

*Devatânussati*

## The Recollection of Deities

[Meditating on one's own godliness]

(Main source: Buddhaghosa's Visuddhi,magga, Vism 7.115-118/225 f)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

## Introduction

(1) A non-theistic Buddhism

The Buddha lived and taught in a society that was steeped in various beliefs in a world of gods, demons, spirits and the supernatural. Instead of adopting an iconoclastic approach towards such beliefs, the Buddha uses them as bridges to the spirituality of personal accountability and liberation. These notions of non-human powers become engaging occasions for the Buddha to shine new lights on old lamps, turning mythology into psychology, superstition into superknowledge, the best example of which is the recollection of deities.<sup>1</sup>

If Buddhism is taken as a pyramid of gradually ascending levels of spirituality, culminating with nirvana as the empty space above the apex, then the belief in devas, along with its magical and apotropaic notions and mythologies, may be said to form the lower levels, populated by the masses who are generally quite contented to see their immediate needs and wants answered, and undesirable situations averted. Buddhism then becomes a sort of out-patient clinic that they visit for quick relief of current symptoms of their difficulties.

The history of world religions can be broadly seen as the rise of two forms of religious systems: the theistic (God-centred) and the non-theistic (not centred around any god-idea). Interestingly, the theistic religious forms are closely connected with the political awareness of the culture in which it arose. The Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), for example, are all rooted in the early violent sociopolitical history of their founders' times. Understandably, the hallmark of such systems has been "power," often expressed in the form of unrelentingly blatant or subtle colonizing, evangelizing, and intolerance even up to this day. Interestingly, much of the violence we see today on the global scene are connected with theistic beliefs and tribes.

Since the rise of modern education and science, and the globality of the internet, we see the borders of the world religions and their various denominations, meeting, even crossing one another. It is common, for example, to find followers of other religions and the non-religious practising Buddhist meditation. As Buddhism today grows into an increasingly global religion, new adherents are attracted more to its mind-training than to its cultural and ritual forms. As such, there is all the more need today to seek the roots of early Buddhism, to return to the original well-spring, so that the True Teaching can be tasted as taught by the Buddha and his early saints, if merely for its simplicity and efficacy.

The recollection of deities is a gentle bridge for the theistically-inclined who seek inner peace away from the raging violence around them through Buddhism. This exercise is an effective and beneficial way of weaning such peace-seekers from the stifle of theistic patriarchalism for a more open humanism that is life-affirming and mind-liberating. If the global history of humankind is one of the quest for wisdom and happiness of the self and society, then we see this evolutionary process pushing its way through the stone ages, the dark ages, the renaissances, the age of empires, and this age of information and globalization. Before the next millennium, we would surely see the walls around the world religions, built by priests, power-seekers and simonists, crumble even more, giving freer access to those who seek peace, truth and liberation. In many way, we would then have returned to the spiritually open society of the Buddha's days. Buddhism, then, becomes even relevant to the individual and to society.

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<sup>1</sup> In this connection, see Gethin 1998:126-132.

(2) Shakra, the lord of the devas

Shakra (P *Sakka*) is the best known of deities in the early Buddhist canon, where he is always spoken of as “Shakra, lord of the devas” (*sakko devanām indo*)<sup>2</sup> of the Heaven of the Thirty-three (Tāva,tiṃsa),<sup>3</sup> and he is also a follower of the Buddha.<sup>4</sup> The Sanskrit *Śakra* often occurs in the Vedas as an adjective, qualifying gods, chiefly Indra, and the meaning is given as “able, capable.” It is however never used as a name in pre-Buddhist times,<sup>5</sup> when Indra, the most popular of the Vedic gods, was the god of war and the weather, with about 250 hymns in his honour.<sup>6</sup>

By the Buddha’s time, the predominant religious belief was that both gods and humans were controlled by forces higher than themselves. Such forces were often referred to as *karman* (usually translated as ritual action), or as *daiva* or *vidhi* (which may translated as “fate”).<sup>7</sup> The Buddha, however, teaches that karma is one’s intention, as such, one is personally accountable for one’s actions and is able to work out one’s own salvation. **The Nibbedhika Pariyāya Sutta** (A 6.63) declares:<sup>8</sup>

Monks, volition is karma, I say! Having willed, one creates karma through the body, speech and the mind.

*Cetanāham bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi, cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā*  
(A 6.63.11/3:415) = SD 6.11

According to Indian mythology, in the age of Manu Vaivaśvata (*Vaivaśvata Manv-antara*), that is, our present cosmic age,<sup>9</sup> Indra is known as Purandara, “the destroyer of strongholds.”<sup>10</sup> In Buddhist mythology, however, Shakra is sometimes called **Purindada**, “the one who was a giver in the past” or

<sup>2</sup> Where Sakka is mentioned throughout, the sutta title is given: D 11.70 f/1:217 f, D 18.13/2:208, D 19.3-14/-2:220-225, **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21/2:263-289), D 30.2.27/3:176 (pl); **Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 37/1:251-256), M 50.28/1:338, M 83.13-16/2:79-81, M 115.15/3:65 f; S v609 (6.15)/1:158, **Dhajajga S** (S 11.3/1:218-220; S 11.4/-1:220-222, battle with asura), **Sakka Saṃyutta** (S 11), **Hālidakāni S** (S 22.4/3:12 f, qu Sakka,pañha S, D 2:283,9-13; cf M 1:252,3-5); (**Pañha**) **Sakka S** (S 35.118/4:101 = Pañca,sikha S, S 35.119/4:103), S 35.248/4:201 f (battle with asuras: parallels S 11.4/1:220-222), **Sakka S** (S 40.10/4:269-280),

<sup>3</sup> See **Nandana S** (S vv20-21 = 1.11/1:5 f). Tāvatiṃsa is the second of the deva realm of the sense-world. The average age of a Tāvatiṃsa deva is 30,000 human years. Each day in Tāvatiṃsa equals a hundred years on earth (DhA 1:364). Some of the devas there measure about three-quarters of a league high (about 8.5 km or 5.25 mi) (DhA 3:8)! A league (*yojana*) is usu taken to be 11.25 km = 7 mi.

<sup>4</sup> Where Sakka is mentioned throughout, the sutta title is given: D 11.70 f/1:217 f, D 18.13/2:208, D 19.3-14/-2:220-225, **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21/2:263-289), D 30.2.27/3:176 (pl); **Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 37/1:251-256), M 50.28/1:338, M 83.13-16/2:79-81, M 115.15/3:65 f; S v609 (6.15)/1:158, **Dhajajga S** (S 11.3/1:218-220); (**Uposatha**) **Sakka S** (A 3.37/1:143-145), A 7.58.11/4:89, A 7.62.10/4:105, A 8.8.5/4:163, A 8.36.6/4:242, A 4.195.1/-2:196.

<sup>5</sup> See DPPN 957 (Sakka).

<sup>6</sup> Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, ed KG Zysk, 1989:9, 12 f, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Basham, *op cit* 1989:74.

<sup>8</sup> As at Kvu 392. This famous statement is often misunderstood. “The Buddha’s utterance does not establish a mathematical equivalence between *cetanā* and *kamma*, such that every instance of volition must be considered *kamma*. As the second part of his statement shows, his words mean that *cetanā* is the decisive factor in action, that which motivates action and confers upon action the ethical significance intrinsic to the idea of *kamma*. This implies that the ethical evaluation of a deed is to be based on the *cetanā* from which it springs, so that a deed has no kammic efficacy apart from the *cetanā* to which it gives expression. The statement does not imply that *cetanā* (in the non-arahant) is always and invariably *kamma*.” (Bodhi 1998:§23/p25 digital ed)

<sup>9</sup> SED: *manv-antara* (p786 col 3).

<sup>10</sup> See S:B 496 n637.

“the one who gives in the cities” (VvA 171).<sup>11</sup> Even as a human being, was virtuous and was reborn as Shakra on account his seven vows, namely:

- As long as I live may I support my parents.
  - As long as I live may I respect the family elders.
  - As long as I live may I speak gently.
  - As long as I live may I not speak divisively.
  - As long as I live may I dwell at home with a heart free from the stain of miserliness, devoted to charity, open-handed, delighting in giving, devoted to alms-giving, delighting to have a share in giving.<sup>12</sup>
  - As long as I live may I speak the truth.
  - As long as I live may I be free from anger, and if anger should arise in me may I dispel it quickly.
- (Vata,pada Sutta, S 11.11/1:228; cf S 11.12/1:229 on his names)**

The Saṃyutta Commentary briefly relates how Shakra, when he was a brahmin youth named **Magha**,<sup>13</sup> went about performing meritorious deeds at the head of a band of 33 friends. Having fulfilled the seven vows, he was reborn, along with his 33 friends, in the Tāvatiṃsa, “the heaven of the thirty-three.” The battles between the devas, under Shakra’s leadership, and the asuras, are often recounted in stock passages in the early suttas.<sup>14</sup> The origin of the animosity is given in a very interesting story. When Shakra and his 33 friends were reborn into the asura world (before it became Tāvatiṃsa), the asuras (the old gods) prepared “the fragrant drink” (*gandha,pāna*).<sup>15</sup> Shakra, however, warned his companions not to drink it. The asuras who drank it became drunk and were thrown down Mt Sineru. Halfway down, the became sober and vowed never to drink strong drinks (*surā*) again; hence their name, *asura*.<sup>16</sup>

Shakra, as an unawakened being, however, is not free from greed, hate and delusion, nor from anxiety and fear.<sup>17</sup> Shakra’s lust is famously related in the story of **Rohiṇī**, sister of the elder Anuruddha. When Anuruddha visits Kapila,vatthu, she is reluctant to meet him as she has a skin ailment. However, when Anuruddha sends for her, she complies, veiling her face. On discovering her problem, Anuruddha persuades her to invite the Buddha and the monks for a meal. After the meal, the Buddha relates Rohiṇī’s past karma. In the past when she was the king of Benares’ chief consort, being jealous of the dancing girl, beloved of the king, she contrived to make the girl’s skin break out in boils.

<sup>11</sup> *Pure dānaṃ dadātī ti purindao ti vuccati*. D 2:260; S 1:230; Vv 37.4, 62.2; PvA 247. See **Sakka Nāma S** (S 11.12/1:229) on his names. The epithet, *Purandara*, is also used with Agni, the god of fire.

<sup>12</sup> This passage also in **Nakula,māta S** (A 8.48/4:268 f) = (**Agata,phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.6/3:287 = SD 15.3). At **Dīgha,jānu S** (A 8.54.14/4:284), this serves as the def for “the accomplishment in charity” (*cāga,sampadā*). Commented upon at Vism 7.101-106.

<sup>13</sup> As a human being, he was known as **Magha** (DhA 1:265-272): the same story is told of our Bodhisattva in his birth as Magha and then reborn as Sakka (**Kulāvaka J**, J 31/6:212). He was also called **Maghavā Sujam,pati** (J 3:146, 4:403, 5:137, 139, 6:102, 481, 573), **Maghavā Sakko** (J 5:141); cf Mvst 1:165, 167, 3:366. Even as a deva, he is sometimes called **Māgha** (a derivative of Magha), as in **Māgha S** (S vv257 f = 2.3/1:47) = **Ghatvā S** (S vv223 f/1:41 = S vv939 f/1:237) = **Dhanañjanī S** (S vv613 f/1:160). He is also called Vatra,bhū, see S:B 386 n146.

<sup>14</sup> Eg D 2:285; M 1:253; S 1:216 ff, 222, 4:201 ff, 5:447; A 4:432. The Dhammapada Comy relates Shakra’s romantic marriage to **Sujā**, daughter of **Vepacitti**, one of the asura leaders, who in fact becomes Shakra’s father-in-law (DhA 1278 f; cf J 1:205 f). Buddhaghosa explains that in those days, father-in-law (*sasura*) and son-in-law (*jāmāta*) sometimes battle with one another (SA 1:345)!

<sup>15</sup> Be *gandha,pāna*; Ce Ee *gaṇḍa,pāna*.

<sup>16</sup> SA 1:338. At DhA 1:272, the drink is called “the divine drink” (*dibba,pāna*). SED defs *gandha,pāna* as “a fragrant beverage.” The asuras are often compared with the Titans (12 brother and sisters according to Hesiod’s *Theogony*), who in Greek mythology were the children of Heaven and Earth. When the Titans rebelled against the chief god, Zeus, they were defeated and imprisoned in the underworld. The Titans may have been gods of an earlier cult ousted by the Olympian pantheon under Zeus, just as the devas under Shakra overthrew the asuras and built Tāvatiṃsa.

<sup>17</sup> (**Duggīta**) **Sakka S** (A 3.37/1:143-145).

At the end of the Buddha's discourse, Rohiṇī's ailment vanishes, her body took on a golden hue, and she attains stream-winning. After her death, she is reborn as a celestial nymph in Tāvātimsa, at the junction of the boundaries of four devas. Due to her great beauty, each deva claims her as his, and refer their quarrel to Shakra, who himself confessed his desire for her, crying, "If I cannot have her, I shall surely die!" They agree to let him take her, and she became a favourite.<sup>18</sup>

The Jātakas mentions Shakra as fearing ascetics who practise severe penances, that they would unseat him from his heavenly yellowstone throne.<sup>19</sup> Shakra sometimes show his frivolous side, and apparently delights in seeing others enjoy life. When no one could amuse king Mahāpanāda, he sent a celestial dancer to do so (SnA 1:400). **The Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 37) relates how Moggallāna roused a sense of urgency (for spiritual development) in Sakka, Vessavaṇa and the gods of the 33 by making the celestial Vejayanta Palace quake and tremble through his psychic powers (M 37.11/1:254 f).

Shakra's devotion to the Buddha is proverbial and he is present at numerous key events in the Buddha's life. Like Brahmā, he welcomes the child Bodhisattva at the Nativity by presenting him with a piece of sandalwood core (said to be a panacea) (J 1:53). When, during the Great Renunciation, the Bodhisattva cuts off his princely hair and throws heavenwards, Shakra enshrines it in the Cūḷamaṇī Cetiya.<sup>20</sup> At the Buddha's passing, he utters this famous ancient verse expressing his sorrow:<sup>21,22</sup>

Impermanent, alas, are all formations [conditioned things]!  
It is their nature to rise and fall;  
Having arisen, they pass away—  
Happy it is when they are stilled!

The Saṃyutta Commentary tells a story about Shakra, reminiscent of the teachings of **the Brahma-deva Sutta** (S 6.3).<sup>23</sup> On seeing the people of Aṅga and Magadha making preparations for a great sacrifice to Mahā Brahmā, Shakra feels pity for them. Appearing to them in the guise of Brahmā, he advises them to take their offerings to the Buddha and listen to his teachings (SA 1:351 f).

**The Sakka,pañha Sutta** (D 2:288) records how Shakra, after listening to the Buddha's teaching, becomes a stream-winner.<sup>24</sup> In due course, the Dīgha Commentary says, Shakra, on seeing signs that his life-span was ending was terrified by them and seeks the Buddha's guidance. As he sat listening to the Buddha's teaching, died and was immediately reborn as a young Shakra, a fact known only by the Buddha and Shakra himself. The Commentary adds that Shakra had, in fact, become an up-stream non-returner (*uddhaṃ, sota anāgāmī*).<sup>25</sup>

The importance of Shakra in early Buddhism is attested by the presence of a whole chapter, **the Sakka Saṃyutta** (but one of the shortest in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, with 25 short suttas), dedicated to him (S 11). This chapter, however, does not mention Shakra's meeting with the Buddha, but relates Shakra's

<sup>18</sup> DhA 7.1/3:295-299.

<sup>19</sup> See eg **Abbhantara J** (J 281/2:394), **Visayha J** (J 340/3:129), **Lomasa,kassapa J** (J 433/3:515), **Kaṇha J** (J 440/4:8 f), **Akitti J** (J 480/4:238), **Mahā Kañcana J = Bhisa J** (J 488/4:306 f), **Naḷinikā J** (J 526/5:193).

<sup>20</sup> J 1:65; BA 284. Similarly, concerned that Doṇa would be unable to pay due honour to the relic, Shakra, steals it and spirits it away to the Tāvātimsa heaven and enshrines it in the Cūḷā,maṇī Shrine which already contains the hair relic of the Bodhisattva during the Great Renunciation (id).

<sup>21</sup> D 16.6.10b/2:157 = SD 9. This verse is said to be a remnant from the teaching of the previous Buddha that only he remembers. This well known stanza concludes **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17). See D 2:157 = 199 = J 1:392 = S vv 21 (1:6), 609 (1:158), 776 (1:200) = 15.10/2:193 (Buddha) = Tha 1159 = DhA 1:71; DA 3:748; MA 1:235.

<sup>22</sup> D 16.6.10b/2:157 = SD 9.

<sup>23</sup> S 6.3/1:140-142 = SD 12.4.

<sup>24</sup> D 21.2.7/2:284,22-23 & 21.2.10/2:288,20-23.

<sup>25</sup> Meaning that he would live 1000 aeons in Avihā, 2000 aeons in Atappā, 4000 aeons in Sudassanā and will end the remaining of his lifespan in Akaniṭṭhā for 31,000 aeons (DA 3:739 f).

deeds and conversations in the Buddha's own words. **Bodhi**, in his Introduction to the Sakka Saṃyutta, notes that

[t]he suttas are thus presented as fables, but fables which always embody a moral message. The saṃyutta also includes the famous Dhajagga Sutta [S 11.3], in which the Buddha commends to the monks recollection of the Three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha—as an antidote to fear.

In Buddhist legend the Tāvataṃsa devas are perpetually being attacked by the asuras, the titans, beings of great physical prowess and violent ambition who seek to conquer them and take control of their domain. The Sakkasaṃyutta repeatedly pits Sakka in struggle against the leaders of the asuras. Vepacitti and Verocana.<sup>26</sup> The two sides can be read as symbolizing alternative political philosophies. The asura leaders favour rule by force and retaliation against enemies; they rationalize aggression and extol the ethic of “might is right.” Sakka, in contrast, stands for rule by righteousness, patience towards aggressors, and the compassionate treatment of wrongdoers [S 11.4, 5, 8]. Sakka and the devas honour sages and holy men, the asuras scorn them, and thus the sages help the devas but curse the asuras [S 11.9, 10].

In this saṃyutta Sakka appears as the ideal lay devotee. He earned his place as ruler of the devas, while he was still a human being,<sup>27</sup> by fulfilling seven vows which embody the standards of the virtuous householder [S 11.11]. His understanding of the Buddha's excellence is inferior to Brahmā Sahampati's [S 11.17], but in three suttas he eloquently proclaims the reasons for his devotion to the Buddha, the Sangha, and even devout householders [S 11.18-20]. In the last three suttas, the Buddha holds up Sakka's patience and forgiveness as a model for the bhikkhus [S 11.23-25].

(Bodhi, S:B 87)

### (3) Prajāpati

In the Pali texts, the deva kings Shakra, Prajāpati, Varuṇa and Īśāna are often mentioned together.<sup>28</sup> The Saṃyutta Commentary says that in the deva assembly, Shakra takes the foremost seat. **Prajāpati** (P *Pajāpati*, “lord of creation”) looks like Shakra and is of the same age, but takes the second seat; Varuṇa, the third; and Īśāna, the fourth (SA 1:341). Prajāpati is sometimes mentioned with Brahmā.<sup>29</sup> **The Ājānāṭṭiya Sutta** (D 32) mentions Indra (P Inda = Shakra), Varuṇa and Prajāpati amongst the great yakshas to be invoked by Buddhists in times of danger.<sup>30</sup>

Several hymns of the tenth book of the Ṛg-veda deal with the creation or evolution of the cosmos through entities or divinities newly devised to account for it. Among such entities we meet a Golden Embryo (Hiraṇya,garbha) out of whom the universe emanated, a god called All-Maker (Viśva,karman), 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.

(Basham 1989:22)

<sup>26</sup> See **Vepacitti S** (S 11.4/1:220-222), **Subhāsita,jaya S** (S 11.5/1:222-224), **Māyā S** (S 11.23/1:238 f), **Yavakalāpi S** (S 35.248/4:201-203).

<sup>27</sup> As a human being, he was known as **Magha (Kulāvaka J, J 31/6:212)**, also Maghavā Sujampati (J 3:146, 4:403, 5:137, 139, 6:102, 481, 573), Maghavā Sakko (J 5:141); cf Mvst 1:165, 167, 3:366. See also DhA 1:264 ff. Even as a deva, he is sometimes called Māgha (a derivative of Magha), as in **Māgha S** (S vv257 f = 2.3/1:47) = **Ghatvā S** (S vv223 f/1:41 = S vv939 f/1:237) = **Dhanañjani S** (S vv613 f/1:160). He is also called Vatra,bhū, see S:B 386 n146.

<sup>28</sup> D 1:244, 2:274; S 1:219; J 5:28 (Soma is also mentioned). See **Dhajagga S** (S 11.3) = SD 15.5.

<sup>29</sup> M 1:140, 327, 329; J 6:568, 571.

<sup>30</sup> D 32.10/3:204.

In due course, by the time of the Mahābharata, Prajāpati's position was taken over by Brahmā who was generally recognized as the creator and protector of the world (Basham 1989:74).<sup>31</sup>

#### (4) Buddhaghosa's commentary

## Devatānussati Kathā The Exposition on the Recollection of Deities (Vism 7.115-118/225 f)

### 4.1 THE RECOLLECTION OF DEITIES

**115** One who wishes to cultivate the recollection of deities should develop the qualities of faith, and so on, roused by the power of the noble path. And he should go into solitary retreat and should recollect his own qualities of faith, and so on, invoking the deities as witnesses, thus:

Furthermore, Mahānāma, the noble disciple cultivates the recollection of deities, thus:  
Here, Mahānāma, the noble disciple recollects the deities—  
there are the devas of the heaven of the Four Great Kings (*cātum, mahā, rājikā*);  
there are the devas of the heaven of Tāvātimsa [the heaven of the 33 devas];  
there are the devas of the heaven of Yāma;  
there are the devas of the heaven of Tusita [the contented];  
there are the devas of the heaven of Nimmāṇa, ratī [those who delight in creating];  
there are the devas of the heaven of Para, nimmita, vasavattī [those who lord over the  
creation of others];<sup>32</sup>  
there are the devas of the heaven of Brahma's Hosts;<sup>33</sup>  
(and) there are the devas beyond these.<sup>34</sup>  
THE FIVEFOLD NOBLE GROWTH.<sup>35</sup>  
1. The devas are endowed with faith<sup>36</sup> because of which, when they pass away from this  
world, they are reborn there....

<sup>31</sup> The Majjhima Comy, however, says that Pajāpati here is a name for Māra the evil one because he is the ruler of this generation (*pajā*) made up of living beings (MA 1:33 f). In contemporary terms, this would include the belief in a theistic creator-god.

<sup>32</sup> Māra the evil one is said to reside in this heaven, lording over a part of it (MA 1:33 f). The ruler of this realm here is called Vasa, vattī (D 1:219; A 4:243). Māra is also called Vasa, vattī (but distinct from his namesake) because he is "lord with great power over the 6 Sense Realms" (*māro mahānubhāvo cha, kāmāvar'issaro vasavattī*, MA 2:201). Māra is also called Pajā, patī, "the lord of creation," because he lords over this "generation" (*pajā*) of living beings (M 1.9/1:2; MA ad loc).

<sup>33</sup> "Brahma's hosts," *brahma, kāyikā*. See n on this section's header.

<sup>34</sup> "Beyond this," *tad'uttarini*, lit "higher than these." The "devas beyond these" are those of the form world and the formless world.

<sup>35</sup> "Fivefold noble growth" (*ariya, vuddhi*, A 3:80); cf the 5 virtues conducive to growth (*vuḍḍhi, dhamma*, A 5.246/2:245): see & **Entering the Stream** = SD 3.3(1) etc.

<sup>36</sup> "Faith," *saddhā*. There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) "rootless faith" (*amūlaka, saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) "faith with a good cause" (*ākāravati, saddhā*), faith founded on understanding (M 1:320, 8 401, 23); also called *avecca-p, pasāda*, faith founded on seeing (S 12.41.11/2:69). "Wise faith" is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = "not seen, not heard, not suspected" (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). **Gethin** speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective (eg ERE: Faith & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387): "Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith is its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive

2. The devas are endowed with moral virtue because of which, when they pass away from this world, they were reborn there....

3. The devas are endowed with learning<sup>37</sup> because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there....

4. The devas are endowed with charity because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there....

5. The devas are endowed with wisdom because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there **Agata,phala) Mahānāma Sutta** (A 6.10.7/3:287) = SD 15.3

**116** Furthermore, in the suttas, it is said:<sup>38</sup>

[THE FIVEFOLD GROWTH.<sup>39</sup>

(1) The faith that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they were reborn there, that kind of faith is found in me, too.

(2) The moral virtue that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they were reborn there, that kind of moral virtue is found in me, too.

(3) The learning<sup>40</sup> that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they were reborn there, that kind of learning is found in me, too.

(4) The charity that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they were reborn there, that kind of charity is found in me, too.

(5) The wisdom that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they were reborn there, that kind of wisdom is found in me, too.'] [288]

**Mahānāma, when the noble disciple recollects his own faith, and moral virtue, and learning, and charity, and wisdom, and those of the devas thus, his mind is not obsessed by lust, not obsessed by hate, not obsessed by delusion. At that time, his mind is straight, inspired by the devas.**

[Mahānāma, a noble disciple whose mind is straight  
gains inspired knowledge in the meaning [the goal] (*attha,veda*),<sup>41</sup>  
gains inspired knowledge in the Dharma [the method] (*dhamma,veda*),  
gains gladness connected with the Dharma;  
when he is gladdened, zest is born;  
when the mind is zestful, the body is tranquil;  
the tranquil body feels happy;  
when one is happy the mind becomes concentrated.

This, Mahānāma, is called a noble disciple:

he dwells impartial amongst partial [vicious] people;

he dwells unafflicted amongst afflicted people;

as one who has entered upon the Dharma stream, he cultivates the recollection of deities.<sup>42</sup>

response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody...the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary." (Gethin 2001:207; my emphases). However, it should be noted here, in terms of rebirth as devas, that the "faith" is not necessarily *aveccāp,pasāda*, but an unconditional belief. "Wise faith" is vital if one wishes to transcend even the heavens.

<sup>37</sup> "Spiritual learning," *suta*, lit "listening," ie "one who has heard much Dharma," cognate with today's "well-read, learned", but in spiritual matters.

<sup>38</sup> The rest of the Sutta is qu here in full, and what Buddhaghosa has omitted are marked by [square brackets].

<sup>39</sup> "Fivefold growth," ie the fivefold noble growth (*ariya,vuḍḍhi*, A 3:80); cf the 5 virtues conducive to growth (*vuḍḍhi,dhamma*, A 5.246/2:245); see & **Entering the Stream** = SD 3.3(1) etc.

<sup>40</sup> "Spiritual learning," *suta*, lit "listening," ie "one who has heard much Dharma," cognate with today's "well-read, learned", but in spiritual matters.

<sup>41</sup> On the meaning of these 2 lines, see Introd (3).

Mahānāma, a noble disciple who has attained the fruit and understood the teaching continuously dwell in this way.] **Agata,phala) Mahānāma Sutta** (A 6.10.7/3:287 f) = SD 15.3

Although this is said, it should nevertheless be understood as spoken for the purpose of showing that their qualities of faith, and so on, in oneself are those of the deities, taking the deities as witnesses. For this is said in the Commentaries: “He recollects his own qualities, taking the deities as witnesses.”<sup>43</sup>

**117** As long as in the preliminary stage, he recollects the deities’ qualities of faith, and so on, and in the later stage, he recollects those qualities of faith, and so on, existing in himself, then,

**...his mind is not obsessed by lust, not obsessed by hate, not obsessed by delusion. At that time, his mind is straight, inspired by the devas.** (A 6.10.7.3:288) = SD 15.3

So when he has suppressed the hindrances<sup>44</sup> just in the way already stated [Vism 7.66], the dhyana factors arise in a single conscious moment. However, because of the profundity of the qualities of faith, and so on, or because of his being preoccupied with recollecting qualities of various kinds, the dhyana is only access (*upacāra*) and does not reach dhyana.

And that access concentration itself is reckoned as “the recollection of deities,” too, because it arises with the deities’ qualities, such as faith, and so on, as the means. [226]

**118** And when a monk is devoted to this recollection of deities, he becomes dearly loved by the deities. He obtains even greater fullness of faith.<sup>45</sup> He dwells with great zest and gladness.<sup>46</sup> And if he penetrates higher, he moves on to a happy state.

Therefore, indeed, when one is truly wise, his will act heedfully;  
Such is the great power of the recollection of deities.

This is a section of the detailed exposition on the recollection of deities.

#### 4.2 THE 6 RECOLLECTIONS: OVERVIEW

**119** Now in these detailed teachings (on the 6 recollections), after the words, “**At that time, his mind is straight, inspired by the Tathagata,**” it is said,

Mahānāma, a noble disciple whose mind is straight  
gains inspired knowledge in the goal,  
gains inspired knowledge in the Dharma,

<sup>42</sup> In (Tad’ah)Uposatha S (A 3.70), here follows “the fivefold growth,” where the practitioner recollects that he, too, has the faith, moral virtue, learning, generosity and wisdom that the devas have, because of which they have won birth in the heavens (A 3.70(8b)/1:210 = SD 4.18).

<sup>43</sup> *Devatā sakkhi-ṭ,thāne thapetvā attano guṇe anussaratī ti* [untraced].

<sup>44</sup> “Suppressed the hindrances,” *vikkhambhita, nīvaraṇassa*. This is the first level of overcoming the hindrances, ie, they are suppressed up to only the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana, as long one remains in that state. altogether **5 types of abandoning** (*pahāna*), also called liberation (*vimutti*), cessation (*nirodha*), seclusion (*viveka*),<sup>44</sup> detachment (*virāga*), or relinquishing (*vossagga*), namely:

- (1) abandoning by suppression (*vikkhambhana pahāna*);
- (2) abandoning by the substitution of opposite or displacement by opposites (*tad-aṅga pahāna*);
- (3) abandoning by cutting off (*samuccheda pahāna*);
- (4) abandoning by tranquillization (*paṭipassaddhi pahāna*); and
- (5) abandoning by escape (*nissaraṇa pahāna*).

(Pm 1:27, 2:219-224; Vism 13.12/410, 22.110/693). See **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** = SD 13.1(4.2c).

<sup>45</sup> This beautiful sentence is from Nāṇamoli’s tr.

<sup>46</sup> *Pīti, pāmujja, bahulo viharati*. On zest (*pīti*) and gladness (*pāmujja*), see (Agata,phala) Mahānāma S (A 6.10) = SD 15.3(3.4).



gains gladness connected with Dharma;  
when he is gladdened, zest is born;  
 [when the mind is zestful, the body is tranquil;  
 the tranquil body feels happy;  
 when one is happy the mind becomes concentrated.] [A 6.10]<sup>47</sup>

Here, “(he) gains inspired knowledge in the goal [meaning]” (*labhati attha,vedam*) should be understood as being said of rejoicing (*tuṭṭhi*) inspired by the meaning, beginning with “The Blessed One is such...” (*Iti’pi so Bhagavā...*) [Vism 6.2].<sup>48</sup> “(He) gains inspired knowledge in the Dharma” (*labhati dhamma,vedam*) is said of rejoicing inspired by the text (*pāli*). “(He) gains gladness connected with Dharma” (*labhati dhammûpasamhîtam pāmujjam*) is said of both.<sup>49</sup>

**120** And when in the case of the recollection of deities “inspired by the deities” (*devatā ārabbhā*) is said, this should be understood as said either of the consciousness occurring in the preliminary stage inspired by the deities, or of the consciousness [occurring at a later stage] inspired by the qualities that are similar to those of the deities and are productive of the deities’ state.<sup>50</sup>

**121** Now these six recollections succeed only in noble disciples. For the qualities of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are evident to them. They possess moral virtue that is untorn, and so on, charity that is free from the stain of avarice, and the quality of faith, and so on, similar to those of the deities.

**122** And in the **Mahānāma Sutta** (A 6.10),<sup>51</sup> they are expounded in detail by the Blessed One, when asked to show a stream-winner’s “dwelling in dependence” [habitual training] (*nissaya, vihāra*).

**123** In the **Gedha Sutta** (A 6.25),<sup>52</sup> too, it is said:

Here, bhikkhus, a noble disciple recollects the Tathagata in this way:  
 “The Blessed One such: an arhat...” ...at that time, his mind having become straight,<sup>53</sup> he gives up attachment (to sense-objects) (*gedha*), he is freed from it, he rises above it.  
 “Attachment,” *avuso*, is a name for the five cords of sense-desire.

Bhikkhus, some beings purify themselves here by making this (recollection) as their mental support [mind-object]. (A 6.26.2/3:312)

In this way, the mind of the noble disciple is purified by virtue of the recollection for the sake of attaining further purification in the ultimate sense.

**124** And in the **Sambādh’okāsa Sutta** (A 6.26), taught by the venerable Mahā Kaccāna, it is spoken of as the realization of an opening (*okāsa*) by way of purification in the ultimate sense only in a noble disciple, thus:

Here, *avuso*, a noble disciple recollects the Tathagata, thus:

“The Blessed One is an arhat,<sup>54</sup>  
 the fully self-awakened one,  
 accomplished in wisdom and conduct,  
 well-farer,  
 knower of worlds,  
 peerless guide of tamable people,

<sup>47</sup> (**Agata,phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.2/3:285) = SD 15.3.

<sup>48</sup> (**Agata,phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.2/3:285) = SD 15.3.

<sup>49</sup> Cf MA 1:173 = see (**Agata,phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.2/3:285) = SD 15.3(3.2).

<sup>50</sup> Cf Vism 7.117.

<sup>51</sup> (**Agata,phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.2/3:285-288) = SD 15.3.

<sup>52</sup> A 6.25/3:312.

<sup>53</sup> “Having become straight,” *uju, gatam*, ie plainly, directly focussed on the object (AA 3:337).

<sup>54</sup> Here begins the nine virtues of the Buddha (*navāraha, guṇa*) (M 1:37; A 3:285).

teacher of gods and humans,  
awakened,  
blessed.’

Avuso, when the noble disciple recollects the Tathagata thus, his mind, at that time, is not obsessed by delusion.

At that time, his mind having become straight,<sup>55</sup> he gives up attachment (to sense-objects) (*gedha*), [227] he is freed from it, he rises above it.

‘Attachment,’ avuso, is a name for the five cords of sense-desire.

Avuso, this noble disciple always dwells with a sky-like mind, extensive, great, boundless, without anger, without affliction.

Here, avuso, some beings, having made this their mental support [mind-object], become pure by nature [become subject to purification].<sup>56</sup> (A 6.26.3/3:314 f)

**125** In the **Uposatha Sutta** (A 3.70), too, it is taught to show the great fruit of the precept day [uposatha] for a noble disciple who keeps the precept day by way of a mind-purifying, thus:

And what, Visākhā, is **the noble disciple’s observance**?

It is, Visākhā, by the cleansing of a soiled mind in a proper way.<sup>57</sup>

How, Visākhā, is a soiled mind cleansed in a proper way?

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects the Tathagata, thus....

(A 3.70.4a-8e/1:206-211) = SD 4.18

**126** In the Book of Elevens (of the Aṅguttara) [**the (Cha Anussati) Mahānāma Sutta**] (A 11.12),<sup>58</sup> too, when a noble disciple asks, “Venerable sir, for those of us who dwell in various dwelling places, in what way should we dwell?”<sup>59</sup> they (the recollections) are expounded to him in order to show the way of dwelling in this way:

(1) One who has faith (*saddha*) is successful, Mahānāma, not one who has no faith.

(2) One who puts forth effort (*ārāddha, viriya*) is successful, Mahānāma, not one who does not put forth effort.

(3) One whose mindfulness is established (*upatthita, sati*) is successful, Mahānāma, not one whose mindfulness is unestablished.

(4) One who is mentally concentrated (*samāhita*) is successful, Mahānāma, not one who is not concentrated.

(5) One who has wisdom (*paññavā*) is successful, Mahānāma, not one who without wisdom.

Having established yourself in these five things, Mahānāma, you should cultivate six things.

Here, Mahānāma, you should recollect the Tathagata, thus: “The Blessed One is such:...”

(A 11.12/5:329-332)

**127** Still, be that as it may, they (the recollections) can be mentally attended to by a worldly person (*puthujjana*) [an ordinary person], too, if he possesses the qualities of utterly pure moral virtue, and so on.

<sup>55</sup> “Having become straight,” *uju, gataṃ*, ie plainly, directly focussed on the object (AA 3:337).

<sup>56</sup> *Idam pi kho āvuso ārammaṇaṃ karitvā evam idh’ekacce sattā visuddhi, dhammā bhavanti*. Comy is silent on *visuddhi, dhammā*, translatable also as “pure states.” Nānamoli renders *Idam pi kho āvuso ārammaṇaṃ karitvā* as “Some beings gain purity here by making this [recollection] their prop” (Vism:Ñ 7.123/245); *evam idh’ekacce sattā visuddhi, dhammā bhavanti* as “Some beings are susceptible of purification here in this way” (Vism:Ñ 7.124/245).

<sup>57</sup> “In a proper way,” *upakkamena*, which Comy glosses as *paccatta, purisa, kārena*, “by individual effort” (AA 2:322). Cf **Uposatha S** (A 3.70.4b) on “Proper personal effort.”

<sup>58</sup> A 11.12/5:328-332.

<sup>59</sup> *Tesaṃ no bhante nānā, vihārena viharataṃ ken’assa vihārena viharitabban ti* (A 11.12.1/5:328).

[228] For when he is recollecting the qualities of the Buddha, and so on, even by way of hearsay, his consciousness settles down (*pasīdati*), by virtue of which the hindrances are suppressed.

In his great gladness, he initiates insight, and may even attain arhathood—

**128** like the elder Phussa,deva who dwelled at Kaṭak’andhakāra [the dark ridge].

That venerable, it is said, saw a figure of the Buddha created by Māra. Thinking: “How good this appears despite its having greed, hate and delusion! How can the Blessed One’s goodness be not so?<sup>60</sup> For he was utterly without greed, hate and delusion!” he attained zest taking the Blessed One as mental object, and cultivating insight, he attained arhathood.

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### (5) Beyond God and gods

It is important to understand what is *not* taught in the recollection of deities: there is no mention of the wish to be reborn as a deva, and there is not mention of worshipping them. **The Dhajagga Sutta** (S 11.3), for example, reminds us that even Shakra, the lord of the devas, is himself “not freed from greed, not freed from hate, not freed from delusion. When timid, or petrified, or fearful, he fled.”<sup>61</sup>

The recollection of deities, however, is an exercise in reminding oneself that whatever wholesome qualities that make God or the gods—this godliness—can be found within oneself:

That kind of faith...moral virtue...learning...charity...wisdom that those devas are endowed with, because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there, that kind of faith is found in me, too.

These five qualities are elsewhere called the “fivefold growth” (*ariya,vuḍḍhi*), that helps one to grow and mature into the spiritual path to at least attain stream-winning (A 3:80).<sup>62</sup> Another important sutta related to the recollection of deities is **the Saṅkhār’upapatti Sutta** (M 120), which teaches that if one has cultivated the fivefold noble growth, one could wish to be reborn in any heavenly realm. However, even better than any heavenly life is this, that of full liberation:

**37** Again, bhikshus, a monk is  
 accomplished in faith (*saddhā*),<sup>63</sup>  
 accomplished in moral virtue (*sīla*),  
 accomplished in spiritual learning (*suta*),<sup>64</sup>  
 accomplished in charity (*cāga*),  
 accomplished in wisdom (*paññā*).

He thinks:

‘Oh how I wish that by realizing for myself with direct knowledge, I might here and now enter upon and abide in the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom<sup>65</sup> that, with the destruction of the mental cankers, are cankerless!’<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Katham nu kho Bhagavā na sobhati* (Vism:WK); Ce MSS omit *na*, foll which Vism:Ñ tr: “What can the Blessed One’s goodness have been like?”

<sup>61</sup> *Tam kissa hetu. Sakko hi bhikkhave devānam indo avīta,rāgo avīta,doso avīta,moho bhīru chambhī utrāsī palāyī ti.* S 11.3.10/1:219 = SD 15.5.

<sup>62</sup> A 5.246/2:245.

<sup>63</sup> “Faith,” *saddhā*, see Introd 3n above.

<sup>64</sup> “Spiritual learning,” *suta*, lit “listening,” ie “one who has heard much Dharma,” cognate with today’s “well-read, learned”, but in spiritual matters.

And by realizing for himself with direct knowledge, he here and now enters upon and abides in the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom that, with the destruction of the mental cankers, are cankerless.

This monk, bhikshus, does not arise anywhere at all!<sup>67</sup>

(M 120.37/3:103) = SD 3.4

The recollection of deities is very useful for those who still have some kind of connection, intellectual or emotional, with some kind of God-idea or belief in gods, deities and powerful spirits. Initially, these religious energies are gently channelled towards building a centred mind of calm and focus. A calm and focussed mind is the fertile ground for wisdom, but unlike the wild weeds of mental proliferation and superstition to spread unattended, wisdom has to be carefully cultivated and nurtured. At this stage, when the mind is calm and clear, one then goes on to reflect that all these wonderful ideas and experiences that one has are mind-made and as such impermanent. One could then go one with one of the perception exercises, as taught, for example, in **the (Satta) Saññā Sutta** (A 7.46).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> “Liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom,” respectively, *ceto, vimutti* (or, liberation by concentration, ie through destruction of the mental hindrances) and *paññā, vimutti* (liberation through insight) (A 1:60). One who is “liberated by wisdom” “may not have reached the 8 liberations (*vimokkha*) in his own body, but through seeing with wisdom, his mental cankers are destroyed” (M 70.16/1:478). All arhats are perfectly liberated in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into 2 types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain **the 8 liberations** (*aṭṭha, vimokkha*), which include the 4 formless attainments and the attainment of cessation, are called “liberated both ways”, ie, liberated from the physical body by means of the formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood. Arhats like Sāriputta and Moggallāna are “liberated both ways” (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*). The differences between the two types of liberation are given in **Mahā, nidāna S** (D 2:70 f) and **Kiṭṭagiri S** (M 1:477 f). For full list of the 8 deliverances, see **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15.35/ 2:70 f) = SD 5.17.35. See also D 3:262, 228; **Vimokkha S**, A 8.66/4:306; also M 120.37/3:103 = SD 3.4.37.

<sup>66</sup> “Mental cankers,” *āsavā*, see Introd (5) n above.

<sup>67</sup> *Ayam bhikkhave bhikkhu na katthaci uppajjati na kuhiñci uppajjati*. Both *katthaci* and *kuhiñci* mean “anywhere.” Despite giving the ways to be reborn in the happy states, the Buddha ultimately closes with the best of all “states”: awakening itself. See Introd (last section).

<sup>68</sup> A 7.46/4:46-53 = SD 15.4.