

## I will wait for you

One of the most moving true story of animal loyalty is that of Hachikō (1923-1935), who was known to have waited for 9 years for his dead master to return at the train station.<sup>1</sup> Hachikō was an Akita dog, born on a farm in the city of Odate, Akita Prefecture. In Japanese, *hachi* meaning eight, the number referring to the dog's birth order in the litter, and the suffix *kō* denotes affection.

In 1924, Hidesaburō Ueno, a professor in the agriculture department at the University of Tokyo, took in Hachikō, a golden brown Akita, as a pet. During his owner's life, Hachikō greeted him at the end of each day at the nearby Shibuya train station. The pair continued their daily routine until May 1925, when Professor Ueno did not return, having died from a cerebral haemorrhage.

Yet, each day for the next 9 years, Hachikō waited for Ueno's return, appearing precisely when the train was due at the station. Hachikō attracted the attention of other commuters. Many of the people who frequented the Shibuya station had seen Hachikō and the Professor together each day. As they learned of his loyalty, they started to bring Hachikō treats and food to nourish him as he waited. Eventually, Hachikō's legendary loyalty inspired the whole nation.

In 1987, the Japanese film, "Hachikō Monogatari" ("The Tale of Hachiko") was made to honour Hachikō. In 2009, Hollywood remade this movie into "Hachi: A Dog's Tale," directed by Lasse Hallström, written by Stephen P Lindsey and stars Richard Gere (a Buddhist), Joan Allen, and Sarah Roemer. Human-like behaviour of animals never fail to inspire us, because it reminds us that if an animal is able to emulate us, as it were, we can surely better ourselves.

Loyalty and waiting are also the themes of **the Thapati Sutta**, "the Chamberlain Discourse" (S 55.6). It is about the deep faith of two streamwinners who are brothers, Isidatta and Purāṇa, who are always sad to see the Buddha leaving Sāvathī. They mentally trace the Buddha's Dharma journey around the central Gangetic plain, and when the Buddha begins his return journey, they, too, begin to rejoice, eagerly awaiting his return to Sāvathī.

When the brothers intimated to the Buddha how they feel about his absence, the Buddha humorously reminds them that the family or household life (the brothers are householders) is "a confinement, a dusty path"; renunciation is like the open air. He then praises them in their faith in the 3 jewels,<sup>2</sup> and their devotion to charity. These are their 4 qualities as streamwinners.

The brothers respond by saying that serving in the royal palace as chamberlains seems an even greater confinement, but they are unnerved by it in anyway (since they are streamwinners). The Sutta closes with the Buddha praising them for their charitable nature, such that whatever they have in their household that can be given away, they readily shared with others. There is no equal to their ever ready partaking of a share in charity.<sup>3</sup>

How do we practise the teachings of the Thapati Sutta? We can begin by asking ourselves: if we were living in the Buddha's time, would we eagerly wait for the Buddha's return as do the streamwinners Isidatta and Purāṇa? Perhaps, we might be inspired to answer that we are willing to wait for the advent of the future Buddha, Metteyya (Sanskrit, Maitreya).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hachiko> & <http://www.unbelievable-facts.com/2013/05/the-tale-of-most-loyal-dog-hachiko.html>.

<sup>2</sup> The Buddha, the Dharma (the true teaching), and the sangha (the holy community of saints): see below.

<sup>3</sup> **Thapati Sutta** (S 55.6), SD 42.7.

The next question we must ask ourselves is: Do we have the patience and loyalty to wait (for the Buddha or anyone else, for that matter)? Can we be patient and loyal like Hachikō? But if we were a dog, we only hear the Buddha's sonorous voice, but not the Dharma that it conveys. So, at best we will be reborn in one of the lower heavens.<sup>4</sup>

The patience of waiting for the Buddha is one thing, loyalty to the Dharma is another. Aspiring to meet the future Buddha, or reciting some powerful mantra, or wholesale faith in some teaching, does not guarantee we will meet him. Even if we do meet the future Buddha, without loyalty to the Dharma, we would not have the capacity for understanding what we hear or for understanding it rightly.

What does loyalty here entail? It is loyalty to the 3 jewels, or better, **the faith of a stream-winner in the 3 jewels**. A streamwinner has faith in the "original" Buddha,<sup>5</sup> that is, Gotama Buddha, whose teaching we still remember and should practise. The future "Buddha" is not a buddha yet. It is Gotama Buddha who, in his wisdom and compassion, bequeaths us the liberating Dharma. For this, we are deeply grateful by keeping to it in our practice.

This is like our parents whose estate we have inherited. We would not say that we are waiting for some future parent! We don't need to, as we have our inheritance to enjoy and work with. This way, we are truly Dharma heirs.

If we say that some later teaching, no matter how "powerful" or remarkable, is "more advanced" than the Buddha's own suttas, we are only rejecting the Buddha Dharma. We have no canonical evidence to support such a view. If we say that a later teaching could not be understood by the Buddha's audience, we are saying that the Buddha does not know any skillful means to speak on the level of his audience.<sup>6</sup> If we say that such a later teaching was hidden in some naga world or imaginative place, we must take it only as a myth, nothing more.

Faith in the Dharma means that we look up to the Buddha Dharma as the only means of personal and mental cultivation for the sake of awakening in this life itself, at least as a streamwinner. Of course, we can choose the "Bodhisattva Path," if we want to. This entails first meeting a future Buddha and declaring our aspiration before him.

If that Buddha declares that we are "buddha material," then we would spend countless lives sacrificing our limbs (eyes, heart, blood, flesh, etc), even our life itself, for the sake of others, even an animal (such as a hungry tigress). Further, we would willingly sacrifice all our wealth and comfort, even our kingdom, our family, our wife and our children, and give them away to even greedy unworthy priests like Jujaka in **the Vessantara Jātaka**.<sup>7</sup>

Aspiration to buddhahood is a very noble one, and we must understand its significance, and take it very seriously. On the other hand, we don't need to struggle to be a tenured university professor when we can be a great scholar, scientist or specialist who excel in the field of our study and make some life-changing and society-uplifting discovery or contribution.

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<sup>4</sup> Animals who die in this way are said to be reborn in the Tāvātimsa heaven (the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest of the sense-world heavens) (see [SD 1.7](#), Table 1.7): see Reflection, "[Animals go to heaven](#)," R69a, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> "Original" is within quote-marks because there is only one Buddha in our universe. It does not mean that there are other Buddhas in our own times (within a buddha-period). This is just like there is only one captain of a ship, or that we only need to discover fire once (once the Buddha Dharma has been discovered and declared, the Dharma wheel need not be turned again, except in personal practice). To speak of any more "Wheel-turnings" (with the big W) is to degrade the Buddha and ritualize the Dharma.

<sup>6</sup> See [the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta](#) (D 16), where the Buddha declares that he is able to speak convincingly to any audience (D 16,3.21-23), SD 9.

<sup>7</sup> See **Vessantara Jātaka** (J 547/6:521-581).

In short, we only need to aspire to attain streamwinning in this life itself. Only streamwinning prevents us from falling into the lower realms of the exploitative asuras, the cyclic rut of the animals, the addictive preta underworld, or the violently painful hell-beings. Even if we are reborn in the heavens on account of some merits we have accumulated, when that karmic support is exhausted, we fall straight into the lower worlds! This is a game of cosmic snakes and ladders.<sup>8</sup>

If we aspire to be streamwinners in this life itself, we are simply following the Buddha's teaching,<sup>9</sup> and have deep faith in the sangha. For a streamwinner, whether a monastic or a lay practitioner, is a member of the noble sangha, whereas a Bodhisattva (as envisioned in the Mahāyāna), is not. Such Bodhisattvas are not even mentioned in the early suttas.<sup>10</sup>

Faith in the sangha does not merely mean supporting worthy monastics in a material way or joining a fan club for monks or nuns. It means practising just as the true saints of the noble sangha would, habitually reflecting on the impermanence of everything around us.

This is the meaning of patience and loyalty in terms of Dharma practice. So, the next time we hear "I will wait for you,"<sup>11</sup> sung by Frank Sinatra,<sup>12</sup> or by Connie Francis,<sup>13</sup> or by any other vocalist, let us remind ourselves to aspire to be streamwinners, so that we will meet the future Buddha and have the capacity for understanding his teachings, and so gain self-awakening.<sup>14</sup>

R362 Simple Joys 261  
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<sup>8</sup> See [\(Nānā, karana\) Puggala Sutta 1](#) (A 4.123/2:126-128), SD 23.8a.

<sup>9</sup> See [\(Anicca\) Cakkhu Sutta](#) (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

<sup>10</sup> This is not saying whether such Bodhisattvas "exist" or do "not exist," but simply that early Buddhism and the later Buddhisms work on different principles, and should be seen like computers running on different operating systems (OS). As far as we use the same "software" (esp the suttas and meditation), we may have common grounds for dialogue, even ecumenism.

<sup>11</sup> The song was originally used as the main theme in the French musical, "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" (1964). Its music was composed by Michel Legrand, French lyrics by Jacques Demy, and English lyrics by Norman Gimbel (1966).

<sup>12</sup> [http://sinatra.wikia.com/wiki/I\\_Will\\_Wait\\_for\\_You](http://sinatra.wikia.com/wiki/I_Will_Wait_for_You).

<sup>13</sup> This version famously closes *Futurama*, season 5, episode 2, entitled "[Jurassic Bark](#)," based on the Hachikō story.

<sup>14</sup> See Reflection, "[To be Bodhisattva, be an arhat first](#)," R198, 2011.