

Brahma,nimantanika Sutta

The Discourse on Brahmā's Invitation¹

[The Buddha defeats a God-Devil league in high heaven]
(Majjhima Nikāya 49/1:326-331)
Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

1 Sutta history

1.1 SUTTA VERSIONS. The Brahma,nimantanika Sutta (M 49) recounts the Buddha's visiting the brahmā Baka to refute his wrong view of permanency. It has a parallel in the Madhyama Āgama (MĀ 78),² which agrees with the Pali version in its title of "Brahmā inviting the Buddha" (梵天請佛), and also that the Buddha is staying at Jeta's forest near Sāvathī. The first part of the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta appears as a discourse in the Saṃyutta Nikāya **the Brahmā Baka Sutta** (S 6.4).³ All three versions open with Baka believing his realm to be permanent and supreme, and the Buddha aware of this wrong view thereupon visits him.

Apparently, the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta is an expansion of the account of the Brahmā Baka Sutta (S 6.4), or that the latter, giving only a brief account, is a summary of the former. More likely, however, both texts were built on an ur-text (common original text). Both the sutta openings [1] are identical, but while the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta is set at Ukkatthā, the Brahmā Baka Sutta is set at Sāvathī. It is also interesting to note that the Majjhima account is given in the first person, with the Buddha himself narrating the event, but the Saṃyutta account is in the third person.

Both the Brahmā Baka Sutta (S 6.4) and the MĀ 78 version agree in saying that the Buddha is residing in Jeta's forest near Sāvathī. Moreover, this account recurs in **the Baka Brahma Jātaka** (J 405).⁴

1.2 PROPHETIC SUTTA. This short but remarkable prophetic sutta⁵—a conversation between the Buddha and the brahmā Baka in the high heavens—anticipates, as it were, the beginnings of God-religions and their power-centred ideology. Once when the Buddha is staying in the Subhaga,vana at Ukkatthā, he reads the thoughts of the brahmā Baka, who has conceived the idea that his heaven is permanent and free from decay and death. The Buddha visits him to point out his error.⁶

Baka welcomes the Buddha [§3] but, owing to his own ignorance, refuses to acknowledge his error [4]. Māra possesses one of Brahmā's host (or one might say the Devil takes over one of the angels), and threatens and then cajoles the Buddha to submit to Brahmā [§5]. Apparently, the tone of Māra's words ring like those of the Old Testament God:

So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me. For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country, so that no one can see the land... (Exodus 10:3)

Regarding the words you have heard, because your heart was penitent and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me, and have rent your clothes and wept before me, I have also heard you, says the Lord. (2 Chronicles 34:26 f)

¹ This sutta was translated at the request of David Sugiman (Indonesia), National University of Singapore Buddhist Society in 2004. On the tr of the title, see Intro (1).

² MĀ 78 = T1.547a-549b. Some aspects of MĀ 78 has been discussed by Thich Minh Chau 1991:58.

³ S 6.4/1:142-144. See Analayo 2005:161 (at M 1:326) & SD 11.6.

⁴ J 405/3:358-363.

⁵ The Sanskrit cognate is found in Chinese tr as MĀ 78 = T1.547a-549b. Qu at Vism 393.

⁶ M 49/1:326; cf S 6.4/1:142; J 405/3:359.

The irony here is that it is Māra (the devil) himself who is defending Brahmā (God)! This is not surprising at all in the Buddhist context, as Māra desires all living beings to remain within his realm, that is, all the universe, earth and heaven, the physical and the formless planes. The Buddha however potently replies, “I know you, evil one!” [§6]. Māra is defeated with wisdom, especially self-knowledge. Understandably, cultish and fundamentalist groups, as a rule, fear exposure to any religion or teaching outside their own—for the simple reason that they fear their faith (or lack of it) would not withstand the open truth.

The brahmā Baka persists in his wrong views and goes on to threaten the Buddha, warning, “You will find no escape beyond, and you will only reap your share of toil and trouble!” Then he cajoles the Buddha, that if he submits himself to Brahmā (God), then “you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble” [§7]. In these statements lie the essence of **behaviourism**, or the “stick and carrot” approach, a common method of social control and the battle for the mind.

Again, the Buddha replies, “I know that, too, Brahmā,” and goes on to detail the limits of Brahmā’s power and glory [§9], revealing that Brahmā is ignorant of his own origins, relating four incidents connected with Brahmā’s previous lives, one of them as **Kesava**⁷ [§10]. The Buddha goes on to speak of his own awakening [§§11-25], and then challenges Brahmā, “Now, good sir, I will vanish! Brahmā, vanish from me if you can!” but try as he may, Brahmā could *not* disappear [§26]! The invisible Buddha then addresses the heavenly assembly [§27], filling it with wonder [§28].

Māra, still uneasily watching the developments, makes a last-ditch attempt to stop the Buddha from teaching the truth to others, rather to take it easy than to trouble himself: “Good sir, be unconcerned, dwell devoted to a pleasant abiding here and now. It is wholesome [It is better] to leave it undeclared, good sir, do not advise anyone!” [§29]. This is like when is asserting at self-improvement or problem-solving or helping others, but someone discourages one by telling, “Why bother?” The Buddha again tells Māra, “I know you, evil one!” and declares that his awakening is in no way affected whether he teaches the Dharma or not [§30].

1.3 THE TITLE. According to **the Majjhima Commentary**,⁸ the “invitation” (*nimantanika*)⁹ here refers to Brahmā’s welcoming the Buddha by declaring his realm to be “permanent, everlasting, eternal” [§4]. **The Madhyama Āgama** (MĀ 78) version, too, uses the same verb “to invite”, 請 qǐng, in the title,¹⁰ and when having welcomed the Buddha, Brahmā declared his realm to be eternal.¹¹ The Pali version closes with these words (by an unknown speaker):¹²

*Itih’idaṃ Mārassa ca anālapanaṭāya Brahmuno ca abhinimantanatāya tasmā imassa
veyyākaraṇassa Brahma,nimantaṇikan t’eva adhivacanan ti*

As such, because Māra was unable to reply, and because of Brahmā’s invitation, this exposition is entitled “the invitation of Brahmā.”

The crucial word here if, of course, **Brahmuno**, that is technically taken here to be the *genitive* of Brahmā. However, it can also be taken as *dative* (to Brahmā). However, rendering *Brahmuno ca abhinimantanatāya* as “because of the invitation to Brahmā” is more in keeping with the drift of the Sutta, where it is actually the Buddha, not Brahmā, who does the “inviting.” That is to say, the Buddha actually invites Brahmā to give up his wrong view [4, 24], besides inviting Brahmā to “disappear” but who is

⁷ M 1:326-311; S 1:142-144.

⁸ *Brahmuno ca abhinimantanatāya ti Brahmuno ca idaṃ hi mārisa niccan ti ādinā nayena sahoḷāsakena Brahma-t,thānena nimantana,vacanena* (MA 2:415).

⁹ *Nimantanika* (vl *nimantaṇika*, J 1:116) is actually an adj, “inviting,” and occurs only here (a hapax legumemnon). The noun is *nimantana* (“invitation”) (V 1:58 = 2:75; D 1:166; M 1:77; A 1:295; J 1:116 (*n*), 412; Pug 55).

¹⁰ T1.547a9 & T1.549a28.

¹¹ T1547a19 & T 1547c3.

¹² It is likely that this last sentence was added by the early reciters, rather than an original part of the sutta.

powerless to do so [26].¹³ However, I have translated the word in accordance with the Pāli, but also bearing in mind the spirit of the sutta.

2 Comparison with other suttas

2.1 THE ARIYA, PARIYESANĀ SUTTA.¹⁴ The Brahma, nimantanika Sutta climaxes with the Buddha rousing the Brahmā assembly with wonder over his teaching [28], but Māra immediately reappears, takes control of a member of Brahmā's host, and warns the Buddha that those who have taught the Dharma or "craved for disciples and renunciants" fall into an "inferior body" (that is, a bad rebirth), while those who do not do so, gain a "superior body" (that is, a good rebirth) [29]. Both the Pali sutta and its Chinese Āgama version continue with the Buddha revealing Māra's real fear that, due to the Buddha's teaching the Dharma, Māra's followers will escape from his grasp. The development here is summarized by Analayo thus:

The agreement of the Pāli and the Chinese versions on Māra's attempt to stop the Buddha from teaching suggests that the present discourse must have taken place at a relatively early stage of the Buddha, since if the Buddha had already started to teach and instruct disciples, there would be little reason for Māra to try to prevent him from teaching. If this should be correct, then the present discourse stands in an interesting contrast to the events narrated in **the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta** [M 26], according to which right after his awakening the Buddha was disinclined to teach, and only after the intervention of another Brahmā did he decide to begin teaching.

The similarity between these two instances can be supported by the vocabulary employed in both discourses, since according to the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta the Buddha was inclined to "abide inactive," which is exactly the expression used by Māra in his recommendation in the present discourse.¹⁵ The Ariyapariyesanā Sutta moreover reports the Buddha to have considered it a "vexation" if others should not understand him, an expression which, though it does not occur in the Pāli version of the Brahma, nimantanika Sutta, has however a parallel in the Chinese version of the same discourse.¹⁶

The contrast between these two discourses is difficult to resolve, since according to the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta the Buddha was on his own disinclined to teach and only convinced to do so by Brahmā, while the present discourse attributes the idea of not teaching the Dharma to Māra, an evil suggestion that meets with no success as the Buddha's mind is firmly set on teaching.

(Analayo 2005:165 at M 1:330)

We will return to this discussion on the Buddha's decision to teach the Dharma and try to resolve this problem in the next two sections [2bc].

The importance of Ariya, pariyesanā Sutta lies in its declaration of his earlier motivation in going forth, and here lies the explanation of why he "hesitates" to teach. According to the Ariya, pariyesanā Sutta and its Madhyama Āgama parallel, the Buddha states his reason for going forth in search of awakening in very personal reasons, speaking of himself (as Bodhisattva) of being subject to old age, to disease, and to death, and of searching a way out of this predicament for himself, without alluding to any wish to give teachings or liberate other beings:

¹³ Analayo, in a personal communication, forwarded to me these comments from Nānatusita: "It is clear that *brahmuno* is a genitive as *mārassa* is also genitive. The accusative of object would be required in the case of Horner's rendering. Wijesekera in *Syntax of Cases in Pali*: 'With verbs of asking, begging, imploring, etc, the person asked and so on is denoted by the accusative of object.' [1993:43]. I have followed their advice in my actual tr.

¹⁴ M 26 = SD 1.11.

¹⁵ M 26.19/1:168,9: "Thinking thus, my mind was inclined towards inaction" (*itiha me... appossukatāya cittaṃ namati*); M 49.29/1:331,7: "Good sir, dwell unconcerned..." (*iṅgha tvam marisa appossukko... viharassa*); MĀ 78 = T1.548c27: 行無為。

¹⁶ M 26/1:168,2: *vihesā*; MĀ 78 = T1.549a7: 煩勞。

*yan nunāhaṃ attanā jarā,dhammo...attanā vyādhi,dhammo...attanā maraṇa,dhammo...
nibbānaṃ pariyeseyyaṃ.*

Suppose that I, being myself subject to decay...being myself subject to sickness...being myself subject to death...were to seek nirvana. (M 26.13/1:163)

Analayo makes this observation in his *Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya*:

To understand the Buddha's reasoning after his awakening, two other passages could be brought in. One of these passages occurs in **the Brahmanimantanika Sutta**, where in reply to Māra the Buddha explained that his condition of inner freedom was independent of whether he taught or not.¹⁷ The other passage is from **the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta**, according to which the Buddha renounced his life principle and thereby set an end to his teaching activities because his attendant Ānanda had failed to request him to stay alive, even though that would have been possible.¹⁸ The point that emerges from these two passages is that the quality of the Buddha's awakening did not in any way depend on him becoming a teacher. His realization was self-sufficient as it were, and there was no need for him to proselyte in order to corroborate the truth he had discovered. Once he had been requested to teach, he did so, but when on a later occasion he was not requested to continue teaching, he stopped teaching. (Analayo 2005 at M 1:167)

2.2 THE MAHĀ PARINIBBĀNA SUTTA (D 16) records how, during the fifth week of the Great Awakening, while he was enjoying the bliss of awakening under the Goatherd's Banyan tree, Māra appears to him inviting him to pass away immediately into nirvana since his goal has been attained.

In fact, Māra, in trying to prevent the Buddha from teaching the Dharma, says:

So, bhikshu, I tell you this. Good sir, be unconcerned, dwell devoted to a pleasant abiding here and now. It is wholesome [It is better] to leave it undeclared, good sir, do not advise anyone!' [29]

The Buddha replies that he (the Buddha) would not pass away until all the fourfold company—the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen—has grown and become spiritually developed and spreading the Dharma. In the Buddha's last days, Māra reappears reminding the Buddha of this declaration, and that now the fourfold community is well-established, so that it is time for him (the Buddha) to pass away as "promised."¹⁹

Māra's request to the Buddha to pass away (since the Dispensation has been well established)—as recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta—is clearly motivated by a reason similar to that behind Māra's efforts in the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta to stop the Buddha from teaching, namely, to prevent beings from being liberated from Māra's grasp. The Sanskrit fragments of the Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra,²⁰ its Chinese parallels²¹ and the Chinese Mūla,sarvāstivāda Vinaya account²² indicate that Māra's attempt to prevent the Buddha from teaching occurs right after the Buddha's awakening. The Dīgha Commentary,

¹⁷ *Desento...Tathāgato sāvakānaṃ dhammaṃ tādiso va, adesento pi...tādiso va* (M 49.30/1:331,18).

¹⁸ D 16.3.3-6/2:103 = SD 9. The same recurs in the Skt fragments of the Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra (Waldschmidt 1951:204) and in the Chinese parallels DĀ 2, T5, T6 and T7 (T1.15b24, T1.165a13, T1.180b20, T1.191b19); a tr of DĀ 2 in Weller 1939:78-79, of T5 in Puini 1909:36, and of T6 and T7 in Waldschmidt 1944:98-99. For biblio see SD 9.

¹⁹ D 16.3.7/2:104,18 = SD 9, esp §3.7nn; see S 4.24/1:122-124; A 5:46; J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f). It is interesting that this early conversation between the Buddha and Māra is not recorded elsewhere in the Nikāyas. Later, at D 16.3.34/2:112-114, the Buddha relates this incident to Ānanda. See also **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26.19/1:167 f) = SD 1.11; see also S 4.24/1:122-124; A 5:46; J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f).

²⁰ Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, vol 2, 1951:208.

²¹ DĀ 2 = T15c9; T6 = T180b24; T7 = T191b27.

²² T1451 = T24.387c24.

too, places the event right after the Great Awakening.²³ Now let us look at Analayo's statement [2a] again:

The contrast between these two discourses [the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta and the Brahma,-nimantanika Sutta] is difficult to resolve, since according to the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta the Buddha was on his own disinclined to teach and only convinced to do so by Brahmā, while the present discourse attributes the idea of not teaching the Dhamma to Māra, an evil suggestion that meets with no success as the Buddha's mind is firmly set on teaching.

(Analayo 2005:165 at M 1:330)

Analayo then proposes this solution (in his footnote):

The only way to reconcile these accounts would seem to be by assuming that Māra's attempt to prevent the Buddha from teaching took place soon after Brahmā had convinced the Buddha to teach.

(Analayo 2005:165 n155 at M 1:330)

2.3 ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION. Let me propose an alternative solution to this interesting problem. First, let us look again at what Analayo has usefully noted earlier:

The similarity between these two instances²⁴ can be supported by the vocabulary employed in both discourses, since according to the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta the Buddha was inclined to "abide inactive," which is exactly the expression used by Māra in his recommendation in the present discourse. The Ariyapariyesanā Sutta moreover reports the Buddha to have considered it a "vexation" if others should not understand him, an expression which, though it does not occur in the Pāli version of the Brahmanimantanika Sutta, has however a parallel in the Chinese version of the same discourse.

(Analayo 2005:165 at M 1:330) [2a for nn]

My solution is this: while I agree with Analayo that the events of the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta "took place soon after Brahmā had convinced him to teach," I think that the Buddha's "hesitation" to teach as recorded in the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta [2.1] and the appearance of Māra in the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta refer to the same event.

If we take the Buddha's "hesitation" to teach as being a historical event, then the acts of Māra in the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta may be taken as a mythification of the Buddha's disinclination to teach. The brahmā Baka's eternalist view is a good example of how wrong view can occur even in high places, what more in the human world. Clearly, it would be an immense task for the Buddha to teach the Dharma that is against such deeply grounded false notions. The Brahma,nimantanika Sutta dramatizes, as it were, on the celestial stage, the odds that the Buddha—indeed anyone trying to teach the Dharma—would face.

It is also interesting to note that although **the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta** records the Buddha's "hesitation" to teach, the ensuing account of Brahmā Sahampati approaching him to invite him to teach is not found at all in the Madhyama Āgama account of the same sutta.²⁵ It is possible that the account of Brahmā Sahampati, too, is a myth, like the episode of the four sights,²⁶ a dramatization of important mental events of the Buddha into a popular and colourful medium so that the masses may initially enjoy a good story and in due course understand the true import of the skillful means.

²³ DA 2:555.

²⁴ That is, Māra's discouraging the Buddha to teach, as recorded in **Brahma,nimantanika S** [2b in Introd], and Brahmā's invitation to the Buddha to do so, as recorded in **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26.20/1:168) = SD 1.11.

²⁵ The whole episode (the "hesitation" and Brahmā Sahampati's invitation) is found in **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 2:93) and **Āyācana S** (S 1:136-138), and also in the **Ekottara Āgama** parallel to the Āyācana S (EĀ 19.1 = T2.-593ab), Skt fragments of **Catuṣpariṣat Sūtra** (Waldschmidt 1957a:108-120; tr Kloppenberg 1973:15-17) & individual trs (T186 = T 3.527c23; T187 = T3.603a10; T189 = T3.642c-643a; T190 = T3.806a3; T191 = T3.952c-953a); cf Waldschmidt 1967g:173; **Lalita Vistara**, in Lefmann 1902:392, Foucaux 1884:326. See Analayo 2005 at M 1:167.

²⁶ See **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26) = SD 1.11(2).

2.4 THE MŪLA,PARIYĀYA SUTTA. Both the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta and the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta are set in the Subhaga,vana, outside Ukaṭṭhā. However, while the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta was delivered at the Subhaga,vana, the events of the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta are set in the same venue (the brahmā world) but narrated in the Jeta,vana, outside Sāvattihī. In either case, the Buddha was residing at Subhaga,vana, and the similarity in the structure and theme of the two suttas—perhaps the only two suttas delivered at Ukaṭṭhā (along with the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta)²⁷—is striking. As Bodhi notes:

It is even possible to see the present sutta [Brahma,nimantanika Sutta] as a dramatic representation of the same ideas set forth by the Mūla,pariyāya in abstract philosophical terms. Thus Baka the Brahmā may be taken to represent *being* (*bhava*) or personality (*sakkāya*) in its most eminent form, blindly engaged in the activity of *conceiving* (*maññana*), sustaining itself with its delusions of permanence, pleasure, and selfhood. Underlying being is *craving*, symbolized by Māra—seemingly inconspicuous in the assembly, yet the real author of all the outpourings of conceiving, the one who holds the entire universe in his grip. The alliance of Brahmā and Māra, God and Satan, an incomprehensible union from the perspective of Western theism, points to the thirst for continued being as the hidden root of all world affirmation, whether theistic or non-theistic. In the sutta the superficial theoretical contest between Baka and the Buddha soon gives way to a gripping deep-level confrontation between Māra and the Buddha—Māra as craving demanding the affirmation of being, the Enlightened One pointing to the cessation of being through the uprooting of delight. (Bodhi, M:ÑB 1246 n499)

3 Ukaṭṭhā & Subhaga,vana

Ukkaṭṭhā was a town in Kosala, near the Himālaya. Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, had given it as *brahma,deyya*²⁸ to Pokkharasātī, in recognition of his skills. It was well populated and had much grass-land, woodland and corn.²⁹ The Icchā,naṅgala forest was in the neighbourhood, and **the Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 1:87) records how when the Buddha was staying in the forest, Pokkharasātī first sent his pupil Ambaṭṭha and then went himself to visit the Buddha. There was a road connecting Ukaṭṭhā with Setavyā (A 2:37) and with Vesālī (J 3:259). **The brahmin youth Chaṭṭha** travels from Setavyā to Ukaṭṭhā to learn under Pokkharasātī (VvA 229; cf AA 3:75). Ukaṭṭhā was also the residence of the monk **Āṅganika Bhāradvāja**³⁰ (ThaA 2:83).

Buddhaghosa explains that Ukaṭṭhā was so called because it was built by the light of torches (*ukkā*) at night, so that it might be completed within the auspicious time.³¹ The Divyāvadāna calls the city Utkūṭā (Divy 319.10).

The Subhaga,vana, a grove in Ukaṭṭhā belongs to the brahmin Pokkhara,sāti. Once, when the Buddha is there, he visits the Avihā gods (D 2:50) and, again, from there he visits the brahmā Baka, recounted in **the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta** (M 49/1:326; cf S 1:142, where it is set in the Jetavana at Sāvattihī). The forest is called Subhaga (“agreeable”) because of its beauty. People often go there for pleasure, and, influenced by the pleasant nature of the surroundings, would plan pleasant things, which will come to pass (MA 1:10). The Subhaga Grove has a royal sal tree (*sāla,rāja*), under which the Buddha delivers **the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** (M 1/1:1-6) and **the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta** (M 49/1:326-331).

²⁷ See SD 11.9.

²⁸ *Brahma,deyya*, “the perfect gift,” said of donations of land to the brahmins. The income derived from such lands were the personal property of the brahmins, who used it for agriculture and brahminical sacrifices. Such gifts probably formed the precedent of royal gifts of parks for monasteries for the Buddha and the Sangha. However, while such gifts were corporately owned by “the Sangha of the four directions” (*catu-d,disa saṅgha*), the *brahma,deyya* were gifts to individual brahmins. See Uma Chakravarti 1987:57.

²⁹ D 1:87, 106, 2:50; M 1:1, 326; DA.1:245.

³⁰ Author of Tha 219-221.

³¹ DA 1:245; MA 1:10; AA 3:75.

4 Buddhist psychocosmology

In the Brahma, nimantanika Suttas, Māra the evil one (counterpart of the modern “devil”) warns the Buddha not to go against Mahā Brahmā, the High God, thus:

Bhikshu, bhikshu, do not disparage him, do not disparage him. For this Brahmā is the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, the Lord God, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief, the Ordainer,³² the Almighty, the Father of all that are and that will be.³³ [5a]

Māra goes on to warn the Buddha that even before him, there were “recluses and brahmins” who scorned and loathed the four elements, Prajāpati, and Brahmā—and they all “were established in an inferior body (*hīna kāye*),” meaning the lower unhappy planes of existence. On the other hand, Brahmā cajoled, there were also those who lauded and delighted in the four elements, Prajāpati, and Brahmā realm—and they all “were established in a superior world (*pañīte kāye*),” here specifically meaning the brahmā realm. What we have here is an early example of religious behaviourism, the use of the carrot and stick to bring others into line with one’s wishes and ways—an idea that finds full bloom in many modern theistic teachings.

The word “body” (*kāya*) [5a, 10, 9] can mean either (1) one’s physical body; (2) a group or realm. The contexts leans more to the latter, referring to the four suffering states (*apāya*) (MA 2:406): the hells (*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tiracchāna, yoni*), ghost realm (*pitti, visaya*) and the asura demon host (*asura, kāya*) (It 93).

Traditionally, there are “the five destinations” (*pañca, gati*), namely, the hells (*niraya*), the animal world (*tiracchāna, yoni*), the ghost realm (*pitti, visaya*), the human world (*manussa, loka*) and the deva realm (*deva, loka*) (D 3:234; M 1:73; A 4:459), further divided into a total of 31 planes of existence, as mentioned in **the Saṅkhār’upapatti Sutta** (M 120).³⁴ It is interesting to note that the earlier list is that of only three “lower worlds,” variously called “plane of misery” (*apāya, bhūmi*), “nether world” (*vinī, pāta*) and “the suffering states” (*duggati*). To this list was later added the asura demons (*asura, kāya*) (UA 140; ItA 101), even then it was subsumed in the “ghost realm.” Only in later Mahāyāna, especially Tibetan Buddhism, we have the “6 realms.”³⁵

Although these realms were regarded by the ancient Indians as actual geographical locations (*loka*), the early Buddhists placed more emphasis on them as mental states or bases (*āyatana*), that is, taking mentally manifested states (*saṅkhāra, loka*) which veritably arise in this life itself depending on our karma or acts of body, speech and mind.

In **the Rohitassa Sutta** (S 2.26), for example, the Buddha uses the word “world” (*loka*) in two senses:³⁶ in the sense of the physical world and the world of formations. Rohitassa asks the Buddha a question on the physical world (*cakkavāla loka*, “universe world”), but the Buddha answers him referring to the world of formations (S 2.26/1:61 f). The Commentaries give three senses to the word “world”.³⁷

- (1) The world of formations (*saṅkhāra loka*),
- (2) The world of beings (*satta loka*),
- (3) The world of space (ie of space-time) (*okāsa loka*).

(Vism 7.37/204 f; DA 1:173; MA 1:397, 2:200)

³² Comy: “I am the supreme ordainer. I am the one who appoints beings to their places, ‘You be a noble [kshatriya], you a brahmin, you a merchant, you an artisan! You be a householder, you a renunciant! And you be a camel, you a cow!’” (DA 1:111 f)

³³ *Aham asmi Brahmā Mahā, brahmā abhibhū anabhibhūto aññad-atthu, daso vasavatti issaro kattā nimmātā seṭṭho sañjita vasi pitā bhūta, bhavyānaṃ*. This is stock: for humorous riposte to this, see **Kevalāḍḍha S** (D 11.80-83/1:220-222) = SD 1.7.

³⁴ See SD 3.4.

³⁵ See S:B 69-73, on Bodhi’s notes on Buddhist cosmology.

³⁶ For a discussion on the meaning of *loka*, see Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:78 ff (ch 5).

³⁷ See **Rohitassa S** (S 2.26) = SD 7.2 Intro (1) for details.

5 Prajāpati and Brahmā

Two high gods are mentioned in the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta, namely, Prajāpati and Mahā Brahmā. Several hymns of the tenth book of the Ṛg,veda deal with the creation of the universe through entities and divinities newly contrived by ancient priestly thinkers to account for it.

Among such entities we meet a Golden Embryo (Hiraṇyagarbha) out of whom the universe emanated, a god called All-maker (Viśvakarman), a feminine entity called Voice or Sound (Vāc), and Time (Kāla). The first two divinities were consolidated into a new god called Prajāpati, the Lord of Progeny, conceived of as the father of the gods and of all things whatever.

(AL Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, 1989:22; see also 24, 74)

The origins of the high god **Brahmā**, the Vedic creator-god, is a little more complicated. During the Vedic period (1550-900 BCE), brahmanical rituals gradually became more complex and materialistic, so that by the Buddha's time, there was a strong reaction against the established brahmanical priesthood, that had imposed itself as a "catholic church," complete with rituals, sacraments and codes of conduct; in short, a lucrative scheme of religious services and social dominance.

As the sacrificial rituals became more complex, new texts were composed to explain their mysteries and symbolism. These orally transmitted texts were called Brāhmaṇas. Basham gives these instructive notes in his lectures:

The word [*Brāhmaṇa*] is the same as that used for the brāhmaṇ priest but is neuter in gender. The word *brahman*³⁸ originally meant magical force, especially the supernatural power inherent in certain utterances. Later, as speculation about *brahman* developed, the word was applied to the ultimate impersonal being that underlay the whole universe. In these senses it is a neuter noun, and it is capitalized to distinguish the two meanings. Later still, the same word in the masculine, usually transcribed with a long final vowel (*Brahmā*) came to mean one of the greatest of the gods, in some places and periods looked on as the high god, who developed out of the previously mentioned Prajāpati. *Brāhmaṇa*, a secondary noun, derived from *brahman*, came to mean a priest only at the end of the Ṛg-vedic period. In most modern languages of northern India the final *-a* is not sounded, and so it is commonly written *brāhman* or [*brahmin* or *brāhmin*], the latter being a solecism or corruption, without justification. These different but cognate words should not be confused. The following spellings are regularly used in [Basham's] book:³⁹

Brahman	<i>Supernatural power, the absolute world spirit.</i>	
Brahmā	<i>The god.</i>	
brāhmaṇ	<i>A member of the priestly order (also brāhmaṇa).</i>	
Brāhmaṇa	<i>A Vedic text of the brāhmaṇic class.</i>	(AL Basham, op cit, 1989:29)

6 Suttas on Brahmā

The Saṃyutta Nikāya has a number of sections dealing with Brahmā and the gods. In fact, the Saṃyutta's opening chapter, **the Sagāthā Vagga**, starts off with **the Devatā Saṃyutta** (S 1/1:1-45) on devas, and is immediately followed by **the Deva,putta Saṃyutta** (S 2/1:45-67), on young devas. The sixth *saṃyutta*, **the Brahmā Saṃyutta** (S 6), has a collection of interesting expositions on wrong views and practices connected with the God-idea, and the true nature of reality (S 6/1:136-159). Here is a summary of its suttas:

³⁸ Zysk: "This is the conventional spelling. If we use *brahma*, we should also have *karma* in place of *karman* and *rāja* in place of *rājan*. The pronunciation without the *n*, which appears only in inflected forms in the original Sanskrit, occur in modern languages of ancient India." (Basham 1989:125 n5)

³⁹ See also **Tevijja S** (D 13) = SD 1.8 Intro (2) regarding brahmanical sources alluded to by the Buddha.

- S 6.1 Āyācana Sutta.** The Brahmā Sahampati beseeches the Buddha to teach the Dharmas (S 6.1/1:136-138 = V 1:4 ff ≠ D 2:36 ff).
- S 6.2 Gārava Sutta.** Brahmā applauds the Buddha's reverence for the Dharma.
- S 6.3 Brahma,deva Sutta.** Brahmā extols an arhat monk on his almsround.
- S 6.4 Baka Brahmā Sutta.** The Brahmā Baka thinks he is eternal.
- S 6.5 Aparā,diṭṭhi Sutta.** An unnamed Brahmā (probably Baka) thinks that he is superior to arhats, and that they are unable to come to his brahmā world.
- S 6.6 Pamāda Sutta.** The Buddha removes a Brahmā's pride.
- S 6.7 Kokālika Sutta 1.** The Individual brahmā Subrahmā recites a verse to the Buddha.
- S 6.8 Tissaka Sutta.** The Individual brahmā Sudhāvāsa recites a verse to the Buddha.
- S 6.9 Tudu Brahmā Sutta.** The brahmā Tudu admonishes the evil monk Kokalika.
- S 6.10 Kokālika Sutta 2.** Parallel account of the Buddha's parinirvana scene.

See also the second section of the Brahmā Saṃyutta, called **Brahmā,pañcaka** or "Brahmā Pentad," for five somewhat related suttas.⁴⁰ The Dīgha Nikāya contains a number of suttas dealing with Brahmā and cosmogony.⁴¹

- D 1 Brahma,jāla Sutta.** The Buddha presents a matrix of speculative views and how they arise. The roots of all religions (especially theistic ideas) and philosophies can be traced to one or more of the 62 wrong views (*diṭṭhi*) listed in the sutta. A Buddhist cosmogony. (D 1.2.2-14/1:17)
- D 11 Kevaddha Sutta.** Mahā Brahmā does not know the answer to the question: "Where do these four primary elements—earth, water, fire, air—cease without remainder?" (D 11.67-84/3:216-222 = SD 1.7)
- D 13 Tevijja Sutta.** The Buddha gives various arguments against the creator-god idea (D 13 = SD 1.8).
- D 27 Aggañña Sutta.** The Buddha speaks of the cyclic evolution and devolution of the world (pulsating universe) and the rise of society without the machinations of the notion of a creator-god or supreme power. (D 27/3:80-98 = SD 2.19)
- D 24 Pāṭika Sutta.** It is not the Buddha's purpose to explain the origin of the world. (D 24.1.5, 2.14-21)

In the (Agga) Kosala Sutta (A 10.29), the Buddha speaks on the vastness and composition of the universe. (A 10.29/5:59-65)

7 The tyranny of theistic ideology

It is remarkable to see that even before the rise of modern colonialist, triumphalist and evangelist theism,⁴² the Buddha has clearly defined the problem over two millennia ago.

If you will hold on to earth,...water,...fire,...air,...beings,...gods,...Prajāpati,...Brahmā, you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble. [7b]

We see here a dark bonding between the devil (Māra) and God (Brahmā)! While Brahmā erroneously thinks that he has created the world (as shown in **the Brahma,jāla Sutta**, D 1.2.2-14/1:17), Māra desires to hold all beings within his realm, the sentient universe so that none, not even the gods, might escape his

⁴⁰ S 6.11-15/1:153-159.

⁴¹ See **Aggañña S** (D 27) = SD 2.19 Intro (3).

⁴² These are not blanket terms, but only refer to pockets and remnants of those with such narrow-minded notions. There are general positive trends of interreligious cooperation and search today more than ever before.

grasp. The suttas of **the Māra Saṃyutta** (S 4) recounts his efforts to hinder the Buddha and spiritual seekers (S 1:103-127).

In the 1930s, the American philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859-1952), the founder of pragmatic naturalism, delivered the Terry Lectures at Yale University (Yale, Massachusetts, USA). In three short chapters, he recast his pragmatic naturalism as a religious way of life, and published it as *A Common Faith* in 1934. Toward the end of his lecture, Dewey said:

Men have never fully used the powers they possess to advance the good in life, because they have waited upon some power external to themselves and to nature to do the work they are responsible for doing. Dependence upon an external power is the counterpart of surrender of human endeavor

...

Were the naturalistic foundations and bearings of religion grasped, the religious element in life would emerge from the throes of the crisis in religion. Religion would then be found to have its natural place in every aspect of human experience that is concerned with estimate of possibilities, with emotional stir by possibilities as yet unrealized, and with all action in behalf of their realization. All that is significant in human experience fall within this frame.

(John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 1934:43, 46)⁴³

It can be said, where theistic beliefs are concerned, that man created God in his own image. This helps explain why the various conceptions of an almighty God reflects the history, culture, emotions and ambitions of their worshippers. **The Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** (M 1) makes a succinct statement in this regard:

He perceives Brahmā as Brahmā. Having perceived Brahmā as Brahmā, he conceives Brahmā. He conceives (himself) in Brahmā. He conceives (himself apart) from Brahmā. He conceives: 'Brahmā is mine.' He delights in Brahmā. What is the reason? It is because it has not been fully understood by him, I say! (M 1.10/1:2)

In the case of the learners (*sekha*), that is, those bound for awakening, they train themselves not to regard Brahmā or anything in this manner, while the adepts (*asekha*), that is, the full-fledged arhats, do not regard beings and things in this manner at all. The nun **Sumedhā** puts it even more succinctly:

Most,⁴⁴ not understanding the truths taught by the noble Buddha,
Rejoice in existence and desire to born amongst the gods.
Birth even amongst the gods is not forever, but an impermanent state of being.
But the foolish fear not being born again and again. (Thī 454 f)

8 The Buddha's knowledge & Māra's powers

8.1 THE BUDDHA'S KNOWLEDGE. In §7, the brahma Baka tries to admonish the Buddha to "hold on to" the four primary elements, to Prajāpati, and to Brahmā, so that "you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble." This clearly sounds like an evangelical sermonizing on faith in God. In §§8-9 the Buddha retorts that he is aware of the brahmā

⁴³ **John Dewey** wrote prolifically on pragmatic naturalism and education (some 50 vols) but only one small book on religion, but "a fully articulated theory of religious experience that is consistent with empirical naturalism" (John J Holder, "On the possibility of a naturalistic theory of religious experience," 2004:3). He continues: "Why Dewey was so reluctant to deal with religion is hard to grasp, but some scholars have suggested that this has something to do with Dewey's conservative Christian upbringing—one scholar has even traced Dewey's reluctance to write about religion to the particular fact that when Dewey was young his mother nagged him every day with the question: 'Are you right with Jesus?' In any way, Dewey's failure to probe more deeply into religious experience is precisely why the early Buddhist tradition has something of profound importance to offer pragmatism in a way that is consistent with pragmatism's own philosophical commitments." (op cit 2004:4).

⁴⁴ "Most," *bahutarā*, lit "more," "majority" (Tha:N 454).

Baka's own knowledge and that it is limited. The Buddha goes on to say that the brahmā Baka is not aware of the "three worlds" [§10], a phrase missing in some manuscripts.

The phrase "three worlds" (*tayo kāyā*) is found the PTS, Sinhalese (Ce) and Siamese (Se) texts, but omitted in the Burmese (Be). The *peyyāla*, however, is given in full in the Sinhalese text, which I follow:

Atthi kho brahme aññe tayo kāyā. Tam tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tyāham jānāmi passāmi.

(1) *Atthi kho brahme ābhassarā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno. Tassa te aticira, nivāsenā sā sati muṭṭhā. Tena taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme n'eva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ. Atha kho ahaṃ eva tayā bhīyyo.*

(2) *Atthi kho brahme subhakiṇṇā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno. Tassa te aticira, nivāsenā sā sati muṭṭhā. Tena taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme n'eva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ. Atha kho ahaṃ eva tayā bhīyyo.*

(2) *Atthi kho brahme vehapphalā nāma kāyo, taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme neva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ atha kho ahaṃ eva tayā bhīyyo.*

But, brahmā, there are three other bodies [worlds], that you neither know nor see; but which I know and see:

(1) There is, brahmā, the body [world] called (the gods of) Streaming Radiance [Ābhassarā], having arisen here, you fell from it.

Because you have dwelt here for so long, your memory has lapsed, and so you neither know nor see it, but I know and see it.

Thus, brahmā, too, as regards direct knowledge you are no equal at all to me, how then could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

(2) There is, brahmā, the body [world] called (the gods of) Refulgent Radiance [Subha,kiṇṇā], having arisen here, you fell from it.

Because you have dwelt here for so long, your memory has lapsed, and so you neither know nor see it, but I know and see it.

Thus, brahmā, too, as regards direct knowledge you are no equal at all to me, how then could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

(3) There is, brahmā, the body [world] called (the gods of) Abundant Fruit [Veha-p,phalā], that you neither know nor see. I know and see it.

Thus, brahmā, too, as regards direct knowledge you are no equal at all to me, how then could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

The Saṅkhār'upapatti Sutta (M 120)⁴⁵ mentions "the brahmā of a thousand (world-systems)" (*sahassa brahmā*) (M 120.12/3:101), which evidently refers to the brahmā Baka, whose realm is part of the 1st dhyana level of the heavens. There are other brahmās whose glory pervades two thousand, three thousand, four thousand, five thousand and ten thousand world systems respectively on this same 1st dhyana level. The Buddha relates to the brahmā Baka how he, from being a 4th-dhyana brahmā of Veha-p,phalā (Abundant Fruit), passes away from there and is reborn as a 3rd-dhyana brahmā of Subha,kiṇṇā (Radiant Glory), and then as a 2nd-dhyana brahmā of Ābhassarā (Streaming Radiance). From there he is reborn into the present 1st-dhyana world of Mahā Brahmā. This is, in fact, a spiritual devolution, a gradual falling from high places!

8B2 IS IT POSSIBLE FOR MĀRA TO MEET THE BRAHMĀ BAKA? The Commentaries often say that Māra's realm and power extends over the whole of the threefold universe: the sense-world, the form

⁴⁵ See SD 3.4.

world and the formless world, that is, practically the whole sentient universe.⁴⁶ This notion however does not have any support in the Nikāyas. The Majjhima Commentary says that Māra, here called **Vasavatti**,⁴⁷ resides in the Paranimitta,vasavattī heaven, ruling over a part of it as a sort of recalcitrant vassal (MA 1:33 f). The Paranimitta,vasavattī realm (of the gods “who lord over other’s creations”) are the highest of the sense-world, and as such, Māra’s power clearly cannot extend beyond that, that is, into the dhyana realms (the form and the formless worlds). **The Nivāpa Sutta** (M 25) and its Chinese cognate, MĀ 178,⁴⁸ and **the Devāsuraṅgāma Sutta** (A 9.39)⁴⁹ say that the dhyanas are completely beyond the reach of Māra.

Both the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta and its Madhyama Āgama parallel say that Māra in disguise appears in the Brahmā world, warning the Buddha against contradicting Brahmā’s word [§§5, 29], saying for example that all those recluses and brahmins who cultivated loathing of earth, water, fire, air, the devas, Prajapati or Brahmā, have on that account been reborn in lower worlds, whereas those who rejoiced in them have been reborn in higher worlds [§5]. The Buddha immediately recognizes Māra, who according to the Chinese Āgama pretends to be a member of Brahmā’s host.⁵⁰ The Pali version however says that Māra takes possession of “a certain member of Brahmā’s host” [§5a].

This seems surprising, for although Māra has considerable powers in the sensuous sphere, other discourses indicate that the *jhānas* and therewith the corresponding realms of the Brahmā world are outside his control. According to the Brahmanimantanika Sutta, however, he not only took possession of a member of the Brahmā’s assembly, but had even taken control over Brahmā himself, together with the whole of the assembly [§6]. This presentation is surprising and conflicts with the range of Māra’s power and influence described in other discourses.

(Analayo [2005] at M 1:326)⁵¹

The Suttas often speak of Māra as evil personified, for example, that the five aggregates are Māra.⁵² The Commentaries however speak of **three kinds of Māra**, namely, the devaputra Māra (*deva,putta,-māra*), death (Death personified) (*maccu,māra*) and defilements (*kilesa,māra*).⁵³ In the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta (and its variants), Māra is presented in a more universal sense, that is, as the keeper of false views (the basis for defilements). After all, it is right view that frees one from suffering, and understandably Māra is the dark force that keeps one shackled to the false world of the senses and of cyclic existence through delusion and ignorance.⁵⁴

The best possible explanation for Māra’s intrusion into the dhyanic world, I think, depends on how we see the three worlds. As already mentioned, the Commentaries say that Māra’s power extends over the whole of the threefold universe.⁵⁵ But this is *the mundane world* with its Brahmas, devas, humans and other beings, all of whom are unawakened, as such, are under “Māra’s sway” (*Māra,dheyya*).⁵⁶ Māra however is *blinded by dhyana*: those who are in dhyana are to that extent (that is, temporarily), beyond

⁴⁶ MA 2:266; SnA 2:506; cf A 4:228.

⁴⁷ The devaputra Vasavatti Māra attacks the Bodhisattva under the Bodhi tree just before the Great Awakening, in an attempt to prevent him from becoming Buddha (BA 287 f).

⁴⁸ M 25/1:159,10 & MĀ 178 = T720a9.

⁴⁹ A 9.39/4:434.

⁵⁰ MĀ 78 = T1.547b24: “Māra the evil one who was not a Brahmā, nor one of Brahmā assembly, yet declared of himself, ‘I am Brahmā!’” 魔波旬非是梵天, 亦非梵天眷屬, 然自稱說我是梵天.

⁵¹ See Analayo, *Buddhist Studies Review* 22,1 2005:12-14.

⁵² Eg S 3:74, 195, 198, 4:85, 91, 189, 202.

⁵³ DA 2:659, 3:858; cf 3:846. Four kinds of Māra are mentioned at DA 1:129 & mostly commonly 5 kinds (*pañca,māra*): (1) the Māra of the defilements (*kilesa,māra*), (2) the Māra of the aggregates (*khandha,māra*), (3) the Māra of karma-formations (*abhisāṅkhāra,māra*), (4) the deity Māra (*deva,putta Māra*), (5) Māra as Death (*maccu,-māra*) (Vism 211; ThaA 2:16, 46; VAT:Se 1/481; DAaT:Be 1:22, 17:6). See also DPPN: *Māra*.

⁵⁴ In §2a we see Māra playing the role of keeper of ignorance, striving to prevent the Siddhattha’s awakening and the Buddha’s teaching the Dharma to the world. See Ling 1962:51.

⁵⁵ MA 2:266; SnA 2:506; cf A 4:228.

⁵⁶ M 106.2/2:262; S 4.17/1:113 (*mārassa thāna,bhūtaṃ te,bhūmaka,vaṭṭaṃ*, SA 1:178); A 8.30/4:228*.

Māra's reach: in dhyana, "Māra is made blind, finds no foothold" (*andham akāsi mārāṃ apadam*).⁵⁷ And, as the **Māra, dheyya Sutta** (It 3.1.10) states, *only the arhats* have totally and permanently transcended Māra's realm.

8 Unpredicated consciousness

The key line of the Brahma, nimantanika Sutta, also found in the **Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11),⁵⁸ is:

The consciousness without attribute, without end, radiant all around.

Viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato, pabhaṃ

[§25] (D 11.25/1:223)

This sentence is a difficult one and is often misinterpreted in post-Buddha times. The main problem lies in whether "consciousness" (*viññāṇa*) here refers to nirvana or to the arhat's mind. Apparently, even Buddhaghosa has problems with this issue. The Majjhima Commentary takes the subject of the sentence to be *nibbāna*, called "consciousness" (*viññāṇaṃ*) in the sense that "it can be cognized" (*vijānitabbhaṃ*). "This derivation," says **Bodhi**, "is hardly credible, since nowhere in the Nikāyas is Nibbāna described as consciousness, nor is it possible to derive an active noun from the gerundive" (M:ÑB 1249 n513).

The word *anidassana* means "without attribute, unpredicated, non-manifesting, signless, invisible." The Majjhima Commentary explains *anidassana* as meaning "invisible," because it (nirvana) does not come within the range of eye-consciousness—but again, notes Bodhi, "this is a trite explanation" (id). The word *anidassana* also occurs in the **Kakacūpama Sutta** (M 21.14):

"What do you think, bhikshus? Could a man draw pictures and make pictures appear on empty space?"

"No, venerable sir. What is the reason? Because space is formless (*arūpi*) and **unmanifesting [signless]** (*anidassano*). It is not easy to draw pictures there or make pictures appear there."

(M 21.14/1:127)

Here we see the statement that empty space is an unsuitable medium for painting pictures. Thus, concludes Bodhi, "the idea seems to be that of not making manifest" (id). **Ñāṇananda**, as such, renders it as "non-manifesting."⁵⁹

9 Sabbato, pabhaṃ

Another problem word is *sabbato, pabhaṃ*, "radiant all around," where *pabhaṃ* has the variant reading of *pahaṃ*, "abandoned." **Ñāṇamoli**, in his Majjhima translation, takes *pabhaṃ* to be the negative present participle of *pabhavati* ("to be able")—*apabhaṃ*—the negative-prefix *a* elided in conjunction with *sabbato*: "The sense can be paraphrased freely by 'not predicating being in relation to "all," or 'not assuming of "all" that it is or is not in an absolute sense'." (M:ÑB 1249 n513)

"But," argues Bodhi, "if we take *pabhaṃ* as 'luminous,' which seems better justified, the [Majjhima] verse links up with the idea of the mind as being intrinsically luminous [A 1:10]" (id).⁶⁰

1 Bhikshus, this mind is radiant, but it is defiled by adventitious impurities [that "arrive" through the sense-doors].

The uninstructed [ignorant] ordinary person does not understand things as they really are.

Therefore there is no mental development for the uninstructed ordinary person, I say!⁶¹

⁵⁷ M 25.11-12/1:159 f, 26.34-42/174 f.

⁵⁸ See SD 1.7.

⁵⁹ **Ñāṇananda**, *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971:59. See also "Nibbāna Sermon 7" in 2004:138-159.

⁶⁰ See D:W 557 n241.

⁶¹ *Pabhassaraṃ idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ. Taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathā, bhūtaṃ n'appajānati. Tasmā assutavato puthujjanassa citta, bhāvanā n'atthi ti vadāmi ti.* Qu at MA 1:167; DhA 1:23; NmA 1:22; PmA 1:242; DhsA 68.

- 2 Bhikshus, this mind is radiant, and it is freed from adventitious impurities [that “arrive” through the sense-doors].
The instructed [wise] noble disciple understands things as they really are.
Therefore there is mental development for the instructed noble disciple, I say!⁶²
(A 1.6.1-2/1:10; also 1.5.9-10/1:10)

In the **Pabhā Sutta 1 & 2** (A 4.141-142/2:139) the light of wisdom (*paññā,pabhā*) is called the best of lights.⁶³

In short, this stanza, “[t]he consciousness without attribute, without end, radiant all around” refers not to nirvana (as suggested by the Commentaries) but to the nature of the arhat’s mind, that is, awakened consciousness, as commonly understood in the Suttas, that is, as one unfathomable: “of the one who is gone to his setting [one who has gone out], there is measuring” (*attham gatassa na pamaṇam atthi*) (Sn 1076).

— — —

The Discourse on Brahmā’s Invitation

(M 49/1:326-331)

1 [326] Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika’s Park in Jeta’s Grove near Sāvattihī. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus!”

“Venerable sir!” the monks answered the Blessed One in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

Baka Brahmā’s wrong view

2 “Bhikshus, once I was staying at the foot of a royal sal tree in the Subhaga Grove at Ukaṭṭhā.⁶⁴

Now at that time, an evil wrong view had arisen in the brahmā Baka thus:

‘This [brahmā realm]⁶⁵ is permanent; this is everlasting; this is eternal; this is everything [complete in itself]; this is not subject to passing away, nor is this born, nor does it decay, nor die, nor pass away (from the heavens), nor is reborn; and there is also no escape beyond this.’⁶⁶

3a Having known with my mind the thought in the brahmā Baka’s mind, just as a strong man would stretch his bent arm or would bend his stretched arm, I vanished from the foot of the royal sal tree in the Subhaga Grove at Ukaṭṭhā,⁶⁷ and reappeared in the brahma world.

The brahmā Baka saw me coming in the distance. Seeing me, he said this (to me):

‘Come, good sir! Welcome, good sir! It has been a long time since the good sir has made this exception [gone out of his way], that is, in coming here.’⁶⁸

⁶² *Pabhassaram idam bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṃ. Taṃ sutavā ariya,-sāvako yathā,bhūtaṃ pajānati. Tasmā sutavato ariya,sāvakassa citta,bhāvanā atthi ti vadāmī ti.*

⁶³ See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513; and also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:100 f.

⁶⁴ See Intro (3) above.

⁶⁵ Comy: “This” refers to *Brahma-t,thāna* (MA 2:405).

⁶⁶ *Idam niccam idam dhuvan idam sassataṃ idam kevalam idam acavana,dhammam, idam hi na jāyati na jīyati ba mīyati na cavati na upapajjati, ito ca pan’aññam uttarim nissaraṇam n’atthi ti.*

⁶⁷ In **Baka Brahmā S** (S 6.4) account: “he vanished from Jeta,vana [Jeta’s Forest]” (S 6.4/1:142).

⁶⁸ “Come, good sir!...coming here” *ehi kho marisā, sāgataṃ marisā,cirassaṃ kho marisā imam pariyāyam akāsi yadidaṃ idh’āgamanāya*, which is cold formality; as at S 6.4/1:142. In **Udumbarikā Siha,nāda S** (D 25), the

3b THE BRAHMĀ BAKA'S ETERNALIST VIEW. Now, good sir, this [brahmā realm] is permanent; this is everlasting; this is eternal; this is everything [complete in itself]; this is not subject to passing away, nor is this born, nor does it decay, nor die, nor pass away (from the heavens), nor is reborn; and there is also no escape beyond this.'

4 Bhikshus, when this was said, I told the brahmā Baka:

'Alas! The worthy brahmā Baka has fallen into ignorance⁶⁹ in that he says

of the impermanent that it is permanent;

of the non-everlasting that it is everlasting;

of the non-eternal that it is eternal;

of the incomplete that it is everything;

of what is subject to passing away as being not subject to passing away;

of where one is born, and decays, and dies, and passes away (from the heavens), and is reborn, that this is where one is not subject to passing away, nor is born, nor decays, nor dies, nor passes away

(from the heavens), nor is reborn;

and when there is an escape beyond this, he says that there is no escape beyond this.'

Māra's intervention

5a Then Māra the evil one possessed a certain member of Brahmā's host,⁷⁰ and he told me:

'Bhikshu, bhikshu, do not disparage him, do not disparage him. For this brahmā is the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, the Lord God, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief, the Ordainer,⁷¹ the Almighty, the Father of all that are and that will be.

Before your time, bhikshu, there were recluses and brahmins in the world who scorned earth, loathed earth,⁷²

wanderer Nigrodha says, *etu kho bhante Bhagavā sagatam bhante Bhagavato...*, "Please come, venerable Blessed One! Welcome to the Blessed One!" using the 3rd imp sg *etu* ("Let ...come!") as a polite formality (D 25.7a/3:39): so too in **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9.5/1:179). In the phrase, *pariyāyam akasi*, "made this exception," Comy glosses *pariyāya* as *vāra* ("occasion, opportunity") (UA 115). This is stock: **D** 1:90 (DA 2:369), 179 (see D:RD 1:245 n2), 2:270, 3:2, 39; **M** 1:252 (MA 2:300 f), 326, 481, 2:2, 30, 3:7; **S** 1:142; **A** 3:332 (AA 3:363), 4:76; **U** 13 (UA 115); **J** 3:359. MĀ 78 only records Brahmā welcoming the Buddha without this stock passage. It is unlikely that the Buddha has previously visited Baka. For if he has done so, one would expect Baka to be in some way familiar with the Buddha's teaching, which would then be unlikely that Baka would have held such a wrong view of eternalism. As such, the Madhyama reading is more probable. Evidently, the greeting is a polite way of welcoming a visitor even when he has come for the first time. In **Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 37), Moggallāna visits Sakra, apparently for the first time, since Sakra takes him on a tour of the place. Both M 37 and its Ekottara Āgama version (EĀ 19.3/ T2.594a6) record Sakra welcoming Moggallāna in this manner; but the Saṃyukta Āgama version (SĀ 505 = T2.133 c5) omits this greeting. Similarly, **Catuṣpariṣat Sūtra** (Waldschmidt 1957a:238) records the Buddha visiting Uruvilva Kaśyapa (apparently for the first time) by greeting the Buddha in this manner. The Vinaya version of the episode, however, omits the greeting. See Analayo 2005:161 n137 (M 1:326).

⁶⁹ "Fallen into ignorance," *avijjāgato*, alt tr "steeped in ignorance" (M:H 1:389).

⁷⁰ "A certain member of Brahmā's host," *aññataram Brahma,parisajjam*, lit "a certain one of Brahmā's host."

Comy: When Māra discovers that the Buddha has gone to the brahmā world, he is worried that Brahmās might turn to the Dharma. So he goes there to discourage the Buddha from teaching the Dharma (MA 2:407). It should be noted here that Māra is simply using this "certain member of Brahmā's host" clearly as a fifth columnist. In fact, Māra has completely overpowered Brahmā, Brahmā's host and Brahmā's retinue [6].

⁷¹ Comy: "I am the supreme ordainer. I am the one who appoints beings to their places, 'You be a noble [kshatriya], you a brahmin, you a merchant, you an artisan! You be a householder, you a monk! And you be a camel, you a cow!'" (DA 1:111 f)

⁷² Comy: Because they regarded it to be impermanent, suffering and not self (MA 2:406). The mention of "not-self" here is problematic as the suttas often declare that only the Buddha first realizes and teaches not-self: see **Dhamma-ṭṭhitatā S** (A 3.129): whether Buddhas arise or not, the fact remains that "all formations are impermanent; all formations are suffering; all things are not self"; but it is only the Buddha who fully penetrates into this fact, and having done so, declares it to the world (A 3.129/1:134). Such a teaching is called *buddhānam sāmukkam-*

who scorned water, loathed water;
 who scorned fire, loathed fire;
 who scorned air [wind], loathed air [wind];
 who scorned beings, loathed beings;
 who scorned gods, loathed gods;
 who scorned Prajāpati, loathed Prajāpati;
 who scorned Brahmā, loathed Brahmā;

and when the body had broken up after their breath was cut off, they were established in an inferior body.⁷³

5b Before your time, bhikshu, there also were recluses and brahmins in the world who lauded earth, delighted in earth;⁷⁴
 who lauded water, delighted in water;
 who lauded fire, delighted in fire;
 who lauded air, delighted in air;
 who lauded beings, delighted in beings;
 who lauded gods, delighted in gods;
 who lauded Prajāpati, delighted in Prajāpati;
 who lauded Brahmā, delighted in Brahmā;

and when the body had broken up after their breath was cut off, they were established in a superior body.⁷⁵

5c So, bhikshu, I tell you this:

Come now, good sir, do only as Brahmā [God] says! Go not against the word of Brahmā [God]. If you go against the word of Brahmā [God], bhikshu, then, you would be like a man trying to deflect approaching glory with a stick,⁷⁶ or, bhikshu, you would be like a man losing his hold of earth with his hand and feet as he falls down the deep chasm⁷⁷—so it will be unto you, bhikshu.

Come now, good sir, do only as Brahmā [God] says! Go not against the word of Brahmā [God]. Do you not see Brahmā’s host seated here, bhikshu?⁷⁸

And then Māra the evil one led me up close to Brahmā’s host.⁷⁸

The Buddha dismisses Māra

6 When this was said, I told this to Māra the evil one:

‘I know you, evil one. Do not think, “He does not know.” You are Māra the evil one, and Brahmā and Brahmā’s host and Brahmā’s retinue have all fallen into your hands; they have fallen under your power.

sikā dhamma,desanā, “a Dharma teaching unique to the Buddhas,” which however usually refers to the four noble truths (eg D1:110): see **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59/3:66-68) = SD 1.2 Introd.

⁷³ “An inferior body,” *hīne kāye*. Here (and §§10, 29), *kāya* (body) can mean either (1) one’s physical body; (2) a group or realm. The contexts leans more to the latter, referring to the four suffering states (*apāya*) (MA 2:406): the hells (*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tiracchāna,yoni*), ghost realm (*pitti,visaya*) and the asura demon host (*asura,-kāya*) (It 93). See Intro (4) above.

⁷⁴ Comy: They lauded earth by praising it as being permanent, everlasting, eternal, etc, and delighted in it by way of craving and views (MA 2:406).

⁷⁵ “Superior world,” (*paṇṭe kāye*). Comy: That is, in the brahmā world (MA 2:406).

⁷⁶ *Seyyathā pi nāma puriso siriṃ āgacchantiṃ daṇḍena paṭippanāmeyya*.

⁷⁷ *Seyyathā pi vā pana bhikkhu puriso naraka-p,papāte papanto hatthehi ca pādehi ca paṭhaviṃ virāgeyya*.

⁷⁸ Comy: Māra intends, “If you do as Brahmā says without overstepping his word, you too will shine with the same splendour and glory as those of Brahmā’s host” (MA 2:407). “Led...up close to,” *upanesi*, 3rd sg of *upaneti*: 1. to bring to or near, to lead to, add; present, offer; stretch out (hand); 2. to accept disciples, initiate; 3. to bring forward accusations, attack, accuse, charge (CPD). I have rendered it literally: the context is not clear. Cf BHSD: *upanāmeti*. M:ÑB: “thus called to witness Brahmā’s Assembly.” M:H “conducted me to the company of Brahmā.” Cf A 1:155.

You, evil one, think, 'This world has fallen into my hands! He [the Buddha], too, has fallen under my power!'

But I have not fallen into your hands, evil one, I have not fallen under your power!'

Baka Brahmā's persistence

7a When this was said, the brahmā Baka told me:

'Good sir, I say of the permanent that it is permanent; [328]

of the everlasting that it is everlasting;

of the eternal that it is eternal;

of the everything [complete in itself] that it is everything;

of what is not subject to passing away that it is not subject to passing away;

of where one is neither born, nor decays, nor dies, nor passes away (from the heavens), nor is reborn, that one is neither born, nor decays, nor dies, nor passes away (from the heavens), nor is reborn there;

and where there is no escape beyond this, I say that there is no escape beyond this.

7b Before your time, bhikshu, there were recluses and brahmins in the world whose asceticism lasted as long as your whole life.⁷⁹ They knew, when there is an escape beyond, that there is an escape beyond; and, when there is no escape beyond, that there is no escape beyond.

So, bhikshu, I tell you this: You will find no escape beyond, and you will only reap your share of toil and trouble.

⁸⁰If you will hold on to earth, you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble.⁸¹

If you will hold on to water, you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble.

If you will hold on to fire, you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble.

If you will hold on to air [wind], you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble.

If you will hold on to beings, you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble.

If you will hold on to gods, you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble.

If you will hold on to Prajāpati, you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble.

If you will hold on to Brahmā [God], you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you low and humble.'

The Buddha challenges the brahmā Baka

8 [Buddha:] 'I know that, too, Brahmā:

that if I will hold on to earth, I shall be close to you, rest in your domain, so that you may work your will upon me and make me low and humble.

that if I will hold on to water, ...

⁷⁹ "Lasted as long as your whole life," *yāvatakaṃ tuyhaṃ kaṣiṇaṃ āyu*.

⁸⁰ The list of categories here, although condensed, is reminiscent of **Mūla,pariyāya S** (M 1) = SD 11.8.

⁸¹ "You will be close to me... low and humble," *opasāyiko me bhavissati vatthu, sāyiko yathā, karaṇīyo bāhiteyyo*. "Make you low and humble," *bāhiteyyo*: I have followed Comy: Should be one who makes himself weak, humble, dwarfed (*jajjharikāgumbato pi nīcataro lakaṇṭakataro kātabbo bhavissati*) (MA 2:407). IB Horner notes: "This [*bāhiteyyo*] is obscure. To be sent out, degraded," or, as *paṭibāheti*, to be kept off, shut off, warded off." (M 1:391 n4). Other trs: "Dwarfed" (M:ÑB 1:391); "punish" (M:ÑB 426). Comy: With the first two terms. Māra tries to cajole the Buddha; by the remaining two terms, he threatens him. To "hold on to earth" means to grasp it by way of craving, conceit and views. (MA 2:407).

that if I will hold on to fire, ...
 that if I will hold on to air [wind], ...
 that if I will hold on to beings, ...
 that if I will hold on to gods, ...
 that if I will hold on to Prajāpati, ...

that if I will hold on to Brahmā [God], I shall be close to you, rest in your domain, so that you work your will upon me and make me low and humble.

But, I know your destiny, Brahmā, and I know your splendour [your fall]: the brahmā Baka has this much might, the brahmā Baka has this much power, the brahmā Baka has this much sway.”⁸²

“Now, good sir, how far do you know my reach and my radiance to extend when you say the brahmā Baka has this much might, this much power, this much sway?”

[The Buddha:]

9 As far as the sun and moon course their way, lighting the quarters with their radiance,
 Over that thousandfold world,⁸³ your might hold sway.
 There you know the high and low, and the lustful and the lustfree,
 Such and such existences,⁸⁴ the comings and goings of beings.

“Thus, Brahmā, I know your reach and I know your radiance: the brahmā Baka has this much might, [329] the brahmā Baka has this much power, the brahmā Baka has this much sway.”⁸⁵

Brahmā’s past lives

10 But, Brahmā, there are three⁸⁶ other bodies [worlds], that you neither know nor see; but which I know and see:

(1) There is, Brahmā, the body [world] called Ābhassarā [Streaming Radiance],⁸⁷ having arisen here,⁸⁸ you fell from it.

⁸² *Api ca te ahaṃ Brahme gatiṃ ca pajānāmi jutiṃ ca pajānāmi, evaṃ mahiddhiko Bako brahmā, evaṃ mahā’-nubhāvo Bako brahmā, evaṃ mahesakkho Bako brahmā ti.* The Chinese Āgama version, however, records the Buddha as saying, “I know where you [Brahmā] came from, where you are going to,” 我知汝所從來處, 所往至處 (MĀ 78 = T1.548a8). This Chinese reading seems to fit better here. The reading given here with *juti* has *cuti* as vr listed in M 1:557 of PTS and Ce, & M:Ce 1:768 n5. M:H 391 n5 notes that *juti* “seems to be faulty for *cuti* (given as vl at M 1:557 and also as vl for *muṭi* at MA 2:36 in quoting the above passage; see PED.” MA 3:408 however glosses it as *ānubhāva* (power, splendour). The word *cuti* is tt for the death of a god. See Analayo 2005:162 (M 1:327 f) & n143.

⁸³ For other kinds of Brahmās and their ranges, see Intro (7) above.

⁸⁴ *Ittha,bhāv’aññathā,bhāvaṃ*, lit “existence thus and otherwise” (M 1:328; Tha 917; Sn 740 = A 2:10 = It 9 = 109 = Nm 455 = 2:113 = 172; Sn 729, 740cd = 752cd ≠ It 94)

⁸⁵ The Brahmā Baka holds sway over a thousand world-systems, but above him, even in the same dhyana plane. other Brahmās lord over many more world-systems. **Saṅkhār’upapatti S** (M 120 = SD 3.4) says that in the 1st dhyana plane, there is the brahmā of a thousand (*sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of two thousand (*dvi,sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of three thousand (*ti,sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of four thousand (*catu,sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of five thousand (*pañca,sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of ten thousand (*dasa,sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of a hundred thousand (*sata,sahasso brahmā*); and many more powerful and more beautiful gods in even higher dhyana planes. See MA 2:409.

⁸⁶ “Three,” *tayo*, PTS, Ce & Se, but omitted in Be. The *peyyāla* is given in full in Ce, which I follow here. See Intro (7) above.

⁸⁷ “Ābhassarā.” This celestial world, one of the form worlds of the 2nd dhyana, is populated by luminescent beings who live on zest (*pīti*) and emanate lightning-like radiance. When the physical universe devolves or “contracts” (*saṃvaṭṭati*) due to “fire,” it reaches up to Ābhassara (CpA 11; Vism 13.41/416 f).

⁸⁸ “Having arisen here,” *idhūpapanno*. It is possible to render *atthi kho brahme ābhassarā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno* here as “Brahmā, there is the world called Ābhassarā, from which you fell and is reborn here,” but the context is difficult in the next para (qv).

Because you have dwelt here for so long, your memory has lapsed, and so you neither know nor see it, but I know and see it.

As such, Brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.⁸⁹

(2) There is, Brahmā, the body [world] called **Subha,kiṇṇā**⁹⁰ [Radiant Glory], having arisen here,⁹¹ you fell from it.

Because you have dwelt here for so long, your memory has lapsed, and so you neither know nor see it, but I know and see it.

As such, Brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.⁹²

(3) There is, Brahmā, the body [world] called **Veha-p,phalā** [Abundant Fruit], that you neither know nor see. I know and see it.

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.⁹³

The Buddha's knowledge

11 (1) Brahmā, having directly known earth as earth, and having directly known that which is not experienced⁹⁴ as the earthiness of earth,

I did not claim to be earth,

I did not claim to be in earth,

I did not claim to be apart from earth,

I did not claim earth to be 'mine,'

I did not worship earth.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Para (1) Ce: *Atthi kho brahme ābhassarā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno. Tassa te aticira,nivāsena sā sati muṭṭhā. Tena taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme n'eva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ. Atha kho aham eva tayā bhīyyo.* In **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1), the Buddha shows how the wrong view that Mahā Brahmā is the supreme creator God arises. When the world re-emerges (unfolds again) after a period of dissolution (folding in or collapsing), a being of great merit is the first to be reborn in the newly evolved Brahmā-world. Subsequently, other beings are reborn in the brahmā world, and this leads Mahā Brahmā to think that he is the creator and lord (D 1.2.2-6/1:17-19). See Bodhi, *The Discourse on the All-embracing Net of Views*, Kandy: BPS, 1978:69 f, 157-166.

⁹⁰ Or, Subha,kiṇṇā.

⁹¹ "Having arisen here," *idhūpapanno*. It is possible to render *atthi kho brahme subha,kiṇṇā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno* here as "Brahmā, there is the world called Subha,kiṇṇā, from which you fell and is reborn here" but the context is unclear.

⁹² Para (2) Ce: *Atthi kho brahme subhakiṇṇā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno. Tassa te aticira,nivāsena sā sati muṭṭhā. Tena taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme n'eva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ. Atha kho aham eva tayā bhīyyo.*

⁹³ Para (3) Ce: *Atthi kho brahme vehapphalā nāma kāyo, taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme neva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ atha kho aham eva tayā bhīyyo.*

⁹⁴ "Not experienced," *ananubhūta*, mfn of *na + anubhavati* (he reaches, gets, obtains; is equal to; is able to; suffices).

⁹⁵ PTS: *Paṭhavim kho ahaṃ Brahme paṭhavito abhiññāya yāvatā paṭhaviyā paṭhavattena ananubhūtaṃ tad abhiññāya paṭhavī nāhosi,paṭhaviyā nāhosi, paṭhavito nāhosi, paṭhavī me ti nāhosi, paṭhaviṃ nābhivadim.* Bodhi: "This passage, parallel in structure to the corresponding passage in M 1, is a difficult one. The negative verb differs among the three editions I consulted. PTS has *nāhosi*, BBS [Be Buddhasāsana Samīti] *nāpahosim*, SBJ [Ce Buddha Jayanti Tripiṭaka Series] *nāhosim*. [Ñānamoli] preferred *nāpahosim*, which he took to be an aorist of *pabhavati*, meaning 'to produce, to give being to.' It is much more likely, however, that *nāpahosim* should be resolved simply as *na + api + ahosim*. Thus the meaning does not differ significantly between BBS and SBJ. MA glosses: 'I did not grasp earth through the obsessions of craving, conceit, and views.' [Ñānamoli] had rendered *ananubhūtaṃ* as 'not co-essential with.' This has been replaced by 'not partaken of by,' following MA's gloss, "not reached by earth" and

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

12 (2) Brahmā, having directly known water as water,...

13 (3) Brahmā, having directly known fire as fire,...

14 (4) Brahmā, having directly known air [wind] as air [wind],...

15 (5) Brahmā, having directly known beings as beings,...

16 (6) Brahmā, having directly known gods as gods,...

17 (7) Brahmā, having directly known Prajāpati as Prajāpati,...

18 (8) Brahmā, having directly known Brahmā as Brahmā,...

19 (9) Brahmā, having directly known the gods of Ābhassarā as the gods of Ābhassarā,...

20 (10) Brahmā, having directly known the gods of Subha,kinnā as the gods of Subha,kinṇa,...

21 (11) Brahmā, having directly known the gods of Vaha-p,phala as the gods of Vaha-p,phala,...

22 (12) Brahmā, having directly known the Overlord [Abhibhū]⁹⁶ as the Overlord,...

23 (13) Brahmā, having directly known the all as the all, and having directly known that which is not experienced as the allness of the all,

I did not claim to be the all,

I did not claim to be in the all,

I did not claim to be apart from the all,

I did not claim the all to be ‘mine,’

I did not worship the all.

As such, Brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

24 If, good sir, you have not experienced the allness of the all, may it not turn out to be just vain and empty for you!⁹⁷

Nirvana

25 The consciousness without attribute,⁹⁸ without end, radiant all around⁹⁹—

MT. ‘Its nature is not shared with earth.’ MA says that what is ‘not partaken of by the earthness of earth’ is Nibbāna, which is detached from all that is conditioned.” (M:ÑB 1248 n511)

⁹⁶ “The Overlord” (*abhibhū*) or “Vanquisher” is the name of a deity as well as a class of gods in Vaha-p,phalā. Comy says that this is a designation for the non-percipient beings (*asañña,sattā*) who abide in the 4th dhyana form plane. The realm is so called because “it vanquishes” (*abhibhavati*) the four formless aggregates [feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness] (MA 1:35 f). M:ÑB however remarks that “The identification sounds contrived, especially because the word *abhibhū* is a masculine singular noun. [In **Brahma,nimantaṇṇika S** (M 49.5/1:327)] the word appears as part of the brahmā Baka’s claim to theocratic hegemony, yet MA rejects identifying the Abhibhū with Brahmā here as a redundancy.” (M:ÑB 1165 n15). See Intro (4) above.

⁹⁷ Se & PTS: *Sace kho te mārisa sabbassa sabbattena ananubhūtaṃ, mā h’eva ye rittakam eva ahosi tucchakam eva ahosi*. PTS errs in omitting *iti*, which has misled IB Horner into ascribing the following passage to Baka instead of the Buddha (M:H 1:392). Be & Ce supplies *iti*. Bodhi: “Baka seems to be suggesting that since the object of the Buddha’s knowledge ‘is not partaken by the allness of all,’ it might be merely an empty concept.” (M:ÑB 1249 n512).

⁹⁸ “Without attribute,” *anidassana*, “unpredicated, unmanifesting, signless, invisible.” **Ñāṇananda** renders it as “non-manifesting” (*Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*, Kandy, 1971 59); also “Nibbāna Sermon 7,” 2004:138-159. See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513.

⁹⁹ This line, *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato.pabhaṃ*, as in **Kevalāḍḍha S** (D11.25/1:223) = SD 1.7 (qv). “**Radiant all around,**” *sabbato.pabhaṃ*, where *pabhaṃ*, vl *pahaṃ*. In his M:B n, **Ñāṇamoli** takes *pabhaṃ* to be the negative present participle of *pabhavati* (“to be able”)—*apabhaṃ*—the negative-prefix *a* elided in conjunction with *sabbato*: “The sense can be paraphrased freely by ‘not predicating being in relation to “all,”’ or ‘not assuming of “all” that it is or is not in an absolute sense’ (M:ÑB 1249 n513). “But,” argues Bodhi, “if we take *pabhaṃ* as ‘luminous,’ which seems better justified, the [Majjhima] verse links up with the idea of the mind as being intrinsically luminous [A 1:10]” (id). See D:W 557 n241. Cf A 1.10 where the mind is said to be by nature radiant (*pabhassara*)

that is not experienced as the earthiness of earth,
 that is not experienced as the wateriness of water,
 that is not experienced as the fieriness of fire,
 that is not experienced as the airiness of air,
 that is not experienced as the being of beings,
 that is not experienced as the deity of devas,
 that is not experienced as the Prajāpatihood of Prajāpati,
 that is not experienced as the brahmāhood of Brahmā,
 that is not experienced as the streaming radiance of the gods of the Ābhassarā,
 that is not experienced as the radiant glory of the gods of the Subha,kiṇṇā,
 that is not experienced as the abundant fruitfulness of the Vehapphalā, [330]
 that is not experienced as the overlordship of the Overlord,
 that is not experienced as the allness of the all.

26 Now, good sir, I will vanish! Brahmā, vanish from me if you can!

Then, bhikshus, the brahmā Baka, thinking, "I shall vanish from the recluse Gotama! I shall vanish from the recluse Gotama!" but was unable to vanish.

Thereupon, bhikshus, I said this to the brahmā Baka:

'Vanish from me, good sir, if you can!'

Then, bhikshus, I performed a psychic miracle so that Brahmā, and Brahmā's host, and Brahmā's retinue, could hear my voice but could not see me.¹⁰⁰

After I had vanished, I spoke this stanza:

27 Having seen the fear in existence after existence, and in existence seeking non-existence, I delighted not in any existence whatsoever, nor did I cling to any delight [in being].¹⁰¹

28 At that time, Brahmā, and Brahmā's host, and Brahmā's retinue, were filled with wonder and amazement, saying:

'It is wonderful, sirs! It is marvellous, great is the power, great is the might, of the recluse Gotama! We have never before seen one with such great power, such great might, as the recluse Gotama, who has gone forth from a Sakya clan.

Although living in a generation that enjoys being, that takes delight in being, that rejoices in being, he has plucked out being along with its root!'

Māra's discourages the Buddha from teaching

29 Then Māra the evil one possessed a certain member of Brahmā's host, and he told me:

'Good sir, if that is what you know, if that is what you have understood, do not guide your disciples and renunciants!¹⁰² Do not teach the Dharma to your disciples and renunciants! Do not crave for disciples and renunciants.

& A 2:139 where the light of wisdom (*paññā, pabha*) is called the best of lights. See Bodhi's important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513. See also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:100 f. See Intro (5) above. On the unestablished consciousness, SD 17.8(11.3).

¹⁰⁰ In Buddhaghosa's classification of miracles, he classes this "invisibility" miracle by the Buddha together with the monk Mahaka's fire miracle shown to Citta the householder (**Mahaka Pāṭihāriya S** (S 4.14.16/4:290 = SD 27.2). In both cases, only the miracle is seen, but not the miracle worker (Vism 12.85 f/393 f).

¹⁰¹ Bodhi: "The Buddha's disappearance seems to be a 'visible' demonstration of his verse. Having extirpated delight in being, he is able to vanish from the sight of Baka, the supreme representative of being and world affirmation, But Baka, bound to clinging, cannot transcend the range of the Buddha's knowledge, which encompasses both being and non-being at the same time that it transcends them." (M:ÑB 1250 n514)

¹⁰² "Disciples," *sāvaka*, here referring to lay disciples; "renunciants," *pabbajitā*, those who have gone forth (the monks and the nuns).

Before your time, bhikshu, there were recluses and brahmins in the world claiming to be worthy and fully self-awakened, and they guided their disciples and renunciants. They taught the Dharma to their disciples and renunciants. They craved for disciples and renunciants. And when the body had broken up after their breath was cut off, they were established in an inferior body.

Before your time, bhikshu, there were also recluses and brahmins in the world claiming to be worthy and fully self-awakened, [331] and they did not guide their disciples and renunciants. They did not teach the Dharma to their disciples and renunciants. They had no craving for disciples and renunciants. And when the body had broken up after their breath was cut off, they were established in a superior body.

So, bhikshu, I tell you this. Good sir, dwell unconcerned, devoted to a pleasant abiding here and now. It is wholesome [It is better] to leave it undeclared, good sir, do not advise anyone!¹⁰³

Māra defeated

30 When this was said, I told this to Māra the evil one:

‘I know you, evil one. Do not think, “He does not know.” You are Māra the evil one! It is not out of compassion for their welfare that you speak thus. It is without compassion for their welfare that you speak thus.

You think thus, evil one:

‘Those to whom the recluse Gotama teaches the Dharma will escape from my sphere!’

Those recluses and brahmins of yours, evil one, who claimed to be fully self-awakened were not fully self-awakened.

But I, who claim to be fully self-awakened, am (truly) fully self-awakened.

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].¹⁰⁴

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].

What is the reason for this?

Because, evil one, the Tathagata has abandoned the mental influxes that defile, bring renewal of being, give trouble, ripen in suffering, and lead to further birth, decay and death. Evil one, he has cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them so that they are not subject to further growth.

In this manner, evil one, the Tathagata has abandoned the mental influxes that defile, cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them so that they are not subject to further growth.”

31 As such, because Māra was unable to reply, and because of Brahmā’s invitation, this exposition is entitled “Brahmā’s invitation.”¹⁰⁵

— evaṃ —

¹⁰³ Māra is reminding the Buddha, when during the 5th week of the Great Awakening, he “hesitates” to teach the Dharma: see **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26.19/1:167 f) = SD 1.11; see also S 4.24/1:122-124; A 5:46; J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f). See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) where Māra tries to persuade the newly awakened Buddha to pass away peacefully without the Dharma (D 16.3/2:112) = SD 9 esp §3.7a nn.

¹⁰⁴ *Tādiso*, ie, whether the Buddha teaches or not, he remains the Tathagata, Thus Come One. See **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26) = SD 1.11 Intro (2b).

¹⁰⁵ *Itih’idaṃ Mārassa ca anālapanatāya Brahmuno ca abhinimantanatāya tasmā imassa veyyākaranassa Brahma,nimantaṇikan t’eva adhivacanan ti.* It is likely that this last sentence is added by the early reciters, rather than an original part of the sutta. See Intro (1c).

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