Devadatta now turns to discredit the Buddha through subterfuge. Well knowing that the Buddha teaches the Middle Path, and recalling how the Five Monks have, before the Awakening, deserted the Bodhisattva after he decided to take food to replenish his body to turn away from self-mortification [2:17], Devadatta, on the instigation of his pupil, Kokālika, submits these five proposals to the Buddha that monks should adopt all life long, that is:

- (1) to live as forest-dwellers, and prohibit living in or near any village (or built-up area);
- (2) to live on almsfood (collected from the almsround), and prohibit accepting any invitation;
- (3) to be rag-robe wearers, and prohibit accepting robes from a householder;
- (4) to live at the foot of a tree, and prohibit staying under artificial cover; and
- (5) not to eat fish and meat (i.e. to be vegetarians).

Predictably, and to the delight of Devadatta and his followers, the Buddha turns down all these proposals, saying that they are optional practices:

Whoever wishes, let him be a forest-dweller; whoever wishes, let him stay in the neighbourhood of a village; whoever wishes, let him be an alms-collector; whoever wishes let him accept an invitation; whoever wishes, let him be a rag-robe wearer; whoever wishes, let him accept a householder's robes. For eight months, Devadatta, lodging at the foot of a tree is permitted by me. Fish and meat are pure in respect of three points: if one has not seen, heard or suspected (that they have been killed on purpose for one).
(V 2:197; cf. V 1:238)

Now they put into action the next step in their subterfuge: they spread talk that the Buddha and his disciples lead luxurious lives, easily moving and attracting those "of little faith and intelligence." But the wise remark: "How can this Devadatta go ahead with a schism in the Lord's Order!" When this matter is brought to the Buddha's attention, he admonishes Devadatta, telling him that it is a very serious matter to break up the Order, with very heavy karmic consequences. Devadatta, of course, is not impressed.

9. SCHISM

Devadatta next informs Ānanda that he will be performing his own Sangha Acts (*saṅgha, karma/saṅgha, kamma*), that is, ecclesiastical acts involving the whole Sangha, such as reciting the Prātimokṣa, ordination, deliberation over offences, etc. (V 2:197 f.; U 60 f.). Effectively, by doing so, Devadatta is forming his own Sangha apart from the Buddha's—this is schism. As many as 500 newly ordained Vṛjī monks of Vaiśālī, inspired by Devadatta's ascetic ideals, follow him to Gayā, Śīrṣa (Gayā, Sīsa) (DhA 1:122). Amongst the nuns who follow him is Sthulā Nandā, who never tire of singing his praises (V 4:66, 335) [6:18b].

During the period following Devadatta's schism, the Buddha preaches three discourses, two Devadatta Suttas (A 7.7; S 17.35) and the Mahā Sārôpama Sutta (M 29). The Devadatta Sutta II (A 4:160 f.; cf. V 2:202) is preached under the same circumstances as the Devadatta Sutta I. It gives eight reasons for Devadatta's downfall, and the Buddha exhorts the monks to reflect on the good and bad fortune which overtake oneself and others from time to time. In the Devadatta Sutta III (also called the Ratha Sutta, S 1:153), Brahmā Sahampati visits the Buddha at Vulture's Peak, soon after Devadatta's schism, and utters the stanza of Devadatta Sutta I (A 2:73) [5]:

As the plaintain is destroyed by its fruit,
As their fruits destroy the bamboo and the rush,
As the mule is destroyed by its embryo,

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So does homage destroy the fool.

(S 1:153; A 2:73)

In the Mahā Sārôpama Sutta (M 29), the Buddha, using the simile of a man going into the forest to look for heartwood, exhorts the monks, especially those newly gone forth, not to be lured by worldly gain, honour and fame, not even to be conceited about one's spiritual attainments:

So this holy life, monks, does not have gain, honour, and fame for its benefit, or the attainment of moral conduct, or knowledge and vision for its benefit. But it is this unshakeable deliverance of mind [the fruit of arhathood] that is the goal of the holy life, its heartwood and its end.
(M 1:197)

10. SANGHA REUNITED

Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana express their concern over the schism, and the Buddha instructs them to bring back the misguided monks. Seeing the two chief disciples of the Buddha approaching, many, including Devadatta, have the impression that they too are defecting to join the schismatics. Devadatta expresses his delight and invites them to preach Dharma to his monks, while Devadatta himself, complaining of a backache, decides to stretch his back, but falls asleep "tired, forgetful and inattentive."

Śāriputra exhorts the monks with the wonders of his thought-reading and Maudgalyāyana instructs using the wonders of his psychic powers. Following their teachings, all the 500 schismatic monks realize the Dharma-eye that "whatever is of the nature to arise, all that is of the nature to cease." By the time Kokālika realizes what has happened and wakens Devadatta up by kicking him on the chest, the monks are well back in the Bamboo Grove with the Buddha. It is said that Devadatta, in his rage, spew forth hot blood and for nine months lie grievously ill (Cv 7.2-4 = V 2:184-203; DhA 1:143; J 1:491).

When he knows that his end is drawing near, Devadatta expresses his wish to see the Buddha, who sends a reply that it is no more possible in this life. Devadatta, nevertheless, begins his journey on a litter towards Jetavana. On reaching the monastery, he stops at the monastery pond and steps out to wash. As soon as his feet touch the ground, it opens up and swallows him. Some Mahayana sources say that feeling his end approaching, Devadatta desperately makes a last-ditch effort to kill the Buddha by poison-coating his finger-nails to scratch the Buddha's feet (Lamotte 1988:658).

As he falls into the bowels of the earth, he declares that he has no other refuge than the Buddha. The Buddha declares that after spending 100,000 world-cycles in Avīci hell, Devadatta would become the Pratyeka Buddha (Pacceka Buddha) called Aṭṭhissara (or Devarāja, according to the Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra). It is said that it is in view of the last act of Devadatta (taking of refuge) that the Buddha has earlier consented to ordain him (DhA 1:147; Miln 101, 109).¹⁹⁶

11. DEVADATTA AS A GOOD MONK

Although the Pali Jātakas are full of stories of how even in his past lives Devadatta commits evil deeds against the Bodhisattva, the Sanskrit Jātaka, mālā curiously makes no mention of him at all even when it repeats the Jātaka whose Pali versions explicitly name him as the villain. It is also notable that when Faxian mentions the story of the drunken elephant Nālāgiri in his memoirs, he blames the incident not on Devadatta, but on Ajāta, śatru.

Devadatta is Siddhārtha's cousin according to some sources (Mvst 2:22; DhA 3:44; Rockhill 13), but this is not his distinction. Despite stories of childhood rivalry [1:13a], Devadatta does not begin his life in the Sangha as a bad monk. In fact, for some 12 years he is an exemplary monk. The Udāna (U 1.5) records that once when the Buddha is residing in Jetavana, Devadatta is walking with a group of distinguished monks: Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, Mahā Kāśyapa, Mahā Kauṣṭilya, Mahā Kapphina, Mahā Cunda, Aniruddha, Revata and Ānanda. Seeing them from afar, the Buddha says: "Monks, these are brahmins coming, these are brahmins coming." And when asked what he means by "brahmin," he explains:

Awakened ones with fetters gone,
With evil states discarded

¹⁹⁶ See Miln 200 ff. where Nāgasena cites another reason being that Devadatta has done many good deeds in the past.

And behaving ever mindfully—
They are the brahmins in the world. (U 4)

In the Devadatta Sutta II (It 3.10), echoing the Vinaya account, there is a verse that actually mentions Devadatta's good qualities uttered by the Buddha himself, especially these lines:

I heard it said that Devadatta the sage, with mind developed (*bhavit'atta*),
Stood burning as it were with fame. (It 85 f.; V 2:203)

Although the Sutta Nipāta Commentary glosses *bhavit'atta* as “of developed mind through developing the path” (*magga, bhāvanāya bhāvita, citto*, SnA 1:330), in the context of the Devadatta Sutta II in the Iti-vuttaka, it means “developed in the higher knowledge of the absorptions” (*jhānābhiññāhi bhāvita, citto*, ItA 2:100) (*pace* Meagher who erroneously claims that “the expression [*bhāvita, citta*] is used only of Gotama and of the most advanced aspirants to full awakening,” 1975:5).

The Silāyūpa Sutta (Discourse on the Stone Column, A ix,25) gives a rare mention of Devadatta's teachings. The monk Candimāputra (Candimāputta) misquotes Devadatta's teaching regarding meditation and Śāriputra actually quotes Devadatta correctly! (A 4:403 f.)

Although the Milinda,pañha says that Devadatta is “entirely of dark (*kṛṣṇa/kaṇha*) mental states [i.e. of totally evil mind]” and the Bodhisattva is “entirely of bright (*śukla/sukka*) mental states”¹⁹⁷, in many past lives, “Devadatta was exactly the same as the Bodhisattva in regard to renown and adherents, and was sometimes more eminent” and examples from the Jātakas follow (Miln 1:200 ff.). It is even said that

...when Devadatta was established in authority he gave protection to the country districts, had bridges built and rest-houses and halls for (making) merit, he gave gifts according to his desire to recluses and brahmins, beggars, tramps and wayfarers—those with protectors and those without. (Miln 1:204)

12. DEVADATTA'S SECT?

John C. Meagher (now a professor emeritus in Christian theology), in his paper, “Devadatta and Buddhist Origins” (1975), is of the opinion that all the negative reports found in the Pali texts “is an indication the importance of Devadatta as an independent teacher,” supported by the “hidden tradition” about Devadatta

...preserved and made available both to Mahayanist elaboration and orthodox rebuff. At the juncture between the Theravadin tradition concerning the schism and the largely non-Theravadin tradition concerning Devadatta's dignity lies, I believe, an important crossroads in early Buddhist history. (John C. Meagher 1975:9)

There should also be some significance to the fact that Devadatta received royal patronage from Ajātasattu (1975:17), something meriting further investigation by scholars. The existence of a Devadatta Sangha is attested by the Chinese pilgrim Faxian at the beginning of the 5th century in the course of his survey of heterodoxy in India:

In the Middle Kingdom there are ninety-six sorts of views, erroneous and different from our system, all of which recognize this world and the future world (and the connection between them). Each has its multitude of followers, and they all beg their food: only they do not carry the alms-bowl. They also, moreover, seek (to acquire) the blessings (of good deeds) on unfrequented ways, setting up on the road-side houses of charity, where rooms, couches, beds, and food and drink are supplied to travelers, and also to monks, coming and going as guests, the only difference being in the time (for which the parties remain). There are also companies of the followers of Devadatta still existing. They regularly make offerings to the three previous Buddhas, but not to Śākyamuni Buddha. (Foguoji:B 62)

¹⁹⁷ Cf. M 1:389 ff; A 2:230 ff.; Dh 87.

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According to E.J. Thomas (whom Meagher mentions in his footnote), however, this only proves that Faxian knew of a group that “followed Devadatta's rules,” and not that it establishes “the continued existence of Devadatta's followers in complete obscurity for a thousand years” (1951:24). Meagher, however, proposes the possibility

...that a Devadattist version of Buddhism managed to endure in a small and localized form during that period [early 5th century]. That is, I dare say, a more credible hypothesis than the standard alternative that a Gotamist group at some late date rejected its founder, adopted the rules of his arch-enemy, and concentrated its reverence on obscure (and imaginary) predecessor-Buddhas. (1975:10 n27)

Meagher does not think that Devadatta was a schismatic but that he had set up a rival *saṅgha* or order:

The account of the schism has little intrinsic plausibility, and neither of Devadatta's takeover proposals has much of malice about it. To the extent that they represent a rivalry and a difference in ascetic principles, however, they have what is probably a core of historical truth. (1975:10)

The ascetic Siddhārtha was criticized of being “too luxurious” by the Five Monk when he gave up self-mortification and turned to the Middle Way [2:17]. Similarly, the Jains and the Ājīvakas are more ascetic than the monastics of Gautama. As late as the early 7th century, Xuanzang notes the link between Devadatta and ascetic restraint, “albeit of a faded and refined sort.” At *Karṇasuvarṇa*, he reports: “There are three saṅghārāmas [monasteries] in which they do not use thickened milk, following the directions of Devadatta.” (Xiyuji:B 2:201; Beal 1957 1:28 f., 4:408). Other Chinese pilgrims such as Hwui Li and Yen Tsung also make similar remarks about their not using “butter or milk” (Beal 1888:131). From such testimonies, we can deduce that Devadatta's followers, following his teachings, were more ascetic and conservative than Gautama's monastics.

13. PRĀTIMOKṢA AND PAST BUDDHAS

(a) Laity joining Prātimokṣa recitations

Going by the five ascetic rules that Devadatta presented to the Buddha, his sect would also have been vegetarian. The Vinaya also records an interesting incident where Devadatta allows laypeople to join the *upoṣadha* (*uposatha*) assembly for the recitation of the Prātimokṣa (V 2:115). Following the Buddha's instructions of the Buddha, “following the practice of previous Buddhas,” the Prātimokṣa is recited in conclave in the absence of the laity and novices (i.e. those who have not attained the *upasampadā*) (V 1:115, 135). The “secrecy” of the Prātimokṣa recital is discussed in the *Milinda,pañha*, where Nāgasena explains that there is nothing secret about the Dharma (A 1:283):

O king, the reason for the *Pāṭimokkha* being open only to *bhikkhus* is that it is a custom of all previous Buddhas, secondly out of respect for the Vinaya and thirdly out of respect for the *bhikkhus*. Just, O king, as the traditions of warriors are handed down among warriors so it is the tradition of Tathāgatas that the recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha* should take place only among *bhikkhus*. (Miln 1:190-192; Bhikkhu Pesala's tr. Miln:P 54)

(b) Three Past Buddhas

The most interesting hypothesis that Meagher advances is Devadatta's association with the three past Buddhas. In his journals, Faxian notes that Devadatta's followers “regularly make offerings to the three previous Buddhas, but not to Śākyamuni Buddha” (Xiyuji:B 62; T 51,861a). The three Buddhas before Śākyamuni are Krakucchanda (Kakusandha), Kanakamuni (Konāgamana) and Kāśyapa (Kassapa). Meagher rightly notes that “none of the past Buddhas has received much scholarly notice. They are deemed too fanciful to reward investigation. But what...sponsored the fantasy in the first place?” (1975: 12).

Meagher goes on to quote the Chinese pilgrims who tell us of cultic habits of late Buddhist India, and among the startling profusion of shrines, stupas and holy places they find several consecrated to earlier

Buddhas—“not *all* the Tathāgatas on the eventually lengthy list of possible candidates, but the three which are common to all the lists and always given as the latest of the lot: Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa” (1975:12 quoting Beal 1869:201, 147). In 1885, an Aśokan inscription of the year 14 (255) was found at Nigālī Sāgar in Nepal, recording the enlargement of the stupa of Kanakamuni (Bloch 1950: 158).¹⁹⁸ All these data, concludes Meagher, point to:

A “pre-Buddhist” Buddhism, which knew and revered Tathāgatas before Gotama appeared on the scene. It is to that tradition, and to that moment in history, that the story of Devadatta leads us, and it is from that tradition and that moment that it lead onward to the Chinese pilgrims who knew of Devadatta’s stricter dietary rules. (Meagher, 1975:13; my emphasis)

Meagher even hints that this “pre-Buddhist Buddhism” might go back to Indus Valley civilization or earlier. This is an interesting point, especially when we know that India is often referred to as Jambudvīpa (Jambu, dvīpa, “Rose-apple Island-continent”).¹⁹⁹ Geologists tell us that during the earth’s Cenozoic era (the last 65,000,000 years), India was actually an island that, through tectonic movements (shifting of earth-plates) slowly broke off from the supercontinent Pangaea, migrated across the ancient Tethys Sea and crashed into the south Asian littoral resulting in the rise of the Himalayas.²⁰⁰ Could the three ancient Buddhas have arisen during these periods before our time? I have to leave this question to more expert minds.

But what happened to the latter-day Devadatta followers (after the 7th century)? Meagher speculates: “Confined to an arena that produced no texts, a Devadattist Buddhist could later be quietly absorbed into a Mahayana syncretism—or simply sink without a trace as Buddhism vanished from India.” (1975:17 f.)

14. PROBLEM WITH ACADEMIC STUDY

In his article, “Devadatta and Buddhist Origins” (1975), Meagher quotes W.H.D. Rouse’s translation of the Daddara Jātaka (J no. 172), where the translated introduction says that Kokālika’s upper robe (*kāsāva*) is “blue as a bluebell; his outer robe was pure white” (J:C 2:46). The Pali for Rouse’s “blue as a bluebell” is *kaṇṭakuraṇḍaka, vaṇṇa*, “the colour of the *kaṇṭakuraṇḍaka*.” According to Cone’s *A Dictionary of Pali*, *kaṇṭakuraṇḍa(ka)* is “a kind of (yellow) flower.” Rouse’s “pure white” is actually *kaṇikārapuppha, vaṇṇa*, “the colour of the *kaṇikāra* flower.” Cone (DP) says that the *kaṇikāra* is the plant *Premna spinosa*, but which the PED says is *Pterospermum acerifolium*, whose flower is “taken metaphorically as typical emblem of yellow and of brightness” (D 2:iii; M 2:14 = A 5:61; DhA 1:388).

Meagher faithfully quotes Rouse’s Jātaka translation, saying that “Kokālika...made a formal recitation clothed in blue and white” (1975:11). I raise this point because Meagher has based his paper totally on translated works (as in the biblical scholarly tradition). I do not think he has any scholar’s knowledge of Pali or Sanskrit, in which case (in academic terms), his work is at best a “documented research” from a Christian theologian’s viewpoint. Meagher however raises some very important issues in his paper, but he is clearly unfamiliar with the Buddhist texts which he quotes according to the translation pages rather than the original text pages that current scholars of Buddhism as a rule do. All this is understandable, perhaps, since Meagher has probably written this paper in his early years as an academic exercise to supplement the foundation of his vast biblical scholarship (which is his real forte).

ĀṄGULIMĀLA

15. AHIMSAKA

We have seen how Devadatta threatens the unity of the Sangha, the spiritual community and attempts to assassinate the Buddha. It is interesting to notice that in his dealings with Devadatta’s offences and crimes, the Buddha never employs any violent means, but uses only religious exhortation and spiritual friendship. We now turn to another major character in the colourful drama of early Buddhism—one who

¹⁹⁸ J Bloch, *Les Inscriptions d’Aśoka*. (Les Belles Lettres) Paris, 1950.

¹⁹⁹ A 4:396; V 1:30; KvU 99; Vism 1:205 f; Miln 27; VA 1:119; J 1:263; SnA 2:443; VvA 18.

²⁰⁰ However, in the Purāṇic cosmography and Aśokan inscriptions, the term *Jambudvīpa* refers to both India (greater India including parts of Central and West Asia) and the world. Bhattacharyya 1991:157.

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threatens the whole of Kośala with his bloodthirsty violence—and the Buddha *goes* to him. In this case, the Buddha himself neutralizes this violence. This is the story of Aṅgulimāla.

This story of Aṅgulimāla is summarized from the Aṅgulimāla Sutta (M 86) and its Commentary, and the Theragāthā Commentary. Aṅgulimāla (“Finger Necklace”) is the sobriquet of the brigand that the Buddha converts in the 20th year of his Ministry, and who later becomes an arhat. He is the son of the brahmin Bhārgava (Bhaggava) with the *gotra* name of Gārgya (Garga), a chaplain (*purohita*) to Prasenajit, the king of Kośala, and his mother is Maitrāyaṇī (Mantānī). He is born under the constellation of thieves, and on the night of his birth all the weapons and armour in the city glow brightly, including those of the king. Since the weapons and armour harm no one, he is called Ahimsaka, the Harmless.

At Tarkaśilā (Takkaśilā, modern Taxila in Gandhāra, Pakistan), Ahimsaka becomes a favourite at the teacher's house. His jealous fellow-students poison his teacher's mind about alleged improprieties he has committed with the teacher's wife. The unwise teacher falls for the talk but fearing that his reputation would suffer if he kills Ahimsaka, turns to a more subtle means of disposing him. He asks Ahimsaka for an honorarium of 1000 human fingers. By this the teacher hopes somehow Ahimsaka would get killed in process of killing.

After initial protests, Ahimsaka respects his teacher's wish. After killing his victims, he makes a garland or necklace of fingers, one from each victim. Hence, his name of Aṅgulimāla. When people stop venturing into the forest he haunts, he goes into the villages to find victims. Village after village become deserted as a result. The populace appeals to the king to capture the brigand and stop the carnage. The king sends his soldiers out to find the brigand. However, no one knows his real name.

Aṅgulimāla's mother, however, guessing the truth and out of motherly love, starts out to warn him. By this time, he has collected 999 fingers and only needs one more to complete his quest. Through his divine eye, the Buddha sees Aṅgulimāla's mother walking into the forest. Aṅgulimāla would have killed his own mother in a final frenzy to complete his deadly garland. Moreover, the Buddha knows that he is ready for conversion.

16. STANDING STILL

When Aṅgulimāla sees the Buddha walking alone in the forest, he is wickedly surprised: for, others, in their fear, have traveled in pairs or in groups. Moreover, this final “victim” is a harmless ascetic; so fate is smiling on him. But as he runs after the Buddha, he seems to be still the same distance ahead. Despite Aṅgulimāla's swiftness that can outrun horses and chariots, he is unable to catch up with the Buddha walking at a normal pace! Finally, he shouts out in exhausted desperation:

Stop, recluse! Stop, recluse!
I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla. You stop, too.

Perplexed by the answer, Aṅgulimāla begs for an explanation: The Buddha replies:

Aṅgulimāla I have stopped forever,
I abstain from violence towards all living beings,
But you have no restraint towards things that live—
That is why I have stopped and you have not.

Oh, at long last, a venerable sage
Has come to this great forest for my sake.
Having heard your stanza teaching me the Dharma,
I will indeed abandon a thousand crimes! [18]

So saying, the brigand took his sword and weapons
And flung them down into a gaping chasm.
The brigand worshipped the Well-gone One's feet,
And then and there asked for the going-forth.

The Enlightened One, the Sage of Great Compassion,

The Teacher of the world with its gods,
Addresses him with these words: “Come, O monk!”
And that was how he became a monk. (M 2:99 f.; Tha 866-870)

Āṅgulimāla is converted by the Buddha through one of his most common skillful means: word-play.²⁰¹ In this case, the Buddha plays on the word *tiṣṭhati* (*tiṭṭhati*), meaning to stand or to stop. Āṅgulimāla only knows the physical sense of the term when he demands that the Buddha “stop.” The Buddha answers giving the same word a spiritual dimension, meaning “liberation from violence and defilements.”

Back in Jetavana, the Buddha meets king Prasenajit with a large band of soldiers looking for Āṅgulimāla. The Buddha then asks,

“Maharajah, suppose you were to see that Āṅgulimāla had shaved off his hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, renounced the world, and keeping the precepts—what would you do?”

“Venerable sir, I would pay homage to him, show him respect, and invite him to accept the four requisites. But, venerable sir, he is an immoral man, one of evil character. How could he ever have such virtue and restraint?”

Then extending his right arm, the Buddha announces: “Maharajah, this is Āṅgulimāla!” The king is understandably shocked and terrified, but the Buddha calms him down. The king then asks Āṅgulimāla his real name and is told that his father is Gārgya (Gagga) and his mother is Maitrāyaṇī (Mantāṇī), and so, out of respect, he is called Gārgya Maitrāyaṇī,putra (Gagga Mantāṇī,putta).

The relieved king offers the four requisites to Āṅgulimāla, but he turns them down as he is now a wandering forest monk living on almsfood, wearing dust-heap rag-robles and limiting himself to the triple robe [6:15].

17. ĀṅGULIMĀLA PARITTA

One morning, while the venerable Āṅgulimāla is on his almsround, he sees a woman having problems with her delivery (P. *mūḷha,gabbha vighāta,gabbha*).²⁰² Moved by compassion, Āṅgulimāla returns to the Buddha and reports the incident. The Buddha teaches him how to heal her by an “act of truth” (*satya,-kriyā/sacchikiriya*). Āṅgulimāla goes back to the woman in pain and recites this asseveration, which came to be known as the Āṅgulimāla paritta (Āṅgulimāla’s protection):

*Yato’haṃ bhagini ariyāya jātiyā jāto
nābhijānāmi sañcicca paṇaṃ jīvita voropetā
tena saccena sotthi te hotu sotthi gabbhassa.*

Sister, since my birth as a Noble Lineage,
I have not willfully deprived (any) living being
of life:
By this truth may you be well, may your unborn
child be well! (M 2:102 f)

Then the woman and the child become well. This *paritta* is still popular today amongst Theravada Buddhists (Gombrich 1971:224).

Āṅgulimāla’s compassion for the pregnant woman and her wellbeing thereafter, and many other such episodes of compassion involving the Buddha and his monks, testify that “other-power” (one’s compassion for others) does work (depending, of course, on the helper’s level of spirituality). To meet a person of great spirituality like the Buddha or an arhat (or even a stream-winner) clearly helps one in one spiritual development. Āṅgulimāla is a good case in point, as also is the case of Milarepa, said to be his Tibetan counterpart (Masfield 1986:92). Masfield’s *Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism* (1986) is a groundbreaking study in the role of the Buddha’s “other-power” in the disciples’ attaining of spiritual liberation.

Past karma ripening

²⁰¹ See my lecture on “The Teaching Methods of the Buddha” (2001 esp. 22:3e). See www.dharma.per.sg for download.

²⁰² I.B. Horner renders this phrase as “in difficult and dangerous labour” (M:H 2:288), but Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli has “giving birth to a deformed child” (M:Ñ 714).

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Āṅgulimāla then goes into spiritual retreat to intensify his practice and in due course gains arhathood. One morning as he is on his almsround, some people attack him with clods of earth, sticks, and potsherds, leaving his head bleeding, his bowl broken and his robe torn. Seeing him coming in the distance, the Buddha consoles him, saying: "Bear it, brahmin! Bear it, brahmin! You are now experiencing here and now the result of deeds because of which you might have been tortured in hell for many years, for hundreds of years, for thousands of years."

Āṅgulimāla's encounter with the Buddha helps the latter turn his life around towards spiritual liberation. The sufferings that Āṅgulimāla suffers here are the last remnants of his past evil deeds. With the exhaustion of the effects of such karma, all his other karma, too, become "superseded" or "defunct" (P. *ahosi kamma*). We shall discuss this topic again in connection with the Buddha himself below [27-28].

Later, in his spiritual solitude, enjoying the bliss of his deliverance, make these utterances:

Let my enemies hear discourses on the Dharma,
Let them be devoted to the Buddha's Teaching,
Let my enemies wait on those people
Who lead others to accept the Dharma.

Let my enemies give ear from time to time
And hear the Dharma of those who preach forbearance,
Of those who speak as well in praise of kindness,
And let them follow up that Dharma with kind deeds.

For surely then they would not wish to harm me,
Nor would they think of harming other beings,
So those who would protect all, weak or strong,
Let them attain the all-surpassing peace.

(M 2:105; Tha 874-876)

18. WHO WAS ĀṅGULIMĀLA?

The last chapter of the remarkable book, *How Buddhism Began* (1996) by Richard Gombrich, is entitled "Who was Āṅgulimāla?" In his 1997 review of Gombrich, Bhikkhu Bodhi remarks that the background stories of Āṅgulimāla as given by the Commentators (Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla) are so improbable "that any reflective reader has to conclude either that the story is sheer legend or that the original reason for Āṅgulimāla's life of crime has been irretrievably lost" (JBE 4 1997:296). Gombrich thinks that he has discovered the real story hidden behind the garbled text of one of Āṅgulimāla's verses, and proposes a few emendations to it (M 2:100 = Tha 868).

In his paper, Gombrich discusses some problems the Commentators face, and tries to conflate the accounts given in the Majjhima Commentary (MA 3:328-381) and the Theragāthā Commentary (ThaA 3:54-56) in trying to iron out their inconsistencies (1996:137-142). In this regard, Gombrich concludes:

According to Buddhaghosa, he [Āṅgulimāla] is explicitly ordered to kill a thousand people (though I do not understand why the text refers to them as a thousand legs [*jaṅghā*, MA]), and the fingers come in late as a mere counting device. Dhammapāla evidently found this too absurd and tried to make the teacher ask him directly for fingers. Even he, however, was not very successful in achieving coherence, if the text is to be trusted, because a thousand fingers from right hands could be supplied by two hundred people, and getting them would not necessarily involve killing. Both versions then resort to a ludicrous account of why the brigand decided to wear the fingers round his neck. No one considers how vast and bulky a necklace of a thousand fingers would be.

(Gombrich, 1996:142)

The most interesting and important point—a ground-breaking discovery—is found in his following proposal for the reconstruction of this verse of the Āṅgulimāla Theragāthā:

cirassaṃ vata me mahito
so 'ham cajjissāmi sahassa, pāpaṃ

mahesi mahāvanaṃ samaṇo paccupādi
sutvāna gāthaṃ tava dhamma, yuttaṃ

(Tha 868 PTS ed.)

Oh, at long last, a venerable sage | Has come to this great forest for my sake.
Having heard your stanza teaching me the Dharma, | I will indeed abandon a thousand evils!

Gombrich proposes the following emendations and translation:

<i>cirassaṃ vata me maheso</i>	<i>mahāvanam pāpuṇi sacca,vāḍi</i>
<i>so 'ham cajissāmi sahassa,pāpaṃ</i>	<i>sutvāna gātham tava dhamma,yuttaṃ</i>

For a long time to fulfil a vow I have been honouring Śiva. You have arrived in the forest, speaking truth. So I shall give up my thousand crimes, for I have heard your verse, which teaches what is right.
(Gombrich 1996:154; my emphases)

"It only remains to point out," concludes Gombrich, "that the first three verses would make sense as a summary account of Aṅgulimāla's conversion without positing the miraculous element that he was running fast but could not catch the walking Buddha. That piece of the story could have arisen as a mere over-interpretation of the word play." (id.)

19. RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

The story of Aṅgulimāla has inspired social workers and social thinkers. For example, the prison chaplaincy programme of the Forest Hermitage (Lower Fulbrook, Warwickshire, UK) is called Aṅgulimāla (www.angulimala.org.uk). David Loy (Faculty of International Studies, Bunkyo University, Japan) has published a thought-provoking socially-engaged article on "How to Reform a Serial Killer: The Buddhist approach to restorative justice" (JBE 7 2000:145-168).

In his article, Loy shows the disadvantages of retributive justice, where the offender is punished to "serve the purposes of the state better than the needs of offenders and their victims" (145). Why do we punish? Loy provides three types of justification: the harm of punishment is outweighed by some greater good (for example, it deters others); punishment does not really harm offenders (because it reforms them); and harming offenders is good in itself (because retribution "annuls the crime"). However, each of these arguments has its own problems.

The first argument (that the harm of punishment is outweighed by some greater good) is a utilitarian one, but it seems immoral to harm someone because we want to influence others' behaviour—it could justify scapegoating innocents. The second argument (that punishment does not really harm offenders) may have some force but is not usually true today. The RAND Corporation report *Prisons versus Probation in California* found that recidivism is actually higher for offenders sent to prison than for similar offenders on probation. "This should not surprise us," remarks Loy,

Śākyamuni emphasized the importance of good friends, but if we look at prisons from that perspective, the predatory societies that they encourage make most of them more like hell than places to repent and reform.
(Loy, 2000:146)

Buddhism stresses on spiritual friendship as the foundation of any healthy relationship: spiritual friendship is "the whole of the holy life" (S 1:87 ff., 5:2 f.) [5:3-5]. In other words, what Buddha does for people like Aṅgulimāla is "to help reform his or her character" (Loy, 2000:150). For this reason, king Prasenajit marvels at the Buddha: "Venerable sir, we ourselves could not tame him with force or weapons, yet the Blessed One has tamed him without force or weapons." (M 2:102).

Aṅgulimāla becomes what he is—a bloodthirsty serial killer—not so much because of his past karma as it is due to present conditions. From an innocent, diligent and popular student he turns into a killing machine in deference to his foolish teacher's demands, a guru who acts upon rumours. Aṅgulimāla becomes a serial killer, and in so doing he creates new unwholesome karmic tendencies. It is important to understand such habitual tendencies (an important aspect of karma)—also called *saṃskāra/saṅkhāra*—"not as tendencies we have, but as tendencies we are: instead of being 'my' habits, their interaction is what constitutes my sense of 'me'." (Loy, 2000:156 f.).

The point of this interpretation is that we are punished not for our sins, but by them. People suffer or benefit not for what they have done, but for what they have become, and what we

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intentionally do is what makes us what we are. This conflation makes little sense if *karma* is understood dualistically as a kind of moral “dirt” attached to me, but it makes great deal of sense if I am my habitual intentions, for then the important spiritual issue is the development of those intentions. In that case, my actions and my intentions build/rebuild my character just as food is assimilated to build/rebuild my physical body. If *karma* is this psychological truth about how we construct ourselves—about how my sense-of-self is constructed by “my” greed, ill-will, and delusion—then we can no longer accept the juridical presupposition of a completely self-determined subject wholly responsible for its own actions. Again, we can no longer justify punishment as retributive, but must shift the focus of criminal justice to education and reformation.

(Loy, 2000:157)

At best, we can say that secular justice deals mainly with crimes on a symptomatic and punitive level, whereas Buddhism tries to look at the individual from a radical and restorative perspective. This is clear from the Buddhist foundation of mind-training; for when we truly understand how the mind works, then we are on the way to root out the problem at the source. In short, it is not a case of social control, but rather one of personal control, the conquest of one's own mind.

THE BUDDHA'S KARMA

20. PHYSICAL DEPRIVATION AND ILLNESS

(A) PHYSICAL DEPRIVATION

In this final category of the Buddha's “bad karma,” we shall examine the physical deprivations and illnesses that plague the Buddha. There are only two accounts of physical deprivation recorded in the Pali texts: the Bodhisattva's six years of self-mortification (eg M 1:77 ff., 240 ff.) and the Verañjā famine (V 3:1 ff.). I have already mentioned the Bodhisattva's self-mortification [2:15].

The Verañjā famine incident, which occurs in the 12th year of the Ministry (AA 2:124; cf. BA 3), opens the Sutta Vibhaṅga of the Vinaya, where the Buddha and his monks reside in Verañjā for the rains, honouring the request of the brahmin Verañja.

However, due to the famine, there is difficulty in getting almsfood. Moreover, the host, the brahmin Verañja, and the inhabitants of the town, it is said, are overcome by a spiteful Māra so that they forget their obligation (VA 1:178 f; DhA 2:153; cf. J 3:494). Maudgalyāyana offers to use his psychic powers to obtain food, but the Buddha forbids it. So they are left with eating crude grain (*yava*) meant for the horses, which Ānanda carefully prepares by pounding it before giving it to the Buddha. (V 3:5-7)

(B) THE BUDDHA'S ILLNESSES

There are, however, a number of occasions when the Buddha suffers from various ailments. Both the Majjhima Nikāya and the Saṃyutta Nikāya mention occasions when the Buddha suffers a debilitating back-ache. The first occasion is recorded in the Sekha Sutta (M 53) where the Buddha and the Order are residing in Nigrodha's Park in Kapilavastu. Before retiring to rest his back, the Buddha instructs Ānanda to teach the assembled Śākyas on the Learner's training (*sekhā, paṭipadā*) (M 1:354).

The second occasion is recorded in the Avassuta Sutta (S 35.243) in the same location in Kapilavastu, and the Buddha instructs Maudgalyāyana to exhort the assembly while he rests (S 4:184). The Saṃyutta Commentary explains that during the six years of self-mortification, the Bodhisattva experiences great bodily pain. In old age, for example, he suffers from back winds (*piṭṭhi, vāta*, rheumatism?) (SA 3:52).

Here also we might add the bleeding wound on the Buddha's foot caused by the splintering of the rock hurled by Devadatta [7]. There are two sutras, both entitled “Discourse on the Splinter”—Sakalikā Sutta I (S 1.38) and Sakalikā Sutta II (S 4.13)—dealing with this incident. In the Sakalikā Sutta I (S 1.38), the Buddha, after being hurt by the rock splinter, rests in the Madra, kukṣi (Maddakucchi) Deer Park at Rājagṛha, and

...severe pains assailed the Blessed One—bodily feelings that were painful, racking, sharp, piercing, harrowing, disagreeable. But the Blessed One endured them, mindful and fully aware, without becoming distressed. Then the Blessed One had his outer robe folded in four, and he lay

down on his right side in the lion posture with one leg overlapping the other, mindful and circumspect. (S 1:27)

Then late in the night, he is visited by numerous devas who sing their admiration and praises to him.

The setting of the Sakalīkā Sutta II (S 4.13) is the same as the Sakalīkā Sutta I, but the interlocutor this time is none other than Māra the Evil One himself. As the Buddha is resting in the lion posture, Māra addresses him:

Do you lie down in a daze or drunk on poetry?
Don't you have sufficient goals to meet?
Alone in a secluded lodging,
Why do you sleep with a drowsy face?

[The Blessed One:]

I do not lie in a daze or drunk on poetry;
Having reached the goal, I am rid of sorrow.
Alone in a secluded lodging
I lie down full of compassion for all beings.

Even those with a dart stuck in the breast
Piercing their heart moment by moment—
Even those here, stricken, get to sleep;
So why should I not get to sleep
When my dart has been drawn out?

I do not lie awake in dread,
Nor am I afraid to sleep,
The nights and days do not afflict me,
I see for myself no decline in the world.
Therefore I can sleep in peace,
Full of compassion for all beings.

(S 1:110 f.)

21. THE BUDDHA'S HEADACHES

Walters apparently only lists the physical deprivations and illnesses of the Buddha as recorded in the Canon. On the other hand, the Dhammapada Commentary, for example, records the Buddha suffering from headache. Walters could have omitted this story because it has to do with present causal condition rather than past karma, as we shall presently see in the story of Virūḍhaka (Viḍudabha) [Chapter 8].

When king Prasenajit asked for a Śākya maiden in marriage, he was deceitfully given Vṛṣabha, kṣatriyā (Vasabhā Kṣatriyā), daughter of the Śākya Mahānāma by a slave woman named Nāgamuṇḍa (J 1:133). When the young Virūḍhaka, the unfortunate child of Prasenajit and Vṛṣabha, kṣatriyā, discovered the intrigue, he vowed vengeance on the Śākyas for their deceit.

When Virūḍhaka became rajah, he remembered his vow for vengeance and marched out with a large army for Kapilavastu. The Buddha, aware of the impending doom, appeared under a tree with poor shade just within the Śākya border. Just on the other side was a banyan tree with cool shade. When Virūḍhaka invited the Buddha over to the banyan's shade, the Buddha replied: "Be not concerned, Maharajah, the shade of my kinsmen keeps me cool!"

Virūḍhaka took the broad hint, but returned three times, each time meeting the Buddha in the same manner. On the fourth occasion, the Buddha knew that the Śākyas had to face the fruition of old karma. In a past life, they had poisoned the river.²⁰³ It is said that the Buddha's exposure to the sun on these occasions caused him headaches (*śīrṣa, duḥkha/sīsa, dukkha*) that lasted for the rest of his life (Ap 387,24 = 1:300; UA 265).

²⁰³ Ap 1:300; DhA 1:346-349, 357-361; UA 265; cf J 1:133, 4:146 f, 151 f. This could be construed as "group karma". But see James P. McDermott, "Is There Group Karma in Theravāda Buddhism?" *Numen* 23,1 1976:67-80.

22. THE LAST DAYS

The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) mentions two occasions of physical illness of the 80-year-old Buddha during his last days. The first episode of illness occurs in Bilva (Beluva) [10:7a] during the rains:

...the Lord was attacked by a severe sickness, with sharp pains as if he were about to die. But he endured all this mindfully, clearly aware and without complaining. He thought: "It is not fitting that I should attain final Nirvana without addressing my followers and taking leave of the Order of Monks. I must hold this disease in check by energy and apply myself to the force of life." He did so and the disease abated. (D 2:99)

The second episode, a more serious attack, occurs in Pāpā (Pāvā) [10:13], after the Buddha has consumed some "pig's delight" (*sūkara,mārdava/sūkara,maddava*)²⁰⁴ offered by Cunda the smith. Apparently, the Buddha knows the nature of the "pig's delight," for when the meal is being served, he instructs that it only be served to him and the rest to be buried in a pit, because, "Cunda, I can see no one in the world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its princes and people who, if they were to eat it, could thoroughly digest it except, the Tathagata." (D 2:128).²⁰⁵ Later, after his meal that includes the "pig's delight,"

...the Lord was attacked by a severe sickness with bloody diarrhoea, and with sharp pains as if he were about to die. But he endured all this mindfully and clearly aware, and without complaint. (D 2:128)

The Buddha and the Order then head for Kuśinagarī, some 80 km southeast from Pāpā. As before, they all journey on foot.²⁰⁶

BAD KARMA AS REASON FOR THE BUDDHA'S SUFFERING

23. PUBBA,KAMMA,PILOTI

Almost all the texts we have discussed so far come from the earliest strata of the Buddhist Canon. As such, the problem of the Buddha's sufferings is as old as Buddhism itself. However, none of these texts even hint that the Buddha's sufferings are due to his past karma, "nor even that they considered the fact of the Buddha suffering to be in any way problematic. Moreover, there is no evidence in these texts that these disparate unpleasant events were contemplated together, as a category." (Walters 1990:75)

However, before the Pali Canon was closed at the Council of Pāṭaliputra, said to be held during Aśoka's time, there was at least one comprehensive effort at explaining the unpleasant aspects of the Buddha's life categorically, and explaining them as the effects of the Buddha's own bad karma. The result of this effort is called the Pubba,kamma,piloti, "The Strands (or Rags) of Previous Karma," included as no. 387 of the Thera Apadāna of the Khuddaka Nikāya.

Oddly enough, the Pubba,kamma,piloti is placed in the section of the Apadāna devoted, not to the Buddha, but to biographies of famous monks. The colophon, however, places it in the Buddhāpadāna section of the same text which, as its name implies, contains a cosmic biography of the Buddha spanning countless world-cycles of self-perfection, and thus paralleling the Jātaka collection, but in a greatly abbreviated form.²⁰⁷

24. PAST BAD KARMA OF THE BUDDHA

The Piloti opens at Anavatapyā (Anotatta) Lake with the Buddha addressing the monks:

²⁰⁴ Cf D:W 571 n417.

²⁰⁵ Cf Lamotte 1976:313 f.).

²⁰⁶ See Chapter 10: "Was the Buddha Poisoned?" for more details on the Buddha's last journey.

²⁰⁷ See Walters 1990:75 f & n13 on possible reasons for this placement

Near the Anotatta Lake, on the delightful rocky ground, where various gems were sparkling and various sweet scents [were exuded] in the forest, the Lord of the World, surrounded by a huge community of monks, sitting down, then explained his own previous karma: “Hear from me, O monks, the karma produced by me [and] the ripening of strands of karma in the Buddha himself.”
(Walter’s prose tr. of verses 1-3, 1990:76)

It is interesting to note here than this is the only sutra attributed to the Buddha himself that is located on the shore of Anavatapta Lake, located high up in the Himālayas.

The remaining 30 verses of the *Piloti* relate the 12 previous lives of the Bodhisattva in which he performed various evil deeds, described in the briefest manner. Here is a summary of the Bodhisattva’s 12 evil deeds of the past (Ap 1:299-301):

- (1) The scoundrel Munāli who slandered an innocent Pratyeka Buddha named Surabhi. Past result (P. *tena kamma, vipākena*): he was reborn in hell (*niraye*) for a long time, experiencing thousands of years of pain. Present karmic remnants (P. *tena kammāvasena*): The female wanderer Sundarī slanders against him [2; 6:4].
- (2) He slandered against Nanda, a disciple of Sarvābhibhū (Sabbābhibhū) Buddha. Past result: Ten thousand years in hell, and after that as a human, continued to be plagued by slanders. Present remnants: The female wanderer Ciñcā Māṇavikā slanders against him [3].
- (3) A learned brahmin, teaching mantras to 500 youths in a great forest: He slanders against a sage named Ṛṣi,gaṇa (Isigaṇa) of unchastity, and his pupils, hearing the slander, repeat it in the village as they went on their almsround. Result: They all suffer slander when Sundarī is murdered [2; 6:4].
- (4) Greedy for wealth, the Bodhisattva murdered his own half-brother by crushing him with a rock. Result: His cousin, Devadatta, throws a boulder at him and a splinter wounds his foot [7].
- (5) As a boy playing on the road, he threw a shard at a passing Pratyeka Buddha. Result: Devadatta employs thugs to kill him [7].
- (6) Mounted on an elephant, he attacked a Pratyeka Buddha going for alms. Result: Nālāgiri rushes at him in Rājagṛha [7].
- (7) As the unrighteous king Pathiva, he killed a man with a knife. Past result: Suffers “roasting” in hell. Present karmic remnants: After the splint from Devadatta’s boulder hurts his foot, it becomes infected [7].
- (8) As the son of a fisherman, he felt happiness upon seeing the fishermen bring in dead fish. Result: Headaches, and his clansmen, the Śākya are massacred by Virūḍhaka (Viḍudabha) [21].
- (9) He cursed the disciples of Puṣya (Phussa) Buddha, saying: “No rice for you—chew and eat bad grain.” Result: At Verañjā, the Buddha has to live on coarse grain [20b].
- (10) As the son of a wrestler, he interrupted a wrestling match (and according to the Commentary, broke the back of one of the wrestlers in the process). Result: Backaches [20b].
- (11) As a physician, he (mistakenly) administered a purge on the son of a millionaire. Result: Diarrhoea [22].
- (12) As Jyotipāla (Jotipāla), he reviled Kāśyapa Buddha: “Where did this baldy get his awakening, the awakening so difficult to obtain?” Result: Performs 6 years of self-mortification before gaining his own awakening [2:15].

In many ways, the *Piloti* is unique. I have already mentioned that this is the only sutra attributed to the Buddha himself that is located on the shore of Anavatapta Lake in the Himālayas. It is the only Apadāna text that focuses on bad karma and its unpleasant results. (The Sanskrit Avadāna, however, have accounts of both types of karma.) More important, for our purposes here, the *Piloti* is the only text in the Pali Canon that explains the Buddha’s sufferings as a result of his bad karma and attributing past-life episodes to explain them.

Walters goes on to say that “[t]here are in fact good reasons to suspect that *Pubbakammapiḷoti* has its origins in a ‘Hīnayāna’ tradition other than the Theravāda (eg, the Sarvāstivāda or Mahāsaṅghika).” (1990:77). In fact, the term *kamma, piloti* does not appear in the Pali Canon or Commentaries, except in reference to this text. The Sanskrit form, *karma, ploti*, however, is found in the Divyāvadāna of the Sarvāstivādins. A few of the past stories are found in the Mahāvastu of the Mahāsaṅghikas (Mvst 1:29 ff.). It is likely, concludes Walters, that the author of the *Piloti* “drew his account, and his position, from non-Theravādin schools of the ‘Hīnayāna’.” (1990:77-79).

DENIALS OF KARMIC EXPLANATION OF THE BUDDHA'S SUFFERINGS

25. MILINDA, PAÑHA & BUDDHAGHOSA

Once the Pubba, kamma, piloti came to be included in the Canon, it became the basis for debate that raged during the Commentarial Period and later. We shall summarize the opposing sides of the debate, that is, the Milinda, pañha and Buddhaghosa on the one side, and Dhammapāla on the other. The Milinda, pañha, however, generally affirms the Apadāna position that even spiritually advanced people might suffer because of bad karma.

The antagonist king Milinda asks how Maudgalyāyana, if truly an arhat and chief among those skilled in psychic powers, could have been murdered so brutally as maintained by hagiographical tradition. The dilemma is this: *if Maudgalyāyana was chief amongst those possessing psychic powers, it must be false that he suffered so terribly. Or, if it be true that he was beaten to death with clubs, then the Buddha was mistaken in declaring him chief among those with psychic powers.*

Nāgāsena, the protagonist in the Milinda, pañha, explains the dilemma of Maudgalyāyana's tragic death by stating that the effects of karma are greater than anything, even arhathood and its fruit:

That, O king, was because he was then overwhelmed by the greater power of *kamma*. Even among things which are beyond the scope of the imagination one may be more powerful than the others. Among things which are unimaginable *kamma* is the most powerful. It is precisely the effect of *kamma* which overcomes and rules the rest, for no other influence is of any avail to the man in whom *kamma* working out its inevitable result. Just as a man who has been found guilty of a crime will be punished and there is nothing his relatives may do to prevent it.

(Miln 1:189, Bhikkhu Pesala's tr. 1991:54)

The Jātakas show that, in the case of Devadatta, there is the common operation of both good and bad karma [11]. The Milinda, pañha similarly affirms this but give no hint whatsoever of the Piloti standpoint (that is, the evil result of bad karma):

...all beings who are carried along in the endless round of rebirths meet with pleasant and unpleasant companions just as water whirled along in a river meets with pure and impure things.

(Miln 1:204, Bhikkhu Pesala's tr. 1991:57 f)

The Milinda, pañha is quite clear about the Buddha's overcoming his unwholesome karma. When Milinda asks: "Did the Tathāgata attain omniscience when he had burnt up all his unwholesome karma, or did he attain while he had some unwholesome karma remaining?" Nāgāsena replies that "He had burned out all unwholesome karma." (Miln 1:134).

As regards the Buddha's foot being hurt by the flying splinter, Nāgāsena first explains that some bodily pain arises from external natural causes as well as karma. The Buddha's pain here, however, is caused only by external natural conditions and also by external human agency (Devadatta) (Miln 1:136), in other words, not because of bad karma.

The Milinda, pañha is the first Buddhist work to explicitly deny that Gautama has no bad karma, both as a Bodhisattva and as Buddha. Buddhaghosa, the 5th century Indian Commentator working in Sri Lanka, too, explains the Buddha's backache by providing non-karmic causes:

Why did it [his back] pain him? The Blessed One, who had devoted himself to the great exertion for six years [as an ascetic], had a great deal of bodily suffering. Later on, when he was very old, he had back trouble. That [backache] had no karmic cause (*akaraṇa*). (SA 3:52)

The Dhammapada Commentary (by Buddhaghosa) retells several of the stories of unpleasant events in the Buddha's biography without the slightest hint that the Buddha's own bad karma was involved. For example, Sundari's slander, is caused by the jealousy of the wanderers (DhA 3:474 ff.). Cīñcā Māṇavika's slander, too, is explained in the same manner (DhA 3:178ff.). Similarly, the Devadatta cycle of stories portrays him as the cause of the Buddha's suffering and not bad karma (DhA 1:133 ff.). Similarly, the deprivations the Buddha and the monks faced in famine-struck Verañjā is not caused by the

Buddha's bad karma but those of the 500 monks themselves (DhA 6.8; J no. 183). In short, the Buddha's deprivations and pains are not caused by his bad karma. (But see DhA 3:512 which actually supports the "bad karma" explanation.)

REBUTTALS AGAINST KARMIC EXPLANATION OF THE BUDDHA'S SUFFERINGS

26. DHAMMAPĀLA

Some Commentators and later editors are less willing to ignore the Pubba,kamma,piloti that the early elders, after all, included in the Canon, and which they regarded as Buddha Word. Moreover, the Canon usually favours the karmic explanation, but the texts that rebut the denials of karmic explanations for the Buddha's sufferings never mention the Piloti. The manner in which they elaborate the simple Piloti references, however, "makes clear that they are writing with those denials in mind" (Walters, 1990:84).

In his Commentary to the Udāna, the earliest canonical text telling the Sundarī story, Dhammapāla clearly supports the karmic cause of the Buddha's problem:

All his sufferings, beginning with the slander of the Blessed One by deceitful women like Ciñcā Māṇavikā and so forth, are to this extent conditioned by the remaining effects of deeds done in past lives, by which are called "karmic strands" (P. *kammāni pilotikāṇi*). [The whole Pubba,kamma,piloti is then quoted.] (UA 263)

Furthermore, Walters notes, Dhammapāla does not simply affirm an old position, but affirms it in the light of the denials which have been made:

[With regard to Sundarī's slanderous accusations,] it is asked: "What was that karma?" The Master, who for an immeasurable period of time carefully heaped up a wide accumulation of merit, received harsh and untrue slander. It is said that this very Blessed One, being a Bodhisatta in a previous birth, was a scoundrel named Munāli. He served evil people, intent on fixing his attention improperly, and roamed about. One day he saw a Pacceka-sambuddha named Surabhi adjusting his robe to enter the city for alms, "This renunciate is a scoundrel, no celibate he." [Munāli/Buddha], because of that karma, roasted in hell for many thousands of years. As the remaining effects of that karma, now, even though he was the Buddha, he received slander because of Sundarī. (U 263; Walters' tr)

Dhammapāla clearly supports the notions of the Piloti, referring his account to a debate over the cause of Sundarī's slander, and states that even though he is Buddha, with all the merit described by the Jātaka, still the Buddha is subject to the effects of his previous bad karma.

27. VISUDDHA,JANA,VILĀSINĪ

The most important rebuttal to the denials of the Buddha's past bad karma is the Commentary on the Piloti itself, that is, the Visuddha,jana,vilāsinī, which gives the Piloti more attention than any of text of the Apadāna collection (Walters 1990:86-88). In doing so, Dhammapāla develops a new Buddhology (conception of the Buddha) and he treats the Pubba,kamma,piloti as part of the Buddhāpadāna section of the text.

For him, the stories about the bad karma and bad effects are part of the same story which tells of good karma and bad effects are part of the same story which tells of good karma and good effects; his is a new conception of the Buddha biography. (Walters 1990:88)

For Dhammapāla, the life of the Buddha is not only a happy account of "ultimately liberating effects of good karma; it is also paradigmatic of every person's ability to get onto the right road, even if he or she be the doer of bad karma" (Walters, id.):

7. The Buddha's bad karma

After asking which road to take, when “avoid the left and take the right” is said, travelers, having gone by that [right] road accomplish their duties in villages, towns and royal cities; but those gone just as far in the same manner on the other, avoided, left road, also [eventually] accomplish their duties in villages, towns, etc. [once they have realized their mistake and returned to the correct road]. In just this way, the *Buddhâpadâna* was set forth because [it exemplified] the wholesome (*kusala*) *apadâna*; there is this problem karma (*pañhakamma*) [i.e. the problems described in *Pubbakammapiṭi*] to detail that [analogous to the left road] because [it exemplifies] the unwholesome (*akusala*) *apadâna*. (ApA 114, Walters' tr. 1990:88)

Like the travelers who, failing to heed the warning of those who know the way, must waste time on the wrong road before realizing their mistake and then get back on the right track, so that the person who acts in an evil manner, not heeding the warning of the Buddha, will, like the Bodhisattva himself, waste time suffering in hell and on earth, but in the end even that evil-doer can also get back on the right road.²⁰⁸

The Milinda,pañha clearly denies the Buddha's bad karma, saying that the Buddha's pain must have been the result of “the fruit of karma or the deed [of Devadatta]” (*kamma,vipākato vā kiriyato vā*) and then proceeds to defend the position (Miln 1:136). Its sub-commentary, the Milinda Ṭīkā, a late mediaeval text from Siam, however, takes the opposite stand by simply explaining that it is “because of the deed” (*kiriyato*) of Devadatta (which is obvious from the context), and glosses: “because of the fruit of karma” (*kamma,vipākato*) by quoting the Pubba,kamma,piloti verse in which the Buddha states that the splinter of rock injured him as the remnant effect of having murdered his half-brother, and continues:

The Thera [Nāgasena] does not have a certain explanation for this problem. Therefore having thought it out, one should accept [whichever answer] is the most appropriate. In that regard [I] am making this investigation. The killing on the road [by the Buddha in a previous life] produced defilements which were not laid hold of in the past, future and present. The talk about [the Buddha having experienced] the cessation of that [karma] which is laid hold of is spoken with reference to future existence. The [painful] feelings were born to the Lord in this present existence. Karma which is to be experienced again and again [*aparāpara,vedaniya,kamma*], cannot be turned back even in Buddhas and Paccekabuddhas. We should therefore take [this as] the most appropriate theory as regards the Thera's [question], “were these pains [of the Buddha's] because of the fruit of the deed or were they reborn [effects of karma]?”

(Mṭ 26 f. Walters' tr. 1990:89)

However, it should be noted that although the commentator upholds the Piloti's position that even Buddhas must experience the effects of past root-karma, he affirms that “with regard to future existence” all bad karma have been exhausted. Even the Buddha (as Buddha) has to finish burning up his karma; but being Buddha, this leaves no residue for rebirth. As such, the Milinda Ṭīkā author postulates a kind of karma which is only experienced without any further karma. Such a karma is technically known as “defunct karma” (P. *ahosi,kamma*).²⁰⁹

28. CONCLUSION

The problem with the Pubba,kamma,piloti is that it seems to show that even though the Bodhisattva committed various bad karma in the past, they were no hindrance to his attaining Buddhahood. If this were the case then the Buddhist ethical system would be undermined to a serious extent. This apparent dilemma, however, is resolved by the stories of the Buddha's biography itself. The sufferings of the Buddha and the arhats show that when the conditions are right, some past bad karma ripen, but they do not adversely affect the enlightened mind as they do the unenlightened.

The lives of the Buddha and his disciples serve as spiritual teachings for us. The life of the Buddha is a cosmos of various spiritual experiences that we must personally face. The lives of the disciples give us a good idea of various personal weaknesses and social realities that we currently experience or are capable of experiencing under the right conditions. This is Indra's Jewel Net of being and interbeing and of ultimate liberation.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Walters 1990:95 n66.

²⁰⁹ Vism 601; Abhs:SR 144 ff.; Abhs:NB 200 ff. For a discussion on some problems of *ahosi,kamma*, see Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*, 1971: ch 5.



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8

THE THUNDEROUS SILENCE

Bimbisāra, Ajātaśatru and Prasenajit

1. MONASTICISM AND MILITARISM

There are two forces that shape our world, whether it was the Buddha's India or our present world. Those forces are war and peace. War and violence began, apparently, when the human species have learned how to use tools with their hands and lived in groups, the bigger the groups the greater the violence amongst them. The large-scale and long-term occurrences of such life-threatening conflict accompanying the quest for power and territorial expansion is called war. The predominance of a military or warrior class, and their ideologies and implementation of warfare to gain power and territory is called militarism.

Around the 6th century BCE, India saw the rise of the military class comprising the *kṣatriya* (*khattiya*), the nobles or barons of ancient India. The other classes were the brahmins (*brāhmaṇa*), the commoners and merchants (*vaiśya/vessa*), and the serfs and artisans (*sūdra'sudda*). Outside these classes were the *mleccha*, the untouchable dark-skinned pre-Aryan indigenous peoples. India of the Buddha's time was dominated by the warrior class, and it was a time, over 2,500 years ago, when the roots of imperial India and the beginnings of modern militarism first appeared and grew.

This militarism was largely fomented by the ancient Indian caste system introduced by the invading Aryan priests to regulate society into a sort of Indian feudal system. Like Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, the Buddha, too, came from the warrior caste. In renouncing the world, they broke away from the caste system, and in their teachings offered spiritual liberation to all without the need for mediating priests. As it were, man could now communicate directly with God and gods. Indeed, in the case of Buddhism, humans could, through their own effort, go beyond castes and priests, to achieve the highest spirituality beyond even God and gods.

At this very same time when militarism was on the rise in India, its very opposite—monasticism—also reached a high point. In this sense, the Buddha arose as a pacifist, one who is against war and militarism. Although the Buddha came from the warrior caste, he discovered that the best alternative to violence and war is the unshakable inner peace of the mind.

Bimbisāra of Magadha

2. ŚREṆIKA BIMBISĀRA

(a) Magadha

Political struggle during the Buddha's time was centred around the control of the Ganges Valley. The states or "countries" (*janapada*) of Kāśi, Kośala, Magadha and the Vṛjī confederacy fought for this control for a century until Magadha (south Bihār) emerged victorious, mainly due to its excellent geographical location that controlled the lower Ganges. The first kings of Magadha belonged to the Haryanka family (Buc 11.2), which was haunted by a dark shadow—that of parricide. In order to gain the throne more quickly, the crown princes regularly put their fathers to death.

The greatest success in the unification of the central Gangetic plain was carried out by the ambitious king Śreṇika Bimbisāra (Seṇiya Bimbisāra, 60-8 BBE = 546-494 BCE; or c.558-491 BCE) who acceded to the throne at the age of 15, around 543 or 546 BCE (according to modern scholars). Bimbisāra carried out a policy of matrimonial alliances and contracted unions with the Madra (Madda) ruling families in Kośala and Vaiśālī (capital of the Licchavī republic). His marriage to Kośala,devī ensured him of the possession of part of the district of Vārāṇasī. After defeating king Brahmadatta, he annexed Aṅga—his territory then came to be called Aṅga-Magadha—which gave him free access to the Ganges Delta which was valuable in terms of potential coastal and maritime trade. Neighbouring forests yielded timber for building and elephants for the army. Revenue also came from the fertile lower Gangetic plain and the river trade.

More land was cleared but the agrarian settlements were probably small because ancient literature mention that journeys from one town to another had to be made through long stretches of forest paths. Most important of all, Magadha had rich deposits of iron ore which gave her the lead in technology. Under Bimbisāra, rudimentary ideas of land revenue developed. Each village had a headman who was responsible for collecting taxes, and another group of officials supervised the collection and conveyed the revenue to the royal treasury. The Buddha adopted Bimbisāra's standard coin, the *kāṣāpaṇa* (P. *kahāpaṇa*; Amg *karisāvaṇa*) in the formulation of rules involving money (VA 297).

(b) Rājagṛha

The capital of Magadha was Rājagṛha (Rājagaha), one of the six chief cities in the Buddha's time—the others were Campā, Śrāvastī (Sāvasthī), Sāketa, Kauśāmbī (Kosambī) and Vārāṇasī (D 2:147). Rājagṛha was a beautiful city surrounded by five hills forming a natural defence. It was 5 leagues from the Ganges and watered by the rivers Tapodā and Sarpinī (Sappinī). The city comprised two parts: the ancient hill fortress, Girivraja (Giribbaja) (VvA 82; cf. D 2:235) and the new section. Bimbisāra abandoned the old city because of frequent fires there. Fears of attack by the king of Vaiśālī (Vesālī) hastened the building of new section of the city at the foot of the hill. This new section, that we know as Rājagṛha, was also called Bimbisāra, purī and Magadha, pura (SnA 2:584). Bimbisāra was one of the earliest Indian kings to emphasize an efficient government and his reign saw the beginnings of an Indian administrative system.

The Bamboo Grove (Veṇuvana/Veḷuvana), the first monastery (donated by Bimbisāra), was located in Rājagṛha. By the Buddha's Final Nirvana, there were 18 large monasteries there (VA 1:9), the main ones, besides the Bamboo Grove, being those on Vulture's Peak (Gṛdhra, kūta Parvata/Gijjhakūṭa, pabbata), Vaibhāra Rock (Vaibhāra, vana/Vebhāra, vana, at the foot of which is the Saptapaṇṇa Guhā/Satta, paṇṇa Guhā), the Indra, śaila Cave (Indra, śaila Guhā/Indasāla Guhā), and a mountain cave on the slopes of the Sarpasūṇḍika (Sarpasūṇḍika Prāgbhāra/Sappa, soṇḍika Pabbhāra) in the Sīta, vana (Cool Forest).

3. BIMBISĀRA'S FAMILY

Bimbisāra's chief queen was Kośala, devī, daughter of Mahā Kośala and sister of Prasenajit (J 2:273, 403), 3:121 f). For her marriage, she received a village in Kāśī as bath-money as part of her dowry. Her son was Ajāta, śatru (Ajāta, sattu) [6]. According to the Jains and the Padma Purāṇa, she was called Celanā or Cellanā, the daughter of Triśalā (also called Priya, karṇī), who was Mahāvīra's mother, and brother of Cetaka, the ruler of the Vajjī republic. Bimbisāra was known in Jaina literature as Śreṇika ("front-tooth").

Bimbisāra had other wives as well: Kṣemā (Khemā) and Padmavatī (Padumavatī). Kṣemā was very conscious of her beauty and would not visit the Buddha for fear that he would disparage it. Bimbisāra then had some poets sing the glories of Veṇuvana, as a result of which she was persuaded to visit it. (AA 1:341)

At Veṇuvana, as soon as she sees the Buddha, he projects to her a holographic sequence of a celestial nymph fanning him. As she gazes, entranced by her beauty, the nymph quickly metamorphoses through the stages of life until she becomes an old hag, falls and disintegrates into the dust of death. Then listening to the Buddha exhort on the vanity of lust, she becomes an Arhant. With the consent of Bimbisāra, she joins the Order and becomes foremost of those nuns with great wisdom and the right-hand nun (A 1:25; DhA 4:168 f.; B 26.19; J 1:15 f.; Dīpv 17,9).

Padma, vatī (Paduma, vatī) was a courtesan of Ujjayinī (Ujjenī). Bimbisāra, hearing of her great beauty, had her brought to Rājagṛha to be the "belle of the city" (P. *nagara, sobhīṇī*). She bore him a son, Abhaya Rāja, kumāra who later joined the Order and became an arhat. Hearing him preach, she too became an arhat and joined the Order. On his account, she went by the filinym of Abhaya, mātā (Mother of Abhaya) (ThiA 31 f.).

Bimbisāra had an affair with Āmra, pālī (Amba, pālī), the famed courtesan of Vaiśālī. She bore him a son, Vimāla Kaunḍīnya (Vimāla Koṇḍañña) who became a prominent elder monk (ThaA 1:145 f.).²¹⁰ Hearing him preach, she herself renounced the world and reflecting on her own aging body she gained arhathood (ThiA 205-207.) [Chapter 9].

²¹⁰ Tha 64 contains a riddle ascribed to him.

4. BIMBISĀRA AND THE BUDDHA

The Buddha was five years older than Bimbisāra, and it was not until 15 years after his accession that Bimbisāra heard the Buddha preach and was converted. Although some Buddhist chronicles claim that the parents of both Bimbisāra and the Bodhisattva were friends (MT 137; Dīpv 3:50 ff.), they only met for the first time at Pāṇḍava Parvata (Paṇḍava Pabbata), soon (probably within the year) after the Great Renunciation, as evident from the Pabbajjā Sutta (Sn 405 ff.; J 1:66; DhA 1:85; Rockhill 27) [1:2c, 2:13].

Their second famous meeting was at the Supraṭṭha Caitya (Supaṭṭha Cetiya) in the Sugar-cane Grove (Yaṣṭi, vana-udyāna/Laṭṭhi, van'uyyāna), shortly after the Great Awakening. It was during this second meeting that Bimbisāra donated the Bamboo Grove to the Buddha and the Sangha (V 1:35 ff.; DhA 1:88; AA:SHB 1:166; BA 21).

Bimbisāra was a devotee of the Buddha for a period of 37 years. Tradition has it that he not only did his best for the growth of the Teaching but also set a good example himself by keeping the Upoṣadha precepts on six days of each month (PvA 209). At the request of king Bimbisāra, the Buddha introduced the weekly conclave of the Order, saying: "I allow you, monks, to assemble together on the fourteenth, fifteenth and eighth days of the fortnight." (V 1:101 f)

Later, when some people remarked that the monks who had gathered together, sat in silence "like dumb pigs" (*mūga, sūkara*), and suggested that they spoke Dharma (like other religious), the Buddha allowed such an assembly to speak Dharma. However, in due course, while meditating in seclusion, he decided that it would be good idea for them to recite the Prātimokṣa (V 1:101-104).

It is said that Bimbisāra had the power of judging the status of anyone just by his voice, as in the case of the treasurer Kumbha,ghoṣaka (DhA 1:233). Nothing is said in the Buddhist scriptures about Bimbisāra's destiny, except that he made a wish to become a Once-returner (D 2:206).

5. BIMBISĀRA'S DEATH

Bimbisāra's tragic death was caused by his own son, Ajātaśatru. Even before the birth of Ajātaśatru, soothsayers had predicted that he would bring about the death of his own father. Learning of this, Kośala-devī went to Madra,kuksi (Madda,kucchi), a park near Rājagṛha, at the foot of Vulture's Peak, to abort the child, but failed (SA 1:77; cf J 3:121 f.). The king heard of this and forbade her to go there again.

When the child was born, Bimbisāra showed him the greatest affection. The prince was given the nickname "Ajāta,śatru" (P Ajāta,sattu) because soothsayers had predicted of his enmity against his own father even before his birth, that is, he is the "unborn" (*ajāta*) enemy (*śatru/sattu*). A more generous etymology, however, is one meaning that he would have no enemies (DA 1:133 ff.; J 3:121 f.; D:RD 2:78 f.). According to Tārānātha, the 16th century Tibetan Buddhist historian, his personal name was Kṣema,darśin (*Indian Historical Quarterly*, 3:508).

However, when the prince came of age, Devadatta, seeking to further his own ambitions, won over the impressionable young Ajātaśatru with a show of psychic manifestations [7:5]. He proposed that Ajātaśatru kill Bimbisāra and take over the throne while he himself would take over the leadership of the Sangha from the Buddha. When Ajātaśatru tried to kill Bimbisāra, he was discovered and brought before the king.

Against the advice of his ministers to have Ajātaśatru executed, Bimbisāra, at the age of 65, after 52 or so years of rule (around 491 or 493 BCE), instead abdicated in favour of his ambitious son. When Ajātaśatru ascended the throne of Magadha without killing Bimbisāra, Devadatta chided him, "You are like a man who puts a skin over a drum in which is a rat!" (DA 1:135-137). At Devadatta's instigation, Ajātaśatru imprisoned his father who was left to die from starvation, since no weapon could kill him (probably because he was a stream-winner).

Bimbisāra was imprisoned in a hothouse (*tāpana, gr̥ha/tāpana, geha*) with orders that no one but Ajātaśatru's mother could visit him. During her visits, she hid in her dress a golden vessel filled with food for him. When she was discovered, she hid food in her head-gear; after that, in her footwear. When all these ploys failed, she washed herself in scented water and then smeared her body with the four kinds of sweetness (P. *catu, madhura*): curds, honey, ghee and molasses.²¹¹ Bimbisāra licked the food off her body.

In the end, she was forbidden to visit the king, who then occupied his time by pacing up and down in his cell in meditation. Hearing of this, Ajātaśatru sent barbers to cut open his feet, fill the wounds with salt

²¹¹ Dīgha Abhinava, tīkā Be 2:114.

and vinegar, and burn them with coals. Bimbisāra accepted his punishment without any resentment. In due course, he died a slow painful death and was reborn in the realm of the Four Guardian Kings (P. *cātummahārājika*) as a yaksha name Janavasabha, in the retinue of Vaiśravaṇa (Vessavaṇa). The Janavasabha Sutta (D 18) records an account of the yaksha's visit to the Buddha. According to the Saṅkicca Jātaka, even in a past life, Ajātaśatru had murdered his father (J 5:262 ff.).

Ajātaśatru of Magadha

6. AJĀTAŚATRU

Ajātaśatru (8 BB-24 AB; 493-462 BCE) was the son of Bimbisāra, the rajah of Magadha, and as such, was the half-brother of Abhaya Rāja, kumāra. His mother, Kośala, devī, was a daughter of Mahā, kośala, the rajah of Kośala/Kosala (J 3:121).²¹² Ajātaśatru married Vajrā (Vajirā), daughter of Prasenajit, king of Kośala. She bore Ajātaśatru a son, Udāyi, bhaddra (Udāya, bhadda). Ajātaśatru grew up to be a noble and handsome youth. Devadatta was at that time looking for ways of taking revenge on the Buddha, and seeing in the prince a very desirable weapon, he exerted all his strength to win him to his side. Ajātaśatru was greatly impressed by Devadatta's psychic power, and became his devoted follower.

Ajātaśatru's friendship with Devadatta and consequent hostility against the Buddha and his Order probably found ready support from those who were overshadowed by the Buddha's growing fame, such as the Jains. It is therefore not surprising to find a different version of Bimbisāra's death in the Nirayavali Sutra of the Jains who have tried to free Ajātaśatru from the guilt of parricide.

According to the Jain Sutra, Kūṇika/Koṇika (as they called Ajātaśatru) ordered his father's imprisonment owing to some misunderstanding. Realizing his mistake, Ajātaśatru rushed to the prison with an axe intending to hack through his father's fetters. But Bimbisara, thinking that his son had murderous intentions, took his own life rather than allow his son to be a parricide.²¹³

On the day that Bimbisāra died, a son was born to Ajātaśatru, which greatly pleased him, Ajātaśatru's mother seized the opportunity to relate to him his father's profound love for him. As a child, when Ajātaśatru had an abscess on his finger, his father, although administering justice at that time, personally soothed the child by holding the festering finger in his own mouth. The abscess broke, but as Bimbisāra was holding court, he could not spit, so he swallowed the discharge. (DA 1:138)

On his accession, Ajātaśatru implemented his father's plans to realize the trade potentials of the Ganges delta within thirty years. He strengthened the defences of Rājagṛha, the capital of Magadha. He also ordered a small fort, Pāṭali, grāma, to be built on the Ganges to repel possible attack of the Vṛjīs from the other side of the river Ganges. [9b]

We do not know Ajātasattu's real name. The Nigaṇṭhas (Jains) know him as Kunika or Konika, which again is probably a nickname (D:RD 2:79 n1). The Jains appear to hate Ajātasattu and the reason is probably that given in the Dhammapada Commentary (DhA 3:66 f), where it is said that when Moggallāna had been killed by thieves, spies were sent out by the rajah Ajātasattu to find the murderers. The apprehended murderers confessed that they had been sent by the Nigaṇṭhas. The rajah then buried five hundred Nigaṇṭhas waist-deep in pits dug in the palace court and had their heads ploughed off.

7. THE SIX SECTARIAN TEACHERS

Later, Ajātaśatru, no longer under the evil influence of Devadatta, begins to fear retribution at the hands of his own son, Udāyi, bhaddra. The Sāmañña, phala Sutta (D no. 2) says that one beautiful serene moonlit night, he hopes that his peace of mind could be restored by some saintly ascetic or brahmin. Ajātaśatru, however, lacks faith in the six heterodox sectarian teachers (*gaṇin*),²¹⁴ namely:

- (1) Pūraṇa Kāśyapa (Purāṇa Kassapa) (died c. 503 BCE). A Materialist who taught "naturalistic amorism" or the doctrine of non-action (*akriya, vāda/akiriya, vāda*), that is, the

²¹² For the non-Buddhist account of his mother, see §3 above.

²¹³ Ency Bsm: Ajātasattu.

²¹⁴ See for example Warder, 1970:39-42; Hirakawa 1990:15-19.

8. The thunderous silence

absence of merit or effect (*kriyā/kiriya*) in any virtuous action and of demerit in even the worst crimes, except that everything was determined by natural causes.

(2) Maskarin Gośāla or Gośālī,putra (Makkhali Gosāla) (died c. 488 BCE) was the leader of the Ājīvaka or wandering ascetics founded in Kośala (west of Vṛjī) in 489 BCE. He taught a kind of fatalism or philosophical determinism (*niyati,vāda*), formulating an elaborate and fantastic system of births, conduct and karma, but denied all responsibility for actions; he admitted the fact of evil, but that purification came through transmigration, not by any action of the individual.

(3) Ajita Keśa,kambala (Ajita Kesa,kambali). He taught the doctrine of nihilism (*uccheda,vāda*) which believed that there is no karma; man consisted of the four elements, and when he died and was cremated, the elements returned to their places. He taught that at death, there was “cutting off” or annihilation. He was the most prominent Lokāyata (Materialist) school, but the founder of this school is the legendary Brhaspati.

(4) Kakuda Kātyāyana (Kakudha Kāccāyana or Pakudhaka Kātiyāna). He taught the doctrine of “one or the other” (*anyonya,vāda/aññōñña,vāda*), by which he explained that there were seven indestructible bodies: earth, water, fire, air, happiness, pain, and life or soul; there is no killer nor causer of killing: if man split a head of another, he was making a hole with his sword between the seven indestructible bodies. His ideas were the forerunner of the Vaiśeṣika doctrines.

(5) Nirgrantha Jñāti,putra or Mahāvīra (Nigaṇṭha Naṭaputta). The founder of Jainism, he taught that karma was a film or cloud deposited on the soul which became the soul’s corporeal prison. Their practice is known as the restraint of four precepts (P. *catu,yāma,samvara,vāda*): (1) not to kill; (2) not to steal; (3) not to tell lies; and (4) not to own property and to observe celibacy. All of these practices prevent karma from arising. The Jains appear to have originated by seceding from the Ājīvakas under Mahāvīra the Jina.

(6) Saṃjayin Vairatī,putra (Saṃjaya Belatṭhaputta/Belatṭhiputta). He taught agnosticism or skepticism (*vikṣepa,vāda/vikkhepa,vāda*) and refused to make a positive or a negative statement on any points, including the above. His notion was probably that knowledge was not necessary, even dangerous, for salvation. [5:10b]

From an overall view of 6th century BCE India, one can surmise that it was a period of intellectual unrest and religious ferment encouraged by social instability. The influence of the brahmins were at low ebb mainly because they were unable to satisfactorily answer life’s fundamental questions nor provide spiritual satisfaction to the growing urbanized intelligentsia. The new radical thinkers gathered their own following and spent their time discussing the issues of the day, and rivalled each other in swaying public opinion and support. It was in such a situation that the Buddha was born into.

At the opening of the Sāmañña,phala Sutta, Ajātaśatru’s doctor, Jīvaka Kumāra,bhṛtya (Jīvaka Komāra,bhacca), informs him that the Buddha is at that time in the Mango Grove with 1,250 monks. With a large retinue, Ajātaśatru goes to see the Buddha in the dead of the night. As they approach the monastery, the king fears an ambush for the strange silence in the air. Nevertheless, they all soon come before the Buddha. Even then, it seems that he is still thinking of himself, so that on his one and only visit to the Buddha, his purpose is to find out the advantages of an ascetic life (*śrāmaṇya,phala/sāmañña,phala*).

At the end of the discourse, Ajātaśatru, feeling remorseful, confesses his wrong against his own father, Bimbisāra (8 years before the Buddha passes away), and asks the forgiveness of the Buddha. After Ajātaśatru has left, the Buddha tells the monks that had Ajātaśatru not killed his father, he would have attained stream-winning on that very occasion (D 1:86). Anyway, after this visit to the Buddha, Ajātaśatru is finally able to sleep again, having been unable to do so ever since he killed his father. Upon his death, Ajātaśatru is reborn in a suffering state but, in the distant future, he would attain final salvation as a Pratyeka Buddha named Vidita,viseṣa or Vijitāvī (DA 1:237 f.)

8. AJĀTAŚATRU AND THE BUDDHA

(a) Welfare of nations

After Ajātaśatru had murdered his own father, king Bimbisāra, Prasenajit of Kośala and the Vṛjīs banded together against him. Ajātaśatru first battled his own uncle Prasenajit and won, but later lost in

another battle and was taken as prisoner by Prasenajit who, however, freed him and gave him his daughter Vajrā in marriage. As dowry, she received a village in Kāśī that had been the pretext for the war.

During the Buddha's last year, Varṣakāra warned him of Ajātaśatru's plans to attack the Vṛjīs. The Buddha then expounds "the 7 conditions for non-decline" (*aparihāṇiya, dharma/aparihāṇiya, dhamma*) on a secular as well as religious level.

(1) CONDITIONS OF NON-DECLINE OF THE VṚJĪS

These conditions of non-decline of the Vṛjīs (*Vajjī aparihāṇiyā dhammā*, D 2:73; A 4:15) keep the Vṛjīs prosperous and progressive, that is, they are the conditions for a nation's welfare:

- (1) They hold frequent and well-attended meetings.
- (2) They meet together in harmony, disperse in harmony, and go about their duties in harmony.
- (3) They do not authorize what not been authorized already, and do not abolish what has been authorized.
- (4) They honour, respect, esteem and salute the elders amongst them, and consider them worthy of listening to.
- (5) They do not forcibly abduct others' wives and daughters and compel them to live with them.
- (6) They honour, respect, esteem and salute the Vṛjī shrines at home and abroad, not withdrawing proper support previously given.
- (7) They properly provide for the safety of arhats so that such arhats may come in future to live there and those already there may dwell in comfort. (D 2:73; A 4:15)

At the conclusion of this teaching, Varṣakāra remarks: "Venerable Gotama, if the Vṛjīs keep to even one of these principles, they may be expected to prosper and not decline, far less all seven! Certainly the Vṛjīs will never be conquered by king Ajātaśatru by force of arms, but only through persuasion (*upalāpana*, i.e. diplomacy) and setting them against one another." (D 2:77). In due course, however, when the Buddha is in the Great Wood, he prophesizes how the Licchavī would be conquered by Ajātaśatru (Kaliṅgara Sutta, S 20.8) [10:10c].

(2) The conditions for the non-decline of the Saṅgha:

After Varṣakāra has left, the Buddha instructs Ānanda to assemble all the monks in Rājagṛha for his further instructions, this time on the progress of the Sangha itself. When the monks are assembled, he expounds to them four more sets of conditions for the welfare of the Sangha, i.e. the conditions for the non-decline of the Sangha (P. *bhikkhu aparāhaniyā dhammā*, D 2:79; A 4:21), and further four sets of teachings, namely:

Seven good qualities (*sapta saddharma/satta saddhamma*, M nos. 8, 53; A 7.63), called "the complete equipment required for insight."

Seven factors of awakening (*sapta bodhyaṅga/satta bojjhaṅga*).

Seven perceptions (*saṃjñā/saññā*), i.e. in terms of meditation.

Six conditions (*śāraṇīya, dharma/saraṇīya, dhamma*, M 48; A 6.11-12) [6:7].

We shall here only look at the first set of the conditions for the non-decline of the Sangha, that is the monastic conditions for the progress of monastics:

- (1) They hold frequent and well-attended meetings.
- (2) They meet together in harmony, disperse in harmony, and go about their duties to the Sangha in harmony.
- (3) They do not authorize what not been authorized already, and do not abolish what has been authorized, but train themselves in accordance with the prescribed training-rules.
- (4) They honour, respect, esteem and salute the elders of long experience and long standing, the fathers and leaders of the Order, and consider them worthy of listening to.
- (5) They do not fall under the influence of craving.
- (6) They delight in forest lodgings.

8. The thunderous silence

- (7) They establish themselves in mindfulness with this thought, “Let virtuous comrades in the holy life (P. *peśala sabrahmacarī/pesalā sabrahmacarī*)²¹⁵ who have not come, come here, and let those virtuous comrades who are already here live in comfort.” (D 2:79; A 4:21)

(b) Ajātaśatru’s wrath

Ajātaśatru apparently had a vile temper. Once a certain Upaka, the son of Maṇḍika, and a supporter of Devadatta, came to find out whether the Buddha would praise or blame him. Ajātaśatru thinking that he presumed to abuse the Buddha after the latter had severely censured Devadatta, exclaimed: “What a pestilent fellow is this salt worker’s boy! A scurrilous shameless rogue! To think that he should presume to revile the Blessed One, the arhat, the Perfect Self-enlightened One! Away with you, Upaka! Let me see you no more!” (A 2:182; Woodward’s tr. A:W 2:190). The Commentary adds that the king had him taken by the scruff and dragged away.

It was during Ajātaśatru’s reign that the two chief disciples passed away. After Maudgalyāyana was savagely clubbed to death, Ajātaśatru sent out his spies to uncover the murderers who, when caught, confessed that they were contracted by some naked ascetics of the Nirgaṇṭha sect (the Jains). The furious king had 500 Nirgaṇṭha ascetics buried waist-deep in the courtyard and their heads ploughed off (DhA 2:66 f.).

9. THE BUDDHA’S DEMISE

(a) Ajātaśatru’s grief

Ajātaśatru’s contrition over his parricide apparently sublimated him into a faithful devotee in the Buddha and his Sangha. His faith grew over the years and he became increasingly attached to them. When the Buddha finally passed away, his ministers took the greatest care in breaking the sad news to him. On the pretext of protecting the king from the fatal attacks of a bad dream, they placed him in a tank “filled with the four kinds of sweetness” [5] and then broke the devastating news to him. (DA 2:605 f.)

Ajātaśatru fainted and had to be immersed into a further two tanks and the announcement repeated before he realized the import of the incident. His despair was extreme, recalling in tears the virtues of the Buddha and he visited those places that the Buddha had sanctified by his presence. After some difficulties, he obtained his share of the Buddha relics (with seven other claimants) and had them enshrined in a stone stupa in Rājagṛha (D 2:167) [10:22e].

(b) Ajātaśatru’s political victories

The very year of the Buddha’s passing, Ajātaśatru’s ministers, Varṣakāra and Sunidha, had built the fortified village of Pāṭalīgrāma on the right bank of the river Ganges (V 1:228; D 2:72 f.; U 87).²¹⁶ Ajātaśatru then went on to annex Kāśi and Kośala, but still had to subdue the Vṛjī confederacy. The war that Ajātaśatru waged against the Vṛjī confederacy (especially the Licchavīs of Vaiśālī and the Mallas of Kuśinagarī and Pāpā) continued for many years. The pretext for the conflict was either the refusal of Ceṭaka, king of Vaiśālī, to restore to Ajātaśatru a necklet which had once belonged to Bimbisāra, or a dispute which had arisen between the Licchavīs and Ajātaśatru over the joint exploitation of a diamond mine on the banks of the Ganges.²¹⁷

The Vassakāra Sutta (A 4:16 ff) and the introduction to the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 2:72 ff.) record Varṣakāra consulting the Buddha regarding the Vṛjīs’ strength [8a]. Ajātaśatru applied his cunning through his prime minister, Varṣakāra, who pretended that he had barely escape with his life from Ajātaśatru. Having been given refuge and hospitality at Vaiśālī, Varṣakāra lived there for three years, secretly sowing dissension among the Vṛjīs.

Three years after the Buddha’s passing, king Ceṭaka of Vaiśālī mobilized the 18 republican rulers (*gaṇa,rāja*) of Kāśi and Kośala together with the Licchavīs and Mallas in an effort to resist the attack of

²¹⁵ According to Buddhaghosa, *pesala* = *piya,sīla* (SnA 475).

²¹⁶ By the time Ajātaśatru’s son, Udāyī.bhadra, became king the capital of Magadha had moved from Rājagṛha to Pāṭalīgrāma. Between the mid-4th and the late 1st century BCE, **Pāṭali,putra** was the capital of the three successive Magadha dynasties: the Nanda, Maurya, and Śuṅga, and also of the Gupta empire (beginning in early 4th century). Pāṭaliputra occupies roughly the same area as modern Patna.

²¹⁷ Lamotte 1988:92.

his southern neighbour. By that time, Varṣakāra's subterfuge of lies and slanders had effectively disunited the Vṛjīs and Ceṭaka's troops. The poor began to hate the rich, and the strong looked down upon the weak.

When the time was right, Ajātaśatru swooped down on the Vṛjīs. The weak Licchavīs refused to stand against him and said: "Let the strong Licchavīs go forward and crush him." Finally, Vaiśālī was taken by means of catapults and heavy chariots of the Magadhans. Ajātaśatru easily destroyed Vaiśālī and massacred its inhabitants, but many escaped.

However, it was only after sixteen years that the Vṛjīs finally fell under his sway. Since then, the most important Vṛjī tribe, the Licchavīs, remained subdued for many centuries until the 4th century CE, when they would regain their power under the Imperial Guptas, with Candragupta I marrying Kumāra,devī, a daughter of the Licchavīs and became the mother of Samudragupta (DA 99; JASB 17 1921:269-271).

10. THE FIRST BUDDHIST COUNCIL

Two months after the Buddha's Final Nirvāṇa, when the First Council (the Council of Rājagṛha) was held at the Satta,paṇṇa Cave (Satta,paṇṇī Guhā), Ajātaśatru undertook to be its royal patron (SA 1:9) [6:25]. The Samanta,pāsādikā, the Vinaya Commentary, gives an interesting account of how Ajātaśatru became the royal patron of the First Council:

The Elders had all the monasteries repaired during the first month and informed the king: "Maharajah, the repairs to the monasteries are completed. We now wish to recite the Dharma and Vinaya."

"Very well, venerable sirs, do so with full confidence. Mine is the wheel of power (*ājñā, cakka/ āṇā, cakka*), let yours be the Wheel of Truth (*dharma, cakka/dhamma, cakka*). Command of me, venerable sirs, whatever you wish me to do."

"A place for the monks who make the recital of the Dharma to assemble, Maharajah."

"Where shall I build it, venerable sirs?"

"It is proper that you build it at the entrance to the Satta,paṇṇī Guhā on the side of the Vebhāra mountain, Maharajah."

"So be it, venerable sirs." (VA 1:10)

The Satta,paṇṇa Cave, so called because of a *saptapaṇṇī* tree (*Aristonia scholaris*) growing nearby, was located on the slope of the Vaibhāra Hill, one of the five hills surrounding Rājagṛha. Cunningham (1871: 531) identifies it as the modern-day Son Bhāṇḍār Cave.

The Mahāvamsa says that Ajātaśatru lived for only 24 years after the Buddha's passing away, bringing the total length of his reign to 32 years (Mahv 2:31 f). Modern scholars say that he died around 459 or 462 BCE (i.e. around the same age). Ajātaśatru was said to have been murdered by his own son, Udāyibhadra (Mahv 4:1). After a series of ineffective rulers, his dynasty was replaced by that of Śīśunāga of the Śāiśu,nāga or Licchavī dynasty.

Prasenajit of Kośāla

11. KOŚĀLA AND PRASENAJIT

Under king Mahā Kośāla,²¹⁸ the kingdom of Kośāla (the present-day province of Oudh) had expanded to the district of Vārāṇasī in the south and the Nepalese Terai (occupied by the Śākya), to the north. His son, Prasenajit (Pasenadi) was a contemporary and friend of the Buddha. Just as king Bimbisāra was the Buddha's supporter in Magadha, Prasenajit, king of Kośāla, was his patron at Śrāvastī. Bimbisāra had, in fact, married a sister of Prasenajit, and when he was killed, she died of grief. The revenue of Kaśī was allocated as part of her dowry, but after Bimbisāra's murder, Prasenajit gave away his daughter to Ajātaśatru with the revenue of the village in question as her wedding gift.

As a ruler, Prasenajit did his best to reform his administration, such as attempting to get rid of bribery and corruption in his court (but here he apparently had little success) (SA 1:74, 100). He valued the companionship of wise and good men like Pokkharasādi and Cankī, to each of whom he respectively gave

²¹⁸ J 2:237, 403, 4:432, SA 1:120.

the villages of Ukkaṭṭhā and Opasāda free of all taxes. He set up alms-hall which were always open to anyone in need of food or drink (U 2.6).

Prasenajit's commander-in-chief was Bandhula, chief of the Mallas. Afraid that he might become too powerful, the king had him and his 32 sons exterminated through a contrivance with corrupt ministers. In his place, Prasenajit put his nephew Dīrgha Cārāyaṇa (Dīgha Kārāyaṇa), who understandably harboured secret vengeance against him. [17]

12. DAHARA SUTTA

According to the Tibetan sources, Prasenajit became the Buddha's disciple in the second year of the Ministry (Rockhill 49). The Dahara Sutta²¹⁹ records this first meeting, at which we find the king referring to the Buddha as being young in years. Prasenajit says that when he asks the six famous teachers [7] whether they have been enlightened, none of them claim so. "So why then should Master Gotama [make such a claim] when he is so young in years and has newly gone forth?"

The Buddha replies that there are four things that should not be despised and disparaged as "young," that is, a kshatriya (warrior noble), a snake, a fire, and a monk. A kshatriya should not be despised as being "young" because one day he might become king and exact harsh punishment on one. A snake should not be despised as "young" because it might attack one. A small fire should not be despised because when it becomes big it might burn one or cause destruction. A monk should not be despised as "young,"

381 For if a monk of perfect virtue
Burns on with the fire [of his virtue],
One does not gain sons and cattle,
Nor do one's heirs acquire wealth.
Childless and heirless they become,
Like stumps of palmyra trees. (S 3.1 = 1:68-70, paraphrased)

Here we see the Buddha's wry humour (speaking at the level of the listener) as he gently chides an unbelieving young kshatriya invoking the archetypal Indian figure of the maligned holy man who deliberately inflicts a curse on his enemies (see, for example, the Samuddaka Sutta, S 11.10 = 1:227 f.). Such grave consequences arise through one's own unwholesome intentions (for a virtuous monk would never curse anyone). At the end of the discourse, Prasenajit declares himself a follower of the Buddha.

13. ATTA,RAKKHITA SUTTA

One day, Prasenajit reports to the Buddha his reflection while he was "alone in solitude," as recorded in the Atta,rakkhita Sutta:

Here, venerable sir, while I was alone in solitude, a reflection arose in my mind thus: "Who now protect themselves and who leave themselves unprotected?" Then, venerable sir, it occurred to me, "Those who engage in misconduct of body, speech and mind leave themselves unprotected. Even though a company of elephants may protect them, or a company of cavalry, or a company of chariot troops, or a company of infantry, still they leave themselves unprotected." For what reason? Because their protection is external, not internal; therefore, they leave themselves unprotected.

But those who engage in good conduct of body, speech and mind protect themselves. Even though no company of elephants protect them, nor a company of cavalry, nor a company of chariot troops, nor a company of infantry, still they protect themselves. For what reason? Because their protection is internal, not external; therefore, they protect themselves.

So it is, Maharajah! So it is, Maharajah! (S 3.5 = 1:73, abridged)

The Kosala Saṃyutta, from which the Atta,rakkhita Sutta comes, contains another short inspiring sutra based of Prasenajit's reflection with a similar structure, that is, the Piya Sutta (S 3.4), where a different question is asked but the same answer applies:

²¹⁹ Called the Kumāra,dṛṣṭānta Sūtra in the Tibetan tradition, Rockhill 49.

Here, venerable sir, while I was alone in solitude, a reflection arose in my mind thus: “Who now treat themselves as dear (*priya/piya*) and who treat themselves as a foe (*apriya/appiya*)?” Then, venerable sir, it occurred to me: “Those who engage in misconduct of body, speech and mind treat themselves as a foe. Even though they may say, ‘We regard ourselves as dear (P. *piyo no attā ‘ti*)’, still they regard themselves as a foe.” For what reason? Because of their own accord, they act towards themselves in the same way as a foe might act towards a foe. Therefore, they treat themselves as a foe.

But those who engage in good conduct of body, speech and mind treat themselves as dear. Even though they may say, “We regard ourselves as a foe (P. *appiyo no attā ‘ti*),” still they regard themselves as dear. For what reason? Because of their own accord, they act towards themselves in the same way as a dear person might act towards one who is dear. Therefore, they treat themselves as dear.

So it is, Maharajah! So it is, Maharajah! (S 1:71 f.)

The Buddha then utters the follow verses that reflect the occasion:

- 385 If one regards oneself as dear
One should not yoke oneself to evil,
For happiness is not easily gained
By one who does a wrongful deed.
- 386 When one is seized by the End-maker [Māra]
As one discards the human state,
What can one call truly one’s own?
What does one take when one goes?
What follows one along
Like a shadow that never departs?
- 387 Both the merit and the evil
That a mortal does right here:
This is what is truly one’s own,
This one takes when one goes;
This is what follows one along
Like a shadow than never departs.
- 388 Therefore one should do what is good
As a collection for the future life.
Merit is the support for living beings
[When they arise] in the other world. (S 1:72, slightly rev fr S:B 1:168)

14. JAṬILA SUTTA

Even after becoming the Buddha’s disciple, Prasenajit, however, still does not fail to show respect to the followers of other faiths as recorded in the Jaṭila Sutta (S 3.11), which is repeated in the Ossajjana Sutta, except for the verses (U 6.2). Once the Blessed One is dwelling in the Mansion of Mṛgāra’s Mother (Mṛgāra,mātuḥ Prāsāda/Migāra,mātu Pāsāda) in the Eastern Park (Pūrv’ārāma/Pubb’ārāma), outside the eastern gate of Śrāvastī. After his evening retreat, the Buddha emerges and sits by the outer gateway of the Mansion. Then king Prasenajit comes to see him.

Now on that occasion, seven matted-hair ascetics (*jaṭila*), seven Jain monks (*nirgrantha/nigantha*), seven naked ascetics (*acela*), seven loin-clothed ascetics (*eka,sūṭaka*, “single-robed”) and seven wanderers (*parivrājaka.paribbājaka*), carrying their bundles of requisites pass by not far from the Buddha.

Then king Pasenadi of Kosala rose from this seat, arranged his upper robe over one shoulder, knelt down with his right knee on the ground, and raising his joined hands in reverential

8. The thunderous silence

salutation towards them, he announced his name three times: “Venerable sirs, I am Pasenadi, king of Kośala....” (S 1:78)

Then, not long after the ascetics have left, according to the Saṃyutta, the king remarks to the Buddha: “These ascetics, venerable sir, are arhats and those on the path to arhathood!” In the Udāna account, however, Prasenajit asks the Buddha whether these ascetics are “amongst those who are arhats or on the path to arhathood.”²²⁰

The Buddha replies that it is difficult for a householder like the king who enjoys family life, sense-pleasures and wealth to know whether people like these ascetics are arhats or on the path to arhathood. The Buddha then goes on to list the ways in which one can truly know another:

Only one who is attentive, not one inattentive; by the wise, not the dullard; and only after a long time, not a short time:

- (1) By living together with someone, his moral conduct (*śīla/sīla*) [of body, speech, mind] is known;
 - (2) By dealing with someone, his honesty (**śaucya/soceyya*) is known;
 - (3) In adversities, a person’s fortitude (*sthāma/thāma*) is known;
 - (4) Through discussion with someone, his wisdom (*prajñā/paññā*) is known;
- (S 1:78 f. = U 65 f.; discussed in detail in the Thānāni Sutta, A 4.192 = 2:187-190)

Prasenajit is delighted at the Buddha’s discourse. Then he confides in the Buddha:

These, venerable sir, are my spies, undercover agents, coming back after spying out the country. First, information is gathered by them and then I will make a decision. Now, venerable sir, when they have washed off the dust and dirt and are freshly bathed and groomed, with their hair and beard trimmed, clad in white garments, they will indulge themselves with the five cords of sensual pleasure that are provided to them.

Then the Buddha, reflecting the occasion, uttered these verses:

A man is not easily known by outward form
Nor should one trust a quick appraisal,
For in the guise of the well controlled
Uncontrolled men move in the world.

Like a counterfeit ear-ring made of clay,
Like a bronze half-cent coated with gold,
Some move about in disguise:
Inwardly impure, outwardly beautiful. (S 1:79)

One should not strive all over the place.
One should not be another’s man.
One should not live depending on another.
One should not make a business of Dharma. (U 66)

According to Ireland, the last verse from the Udāna means that a monk should not emulate the unwholesome actions of these king’s men by doing the work of a spy. As an ascetic is able to travel about freely, he could be misguided into doing such work. The Buddha apparently is warning against wrong livelihood and expressing his disapproval of misusing the outward signs of religion for such a wrong purpose as gathering information for a king to use for military and political ends. (J.D. Ireland, U:I 143 n15)

15. RĀJĀK’ĀRĀMA

²²⁰ Cf. Śāriputra’s lion-roar recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta and the Sampāsadanīya Sutta and the Buddha’s response [5:25c].

(a) Bharu Jātaka

The Commentaries have an interesting account of how Prasenajit comes to build the Rājak'ārāma, his first (and only) monastery for the Buddhists, located in front of the Jetavana in Śrāvastī. It is said that the other ascetics, jealous of the Buddha's popularity, desire their own monastery close to the Jetavana. To make sure their wish is realized, they bribe Prasenajit with 100,000 pieces of money.

The Buddha discovers their intention through the great uproar they make while preparing the preliminaries for the building. The Buddha, fearing endless dissensions that would attend such a proximity of rivals, sends Ānanda to see the king to have it stopped, but the king refuses to see Ānanda, nor, later, the chief disciples, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. (It is said that this ill-intentioned discourtesy led his losing his throne before his death.)

The Buddha himself then goes to see Prasenajit, who entertains him to a meal-offering. At the end of the meal, the Buddha preaches the Bharu Jātaka (J 213), gently warning him of the evil of bribery and creating opportunity for virtuous people to quarrel amongst themselves. Prasenajit is filled with remorse and have the ascetics expelled. Realizing that he has never built a monastery for the Buddha and his monks, he goes on to build the Rājak'ārāma for them. (SA 3:283 f.; J 2:170).

(b) Puggala Sutta

The sutras often record the Buddha reminding the king of Kośala to walk on the right path. One of the most famous exhortations is on the four kinds of persons as recorded in the Puggala Sutta (S 3.21), which is also found in the Puggala Paññatti (Pug 4.19); but in the Dīgha (D 3:233) and the Aṅguttara, the list is given without similes or verses (A 4.85 = 2:85):

Maharajah, there are these four kinds of persons found in the world. What four?

The one heading from darkness to darkness.

The one heading from darkness to light.

The one heading from light to darkness.

The one heading from light to light.

The one heading from darkness to darkness is a person born in some low, poor, or difficult family, who is ugly, sickly, handicapped, disabled in some way; but he continues to engage in evil conduct of body, speech and mind. As such, he is reborn in a suffering state.

The one heading from darkness to light is a person born in similar unfortunate circumstances, but engages in good conduct of body, speech and mind. As such, he is reborn in a happy state.

The one heading from light to darkness is a person born in some high, wealthy and good family, who is good-looking, healthy, graceful, able; but he engages in evil conduct of body, speech and mind. As such, he is reborn in a suffering state.

The one heading from light to light is a person born in some high, wealthy and good family, who is good-looking, healthy, graceful, able; and he continues to engage in good conduct of body, speech and mind. As such, he is reborn in a happy state. He is like one who crosses over from palanquin to palanquin, horseback to horseback, from elephant to elephant, or from mansion to mansion. (S 1:93-96; Pug 4.19; D 3:33; A 2:85; abridged)

(c) Appamāda Sutta I

Once at Śrāvastī, Prasenajit asks the Buddha: "Is there, venerable sir, one thing which secures both kinds of good, the good pertaining to the present life and that pertaining to the future life?"

"There is," the Buddha replied. "Diligence (*apramāda/appamāda*). Maharajah. Just as the footprints of all living beings that walk fit into the footprint of the elephant, and the elephant's footprint is declared to be their chief by reason of its size, so diligence is the one thing which secures both kinds of good, the good pertaining to the present life and that pertaining to the future life." [Cf. 5:29]

(S 3.17 = 1:86 f. abridged.)

16. MALLIKĀ

8. The thunderous silence

(a) The Kummāsa,piṇḍa Jātaka

The story of the virtuous and beautiful Mallikā, the daughter of the chief garland-maker of Śrāvastī, is told in the Introduction to the Kummāsa,piṇḍa Jātaka (J 415). When she is 16, she brings three rice-dumplings (*kulmāṣa/kummāsa*) in her flower-basket. As she is leaving town for the flower-garden, she meets the Buddha and his Order. She gives the three dumplings to him and salutes him at his feet, taking her joy as object of meditation.

The Buddha then smiles, and Ānanda asks him for the reason. The Buddha replies that through the merit of her offering she would that very day become the chief queen of the king of Kośala. Mallikā leaves for the flower-garden and happily goes about her work singing.

Now on that very day, Prasenajit loses a battle with Ajātaśatru and flees in defeat. As he rides on his horse, he hears Mallikā singing, and so her karma ripens. When the king sees that she does not run away but approaches him and takes hold of the bridle at the horse's nose. When, on asking her, the king learns that she is not married, he dismounts and being wearied with wind and sun, rests on her lap. Then, on rising, she brings Mallikā to his palace and marries her, making her chief queen, becoming the subject of the city's talk. (J 3:406)

(b) The Mallikā Sutta

The Mallikā Sutta (S 3.8) gives a heart-warming account of feminine wisdom. One day, while they are on the upper terrace of the palace, Prasenajit asks Mallikā: "Is there, Mallikā, anyone more dear to you than yourself?" He expects that she would say: "You are dearer to me than myself." Then, he would say the same thing, and that way they would strengthen their bond of mutual love. But Mallikā answers in all honesty (P. *sa,rasen'eva*): "There is no one, Maharajah, more dear to me than myself. But is there anyone, Maharajah, more dear to you than yourself?"

"For me, too, Mallikā, there is no one more dear than myself."

Then Prasenajit having left the palace, visits the Buddha and relates to him his conversation with Mallikā. Understanding the import of the occasion, the Buddha utters this verse:

Having traversed all the quarters with the mind,
One finds none anywhere dearer than oneself.
Likewise, each person holds himself most dear.
As such, one who loves himself should not harm others. (S 1:75 = U 47)²²¹

(c) Dhītā Sutta

Once in Śrāvastī when Prasenajit is with the Buddha, a messenger arrives to inform the king that queen Mallikā has given birth to a daughter. Prasenajit, however, is displeased with the news, thinking, "I elevated queen Mallikā from a poor family to the rank of queen. If she had given birth to a son she would have won great honour, but now she has lost that opportunity."

The Buddha, noticing that Prasenajit is displeased, utters these verses:

408 A woman, O lord of the people,
 May turn out better than a man:
 She may be turn out to be wise and virtuous,
 A devoted wife, revering her mother-in-law.

409 The son to whom she gives birth
 May become a hero, O lord of the land.
 The son of such a blessed woman
 May even rule the realm. (S 1:86)

This daughter that Mallikā gives birth to is most likely the princess Vajrī (Vajīrī) (M 2:110), who is later married to king Ajātaśatru of Magadha, after the two kings are reconciled. (S:B 407 n238)

²²¹ Cf. S:B 401 n212 for an allusion to the Upanishads.

17. DHAMMA,CETIYA SUTTA

The Dhamma,cetiya Sutta (the Discourse on the Monuments to the Dharma, M 89) records the tragic end of king Prasenajit. While the Buddha is residing in the town of Medataḷumpa (v.l. Medaḷumpa; or Ulumpa, DhA 1:356), king Prasenajit visits him. At that time, both the Buddha and the king were 80 years old (that is, during the last year of the Ministry). Prasenajit and his retinue make a journey of three leagues (some 30 km) from Nagaraka (also in Śākya country) to Medataḷumpa.

When Prasenajit arrives at the monastery, the Buddha is in his Fragrant Chamber. Leaving his sword, turban and royal insignia with Dīrgha Cārāyaṇa [11], his commander-in-chief, Prasenajit goes alone quietly and knocks on the Buddha's cell door. When the Buddha appears, he profusely shows his respect to the Buddha.²²² "But, Maharajah, what reason do you see for doing such supreme honour to this body and for showing such friendship?" Prasenajit then goes on to compare his experiences with meeting the Buddha's disciples and meeting the followers of other sects.

...Venerable sir, kings quarrel with kings, nobles with nobles, brahmins with brahmins, householders with householders; mother quarrels with child, child with mother, father with child, child with father; brother quarrels with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, sister with sister, friend with friend.

But here I see monks living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, looking at each other with kindly eyes. I do not see any other assembly elsewhere with such concord.

Again, venerable sir...I have seen some recluses and brahmins who are lean, wretched, unsightly, jaundiced, with veins standing out on their limbs, such that people would not look at them again...

But here I see monks smiling and cheerful, sincerely joyful, plainly delighting, their faculties fresh, living at ease, unruffled, subsisting on what others give, abiding with mind [as aloof] as a wild deer's... Surely, these venerable ones have certainly realized the great and full significance of the Blessed One's teaching. (M 2:121)

Prasenajit then speaks of his hectic royal life and duties (in spite of his absolute power), and in contrast, how peaceful and orderly, the Order of Monks is: "It is wonderful, it is marvelous how an assembly can be so well disciplined with neither fear ("the rod") nor force ("the sword")!²²³ Indeed, I do not see any other assembly anywhere else so well disciplined."

Prasenajit then speaks of his two inspectors (*sthapati/thapati*), **Rṣidatta** (Isidatta) and **Purāṇa**.²²⁴

...[who] eat my food and use my carriages; I provide them with a livelihood and bring them fame. In spite of this, they are less respectful to me than they are towards the Blessed One. Once, when I had gone out leading an army and was testing these inspectors, Isidatta and Purāṇa, I happened to put up in very cramped quarters. Then these two inspectors, Isidatta and Purāṇa, after spending much of the night talking Dharma, lay down with their heads in the direction where they had heard that the Blessed One was staying, and with their feet towards me! I thought, "This is wonderful! This is marvelous!..."

Again, venerable sir, the Blessed One is a kshatriya and I am a kshatriya; the Blessed One is a Kośalan and I am a Kośalan; the Blessed One is 80 years old and I am 80 years old. Since that is so, I think it proper to do such supreme honour to the Blessed One and to show such friendship. (M 2:124 f)

²²² It is at this point that Dīrgha absconds with the regalia to make Virūdhaka king [19].

²²³ In **Aṅgulimāla S** (M 86), the rajah again makes the same praise in reference to how the Buddha has tamed the bloodthirsty bandit, Aṅgulimāla, "with neither rod [fear] nor sword [force]" (M 86.14a/2:102). This is an example of the difference between the "wheel of power" (*āṇā,cakka*), ie the sphere of political power, and the "wheel of truth" (*dhamma,cakka*), the realm of the Dharma (VA 10 = KhA 1:95; MA 2:278; ThaA 3:48).

²²⁴ Rṣidatta and Purāṇa. Both are again mentioned in Thapātaya S (S 55.6/5:348-352) as "chamberlains" or keepers of the women's quarters (*thapātaya*; Skt *sthapātaya*) of king Pasenadi. At the time of their deaths both were declared by the Buddha to be Once-returners. (A 6.44/3:348, 10.75/5:137 f). See S:W 5:303 n1, S:B 1955 n326.

When the king has left the Buddha informs the Sangha that the king has uttered “monuments to the Dharma” (*dharma,caitya/dhamma,cetiya*), that is, words of reverence to any of the Three Jewels. This apparently is a layman’s version of the lion-roar (*siṃha,nāda/sīha,nāda*).

18. PRASENAJIT’S DEVOTION TO THE BUDDHA

From the sutras and stories, we can deduce that Prasenajit is a devoted disciple and admirer of the Buddha. When he meets the Buddha, he would bow his head down to his feet, covering them with kisses and stroking them (M 2:120). It is said that that Prasenajit goes to see the Buddha thrice a day, sometimes with only a small bodyguard. Prasenajit’s devotion to the Three Jewels is attested by the Kosala Saṃyutta, a whole *saṃyutta* in his name, the third Connected Collection of the Chapter With Verses (Sagāthā Vagga) of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, comprising a total of 25 discourses (S ch 3).

In the Aggañña Sutta, the Buddha explains why Prasenajit is so devoted to him:

King Pasenadi of Kosala knows: “The ascetic Gotama has gone forth from the neighbouring clan of the Sakyans.” Now, the Sakyans are vassals (*anuyuktā/anuyuttā*) of the king of Kosala. They offer him humble service and salute him, rise and do him homage and pay him fitting service.

And just as the Sakyans offer the king humble service...so likewise does the king offer humble service to the Tathāgata, thinking: “If the ascetic Gotama is well-born, I am ill-born; if the ascetic Gotama is strong, I am weak; if the ascetic Gotama is pleasant to look at, I am ill-favoured; if the ascetic Gotama is influential, I am of little influence.”

Now it is because of honouring the Dharma, making much of the Dharma, esteeming the Dharma, doing reverent homage to Dharma, the king Pasenadi does humble service to the Tathāgata and pays him fitting service.

(D 3:83; cf. D 1:60 for respect shown to ascetics in general)

19. PRASENAJIT’S TRAGIC DEATH

While Prasenajit was conversing with the Buddha (as reported in the Dhamma,cetiya Sutta) [17], Dīrgha Cārāyaṇa thought, “Previously, after conferring in private with the recluse Gotama, the king arrested my uncle and his 32 sons. Perhaps this time he will arrest me.” Dīrgha, who was in secret collusion with his son Virūḍhaka (Viḍudabha), then absconded with the retinue and the royal insignia entrusted to him. The royal insignia, which included the fan, parasol and sandals, were rushed to the capital, Śrāvastī, where Virūḍhaka was enthroned. (MA 3:352; J 4:151; DhA 1:356)

The forlorn Prasenajit, left only with a horse and a female servant, rushed to Rājagṛha to get the help of his nephew, Ajātaśatru. It was rather late when he arrived at Rājagṛha and the city gates were closed. Exhausted he lay down in a hall outside the city, and died of exhaustion and exposure in the night. Ajātaśatru arranged for him a grand funeral but did nothing to Virūḍhaka who had just ascended the throne. (MA 2:753 f.; J 4:131).

When Virūḍhaka became king, he remembered his grudge against the Śākya that began when he discovered that his mother, the Śākya Vṛṣabha,kṣatriyā, was actually of low birth. His father, Prasenajit, had not been aware of this fact when he married her. Virūḍhaka then set out with a huge army to exterminate the Śākya. The Buddha perceived Virūḍhaka’s intentions. However, on noting that this was impending tragedy was the consequence of the karma of the Śākya in poisoning the waters of the river, decided not to frustrate Virūḍhaka’s expedition. [7:21]

Virūḍhaka set up camp on the dry bed of the river Aciravatī. However, during the night, a sudden swelling of the waters drowned him and a large part of his army. He was succeeded by his son, Uttara,sena, who claimed part of the Buddha’s relic together with the other claimants.

Later legends claim that those who escaped the massacre founded towns and kingdoms in the Himalayas, on the banks of the Ganges, or in Northwest India. According to Xuanzang, one of the Śākya escaped to Udyāna (in extreme northwest India) and became king there. In the 6th century, the monk Vimokṣa,prajñā or Vimokṣa,sena claimed to be a descendent of a Śākya who had been saved from the massacre.

20. CONCLUSION

The success of Buddhism as a world religion has its roots in the contributions of these three kings, especially of Bimbisāra, whose enlightened reign “inspired a new form of flexibility that loosened social barriers and the hold of outmoded tribal customs, particularly in the resurgent urban areas of culture” (Lannoy, 1971:13). The state of Magadha was further unified by the establishment of a new type of army. Where formerly there were only armed tribes, Bimbisāra’s army owed allegiance to him alone and was the main support of his absolute power. The army also ensured protection of trade-routes and right of private ownership among commercial entrepreneurs. This is something new in Indian history.

Despite his political might, Bimbisāra showed great spiritual strength by abdicating in favour of his own ambitious son, Ajātaśatru, and suffered in silence from his son’s atrocities against him, out of great love for him. Ajātaśatru, in his turn, could not find any peace ever since he murdered his own father. The silence that he encountered during first meeting with the Buddha as a parricide deafened him with fear, but after that opened his mind to spirituality as recorded in the *Sāmañña,phala Sutta* and his patronage of the First Buddhist Council. The tragic Prasenajit enjoyed greater moments of inner silence ever since he became the Buddha’s follower.

Through their royal patronages, these world men of the world, wielders of the wheel of power (*ājñā, cakra*) supported the progress of the Buddha’s wheel of truth (*dharmā, cakra*) [10]. They were an essential part of the great Indian social revolution that changed not only India forever, but also the world. It is a social and spiritual storm whose centre is a thunderous silence that is still being heard today and that continues to grow.



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9

THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY

Women in Buddhism:

Āmrapālī, R̥ṣīdāsī, Paṭācārā, Śīrīmā

1. WHY THE SEXES?

Sexuality has only one real purpose: the propagation of the species. As such, it is the greatest worldly power there is. Power means the promotion of self and domination over others. Sexuality (as promotion of self and domination) expresses itself through the senses by the desire to dominate “the other,” such as the male dominating the female. This is due to the perception of existence and reality in terms of duality.

Why are there women and men in the world? In the Aggañña Sutta (the Discourse on the Knowledge of Beginnings, D 27),²²⁵ the Buddha gives an interesting explanation for it. The discourse is actually a satire on the socioeconomic origins of the caste system and the social contract of kingship in ancient India, but the Buddha in his characteristic humorous manner of teaching, starts at the very beginning of things, the origin of the universe itself.

There comes a time, Vāseṭṭha, when sooner or later after a long period of time, this world contracts²²⁶. At the time of contraction, beings are mostly born in the Ābhassara (Skt. Ābhasvara) Brahmā world. And there they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through space, glorious—and they stay like that for a very long time.

But sooner or later, after a very long period, this world begins to expand²²⁷ again. At the time of expansion, the beings from the Ābhassara Brahmā world, having passed away from there, are mostly reborn in this world. Here they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through space, glorious—and they stay like that for a very long time. (D 1:17 = 3:86)

The description here is common to the Brahma-jāla Sutta (D 1) and the Aggañña Sutta. It continues, in the latter case, as follows:

At that time, Vāseṭṭha, there was just one mass of water, and all was darkness, blinding darkness. Neither moon nor sun appeared, no constellations or stars appeared, night and day were not distinct, nor months or fortnights, no years or seasons, and no male or female—beings were reckoned only as beings.

And sooner or later, after a very long period of time, savoury earth (P. *rasa,paṭhavī*) spread itself over the waters where those beings were. It looks just like the skin that forms itself over hot milk as it cools. It was endowed with colour, smell and taste. It was the colour of fine ghee or butter, and it was very sweet, like pure wild honey. (D 3:86 f)

Then a curious radiant being tasted the savoury earth. Finding it very tasty, craving arose in the being. Other radiant beings also tasted the savoury earth and were captivated by its taste and craving arose in them. So, they consumed more and bigger chunks of the tasty earth, and as a result began to progressively lose their radiance. At that time, too, the moon and sun, night and day, and the seasons appeared.

Feeding on the tasty earth over a long period of time, the bodies of these beings became coarser and began to lose their ethereal qualities. Some were good-looking, some ugly, and the better looking became conceited with their looks, while the ugly scorned the tasty earth, which by then had disappeared. In its place, there grew mushroom-like fungus (P. *bhūmi,pappaṭaka*), of good colour, smell and taste. The

²²⁵ For scholarly analyses of this sutta, see, for example: R.F. Gombrich, “The Buddha’s Book of Genesis?” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35 1992a:179-191; Steven Collins, “The Discourse on What is Primary.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 21 1993:301-393; Rupert Gerthin, “Cosmology and Meditation: From the Aggañña-Sutta to the Mahāyāna”. *History of Religions* 36,3 1997:183-217.

²²⁶ *saṃvartate/saṃvaṭṭati*, lit. “rolls in,” devolves.

²²⁷ *vivartate/vivaṭṭati*, lit. “rolls out,” evolves.

9. The agony and the ecstasy

beings now fed on this fungus and their metamorphosis continued. When the fungus disappeared, bamboo-like creepers, just as sweet, took their place.

When the creepers disappeared, a kind of rice, “free from powder and from husks, fragrant and clean-grained,” grew in the open spaces. By this time, their bodies had become coarse and physical enough so that “the females developed female sex-organs, and the males developed male sex-organs.” (The Commentary explains that those who were women in their previous lives, became women; those who were men before, became men.)

And the women became excessively preoccupied with men, and the men with women. Owing to this excessive preoccupation with each other, passion was aroused, and their bodies burned with lust. And later, because of this burning, they indulged in sexual activity.

(D 3:86-88; abridged & paraphrased)

The sutra then goes on to explain how they began to build homes and villages, to work and share labour, and how those who worked in the fields (*kṣetra/khetta*) came to be called *kṣatriya* (*khattiya*), among whom were those who gladdened (*rañjeti*) the people with what is good (*dharma/dhamma*), that is, the *rāja*. Those who drew others away (*bāhenti*) away from evil were called *brāhmaṇa*. Those who lived by various (*viśva/vissa*) trades were called *vaśya* (*vessa*), and those who lived by hunting (*raudra/ludda*) were called *sūdra* (*sudda*). This was how society first functioned: through circles (*maṇḍala*) of work.

2. BUDDHIST CONCEPTION OF OEDIPUS COMPLEX

The Mahā Tanhā,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 38, “Discourse on the Destruction of Craving”) contains the only canonical description we have of the physical conditions for rebirth, that is, through the conjunction of three things: the sexual union of the parents, the mother’s fertile period and the being-to-be-born (*gandharva/gandhabba*) (M 1:265 f.). However, the Theravadins are at pains to stress that the *gandhabba* here refers to the rebirth consciousness (P. *paṭisandhi,citta*), not an “intermediate being” (Skt. *antarā,-bhava*) as claimed by the Mahayana. In fact, the Theravadins say that the Majjhima text is actually “a concrete application of dependent arising—so far expressed only as a doctrinal formula—to the course of individual existence” (M:Ñ 1232:410n).

Perhaps the oldest statement on the psychology of sex in terms of what later is called the Oedipus complex by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the German founder of psychoanalysis, is found in the most important work of the Sarvāstivāda, that is, Vasubandhu’s Abhidharma,kośa (4th-5th century). There, Vasubandhu attempts to describe how rebirth (Skt. *pratisaṃdhi*) takes place. His description is clearly an elaboration based on the description of conception given in the Mahā Tanhā,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 1:265 f.). Driven by karma, the being-to-be-born or “intermediate being” (*antarā,bhava*, to use Vasubandhu’s term) goes through a birth experience:

Even though distant, he sees the place of his rebirth. There he sees his father and mother united. His mind is troubled by the effects of sex and hostility. When the intermediate being is male, it is gripped by a male desire with regard to the mother, when it is female, it is gripped by the female desire with regard to the father; and inversely, it hates either the father, or the mother, whom it regards as either a male or female rival. As it is said in the *Prajñāpti*, “Then either a mind of lust or a mind of hatred is reproduced in the Gandharva.”

When the mind is thus troubled by the two erroneous thoughts, it attaches itself through the desire for sex to the place where the organs are joined together, imagining that it is he with whom they unite. Then, the impurities of semen and blood is [*sic*] found in the womb; the intermediate being, enjoying its pleasures, installs itself there. Then the *skandhas* harden; the intermediate being perishes; and birth arises that is called “rebirth” (*pratisaṃdhi*)...

(Abhk 3,15; based on Pruden’s tr.)

3. EARLY INDIAN CONCEPTION OF WOMEN

During the Vedic period (1500-1200 BCE), women were greatly honoured as mothers, and were generally permitted freedom of movement by their menfolk, but as a rule, they played little significant role in religious life and rituals. With the rise of the Brāhmaṇas (900-700 BCE), the prose commentaries on the Vedas, complex rituals were seen as being able to influence or control the cosmos. A class of priestly specialists arose who performed these rituals and taught them in their own dwellings. Only the

sons of the brahmins were allowed such training since they have to live outside their own homes for the training. (Jhingram 1989:90 ff.)

Moreover, a son had to perform the funeral and memorial rites for the benefit of the father and male ancestors in the afterlife. There were rituals to prevent the birth of a girl, since they were regarded as a burden freed only by marriage. A wife was largely regarded as a child-bearer and as subservient to the husband and his parents. Even in the time of the Upaniṣāds (1000-600 BCE), i.e. including the Buddha's time, religion, especially asceticism, was seen as a male reserve, and ascetics generally regarded women as temptresses.

Although according to Jainism a woman can be reborn as a man, unlike Buddhism, it does not concede the possibility of ultimate spiritual liberation for women. Such ideas crystallized after the 5th century and the best example of this attitude is found in such works as the brahminical Dharmaśāstras, of which the best known text is the Manusmṛti or "Laws of Manu" (which in its present form dates from 1st century BCE). The Manusmṛti describes women as follows:

By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged woman, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons. A woman must never be independent.

(Manu,smṛti v,147 f.) [Cf. 7c]

The Manusmṛti also forbids women from performing religious rites and from having any knowledge of the Vedas (Manu,smṛti ix,18). A woman's religious duties were simply to server her husband and looking after the domestic affairs (ii,67). A man could divorce his wife, but a woman had not right to divorce her husband (ix,81). Generally, women were seen as highly sexed and ever ready to seduce men (ix,13-18). (Jhingram 1989:96).

BUDDHIST VIEWS OF WOMEN

4. SEXUAL EQUALITY

(a) Changing attitudes

The early Buddhist view of women is liberal and egalitarian. However, during the Commentarial period (beginning about 500 years after the Buddha), the monastic view of women were generally less flattering as the Order became more male-centred and described by terms such as "institutional androcentrism" and "ascetic misogyny" (Sponberg 1992). The Jātaka stories, for example, contain some of the most blatantly misogynous texts. We shall first look at the early Buddhist attitude to women and then at the later change of heart, and the reasons behind them.

The Buddha lived and taught in a society where women were generally regarded as socially and spiritually subservient to men. In keeping with the social conventions of his days, the Buddha first approached only male ascetics and male householders, that is, until the 5th year of his Ministry, when the Order of Nuns was formed [6:6]. The Buddha, however, introduced radical measures that allow women to realize their full spiritual potential.

On a social level, the Buddha's teaching on individual karma plays down the need for a person to depend on the memorial rites of his son for postmortem spiritual benefits. A person's destiny, both male and female, according to the Buddha, largely lies in one's own hands:

Just as you have sown the seed,
So shall you reap its fruit.
One who does good reaps good,
And the evil doer reaps evil.
When you have sown the seeds,
You shall taste the fruit. (S 1:227)²²⁸

²²⁸ For details, see eg Cūḷa,kamma,vibhaṅga Sutta, M 135.

9. The agony and the ecstasy

(b) Spiritual equality

Never before has the position of women come to be so equal that of men as in the Buddha's Order and Buddhist community. In her classic work, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, I.B. Horner comes to the conclusion that

...the position of women in Buddhist India was more enviable and more honourable than it had been in pre-Buddhist days. Daughters and widows were no longer regarded with such undisguised despair and contumely. On the contrary, both they and wives commanded more respect and ranked as individuals. They enjoyed more independence, and a wider liberty to guide and follow their own lives. (Horner 1930:82)

The Buddha's teachings as we have them in the four Nikāyas [6:27b] and even in the Khuddaka Nikāya, are generally quite clear about the spiritual equality of women and men. The main points of this sexual equality in spiritual terms cover not only ordained members (monks and nuns) but also lay followers (male and female). I have here expanded and updated I.B. Horner's main points relating to sexual equality as evident in the early texts (Horner, 1930:287 f.):

(1) The Buddha wins awakening for monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, and teaches the Dharma to all alike (M 1:490 f). The Milinda-pañha gives the simile of "the tree [that] makes no distinction in giving shade" (Miln 409 f.), that well illustrates the Buddha's compassion:

To the murderer Devadatta, to the robber Aṅgulimāla,
To Dhanapāla [Nālāgiri], and to Rāhula, too—the Sage was the same to all.

(DhA 1:146; cf. MA 2:387; Ap 145)

(2) The conduct of the members of the fourfold company have an analogous effect on the persistence or disappearance of the Dharma (A 5.201 = 3:247), the progress or decline of the Sangha (A 4.7 = 2:8), and the same virtues or vices will take the woman or the man to happy states or suffering states (A 5:283-287).

(3) Women and men may have the same spiritual limitation or powers (Vajjī, S 1:86; Somā Therī, S 1:129; Udena, S 4:110 f.; Mātugāma Saṃyutta, S 26; Kāḷigodhā, S 5:396 f.); sometimes, women may be wiser than men (eg Bhaddā Kuṇḍala, kesī, DhA 2:222; Mallkā, S 3.8 [8:16a]).

(4) Nuns may develop to the same extent as monks. (Ānanda's lion-roar, D 2:141; M 1:466 f.) [6:6]

(5) The Buddha has declared that he would not enter Nirvana until the fourfold company, comprising wise monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, has been established for the progress of the Teaching. (D 2:104, 113)

(6) The Buddha's teachings apply equally to both sexes (Dh 168 f.). The Buddha himself shows an egalitarian attitude towards his devotees. In the Desanā Sutta, for example, the Buddha declares, "...just like the excellent field are my ordained disciples, *both men and women*...just like the moderate field are my lay disciples, *both men and women*, I teach them Dharma that is good in its beginning, good in its middle and good in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the Holy Life that is wholly perfect and pure." (S 4:315 f.)

Futhermore, it is recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, that after accepting a meal offering from a courtesan, Āmrāpālī (Ambapālī) [14; 10:66], he honours it by turning down another invitation from a group of young Licchavī kshatriyas of Vaiśālī (V 1:231-233; D 2:95-98). Āmrāpālī later joins the Order and becomes an arhat (ThiA 206 f.).

(7) The Dharma protects all Dharmafarers, male and female, equally, who practise it. (Tha 303)

5. THE ORDER OF NUNS

(a) The Jains

The position of women in Buddhism is closely associated with Ānanda [6:6] since he is instrumental in moving the Buddha to establish the Order of Nuns (*bhikkhūnī, saṅgha/bhikkhūnī, saṅgha*) in the fifth year of the Ministry (V 2:253-283; A 4:274-280). After Śuddhōdana's death, Mahā Prajāpatī Gautamī (at the head of 500 companions whose husbands have renounced following their listening to the Kalaha, vivāda Sutta, Sn 862-877) approaches the Buddha and thrice requests ordination, but he turns her down, replying: "Be careful, Gotamī, of the going-forth of women from home into homelessness."²²⁹

Even before the Buddhist Order of Nuns is formed, the Jains have their own Order of Nuns, as evident from the Therīgāthā (Thī 107-111) of Bhadrā Kuṇḍala, keśā (Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesī, the Curly-haired), a former Jain nun.²³⁰ The Jain Order, however, is more solitary and less organized than the Buddhist one, and they actually deny that women are capable of liberation (Harvey, 2000:383 f.; Jaini, 1991). There are also other non-Buddhist women religious wanderers and debaters in the Buddha's time.

(b) Cūḷa Dhamma, samādāna Sutta

In the Cūḷa Dhamma, samādāna Sutta (M 1:305) the Buddha speaks of "four ways of undertaking" the religious life: that is,

that which is pleasant now but painful later;
that which is both painful now and later;
that which is painful now but pleasant later; and
that which is both pleasant now and later.

In the first case, a religious person claims that "there is no harm in sensual pleasures" and indulges in them, and so suffering painful karmic effects in due course. The second case is illustrated by one who practices self-mortification, suffering pain now and later. In the third case, there is the case of a person with strong greed, hate and delusion, but he perseveres in the holy life, in due course enjoying the fruits of the holy life. And in the last case, a person without strong greed, hatred or delusion meditates and gains the absorptions, and is reborn in the happy realms.

In the first case, that of one whose religious undertaking is pleasant now but painful later, the Buddha gives the example of a religious who "gulps down sensual pleasure...with women wanderers who wear their hair in a topknot" saying, "Pleasant is the touch of this woman wanderer's tender soft downy arm!" (M 1:305). The Buddha's caution over ordaining women is clearly motivated by the danger of sexual relations between monks and nuns, if they were to be in close association. The second reason is that the Buddha does not see any advantage in going against social conventions of the day (as long as they do not go against his Teachings) (see Harvey 2000:387 f.).

(c) Women's spirituality

When Ānanda comes to know of the plight of Gautamī and her companions, he intercedes on their behalf and approaches the Buddha with the famous remark confirming women's spirituality:

Now, Lord, are women, after having gone forth from home into homelessness in the Doctrine and Discipline proclaimed by the Truth-finder, able to realize the fruit of stream-winning or the fruit of Once-return, or the fruit of Non-return, or spiritual perfection? (V 2:254)

The Buddha's hesitation to ordain women is similar in spirit as when he hesitates to teach the Dharma immediately after his awakening (M 1:168 f.) [4:1].

In both cases, he only agrees once good reasons are cited: some "have little dust in their eyes" and will understand; women can attain advanced states of insight. While the ordination of women

²²⁹ **The Dakkhiṇā, vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 142) relates how Gautamī, when still a lay-woman (M 3:253), makes an offering of "a new pair of cloths" that she had herself spun to the Buddha, but he proposes that she instead offer them to the Saṅgha, that is, so that the merit is greater. In the list of **seven kinds of offerings**, the sutta also mentions the "twofold Saṅgha" (P. *ubhato, -saṅgha*), that is, including the Order of Nuns (M 3:255). If Gautamī were a laywoman when the Order of Nuns was already formed, then the account about her being the first nun (V 2:254 ff.) must be false [5]. However, it is possible that the sutta consisted of two originally separate passages being conflated into one text (Harvey 2000:386). In other words, it is likely that at least the section on the seven kinds of offerings was interpolated later. [17]

²³⁰ A 1:25; AA 1:367 ff.; Ap 2:560 ff.; ThīA 101 f.; DhA 2:217 ff.

9. The agony and the ecstasy

was not a complete innovation at the time, I.B. Horner comments that it was unusual at the time, and was made in the face of the “dead weight” of public opinion (1930:110), so that “What Gotama did for women shines as a bright light in the history of freedom” (p. 113).

(Harvey 2000:384)

(d) The Buddha’s hesitation to ordain women

Mohan Wijayaratna, in his book, *Buddhist Monastic Life* (tr. Grangier & Collin, 1990:158-163), gives some important insight into the reasons for the Buddha’s hesitation to ordain women. The Buddha might have thought that it was not the proper time to establish the Order of Nuns. The first hypothesis offered by Wijayaratna is that all the women who first came to him for ordination were his relatives from the Śākya clan. If the Buddha had acceded to their request at once, some of his opponents might have thought it scandalous. However, after it was formed, many brahmin women join the Order.

The Buddha probably also anticipated some serious problems that might arise in the daily lives of the nuns. The Order of Nuns might become vulnerable and needed the protection of future generations. Indeed some unfortunate incidents did occur even in his own lifetime. For example, Utpalavarṇā was raped in Andhavana (the Dark Wood), after which nuns are forbidden to travel or dwell in forests (V 3:35; DhA 2:49 f.) [9:11b]. On another occasion, while the nuns were away, their huts were burned down (V 4:303). Once a group of travelling nuns were looking for a place to lodge for the night. The brahmin’s wife told them to wait until the head of the house returned. But when he arrived in the night and saw the nuns, he immediately threw them out with the words, “Out with these shaven-headed whores!” (V 4:273-275).

(e) The eight rules of respect

The most important reason for the Buddha’s hesitation is that having women in the Order might be a serious threat to the celibacy and discipline of the monks. As such, it is not so much as that women are vulnerable, as that the men who are morally weak might easily fall into sexual temptations. There is also the tendency of women to mother men with whom they are familiar or favour. Above all, in any social or physical relationship between the sexes, it is usually the women who bear the brunt of the blame, like ending up being pregnant [9b].

As such, the Buddha introduced the eight rules of respect (*guru,dharma/garudhamma*) to be “observed, respected, honoured and revered by a nun, and never transgressed for as long as she lives,” that is to say:

- (1) A nun, even if ordained for a hundred years, must greet a monk with deference, even if he has been ordained that very day. She must rise up from her seat, salute him with joined palms, and show him proper respect.
- (2) A nun is forbidden to spend the Rains Retreat in a place where there is no monk.
- (3) Every fortnight, a nun is to ask two things of the monks: the date of the Upoṣadha ceremony (for the recitation of the Prātimokṣa) and to teach them Dharma.
- (4) At the end of the Rains Retreat, a nun must address the triple “invitation” (*pravāraṇā/pavāraṇā*) to both the Orders (of the monks and of the nuns): she must ask if anyone has “seen, heard or suspected” anything against her (for which she has to make amends).
- (5) A nun who has committed a serious offence must undergo probation (*mānatva/mānatta*) before both Orders.
- (6) Ordination as a nun must be sought from both Orders only after a postulant (*śikṣamānā/sikkhamānā*) has kept to the Six Precepts [i.e. the 5 Precepts and the rule regarding not eating during wrong hours] for two years.
- (7) A nun should on no account revile or abuse a monk.
- (8) A monk can admonish and advise a nun, but a nun cannot admonish or advise a monk.

(V 2:255, 4:52; A 4:276 f.)

These heavy rules are interesting because, traditionally, the Buddha would only make a rule or amend one after the fact, that is, only after a problem incident or an infringement of a rule has occurred. In the case of the ordination of women, he has introduced preventive measures, rather than corrective and restorative procedures (which were introduced later for the nuns by way of the Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya). Despite the Buddha’s careful precautions, however, many untoward incidents later occur involving the nuns. There are cases where indisciplined nuns like Sthulā Nandā (S 2:219) [6:18] and Sthulā Tiṣyā (S 16:10) [6:17] who rudely abused Mahā Kāśyapa.

6. ASCETIC MISOGYNY?

There are in the early Canon, especially the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, what appears as negative references to women. It is useful here to remember that the teachings of the *Aṅguttara* are generally meant for the laity, and originally compiled with the Indian social background. Women are likened to black snakes, treated as evil smelling and adulterous, and accused of ensnaring men (A 2:498). They are regarded as secretive and not open (A 1:263). They are thought of as being full of passion, easily angered, envious, and “weak in wisdom,” and have no place in public assemblies or business. They are incapable of earning a living by any profession because they are uncontrolled, envious, greedy and stupid (A 2:87). A woman’s existence is described as centring around men, adornment, her son, and being without a rival (A 2:76). Women are expected to be like slaves and be obedient to their husbands (A 3:224, 361-367).

Taken out of context, such statements may sound like expressions of classic male chauvinism or more technically, “ascetic misogyny” (Sponberg 1992:18-24). Let us examine this problem from historical, social and spiritual angles. Historically, early Buddhism inherited a society whose attitude towards women have been moulded by the androcentric priestly texts (especially the *Manu-smṛti*) of the brahminical system [3]. The apparently anti-feminist statements reflect the early Buddhist *inheritance*, not its legacy.

Socially, we see Buddhist women in Buddhist communities in south-east Asia, especially modern Singapore and Malaysia, for example, as antitheses of the “misogynist” statements quoted here. According to the 1980 Singapore Census, about 35% of Singapore men are Buddhist, and a slightly higher percentage of women are Buddhist. In Malaysia, too, Buddhist social and welfare activities are generally dominated by women. This might be regarded as a modern development, but in the history of a Buddhist country like Siam, for example, there are women warriors like Suriyothai and women (more than men) engaged in business often line the streets of the towns. All this despite the fact that the post-canonical texts tend to show a misogynist bias.

Despite the presence of the “misogynist” texts in the early Canon, it is very difficult to find men in our Buddhist community (or Buddhist communities anywhere in the world) who actually have a low opinion of women, unless perhaps if they have serious marriage problems or are male homosexuals. In other words, those remarks quoted from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* are culturally limited to ancient Indian society of the Buddha’s time.

On the spiritual level, practising Buddhists generally try to develop a balanced approach to gender issues. I have use the term “balance” in two senses: as counter-weight and as harmony. Among the Confucian-dominated patriarchal Chinese society, for example, its male-centredness is counter-weighted by a motherly Guanyin, the female form of Avalokiteśvara, said to be the object of faith of “half of Asia.” In the Tibetan pantheon, however, Avalokiteśvara is represented as an androgynous hypostasis of compassion balanced by wisdom (the eye in each of “his” thousand palms).

The concept of balance as harmony plays a vital role in Buddhist practice. The teaching of the Five Spiritual Powers (*bala*) or Faculties (*indriya*), is one of balance: faith should be balanced by wisdom, effort by concentration, and harmonizing the four is mindfulness (D 3:239; A 3:10; Vbh 342). The four Divine Abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), too, is only effected by a balanced practice of lovingkindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity (D 2:196, 3:220; Dhs 262; Vism 320). At the heart of Buddhism, we have the statement that “there is no concentration (*dhyāna/jhāna*) without wisdom; nor is there wisdom for him who lacks concentration” (Dh 372), both should work together like the wings of a bird.

If Buddhism is founded on the misogynist notion that women are in various ways inferior to men, it is hard to explain the general openness we see today among modern practising Buddhists with regards to gender issues. Buddhist men are just as willing to perform domestic functions (like “mothering” a child) just as much as Buddhist women would excel in business, and in academic and professional fields. Even if the modern philosophy of gender is dictated by socioeconomic circumstances, Buddhists easily accept the notion of harmony between the male and female. [9a]

7. MALE MONASTIC VIEW OF WOMEN

9. The agony and the ecstasy

(a) Mātā,putta Sutta

By its very definition, monasticism (a term derived from the Greek *monazein*, “to live alone”) entails celibacy. As such, it is not surprising if monastic teachings are coated in what appears to be “misogynist” language. After all, one of the greatest threats to the celibate life of the monastic would be the opposite sex, which would lead to sexual involvements, caring for a family and distraction to the spiritual life. Hence, the Buddha’s warning to the monks in the Mātā,putta Sutta (A 5.55) relates a case where a mother and son were nun and monk spending the rains retreat together in Śrāvastī committed incest:

Monks, I see no other form...sound...smell...taste...or touch, so enticing, so desirable, so intoxicating, so binding, so distracting, such a hindrance to winning the unsurpassed release from the yoke as a woman’s form...sound...smell...taste...or touch.

Monks, a woman, even when walking, will stop to ensnare a man’s heart. Whether standing, sitting or lying down, laughing, talking or singing, weeping, stricken or dying, a woman will stop to ensnare a man’s heart.

Indeed, monks, one may in truth speak of womanhood as being totally a snare of Māra.

Speak to a man who has a sword in hand, or a goblin,
Or even sit close to a venomous snake, by whose bite one lives not—
But never speak with a woman alone! (A 3:68)

One should consider the context of this teaching. The fact that this sutra is preserved in the Aṅguttara—a collection meant for the initial and basic reading of newly ordained monks and serious lay practitioners—serves to remind them of the minimum personal conduct so that the precept of celibacy is not threatened or broken. Far from degrading women, we can easily sense here the Buddha’s wry humour in wisely appreciating the beauty of women. And if we understand the real nature of Māra (as our own state of mind), then the problem lies more with the men’s weaknesses than with the women’s powers.

(b) The Uppatho Sutta

There is no notion of ritual pollution here, as in the case of the brahminical system [3]. It is simply a case of separating an inflammable fuel from the fire that needs to be extinguished. The purpose of monasticism is to create the best conditions for spiritual development of its candidates, which as such entails the removal of all distractions. The danger to personal development is lust, that is, the drive to fill a perceived emptiness in oneself by things and experiences of others. In this context, the reference from the Devatā Saṃyutta is enlightening:

- 197 What is called the deviant path?
 What undergoes destruction night and day?
 What is the stain of the holy life?
 What is the bath without water?
- 198 Lust is declared the deviant path.
 Life undergoes destruction night and day.
 Women are the stain of the holy life—
 Here men are trapped.
 Austerity and the holy life—
 This is bath without water. (S 1:38; cf 1:43)

It is important to note here that “women are the stain of the holy life” insofar as holy men (who have chosen celibacy) are concerned. This statement is applied to a conventional situation; it is not a universal statement of ultimate truth. “The bath without water” is the Buddha’s humorous repartee to the brahminical practice of washing away their impurities (sustained by external impure situations and persons).

(c) The Bhāradvāja Sutta

The Bhāradvāja Sutta gives a good idea of how monks and nuns train themselves in relation to the problem of sexual lust. Once when the venerable Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja (the foremost amongst monks who

are lion-roarers, A 1:23; S 5:224 f.; V 2:111 f.) is dwelling in Ghosita's Park at Kauśambī, king Udayana (Udena) of Vatsā (Vamsā) approaches him and asks how the young monks maintain their celibacy and spiritual practice:

Master Bhāradvāja, what is the cause or reason why these young monks, youths with black hair, endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, who have not dallied with sensual pleasures, lead the complete and pure holy life all their lives and maintain it continuously?

Maharajah, this is spoken by the Blessed One: "Come, monks, towards women who are old enough, bear them in mind as your own mother; towards those old enough to be your sisters, bear them in mind as your sisters; towards those young enough to be your daughters, bear them in mind as your daughters." This is the reason, Maharajah...

The mind is wanton, master Bhāradvāja. Sometimes lust arises towards women who are old enough to be one's mother...towards women who are old enough to be one's sisters...towards women who are young enough to be one's daughters. Is there any other reason that these young monks...lead the complete and pure holy life all their lives and maintain it continuously?

Maharajah, this is spoken by the Blessed One: "Come monks, review this body upwards from the soles of the feet, downwards from the tips of the hair, enclosed in skin, as full of many kinds of impurities: head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, midriff, spleen, lungs, intestines, small intestines, chyme, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, snot, synovial fluid, urine" (asubha,saññā or kāya,gatā,satī.) (D 2:293 f.; M 3:90; A 5:109; Vism 239-266)²³¹

[King Udayana to Piṇḍola:] That is easy, Master Bhāradvāja, for those monks who are developed in body, in moral conduct, in mind, in wisdom but, it is difficult for those who are undeveloped... Sometimes, though one thinks: "I will regard the body as foul," one beholds it as beautiful...

Maharajah, this is said by the Blessed One: "Come, monks, dwell guarding the sense-doors. Having seen a form with the eye, do not grasp its signs and features. Since you leave the sense-door unguarded, evil, unwholesome states of covetousness (abhiññā) and displeasure (domanassa) might invade you...Having heard a sound with the ear...Having smelt an odour with the nose...Having felt a touch with the body...Having cognized a mental state with the mind, do not grasp the signs and features...cultivate the restraint of the senses."

It is wonderful, Master Bhāradvāja! It is amazing, Master Bhāradvāja! You have made the Dharma clear in many ways.... Master Bhāradvāja, I go for refuge to the Blessed One, and to the Dharma, and to the Order of Monks. From this day let Master Bhāradvāja remember me as a lay follower who has gone forth for refuge for life. (S 35.127 = 4:110-113; abridged)

8. POWERS OF THE SEXES

(a) Powers of a woman

The androcentric society of the Buddha's time had certain expectations of a woman, that is, there were certain qualities that men saw as desirable in a woman. Most of these expectations were understandably from a male bias. However, there is a universal quality that is expected not only of women, but also of men, that of virtue. The Visāraḍa Sutta gives us a good idea of these ancient expectations:

Monks, there are five powers of a woman. What are the five?

The power of beauty, the power of wealth, the power of relatives, the power of sons, the power of virtue. These are the five powers of a woman. When a woman possesses these five powers, she dwells confident at home...she abides at home having won over her husband...she abides with her husband under her control. (S 4:246)

²³¹ *kāya,gatā,satī*. To these 31 parts of the body, the Commentaries add "brain" as the 32nd, Vism 241.

9. The agony and the ecstasy

However, the Buddha observes that in ancient India, if a woman has only the power of virtue, even to the exclusion of the other qualities, the virtuous would “accommodate her in the family; they do not expel her” (S 4:248)

(b) The best of goods

The Saṃyutta Nikāya contains a riddle: What is the best goods (*bhaṇḍana*)? Answer: “A woman ranks as the best of goods.” (S 1:43). At a cursory glance, this sounds like regarding woman as a “commodity,” which might well be true in androcentric India (and materialistic modern society). This riddle is actually the second question is a quatrain of riddles:

- 239 What is sovereignty in the world?
 What ranks as the best of goods?
 What in the world is a rusty sword?
 What in the world is considered a plague?
- 240 Power (*vaśa/vasa*) is sovereignty in the world.
 A woman ranks as the best of goods.
 In the world anger is a rusty sword.
 Thieves are considered a plague in the world. (S 1:43)

Like many of the verses (*gāthā*) of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, especially the Sa, gāthā Vagga (the first chapter), this riddle is in the ballad (*ākhyāna*) form and belongs to free floating ancient gnomic poetry of India which the Buddhists preserved (Winternitz 1933 2:57 f.). “Too many cooks spoil the broth” is an English gnome. (The Āḷavaka Sutta, for example, centres around riddles given by the yaksha Āḷavaka to the Buddha who answers them, Sn 181-192.)

As such, the statement that “A woman is the best of commodities” is a gnome or ancient Indian saying preserved in the Canon. The Saṃyutta Commentary, however, gives an interesting explanation to this non-Buddhist statement. A woman is called *the* best of goods because a woman is an article that should not be given away; or else she is so called because all Bodhisattvas and Universal Monarchs are conceived in a mother’s womb. (SA 1:100)

(c) Common qualities

The importance of woman in Buddhism is attested by the fact that a whole section, the Mātugāma Saṃyutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya is dedicated to women. This *saṃyutta* or “connected discourses” on women significantly open with two discourses of the title, the Manāpa Amanāpa Sutta. The two discourses are identical except for the subject: in the first is about women; the second is about men.

What five qualities that a woman possesses that makes her extremely disagreeable to a man?
She is not good-looking; not wealthy; not virtuous; lethargic; and infertile. (S 37.1)

What five qualities that a man possesses that makes him extremely disagreeable to a woman?
He is not good-looking; not wealthy; not virtuous; lethargic; and infertile. (S 37.2)

Again, here we see only the social aspects of gender relationship; as such, this is a conventional truth that can be overcome through spiritual practice. With some understanding of the Dharma, one can look beyond the external standards into the true nature of others and inspire them to show their natural goodness. In short, one attempts to see a person as he or she really *is*, and respecting that being. In this way, one will discover the other person’s hidden goodness and one’s own self-knowledge.

9. EQUALITY OR HARMONY?

(a) Gender harmony

As a rule, stereotypes are inaccurate: that women are feminine, and men should be masculine. Femininity is on one extreme of the gender spectrum, and masculinity is on the other end. The feminist movement that has arisen in western societies is a reaction against a male-dominated western society

under the shadow of patriarchal Christian values. Indeed, feminism exists because there is masculinism; but both, seen as polarized externalities, are incomplete in themselves.

According to Buddhism, in terms of emotional health, social harmony and spiritual development, mental or psychological aspects of gender matter more than its physical manifestations. Modern psychology, such as the work of Carl Gustav Jung, the German psychologist, has shown that we all have aspects or degrees of femininity and masculinity in ourselves. There is a masculine side (anima) in every woman, and a feminine side (animus) in every man. Both aspects must be harmonized internally for one to become a healthy individual. [5:4c]

“Equality” of gender is not necessarily a good thing for anyone, since equality suggests a more physical situation than a mental or emotional one. We can share things equally but we can only harmonize an imbalance, which really is the crux of the gender problem in a patriarchal (or matriarchal) society. The harmonization of gender gives a truer picture of the problem and its solution. It is in this light that we should view the various “negative” statements made, especially in the Aṅguttara, regarding women [6].

(b) Qualities peculiar to women

Social “equality” is not a just measure for women as against men but the two genders each have their peculiar qualities. In the Āveṇika Sutta (S 37.3), the Buddha lists five characteristics peculiar to women, “the five kinds of sufferings peculiar to women, that women experience but not men”:

- (1) Even when young, when a woman marries (goes to live with her husband’s family), she is separated from her relatives.
- (2) A woman is subject to menstruation.
- (3) A woman becomes pregnant.
- (4) A woman gives birth.
- (5) A woman is made to serve a man. (S 4:239)

Kṛṣṇā Gautamī (Kīsā Gotamī) makes this “indirect” statement of conventional truth regarding women, recorded in her Therīgāthā:

Painful is the state of a woman, says the Trainer of those persons worthy of training.
Being a co-wife, too, is painful—some having given birth once,
Even cut their throats; the gentler ones take poison.
When a difficult birth occurs, both mother and unborn child die. (Tha 216 f.)

(c) Contextualization

It is important here to “contextualize,” that is, read these texts in their context, first by analyzing whether each statement is a “hidden” (Skt. *saṃvṛti*, lit. “covered”) or “conventional” (P. *sammutti*) teaching, or a statement of ultimate (*paramārtha/param’attha*) truth [1:1b]. The statements made in the Āveṇika Sutta: (1) about married women living with the in-laws, and (5) about women being subservient to men, for example, are conventional truths relating only to societies like those of ancient India of the Buddha’s time.

The other three statements of the Āveṇika sutta—that (2) a woman is subject to menstruation; that (3) a woman becomes pregnant; and that (4) a woman gives birth—are also conventional truths but they are also universal truths of a worldly (*laukika/lokiya*) level, i.e. not of the level of spirituality or Dharma. In other words, these last three statements are not true in the ultimate sense because they are not hindrances to spiritual development and awakening. In terms of the not-self doctrine (*anatman/anattā*), there is no persisting personality, male or female, but only a single karmic stream interconnected with other karmic streams in a boundless net of interbeing. This is what Sponberg calls “soteriological inclusiveness” (1985:8-13).

BUDDHIST WOMEN SAINTS

10. BUDDHIST VIEW OF GENDER

9. The agony and the ecstasy

(a) Solutions to gender problem

The gender issue, that is the problem of sexual justice and harmony, arises from two causes: social oppression and emotional oppression. The first, social oppression, as we have seen is often rooted in ancient culture and religion. The second cause, emotional oppression, arises from personal interaction between individuals of different sexes into professional or intimate relationships (especially in marriage, family life and as occupational hazard). In both cases, the best way of the oppressed gender (whether male or female) is to be spiritually strong.

There are two basic ways to solve the gender problem if one is entangled in it. First, form a circle of positive like-minded spiritual friends to define, discuss, deliberate, solve and prevent the problems, especially through mutual emotional support and engaged action (such as learning from other action groups dealing with similar problems). In short, form or join a network of engaged Buddhists to deal with the problem.

The second solution to the gender problem is to revise and harmonize your mental approach to the whole problem. One of the most difficult aspects of the gender issue to deal with is the perception of one's being a "victim," which is clearly defined in the Dhammapada:

He abused me; he beat me; he defeated me—
In those who harbour such thoughts, hatred (*vera*) is never appeased.

He abused me; he beat me; he defeated me—
In those who do not harbour such thoughts, hatred (*vera*) is appeased. (Dh 3-4)

The point of these statements is that one has the choice of not *thinking* about it, since this does not solve the problem, but only worsen it. Being a victim remains a negative mental attitude after the wounds, bruises and hurt have healed.

(b) Kṛṣṇā Gautamī

The healing has to start and continue with a positive mental attitude of lovingkindness to oneself and to the oppressor. It is important to try to understand the oppressor: why he or she is oppressive and perhaps do something positive about it.²³² When Kṛśṇā Gautamī loses her only child after a long-awaited pregnancy, she falls into the rut of denial, insanely wandering about in search of a cure for her dead infant. She meets the Buddha who tells her to find a handful of mustard seeds from a house that has known no death. As she goes from house to house throughout the city, the message of impermanence and death is echoed and re-echoed into her being. She returns a sane person to the Buddha and is ordained into the Order. (DhA 2:270-275; cf. Thī 213-223)

One day, while Gautamī is meditating in the Andha,vana (Blind Men's Grove) in Śrāvastī after her noonday meal, Māra appears to her in an attempt to terrify and distract her from concentration. Māra addresses Gautamī in verse:

525 Why now, when your son is dead,
Do you sit here alone with tearful face?
Having entered the woods all alone,
Are you on the lookout for a man?

Then, upon investigating, it occurs to the nun Gautamī that it must be Māra: “This is Māra the Evil One.” Then she replies him in verse:

526 I have gotten past the death of sons;
With this, the search for men has ended.
I do not sorrow, I do not weep,
Nor do I fear you, friend. (S 1:130; cf. Thī 213-223)

²³² See for example Thich Nhat Hanh's poem "Please Call Me By My True Names" (in *Peace is Every Step*, London, 1991: 123 f.)

Here, Gautamī puns on the expression “gotten past the death of sons.” First, she has accepted her child’s death and her mourning is over. Having understood the Dharma, she does not need a son any more; as such, there is no more fear of losing one. So she lives fearless of Māra.

(c) Somā Therī

One of the most famous stories regarding the gender issue is that of the nun Somā, the daughter of king Bimbisāra’s chaplain. She became a nun on meeting the Buddha during his first visit to Rājagṛha [4:20]. Once in Śrāvastī, after her noon-day meal, she enters the Andhavana. Then, Mara the Evil One, desiring to frighten and distract her from her concentration, approaches her and addresses her in verse:

522 That state so hard to achieve,
 Which is to be attained by the seers,
 Cannot be attained by a woman
 With her two-finger wisdom.²³³

Then, upon investigating, it occurs to the nun Somā that it must be Māra: “This is Māra the Evil One.” Then she replies him in verse:

523 What does womanhood matter at all
 When the mind is well-concentrated,
 When knowledge flows on steadily
 As one sees rightly into the Dharma.

524 One to whom it might occur,
 “I’m a woman” or “I am a man”
 Or “I’m anything at all”—
 Is fit for Māra for to address. (S 1:128 f.)

Then Māra the Evil One, realizing that the nun Somā knows him, sad and disappointed, disappears right there.

(d) Craving, conceit, wrong view

The notion that “I am a woman” or “I am a man” or “I am this or that” is rooted in craving, conceit and wrong views. Other than simply accepting one’s gender, to dwell on the thought that one is “male” or “female” is rooted in craving (as allegorized in the origin story of the universe in the Aggañña Sutta) [1]. When this craving reaches a neurotic level, one begins to crave for what one “thinks” (subconsciously) that one needs, that is, what one perceives as sexually desirable in another.

Often a woman, because of her sex and sexuality, thinks of herself as “equal, superior or inferior” to another (S 1:12, 3:48 f., 5:56, 5:98). A man might perceive himself as being better or stronger than a woman, or that being a male is superior to being a female. This wrong perception based on discrimination (*vidhā*) or conceit (*māna*) plays a key role when one tries to solve interpersonal problems. In other words, one has to outgrow cultural conditioning regarding gender stereotypes and treat everyone as a person.

The most difficult level of overcoming the gender problem is that of wrong view because despite our “understanding” of the not-self doctrine (what more if we do not even know about it), we often find it difficult to relate to the opposite sex or have a healthy view of sexuality. Through lack of understanding how one’s mind works, one thinks one has needs that could be satisfied outside of oneself or by someone else, when the answer actually lies with understanding one’s own mind.

²³³ Two-finger wisdom. The Commentary explains that when a woman wants to check if the boiling rice is cooked or not, she would squeeze a bit of it between her two fingers.

- 532 Having gone to a sal tree with flowering top,
You stand at its foot all alone, O nun.
There is none whose beauty rivals yours:
Foolish girl, are you not afraid of rogues?

Then, upon investigating, it occurs to the nun Utpalavarṇā that it must be Māra: “This is Māra the Evil One.” Then she replies him in verse:

- 533 Though a hundred thousand rogues
Just like you might come here,
I stir not a hair, I feel no terror;
Even alone, Māra, I do not fear you.
- 534 I can make myself disappear
Or I can enter your belly.
I can stand between your eyebrows
Yet you will not catch a glimpse of me.
- 535 I am the master of my mind,
The bases of power are all well developed;
I am freed from all bondage:
Therefore I do not fear you, friend! (S 1:131 f)

Then, Māra the Evil One, realizing that the nun Utpalavarṇā knows him, sad and disappointed, disappears right there.

It is said that once when she was in Blind Men’s Grove, her cousin, the youth Ānanda, madly in love with her, hid in her hut and upon her returning, rapes her. After that, nuns are forbidden to stay in the Grove. (DhA 2:49 f.; V 3:35)

12. ṚṢI,DĀSĪ

(a) Failed marriages

Ṛṣi,dāsī (Isi,dāsī) was the beautiful daughter of a good and wealthy merchant of Ujjayinī (Ujjenī), the capital of Avantī (modern-day Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh). She was given in marriage to the son of a merchant of Sāketa in Kośala (modern-day Sujankot on the Sail river, Unao district, Uttar Pradesh). For a month, she served him lovingly and conscientiously .

412. By myself I cooked the rice,
By myself I washed the dishes.
As a mother looks after her only son,
So did I serve my husband.
413. I showed him devotion unsurpassed,
I served him with a humble mind,
I rose early, diligent, virtuous was I—
And yet my husband hated me. (Thī 412 f.)

When Ṛṣidāsī related her predicament to her parents-in-law, they praised her virtues and asked their bewildered son what was wrong. He could not give a good answer and replied that he simply could not stand the sight of her, even though she was an ideal wife, having done nothing wrong.

418. I have done nothing wrong,

9. The agony and the ecstasy

I have done him no harm,
I have not spoken rudely to him.
What have I done that my husband hates me? (Thī 418)

He simply tired of her for no apparent reason at all. In the end when her husband could not be brought to love her, they had no choice but to send R̥ṣidāsī back to her parents' house. Returning to her house as a rejected wife, everyone (except the husband) was devastated:

419. Rejected, overcome by suffering,
They led me back to my father's house.
"While appeasing our son," they exclaimed,
"We have lost the beautiful goddess of fortune!" (Thī 419)

She was back in her father's protection, and he looked for a new husband for her, this time even asking for only half the usual dowry. When she finally found a new husband, again she served him with love and diligence but the same pattern repeated itself. Now both she and her father were totally at a loss.

Shortly thereafter, an ascetic visited them in quest of alms. It occurred to R̥ṣidāsī's father to offer her to this ascetic. When the ascetic was offered the hand of the beautiful R̥ṣidāsī and the comfort of her mansion, he readily accepted. But after only two weeks, he begged the father to return his robe and bowl. The ascetic would rather starve as the poorest of beggars than spend one more day in R̥ṣidāsī's company. Despite the pleas and offers from the family, the ascetic said that he simply could not live in the same house as R̥ṣidāsī, and with those words he left. (Thī 422-425)

(b) Recalling her past lives

R̥ṣidāsī was now miserable and on the verge of suicide rather than continue to bear such suffering. Now on that same day, the nun Jina, dattā came to her house for alms. Seeing the nun's peaceful countenance, R̥ṣidāsī decided that she should be a nun herself. At first, her father refused to release her, but relented in the end after considering her pleas, exhorting her to gain awakening (Thī 432).

After seven days of spiritual striving, she gained the Three Knowledges (of the recollection of her past lives, of the other's karma, and of the destruction of defilements). Looking into her past, she realized that eight lives ago, when she was a man: a handsome and rich goldsmith, who intoxicated with his youth, seduced the wives of others, treating them as objects to be won, used and discarded.

For his evil deeds, the goldsmith was reborn in a hell where he was cut on all sides by razor-sharp blades as she ran towards the form of a beautiful woman before him. After that, he was reborn as a monkey. When he was only seven days old, the troop leader castrated him. After dying, he was reborn as a sheep, the offspring of a one-eyed ewe, and was made a gelding, unable to satisfy his sexual urges. His third animal birth was as an ox, castrated and forced to pull the plough and cart with hardly any rest (Thī 440 f.), which was especially painful for him because he had always avoided hard work when he was a goldsmith. In fact, as an ox, he had to work so hard that he lost his eyesight.

After three births as animals, he was reborn as a human being, as a hermaphrodite, with the sex organs of both male and female, since he was obsessed with them! After 30 unhappy years he died and was reborn as the object of his desire: a woman. This is how desire turns man into the object of his desire (Nyanaponika & Hecker 1997:315). The newborn girl was born into the lowest caste, the daughter of a very poor carter who failed in everything he did and ended up owing money to a lot of people.

In order to discharge his debt, he had no choice but to give his sixteen-year-old daughter away as a slave to his creditor, a wealthy merchant. In due course, the merchant's son, Giridāsa, fell in love with her and took her as a minor wife. The first wife suffered as a result of this new intrusion. The slave girl secured her newly won position by sowing discord between Giridāsa and his first wife so that they broke up in the end. (Thī 443-446)

After her death this time, she was reborn as R̥ṣidāsī, whom, despite her love and industry, three successive husbands could not love. Since she did not react with anger or aggression, but endeavoured at all times to be a model wife, she cultivated a store of merit for herself. Finally, R̥ṣidāsī cleared the mystery of her strange fate, and was finally free.

447. This was the fruit of that past deed,

That although I served them like a slave,
They rejected me and went their way:
Of that, too, I had made an end. (Thī 447)

(c) Evaluation

Mrs. C.A.F. Rhys Davids is of the opinion that the Isidāsī Therīgāthā (the above story) has a late style and suggests late literary creation. The scene is Pāṭaliputra, and not any of the usual towns mentioned in the Canon. According to her, the name of Ṛṣidāsī's sponsoring nun—Jinadattā—suggests traces of Jain influence here. (Thī:R xxii f.)

The Ṛṣidāsī story could easily be misread to affirm that it is one's bad karma to be born as a woman or a hermaphrodite. The story however does confirm that one's habitual thought and actions will follow one in one form or another. As one thinks and acts, so would one reap the fruits. The point is clear: one should take care what one desires after because ultimately one becomes what one desires.

13. PAṬĀCĀRĀ²³⁶

(a) Secret affair

Paṭācārā (we do not know her real name) is the foremost amongst the nuns who are well-versed in the Vinaya (A 1:25). However, her story is a very sad one: she suffered the tragic loss of all her loved ones all within a few days, a tragedy that drove her to madness, that is, until she met the Buddha (DA 3:746; MA 1:232; UA 127). She was the beautiful daughter of a Śrāvastī banker. When she came of age (between 14-16), her parents confined her to the seventh floor of their mansion, where she secretly became intimate with her servant boy.

One day, when her parents decided that she should marry a rich young man of her station, she decided to elope with her secret lover, the servant-boy. Disguised in servant's clothes, she met the boy at the city gate, and together they ran off to another village, where they lived together by growing their own food. She herself prepared food for both of them.

In due course, she had a child. Thinking that they needed their parents' help now and that as parents they would surely love grandchildren, she decided that they should return to Śrāvastī. Her husband, fearing that he might be beaten up upon his return, refused to go. Then, her birth pangs came and she delivered a son in great pain.

When the second child came, she again thought of visiting her parents' house. Again, her husband refused. When her husband was away working, she took the first son with her and left for Śrāvastī. On finding out that she had left, her husband immediately trailed her into the middle of the forest. When he found her, however, she refused to turn back.

(b) Loss of all her loved ones

Then a thunderstorm arose and at the same time she suffered her birth pangs. Her husband quickly went about with an axe seeking materials for making a shelter. While standing on top of an anthill, a fierce serpent inhabiting the anthill emerged and stung him to death.

Meanwhile, Paṭācārā was giving birth to her second child by herself unsheltered from the storm with her first son wailing away. Both her sons now cried loudly for the cold and rain. She spent the rest of the night weak and alone in the forest. When morning came, she found her dead husband. "Because of me, my husband has to die in such a lonely place," she lamented. Then she struggled on her journey with her two children.

They soon reached a stream that had flooded because of the storm during the night. She could not ford the stream with both her children because of the swift currents and deep waters. So, she carried the new-born infant in her arms, and left the first son behind on the bank.

Having reached the other bank, she left the new-born son there. But when she was midstream, a hawk saw the new-born son. Because of his reddish flesh, the hawk mistook it for a piece of meat and so swooped down on it. The terrified mother hysterically screamed, "Shoo! Shoo!" Hearing her shouting, the first son thought that she was calling for him. He stepped into the river and drowned in the swift currents. The hawk had taken away her second son. She cried out in great grief.

²³⁶ ThīA 108 ff.; AA 1:356 ff.; DhA 2:260 ff., 3:434 f.; DA 3746; MA 1:232; UA 127; J 6:481.

9. The agony and the ecstasy

Then she met a man from Śrāvastī and when she asked him about her family, the man replied that their house had collapsed in the terrible storm in the night. Both her parents and her brother, too, were killed and their bodies were being cremated right at that moment, pointing to the smoke rising in the sky over the trees.

At that very moment, Paṭācārā could not bear it any longer and went mad. Her clothes fell from her body, but she did not know it. As she went about lamenting her losses, some scolded her, some threw rubbish at her, some threw dust on her head, some pelted her with clods of earth.

(c) Paṭācārā healed

Now at that time, the Buddha was teaching in the Jetavana. When he saw her, he knew that she had done good deeds in the past which were just then ready to ripen. The Buddha simply pronounced: “Sister, regain your mindfulness!” Instantly, through the supernatural power of the Buddha, she was healed. Then someone threw her his cloak and she put it on.²³⁷

She then told her tragic story and the Buddha listened patiently. When her grief had subsided, the Buddha said:

The four oceans contain but little water
Compared to all the tears that we have shed,
Smitten by sorrow, bewildered by pain.
Why, O woman, are you still heedless? (DhA 2:268; cf. Assu Sutta, S 2:180)

The Buddha then gave her this instruction as recorded in the Dhammapada:

288. There are no sons for one's protection,
Nor father nor relatives, too.
For one who is overcome by death,
No protection is to be found amongst relatives.
289. Realizing this reality,
Let the wise and the virtuous
Swiftly clear the way
That leads to Nirvana. (Dh 288 f.)

At the end of the teaching, Paṭācārā became a stream-winner and requested to be admitted into the Order. After her ordination, by reason of her happy mind (P. *paṭit'ācār'attā*), she was called Paṭācārā. (DhA 2:269)

(d) Paṭācārā's awakening

One day, while she was washing her feet, she noticed how the water she had spilled on the ground ran a little way and disappeared into the ground. The second time it went a little farther, and a third time farther still. Taking this as her subject of meditation, she reflected:

Even as the water I spilled the first time ran a little way and disappeared, so also living beings in the world are dying in youth. Even as I spilled the water the second time ran a little way farther, so also living beings in the world are dying in the prime of life. Even as the water I spilled the third time ran a little farther yet, so also living beings here in the world are dying of old age.

(DhA 2:269)

In her Therīgāthā, there is a verse which describes another intense spiritual experience of hers. She describes how, before turning in, when extinguishing her lamp, she realizes that the point of the light going out is like the moment of awakening.²³⁸

²³⁷ Hence her name (ThīA 110). Here, *paṭā, cārā* means “cloak-walker,” ie one who wanders about in a cloak.

²³⁸ Dh 288 f; 113; Thī 112-116, 218 f; AA 552-560; DhA 8.12/2:260-270; ThīA 108-112. See DhA:B Introd §27, Synoptical Table & p50. The Commentarial accounts are confusing. The **Dhammapada Comy** says that she becomes an arhat after mindfully watching the water flowing into the ground. The **Therīgāthā Comy**, however, adds that she enters her cell and on putting out the oil-lamp, she wins arhathood. It is impossible for a person to gain

Having taken a lamp, I entered my cell.
I checked the bed and sat down on the couch.
Then, taking a needle,
I pulled down the wick.
The liberation of the mind
Is like the quenching of the lamp. (Thī 112-116)

The Buddha who was seated in his Fragrant Chamber, sent forth a radiant image (hologram) of himself, and standing before Paṭācārā said:

Paṭācārā, it is better to live but a single day, indeed, a single moment, and see the rise and fall of the five aggregates, than to live a hundred years and not see.

And, connecting his teachings together, the Buddha pronounced this stanza:

113. One may live for a hundred years,
Not seeing the rise and fall of things.
Better, indeed, is one day's life
Of one who sees this rise and fall. (Dh 113)

At the conclusion of this teaching, Paṭācārā became an arhat together with the four analytical skills (*pratisaṃvid/paṭisambhidā*). [11b n8]

Paṭācārā later became a great teacher, and many women, stricken with grief, sought her guidance and her consolation (ThīA 47, 177, 122). The Buddha declared her as the foremost amongst the nuns who are Vinaya-experts (A 1:25). From being a frivolous young girl who lost everything she had loved, Paṭācārā became an arhat and the expert in the Discipline amongst the nuns.

FAMOUS COURTESANS WHO CONVERTED

14. COURTESANS

In a man-dominated society, as India was during the Buddha's time, women were regarded as valuable commodity (S 1:43) [8b]. To the worldly ancient Indians, women had only three functions: doing domestic chores, entertaining the men, and bearing children. Social controls, like those advocated by the *Manu-smṛti*, as we have seen [3], kept the women uneducated and dislocated from religious wisdom. On the other hand, if a woman had some wisdom she was more likely to be liberated.

The most potent combination for an Indian woman then would be beauty and wisdom. Such a woman would likely be a special class of women in the Buddha's time: the courtesan or geisha (*gaṇikā* or *gaṇakī*, lit. "one who belongs to the crowd"). Such women are highly respected and admired by the ancient Indian men. They are not like the prostitutes or social escorts of modern times but perhaps more like the ancient Greek heterae or the Japanese geishas. They are well-versed in the culture and literature of their society, and as such provided much more than just physical pleasures to the clients, and they charged very high fees for their services.

In spite of the adverse opinions of the priests and more traditional people, courtesans flourished in the Buddha's days. Some, like Vimalā (Thi 39) and Śīrimā (SnA 1:144), appear to have been courtesans because their mothers were. Birth-rate amongst the Indian courtesans was low simply because, as Sālavatī puts it: "Men do not like a pregnant woman." (V 1:267 f.). There are no records of infanticide but the murder of illegitimate children are recorded in the *R̥gveda* (Macdonell & Keith 1912 1:395). Sāla,vaṭī of Rājagṛha (V 1:269) and a courtesan of Kauśambī (DhA 1:174) put their sons in an old winnowing basket

awakening twice. However, from the canonical verses (Thī 112-116), it is clear that she only mindfully watches the flowing water, and becomes an arhat at the putting out of the lamp.

9. The agony and the ecstasy

and abandoned them on a dust-heap. Sālavatī's son was saved by the prince, Abhaya, and lived to become the famous physician, Jīvaka.

Āmrāpālī (Ambapālī) of Vaiśālī had a son, Vimala Kauṇḍinya (ThīA 206 f.) and Abhaya, mātā Padmavatī (Padumavatī) of Ujjayinī had Abhaya Rāja, kumāra (ThīA 31 f.), both of whom became monks. Four courtesans, namely:

Vimalā of Vaiśālī (Thī 72-76; Tha 1150-1157; ThaA 2:178; ThīA 76 f.),

Abhaya, mātā Padmavatī (Thī 33 f.; Thī 33 f.; ThīA 31 f.),

Ardhakāśī (Aḍḍhakāśī) (V 2:277; VA 1:242; Thī 25 f.; ThīA 30 ff.; Ap 2:610 f.), and

Āmrāpālī (Thī 252-270; ThīA 206 f.)

converted to Buddhism, joined the Order and became arhats. Little is known of Vimalā of Vaiśālī, except that she tried to seduce Maudgalyāyana (ThīA 76 f.) and was rebuked for it (Tha 1150-1157). Almost nothing is known of Abhaya, mātā of Ujjayinī except that she entertained king Bimbisāra and bore him a son, Abhaya Rāja, kumāra (ThīA 31 f.).

Ardha, kāśī of Kāśī is an important nun whose ordination has no precedent: she was ordained by a messenger (V 2:276 f.). When unscrupulous men heard that she plans to renounce the world, they keep a watch over the road she will be taking to go to Śrāvastī. For her safety, the Buddha allows her ordination through a messenger, a learned and competent nun.

15. ĀMRAPĀLĪ

The beautiful Āmrāpālī (Ambapālī) began her lay life as a loyal and generous supporter of the Order, but later renounced the world and became an arhat. She was said to have been spontaneously born in the king's garden at Vaiśālī. It is more likely that she was an abandoned child that the gardener found at the foot of a mango tree, hence her name. She grew up to be an extremely beautiful girl and numerous young Licchavī princes vied each other for her hand. Not to offend any of the suitors, she was made a courtesan of the city.²³⁹

Āmrāpālī's fame spread and reached king Bimbisāra of Magadha who decided to meet her and was overcome by her beauty. She bore him a son, Vimala Kauṇḍinya, who later became a monk.²⁴⁰

In the course of his final journey, the Buddha stopped at Vaiśālī and stayed in Āmrāpālī's Mango Grove. Inspired by a long Dharma discourse from the Buddha, she invited the Order for the next day's meal. As she hurried home to make preparations, a troop of Licchavī princes met her. On learning that she would be hosting the offering the next day, they made an offer of 100,000 pieces of money for the transfer of the honour to them. However, Āmrāpālī replied that she would not turn over the honour even if she were offered the whole of Vaiśālī and its revenues! On the following day, at end of the meal-offering, she donated her Mango Grove to the Order, where the Buddha had earlier on delivered many discourses. (D 2:101 f.) [10:4c2]

Vimala Kauṇḍinya, her son by Bimbisāra, had become a monk and an arhat. One day, while listening to him preaching, Āmrāpālī decided to join the Order as a nun (ThīA 207). She took her own body as her meditation object, and reflecting on its impermanence and imperfections attained arhathood.

252 My hair was black, the colour of bees, each ending in a curl.
Now on account of old age, it has become like hemp fibres:
Not otherwise is the word of the Speaker of Truth.

253 Covered with flowers my head was fragrant like a casket of delicate perfume .
Now on account of old age, it smells like dog's fur.
Not otherwise is the word of the Speaker of Truth.

256 Formerly my eyebrows were beautiful like crescents well-painted by an artist .
Now on account of old age, they droop down with wrinkles.
Not otherwise is the word of the Speaker of Truth.

²³⁹ Cf. case of Uṭpalavarṇā. [11b].

²⁴⁰ Bimbisāra, however, installed Sālavatī as the courtesan of his capital, Rājagṛha.

- 257 Brilliant and beautiful like jewels, my eyes were dark blue and long in shape.
Now overwhelmed with age, their beauty has utterly vanished.
Not otherwise is the word of the Speaker of Truth.
- 260 Formerly my teeth looked beautiful, like the colour of plantain buds.
Now on account of old age, they are broken and yellow.
Not otherwise is the word of the Speaker of Truth.
- 265 Formerly both my breasts were lovely, full, round, firm and high.
Now they just hang down and sag like a pair of empty water bags.
Not otherwise is the word of the Speaker of Truth.
- 266 Formerly my body was beautiful like a well-polished sheet of gold.
Now it is all covered with fine wrinkles.
Not otherwise is the word of the Speaker of Truth.
- 267 Formerly both my thighs looked beautiful like an elephant's trunk.
Through old age, they are now like bamboo poles.
Not otherwise is the word of the Speaker of Truth.
- 270 Such is the body: now decrepit, the abode of many pains.
It is nothing but an aged house with its plaster fallen off.
Not otherwise is the word of the Speaker of Truth. (Thī 252-270; selections)

Āmrapālī's gaining awakening by reflecting on the impermanence of her own body shows that Buddhist spiritual practice or meditation, far from being something mystical and difficult, is an awareness and acceptance of the natural processes that our lives go through. If we constantly apply this perception of impermanence (*anitya, saṃjñā/anicca, saññā*) every waking moment of our lives—whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down—we would surely move faster on the path to awakening.

16. ŚIRĪMĀ

(a) Uttarā

Śirīmā was a courtesan of Rājagṛha, daughter of Śālavatī and younger sister to Jīvaka the doctor. Her story is closely intertwined with that of Uttarā Nanda, *mātā*, the foremost of lay-women disciples who waited on the Buddha (B 36.20). Uttarā was married into a non-Buddhist family so that her husband, Sumana, forbade her from observing the fast (*upoṣadha/uposatha*).

Knowing her husband well enough, Uttarā then came up with an idea. She hired the services of the courtesan Śirīmā at the cost of 15,000 pieces of money (*kārṣāpaṇa/kahāpaṇa*)²⁴¹ to look after her husband for a fortnight. When her husband saw the beauty of Śirīmā, he immediately agreed to the arrangement.

On the last day of the fast, Uttarā was busy preparing alms for the Buddha. Her husband, who was walking nearby with Śirīmā, saw Uttarā hard at work, smiled thinking what a fool she was not to enjoy her wealth. Uttarā smiled in return, thinking how foolish he was for not making proper use of his wealth. Śirīmā, thinking that both husband and wife were smiling at each other to slight her, flew into a fury.

Seizing a pot of boiling oil, Śirīmā threw it at Uttarā's head. Uttarā, at that moment, was full of lovingkindness for Śirīmā. The oil, therefore, did not hurt her at all. Śirīmā, realizing her grievous error, begged for forgiveness from Uttarā. Uttarā then said:

"My father is still living. If he forgives you, so will I."

"I shall go to your father, the rich guildmaster, and ask him for forgiveness."

"Purṇa is the father who brought me into the round of suffering. If the father bringing me out of the round forgives you, then so will I."

"But who is this father who is bringing you out of the round of suffering?"

²⁴¹ On the *kārṣāpaṇa*, see section 8:2a.

9. The agony and the ecstasy

“The Buddha, the Perfect Self-enlightened One.”

“But I don’t know him. What shall I do?”

“The Teacher will be coming here tomorrow, together with his monks. Come yourself, bringing whatever offering you can, and ask his forgiveness.”

The following day, after the meal-offering was over, Śīrimā went up to the Buddha and begged for forgiveness. “What for?” asked the Buddha. Śīrimā then related the whole story. The Buddha then asked Uttarā to confirm the story. Uttarā said:

“I suffused her with lovingkindness, and thought to myself: My friend Śīrimā has done me a great service...”

“Excellent, Uttarā, excellent!” said the Buddha, “That is the right way to overcome anger.” And he added this verse:

223. Overcome anger with non-anger,
Conquer evil with goodness,
Conquer the miserly with generosity,
And the liar with truth. (Dh 223)

Then the Buddha delivered a discourse, at the end of which Uttarā won the fruit of Non-return. Her erstwhile unbelieving husband and parents-in-law all became stream-winners, as did Śīrimā.

(b) Śīrimā’s body

Ever since the Eye of Truth arose in her, Śīrimā gave up her life as a courtesan and devoted herself to looking after the Order. Through meal-tickets, she invited the Order to send eight monks daily to her house for a meal-offering. One day, one of the eight monks returned to his monastery and when asked about the meal, he replied that the food was indescribably good, but Śīrimā’s looks was even better.

As the monk described Śīrimā’s beauty, another monk who was listening simply fell in love with her without even having seen her. It so happened that on the following day, Śīrimā fell sick and could not serve the monks, including the lovesick monk. So, her servant served the monks. At the end of the meal, Śīrimā made an effort to get out to pay her respects to the monks. Even without her adornments and simply dressed, the lovesick monk thought that Śīrimā looked extremely beautiful. “Imagine how beautiful she would look when she is well and wears her jewelry!” he thought.

That same evening, Śīrimā died. King Bimbisāra relayed the news to the Buddha, who then instructed that the body should not be cremated but left in the charnel ground and guarded against carrion crows and other animals. After three days, Śīrimā’s corpse was swollen and festering with worms, so that it looked like a pot of rice over a hot fire, bubbling over on the surface.

Bimbisāra then decreed, under pain of a fine of eight gold coins, that all adult residents of Rājagṛha were to file past the body, to see Śīrimā in her present condition. As for the lovesick monk who had not eaten for four days, the food in his bowl, too, was by then crawling with worms. His friends then told him that the Buddha was going to see Śīrimā. At the word “Śīrimā,” the monk was galvanized. He emptied his bowl and rinsed it, and then joined the others to see Śīrimā.

When the crowd had gathered, the Buddha instructed king Bimbisāra, “Let it be proclaimed with the beating of drums what whoever pays the sum of 1000 coins may have Śīrimā.” But no man wanted her now, so the price was lowered; but no man wanted her even for free. Then the Buddha spoke to the monks:

Here, monks, you see a woman who was loved by the world. In this same city, in the past, men would gladly pay a thousand gold coins to enjoy her for just one night. Now, however, no one will have her, even for nothing. This is what the body comes to, perishable and fragile, made attractive only through ornaments, a heap of wounds with nine openings, held together with three hundred bones, a continuing burden. Only fools attach fancies and illusion to such an impermanent thing.

147 See this painted puppet,
A mass of wounds,
Diseased: an object of desires,
It has nothing stable or lasting. (Dh 147)

After the Buddha's discourse, the lovesick monk was cured and became a stream-winner (DhA 3:104 f; VvA 74 ff.). After the contemplation of the body, he developed insight and became an arhat.

As for Śirimā, she had been reborn in the heavens. Seeing the Buddha, the monks and the crowd around her corpse, she descended to earth in a glorious blaze accompanied by 500 celestial maidens in 500 chariots. Then she dismounted and saluted the Buddha. The venerable Vaṅḡsa, the foremost poet in the Order, asked from where she had come and what meritorious deeds she had done to obtain such glory, and Śirimā told her story (Vv no. 16 = 137-149).

(c) The Vijaya Sutta

On this special occasion, the Buddha delivered the Vijaya Sutta, also known as the Kāya, vicchan-danika Sutta (The Discourse for Disillusionment Regarding the Body, Sn no. 11):

- 193 If walking or standing still,
Sitting or lying down,
One bends, one stretches—
This is the movement of the body.
- 194 Joined together with bones and sinews,
Laid over with skin and flesh,
Covered by the outer skin—
One does not see it as it really is.
- 195 Full of gut, filled with the belly,
The lobe of the liver, the bladder,
The heart, the lungs,
The kidneys and the spleen.
- 196 Nasal mucus, saliva,
Sweat and lymph,
Blood, fluid of the joints.
Bile and fat.
- 197 And from the nine openings,
Impurities ever flow:
Eye secretion from the eye;
Wax from the ear,
- 198 And mucus from the nose;
Through the mouth, it pukes
Now bile, now phlegm;
From the body, sweat and dirt;
- 199 And the hollow of its head
Is filled with the brain.
“It's beautiful!” so thinks
The fool led by ignorance.
- 200 But when it lies dead,
Bloated and blue-black,
Cast away in the cemetery,
Relatives care not for it.
- 201 Dogs devour it, and
Jackals, wolves and worms,
Crows and vultures, too, devour it,
And what other living beings there be.

9. The agony and the ecstasy

- 202 Having heard the Buddha Word,
The monk has insight here—
Indeed, he thoroughly knows it.
For he sees (the body) as it really is.
- 203 “As this [body] is, so was that;
As that [body] is, so will this be be.”
(Knowing this,) let one discard desire for the body,
Both within and without.
- 204 Having discarded desire and passion,
The monk who has insight here
Reaches the Deathless, the Peace,
The eternal state of Nirvana.
- 205 This two-legged (body) is impure,
Foul-smelling, that we attend to:
Full of various dead things,
Trickling from here and there.
- 206 Whoever, such a body
Would think to exalt
Or should despise another—
What else is this but lack of insight. (Sn 193-206)

At the end of the discourse, the nun Janapada, kalyāṇī Nandā became an arhat, and Śīrimā a Non-returner. (SnA 1:244 f., 253 f.)

17. GOTAMĪ THERĪ APADĀNA

The first Buddhist nun is Mahā Prajāpatī Gautamī (Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī), the Buddha’s foster mother.²⁴² One of the most beautiful examples of spiritual poetry is found in the Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī Therī Apadāna. It is also a good example of the usage of the dichotomy of “worldly language” and “Dharma language” [1:1b]. Above all, this selection of verses (esp. verse 31) reflect the harmonization of femininity and masculinity in an individual:

27. What I’ve long wished for, | today is fulfilled.
‘Tis time to beat the drum of joy. | What are your tears for, daughters?
28. If there is love for me; | if there is gratitude,
Let all work with firm effort | so that the True Teaching may stand.
29. When asked by me, | the Self-enlightened One gave women the going-forth.
Therefore, just as I rejoice, | so should you do the same.
30. Having thus admonished those women, | preceded by the nuns,
She approached and worshipped the Buddha, | and these words spoke:
31. O Well-gone One, I am your mother; | and you, O Wise Hero, are my father:
O giver of happiness of the True Teaching, | O refuge, I was given birth by you, O Gotama!
32. O Well-gone One, your physical body was nurtured by me;
My Dharma body, flawless, | was nurtured by you.
33. To satisfy a moment’s craving, | you had milk suckled by me.

²⁴² See section 5 n above.

But I, drinking the milk of Dharma from you, | Had peace without end.

34. For my raising you, | you owe me no debt, Great Sage!
For women desiring children, | may they have a child like you.²⁴³
35. Mothers of kings like Mandhātā | drown in this sea of becoming,
But you, O Son! brought me | Across the ocean of becoming.
36. Queen mother, royal consort: | these names are easy for women to gain,
But “the mother of the Buddha,” this name | is the most difficult to obtain. (Ap 531)

18. CAN A WOMAN BE A BUDDHA?

Both the Pali Canon and the Commentaries say that “it cannot happen that a woman might become an a Worthy, Perfect Self-enlightened Buddha” (M 3:65; A 1:28; BA 91). The reasons, as we have seen are more biological and historical, not spiritual. The position of a Perfect Self-enlightened Buddha is that of someone who has not only discovered the highest liberating truth of reality but who proclaims it to a world that is rooted in the twin evils of like and dislike, a male-dominated world.

As we have also seen, in the ultimate sense, sex is a world-bound notion. On the spiritual level, one has to transcend sexuality, and are as such equal—or more accurately, on the highest spiritual level, all biases of superiority, inferiority and equality are transcended, since the notion of ego and self are destroyed.

Can a woman become a Buddha? It is interesting to note that in the distant past, Gautama Buddha was a born as a woman. According to the *Jina, kāla, māli* (written by Ratana, paññā, a 16th century monk in Siam), the Bodhisattva, in the distant past before the Buddha Dīpaṅkara, is the step-sister of a Buddha named Purāṇa Dīpaṅkara (“Earlier Dīpaṅkara”). It is said that she makes a gift of mustard oil to a renowned elder monk named Pacchima Dīpaṅkara (“Later Dīpaṅkara”).

With the offering, she makes an aspiration to attain Buddhahood, and predicted by the Buddha Purāṇa Dīpaṅkara that in the distant future the elder monk would become the Buddha Dīpaṅkara and that the young woman would be reborn as the male ascetic named Sumedha (Jin:J 1978:3). It is also interesting to note here that, according to Theravāda tradition, once a vow for Buddhahood is made, the aspirant would always be born as a woman thereafter until the final attainment of Buddhahood. (Reynolds, 1997:29 f.)

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9. The agony and the ecstasy

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10

WAS THE BUDDHA POISONED?

An Overview of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta

1. INTRODUCTION

(a) The longest Pali sutra

The last few months of the Buddha's life are recorded in detail in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16), the Jana,vasabha Sutta (D 17) and the Mahā Sudassana Sutta (D 28). The most details, however, are found in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, "the Great Discourse on the Final Nirvana"²⁴⁴ (D 16/2:72-167) by itself is the longest of all the Buddhist texts (96 pages of Pali text in the PTS edition), indeed, the longest of all ancient Indian literary composition still extant. For even though there are longer Indian texts, such as the Brāhmaṇas, these are compiled from small, independent pieces, while the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta "is built according to a uniform plan" (Hinuber 1996: 31).

Furthermore, it forms the hub of at least three other long discourses, that is, the two Dīgha Nikāya sutras that immediately follow: the Mahā Sudassana Sutta ("the Discourse on the Great Sudarśana," D 17) and the Jana,vasabha Sutta ("the Discourse on Jana,vasabha," D 18); and the Sampasādanīya Sutta "the Discourse that Inspires," D 28, S 47.2/5:159-161; cf. J 5:443). Each of these three sutras (and another) are expansions on passages from the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, as follows:

<u>Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta</u>	<u>Expanded as</u>
D 2 :81/16.1.16 (Āmra,yaṣṭhikā)	Sampasādanīya Sutta (D 28 = S 47.2)
D 2:91-93/16.2.5-7 (Nāḍikā)	Jana,vasabha Sutta (D 18)
D 2:119/16.3.49 (Great Wood)	Kaliṅga Sutta (S 20.8/2:267 f.)
D 2:146/16.5.17-18 (Kusinagarī)	Mahā Sudassana Sutta (D 17)

Although the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta is in many respects the most important discourse in the Dīgha Nikāya, it differs essentially in form and contents from all the other Pali sutras. It is neither a dialogue nor a discourse on any single doctrine, but a long record, albeit not always continuous, of the Buddha's last days and his Final Nirvana. Although it forms the literary hub of at least three other sutras, it is not (as a whole) the oldest in the collection. Only some parts of it can be regarded as ancient and original.

(b) Composition of the sutra

At some very early period, probably soon after the Buddha's passing, there had been a short Parinibbāna Sutta, "the Discourse on the Final Nirvana," which, "by means of interpolations and additions, grew longer and longer in the course of time, till it became the 'great Sutta of the perfect Nirvana' which we now have in our Pali Canon" (Winternitz 1933:39). According to Winternitz, those "ancient and original" sections of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, besides the verses which "bear the stamp of the greatest antiquity," are as follows (listed according to chapter and section):

- 2.23 The first illness that befalls the Buddha at Bilva, and which he overcomes by sheer will.
2.25 He assures Ānanda that he does not have a guru's "closed fist," and that he has never wished to pose as a leader of the Order.
5.13 f. Ānanda's grief at the Buddha's impending departure and consolation by the Buddha.

T.W. Rhys Davids (the founder of the Pali Text Society, London) has made a concordance of sources of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta in his Introduction to his translation (D:R 2:71 f.). All of the 96 pages of the Pali text, with the exception of nine gaps (the original materials)—pp. 92 f.; 113-115; 117-121; 130-133; 137-140; 148-150; 153; 158-160; 164-167—are found, in nearly identical words, elsewhere in the Canon.

²⁴⁴ On the problem of the translation of *parinibbāna* and *nibbāna*, see K.R. Norman, "Mistaken Ideas about *Nibbāna*," *The Buddhist Forum*, vol. 3, 1995:211-225. A summary of the discussion is given in section 21c below.

10. Was the Buddha poisoned?

THE ORIGINAL MATERIALS, UNIQUE TO THE SUTRA

- (1) §2.10-11 (D 2:92-93) The Brick House & Āmrāpālī's Grove (mention of location only).
 (2) §3.34-42 (D 2:113-115) The Buddha tells Ānanda about Māra's approaches in the past and in the present; the Final Nirvana in 3 months' time; Ānanda's belated request & the Buddha's rebuke.
 (3) §3.44-51 (D 2:117-121) Rebuke of Ānanda continues; the Gabled House; public announcement of the Final Nirvana in 3 months' time.
 (4) §4.26-38 (D 2:130-133) Putkasa presents the golden robes.
 (5) §5.1-11 (D 2:137-140) The sal grove; Upavāṇa; devas' lamentation; the 4 holy places; attitude to women; the Tathāgata's remains.
 (6) §5.19-26 (D 2:148-150) The impending Final Nirvana announced to the Mallas, who then visit the Buddha; Subhadra.
 (7) §5.29-30 (D 2:153) Subhadra's ordination.
 (8) §6.11-15 (D 2:158-160) Aniruddha consoles Ānanda, instructs Ānanda to announce the Buddha's passing to the Mallas; laying in state.
 (9) §6.21-26 (D 2:176-167) The cremation and division of relics.

The original materials amount altogether about 32 or 33 pages, that is, about one-third of the whole. That proportion, Rhys Davids notes, "would be reduced if we were to include passages of similar tendency, or passages of shorter length" (D:R 2:71). Rhys Davids has worked out a list of those passages that are found in other parts of the Canon (see following page).

CONCORDANCE OF SOURCES OF THE MAHĀ PARINIBBĀNA SUTTA (T.W. RHYS DAVIDS)

[My remarks and additions are within parentheses.]

	ch	section	page	Other old Pali texts
1	1	1-10	72-80	A 4:16-24
2		16, 17	81-83	D 28 & S 5:159-161
3		20-34	84-89	U 8.6 & V 1:226; [D 3:209; M 1:354; S 4:183]
4	2	2, 3	90, 91	S 5:431, V 1:231 & Nett 166
[6-9	91-94	S 5:356 f/55.8
		6-9	92 f.	S 5:358-360/55.10]
5		12, 13	94, 95	S 4:211
6		14-19	95-98	V 1:231-233 (differs as to location.)
7		22-26	98-101	S 5:151-154, §26, 5:164, 165
8	3	1-20	102-109	A 4:308-313
9		1-10	102-107	S 5:259-263 & U 6.1; [Nett 60]
10		21-23	109, 110	A 4:30 (nearly = M 1:72)
11		24-32	110, 111	A 4:305 & 349; M 2:13, 14
12		33	111, 112	D 2:70, 71; A 4:306 & 349
13		43	116	Quoted Kvu 559
14	4	2, 3	122, 123	A 2:1, 2 & A 4:105 (quoted Kvu 115, different application.)
15		7-22	123-126	A 2:167-170
16		13-25	126-129	U 8.5
17		39-43	134-136	U 8.5
18	5	11	141, 141	D 2:161
19		12	142, 143	A 2:245, 246
20		15	144	S 5:16 (nearly)
21		16	145, 146	A 2:132
22		17, 18	146, 147	D 2:169, 170
23		27	151	Quoted Kvu 601
24		28	152	D 1:176; M 1:391, 494; S 2:21; V 1:69, 71
25	6	5	154, 155	A 2:79, 80
26		7-10	155-158	S 1:157-159 (differs as to order of sentences.)
27		9	156	A 4:410 ff.
28		10	157	Tha 905, 1046; A 1:236
29		17	161	D 2:141, 142
30		19-20	162, 163	V 2:284, 285 (differs as to order of sentences.)
31		27	167	(end of text)
[32		28	168	Buddhaghosa attributes to Sinhalese redactors.] (D:R 2:72)

Rhys Davids also notes that "the slight differences, the more important of which are noted in the table, are very suggestive," that is, No. 26 (the episode of the stanzas uttered at the moment of the Buddha's death),

No. 14 (a four-line verse attributed to the Buddha in our sutra but also found in the *Aṅguttara*), and No. 30 (the old Subhadra's callous remark after the Buddha's passing)—which are discussed at length in the Introduction to his translation of the sutra. (Rhys Davids, 1938:73 ff.)

(c) Chronology of the Canon

An important point to note here is that all the parallel passages mentioned here, without exception, unlike the original passages, belong to the oldest strata of the Canon. In his *Buddhist India* (London, 1903:188), T.W. Rhys Davids gives the following interesting chronology of the Pali Canon.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF BUDDHIST LITERATURE FROM
THE BUDDHA'S TIME TO THE TIME OF AŚOKA

1. The simple statements of Buddhist doctrine now found, in identical words, in paragraphs or verses recurring in all the books.
2. Episodes found in identical words, in two or more of the existing books.
3. The *Sīlas*, the *Pārāyaṇa*, the *Octades* [*Aṭṭhaka*] and *Samyutta Nikāyas*.
4. The *Dīgha*, *Majjhima*, *Aṅguttara* and *Samyutta Nikāyas*.
5. The *Sutta Nipāta*, the *Thera-* and *Therī-gāthās*, the *Udānas*, and the *Khuddaka Pāṭha*.
6. The *Sutta Vibhaṅga* and the *Khandhakas* [of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*].
7. The *Jātakas* and the *Dhammapadas*.
8. The *Niddesa*, the *Itivuttakas*, and the *Paṭisambhidā*.
9. The *Peta-* and *Vimāna-Vatthu*, the *Apadānas*, the *Cariyā Piṭaka*, and the *Buddha Vaṃsa*.
10. The *Abhidhamma* books; the last of which is the *Kathā Vatthu*, and the earliest probably the *Puggala Paññatti*.

The above table represents the probable order in which the extant Buddhist documents of this period were composed. They were not yet written down, and a great deal has no doubt been lost.

(T.W. Rhys Davids, 1903:18)

All these passages belong to the two earliest groups. All are found in books included in groups 4-6; not one occurs in any of the books included in later groups—groups 7-10.

(d) Recensions of the sutra

The *Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta* is available in a number of recensions. The Pali version is also preserved in the *Taishō Tripiṭaka* (T 1 No. 2). Other Chinese versions are T 5 (diverges from the Pali), T 6 and T 7 (both closer). The Sanskrit version, *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, belonging to the *Sarvāstivāda*, has been edited by Ernst Waldschmidt,²⁴⁵ who also gives the parallel texts from the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya* in its Tibetan and Chinese versions.

T.W. Rhys Davids' translation of the sutra is found in volume 2 of his *Dīgha* translation, *Dialogues of the Buddha* (2nd ed. 1938, 4th ed. 1959, D:R 2:71-191). The Tibetan version from the *Dulva* (*Vinaya*) has been translated by W.W. Rockhill in *The Life of the Buddha* (1884:122-147). Recent translations include one by Maurice Walshe, in his *Long Discourses of the Buddha* (1995, D:W 223-277). Sister Vajira and Francis Story have produced a revised translation ("Last Days of the Buddha," 1998), while Thanissaro Bhikkhu has translated the last two chapters ("The Great Discourse on the Total Unbinding," rev. ed. 2002). The last two are available online (www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/digha). In his *Indian Buddhism* (1970:67-80), A.K. Warder has made his own translation of the Pali version "omitting anything not confirmed by other versions. The main episodes are translated, with a minimum of comment and continuity."

²⁴⁵ Abhandlungen DAWB, Phil. Hist. K1, 1950 and Kl. f. Spr., Lit. und Kunst, 2 parts; *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1950-51.

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(e) Bareau's analyses

André Bareau, the French scholar, has examined the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra in several studies (1962, 1963, 1970-71, 1974, 1975, 1979). His major contribution to the study of our text is in 1979, when Bareau examines and compares the six principal recensions of the Sūtra—one version each in Pāli and Sanskrit, and four in Chinese and concludes—and concludes that our text formed gradually over several centuries.

The number and order of the episodes vary in the different versions, and less than half are found in all six versions. Nevertheless, an analysis of the six versions show (1979:46):

- (1) that there is a common plan among them;
- (2) that the texts share certain central episodes; and
- (3) that the principal episodes almost always appear in the same order.

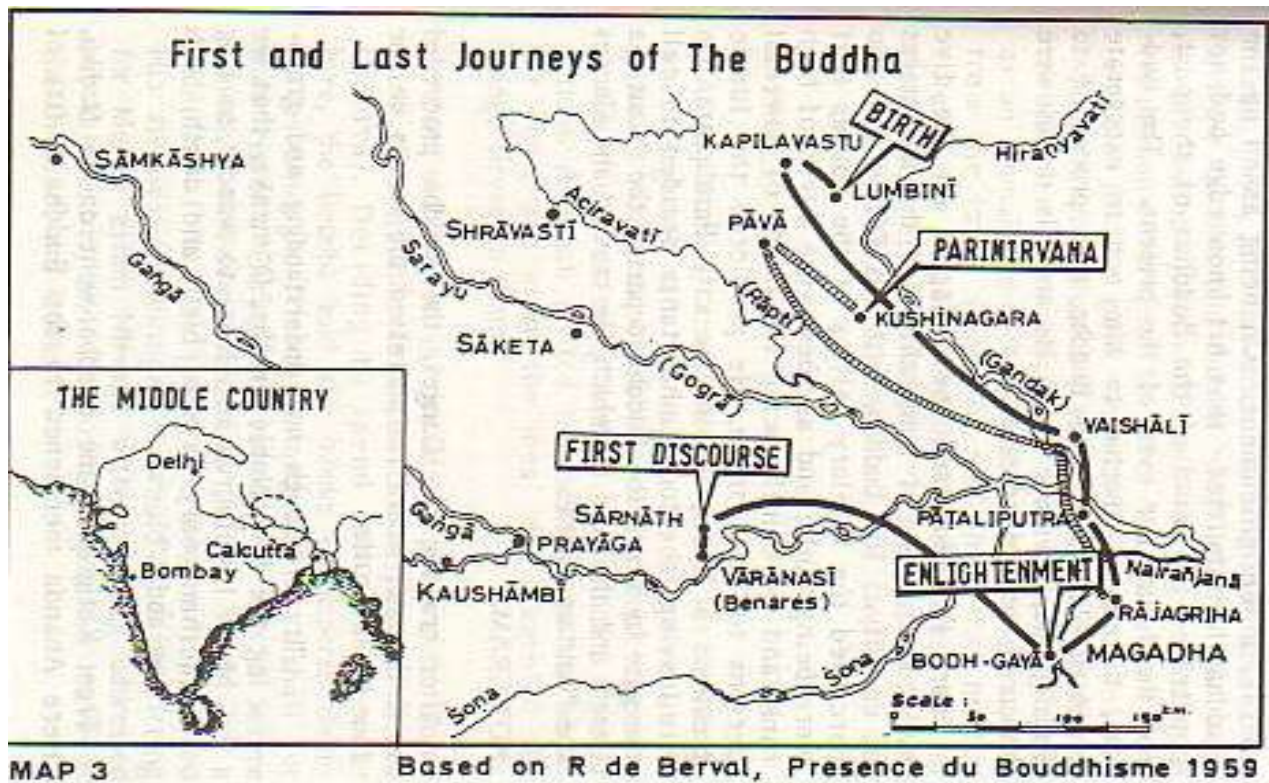
The Sūtra in its various versions contains a total of over 80 episodes, an analysis of which shows a relative chronology in which these episodes were added. This however does not tell us the order in each individual unit came into existence.

Bareau suggests in “a fragile enough hypothesis” an absolute chronology, in which he locates the addition of the texts to the Sūtra over some 400 years from the Final Nirvana (c. 480 CE) to the beginning of the Common Era (1979:47). As Bareau sees it, the Sūtra may be divided into 9 major sections, according to locale of the incidents, and these may in turn be divided into two major groupings, as follows (1979:48) [with my own section headings here listed in parentheses]:

- I. Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta §§1-2.20
 1. In the environs of Rājagṛha [2]
 2. From Rājagṛha to Pāṭaligrāma [3]
 3. At Pāṭaligrāma [4]
 4. From Pāṭaligrāma to Vaiśālī [5]
 5. At Vaiśālī [6]
- II. Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta §§2.21-6.26
 6. In the environs of Vaiśālī [7-11]
 7. From Vaiśālī to Kuśinagarī [12-15]
 8. At Kuśinagarī: the final hours of the life of the Buddha [16-21]
 9. At Kuśinagarī: the last rites of the Buddha [22].

Sections 6-9 form the older sections, while sections 1-5 are later. Bareau proposes that the oldest section—“the kernel of the work”—is section 8 (The final hours of the Buddha at Kuśinagarī). Following this are sections 9, then 6, then 7 and then the newer sections (1979:50 f.). The oldest part of the text, section 8, minus some episodes added later, according to Bareau, is dated to the second half of the 5th century BCE. The next section were added from this time onward, with the latest sections (1-5) added in the 2nd-1st centuries BCE (1979:51).²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ For other details, see Ray, 1994:386 n2 which I have summarized here.



CHAPTER 1

(First Recital, *paṭhama bhāṇavāra*.)

2. AJĀTAŚATRU

The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta opens with the Buddha staying on Vulture's Peak (Gṛdhra,kūṭa/Gijjha,kūṭa) at Rājagṛha, the capital of Magadha and one of the six main cities of India (D 2:147). It has been identified as modern Rajgir in the Nalanda district of Bihar about 21 km (13 miles) southwest of Bihar-Sarif. Its southern flank is protected by five hills: Vaibhāra (Vebhāra), Vaipulya (Vepulla), R̥ṣi,giri (Isigili), Pāṇḍava (Paṇḍava) and Gṛdhra,kūṭa (Gijjha,kūṭa).

Ajātaśatru Vaidehi,putra (Ajātaśatru Vedehi,putta),²⁴⁷ having come into power, decides to conquer the Licchavis of Vaiśālī and the Vṛjī republic. Before embarking on his venture, Ajātaśatru wishes to know what outcome the Buddha would foresee. Consequently, he despatches his minister, the brahmin Varṣakāra, to consult the Buddha.

The Buddha tells the minister of the seven conditions for a nation's welfare: frequent public meetings, peaceful living, lawfulness, respect for the elders and for women, veneration of sanctuaries, and kindness to holy men [8:8a]. At the conclusion of this teaching, Varṣakāra remarks that if the Vṛjīs were to keep to even one of these principles, they may be expected to prosper and not decline, far less all seven! Apparently, the Vṛjīs will never be conquered by king Ajātaśatru by force of arms, but only through diplomacy or propaganda (D 2:77).

When the minister leaves, the Buddha goes on to address the monks on the 7 conditions for the welfare of the spiritual community [8:8b], followed by other teachings: the 7 good qualities, the 7 factors of awakening, the 7 perceptions, the 6 memorable qualities [6:7]. The Buddha also gives a comprehensive discourse on the threefold training [3a, 5a, 12a]:

This is moral conduct, this is concentration, this is wisdom. Moral conduct, when well tempered²⁴⁸ with concentration, brings great fruit and great profit. Concentration, when well tempered with wisdom, brings great fruit and great profit. The mind, when well tempered with

²⁴⁷ Vaidehi,putra. Ajātaśatru is called *Vaidehi,putra* because his mother is from Videha, whose capital is Mithilā. For details, see Lecture 8 "The Thundering Silence" §3-9.

²⁴⁸ "Well tempered," *paribhāvito*, lit "cultivated all around."

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wisdom, becomes completely free from the mental cankers,²⁴⁹ that is to say, from the canker of sensual lust, the canker of becoming, the canker of false views and the canker of ignorance.

(D 2:81)

3. FROM ĀMRA,YAṢṬIKĀ TO NĀLANDĀ

(a) Āmra,yaṣṭikā (Amba,laṭṭhikā)

After Rājagṛha, the Buddha sets out with a large retinue of monks for Āmra,yaṣṭikā (Amba,laṭṭhikā, located halfway between Rājagṛha and Nālandā), on his first lap of the northbound final journey. It is a royal park, surrounded by a rampart and the royal rest-house is adorned with paintings. At Āmrayaṣṭhikā, too, the Buddha gives a comprehensive discourse on the threefold training [2].

(b) Nālandā

Having stayed there long enough, they proceed to Nālandā, located on the outskirts of Rājagṛha. It has been identified by Cunningham on the basis of distances and directions given by the Chinese pilgrims and some image inscriptions discovered at the ruins of the village of Bargaon near the Nālandā railway station of the Bakhtiarpur-Bihar branch line of the Eastern railway. There is a high road that starts from Rājagṛha passing through Nālandā and goes up to Pāṭaligrāmaka (D 2:48). According to the Mahāvastu, Nālandā is the birthplace of Śāriputra (Mvst 2:56), who visits the Buddha there.

At Nālandā, the Buddha and the Order stay at the Pāvārika Mango Grove. There, Śāriputra utters his lion-roar of faith in the Buddha: “Such, Lord, is my faith in the Lord, that there has not been, will not be, nor is there now another ascetic or brahmin greater or of more wisdom, that is to say, in Awakening!” On being asked by the Buddha, he admits that his knowledge has not penetrated the mind of the Buddhas of the past, nor the future nor even of the present. However, his testimony, he replies, is based on his retrospective knowledge (*dharm’anvaya*) [5:25c]. This episode is expanded in the Sampasādanīya Sutta (D 28).

4. PĀṬALI,GRĀMAKA (PĀṬALI,GĀMA)

(a) Advantages of moral conduct

The Buddha then proceeds to Pāṭali,grāmaka (Pāṭali,gāma), 100 km (62 miles) from Rājagṛha. This fortress would later become the capital of the Magadhan empire. This ancient town, later also known as Puṣpa,pura or Kusuma,pura, is located in the villages of Kumrahar, Bulandibagh and the outskirts of modern Patna in Bihar. At Pāṭaligrāmaka, the Buddha and the Order are well received. There, the Buddha addresses the villagers on the five evil consequences of immoral conduct and the advantages of moral conduct and the five advantages in being virtuous:

Householders, there are these five advantages in being virtuous, of success in moral conduct. What five? The first advantage is that one who is virtuous, who has succeeded in moral conduct, through care of his affairs acquires a great store of property... The second is that a good report of his fame is spread about... The third is that whatever assembly he approaches, whether of nobles, priests, householders, or ascetics, he approaches confident, not shamefaced... The fourth is that he dies unconfused... The fifth is that after death, after the body has broken up, one who is virtuous, who has succeeded in moral conduct, is reborn in a good destiny, in a heaven world. These are the five advantages in being virtuous, of success in moral conduct.

The Buddha then instructed (*sandassetvā*), inspired (*samādapetvā*), roused (*samuttejetvā*) and gladdened (*sampahaṃsetvā*) the lay disciples of Pāṭaligrāmaka for most of the night with Dharma talk, and then dismissed them. (D 2:86; cf. D 1:126; DA 2:473; UA 242. 361, 384)

²⁴⁹ “Mental cankers,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “cankers”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the canker of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of three cankers (omitting the canker of views) [43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

(b) The Buddha's teaching method

This action sequence—instructed (*sandassetvā*), inspired (*samādapetvā*), roused (*samuttejetvā*) and gladdened (*sampahaṃsetvā*)...with Dharma talk—reflects the basic structure of the Buddha's teaching method: (1) the Dharma is shown; (2) the listener/s are filled with enthusiasm; (3) they are fired with commitment; and (4) filled with joy.²⁵⁰ The Commentaries explain that by instructing, the Buddha dispels the listener's delusion; by inspiring him, heedlessness is dispelled; by rousing him, indolence is dispelled; and by gladdening, brings the practice to a conclusion. In short, when we teach Dharma to benefit others, we should do our best to bring instruction, inspiration, motivation and joy to the listener. These four qualities are, in fact, the sixth or last of the ideal skills of a Dharma speaker (*Ānanda Sutta*, A 3.61/3:361 f.).

The Buddha then meets Varṣākāra [2] again, and the minister invites him and the Order to a meal offering the next day. According to the Sarvāstivāda version, the minister expresses his wish that through his alms offering to the Order, the deities of the city may long prosper and be happy, dedicating the gift in their name. In the Pali version, too, the Buddha expresses his appreciation in verses:

In whatever realm the wise man makes his home,
He should feed the virtuous leaders of the holy life.

Whatever devas there are who report this offering,
They will pay him respect and honour for this.

They tremble for him as a mother for her son.
And he for whom devas tremble ever happy is. (D 2:66 f.; Walshe's tr. D:W 238)

(c) Future of Pāṭaligrāmaka

Pāṭaligrāmaka is a fortified village standing on the south bank of the Ganges between Rājagṛha and Vaiśālī, that is, on the borders between Magadha and Vṛjī country. Ajātaśtaru has commanded the construction of this fortress to repel any Vṛjī attack. Evidently, he is on the defensive, convinced of the Vṛjī strength. The Buddha, with his Divine Eye perceives the tutelary deities of the houses that are being built there; and as they are devas of high rank, and are influencing the minds of powerful persons to build there, he predicts the future greatness of the place as the city, Pāṭali,putra (the future capital of Aśoka's empire); and that it will face three perils: from fire, from water and from internal dissension..

This is a remarkable statement to make: either the city was later named following this remark, or "the Buddhists of the first century after the *parinirvāṇa* may perhaps be suspected of slightly embroidering this part of the narrative to connect their Master with the new and prosperous capital" (Warder 1970:70). On his leaving Pāṭaligramaka, Varṣākāra decides to call the gate by which the Buddha has departed the "Gautama Gate," and the ford by which he has crossed the Ganges the "Gautama Ford" (*Gautama* being the Buddha's clan name). According to the Sarvāstivāda version, the Buddha leaves by the west gate. (No ford is named in the Pali version.)

(d) Crossing the Ganges

The various texts differ regarding the details of the Buddha's crossing the Ganges. They however agree that he uses his psychic power to teleport himself (and the Order) across the river. The Pali texts apparently regard the episode as "symbolic of the Buddha's attainment of the 'other side' of transmigration, i.e. extinction (*nirvāṇa*), by the power of meditation" (Warder 1970:71), and puts this verse in the Buddha's mouth:

When they want to cross the sea, the lake or a pond,
People make a bridge or raft—the wise have already crossed. (D 2:89)

According to the Sarvāstivāda account, only the Buddha crosses the Ganges by his own power. The monks swim across while other disciples build a raft (Waldschmidt 1950-51:158). The imagery here is

²⁵⁰ L.S. Cousins, in his review of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (tr. Ñāṇamoli) in JBE 4 1997:272, gives a slightly different listing.

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obvious: the Buddha has crossed the ocean of suffering; his immediate disciples, the monks, crosses the river of suffering using their own effort; and the lay disciples are working at their own means of the salvation, the raft.

CHAPTER 2

(Second Recital, *dutiya bhāṇavāra*)

5. VṚJĪ COUNTRY

(a) Kuṭṭigrāmaka (Koṭṭigāma)

After crossing the Ganges, the Buddha proceeds to Kuṭṭigrāmaka (Koṭṭigāma) on the northern bank of the Ganges, where he addresses the monks on the four noble truths:

It is through not understanding and grasping the four Noble Truths, O monks, that we have had to run so long, to wander so long in this weary path of birth and death, both you and I.

(D 2:90 = S 5:431 = V 1:231 = Nett 166; Waldschmidt 1950-51:136)

There, too, the Buddha gives a comprehensive discourse on the threefold training [2]. Having stayed in Kuṭṭigrāmaka long enough, they proceed to the Nādikās

(b) The Nādikās

From Kuṭṭigrāmaka, the Buddha and the Order go on to the Nādikās or Nātikās (according to Buddhaghosa, two villages of the same name on the same river bank), on the highway between Kuṭṭigrāmaka and Vaiśālī (V 1:230 ff; D 2:90 f., 200; M 1:205). The Buddha's instructions to Ānanda given here are also recorded in the Saṃyutta, which has Nātika as the place-name (S 5:356 ff.). The Commentaries to both the Dīgha and the Saṃyutta confirm it as "Nātika," explaining that "There were two villages close by the same pond, inhabited by the sons of two brothers. Thus, both of them were called Nātika ('of the relatives')" (DA 2:543; SA 2:74).

At Nādikā, they reside in the Brick House (*giṇṇak'āvasatha*, D 1:91, 2:96; M 1:205; V 1:232), which is specially mentioned in the text because generally other buildings are made of wood (MA 2:235). Ānanda mentions to the Buddha a list of monks, nuns, and lay-disciples, who had have died there and the Buddha tells him in which of the four stages of Sainthood, each of them have died.

Finding it wearisome for him to give Ānanda a complete list, the Buddha gives him the formula of the "Mirror of the Dharma" (*dharm'ādarśa/dhamm'ādāsa*), by which a disciple "can look at himself in" and use it to discover if he is free from rebirth in the hell realm, the animal kingdom, the hungry ghost realm, or any lower state of suffering, or that he has entered the Stream and is destined for awakening. The "Mirror" consists of having unwavering faith in the Buddha, the Doctrine and the Order, and mastering the noble eightfold path. This instruction to Ānanda—the Mirror of the Dharma—are also recorded in two discourses (Giṇṇak'āvasatha Sutta I and Giṇṇak'āvasatha Sutta II, S 5:356 ff.) in the Saṃyutta.

6. VAIŚĀLĪ (VESĀLĪ)

(a) Mindfulness and full awareness

After Nādikā, the Buddha calls at Vaiśālī, the capital of the Vṛjī confederacy, identified with modern Basarh in the Muzaffarpur district of Bihar. At Vaiśālī, the Buddha and his monks sojourn at Āmrāpālī's mango grove, where he gives a short discourse to the monks on mindfulness and full awareness (*smṛti-saṃprajanya/sati,sampajañña*), the essence of meditation practice:

And how is a monk mindful? Here, a monk abides contemplating the body as body, earnestly, circumspect, mindful and having put away all covetousness and discontent for the world, and likewise with regard to feelings, mind and mind-objects. That is how a monk is mindful.

And how is a monk fully aware? Here a monk, when going forward or backward, is aware of what he is doing; in looking forward and backward, he is aware of what he is doing; in carrying his inner and outer robe and bowl, he is aware of what he is doing; in eating, drinking, chewing and tasting, he is aware of what he is doing; in passing excrement or urine, he is aware of what he is doing; in walking, standing, sitting or lying down, in keeping awake, in speaking or in staying silent, he is aware of what he is doing. That is how a monk is fully aware.

A monk should be mindful and fully aware: this is our charge to you!

(D 2:93)

These concise teachings are given in detail in the Mahā Sati'paṭṭhāna Sutta (D 22). According to Ajahn Brahmavaṃso (in a personal communication), the dvandva “covetousness and discontent” (*abhi-dhyā, daurmanasya/abhijjhā, domanassa*)—translated as “hankering and fretting” by Walshe (D:W 242, 335)—is an abbreviated statement for the 5 Mental Hindrances²⁵¹. His interpretation agrees with the Commentary on the Mahā Sati'paṭṭhāna Sutta which glosses these two terms as *abhijjhā=kāma-c, chanda* (attachment to sensual pleasures) and *domanassa=vyāpāda* (ill-will), and they refer to the abandoning of the Five Mental Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) (DA 3:759).

(b) Āmra, pālī (Amba, pālī)

Among the Buddha's disciples in Vaiśālī is the celebrated courtesan or geisha (*gaṇikā* or *gaṇakī*) [9:13], Āmra, pālī (Amba, pālī), a wealthy and respected woman, among whose friends is king Bimbisāra himself [9:14]. As soon as she hears that the Buddha and his Order are residing in her mango grove, she drives out using her best carriages to meet them. After the Buddha has instructed, inspired, roused and gladdened her with a discourse, she invites him and the Order for a meal offering the next day.

The Licchavīs of Vaiśālī, too, hear the news that the Buddha and his Order are in Vaiśālī. As they ride out to see the Buddha, they meet Āmrapālī on the street, hurrying home in her carriage to prepare for the morrow's meal. They catch up with her, and “axle to axle, wheel to wheel, yoke to yoke,” they converse. On learning that she has invited the Buddha for a meal the next day, they offer her 100,000 pieces of money to give up the meal to them.

“Young sirs,” replies Āmrapālī, “if you were to give me all of Vaiśālī with its revenues, I would not give up such an important meal!” The disappointed Licchavīs snap their fingers, declaring, “We've been beaten by the mango woman!” Then they head for the mango grove to meet the Buddha.

As these handsome regal young Licchavīs in their magnificent chariots, some in blue with blue make-up and ornaments, some in yellow with yellow make-up and ornaments, some were red with red make-up and ornaments, some in white with white make-up and ornaments, approach the mango grove, the Buddha remarks: “Monks, any of you who have not seen the Thirty-three gods, just look at this troop of Licchavīs. Take a good look at them, and you will get an idea of the Thirty-three gods!” (D 2:96)

After the Buddha has instructed, inspired, roused and gladdened them with a discourse, they invite him and the Order for a meal offering the next day. The Buddha informs them of his prior meal invitation by Āmrapālī. Again, they snap their fingers in annoyance, “We've been beaten by the mango woman!” However, rejoicing in the Buddha's discourse, they depart.

On the following day, after Āmrapālī has offered almsfood to the Buddha and his monks, she donates the mango grove to them (V 1:232). (The Sarvāstivāda version, however, only mentions that the Buddha praises the meal.) The Buddha then instructs, inspires, rouses and gladdens her with a discourse. Later, the Buddha gives another comprehensive discourse on the threefold training to the monks [2].

7. BILVA, GRĀMAKA (BELUVA, GĀMAKA)

(a) The last rains retreat

After staying on in Āmrapālī's mango grove for some time, the Buddha leaves for the village of Bilva (Bilva, grāmaka) or Veṇu, grāmaka (Beluva or Veḷuva), near Vaiśālī. As it is the month of Āṣāḍha (Āsāḷha, June-July), with the rains approaching, the Buddha and the Order enter the rains retreat (his last) at Bilva. The Buddha instructs the monks to spend retreat in groups in different places all around Vaiśālī. According to the Sarvāstivāda version, this is in response to a bad famine that has occurred there. The Pali version, however, makes no mention of any famine. The Commentary simply states that the small village where the Buddha spends retreat is neither able to accommodate nor feed so many monks. (DA 2:546)

During the retreat, the Buddha has a severe illness, accompanied by deadly pains [7:22]. This is his first attack of bodily pains recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta:

²⁵¹ The 5 Mental Hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇa*): sensual desire (*kāma-c, chanda*), illwill (*vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*), restless and worry (*uddhacca, kukkucca*) and spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*). (A 3:62; Vbh 378)

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...the Lord was attacked by a severe sickness, with sharp pains as if he were about to die. But he endured all this mindfully, clearly aware and without complaining. He thought: “It is not fitting that I should attain final Nirvana without addressing my followers and taking leave of the Order of Monks. I must hold this disease in check by energy and apply myself to the force of life.” He did so and the disease abated. (D 2:99)

(b) Self as refuge

Ānanda is greatly alarmed by the Buddha’s illness. “Lord, I have seen the Lord in comfort, and I have seen the Lord’s patient enduring. And, Lord, my body is like a drunkard’s. I’ve lost my bearings and things are unclear to me because of the Lord’s sickness. The only thing that is some comfort to me is the thought: ‘The Lord will not attain the final Nirvana until he has made some statement about the Order of Monks.’” The Buddha consoles him by explaining that he has no secret teachings nor regards himself as the leader of the Order, how he overcomes his bodily pains and that his followers should be self-reliant:

But Ānanda, what does the Order of monks expect of me? I have taught the Dharma, Ānanda, making no “inner” and “outer”: the Tathāgata has no “teacher’s fist”²⁵² in respect of doctrines. If there is anyone who thinks: “I shall take charge of the Order (P. *saṅghaṃ pariharissāmi*),” or “The Order should refer to me (P. *mam’uddesiko bhikkhu,saṅgho*),” let him make some statement about the Order, but the Tathāgata does not think in such terms. So why should the Tathāgata make a statement about the Order?

Ānanda, I am now old, worn out, elderly, my time has gone, I have reached the term of my life, which is eighty. Just as an old cart is made to go by being held together with straps, so the Tathāgata’s body is kept going by being strapped up. It is only when the Tathāgata withdraws his attention from outward signs, and by the cessation of certain feelings, enters into the signless concentration of mind, that this body knows comfort.

Therefore, Ānanda, you should live as islands unto yourselves (*ātma,dvīpa/atta,dīpa*), being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dharma as an island (*dharma,dvīpa/ dhamma.dīpa*), with the Dharma as your refuge, with no other refuge. And how does a monk live as an island unto himself....with no other refuge?

Here, Ānanda, a monk abides contemplating the body as body, earnestly, clearly aware, mindful and having put away all covetousness and discontent for the world, and likewise with regard to feelings, mind and mind-objects. That, monks, is how a monk lives as an island unto himself....with no other refuge.

And those who now in my time or afterwards live thus, they will become the highest (P. *tamatagge*)²⁵³, but they must be anxious to learn. D 2:101/3:58, 77; S 3:42, 5:154, 163, 164)

(c) Island or lamp?

The existence of two ancient Buddhist languages, Pali and Sanskrit, provides a dynamic stereoscopic panorama of Buddhism. It helps us to clear a problem in the interpretation of this passage from the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta

*Tasmā-t-ih’Ānanda atta,dīpā viharatha atta,saraṇā anañña,saraṇā, dhamma,dīpā dhamma,-saraṇā anañña,saraṇā.*²⁵⁴

Therefore, Ānanda, live as an island unto yourself, with self as refuge, with no other refuge, the Dhamma as an island, the Dhamma as a refuge, with no other refuge.

(D 16.2.26/2:100 f = 26.1/3:58, 26.27/77; S 3:42, 5:154, 163, 164)

²⁵² *nāsti ācārya,muṣṭi/n’atthi ācārya,muṭṭhi.*

²⁵³ On the difficult term, *tamatagge* (“the highest”), see Vajira & Story n20.

²⁵⁴ Cf. *yo kho Vakkali dhammam passati so mam passati*, etc. S 3:120.

Some scholars have rendered the term *ḍīpa* here as “light”—Rhys Davids (D:R 2:110); Fausböll (Sn:F 501)—or as “lamp” (Adikaram and Childers), probably because they are influenced by the Western saying “No man is an island” and its negative connotation. Buddhaghosa comments on the term *atta, ḍīpa*, “with self as island”: “What is meant by ‘self’? The mundane and supramundane Dhamma.” Therefore he says next, “with the Dhamma as island,” etc. Bhikkhu Bodhi notes here that “This comment overlooks the obvious point that the Buddha is inculcating self-reliance.” (S:B 1:1055 n53).

(1) Sanskrit

The Sanskrit words *ḍīpa* (light, lamp) and *dvīpa* (island, continent) are both rendered as *ḍīpa* in Pali. The Sanskritized passage of the Buddha’s last words (D 2:100) are found in the Mahāvastu, giving *dvīpa*:

ātma, dvīpa bhikṣavo viharatha ananya, dvīpāḥ ātmaśaraṇāḥ ananya, śaraṇāḥ
(Senart, *Le Mahavastu* 1: 334)

The same Sanskrit word is found in the Turfan version of the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra (Waldschmidt 200).

The Gāndhārī Dharmapada also renders the term *ḍīpa* as “island” (Brough 209 f.). The Tibetan translation also uses “island” (*glin*), and not “a light of lamp” (*mar me*).

(2) Chinese mistranslation

Chi Fa Nien (Former Chin 351-394): “a light” (T 1: 15b). Saṅghadeva (Later Chin 384-417) rendered it as “a lamp-light” in the Mādhyāgama: “Make yourself a lamp-light” (T 1:645c). The Chinese Dharmapada (25, 238) also uses “light” (pointed out by P.V. Bapat).

However, Guṇabhadra (Liu Sung dynasty 420-479) rendered *ḍīpa* as “island” in his translation of the same passage in the Saṃyuktāgama (T 2: 8a).²⁵⁵

(d) The only way

In declaring that after his passing, only the Dharma should be one’s refuge (*dharma, śaraṇa/dhamma, saraṇa*), the Buddha effectively and radically shifts the focus from the Three Refuges to the One Refuge—the Dharma—that is, one’s practice of the four Stations of Mindfulness (*smṛty-upaṣṭhāna/satī’-paṭṭhāna*) that he often discourses on [7b, 10b]. In this sense, it becomes clear why in the Maha Satī’-paṭṭhāna Sutta (D 22), for example, the Buddha declares it to be “the only way” (*ekāyana, magga*) “for the purification of beings.”²⁵⁶

It is important here to understand that the Buddha is referring to mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). For mental cultivation to progress, one needs to be strongly grounded in virtue or moral conduct (*śīla/sīla*), so that such a mental cultivation would lead to wisdom (*prajñā/paññā*) and spiritual liberation (*vimukti/vimutti*) (M 1:195-197). As such, the “only way” here does not refer to a particular “method” of meditation, whether it is called “Vipassanā” or “Satipaṭṭhāna.” The “only way” here refers to the noble eightfold path, which is clear from the Dhammapada (as pointed out to me by Ajahn Brahmavaṃso):

<i>Maggān’atthāṅgiko seṭṭho</i>	The best of paths is the Eightfold Path.
<i>saccānaṃ caturo padā</i>	The best of truths are the four sayings [the Noble Truths].
<i>virāgo seṭṭho dhammānaṃ</i>	Non-attachment is the best of states.
<i>dipadānaṃ ca cakkhumā.</i>	The best of the two-legged is the Seeing One.
<i>Eso’va maggo natth’añño</i>	This indeed is the only way,
<i>dassanassa visuddhiyā</i>	There is none other for the purity of vision:
<i>etaṃhi tumhe paṭipajjatha</i>	Follow then this path:
<i>Mārass’etaṃ pamohanaṃ</i>	This is the bewilderment of Māra [the Evil One].

(Dh 273 f.) [19b]

It does not refer to “Vipassanā” meditation (if there is such a meditation) or one school of Buddhism to the exclusion of others. This *ekāyana* statement should be understood in the context of the Buddha’s

²⁵⁵ G.H. Sasaki, *Linguistic Approach to Buddhist Thought*. Delhi: MLBD, 1986: 58-63.

²⁵⁶ D 2:290 = 315 = M 1:55 = 63 = S 5:141 = 167 f. = 185 f. = Kvu 158 = Vism 3.

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final instruction here—and the Buddha’s prophecies of what is popularly known as the “Dharma-ending age” [6:21]. After the Buddha’s passing, he is no more the practitioner’s refuge as it were (not in person, anyway). As for the Saṅgha, its gradual laicization and degradation increases as the number of those who transgress the Vinaya increases and the number of arhats and saints decrease. [19b]

(e) The One Refuge

The One Refuge, the Dharma as one’s practice, is the “one and only way.” As we have seen here the “one and only way” is the noble eightfold path, which is a statement of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in terms of total practice: on the inter-personal and social level (virtue), the personal level (mind or concentration), and the spiritual level (wisdom and liberation).

The “Three Refuges” of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are here revised and reduced to the barest minimum: oneself and Dharma. Matthew Dillon, in his remarkable comparative study of the last days of Socrates and the Buddha in “Dialogues with Death,” remarks: “However much support may be offered by teacher and community, it all comes down to you and the Truth” (2000:547). The Buddha is dead, long live the Dharma!

CHAPTER 3

(Third Recital, *tatiya bhāṇavāra*)

8. CĀPĀLA SHRINE

(a) The Buddha’s lifespan

On the following day, the Buddha leaves Bilva and heads for Vaiśālī on almsround. On returning from Vaiśālī, he sits with Ānanda at the Cāpāla Shrine, where the Buddha praises various shrines:

Ānanda, Vesālī is delightful, the Udena Shrine is delightful, the Gotamaka Shrine is delightful, the Satt’ambaka Shrine [of the 7 Women] is delightful, the Bahu,puttaka Shrine [of Many Sons] is delightful, the Cāpāla Shrine is delightful. (D 2:102)

With the exception of Vaiśālī, these are all probably tree shrines, which understandably would delight the Buddha who has lived much of his life in the open and encourages his disciples to live the solitary forest life to expedite their spiritual practice.

At the Cāpāla Shrine, the Buddha again tells Ānanda he is able to live longer if wishes to—for a full life-span (*kalpa/kappa*) or the remainder of it. The Buddha explains that anyone who has developed the 4 paths to spiritual power (*iddhi, pāda/iddhi, pāda*)²⁵⁷ will be able to live for a full life-span or the remainder of the life-span (of about 120 years) (D 2:103, 3:77). Ānanda, however, does not understand the meaning or implication of the Buddha’s statement and remains silent, even after being informed three times.

The Commentary explains that Ānanda’s mind is influenced (P. *pariyuṭṭhita, citta*) by Māra’s exhibiting a fearsome sight that distracts his attention, preventing him from appreciating what the Buddha says. The Buddha then dismisses Ānanda who takes his leave and sits down at the foot of the nearby tree.

There is some uncertainty regarding what is meant by “life-span” (*kalpa/kappa*) here, that is, it could mean any of the following:

(1) A “world-cycle” or “great cycle” (*mahā.kalpa/mahā,kappa*), that is, one full cycle or age of the world (V 3:109; S 2:185 = It 17; Miln 108; PvA 21), described as comprising of four stages of a pulsating universe (A 2:142);

(2) A “fortunate cycle” (*bhadra.kalpa/bhadda,kappa*), that is, a world-period when there is a Buddha. This is probably one of the four “incalculables” (*asaṃkhyeya/asaṅkheyya*): in this case, it would be the stable period (P. *vivatta-a-ṭṭhāyi,kappa*) after the universe’s re-evolution (P. *vivatta,kappa*), which, according to the Saṃyutta Commentary is the opinion of one Mahāsīva Thera (SA 3: 251).²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ The 4 paths to spiritual power (*iddhi, pāda*): will or intention (*chanda*), energy or exertion (*virīya*), consciousness or mind (*citta*) and mental investigation (*vīmaṃsa*) (D 3:77, D 3:213 = M1:103 = 2:11; D 3:221; Vbh 216). See Gethin 2001:94-97.

²⁵⁸ See PED s.vv. Kappa; Vivatta; Saṃvatta.

(3) A human “life-span” (*āyu, kalpa/āyu, kappā*). This is the opinion of the Dīgha and Saṃyutta Commentaries (DA 554 f.; SA 3:251) and the Milinda, pañha (Miln 141).

However, there are two reasons for taking the term to mean a human life-span. The first reason comes from a statement made in the Cakka, vatti Sīhanāda Sutta (D 26):

Keep to your pastures, monks, to the haunts of the fathers. If you do so, your life-span will increase....

And what is the length of life for a monk? Here, a monk develops the paths to spiritual power which is the concentration of intention accompanied by effort of will, concentration of energy accompanied by the effort of will, concentration of consciousness accompanied by the effort of will and concentration of mental investigation accompanied by effort of will. By constantly practising these four roads of spiritual power he can, if he wishes, life for a full life-span, or for the remaining of the life-span. That is what I call the length of life for a monk. (D 3:77)

It is clear from this statement that it is not only the Buddha, but any monk who has cultivated “the paths to spiritual power” will be able to live a full life-span or what remains of the longest possible life-span at that time. The paths to spiritual power here refer to the conscious development of psychic skills (*raddhi/ iddhi*), including the knowledge of the destruction of defilements (S 51/5:254-290).

The second reason, based mostly on scriptural common sense, is attested by the fact that many of the arhats—like Ānanda (DhA 2:99) [6:29] and Mahā Kāśyapa (SA 2:173) [6:21]—are said to live to a full 120 years, though the oldest of them, Bakkula, is said to have lived to 160, well over “the remainder” of the full life-span! [6:32].

(b) The life-spans of Buddhas

A Buddha has the power to live for one whole *kalpa* but no Buddha does so because the term is shortened by reason of climate and the food he takes (DA 413). No Buddha, however, dies before his dispensation is firmly established. Some Buddhas live longer than others. Those who are long-lived have only direct disciples (*saṃmukha śrāvaka/sammukha sāvaka*) who hear the Dharma in his presence, and at their final *parinirvāṇa* their relics are not scattered, but have a single stupa erected over them (SnA 194 f).

Short-lived Buddhas hold their Upoṣadha (Uposatha, Observance or ecclesiastical convocation to recite the Prātimokṣa) fortnightly. Others (like Kāśyapa Buddha) may hold it only once every six months; yet others (like Vipasyī Buddha) only once every six years (ThaA 1:62). In cases where the Buddha does not appoint the Observance of the Pratimoksha (eg Vipasyī, Sikhī, Viśvabhū) the Teaching quickly dies after his final *parinirvāṇa*. However, where the Buddha appoints the Prātimokṣa (such as Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, Kāśyapa, Gautama), the holy life lasts long (V 3:7 f.; cf. D 2:48).

9. THE BUDDHA’S RELINQUISHMENT OF HIS LIFE-SPAN

(a) Māra’s invitation

At this point, when the Buddha is alone, Māra, the personification of Death, appears to him and invites him to pass away. The Buddha replies to Māra in the very same words that he had used when Māra appeared to him under the Goatherd’s banyan tree during the eighth week (after Brahmā had invited him to teach the Dharma) (S 1:122-124) that he will not pass away until there are “monk disciples who are accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, well-versed in Dharma, trained in accordance to the Dharma, correctly trained and walking the path of the Dharma, who will pass on what they have gained from their own teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyze it, make it clear: until they shall be able by means of the Dharma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma accompanied by wonders (*sapratihārya dharma/sappāṭihāriya dhamma*)” [4:2].

Māra then cunningly replies that the Buddha already has monk disciples, and again invites him to pass away. The Buddha then tells him that he will not pass away until there are nun disciples who are accomplished...who could teach the Dharma accompanied by wonders. Again Māra replies that the Buddha already has such nun disciples. Then the Buddha tells him that he will not pass away until there are layman disciples who are accomplished...who could teach the Dharma accompanied by wonders. Again Māra replies that the Buddha already has such layman disciples. Then the Buddha tells him that he

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will not pass away until there are laywoman disciples who are accomplished...who could teach the Dharma accompanied by wonders. Again Māra replies that the Buddha already has such laywoman disciples. At this point, the Buddha tells Māra:

You need not worry, Evil One. The Tathāgata's Final Nirvana will not be long delayed. Three months from now, the Tathāgata will enter final Nirvana. (D 2:106)

(b) Causes of earthquakes

Then mindfully, the Buddha at the Cāpāla Shrine renounces his will-to-live (*āyu,saṃskāra/āyu,saṃkhāra*), that is, the remaining years of his life. As he does so, the earth trembles and the sky thunders. It is said that the Buddha's life is attended by six earth tremors: when he is conceived, when he is born, when he attains Awakening, when he gives the first discourse, when he renounces the remainder of his lifespan (instead of living out the cycle), and when he attains Final Nirvana (D 2:107). To the shocked Ānanda, the Buddha then explains the eight causes of earthquakes:

- (1) Tectonic movement: "The great earth rests on water; the water on wind; the wind on space. And when the mighty wind moves, it disturbs the water, and through the disturbance of the water, the earth quakes."
- (2) Supernatural event. An ascetic or brahmin who has developed psychic powers, or a powerful deva "whose earth-consciousness is weakly developed but his water-consciousness is immeasurable, and he makes the earth shudder and shake violently."
- (3) The conception of the Bodhisattva, when he descends from Tuṣita heaven and enters his mother's womb.
- (4) The nativity, that is, when the Bodhisattva is born.
- (5) The Great Awakening.
- (6) When the Dharma Wheel is first set in motion, that is, the First Discourse.
- (7) When the Buddha renounces his will-to-live.
- (8) When the Buddha finally passes away without any remainder of the Aggregates (of form, feeling, perception, dispositions, consciousness). (D 2:107-109) [1:8d]

This earth-shaking event apparently brings Ānanda to his senses that he should have invited the Buddha to live on for the remainder of the natural life-span. So, he beseeches the Buddha to change his mind and live on for the sake of all being. But, it is too late now: the Buddha has made his decision. After this, the text somewhat inconsistently makes the Buddha "speak of impermanence as if he could not defy this natural law." It seems probable that the episode of his life-extension, Māra's visit and Ānanda's supposed fault, together with the discussion of portents relating to a Buddha's life, "was not originally part of the text, though it was inserted in it very early" (Warder 1970:75 f.). What we have here are the seeds of legends that would grow into a cosmic drama that will inspire the art and literature of the times to come.

(c) Interpolations

At this point, the Mahā Parinibbāna seems to have some incongruous interpolations. It is as if, following the mention of the "eight" causes of earthquakes, the Reciters of the oral tradition recollect and assemble other teachings of the same number and insert them here:

The eight assemblies (*pariṣad/parisa*, D 2:109, 3:260; M 1:72; A 4:307) [see below].

The eight spheres of mastery (*abhibhū-āyatana/abhibh'āyatana*, D 2:110; M 2:13; S 4:77; Nm 143; Dhs 247; DhsA 191). These are powers gained through Kṛtsna/Kasiṇa meditation as means of transcending the Sense-sphere.²⁵⁹

The eight liberations (*vimokṣa/vimokkha*, D 2:111 f., 3:262, 288; A 4:306). Liberations 1-3 have to do with the spheres of mastery; liberations 4-7 are the absorptions (*dhyāna/jhāna*); and the last is the Extinction of Perception and Feeling (*nirodha,samāpatti*).

²⁵⁹ See *Buddhist Dictionary*, s.v. *abhibhāyatana*.

These are teachings found elsewhere in the Canon. According to the Pali version of the sutra, after the Buddha has given these teachings, he tells Ānanda about the Goatherd Banyan Tree incident [9a], where Māra had similarly invited him to enter into final Nirvana during the 5th week after the Awakening [4.2]. We are made to believe that only after listening to all these teachings (after the earthquake) does Ānanda, coming to his senses, beseech the Buddha to change his mind and live on.

However, of special interest here, is the teaching of the eight assemblies (*aṣṭa,pariṣad/aṭṭha,parisa*), that is, the assembly of the kshatriya (nobles), of the brahmins (priests), of the householders, of ascetics, of the devas of the Realm of the Four Great Kings, of the Thirty-three Gods, of Māras, and the assembly of Brahmā.

I remember well, Ānanda, that I have attended the assembly of kshatriyas, numbering in the hundreds....the assembly of Brahmā, numbering in the hundreds. I sat down before them, spoke to them, and joined in their conversation. I assumed their appearance and speech, whatever it might be. And I instructed, inspired, roused and delighted them with a discourse on Dharma. Even as I spoke to them, they did not know me and wondered: “Who is this that speaks like this—*—a deva or a human?*” And having thus instructed them, I disappeared, and still they did not know me: “He who has just disappeared—is he a deva or a man?” (D 2:109 f)

This teaching is vital for an effective Buddhist mission, the discipline and art of teaching and spreading the Buddha Word. From the Buddha’s statement here, it is clear that he is capable of blending with the crowd and effectively communicating with his listeners at their level.²⁶⁰

(d) Dharm’ārāma

A short but inspiring episode is found in the Dhammapada Commentary in this connection. The Dhammapada story opens in this manner:

From the day when the Teacher announced, “Four months [*sic*] hence I shall pass into Nirvana,” monks by the thousand spent their time in attendance upon the Teacher. Those who had not yet attained the fruit of stream-winning were unable to restrain their tears. Those who had attained arhathood experienced profound religious emotion. All went about in small groups, saying, “What are we to do?” (DhA 4:93)

But, one monk, by the name of Dharm’ārāma (Dhamm’ārāma), which means “one who dwells in the Dharma,” kept to himself. And when they asked him, they gave them no answer. He thought to himself: “The Teacher has announced that four months hence he will pass away into Nirvana, and I have not yet freed myself from the bondage of desire. Therefore so long as the Teacher remains alive, I will struggle and attain arhathood.”

The monks reported Dharm’ārāma’s aloofness to the Buddha and he was summoned. When the Buddha asked him if it was true that he was being aloof, Dharm’ārāma explained that he was trying hard to attain arhathood while the Buddha was yet alive and before he passes away into final Nirvana. The Buddha applauded him.

Monks, every other monk should show his affection to me just as Dhamm’ārāma has done. For they honour me with garlands, perfumes and the like, honour me not; but they that practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, they alone truly honour me. (DhA 4:94)

Having said, that, the Buddha pronounced the following Dhammapada stanza

The monk who dwells delighting in the Dharma,
Who reflects on the Dharma,
Who remembers the Dharma,
Does not fall away from the True Dharma. (Dh 364)

²⁶⁰ Cf. the 6 qualities of an ideal Dharma speaker given in the Alaṃ Sutta, A 4:296-299; the Udayī Sutta, A 3:184; and Piya Tan, *The Teaching Methods of the Buddha*, 2001 (unpublished MS).

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At the conclusion of the discourse, Dharm'ārāma was established in arhathood, and the assembly, too, profited from the discourse.

It is curious that the Dhammapada story mentions that the Buddha's announcement of his impending final Nirvana is made "four months" instead of three month (as mentioned in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta). There are two possibilities: the Buddha had made an earlier announcement, or the Dhammapada Commentary (Buddhaghosa) errs.

10. ĀNANDA REBUKED

(a) Ānanda's request

On coming to his senses and realizing his error, Ānanda thrice beseeches the Buddha to live on. But the Rubicon is crossed, and the Buddha is a man of his word (P. *yathā, vā dī tathā, kā rī*, D 2:224, 229; Sn 357; It 122). "Yours is the fault, Ānanda, yours is the failure that, after being given such a broad hint, such a clear sign by the Tathāgata, you did not understand and did not invite the Tathāgata to stay on for the life-span," rebukes the Buddha. Incredibly, he has given Ānanda broad hints a total of 16 times at various places (D 2:115-118)!

One might ask here: why does the Buddha need to throw a broad hint to Ānanda regarding the Buddha's ability to extend his life-span? Why not the Buddha himself live out his full life-span for the benefit of all beings? There are two possible answers. The first is that the Buddha does not really need to live out his full life-span as the fourfold community has been established: his work is done. The "broad hint" is a bonus that Ānanda fails to accept. But the second reason is more likely: this curious episode was interpolated some time before the Canon was closed and does not form a vital part of the sutra. Whether the Buddha lives on or not, he would eventually have to pass into final Nirvana:

Ānanda, have I not told you before: All those things that are dear and pleasant to us must suffer change, separation and becoming other? What else is there to expect? Whatever is born, become, compounded, is liable to decay—that it should not decay is impossible. (D 2:118 f.)

(b) The Great Wood

After consoling Ānanda, the Buddha and the Order then visit the Great Wood (*mahā, vana*), near Vaiśālī, and reside in the Gabled Hall (*kūṭāgāra, sālā*). The Buddha instructs Ānanda to assemble all the monks in the vicinity of Vaiśālī. When they are assembled, he exhorts them to practise the Dharma—the 4 stations of mindfulness, the 4 right efforts, the 4 bases of power, the 5 spiritual faculties, the 5 mental powers, the 7 factors of awakening, the noble eightfold path—so that the religious life might last long. Then the Buddha announces his impending demise:

Come now, monks: subject to decay are all component things: strive on heedfully! In no long time, the Tathagata will attain Nirvana. The Tathagata will attain Nirvana in three months' time.

Ripe am I in years. Little of my life remains (P. *parittaṃ mama jīvitaṃ*).
Now I go, leaving you, having made myself my refuge.

Be heedless, monks, mindful, virtuous,
Guard well your mind with well-focussed thought.

He who would be heedless, keeping to the Dharma and Discipline,
Leaving the birth-cycle behind, will make an end of suffering. (D 2:120 f.)

(c) The future of the Licchavīs

The Buddha then makes a prophecy, not recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, but in the Kaliṅga-ra Sutta (S 20.8), where he declares the strengths and weaknesses of the Licchavīs, hinting at their eventual conquest by Ajātaśatru, and warns the monks of their own future:

Monks, now the Licchavīs dwell using blocks of wood as pillows. They are diligent and ardent in exercise (*upāsana*). King Ajātasattu Videhi,putta of Magadha, cannot find their weakness nor have a hold on them. But in the future, the Licchavīs will become delicate, with soft and tender hand and feet; they will sleep on soft beds with pillows of cotton until sunrise. Then Ajātasattu will find their weakness and have a hold on them.

Monks, now the monks dwell using blocks of wood as pillows. They are diligent and ardent in striving. Māra the Evil One cannot find their weakness nor have a hold on them. But in the future, the monks will become delicate, with soft and tender hand and feet; they will sleep on soft beds with pillows of cotton until sunrise. Then Māra will find their weakness and have a hold on them.

Therefore, monks, you should train yourselves thus: “Using blocks of wood as cushions, we will dwell diligent and ardent in striving.” Thus you should train yourselves. (S 2:267 f.)

The Commentary explains that in the first period of the Buddha’s Ministry, the monks would practise meditation from the time they finished their meal (before noon) through the first watch of the night. They would sleep in the middle watch (10.00 pm to 2.00 am), resting the head on a piece of wood. Then they would rise early and resume their walking meditation. (SA 2:230)

(d) Invitation Day (*pravāraṇā/pavāraṇā*)

It is curious that the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, with all its detailed treatment, fails to mention an important annual ceremony of the Sangha, that is the Invitation (*pravāraṇā/pavāraṇā*), held on the last day of the rains retreat. It is not likely that the gathering in the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest is the Invitation assembly simply because it is “three months” before the final Nirvana (which is in the month of Vaiśākha/Vesākha or May-June of the same year). That would put the Great Forest assembly in the month of Māgha (February-March).

In modern times, the month of Māgha is highlighted by Sangha Day, commemorating the spontaneous assembly of 1250 arhats in the Buddha’s presence. The first 1000 were enlightened upon listening to the Buddha, and the remaining 250 were Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana and their respective followings. To mark the occasion the Buddha delivered the Avavāda Prātimokṣa (Ovāda Pāṭimokkha), “The Admonition Code” (the first proclamation of a monastic conduct, comprising Dh 183-185). It is given in response to Ānanda’s question regarding lengths of the dispensations of previous Buddhas (VA 186 f.; Kkhv 9 f.; MA 2:209; UA 298), and delivered during the first year of the Ministry in the Bamboo Grove soon after Śāriputra’s gaining of arhatood and Dīrgha,nakha’s attaining of the Dharma Eye (M 1:501).²⁶¹

11. THE BUDDHA’S PROPHECIES

(a) Future dangers

Early Buddhist prophecies regarding the future of the Teaching and the Order are scattered all over the Nikāyas, for example, the Cakka,vatti Sihanāda Sutta (D 26), the three Ovāda Suttas (S 16.6-8) [6:21], the three Kimbila Suttas (A 5.201, 6.40, 7.56) [6:22], the Saddhamma Paṭirūpaka Sutta (S 16.13) [6:22] and others [6:22]. It is an interesting subject of study not yet examined by many scholars.²⁶² The Aṅguttara Nikāya, for example, contains an interesting set of four suttas all entitled Anāgata,bhaya Sutta, the Discourses of Future Dangers (A 3:100-110). The first two suttas are inspirational and the latter two are prophetic. I shall summarize the first, and abridge the second (because it is beautiful and inspirational) and the last two suttas:

The Anāgata,bhaya Sutta I (A 5.77/3:100-102) exhorts the forest monk to make urgent and earnest effort to “attain the unattained” lest such a spiritual quest would be hindered by death from (1) the venomous bite of a snake, scorpion or centipede; (2) accidents or ill health; (3) dangerous animals; (4) thieves; (5) non-humans (or “inhuman people”).

The Anāgata,bhaya Sutta II (A 5.78/3:103-105) (given in brief in the Samaya Sutta, A 3:66), a beautiful reflection on the urgency of spiritual practice, is here abridged:

²⁶¹ See Piyasilo, 1988b:40 f.

²⁶² Except, for example, Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*, 1991.

10. Was the Buddha poisoned?

- (1) The monk reflects: “I am now young...but the time will come when old age will touch this body; then it would not be easy to turn to the Buddha Word, or the forest and woodlands, or the solitary dwelling. Before it comes to me, let me attain the unattained, so that I will dwell comforted (*phāsu*) even when I am old.”
- (2) The monk reflects: “I am healthy...but the time will come when sickness will touch this body... Before it comes to me, let me attain the unattained, so that I will dwell comforted even when I am sick.”
- (3) The monk reflects: “Now there is no famine, and food is easy to get...but the time till come when famine and difficulty in getting food will arise. Before it comes to me, let me attain the unattained, so that I will dwell comforted even in time of famine and difficulty in getting food.”
- (4) The monk reflects: “Now people dwell in good fellowship, like milk and water...but the time will come when fear will reign, when robbers abound, when the fear-stricken gather their things and flee looking for safety, and people will live in groups and communes. It is then not easy to turn to the Buddha Word, or the forest and woodlands, or the solitary dwelling. Before it comes to me, let me attain the unattained, so that I will dwell comforted even in time of fear.”
- (5) The monk reflects: “Now the Order dwell in spiritual fellowship, finding comfort in one teaching...but the time will come when the Order is divided. It is then not easy to turn to the Buddha Word, or the forest and woodlands, or the solitary dwelling. Before it comes to me, let me attain the unattained, so that I will dwell comforted even though the Order is divided.” (A 3:103-105)

The Anāgata,bhaya Sutta III (A 5.79/3:105-108), in a more serious tone, warns of the growing malpractices and wrong views of the Order members (here abridged and paraphrased):

Monks, there will be in the long road of the future, monks who are not cultivated in body, nor in moral conduct, nor in mind, nor in wisdom.

- (1) They will ordain (P. *upasampādessanti*) others but they will not be able to lead them to higher training (in moral conduct, mind and wisdom), and these undeveloped candidates in turn ordain others, repeating the vicious cycle...
- (2) They will provide training and support (*nīśraya/nissaya*) to others but they will not be able to lead them to higher training (in moral conduct, mind and wisdom), and these undeveloped candidates will repeat the vicious cycle...
- (3) They will give talks regarding Dharma (*abhidharma/abhidhamma*) and on the Catechisms (*vaidalya/vedalla*), and fall into dark teachings (*kr̥ṣṇa.dharma/kaṇha,dhamma*), without any understanding...
- (4) They will not listen to the Buddha Word, neither study or master them; instead they will listen to and master “discourses that are mere poetry composed by poets, beautiful in word and phrase,, created by outsiders, spoken by their disciples” [S 2:266 f.]...
- (5) They will become luxurious, lax, backsliders (P. *okkamane pubbaṅgamā*, “falling back to prior states”), not valuing solitude (P. *paviveke nikkhitta,dhurā*)...

Thus, indeed, monks, from corrupt Dharma comes corrupt Discipline; from corrupt Discipline comes corrupt Dharma. (A 3:105-108; cf. S 2:266 f)

The Anāgata,bhaya Sutta IV (A 5.80/3:108-110), gives warning of growing materialism in the Order:

Monks, in the long road to the future, there will be monks who,

- (1) Longing for fine robes, will forsake rag-robes and leave the forest and solitary dwelling, and move into urban areas and metropolises, and commit many improper and unseemly deeds...
- (2) Longing for good almsfood..., will move into urban areas and metropolises, and commit many improper and unseemly deeds...
- (3) Longing for comfortable quarters (“beds and seats”)..., will move into urban areas and metropolises, and commit many improper and unseemly deeds...
- (4) Living with nuns, probationers and novices, will not delight in the holy life and either will commit some foul deed or return to lay life.
- (5) Living with monastery attendants and novices, will enjoy their various hoarded goods, and mark out their lands and crops (P. *oḷārikaṃ pī nimittam karissanti paṭhaviyā pī haritagge pī*).

Monks, be fully awake against these things, and so should you strive to get rid of them.

(A 3:108-110; cf. S 2:195 f.)

CHAPTER 4

(Fourth Recital, *catuttha bhāṇavāra*: the Ālāra cycle)

12. AṅGA COUNTRY

(a) The Elephant Look

After their noonday meal, the Buddha and the Order heads for Bhaṇḍa,grāma (Bhaṇḍa,gāma). Just outside Vaiśālī, the Buddha turns his whole body around—the “elephant look” (*nāgāpalokita*)—to gaze at it as a final farewell gesture. At Bhaṇḍagrāma, he declares that through not understanding and penetrating four things, we have been faring for a long time in the cycle of rebirths, that is to say, our not realizing moral conduct, concentration, insight, release (D 2:122 f.). This is the fuller statement of the usual threefold training, comprising the first three factors (D 2:220; A 1:229).

The Buddha and his Order then pass through the villages of Hasti,grāma (Haṭṭhi,gāma), Āmra,grāma (Amba,gāma) and Jambu,grāma (Jambu,gāma, a village near Campā, the Aṅga capital),²⁶³ and sojourn at Bhoga,nagara (D 2:124), the city of the Bhogas, a constituent tribe of the Vṛjī confederacy, lying midway between Vaiśālī and Pāvā (Pāvā) (D 2:122-126).

(b) The 4 great references

At Bhoga,nagara, the Buddha discourses on the four great references (*mahāpradeśa/mahāpadesa*) which serve as the criteria for the true teaching. The term *apadeśa/apadesa* means “designation, pointing out; reference; witness, authority” (DP). However, in this context, it is best rendered as “reference” since we actually have only two final “authorities,” that is, the Dharma (the Suttas or Discourses) and the Vinaya (the Discipline). The four Great References are as follows:

- (1) *The Buddha*. Suppose a monk were to say: “Friends, I heard and received this teaching from the Lord’s own mouth: This is the Dharma, this is the Discipline, this is the Master’s Teaching.” Then, monks, you should neither approve nor disapprove of his words...
- (2) *The Order*. Suppose a monk were to say: “In such and such a place, there is a community (*saṅgha*) with elders and distinguished teachers. I heard and received this teaching from that community: This is the Dharma, this is the Discipline, this is the Master’s Teaching.” Then, monks, you should neither approve nor disapprove of his words...
- (3) *Elders*. Suppose a monk were to say: “In such and such a place, there are many elders (*sthavira/thera*) who are learned, masters of scripture (*āgataṅgama*), Dharma-experts, Vinaya-experts, experts in the Summaries (*māṭṭhikā/māṭṭhikā*): This is the Dharma, this is the Discipline, this is the Master’s Teaching.” Then, monks, you should neither approve nor disapprove of his words...
- (4) *An elder*. Suppose a monk were to say: “In such and such a place, there is an elder who is learned, bearer of tradition, Dharma-expert, Vinaya-expert, expert in the Summaries (*māṭṭhikā/māṭṭhikā*): This is the Dharma, this is the Discipline, this is the Master’s Teaching.” Then, monks, you should neither approve nor disapprove of his words...

Neither approving nor disapproving, his words and expression should be carefully noted and compared with the Suttas and reviewed in the light of the Discipline. If they, on such comparison and review, are found not to conform to the Suttas or the Discipline, the conclusion must be: “Surely, this is not Buddha Word. It has been wrongly understood by this monk,” and the matter is to be rejected. But where on such comparison and review they are found to conform to the Suttas and the Discipline, the conclusion must be: “Surely, this is Buddha Word. It has been rightly understood by this monk.” (D 2:123 ff. = A 2:167-170)

The Buddha then (still in Bhoganagara) gives a comprehensive discourse on the threefold training [2]. Having stayed there long enough, the Buddha and the Order move on to Pāvā (Pāvā).

²⁶³ Jambugrāma. There is another Jambugrāma on the high road between Vaiśālī and Kuśinagarī.

10. Was the Buddha poisoned?

13. IN MALLA COUNTRY

(a) Cunda the blacksmith

After Bhoganagara, the Buddha and the Order continue their last Dharma-tour together and arrive in Pāpā (Pāvā), the town of the Mallas, across the Kakuṭṭha River from Kuśinagarī, to which it is connected by road. At Pāpā, the Buddha and the Order stay at the mango grove of Cunda the blacksmith, whose family prepare a sumptuous meal for them, abounding in “pig’s delight” (*sūkara,mārdava/sūkara,maddava*).²⁶⁴ Apparently, the Buddha knows the nature of the “pig’s delight,” for he instructs that it only be served to him and the remainder to be buried in a pit because, “Cunda, I can see no one in the world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its princes and people who, if they were to eat it, could thoroughly digest it except the Tathāgata.” (D 2:128)²⁶⁵

This dish is apparently a heavy one and the Buddha has a relapse of the dysentery he suffered earlier on at Bilva [7]. Nevertheless, he bravely bears this new, less painful attack:

...the Lord was attacked by a severe sickness with bloody diarrhea, and with sharp pains as if he were about to die. But he endured all this mindfully and clearly aware, and without complaint.
(D 2:128)

Buddhaghosa gives three alternative meanings of the Pāli term *sūkara,maddava*: (1) the flesh from a single first-born wild pig, neither too young nor too old, which had come to hand naturally, i.e. without intentional killing; (2) a preparation of soft boiled rice cooked with the five cow-products (milk, cream, buttermilk, butter, ghee)²⁶⁶; (3) a kind of alchemic elixir (P. *rasāyana*) (DA 2:568). Dhammapala, in his commentary to Udāna 8.5 adds: (4) young bamboo shoots trampled by pigs (P. *sūkarehi maddita,vamṣa-kaliro*). In short, the ancient Commentators are not sure of the exact meaning of *sūkara,maddava*.

Modern scholars tend to favour “truffles” (a kind of underground edible fungus) as the translation of *sūkara,maddava*, but this is not without its critics. Trevor Ling, in his work *The Buddha’s Philosophy of Man* (1981:218 n31) revised Rhys Davids’ translation and remarks (D:R 2:137 n31): “This explanation seems intended to avoid offence to vegetarian readers or hearers. Rhys Davids’s statement that Buddhists ‘have been mostly vegetarians, and are increasingly so,’ is difficult to accept.” In fact, adds Walshe in his own note: “Be that as it may (and in fact Eastern Theravāda Buddhists have rarely been vegetarians, though some are now, almost certainly under Western influence!), the question of vegetarianism has frequently been raised in the Buddhist field.” (D:W 572 n417).

(b) Was it a pork dish?

Although Rhys Davids notes that “it is important that the food prepared by [C]unda and eaten by the Buddha is called Bhatta [D 2:127]: this is not used elsewhere of meat” (D:R 2:137 n31), the term *bhatta* probably refers to the food offering as a whole (that is, including but not only the *sūkara,maddava*). Moreover, in reply to Devadatta’s proposal that the monks should not take fish and meat all life long, the Buddha declared that “fish and meat are pure in respect to three points: if one has not seen, heard or suspected (that they have been killed on purpose for one)” (V 2:197). In other words, vegetarianism is an option not the rule for Buddhist monastics. [7:8]

In the case of the **Ugra (Ugga), the householder of Vaiśālī** [4:21d], the foremost of those who give pleasant gifts (A 1:25), it is clear that amongst his gifts is “pork (P. *sūkara,mamṣa*) with a generous serving of jujube fruit” (A:W 3:41n) which the Buddha accepts “out of compassion” (A 3:49). However, it should also be noted that the Pali text is only one of two texts out of all the early sources (Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan) that *specifically* mentions the kind of food prepared by Cunda for the Buddha.²⁶⁷

14. WAS THE BUDDHA POISONED?

The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) mentions two occasions of physical illness of the 80-year-old Buddha during his last days. The first attack is at Bilva (Beluva) [7a] during the rains retreat. However,

²⁶⁴ Cf. D:W 571 n417.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Lamotte 1976:313 f.

²⁶⁶ V 1:244; DhA 1:158, 323, 397; SnA 322; VvA 147.

²⁶⁷ For the latest discussion on the Buddha’s last meal and references, see John S. Strong, *The Buddha: A short biography*, 2001:134-135.

realizing that it would be a calamity if he were to die there, the Buddha mindfully suppresses his sickness, thinking: “It would not be fitting for me to attain Nirvana without having addressed my followers, and without having taken leave of the Order of the Monks.” (D 2:99).

The second attack occurs following the Buddha’s consumption of Cunda’s meal offering at Pāpā (D 2:218). Again, for the same reason and using his mental powers, the Buddha suppresses the pain and illness, and continues his journey and teachings. Like Socrates who nobly drinks the hemlock deliberately prepared by his executioners without bearing them the slightest ill-will, the Buddha graciously eats his portion of the ‘pig’s delight’ offered by Cunda the smith, but bids the others refrain, and the rest of it should be buried.²⁶⁸

Of course, there is no question of ill intent on Cunda’s part, but the Buddha is concerned lest the man feel guilty, and consoles him with the remark that Cunda should rather be praised, because “the Tathāgata gained final Nibbana after taking his last meal from you!” (D 16.4.42). Since neither man [Buddha or Socrates] feels that his impending death is an evil thing to be avoided, it is only natural for them not to resent the proximate causes, but the sensitivity with which they communicate this to the person responsible is indicative again of the compassion that characterizes both men. (Matthew Dillon, 2000:531)

Traditionally, it is said that the Buddha asks Cunda to bury the remainder of the *sūkara,maddava* because the gods have infused it with divine essence (*ūrjas/ojā*) as a tonic for the Buddha so that “no one in the world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its princes and people who, if they were to eat it, could thoroughly digest it except the Tathāgata.” (D 2:128; Bareau 1971:4).

In his notes, John Strong (2001:171) highlights the curious omission in the Pali account of an episode that is found in all the other versions of the Buddha’s last meal, that is, the mysterious and confused account of the “evil monk” who steals the bowl of food intended for the Buddha, thus forcing Cunda to prepare a second special meal, or who steals a bowl containing the leftovers of the meal (Bareau, 1970-71:258-264).

The Milinda,pañha discusses the dilemma confronting Cunda’s offering and the Buddha’s final Nirvana, and concludes that

The last offering of food is of great advantage because of the Tathāgata’s attainment of *parinibbāna*. It was not because of the food that the sickness fell upon the Blessed One but because of the extreme weakness of his body and the proximity of death. These two offerings of food were of great and incomparable merit because of the attainment of the nine successive absorptions in forward and reverse order which the Tathāgata gained after partaking of that food. (Miln 174-178; Miln:P 50 f. Pesala’s abr. tr.)

15. KAKUṬṬHĀ RIVER

(a) Putkasa the Malla

After Pāpā, the Buddha and the Order heads for Kuśinagarī (Kusinārā), some 80 km southeast from Pāpā. Midway between Pāpā and Kuśinagarī, the Buddha rests under a tree beside a ford, over which 500 carts has crossed. As such, the water there is all churned up and muddy. The Buddha instructs Ānanda to fetch some drinking water, but Ānanda suggests that they trek to the nearby Kakuṭṭha River where “the water is clean, cool and clear, with beautiful, delightful banks” (D 2:128 f.). After the Buddha’s third request, Ānanda obliges and to his wonder, there is clear water in the ford despite the passing of the 500 carts over it.

At this point, it is clear that an episode to glorify the Buddha is interpolated, as will be evident when we examine its implications. This is the episode of the Buddha’s transfiguration following the offering of “golden” robes by Putkasa (Pukkusa), a pupil of Āraḍa Kālāma, who meets the Buddha resting under

²⁶⁸ Cf. Matthew Dillon’s insightful comparison of the deaths of the two great men in “Dialogues with Death,” *Philosophy East and West* 50,4 Oct 2000:525-558.

10. Was the Buddha poisoned?

the tree. Putkasa, proud of his teacher, Ārāḍa, who was also the Bodhisattva's first teacher [2:14], boasts that Ārāḍa was such a remarkable meditator who "neither saw nor heard 500 carts passing nearby."

The Buddha replies that he himself, when meditating, is totally unaffected by greater commotion: "while conscious, not to see or hear anything in heavy rainstorm, when lightning flashes and thunder crashes"—which, he asks Putkasa, is more difficult to do? In fact, when the Buddha was staying in the threshing-house (*bus'āgāra/bhus'āgāra*, i.e. where harvest is threshed) at Ātumā, a village between Kuśīnagarī and Śrāvastī, there was a bad thunderstorm, where "two farmers, brothers, and four oxen were killed; and a lot of people went out of Ātumā to where the two brothers and four oxen were killed." The Buddha was walking in meditation just outside the building, but was totally unaffected by the whole incident. (D 2:131 f.; cf. V 1:249 f.)

Putkasa is impressed at the Buddha's meditative powers and goes for refuge. He then donates to him a pair of robes "of golden cloth, burnished and ready to wear." He instructs Putkasa to clothe him with one of the robes, and to clothe Ānanda with the other. After Putkasa has left, and while Ānanda is arranging the robe over the Buddha, his body glows brighter than the robe of burnished gold itself so that the robe appears to become dull in colour.

The Buddha then informs Ānanda that on two occasions, the Buddha's body would glow radiantly (as if transfigured): the first occasion is on the night of the Great Awakening, and the second is on the night of the Final Nirvana. "Tonight, Ānanda, in the last watch, in the sal grove of the Mallas near Kuśīnagarī, between two sal trees, the Tathāgata's final passing without remains will take place."²⁶⁹ (D 2:134)

A very interesting point regarding the Buddha's transfiguration is that it is very similar to that of Jesus Christ (Mark 9:2-8), so that "his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them." In the case of the Buddha, it is his whole body that glistens brightly, some 500 years (or at least 200 years in terms of the recorded tradition) before the biblical story.

(b) Exoneration of Cunda

The Buddha and the Order then proceed to the Kakuṭṭha River that divides Kuśīnagarī and Pāpā (D 2:129, 134 ff; U 7.5). It is called Cocouthes by the ancient Greek writers. Today the river is called the Kuku. Some scholars, however, identify it with the modern Ghāgī, a small stream flowing into the Little Gandak, about 3 km (2 miles) to the west of Chitiyaon in the Gorakhpur district.

The Buddha bathes and drinks at the Kakuṭṭha River. After that, they go into the mango grove. There, he instructs Ānanda to inform Cunda that his offering will bring great reward, for it will be the immediate cause of his attaining to final Nirvana.

It might happen, Ānanda, that Cunda the smith might feel remorse, thinking, "It is your fault, Cunda, it is by your misdeed that the Tathāgata gained the final Nirvana after taking his meal from you!" But Cunda's remorse should be expelled in this way: "This is your merit, Cunda, that is your good deed, that the Tathāgata gained the final Nirvana after taking his last meal from you! For, friend Cunda, I have heard and understood from the Lord's own mouth that these two almsgiving are of very great fruit, of very great result, more fruitful and advantageous than any other. Which two? The one is the almsgiving after eating which the Tathāgata attains Supreme Awakening, the other after which the Tathāgata attains the Nirvana-element without remainder at his final passing. These two almsgiving are more fruitful and profitable than all others. Cunda's deed is conducive to long life, beauty, happiness, fame, heaven and lordship." In this way, Cunda's remorse is to be expelled.

(D 2:138)

The other foremost gift is made just before the Great Awakening, but no mention is made of its giver, although the Theravada tradition it is the lady Sujāta [2:18].

CHAPTER 5

(Fifth Recital, *pañcama bhāṇavāra*: the Hiraññavatī)

²⁶⁹ On the 3 types of *parinirvāṇa*, see section 20b below.

16. KUŚĪNAGARĪ

(a) Upavartana Wood

At this point, the Buddha and his Order come to the river Hiranya, vatī (Hirañña, vatī) that runs by the sāl grove of the Mallas and the Upavartana Wood (recreation ground) of Kuśinagarī (D 2:137). Crossing the Hiranyavatī, the Buddha reaches the sal grove of the Mallas at Kuśinagarī (Kusinārā), the Malla capital (D 2:146, 170; J 1:392, 5:278; Divy 152 ff.). The Hiranyavatī river is today called the Little Gandak, flowing through district of Gorakhpur about 13 km (8 miles) to the west of the Great Gandak and falls into the Ghogra. Kuśinagarī is located near modern Kasia in the district of Deoria, Uttar Pradesh

According to the Commentary, Pāpā is three *gavutas* (approximately 8 km or 5 miles) from Kuśinagarī. Walking that distance with great effort and sitting down at 25 places on the way, the Buddha reaches the sal grove when the sun has already set. Thus illness comes to a man, crushing all his health. As if he wants to point to this fact, the Buddha speaks these deeply moving words: “I am weary, Ānanda, and want to lie down.” (DA 2:575) There the Buddha mindfully lies down in the “lion-posture,” on his right side with his head to the north and legs to the south, between two *sāla* trees, determined never to rise again.

It is said that the twin sal trees burst forth with untimely blossoms that fall on the Buddha’s body, covering it up, as if in homage. Divine coral tree (*mandāra*) flowers fall from the sky, divine sandalwood powder descend from the sky, sprinkling and covering the Buddha’s body in homage as it were. Divine music and song resound through the sky. Never before has he been so honoured, the Buddha tells Ānanda.

And yet, Ānanda, whatever monk, nun, layman or laywoman practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, properly practising, living in accordance with Dharma, he honours the Tathāgata, reveres him, esteems him, pays him the supreme homage (*paramā pūjā*). Therefore, Ānanda: “We will practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, properly practising, living in accordance with Dharma!” — this is how you should train yourself. (D 2:139)

(b) Looking at the Buddha

Now at the time, the venerable Upavāṇa is standing in front of the Buddha, fanning him. Then the Buddha tells him, “Move aside, monk, do not stand in front of me!” Upavāṇa has been the Buddha’s personal attendant for a long time before; so Ānanda wonders why the Buddha tells him to move aside. The Buddha then explains to Ānanda that the gods from ten world-systems have gathered to witness him.

For a distance of 12 yojanas (130 km) around the Mallas’ sal grove near Kusinārā there is not a space you could touch with the point of a hair that is not filled with mighty devas, and they are grumbling: “We have come a long way to see the Tathāgata. It is rare for a Tathāgata, a fully self-enlightened Buddha, to arise in the world, and tonight in the last watch the Tathāgata will attain final Nirvana, and this mighty monk is standing in front of the Lord, preventing us from getting a last glimpse of the Tathāgata!”

But, Lord, what kind of devas can the Lord perceive?

Ānanda, there are sky-devas whose minds are earth-bound, they are weeping and tearing their hair, raising their arms, falling to the ground as with feet cut off, twisting and turning, crying: “All too soon the Blessed Lord is passing away, all too soon the Well-farer is passing away, all too soon the Eye of the World is disappearing!” And there are earth-devas whose minds are earth-bound, who do likewise. But those devas who are free from craving endure patiently, saying: “All compounded things are impermanent: what is the use of this?” (D 2:139 f)

This is an interesting way of presenting the ancient belief in *darśana/dassana* (“seeing”) that goes way back to the Vedic times. This notion is found the expression “the Eye of the World” (P. *cakkhum loke*, lit. “the eye in the world”), which reflects the fact the Buddha only appears *in* this world, but is not of this world (i.e. not worldly). In his notes to his translation of this sutra, Thanissaro Bhikkhu says:

From Vedic times, it has been considered auspicious in India to gaze on a holy person or heavenly being, and to be gazed on by such a being as well. Here the fact that heavenly beings

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themselves want to gaze on the Buddha indicates the high regard they have for him (this is also the motive for their Great Meeting in D 20 [the Mahā Samaya Sutta]); the phrase...“the One with Eyes,” indicates that they also regarded his gaze as highly auspicious for them. Later passages in this discourse indicate that human beings have similar feelings about the auspiciousness of the Buddha’s gaze and the Buddha as an object of one’s own gaze. A great deal of later history of Buddhism in India—including devotional practice, Buddhology, meditation practice, and even the architecture of monasteries—grew out of the continuing desire to have a vision of the Buddha and to be gazed on by the Buddha, even after his Parinibbana.

(Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2002:16 n2; my emphasis)

(c) The four holy places

Ānanda then raises the question regarding monks who after their rains retreat would come from various places to pay their respects to the Buddha: how are they going to do this after the Buddha has passed away? The Buddha then introduces a novel practice: the pilgrimage to the four holy places:

Ānanda, there are these four holy places the sight of which should arouse religious emotion (or “sense of urgency,” *saṃvega*) in the faithful. Which are they? “Here the Tathāgata is born” is the first. “Here the Tathāgata attained supreme awakening” is the second. “Here the Tathāgata set in motion the Wheel of Dharma” is the third. “Here the Tathāgata attained the Nirvana-element without remainder” is the fourth. And, Ānanda, the faithful monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen may visit those places. And anyone who dies while making the pilgrimage to these shrines with a devout heart will, at the breaking up of the body after death, be reborn in a heavenly world. (D 2:140 f; A 2:120)

These names of these four places “that arouses religious emotion” (*saṃvejanīya,sthāna/saṃvejanīya-ṭṭhāna*) that are worthy of pilgrimage are: Lumbinī (modern Rummidei, Nepal), Uruvilvā (Buddha Gayā), Rṣipatana (modern Sarnath) and Kuśinagarī (Kusinārā).

The *Pali-English Dictionary* defines *saṃvega* as “agitation, fear, anxiety; thrill, religious emotion (caused by contemplation of the miseries of the world).” It is one of the most powerful of Buddhist terms that refers to a sort of spiritual crisis that results from directly perceiving the truth. For a lay person, this usually results in disillusionment with worldly life, whereas in the case of a Sangha member, it urges him to exert more energy in spiritual practice until the goal is attained. This was the kind of experience that prince Siddhārtha had when he saw the four Sights [2:3].

The *Buddhist Dictionary* defines *saṃvega* as “‘the sources of emotions’ or, of a sense of urgency” of which there are eight: “birth; old age; death; the suffering in the lower states of existence; the misery of the past rooted in the cycle of rebirth; the misery of the future rooted in the cycle of rebirth; and the misery of the present rooted in the search for food” (Vism 4.63 = KhA 235; D 3:124; S 1:197; A 1:43; It 30; J 1:138; Nm 406).

(d) Treatment of the Buddha’s remains

At this point, another arbitrary and incongruous interpolation, albeit only a short paragraph, appears to have been made, that is, Ānanda’s questioning the Buddha as regards to “how should we act towards women?” [6:6].²⁷⁰ This episode is not found in the Sanskrit versions, attesting to its lateness.

Then follows a more related question regarding how the Buddha’s remains should be treated, to which the Buddha answers:

Do not worry yourselves about the funeral arrangements, Ānanda. You should strive for the highest goal, devote yourselves to the highest goal, and dwell with your minds tirelessly, zealously devoted to the highest goal. There are wise kshatriyas, brahmins and householders who are devoted to the Tathāgata: they will take care of the funeral. (D 5.10/2:141)

Ānanda, however, repeats the question: “What are we to do with the Tathāgata’s remains?” Pressed for an answer, the Buddha replies: “Ānanda, they should be treated like the remains of a wheel-turning monarch.” That is to say, it should be wrapped alternately with new unbleached cotton cloth and a layer

²⁷⁰ For a more positive answer, see the Bhāradvāja Sutta, S 35.127 = 4:110 f.

of carded cotton.²⁷¹ It should be done in this manner to the length of 500 yugas,²⁷² and then the body is placed in an oil-vat of iron. This should be covered with an iron lid. The pyre should comprise totally of fragrant material, and then cremate the body. Then a stupa (burial mound) is built over the relics at the crossroads. And those who offer a garland, a scent, or perfume powder, or bow down there, or brighten their minds there, that will be for their profit and welfare for a long time to come.

The Buddha then tells Ānanda that the following four people are worthy of a stupa: the Buddha, a Pratyeka Buddha (a fully self-enlightened Buddha who does not establish a dispensation), a disciple of the Buddha, and a wheel-turning (universal) monarch. The reason for this is:

Because, Ānanda, at the thought, “This is the stupa of a Tathāgata, of a Pratyeka Buddha, of a disciple of the Tathāgata, of a wheel-turning monarch,” people’s hearts are made peaceful, and then, at the breaking up of the body after death, they go to a good destiny and reappear in a heavenly world. (D 2:143)

²⁷¹ *Ahatena vatthena veḥetvā vihatena kappāsena veḥenti* (D 16.5.11/2:141).

²⁷² *Etena upāyena pañcahi yuga,satehi* (D 16.5.11/2:142). A *yuga* is the length of an Indian plough = 9 spans (DPL 605 f). A span (*vidatthi*) is the distance between the ends of the thumb and the little finger extended (about 20 cm = 8 ins). As such, a *yuga* is about 1.8 m (5.9 ft), and 500 *yugas* would be 900 m (984 yd). Apparently, all the better known English trs (Rhys Davids, Walshe, Vajirā & Story, and Ṭhanissaro) overlooked or mistranslated *yuga*.

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7. FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

(a) Ānanda's grief

And the venerable Ānanda then went into his lodging and stood lamenting, leaning against the door-post: "Alas! I am still a learner (*śaikṣa/sekha*) with much to do! And the Teacher is passing away—he who is so kind to me!" (D 2:143) [6:24]

Then the Buddha, on learning of Ānanda's predicament, summons him and then consoles him:

Enough, Ānanda, do not grieve! Do not weep! Have I not told you before: All those things that are dear and pleasant to us must suffer change, separation and becoming other? What else is there to expect? Whatever is born, become, compounded, is liable to decay—that it should not decay is impossible.

For a long time, Ānanda, you have been in the Tathāgata's presence, showing lovingkindness in act of body, speech and mind, helpfully, happily, whole-heartedly and unstintingly. You have gained much merit, Ānanda. Make an effort, and in a short time you will be free of the cankers.

(D 16.5.14/2:144)

Ānanda, being only a stream-winner at this point, understandably suffers grief at the impending loss of a spiritual friend. Earlier on when Śāriputra is still alive, he admonished Ānanda that

Friend, even if the Teacher himself were to undergo change and become other, still sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair would not arise in me. However, it would occur to me: "The Teacher, so influential, so powerful and mighty, has passed away. If the Blessed One had lived for a long time, that would have been for the welfare and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of gods and humans."

(Upatissa Sutta, S 2:274)

It is interesting to note here that Śāriputra has actually hinted to Ānanda regarding the life-span of the Buddha. Surely, if Śāriputra had not predeceased the Buddha, Śāriputra would have surely invited the Buddha to remain for the full duration of his life-span here on earth.

(b) Valediction to Ānanda

The Buddha then delivers his valediction to Ānanda, giving him a vote of thanks as it were, for the decades of personal service. This is an occasion when the Buddha's remarks are completely full of compassion, spoken totally in terms of the person:

Monks, all those who were arhat, Perfect Self-enlightened Buddhas in the past have had just a chief attendant as Ānanda, and so too will those Blessed Ones to come. Monks, Ānanda is wise. He knows when it is the right time for monks to come to see the Tathāgata, when it is the right time for nuns, for male lay-followers, for female lay-followers, for kings, for royal ministers, for leaders of other schools, and for their pupils.

Ānanda has four remarkable and wonderful qualities. What are they? If a company of monks comes to see Ānanda, they are pleased at the sight of him, and when Ānanda talks Dharma to them they are pleased, and when he is silent they are disappointed. And so it is, too, with nuns, with male followers and female followers. And these four qualities apply to a universal monarch: if he is visited by a company of kshatriyas, or brahmins, or householders, or of ascetics, they are pleased at the sight of him and when he talks to them, and when he is silent they are disappointed. And so too it is with Ānanda. (D 2:144 f; A 2:132, 5:229; SA 2:94 f) [6:6a]

18. KUŚINAGARĪ AND THE MALLAS

(a) Kuśinagarī

At this point, Ānanda is concerned that the Buddha has chosen a rather way-out place to pass away. After all, Kuśinagarī is “this miserable little town of wattle-and-daub, right in the jungle, an outpost township!” There are other great cities like Campā, Rājagṛha, Śrāvastī, Sāketa, Kauśāmbī or Vārāṇasī, that is, together with Vaiśālī, are the seven great cities of the time.

The Buddha then tells him that at one time, this humble place was Kuśavatī (Kusavatī), the capital of the universal monarch, Mahā Sudarśana (Mahā Sudassana), whose details are given at length in the sutra (M 17; J 95) following the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta. The Buddha compares ancient Kuśavatī to Āḷakamandā, the royal city of Kuvera, the king of Uttara, kuru, the northern continent (D 3:201).

(b) Lamentations of the Mallas

The Buddha then instructs Ānanda to inform the Vāsiṣṭhas (Vāsetṭha), that is, the Malla clan of Kuśinagarī that the Buddha will be passing away in their town. The Mallas are assembled in their meeting-hall when Ānanda breaks the sad news to them. They at once lament and grieve, and in due course make their way to the sal grove.

Realising that it would go well beyond the night to present the Vāsiṣṭhas individually, Ānanda decides to present them by families. So, during the first watch of the night (6.00 pm-10.00 pm) each of the Vāsiṣṭha family salutes the Buddha, announcing their names to him and saluting the Buddha’s feet. This practice of announcing one’s name to a holy person is another pre-Buddhist devotional practice, which evolved into the custom of recording the donor’s names on carvings and bas-reliefs on or near the stupas, on walls and in buildings, or at any spot deemed sacred, even when such inscriptions are invisible.

19. THE LAST CONVERT

(a) Subhadra the last convert

Subhadra (Subhadda), a wanderer, hears of the impending demise of the Buddha and decides to clear his doubts at this most opportune moment. At first, Ānanda refuses to allow him to see the Buddha, thinking that the Buddha should not be troubled by questions at such a time. The Buddha, however, overhears their conversation and invites Subhadra over. He asks the Buddha whether any or some, and which ones, of the six sectarian teachers [8:7] of the time have realized the truth. The Buddha replies that he need not bother about such questions:

Subhadda, in whatever Dharma [Teaching] and Vinaya [Discipline], where the noble eightfold path is not found there, the recluse of the first kind [stream-winner] is not found there, the recluse of the second kind [once-returner] is not found there, the recluse of the third kind [non-returner] is not found there, the recluse of the fourth kind [arhat] is not found.

But, Subhadda, in whatever Dharma and Vinaya, where the noble eightfold path is found, the recluse of the first kind [stream-winner] is found here, the recluse of the second kind [once-returner] is found here, the recluse of the third kind [non-returner] is found here, the recluse of the fourth kind [arhat] is found here.

The other schools are empty of recluses, but, Subhadda, here if these monks were to live rightly, this world would not be empty of arhats.

I was twenty-nine years of age, Subhadda,
When I went forth, seeking for the good.
Now over fifty years have passed
Since the day that I went forth, Subhadda.
Outside of the realm of this True Way [Right Method] of the Dharma,
There are no ascetics. (D 2:151 f)

Subhadra is converted, but the Buddha informs him that converts from non-Buddhist sects, as a rule, have to undergo a probation period of four months.²⁷³ Subhadra enthusiastically answers that he is willing to wait even if it takes four years. The Buddha then instructs Ānanda to let Subhadra go forth (D 2:152,

²⁷³ Cf the similar case of Kassapa the naked ascetic, S 2:21.

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1:176 f.). Subhadra then, using a term from the vocabulary of his erstwhile faith, tells Ānanda that it is such good fortune to have received “the pupil’s consecration” (*antevāsikābhīṣeka/antevāsikābhiseka*) from the Buddha himself. This is the lion-roar of Subhadra, the last personal disciple (*sakṣī, śrāvaka/sak-khī, sāvaka*) of the Buddha, that is, one who has attained arhathood in due course.

(b) The noble eightfold path

The Buddha’s statement here that where the noble eightfold path is found, there too is to be found the four types of Saints is of paramount importance to the growth of Buddhism after the Great Final Nirvana. One of the greatest stumbling blocks to Buddhist growth and openness is the problem of sectarianism and triumphalism. The Buddha’s declaration here means that it is the noble eightfold path that is “the one way” and not any sect or tradition. [7d]

273. The best of paths is the Eightfold Path.
The best of truths are the four sayings [the four noble truths].
Non-attachment is the best of states.
The best of the two-legged is the One with the Eyes.
274. This is the only way; there is no other
For the purity of vision.
Be sure you follow this path
For the bewilderment of Māra.
275. Entering upon that path,
You will make an end of pain.
I have taught you the way
Knowing how to draw out the dart (of suffering).
276. You yourself must strive:
The Buddhas are teachers—
Those who follow the way and meditate
Will be free from Māra’s bonds. (Dh 273-276)

CHAPTER 6

(Sixth Recital, *chaṭṭhī bhāṇavāra*)

20. THE BUDDHA’S LAST INSTRUCTIONS

(a) The Dharma-Vinaya as teacher

The sutra continues as follows:

Ānanda, it may be that you would think: “The Teacher’s instruction has ceased; now we have no teacher.” It should not be seen like this, Ānanda, for what I have taught and explained to you as Dharma and Discipline will, at my passing, be your teacher.” (D 2:154)

The Buddha then instructs that the monks should stop addressing one another as “friend” (*āvusa/āvuso*). After his passing, senior monks are to address junior monks by the name, their clan or as “friend,” whereas junior monks should address their seniors either as “venerable sir” (*bhāvan/bhante*) or as “Venerable” (*āyusmat/āyasmā*). The reason here is to inculcate due respect to seniority, so that proper authority is acknowledged and harmony maintained, hence promoting solidarity in the Order.

The Buddha then concedes that the Order may, if it wishes, after his passing, abolish the lesser and minor rules (*kṣudrānuṣṣādraka śikṣāpada/khuddakānukhuddaka sikkhāpada*) (D 2:154). Ānanda, however, fails to clarify with the Buddha what are the extent of these rules, so the elders of the Council of Rājagṛha decide not to make any changes to the rules [6:28].

(b) The supreme penalty on Chandaka

The Buddha then imposes a posthumous corrective measure, the “supreme penalty” (*brahma,daṇḍa*) on the monk Chandaka (Channa), who had been the Bodhisattva’s charioteer, but since he joined the Order he had been showing improper conduct (*anācāra*) by being arrogant and incorrigible even towards elders of the Order. He once cut down a tree shrine revered by the people to make space for a residence (Saṅgh’ādi,sesa 7 = V 3:155 f.). He despised all the other monks, thinking, “The Buddha is mine; the Dharma is mine!” (Saṅgh’ādi,sesa 12 = V 3:177 f.). He counter-questioned his examiners during another Saṅgh’ādi,sesa proceeding against him (Pācittiya 12 = V 4:35 ff.). Going in search of grass and sticks for his lodging, he damaged the cornfield of a certain brahmin (Pācittiya 19 = V 4:47). He was generally disrespectful to others (Pācittiya 54 = V 4:113).

The Buddha defines the supreme penalty here as “Whatever the monk Channa wants or says, he is not to be spoken to, admonished or instructed by the monks.” (D 2:154).²⁷⁴ Effectively this is a total boycott by the Order. The closing of Culla,vagga 11 of the Vinaya records how when Ānanda conveys the supreme penalty to Chandaka at Ghosīt’ārāma (in Kauśambī), he faints at the thought of being boycotted by the Order. He then goes into retreat to develop himself (V 2:292). The Channa Sutta (S 22.90) records in a humorous tone, how he attempts to seek Dharma instruction from other monks, and how Ānanda admonishes him (S 3:133 ff.). Apparently, no monk actually boycotts him, since they try to answer his questions, albeit careful to not offend him. In due course, he gains arhathood, by which the supreme penalty is automatically abrogated.

21. THE FINAL MOMENTS

(a) The Buddha’s last words

The Buddha then addresses the Order, asking whether anyone has any doubt or uncertainty about the Buddha, the Dharma or the Sangha:

Ask, monks! Do not afterwards feel remorse, thinking: “The Teacher was there before us, and we failed to ask the Lord face to face!”

Thrice the Buddha addresses the Order, and thrice they are silent. Then the Buddha says: “Perhaps, monks, you do not ask out of respect for the Teacher. Then, monks, let one friend tell it to another.” But they are still silent. Ānanda then remarks:

It is wonderful, Lord! It is marvellous, Lord! I clearly perceive that in this assembly there is not one monk who has any doubt or uncertainty!

You speak out of faith, Ānanda! But the Tathāgata knows that in this assembly there is not one monk who has any doubt or uncertainty about the Buddha, the Dharma or the Sangha or the path or the practice. Ānanda, the least one of these 500 monks is a stream-winner, incapable of falling into any suffering state, certain of Nirvana.

Now, monks, I declare to you: all conditioned things are subject to decay—strive on heedfully!
(D 2:155 f)

These are the Buddha’s last words.

(b) The Buddha’s last moments

Then the Buddha successively enters the first, the second, the third and the fourth absorptions. Then emerging from the fourth absorption, he enters the Sphere of Infinite Space, then the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness, then the Sphere of Nothingness, then the Sphere of Neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception, and leaving that, he attains the Cessation of Feeling and Perception.²⁷⁵ All this is noted by Aniruddha, the foremost of those monks with the Divine Eye.

²⁷⁴ Cf. D 1:96 where it is used differently.

²⁷⁵ See Norman 1981c:136.

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When Ānanda remarks that the Buddha has passed away, Aniruddha explains that the Buddha has only attained the Cessation of Feeling and Perception. Then the Buddha emerges from that state, and proceeds in reverse until he attains the first absorption again. Then he again attains the second absorption, the third absorption, and the fourth absorption, and there he finally passes away. At that moment, there is a great earthquake and thunder.

(c) Aspects of (pari)nirvāṇa

The oldest Pali texts (cf. DhA 2:163) mention two aspects of *nirvāṇa/nibbāna* and of *parinirvāṇa/parinibbāna*, where both the terms—*nirvāṇa* and *parinirvāṇa*—are identical in meaning. Partly due to the usage of the term *parinirvāṇa/parinibbāna* in this sutra, where it describes the Buddha's final passing away—the “Final Nirvana”—the term is often associated (exclusively) with the “death” of the Buddha or an arhat.²⁷⁶ Moreover, Rhys Davids' Pali-English Dictionary perpetuates this error (PED 427, under *Parinibbāna*). E.J. Thomas²⁷⁷ remarks that “Even the Buddhists of Ceylon have the same idea [that *parinirvāṇa* means final *nirvāṇa* or *nirvāṇa* attained at death with the complete dispersal of the *skandhas*], probably because they follow Rhys Davids [i.e. the Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary] more closely than the Pali texts.”

Some scholars have also endorsed this error: A.K. Warder²⁷⁸, for example, says that “The prefix *pari* is generally used when referring not to *nirvāṇa* itself as a state, but to the event of an individual's (final) attainment of it at the end of his worldly life.” Modern scholars like K.R. Norman and Bhikkhu Bodhi are well aware of this problem. K.R. Norman disagrees with Warder and prefers Thomas' view, but agreeing that “the difference between *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna* is a grammatical one.” (1995:216 f.)

[E.J. Thomas] clarified the relationship between *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna* long ago, referring²⁷⁹ to E. Kuhn's explanation [untraced] that “*pari* compounded with a verb converts the verb from the expression of a state to the expression of the achievement of an action.” He states, “*Nirvāṇa* is the state of release; *parinirvāṇa* is the attaining of that state. The monk *parinirvāṇi* ‘attains *nirvāṇa*’ at the time of awakening as well as at death”....

Thomas...elaborated the same explanation,²⁸⁰ “He *parinibbāyati*, attains the state, and then *nibbāyati*, is in the state expressed by *nibbāna*.” (KR Norman, 1995:217; my emphasis)

“It is clear, therefore, that the difference between *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna* is not that of *nibbāna* in life and *parinibbāna* at death” (Norman, 1995:216).²⁸¹

Later, medieval scholars expanded the usages of the term *parinibbāna*. Buddhaghosa, in his *Dīgha Commentary*, for example, speak of three kinds of *Parinirvāṇa* connected with the Buddha, namely, that of the defilements (*klesā parinirvāṇa/kilesa parinibbāna*), that of the Aggregates [lit. “Groups” of Aggregates]²⁸² (*skandha, parinirvāṇa/khandha parinibbāna*), and that of his bodily relics (*dhātu parinirvāṇa/dhātu parinibbāna*) (DA 899 f.).²⁸³ The first, also known as “Nirvana with remnants of clinging” (*sa-upadhi, śeṣa nirvāṇa/sopādi, sesa nibbāna*), according to Buddhaghosa, took place under the Bodhi tree during the Awakening (It 41). The second, or “Nirvana without remnants of clinging” (*nirôpadhi, śeṣa nirvāṇa/nirupādi, sesa nibbāna*) (It 41; A 4.116), is the Mahā Parinirvāṇa at Kuśinagarī (a view, as have seen differing from that of the early texts). The third kind of *parinirvāṇa* refer to the end of the Dispensation, that is, the final disappearance of the Buddha's Teaching [6:22].

The Pali term *upādi* (“clinging,” from *upa* + *ā* + *dā* “to take”) is often confused with the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *upādhi* (meaning “remnant, substrate,” or more correctly, “acquisitions” or “belongings,” attachment to which leads to rebirth). Despite the subtle but important difference in meaning, most

²⁷⁶ K.R. Norman, “Mistaken Ideas about *Nibbāna*”. In *The Buddhist Forum* III, ed. Skorupski & Pagel, London, 1995:216. This section is a summary of the salient points in this insightful article.

²⁷⁷ E.J. Thomas. “Nirvāṇa and Parinirvāṇa,” in *India Antiqua* (Festschrift for Jean Philippe Vogel), Leiden, 1947:294 f. See also R. Gombrich, *Precepts and Practice*, Oxford, 1971:70 n14.

²⁷⁸ A.K. Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, London, 1963:49 n1.

²⁷⁹ E.J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought*, London, 1933:121 n4.

²⁸⁰ E.J. Thomas. “Nirvāṇa and Parinirvāṇa,” 1971:294 f.

²⁸¹ For Bhikkhu Bodhi's discussion, see S:B 1:49-52.

²⁸² The Groups here comprises those of form, feeling, perception, dispositions, and consciousness. See n1.

²⁸³ Cf. DhA 2:163 where 2 kinds of *parinibbāna* are distinguished.

modern commentators regard them as synonymous, and do not try to explain how and why the difference arose. (Norman, 1995:215)

(d) The four verses

Brahmā Sahampati (who had just after the Awakening invited the Buddha to proclaim the Dharma) [4:1] utters this verse:

All beings in the world, all bodies must break up!
Even the Teacher, peerless in the human world,
The Lord Thus-come, powerful in wisdom, the perfect Buddha has passed away.

Śakra, the king of the gods, utters this popular ancient verse, said to be a remnant from the teaching of a previous Buddha that only he remembers:

Impermanent, alas, are all compounded things!
It is their nature to rise and fall;
Having arisen, they pass away--
Happy it is when they are stilled!
(D 2:157/199 = J 1:392 = S 1:6 = 158 = 2:193 = Tha 1149 = DhA 1:71 = MA 1:235)

Aniruddha proclaims:

There is no more breathing in and out in the one whose mind is steady;
The wise sage, unstirred, bent on peace,
The self enlightened one attained final Nirvana.

With mind unshaken, he endured the pain:
Like a lamp extinguished, his mind is freed.

And Ānanda utters:

There was terror, there was hair-raising fear,
When the self-enlightened one, perfect in all excellent qualities, passed away.
(D 2:157; S 1:158)

The Parinibbāṇa Sutta of the Saṃyutta, found in the Brahma Saṃyutta (S 1:158), contains the first verse since it is attributed to Brahmā. The second is Śakra's. The last two verses are there put into the mouths of Ānanda and Aniruddha respectively, perhaps because Aniruddha's verse forms a more fitting conclusion (S 1:158). In the Dīgha, however, Ānanda's verse comes last, "either in deprecation of Ānanda (which is scarcely probable), or more probably the way in which the early Buddhists regarded the passing of the Buddha. These four speakers are "four representative persons": Brahmā, the exalted god of the brahmins; Śakra, the king of the gods, popular with the Buddhists; Aniruddha, the holy, thoughtful arhat; and Ānanda, the loving, childlike disciple. (D:R 2:71, 73)

The Buddha passed away in the early hours of the full-moon day of the month of Vaiśākha, 543 BC (or, according to modern scholars, c. 483 BCE) at the age of 80. To remember the Buddha and mark this important occasion, south and south-east Asian Buddhists calculate their respective Buddhist calendars from this year (that is, by adding the number 543 to the Common Era).

22. REMEMBERING THE BUDDHA

(a) Homage to the Buddha's remains

Aniruddha then comforts the congregation reminding them of what the Buddha himself has admonished on impermanence. Those devas who are free from craving patiently endure the loss, saying: "All compounded things are impermanent. What is the use of all this?" Then Aniruddha and Ānanda spend the rest of the night in conversation on Dharma.

10. Was the Buddha poisoned?

At the end of the conversation, Aniruddha instructs Ānanda to go to the Malla family called the Vāsiṣṭha (Vāseṭṭha) to inform them of the Buddha's passing. When Ānanda arrive in their assembly hall, the Mallas are in the midst of a congregation. Hearing the news, they are overcome by grief, tearing at their hair. Sadly, they then order their people to bring perfume and wreath, and gather all the musicians together. Then with 500 sets of garments they proceed to the sal grove where the Buddha's body lies in state.

After worshipping the Buddha's body, they honour it with dance, song and music, with garlands and scents, making awnings and circular tents in order to spend the day there. Since it is already late, they decide to cremate the body the next day. But the mourning goes on for up to six days. On the seventh day, the Mallas decide to carry the body in procession through the south gate.

However, when the pall-bearers, eight Malla chiefs, try to lift the Buddha's body, they are unable to do so. Aniruddha informs them that this is because the devas desire that the body be carried through the north gate, through the city centre and out through the east gate to the Mallas' shrine of Makuṭa Bandhana, and there to be cremated. This location, where the Buddha's remains are cremated is believed to be marked today by the Rāmabhār Stūpa (about 15 m or 50 ft. high), located about 1.5 km from Māthā-kuār Shrine.

At that time, the sutra says, even the sewers and rubbish-dumps of Kuśinagarī are covered knee-deep in celestial coral-tree (*mandāra*) flowers. During the funeral procession, the Mallas honour the Buddha's remains with earthly music and offerings, while the devas make similar celestial music and offerings. At the Makuṭa Bandhana shrine, the Buddha's body is prepared in the manner of a universal monarch. The remains are wrapped in new linen-cloth, then in teased cotton-wool, and so on. The funeral pyre is made of all maners of perfume.

(b) The old Subhadra episode

From this point on, there are two canonical versions: the Dīgha version (Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta) gives in narrative form (as before), and the Vinaya version (V 2:284-308 = Cullavagga 11) put into the mouth of Mahā Kāśyapa himself. An interesting point here is that in the Dīgha version, Kāśyapa's speech is put after the outburst of Subhadra, while the Vinaya puts it before—that is, the last two paragraphs in the Dīgha are transposed in the Vinaya (D:R 2:75).

Hermann Oldenberg was the first western scholar to point out (*Vinaya Texts*, 1881:xxvi-xxviii) the parallel between the two texts. He suggests that the change is due to the position occupied by this episode in the Vinaya. It is there used as an introduction to the account of the Council of Rājagṛha held, according to the Theravada, to counteract such sentiments as were expressed by Subhadra's outburst. It was considered more appropriate, therefore, that *in that connection*, Subhadra's words should come last, to lead up to what follows. The whole story is then interpolated from our sutra. But the last paragraph is transposed, and the whole is put into Kāśyapa's mouth, on whose advice the Council is said to have been convened. [6:27]

(c) Mahā Kāśyapa

Now at that time, Mahā Kāśyapa is travelling along the main road from Pāpā to Kuśinagarī with a company of 500 monks. While resting under a tree by the high road, Mahā Kāśyapa sees a naked ascetic (*ājīvaka*) going towards Pāpā and holding a coral-tree (*mandāra*) flower in his hand. Mahā Kāśyapa knows that such a flower is not native to this world and only appears during very special occasions.

When Mahā Kāśyapa asks the naked ascetic about the *mandāra* flower, he is told of the Buddha's passing. Those monks who still have craving are painfully overcome with grief, while those more spiritually developed remain calm, saying: "All compounded things are impermanent. What is the use of all this?" However, in their number is the aged Subhadra, who still with craving, and having renounced in old age, does not grieve, claiming: "Enough, friends! Do not grieve, do not lament. We are well rid of the Great Ascetic. We were constantly troubled by his telling us: 'This is proper; that is improper!' Now, we can do what we like, and we won't have to do what we don't like." [6:23]

Mahā Kāśyapa, remaining calm, despite Subhadra's callous remark, exhorts the monks:

Friends, enough of your weeping and wailing! Has not the Lord already told you that all things that are pleasant and delightful are changeable, subject to separation and becoming other?

So why all this, friends? Whatever is born, become, compounded, is subject to decay; it cannot be that it does not decay. (D 2:162 f)

(d) The cremation

Mahā Kāśyapa then continues his journey with the monks, heading for Kuśinagarī to pay their last respects to the Buddha. Meanwhile, in Kuśinagara, the four Malla chiefs of the Vāsiṣṭha clan try to light Buddha's funeral pyre, but fail to do so. Aniruddha then informs them that the devas have held up the cremation until the arrival of Mahā Kāśyapa.

Mahā Kāśyapa arrives in Kuśinagarī and pays his last respects to the Buddha by circumambulating clockwise around the pyre three times with clasped hands. Then, uncovering the Buddha's feet, pays homage with his head to them. The 500 monks do likewise. And when this is done, the Lord's funeral pyre ignites of itself. (D 2:63-165)

The sutra says that the bodily remains of the Buddha all burned up, "not even ashes or dust remained, only the relics remained" (D 2:165). Then a shower of water descend from the sky, and another burst forth from the sal trees extinguishing the last funeral embers. In his translation notes, Maurice Walshe remarks that some trees are said to have the property of putting out fires. In Japan this is said of the ginkgo—despite considerable evidence to the contrary! (D:W 576 n462)

The Mallas then pour perfumed water over the pyre for the same purpose. For a week they honoured the Buddha's relics in their assembly hall, "having made a lattice-work of spears and an encircling wall of bows, with dancing, singing, garlands and music." (D 2:164)

(e) Division of the relics

King Ajātaśatru of Magadha then sends a message to the Mallas of Kuśinagarī: "The Lord was a kshatriya and I'm a kshatriya. I am worthy to receive a share of the Lord's remains. I will make a great stupa for them." [8:9a]. The Licchavīs of Vaiśālī, on hearing of this, send a similar message. Then the Śākya send their message: "The Lord was the chief of our clan..." The Bulakas (Bulayas) of Calakalpā (Allakappā), the Kraudiyas (Koliyas) of Rāmagrāma (Rāmagāma), the brahmins of Viṣṇudvīpa (Veṭṭhadīpa), and the Mallas of Pāpā, all made similar claims.

The Mallas of Kuśinagarī, however, refuse to share the relics, claiming that the Buddha has passed away in their town. To defuse the tension, the brahmin Dhūmrasa, gotra (also called Droṇa/Doṇa) address the gathering:

Listen, lords, to my proposal,
Forbearance is the Buddha's teaching.
It is not right that strife should come
From sharing out the best of men's remains.
Let's all be joined in harmony and peace,
In friendship sharing out the portions eight:
Let stupas far and wide be put up,
That all may see—and gain in faith! (D 2:166)

And so the relics are peacefully divided, with Droṇa himself taking for himself the urn with which the relics are measured. The Mauryas (Moriyas) of Pippalivana, however, arrive too late, and receive only the ashes from the pyre. Each of them then build a stupa over the precious remains that they have obtained. There are ten stupas in all: eight contain relics, the ninth over the urn, and the tenth over the ashes of the pyre. (Lamotte 1988:23 & 727 n25 for bibliography.)

The sutra originally ends here. Buddhaghosa, in his Commentary, remarks that this closing verse was added by the Sinhalese elders:

Eight portions of relics there were of him,
The All-seeing One. Of these seven remained
In Jambudīpa with honour. The eighth
In Rāmagāma's kept by nāga kings,
One tooth the Thirty Gods have kept.
Kalinga's kings have one, the nāgas, too.
The shed their glory o'er the fruitful earth.

10. Was the Buddha poisoned?

Thus the Seer's honoured by the honoured.
Gods and nāgas, kings, the noblest men
Clasp their hands in homage, for hard it is
To find another such for countless aeons.

(D 2:167 f. Walshe's tr.)

(f) Barlaam & Josaphat

Apparently, the relics of the Buddha made fabulous journeys even into foreign lands—and outside of Buddhism. Few mediaeval Christian names are better known than those of Barlaam and Josaphat,²⁸⁴ who were credited with the “second conversion” of India to Christianity, after the country had relapsed to “paganism” following the mission of the Apostle Thomas. Barlaam and Josaphat were remembered in the roll of saints recognized by the Roman Catholic Church with the festival day of 27 November. In the Greek Church, Iosaph (Josaphat) was commemorated on 26 August, while the Russians remember both Barlaam and Ioasaph, together with the latter's father, King Abenner (Śuddhōdāna), on 19 November (2 December, Old Style). Sir Henry Yule once visited a church at Palermo, Italy, dedicated to “Divo Josaphat.”

In 1571, the Doge Luigi Mocenigo presented to King Sebastian of Portugal a bone and part of the spine of St. Josaphat. When Spain annexed Portugal in 1580, these sacred treasures were removed by Antonio, the Pretender to the Portuguese throne, and ultimately found its way to Antwerp, Belgium, where they were preserved in the cloister of St. Salvator.

After the European colonists had settled in India with the arrival of Roman Catholic missionaries, some of them were struck by the similarities between episodes and features of the life of St. Josaphat and those of the Buddha, as is clearly evident from the early 17th century Portuguese writer Diogo do Couto who declared this fact. By the 1850s, European scholars doing comparative study of the legend of St. Josaphat [“Bodhisat”] and the life of the Buddha, “came to the startling conclusion that for almost a thousand years, the Buddha in the guise of the holy Josaphat, had been revered as a saint of the principal Churches of Christendom”! (D.M. Lang, introd. Barlaam & Josaphat, 1967:x-ix).

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²⁸⁴ See, for example, Graeme MacQueen's “Changing Master Narratives in Midstream: *Barlaam and Josaphat* and the Growth of Religious Intolerance in the Buddhalegend's Westward Journey”. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 5 1998:144-166.

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