

## A pillar of faith

Based on **Nagarôpama Sutta** (A 7.63), SD 52.13 (1.4.1 & 2.3.1)

**The Nagarôpama Sutta** (A 7.63) the discourse on the citadel parable, is a summary of the full Buddhist training for the laity by way of a parable of a rajah's frontier citadel. The Sutta opens with the parable of the citadel, comprising the 7 requisites of a citadel that protect the city, and its 4 kinds of foods that nurture the inhabitants.

The 7 citadel requisites illustrate **the 7 "true virtues"** (*satta saddhamma*) or good qualities of a noble disciple, that is, a true practitioner, namely, faith, moral shame, moral fear, much learning, effort, mindfulness and wisdom. **The 4 kinds of food** represent the 4 dhyanas, which should be cultivated by the disciple. Keeping to this regime of practice, the disciple will not fall under the power of Māra, the bad one who distracts us from spiritual progress.

### The citadel's pillar

The parable of the rajah's frontier citadel begins with a description of **the citadel pillar** (*esikā*), that is "deeply buried, well sunk, unshakable." The pillar is significantly the first of the 7 requisites of a citadel because it is its "palladium," that is, the "protector" of the city and its people, often believed to be a god or some kind of power. In psychological terms, it is the spirit or rallying-point of the nation.

Hence, it is located at the city-centre, acting as the hub of a huge wheel that is the citadel. Mythically, this represents the axis mundi, the centre of the universe, like Mount Meru in early Buddhist mythology.

### The gate bolt

The city pillar—the nation's palladium—should be distinguished from another important pillar that is, a strong bolt (*khīla*) for the city-gate or gates. The word *khīla* (not to be confused with *khila*, "barrenness") means "a peg, spike, stake, bolt, pillar." More fully, a *khīla*, especially in the expression, *inda, khīla*, "Indra's bolt," is "a post or stone set in the ground at the door of a house or palace or at the city gates against which the door or gate was closed (SnA 185,21)."

The most famous mention of *inda, khīla* is in **the Ratana Sutta** (Khp 4 = Sn 2.1): "Even as Indra's bolt stays put in the ground" (*yath'inda.khīlo paṭhavirūṇṇa sīto siyā*) unmoved by the 4 winds, the noble sangha comprises those who understand the 4 noble truths.

### Strength and steadiness

The key significance of the citadel pillar lies in its strength and immovability—so is the **faith** (*saddhā*) of the noble disciple. And the pillar also inspires the inhabitants with a common love and ideal, that is, for the city, country and nation. Even so, our wise faith in the 3 jewels arises from understanding the teachings and practising it correctly and effectively, which further deepens our wisdom, leading us to liberation.

A true disciple's faith (*saddhā*) is like **the citadel pillar** (*saddh'esika*), "deeply buried, well sunk, immovable, unshakable." He has wise unshakable faith in the Buddha's awakening—the possibility of spiritual evolution of the human into the divine and beyond. And that both the Buddha's awakening and the arhat's awakening are the same, except that the Buddha discovers and teaches that truth.

In other words, there is only one Buddha, that is, the historical Buddha, and he is **the 1<sup>st</sup> arhat**, the one of the many, the 1<sup>st</sup> amongst equals, as stated in **the Sambuddha Sutta** (S 22.58)<sup>1</sup> and **the Pavāraṇā Sutta** (S 8.7).<sup>2</sup>

This faith—like the citadel pillar—is "*for the protection of the city inhabitants and for warding off outsiders.*" The powerful citadel pillar securely locks the city-gate against being rammed opened from the outside—even so, our faith keeps us from being distracted by outside teachings and influences.

This is the wise faith that protects and perpetuates the path of awakening so that it is still open to us even today. The disciple's faith is strong because he is emotionally independent of others — he is wise and happy by his own efforts—which confirms the Buddha's awakening.<sup>3</sup>

### **Faith in the 3 jewels**

Just the citadel pillar **inspires strength in its inhabitants**, so, too, our faith in the 3 jewels—even though we are yet unawakened—inspires us to diligently practise, and remain happy and inwardly peaceful, throughout our lives, as we gradually but surely approach the path of awakening.

With this faith, *we abandon the unwholesome and cultivate the wholesome. We abandon the blameworthy and cultivate the blameless. We keep ourself in purity.* This refrain is repeated for each of the other 6 true virtues. This is the function of every true virtue (*saddhamma*).

In short, the disciple's faith—wise in understanding the nature of the 3 jewels—is unshakable, like that of the arhat monk Sāriputta and of the layman non-returner Citta. While Sāriputta tells us that he understands the "drift of the Dharma" (the true nature of reality) that he has full faith in the Buddha,<sup>4</sup> Citta declares that his faith arises from his personal experience of meditation (that is by way of self-verification).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Sambuddha Sutta** (S 22.58), [SD 49.10](#).

<sup>2</sup> **Pavāraṇā Sutta** (S 8.7), [SD 49.11](#).

<sup>3</sup> See the case of Citta: **Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta Sutta** (S 41.8), [SD 40a.7](#); [SD 40a.8 \(5.6.3\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> On Sāriputta's faith, see **Sampasādaniya Sutta** (D 28,1-2) + [SD 14.14 \(2.3\)](#) & [SD 40a.8 \(5.6.2\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> On Citta's faith, see **Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta Sutta** (S 41.8), [SD 40a.7](#); [SD 40a.8 \(5.6.3\)](#).