

# 2

## Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta (Be)

Ce **Acchariy'abbhuta Sutta**, The Discourse on the Wonderful and Marvellous • **M 123**

Ee Se **Acchariya,abbhuta,dhamma Sutta**, The Discourse on the Wonderful and Marvellous Qualities, (Majjhima) **Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta**, The (Majjhima Nikāya) Discourse on the Wonderful and Marvellous

Theme: The miraculous qualities of the Buddha

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### 1 Sutta summary and versions

#### 1.1 SUMMARY

**1.1.1** The **Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta** M 123), the “discourse on the wonderful and marvellous,” records Ānanda describing various extraordinary, even miraculous, qualities of the Bodhisattva from his penultimate birth in Tusita heaven up to his final human birth before he becomes the Buddha Gotama.<sup>1</sup> The Sutta theme is that of the miraculous events and superhuman powers characterizing the Buddha by way of attributing charisma<sup>2</sup> to him. [3.4.2]

**1.1.2** The **Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta** opens with a group of monks discussing the Buddha’s profound knowledge of the 6 past buddhas [§§2.1-2.2], Ānanda agrees with them [§2.3]. When the Buddha arrives and learn about their discussion, he instructs Ānanda to expound the Buddha’s other marvellous qualities [§§2.4-2.6]. Ānanda expounds the Buddha’s marvellous qualities, beginning each statement of the qualities by declaring that he has learned it from the Buddha himself.

#### 1.1.3 A summary of the marvels

**1.1.3.1** Here is a **summary** of the 19 wonderful and marvellous qualities of the Bodhisattva described by Ānanda and the 20<sup>th</sup> added by the Buddha himself, and collated with “the nature of the Bodhisattva” (*bodhisatta dhammatā*) chapter of the Mahā’padāna Sutta (**D 14**,1.17-1.32), SD 49.8a, list:

#### D 14

- |   |                                     |           |
|---|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| (1) [§3] The Bodhisattva’s rebirth in Tusita.*                                      | → Mindful and clearly comprehending |           |
| (2) [§4] His dwelling [remaining] in Tusita.*                                       |                                     |           |
| (3) [§5] His full life-term in Tusita.*   |                                     |           |
| (4) [§6] His demise (descent) from Tusita.*   |                                     |           |
| (5) [§7] The Bodhisattva’s conception (descent into his mother Mahā Māyā’s womb).** |                                     | (1) §1.17 |
| (6) [§8] Protection of the Bodhisattva and his mother by the 4 great kings.**       |                                     | (2) §1.18 |
| (7) [§9] The mother’s moral virtue.   |                                     | (3) §1.19 |
|   |                                     | (4) §1.20 |

**Acknowledgement:** The scholarly notes here are mostly from **Analyo**, *The Genesis of the Bodhisattva*, 2010 & *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya* [2006], 2011.

<sup>1</sup> The Chinese parallel is called 未曾有法經 *wèi céng yǒu fǎ jīng*, lit, “the Discourse on There Hasn’t Ever Being Such a Dharma Before,” the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities (MĀ 32 @ T1.469c-471c). It agrees with M 123 on the title and its location. For a study of M 123 and MĀ 32, the Sutta and its parallels, see **Bareau** 1974a:203-209; **Analyo** 2011:702-711, 2010f:28-46. For comparative nn on M 123 with MĀ 32, **Thich Minh Chau** 1964:66, 159-165 and 205. A study of the Skt version of M 123 is found in **Windisch** 1908:107-143. For a quotation in **Tarkajvala**, listing three of the wonderful qualities in verse, see **Skilling** 1997b:610-611. On the significance of M 123, see **Analyo** 2010f:28-46.

<sup>2</sup> On charisma, SD 3.14 (4-8).

- |            |   |            |
|------------|---|------------|
| (8) [§10]  | The mother's freedom from all sexual thoughts (desire for men).   | (5) §1.21  |
| (9) [§11]  | The mother's enjoyment of sensual pleasures without any moral transgression.  | (6) §1.22  |
| (10) [§12] | The mother's good health and vision of the foetal Bodhisattva (like a beryl gem).   | (7) §1.23  |
| (11) [§13] | The mother dies 7 days after giving birth. (This event is out of sequence.)   | (8) §1.24  |
| (12) [§14] | The gestation period of 10 months.  | (9) §1.25  |
| (13) [§15] | The mother gives birth standing.  | (10) §1.26 |
| (14) [§16] | The gods receive him first, then the humans.*   | (11) §1.27 |
| (15) [§17] | 4 devaputras receive the Bodhisattva and presents him to the mother.**  | (12) §1.28 |
| (16) [§18] | The Bodhisattva is born immaculate.*  | (13) §1.29 |
| (17) [§19] | The 2 divine streams of water (one cool, one warm) wash mother and child.**   | (14) §1.30 |
| (18) [§20] | The first 7 steps and lion-roar.*   | (15) §1.31 |
| (19) [§21] | The universal radiance and tremors.*  | (16) §1.32 |
| [20] [§22] | <b>The Buddha's</b> special quality of mindfulness of the rise, presence and ceasing of his feelings, perceptions and thoughts. |            |

It should be noted here that **the 1<sup>st</sup> 3 marvels** of M 123, concerning the Bodhisattva in Tusita are omitted from the Mahā'padāna Sutta (D 14) list. **The 4<sup>th</sup> marvel** of D 14, however, mentions Tusita, from where the Bodhisattva passes away and descends into his mother's womb. It is also interesting that the D 14 list mentions the premature death of the Bodhisattva's mother Māyā, which is out of sequence. Understandably, D 14 omits **marvel 20** of M 123, which concerns not the Bodhisattva, but the Buddha, who has himself added this marvel.

**1.1.3.2 Of the 19 marvels** described by Ānanda, *only 8* are distinctly those of the Bodhisattva (denoted by an asterisk \*) (1-4, 14, 16, 18, 19); another *7 marvels* are those of his mother (7-13, 15, 17); and the other *4 marvels* (5, 6, 15, 17) are shared between the two of them (double asterisks \*\*). The *last* and 20<sup>th</sup> marvel is that of the Buddha himself.

Hence, we can see that these marvels—except for the last (no. 20)—are actually shared almost equally between mother and child. The final marvel—added by the Buddha himself—is the highest of the marvels. Not only is this last marvel that of the Buddha, but, unlike all the other marvels, it is a quality of the awakened mind, that of the arhats. The Buddha and the arhats share the same awakening.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that marvel (11)—Māyā's early death—is inserted out of sequence [2.2]. Notably, this last marvel is not so much about the Buddha as it is about his mental process, something that also applies to the arhats. In other words, we see here an extension of the meaning of “marvel” (*abbhuta,- dhamma*) to include mental or spiritual states. [3.3.2]

## 1.2 THE CHINESE VERSION

**1.2.1 Ānanda's initiative.** According to the Chinese version, preserved in the Madhyama Āgama (MĀ 32), Ānanda, emerges from his solitude and approaches the Buddha. Ānanda, on his own initiative, expounds the Buddha's marvellous qualities. The Chinese version also does not specify the Buddha as Ananda's source. Ānanda only says that he has heard about the Buddha's marvellous qualities.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10.

<sup>4</sup> MĀ 32 (T12.469c24), “I heard,” 我聞 *wǒ wén*.

### 1.2.2 Comparative differences

**1.2.2.1** The list of the Buddha’s wonderful and marvellous qualities in the Pali and the Chinese versions differ significantly<sup>5</sup> [1.2.3.1]. The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta begins its account of marvellous qualities beginning with the Bodhisattva’s sojourn in Tusita heaven. He is said to be mindful and clearly comprehending when he is reborn in the Tusita heaven [§3], while living there [§§4-5], and when passing away from there [§6] to enter his mother’s womb [§7]. The Chinese version (MĀ 32), however, only mentions the Bodhisattva’s clear comprehension when passing away from Tusita heaven and descending into his mother’s womb.<sup>6</sup>

**1.2.2.2** The Bodhisattva’s initial vow to attain buddhahood occurs not only as the 1<sup>st</sup> marvel, but is repeated in connection with the 2<sup>nd</sup> marvel (the Bodhisattva’s rebirth in Tuṣita), and both for the 3<sup>rd</sup> marvel (the Bodhisattva excelling other Tuṣita devas)—in the sequence 1, 1+2, 1+2+3, 4 etc. From the 4<sup>th</sup> marvel onwards, however, the discourse simply lists each marvel singly, without repeating those mentioned earlier. This irregularity found at the beginning of the listing regarding the Bodhisattva’s vow, concludes **Analayo**, “gives the impression that some form of change took place during the transmission of the discourse, quite probably caused by the inclusion of the Bodhisattva’s initial vow to pursue buddhahood in the listing of marvels.” (2010f:86, standardized)

### 1.2.3 The Bodhisattva’s vow in the Chinese version

**1.2.3.1** The Madhyama Āgama records or introduces an innovation in the evolution of the Buddha doctrine in China. Its very first wonderful and marvellous quality of the Buddha is not the Bodhisattva’s sojourn in the Tusita heaven, but the Bodhisattva’s “initial vow” (始願 *shǐ yuàn*)<sup>7</sup> to become a Buddha when he was a monk under Kassapa Buddha. The Chinese Discourse on Marvellous Qualities (MĀ 32) says:

“The Blessed One, at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa, made his initial vow to [realize] Buddhahood [while] practising the holy life” (世尊迦葉佛時，始願佛道，行梵行 *shìzūn jiāyèfó shí, shìyuàn fó dào, xíng fàn xíng*).<sup>8</sup>

The far-reaching implications of this statement turns on a single character—始 *shǐ*, “initial.”<sup>9</sup> It means that this was the very first time Gotama (as Sumedha) made his aspiration or vow to attain buddhahood.

<sup>5</sup> See **Analayo** 2011: Table 13.2. **Thich Minh Chau** thinks that “the accounts of the Buddha’s ... marvellous qualities are not the same in both versions, each seems to derive from an independent source.” (1964:165).

<sup>6</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.470a14) speaks of the Bodhisattva’s “knowledge,” 知 *zhī*. Similarly, **Mahāsāmvartanīkathā** speaks of his mindfulness, *smṛti* (**Okano** 1998:113). **Thich Minh Chau** notes that MĀ 32 does not use the expression “bodhisattva,” but instead refers to the Buddha even before his awakening with the expression the “Blessed One,” 世尊 *shìzūn* (1964:165). For other similar cases, see **Analayo** 2010f:16 n3.

<sup>7</sup> In Skt, this is prob *pūrva,praṇidhāna*, “past vow or aspiration”: see Princeton Dict of Buddhism: praṇidhāna. The Pali near-syn is *mūla,paṇidhāna = abhinīhāra* (SnA 1:48 = ApA 140). Interestingly, the phrase *pubba,patthāna abhinīhāra*, “past aspiraton, earnest vow” refers to Aññā Koṇḍañña’s aspiration to the position of seniormost monk in terms of rains (monastic age) (AA 1:135): this is prob an early comy term before it became more technical, referring to the aspiration to Buddhahood, as *abhinīhāra* is used in later canonical works (B 1:75; qu at CA 5,34\*; and other comys): see CPD: abhinīhara (c); Ency Bsm 1:94 f: abhinīhara. On Skt *abhinīhāra*, see Dayal 1932:64-67. Such terms or concepts are not found in the earlier suttas.

<sup>8</sup> Tr by Thich Minh Chau (1991:159) as “at the time of the Buddha Chia-yeh (Kassapa), the [World Honoured] One began to make the vow to become a Buddha and to practise the brahma-life” (MĀ 32 @ T1.469c24). For a study of this passage and its significance, see **Analayo** 2010f:84-92.

<sup>9</sup> A comparison of various eds of this sentence confirms this reading, as it is found in the various Chin Tripiṭaka:

The fact that this statement has no parallel in the Pāli version makes it likely that this particular marvel is a later addition. Likewise, the Bodhisattva's 1<sup>st</sup> lion-roar right after his birth, is also found only in the Pāli version [3.5.2.3].

Significantly, however, **the (Majjhima) Ghaṭṭikara Sutta** (M 81) and its Chinese (Madhyama Āgama) parallel, which records the activities of the Bodhisattva under Kassapa Buddha, make no mention of such a vow.<sup>10</sup>

**1.2.3.2** The tradition of **the Bodhisattva's vow** [1.2.3.1] is a post-Buddha innovation that probably had parallel developments in both the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna sects during the commentarial period. The earliest hint we have of the concept—that the Bodhisattva at some point made an aspiration for Buddhahood—is probably in **the Buddha,vaṃsa** (B 2.55+61+177), a late canonical work. Notably, it was not accepted as canonical by the Dīgha,bhāṇakas.<sup>11</sup>

The older parts of the Pali canon—**the Mahā'padāna Sutta** (D 14, SD 49.8a)<sup>12</sup> and **the Vinaya** (V 3:7 f)<sup>13</sup>—mention only 7 buddhas: 6 past buddhas and Gotama.<sup>14</sup> Only **the Buddha,vaṃsa** lists a total of 24 buddhas (plus 3 others before them) [3.1.4]. Clearly this is a “developed Bodhisattva doctrine” (Norman 1983: 94).

E J Thomas (*History of Buddhist Thought*) thinks that this tradition was “adopted” by the Lokōttara,-vāda<sup>15</sup> (a subsect of the Mahāsaṅghika,<sup>16</sup> and source of the Mahāvastu) or the Sarvāstivāda<sup>17</sup> (which arose

宋版磧砂大藏經	<i>sòng bǎn qì shā dà zàng jīng</i>	(Song Qisha Canon, 1234-1322)	T17.485c10;
房山石經	<i>fáng shān shí jīng</i>	(Fangshan Stone Sutras, 7 <sup>th</sup> cent)	T21.75a9;
高麗大藏經	<i>gāo lí dà zàng jīng</i>	(Tripiṭaka Koreana, 13 <sup>th</sup> cent)	T17.1085b11;
洪武南藏	<i>hóng wǔ nán zàng</i>	(The Hongwu Southern Tripiṭaka, 14 <sup>th</sup> cent)	T90.533a10;
永樂北藏	<i>yǒng lè běi zàng</i>	(Yongle Northern Tripiṭaka, 15 <sup>th</sup> cent),	T55.209a10;
乾隆大藏經	<i>qián lóng dà zàng jīng</i>	(Qianlong Tripiṭaka, 18 <sup>th</sup> cent)	T46.678a10;
卍正藏經	<i>wàn zhèng zàng jīng</i>	(Manji Canon, 1912)	T22.589b16;
中華大藏經	<i>zhōng huā dà zàng jīng</i>	(Chinese MSS in the Tripiṭaka Sinica, 1983-97)	T75-6.36384a10;
佛教大藏經	<i>fó jiào dà zàng jīng</i>	(Buddhist Tripiṭaka, Taipei, 1978-1983)	T22.636,19.

Hirakawa, in his dictionary lists Skt equivalents like *ādi, prathama; ārambha; agra, ādya, pūrva, prathamāt* (1997: 360).

<sup>10</sup> **M 81/2:45-54** (SD 49.3) and **MĀ 63** (T1.499a-503a). **Mahā,vastu**, however, does record that the Bodhisattva received a prediction from Kassapa Buddha: see Analayo 2011:450. Sources that recount the Bodhisattva's life under Kassapa Buddha as the life preceding his sojourn in Tusita heaven incl: **MĀ 32** (T1.469c27); **Saṅgha.bheda,vastu** (Gnoli 1977:21,1). According to the Pali commentarial tradition—J 1:47,16 and MA 4:169,7—however, it is his life as **Vessantara** (J 547) that precedes his Tusita birth (J 547/6:479,1): for Saṅgha.bheda,vastu's version, see Gnoli 1978a: 119,10.

<sup>11</sup> See Norman 1983:9 (3.5.15).

<sup>12</sup> See Norman 1983:36 (§3.1.2).

<sup>13</sup> The 6 past Buddhas—Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa—are listed in **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,1.4 f/3:2 f); **Jātaka Nidāna** (J 1:42 f); **Vinaya** (Pār1.3 @ V 3:7 f); see SD 49.8a. On Sikhī, see **Aruṇa,vatī S** (S 6.14/1:156 f). On the 24 buddhas, see DhA 1.8/1:84.

<sup>14</sup> On the 6 past buddhas + Gotama, see DhA 14.4/3:236.

<sup>15</sup> **Lokōttara,vāda** (the Supermundane School), which taught that the Buddha is “transworldly” (*lokōttara*), ie, transcendental (not of this world), quasi-theistic (God-like) and docetic (a projection of the cosmic Buddha). See under Lokottara-vada in Oxford Dict of Buddhism & Princeton Dict of Buddhism.

<sup>16</sup> **Mahāsaṅghika** (the Great Assembly) which arose from the schism with **the Sthaviras** (Elders) after the 2<sup>nd</sup> council (Vesālī, 100 years after the Buddha, and possibly just before the 3<sup>rd</sup> council (Pāṭaliputta 1). Their views on the Vinaya and the nature of the arhat differ from those of early Buddhism. Apparently, it is the ancestor, or at least one of the ancient roots, of the Mahāyāna tradition. See Routledge Ency of Buddhism 484 f: Mahāsaṅghika.

in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) (1933:204). K R Norman, on the other hand, thinks that the Bodhisattva doctrine could be “an idea old enough to be common to both the Theravādins and the Sarvāstivādins, who developed it much further” (1983:94 §3.5.14).

“In view of the state of development of both the Buddha and the Bodhisattva doctrines,” Norman adds, “it would seem that the Buddhavaṃsa is a relatively late addition to the canon” (1983:94). As we have just noted, the Dīgha,bhāṇakas did not regard it as canonical.<sup>18</sup>

However, like the Buddhavaṃsa, the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta, too, deals with **the Bodhisattva myth**. Apparently, the Sutta perhaps marks the earliest stage, the beginning, of the evolution of the Bodhisattva ideal. It is likely that these two works were compiled after the Buddha’s death, whose significance in that context we will examine later. [3]

**1.2.3.3** Such an inclusion of the marvel of **the Bodhisattva’s initial vow**, taken in the time of the past Kassapa Buddha (Skt *kāśyapa*), would have been a result of the Chinese version introducing a “temporally wider frame.” While the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta lists marvels that occurred from the time of the Bodhisattva’s birth in Tuṣita to his birth on earth, the Madhyama Āgama version covers marvels that happened before his Tuṣita birth and marvels that happened after his birth.<sup>19</sup> Since the Sarvāstivāda records that the Bodhisattva’s Tusita life was preceded by his monkhood under Kassapa Buddha,<sup>20</sup> we can only conclude that the “temporally wider frame” adopted in the Chinese version imported a marvel from that time.

Further evidence that the Bodhisattva’s initial vow was a later addition to the Chinese listing of marvels in MĀ 32 comes from the Chinese version of **the Ghaṭikāra Sutta** (M 81)—that is, MĀ 63<sup>21</sup>—which records the meeting between Kassapa Buddha and the Bodhisattva as the brahmin youth Jotipāla. Neither MĀ 32 nor MĀ 63 make any mention of Jotipāla (Skt *jyotipāla*) (who was to become Gotama Buddha) vowing or aspiring to be a Bodhisattva.

**1.2.3.4 Analayo** concludes: “This is remarkable, given that this decision is reported in the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the same Madhyama Āgama collection. Such a decision would be too important to be overlooked in an account of the meeting between the Bodhisattva and Kassapa Buddha. This suggests that the Madhyama Āgama parallel to the Ghaṭikāra Sutta may well stem from a time when the idea of a decision taken by the Bodhisattva at the time of Kassapa Buddha to pursue the path to Buddhahood had not yet come into being.” (2010f:86, standardized)

**1.2.3.5** Other texts record the Bodhisattva’s taking up the path to Buddhahood in some remotely distant past life. **The Buddhavaṃsa**, for example, records that Gotama had already received a prediction of his future buddhahood from Dīpaṅkara Buddha, the first of the 24 past buddhas [3.1.4], of which Kassapa is the last. [1.2.3.2]

A general tendency of these accounts is to shift Gotama’s aspiration for buddhahood to an ever more distant past. As a consequence of this progressive back-shift in works like the Buddhavaṃsa, the Jātaka Nidāna, the Mahā,vastu, the Avadāna,śataka and the Saṅgha.bheda,vastu, the Bodhisattva’s meeting

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<sup>17</sup> **Sarvāstivāda**, arising in 3<sup>rd</sup> cent BCE, was apparently expelled from the main tradition of the Elders (Skt *sthavira*; P *thera*) at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pāṭaliputta council. They were influential in Kashmir (Vaibhāṣika) and Gandhara (Mūla,sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika), the ancient strongholds of Mahāyāna.

<sup>18</sup> See Norman 1983:9 (3.5.15).

<sup>19</sup> Nakamura comments that, compared to M 123, MĀ 32 “represents a movement toward a more fully organized biography” (2000a:68).

<sup>20</sup> See Analayo 2010f:78 n73.

<sup>21</sup> The Chin version of M 81 is **MĀ 63** (T1.499a-503a).

with Kassapa Buddha assumes the function of confirming his quest.<sup>22</sup> Kassapa Buddha's confirmation of the Bodhisattva Gotama's impending buddhahood then becomes the end in a series of such proclamations made by past buddhas.

"Now most of the sources that record the taking of such a vow by the bodhisattva Gotama or the predictions he received from other buddhas belong to a later textual stratum than the early discourses. This makes it reasonable to assume that the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities (MĀ 32) may have preserved a remnant of an incipient stage in the development of the idea that in a former life the Bodhisattva Gotama made a vow to follow the path to buddhahood. That is, in the beginning stages of the development of this idea the vow was—quite naturally one might say—associated with the buddha that immediately preceded Gotama Buddha." (Analayo 2010f:88)

With the growing glorification of Gotama Buddha, in due course, the period he was held to have required for developing the necessary qualifications would naturally have expanded, causing the start of his quest for buddhahood to a more distant past.<sup>23</sup>

**1.2.3.6** In sum, the encounter between the Bodhisattva and the past buddha Kassapa seems to have gone through 3 main stages:

- (1) The Bodhisattva Gotama as the brahmin youth Jotipāla renounces under Kassapa Buddha: see **Ghaṭīkāra Sutta** and its Madhyama Āgama parallel.
- (2) This meeting inspires the Bodhisattva to take the vow to become a buddha himself: **Discourse on Marvellous Qualities** (MĀ 32).
- (3) The Bodhisattva's meeting with Kassapa Buddha reconfirms his impending buddhahood by way of a prediction, since he has taken the Buddha-vow much earlier [MĀ 32; Kvu 288,34].<sup>24</sup> [1.2.4.3]

#### **1.2.4 The Bodhisattva's vow in the Pali texts**

**1.2.4.1** Assuming that the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities (MĀ 32) testifies to an incipient stage in the evolution of the notion that the Bodhisattva took a vow to Buddhahood, reasons **Analayo**, "the question may be asked whether the context in which this vow occurs provides any rationale for the arising of such a notion. In other words, does the account in the Ghaṭīkāra Sutta and its Chinese parallel (MĀ 23) give any indication as to what might have been responsible for the arising of the idea of a vow, taken by the Bodhisattva at that time?" (2010f:90)

When considered from this perspective, it is noteworthy that, after reporting that the Bodhisattva renounced under Kassapa Buddha, **the Ghaṭīkāra Sutta** (M 81) and its Chinese parallel give no further information about him. That is, in these two discourses the potter Ghāṭīkāra shows exemplary conduct and praiseworthy qualities, but the Bodhisattva (Jotipāla) shows nothing inspiring. This is remarkable, since the Bodhisattva, as a rule, presents himself with exemplary conduct, as attested in the Jātaka stories. Such cases of noble conduct build up significantly to fruit into Buddhahood.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Avadāna,śataka (Speyer 1906:239,7; 1909:23,5 + 51,8 + 88,1); Buddha,vamsa (B 25.16/93,6); Jātaka Nidāna (J 1:43,20); Mahā,vastu (Senart 1882a:332,2); Saṅgha.bheda,vastu (Gnoli 1977:163,15; 1978:3,26 + 52,7 + 67,9).

<sup>23</sup> Wangchuk notes that "the changing view of the nature of the Buddha directly affected how his initial resolution was viewed." "When and how the historical Buddha resolved to become a *buddha* for the first time was [thus] perceived differently at different times and places in different texts and traditions" (2007:92f). See also Dayal 1932:293.

<sup>24</sup> Shiraishi suggests that the Buddha's death affected his followers such that "their devotion and adoration made them even believe that Śākyamuni exerted himself not only in this last rebirth, but in his former one also ... [that already then] he had expressed his bodhi wishes and ... had been given the assuring prophecy to be a future buddha," a development that continued until "all ... [past] buddhas gave him their assuring prophecies" (1958:311 f).

Ironically, however, as the brahmin youth Jotipāla, living in Kassapa Buddha's time, which is very close in time to his own buddhahood, he plays only a secondary role in the story. Instead of making an inspiring example of himself, the Bodhisattva vehemently refuses to meet the Buddha and even disparages him!

**1.2.4.2** Another noteworthy aspect of this story is that, once the Bodhisattva has developed faith and renounced under Kassapa Buddha, nothing more is heard about him. Neither the Ghaṭikāra Sutta nor its Chinese version record any exemplary act or worthy attainment during that time. Instead, both discourses highlight the noble qualities of the potter Ghaṭikāra.

Then, in the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities (MĀ 32), this somewhat uninspiring record of the Bodhisattva's monkhood under the past Buddha Kassapa becomes a marvellous and wonderful quality through a shift of perspective. It is only natural that no further attainment or distinction achieved during his life as a monk under Kassapa Buddha has been recorded, as at that time he decided to pursue the career of becoming a buddha. Hence, far from being a failure, his period as a monk under the past buddha becomes inspiring and marvellous since "at the time of Kassapa Buddha, [he] made his initial vow to buddhahood in practising the holy life."<sup>26</sup> Thus, this marvel seems to explain why he did not take full advantage of the teachings on the path of awakening, directly available to him from a fully awakened buddha—that is, he had aspired to attain buddhahood himself.

**1.2.4.3 The Mahā,vastu** deals with the same issue in a more explicit manner. It reports that, on an occasion after the brahmin youth had renounced, Kassapa Buddha assembled his monks and told them to sit in meditation without getting up until their defilements were destroyed.<sup>27</sup> This instruction quite dramatically highlights the type of conduct that, from the perspective of the early suttas, would be appropriate for someone who renounced under a Buddha. The Mahā,vastu goes on to say that the brahmin youth instead aspired to become a buddha himself. This obviously excused him from not carrying the fervent practice to its highest fruition.

The way the Mahā,vastu directly and ingeniously resolves the dilemma of the Bodhisattva's lack of attainment by declaring that at that time he had aspired to buddhahood. In this way, a clear precedent was set for later developments, and naturally the next step was for the Bodhisattva to become a monk under Kassapa Buddha precisely to facilitate his own progress towards buddhahood, a step taken in the Kathā,vatthu and in the Saṅgha.bheda,vastu.<sup>28</sup>

In this way, **the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities** (MĀ 32) may well testify to an important intermediate stage in the development of the Bodhisattva ideal, when the doctrine of a **vow** for buddhahood emerges. Notably, the listings of past buddhas in the Mahā'padāna Sutta and its parallels have not yet taken this step, as they do not establish a direct relationship between the Bodhisattva and any of the

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<sup>25</sup> Ohnuma, eg, noted, "most jātakas portray the bodhisattva as an exemplary figure" (2004:401). Shaw similarly mentions that the Bodhisattva is only "very rarely shown with some faults," as "his behaviour is ... largely exemplary and an embodiment of heroic elements" (2006:xxii).

<sup>26</sup> See Analayo 2010f:85 n90.

<sup>27</sup> Mvst 1:329; Senart 1882a:329,17.

<sup>28</sup> Kvu 288,34: "It was said by the Blessed One: 'Ānanda, I lived the holy life under the Blessed One Kassapa for the sake of full awakening in the future'" (*vuttam bhagavatā: kassape aham, ānanda, bhagavati brahmacariyam acarim āyatim sambodhāyati*," a quote not found in any Pāli sutta. **Saṅgha.bheda,vastu** (Gnoli 1977:20,17) refers to "the Buddha, the Blessed One by the name of Kāśyapa ... in whose presence the Bodhisattva, the Blessed One, had lived the holy life for the sake of his aspiration for awakening in the future" (*kāśyapo nāma ... buddho bhagavān, yasya antike bodhisattvo bhagavān āyatyām bodhāya prañidhāya brahmacariyam caritvā*).

past Buddhas.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities (MĀ 32) appears to reflect a rather significant development in the bodhisattva idea, which lays a crucial foundation for the rise of the Bodhisattva Ideal.

## 2 Sutta highlights

### 2.1 MARVELS

#### 2.1.1 The descent

Both the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta and its Chinese parallel (MĀ 32) say that the Bodhisattva's **descent into his mother's womb** (the conception)<sup>30</sup> was accompanied by the appearance of a great radiance and earthquakes<sup>31</sup> [§7]. The great radiance marking this event is also reported in **the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 1** (A 4.127) that lists the Buddha's 4 marvellous qualities. The last three qualities are the appearance of a great radiance when the Bodhisattva was born, when he attained awakening, and when he began to teach Dharma.<sup>32</sup> According to **the Mahā'padāna Sutta** and its Chinese and Sanskrit versions, the appearance of a great radiance and earthquakes are the rule when a bodhisattva descends into his mother's womb.<sup>33</sup>

#### 2.1.2 Other marvels

Most of the qualities of the Buddha mentioned in the rest of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta (M 123) are, according to **the Mahā'padāna Sutta** and its parallels, standard occurrences for buddhas in general.<sup>34</sup> The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta next takes up the external conditions of the Bodhisattva in his mother's womb,

<sup>29</sup> Gokuldas notes that in the Pāli tradition such a direct relation is entirely absent from the Mahā'padāna Sutta, in contrast to its prominence in the Buddha,vaṃsa (1951:26). Walters points out that in "*Mahāpadāna [Sutta]* the ... frame is not [yet] universal soteriology" (1997:184 n22)

<sup>30</sup> On the Bodhisattva's conception, see SD 52.1 (2).

<sup>31</sup> §7.2 (M 3:120,8) + §7.5 (M 3:120,15); MĀ 32 (T1.470a15). According to **Mahāvastu**, the Bodhisattva's descent (conception) with mindfulness and clear comprehension was accompanied by 6 earthquakes (Mvst 1:206 2:10; Basak 1963a:251,6; Senart 1882a:206,16; and Basak 1965:14,9; Senart 1890:10,9). A number of earthquakes are also recorded in **Lalita,vistara** (Hokazono 1994:376,4; Lefmann 1902:51,19; Vaidya 1958b:39,10). **Saṅgha,bheda,-vastu** only reports a single great earthquake accompanied by a radiance (Gnoli 1977:41,7). For a study of earthquakes in Buddhist literature, see Ciurtin 2009. Reynolds notes that "the Buddha's birth is presented as a cosmic event in which his character as a *mahāpurisa* ... is evident to those who have the eyes to see" (1985:214).

<sup>32</sup> A 4.127/2:130,20 (SD 52.2a). **Eka,puggala Vg** (A 1.13.6) states that "with the manifestation of the Tathagata, a great eye, a great light, and a great radiance occur" (*mahato cakkhussa ... mahato alokassa ... mahato obhasassa patubhavo hoti*, A 1.13.6/1:22,29). The "great eye" is clearly a figure referring to the effect of the Buddha's knowledge. It is possible that mentions of physical light accompanying the Bodhisattva's descent (conception) and his birth (eg, **Acchariya,abbhuta S**, M 123, or **Acchariya,abbhuta S 1**, A 4.127), are based on this passage but taken *literally*. This radiance is prob a common religious tradition of the time: the Jain Ṭhāṇaṅga 4.324, too, lists 4 occasions of a great radiance, viz: when arhats are born, when they go forth, when they gain realization, and when they gain final nirvana (Jambuvijaya 1985:141,4).

<sup>33</sup> D 14/2:12,6; DĀ (T1.3c14); and Skt in fragment 420dR6 (Fukita 2003:53 (93.6); Waldschmidt 1953:45). Gokhale says that "these events are explained as the result of *dharmatā* ... implying that they are not causally connected with the Buddha as such, but occur because it is the nature or order of things" (1994:98).

<sup>34</sup> Bareau suggests that several elements in the account of Gotama's youth may have at first been used as part of a fictional account of the past buddha Vipassī. This fictional account would, in time, have been taken to be the norm for all buddhas. Then, it is applied to Gotama's narrative (1974a:240, 245, 254).



adding that 4 devaputras protected him,<sup>35</sup> and that his mother was virtuous, free from sensual thoughts and affliction, but also enjoyed the 5 types of sense-pleasures and was able to see the Bodhisattva in her womb.<sup>36</sup>

The Chinese version, however, does not mention these events. It only describes how the Bodhisattva rested inside the womb on his right side, was able to stretch his body, and was unsullied by blood or any other bodily impurities.<sup>37</sup>

## 2.2 MĀYĀ'S DEATH

**2.2.1** Another marvellous quality listed in the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta is not really about the Bodhisattva, but about his mother. She **passed away 7 days after giving birth** and was reborn in Tusita heaven [§13].<sup>38</sup> The Chinese version, however, makes no mention of her death at all.

Regarding this discrepancy, the chronological order of events should be noted in the two parallel versions. The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta begins with the Bodhisattva's Tusita birth, then mentions his qualities while he was there, followed by his departure from there and descent into his mother's womb. Then, it relates the Bodhisattva's qualities while he was in the mother's womb.

Chronologically, events or qualities related to the mother's pregnancy and her giving birth should follow. The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta, however, here relates **the death of the Bodhisattva's mother**. Then, it continues by describing her pregnancy and giving birth. Hence, the mention of his mother's

<sup>35</sup> §8.2 (M 3:120,22). The presence of 4 great kings is also recorded in **Lalita,vistara** (Hokazono 1994:372,5; Lefmann 1902:50,5; Vaidya 1958b:38,3); **Mahā,vastu** (Basak 1965:15,5; Senart 1890:10,1); and **Saṅgha.bheda,vastu** (Gnoli 1977:42,3). Comy explains that these were the 4 great kings (*catunnaṃ mahārājānaṃ vasena vuttarāṃ*), whom Lalita,vistara refers as the "protectors of the 4 quarters" (*caturdiśāsu pālāḥ*), and Mahāvastu as the 4 "world protectors" (*loka,pāla*). In **Saṅgha.bheda,vastu**, however, the protectors are Sakra and 4 deva,putras (MA 4:179,5).

<sup>36</sup> §9.2 (M 3:120,30), §10.2 (M 3:131,3), §11.2 (M 3:121,10), §12.2 (M 3:121,17), §12.3 (M 3:121,19). According to **Lalitavistara** and **Mahā,vastu**, the virtuous conduct of the Bodhisattva's mother had already begun before the Bodhisattva descended into her womb (**Lalv**: Hokazono 1994:352,1; Lefmann 1902:41,18; Vaidya 1958b:29,26; **Mvst** 1:202, 2:6-8; Basak 1965:8,3; Senart 1890:6,2). **M 123** describes the mother's ability to see her child in her womb to be like a multi-coloured thread strung through a beryl gem (M 123,12.4/3:121,20)—this image recurs in the same context in **Saṅgha.bheda,vastu** (Gnoli 1977:42,16). **Lalita,vistara** compares her seeing the Bodhisattva to one looking at oneself in a clean mirror (Hokazono 1994:418,16; Lefmann 1902:72,9; Vaidya 1958b:53,20). **Mahā,vastu** reports that she saw her child as a golden body, a vision comparable to a beryl placed in a crystal casket (Mvst 2:14, 16; cf 1:221, 2:22; Basak 1965:23,10; Senart 1890:16,16). On the mother's body being compared to a relic-shrine (*ceṭiya*), see Drewes 2007:107-110. Durt notes that as part of "a larger programme of quasi-deification of the Buddha ... Māyā appears as a living tabernacle sheltering her son" (2003:44). T W Rhys Davids observes that "the myth of the visible embryo recurs in medieval Christian art" (D:RD 2:10 n1).

<sup>37</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.470a27). **Saṅgha,bheda.vastu** also reports that the Bodhisattva stays unsullied in the womb (Gnoli 1977:42,7). For a study of marvels attending the Bodhisattva's birth, in the light of ancient Indian perceptions of birth conditions, see Hara 1980.

<sup>38</sup> §13 (M 3:122,2). References to the mother's death 7 days after giving birth is also found in **Lalita,vistara** (Hokazono, 1994:470,5; Lefmann 1902:98,3; Vaidya 1958b:70,25); **Mahā,vastu** 2:3 (Basak 1965:5,1; Senart 1890:3,18) (here it implies she would live for 7 days besides the time of pregnancy); **Saṅgha.bheda,vastu** (Gnoli 1977:51,18); and in several biographies of the Buddha in Chinese translations, eg, T184 (T3.465a23), T185 (T3.474b7), T188 (T3.-618b14), and T189 (T3.623b9). Obeyesekere suggests that "the death of Māyā seven days after the Buddha's birth cannot be taken literally, or even to mean that 'she died soon after' ... rather, Māyā's death is a structural requirement of the myth: the pure womb from which the Buddha was born could not thereafter be contaminated by child-birth or sexual pollution" (1997:475). **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14) gives the name of the Bodhisattva's mother as "queen Māyā" (*māyā devī*, D 14/2:52,10). Von Hinüber speculates that this "was not originally meant to be a personal name, but simply is the eastern form corresponding to *mātādevī* [queen mother]." (1995b:189)

death falls out of sequence—which suggests that this episode is a later addition. Moreover, the mother's death does not fit in with the list of wonderful and marvellous qualities of the Bodhisattva. It is actually a characteristic of the mother.

**2.2.2 The App'āyuka Sutta** (U 5.2) deals with the premature death of the Bodhisattva's mother. When Ānanda expresses his astonishment that the Bodhisattva's mother dies 7 days after the nativity, the Buddha endorses this fact and utters a verse reflecting on impermanence.<sup>39</sup>

Unlike the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta, the App'āyuka Sutta does not regard her premature death as a marvellous quality of the Buddha, but as something marvellous in itself, that is, as a reminder on “how the all is lost” (*taṃ sabbam jānim*). This consideration is more natural than to reckon her death as one of the wonderful and marvellous qualities of the Bodhisattva or the Buddha.

Considering that the location of the mother's death is out of sequence in the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta, it is possible that, at some point during the sutta transmission, this Udāna passage must have been added to the Buddha's marvellous qualities in the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta without any regard for its chronology.

## 2.3 THE NATIVITY

**2.3.1 The right side.** After mentioning the death of the Bodhisattva's mother, the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta (M 123) goes on to note the duration of her pregnancy and that she stood while giving birth.<sup>40</sup> Again, these details are omitted in the Chinese version. Other biographies often mention this unusual manner of giving birth, and that the Bodhisattva emerged from the mother's right side.<sup>41</sup> **The Mahā, -vastu**, too, mentions this and discusses how the Bodhisattva managed to emerge without hurting his mother. Considering the ideological inclination of the Mahāvastu authors—the Lokottara,vāda (a subject

<sup>39</sup> U 5.2/48,4 (SD 52.1(2.2.2)).

<sup>40</sup> §14 (M 3:122,7) + §15 (M 3:122,15). Her pregnancy term is also mentioned **Lalita,vistara** (Hokazono 1994:420,-15; Lefmann 1902:73,11; Vaidya 1958b:54,7) and **Mahā,vastu** 2.8 (Basak 1965:25,11; Senart 1890:8,7). The traditional “10 lunar months” of Māyā's pregnancy has been noted by scholars (Franke 1914b:337 n1; Printz 1925: 120), that this was “according to the classical Indian method of calculation” (Durt 2002:46).

<sup>41</sup> Also in **Buddha,carita** 1:9 (Johnston 1936:1), **Mahā,vastu** 1.206 (Basak 1963a:250,8; Senart 1882a:206,4); **T184** (T3.463c13), **T185** (T3.473c1), **T188** (T3.618a17), **T189** (T3.625a24), **T193** (T4.58b21), and in Bu ston's *History of Buddhism* (Obermiller 1932:11). For Ajaṅṭā cave-paintings of the event, see Schlingloff 1988a:4 + 2000a:4-5 and 60-61; for sculptural representations in Gandhāra art, see Dehejia 1997:51 fig 42; Foucher 1905:301-321; Kurita 1988: 12 plates P1-V to VI and 31-38 plates 31-53; Klimburg-Salter 1995:274 + fig 157; Luczanits 2008a:217 pl 147; Stoye 2008a:186 pl 4 2008b:194 pl 3; Tanabe 2007:18-20 figs I-6 to I-9.1; Zwalf 1996:89-95 pls 145-152 + 154. For its artistic depictions at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, see Rama 1995:50-51 + pl 4; Rao 1956:84-85 pl 25. On the iconography of the nativity, see Foucher 1934. The Bodhisattva's emergence from his mother's side was known to Hieronymus: Dihle 1965:38. The future buddha Maitreya will be born in the same way, EĀ 48.3 (T2.788b2). Bollée suggests that “the lateral birth idea ... perhaps ... originated in the custom of carrying children on the hip” (2005:15). Dayal notes that “the idea of being born from the mother's side is referred to in a R̥gveda hymn (R̥g 4.18.1)” (1932:298). Printz explains that, according to ancient Indian beliefs, when a foetus is on the right side of the womb, it will be a boy; while a foetus on the left means that it will be a girl (1925:125). This prob explains why, according to the traditional account, the Bodhisattva dwelled on the right side of his mother's womb (MĀ 32 @ 1.470a27) and issued from her right side. The association of a male child with the right side occurs in **Divyāvadāna**: *saced dārako bhavati dakṣiṇam kuṣṭhīm nisritya tiṣṭhati, saced dārikā bhavati vāmaṅkuṣṭhīm nisritya tiṣṭhati* (Cowell 1886:2,7; Vaidya 1999:1,17; cf **Abhidharma,kośa Bhāṣya** (Abhk 3.15: Pradhan 1967:126,24); T1558 (T29.46c17), T1559 (T29.203b27). Bucknell explains that in ancient Indian religious thought the female is associated with the left side of the body, as well as with the moon, water, the out-breath, and vowels, while the male is associated with the right side of the body, with the sun, fire, the in-breath, and consonants (1980:40).

of the Mahāsaṅghika) [1.2.3.2 n] innovatively states that a Tathagata took birth by way of a mind-made body!<sup>42</sup>

**2.3.2 Two streams of water.** The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta (M 123) and its Chinese version agree that, on being born, the Bodhisattva was received by gods.<sup>43</sup> The two versions describe that his body was unsullied by any impurity. Still, 2 streams of water, one cool and the other warm, appeared miraculously to wash mother and child anyway.<sup>44</sup> The Chinese version adds that a lake appeared miraculously so that the mother could take a bath, and a shower of heavenly flowers fell on the newborn child.<sup>45</sup>

### **2.3.3 Radiance, tremors and beings perceiving one another**

**2.3.3.1 The great boundless light** [§7,2] means that we now have the opportunity to study the significance of each of these key events. Each of them has been briefly explained elsewhere.<sup>46</sup> We need to reflect on them, especially how they significantly differ from the God-religions and priestcraft. Briefly, we should reflect on each of the 4 key events as follows:

- heaven has nothing to do with spiritual development: good is something within us;
- being human is the best way we can and must work for our personal growth and spiritual development;
- we can either choose to become a buddha (long and difficult) or awaken as his follower (this life itself);

<sup>42</sup> Mahā,vastu 1:218 (Basak 1963a:266,14; Senart 1882a:218,15). It explains that *manomayena rūpeṇa prādurbhonti tathāgatā* (Basak 1965:29,3; Senart 1890:20,16), which Jones points out as a typical “tenet of the Lokottaravadins” (1949:174 n1), ie, the Buddha was merely a “phantom” projection from the cosmic Buddha. T Rahula, after a similar explanation, quips, “the justification is forgotten in an attempt to reason the seven strides, which was necessary, according to the tradition (*āgama*), because the Bodhisattva was tired of the ten months’ uterine confinement” (1978:74); cf Mvst 2:21 (Basak 1965:29,10; Senart 1890:21,3).

<sup>43</sup> §§16+17 (M 3:122,21) considers this as two separate events: it distinguishes between the Bodhisattva being first received by the gods and that, this was done so that he did not touch the ground at all, and then the gods presented him to his mother. MĀ 32 (T1.470b22), however, relates them as a single event, without explicitly mentioning that he did not touch the ground. For an early depiction of this event in art, see Schlingloff 1981a:186-188 (with refs to other representations).

<sup>44</sup> §18.2 (M 3:122,33) + §19.3 (M 3:123,11); MĀ 32 (T1.470b2; T1.470c7), **Lalita,vistara** (Hokazono 1994:440,16 + 442,8; Lefmann 1902:83,10+22; Vaidya 1958b:61,21 + 62,1); **Mahā,vastu** 2:24 (Basak 1965:33,3 + 34,4; Senart 1890:24,1 + 20 (the miraculous appearance of the 2 streams of water comes up again: Basak 1968:228,8; Senart 1897:380,13) and **Saṅgha.bheda,vastu** (Gnoli 1977:45,5+16). **Saṅgha.bheda,vastu**, elaborating on the purity of the mother’s womb, reports that, even before the Bodhisattva descended into the womb, Sakra had purified her womb to prepare it for receiving the Bodhisattva (Gnoli 1977:40,6). For a Jain counterpart to this motif, see Alsdorf 1947:125 and Roth 1983:182. Klimkeit explains that these passages highlight the contrast between the Bodhisattva’s purity with the defilement of worldliness symbolized by the mother’s womb (2000:222). Robinson remarks that “the purpose of all the mythical elements in the nativity cycle is to show that the Bodhisattva was innately different from ordinary man” (1970:7). Schlingloff explains that descriptions of the Buddha’s life were not meant as historical records, hence, to treat them as such is to misunderstand their purpose (“die Lebensbeschreibungen wollten nicht historische Reminiszenzen an tatsächliche Ergebnisse ... überliefern; sie wollten auch nicht etwa durch erfundene Berichte Authentizität vortäuschen. Wenn wir derartige Absichten voraussetzen, unterstellen wir den Erzählern ein historisches Bewußtsein, daß jener Zeit völlig fremd war”) (1962b:86); cf also Klimkeit 1990:35. Thus, the appearance of streams of water to bathe the already purified bodhisattva has only a symbolic function.

<sup>45</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.470c3+11); cf also **Saṅgha.bheda,vastu** (Gnoli 1977:45,18). According to §14 (M 3:122,14), the 2 streams of water were for the use of the Bodhisattva and of his mother, so that in its account there is no need for an additional source of water for the mother to clean herself.

<sup>46</sup> See SD 52.2a (2).

- as long as the Buddha’s teaching is with us, we can progress by ourself on the path of awakening.

The radiance signifies that we are given the means and path of seeing things as they really are and to understand that everything is impermanent. When we understand that everything in this world and in heaven are subject to change—to exist is to change—then, we have a better and truer perspective of religion and reality. This is the foundation of liberating wisdom.<sup>47</sup>

**2.3.3.2 The perception of other beings** means that we are not alone in our life here and in this universe. All beings love their life and have the right to life. They have the right to have the means of life, such as food, clothing, shelter and health. Hence, they should be shown respect as a person or being. Our mutual existence will be enhanced if we learn to communicate properly valuing truth as the basis for the best benefits of such a communication. Finally, we all need to understand and master the power of our own minds for the sake of self-understanding and spiritual freedom. This is the spirit of **the 5 precepts** and their **5 values**.<sup>48</sup>

**2.3.3.3** M 123 and its Chinese version agree that a great radiance and earthquakes attended the Bodhisattva’s birth, after which he took 7 steps.<sup>49</sup> The Pali commentary explains, in agreement with two Chinese biographies of the Buddha, that the 7 steps of the bodhisattva right after his birth symbolized his later attainment of the 7 awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*).<sup>50</sup>

## 2.4 THE BODHISATTVA’S LAST BIRTH

### 2.4.1 The lion-roar

**2.4.1.1** The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta states that, not only is the bodhisattva able to walk right after birth, he even speaks, making his stentorian lion-roar that he is the supreme being in the world and that this is his last birth<sup>51</sup> [**§20.3**]. The Chinese version, on the other hand, makes no record of any proclamation on this occasion.<sup>52</sup> Other biographies of the Buddha preserved in Chinese, Sanskrit, and Tibetan,

<sup>47</sup> Further, see the 3 characteristics: SD 1.2 (2).

<sup>48</sup> See SD 1.5 (2) Table; SD 51.11 (2.2.3.4). Further see SD 52.2a (2.5.2.2).

<sup>49</sup> **§21.3** (M 3:123,19), **§21.6** (M 3:123,30), **§20.2** (M 3:124,4); MĀ32 (T1.470b6+29).

<sup>50</sup> MA 4:186,1: *satta,pada,gamanam satta,bojjhaṅga,ratana,paṭilābhassa pubba,nimittam*; T193 (T4.59a8); T194 (T4.122c3); cf **Maha,vastu** 3:112 (Basak 1968:69,4+5; Senart 1897:112,12+13). Dayal, commenting on the symbolic nature of these 7 steps, notes that in “Hindu marriage ceremony, the bride and the bridegroom take seven steps together [a]round the sacred fire” (1932:299). On the 7 awakening-factors, see (**Bojjhaṅga**) **Sīla S** (S 46.3), SD 10.15.

<sup>51</sup> **§20.3** (M 3:123,21). According to **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3/1:93,6 @ SD 21.3), and its Chin parallel, DĀ 20 (T1.83a8), the ability to speak right after birth was not unique to the Bodhisattva, as another boy, Kaṇhā, was able to speak right after his birth. Unlike the Bodhisattva, however, instead of making a majestic proclamation, he asked his mother to wash him because he had such dark skin [3.5.2.3]. For another instance where a baby is able to speak right on being born, see **Suppavāsa S** (U 2.8/17,27), SD 76.10. For accounts of the future Buddha’s ability to speak as a newly born baby in former lives, as Mah’osadha in **Vidhura J** (J 546/6:331,15), and as Vessantara in **Vessantara J** (J 547/6:485,-14). Derrett lists occurrences of the motif of a newly-born baby being able to walk and speak in ancient Greek mythology (1992:54). Karetzky comments that “because no child can immediately walk or talk, let alone make proclamations at birth, it is by these acts that the Buddha’s prodigious nature, even as an infant, is revealed” (1992:16). On the significance of this event, see also Analayo 2010f:38-46, Eliade, “*Sapta padāni kramati*,” 1948; Irwin, “The mystery of the (future) Buddha’s first words,” 1981.

<sup>52</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.470b29).

however, concur with the Sutta statement that the newborn Bodhisattva makes a proclamation.<sup>53</sup> While some only record his proclamation of being supreme,<sup>54</sup> others agree with the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta that the Bodhisattva also declares that this is his last birth.<sup>55</sup>

**2.4.1.2** Many suttas associate the Bodhisattva's proclamation to have reached his last birth with the Buddha's awakening.<sup>56</sup> For the Bodhisattva to make such a proclamation right after his birth would imply that he is destined for awakening. From this perspective, his struggle to reach awakening by various methods is also destined to end successfully. The assumption that the Buddha's awakening is inevitable even at his birth shows the beginning of tendencies that, in due course, led some post-Buddha traditions to assume that he is already awakened even at birth and that his activities are merely an illusory display for the sake of saving sentient beings.<sup>57</sup> This is a case of **docetic theology**.<sup>58</sup> Understandably, Nakamura concludes that "the verse claimed to have been proclaimed by the Buddha at his birth was composed very late" (1980:18).<sup>59</sup>

## **2.4.2 Chinese innovations**

While in the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta, Ānanda's account of the Buddha's wonderful and marvellous qualities comes to an end at this point, **the Chinese Madhyama Āgama version** (MĀ 32) continues to explore the same theme in relation to later events in the Buddha's life, describing that:

<sup>53</sup> Nakamura comments that "the verse ... proclaimed by the Buddha at his birth was composed very late" (1980: 18). Silk observes that according to the proclamation of supremacy the Bodhisattva "is virtually fully awakened ('enlightened') from the moment of his birth," highlighting the resulting contrast where "the infant, upon his birth, knows everything; the young man he becomes knows nothing" (2003:864).

<sup>54</sup> T184 (T3.463c14), T185 (T3.473c2), T188 (T3.618a19).

<sup>55</sup> T189 (T3.625a27); Buddha, carita 1.15 (Johnston 1936:2); Lalita, vistara (Hokazono 1994:444,8; Lefmann 1902: 85,1; Vaidya 1958b:62,18), Mahā, vastu 2:24 (Basak 1965:33,10; Senart 1890:24,8); Saṅgha, bheda, vastu (Gnoli 1977: 45,13; Bu ston's "History of Buddhism" (Obermiller 1932:11).

<sup>56</sup> **D** 29/3:134,12; **M** 26/1:167,28 + 173,19, **M** 128/3:162,25; **S** 14.31/2:171,2, **S** 14.32/2:172,12, **S** 22.26/3:28,33, **S** 22.27/3:29,29, **S** 35.13/4:8,2, **S** 35.14/4:8,26, **S** 35.15/4:9,30, **S** 35.16/4:10,21, **S** 48.21/5:204,12, **S** 48.28/5:206,6, **S** 56.11/5:423,10; **A** 3.101/1:1259,11+32, **A** 7.47/4:56,15, **A** 8.64/4:305,4, and **A** 9.41/4:448,19. Only **Mahāpadāna S** and its Skt parallel associate such a statement with the birth of a Bodhisattva, cf **D** 14/2:15,12 and fragment 360 fol 123V4 (Fukita 2003:9; Waldschmidt 1953:19). According to the Chin version (DĀ 1 @ T1.4c2), after proclaiming to be supreme in the world the newly born bodhisattva said: "[my] aim is to deliver sentient beings from birth, old age, disease, and death," 要度眾生老病死 *yào dù zhòng shēng shēng lǎo bìng sǐ*.

<sup>57</sup> **Kathā, vatthu** refers to this view, attributing it to the Vetullakas, according to which the Buddha did not really leave the Tusita heaven and what was seen in the human world was only a magical apparition (*bhagavā tusita, bhavane nibbatta tatth'eva vasati, namanussa, lokam āgacchati, nimmita, rupa, mattakam pan' ettha dasseti*, Kvua 172,4). According to Guang Xing, **Acchariya, abbhuta S** "provides some vital statements that served as repositories of the transcendental Buddha conception" (2004:45).

<sup>58</sup> Gaffney notes that in **M** 123 "the description of his [the Buddha's] birth is full of what might almost be called docetic tendencies" (1996:84).

<sup>59</sup> Gowans remarks that, even though the tale of the Bodhisattva's declaration given right after his birth is an "obvious fabrication," such "apparent amendments are often symbolically significant even if historically false" (2003:17+23). Irwin 1981 even goes so far as to assume that this declaration has cosmogonic significance; see also Eliade 1948. Mus observes that "les thèmes fondamentaux de la spéculation postérieure ont leurs racines dans le commun bouddhisme, et sans doute bien avant qu'il ne soit permis de prononcer les mots de Mahāyāna ..." (1935: 497). The significance of this particular marvel also appears to be reflected in the high percentage of representations of the newborn bodhisattva taking seven steps found among a sample of temple paintings and sculptures in modern Sri Lanka surveyed by Gombrich (1971:110), ranking second only to depictions of the lineage of 24 buddhas, the reclining buddha and the first sermon.

- on several occasions the shadow of a tree did not move as if to shelter the Buddha seated under it in meditation,<sup>60</sup>
- a monkey took the Buddha's bowl, filled it with honey, and offered it to him<sup>61</sup>
- it did not rain until the Buddha had recovered his sitting mat, which he had put out in the sun to dry,<sup>62</sup>
- the Buddha was in such a deep meditation that he did not hear a storm that killed four oxen and two men,<sup>63</sup>
- after a great rain and a flood, the Buddha's ambulatory for walking meditation stayed dry,<sup>64</sup>
- Māra followed the Buddha for 6 years,<sup>65</sup>
- the Buddha practised mindfulness of the body uninterruptedly for 7 years.<sup>66</sup>

## 2.5 THE SUPREME QUALITY

The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta and its Chinese version (MĀ 32) agree that, in reply to Ānanda's exposition of wonderful and marvellous qualities, the Buddha adds the final marvellous quality—clearly, the most significant of all the Buddha's own qualities. This is his ability to know clearly the arising, the presence, and the disappearance of feelings, perceptions, and thoughts [§22], thereby presenting a quality related to meditative mastery of the mind as the culmination point of the Sutta listing of marvellous qualities.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>60</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.470c16) this is the 1<sup>st</sup> meditation while still being a Bodhisattva); T1.471a1, T1.471b8.

<sup>61</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.471a16); see also Saṅgha.bheda,vastu (Gnoli 1978a:47,21).

<sup>62</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.471a29).

<sup>63</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.471b18). The same event recurs in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16/2:131,20), SD 9, and its parallels DĀ 2 (T1.19a25, T5 (T1.168b13), T6 (T1.183c24), T7 (T1.198a17), and in fragment 360 fol 190R and 191V (Waldschmidt, 1950: 27-28).

<sup>64</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.471c9), an event also recorded in the Dharma,guptaka Vinaya (T1428 @ T22.796a16), in the Mahī-śāsaka Vinaya (T1421 @ T22.109a21), in the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda Vinaya (T1450 @ T24.133b16); see. also Catus-pariṣat Sūtra fragment S 362 (56)V5 (Waldschmidt 1952:34; Gnoli 1977:227,32), and in Theravada Vinaya (V 1:32,-6).

<sup>65</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.471c14). S 3:2 (S 446) speaks instead of 7 years, while Lalita,vistara (Lefmann 1902:260,17; Vaidya 1958b:191,2) agrees with MĀ 32 on 6 years. Oldenberg suggests that references to 7 years may intend the whole period of going forth, while those to 6 years may only cover the period spent in ascetic practices (1881:366 n50). Nakamura instead explains that "in ancient India periods of time were expressed both in terms of full years (how much time had actually elapsed) and calendar years. The difference in the number of years mentioned may arise from different methods of counting" (2000a:170).

<sup>66</sup> MĀ 32 (T1.471c17): 七年念身, 常念不斷 *qī nián niàn shēn, cháng niàn bù duàn*. This brings to mind the prediction in **Satipaṭṭhāna S** and its parallels, according to which either non-returning or awakening can be reached within a maximum period of 7 years of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice: **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22/2:314,11), **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10/1:62,34), and MĀ 98 (T1.584b16): see SD 13. On the 7 years, see **Satta Vassa S** (S 4.24), SD 36.5 (1.1.3).

<sup>67</sup> §22 (M 3:124,11) and MĀ 32 (T1.471c21), which speaks of feelings, intentions (thoughts), and perceptions (覺思想 *jué sī xiǎng*), as the objects of such knowledge. This type of contemplation recurs in other suttas: **Saṅgīti S** (D 33/3:223,11) and **Samādhi Bhāvanā S** (A 4.41/2:45,17 @ SD 24.1), where the parallel passage in **Saṅgīti,pariyaya** (T1536 @ T26.395c21), agrees with the Pali versions on speaking of feelings, perceptions and thoughts, 受想尋 *shòu xiǎng xún* (the Saṅgīti-sūtra restored in Stache-Rosen (1968:113), only lists the 4 types of *samādhi,bhāvanāh*, without giving details of their implications). The terms recur in (**Aṭṭhaka**) **Nanda S** (A 8.9/4:168,12 @ SD 84.14), where the Chin parallels (SĀ 275 @ T2.73b24 and SĀ 26 @ T2.375b10) list "feelings" 受, "perceptions" 想, and then 覺, which, judging from the context might stand for "thought." In fact, a Skt fragment of the same discourse (SHT VI 1226 folio 5V2, p22) has preserved *(vi)[d](i)tā vivar[k]ā [u]tpadyanti*, which, as the editors in fn43 suggest, should be corrected to *vitarka*, "thoughts."

Thus, even though most of the description of wonderful and marvellous qualities in the Acchariya,-abbhuta Sutta is different from its Madhyama Āgama parallel, and appears to be reflecting later tendencies and ideas, the final point made in both versions remains the same: the attention is directed back to the ability to wholesomely observe mental processes.<sup>68</sup>

### 3 Development of the Bodhisattva ideal

#### 3.1 EVOLUTION OF THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

##### 3.1.1 Reversal of ideals

**3.1.1.1** Throughout the early Buddhist texts, in both the suttas and the Vinaya, and even in the late canonical collection—the Abhidhamma—the historical Buddha the highest spiritual goal in terms of precedence. According to **the Sambuddha Sutta** (S 22.58), there is no real difference between the Buddha and the arhat, except in terms of precedence or timing: the Buddha is the discoverer and teacher of the path of awakening while the arhats are followers of that path.<sup>69</sup>

The essential teachings of early Buddhist soteriology (teaching on the goal or liberation) regarding the “awakened” one or the goal of Buddhist practice are as follows:

- the Buddha is the discoverer of the path and its teacher: **Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), SD 1.11;
- the Bodhisattva is “a being bound for awakening,” from his birth to awakening: **Pubbe’va Sambodha Sutta** (A 3.101a), SD 14.6;
- the Buddha is a human being, a historical person who is born and then passes away: **Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), SD 9;
- the Buddha’s awakened disciples, the arhats, all attain the same awakening and liberation: **Sambuddha Sutta** (S 22.58), SD 49.10.

**3.1.1.2** The Bodhisattva ideal was a post-Buddha sectarian development, a radical shift from these essential teachings. Basically, the Bodhisattva ideal entails the following dogmas (which are *not* found in early Buddhism and goes *against* the historical Buddha’s teaching): [3.3.2.2]

- that Gotama aspired—took the vow—to attain Buddhahood; [1.2.3.1]
- that the Bodhisattva was already enlightened;<sup>70</sup> [3.1.3]
- that the Buddha on earth was only a divine projection of a cosmic or eternal Buddha; [2.4.1.2]
- that an arhat still needed to aspire for enlightenment, that is, vow to be a Bodhisattva.<sup>71</sup>

These are the new ideas introduced by translators and new “sutras” by later writers that contributed to the rise of a revisionist Buddhist ideology that effectively diminished and usurped the position and nature of the historical Buddha by promoting the Bodhisattva as the supreme ideal.

<sup>68</sup> In Acchariya,abbhuta S (M 123), Ānanda repeats this statement, and the Sutta concludes with the monks rejoicing in Ānanda’s statement. MĀ 32, however, concludes with the monks and Ānanda rejoicing in the Buddha’s exposition.

<sup>69</sup> S 22.58 (SD 49.10).

<sup>70</sup> Generally, I have used “awaken, awakening,” etc, for the early Buddhist context, and “enlighten, enlightenment,” etc, for the post-Buddha sectarian developments, esp Mahāyāna. On *bodhi*, see SD 50.13 (3.4.4.3).

<sup>71</sup> On this wrong view, see **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10.

**3.1.2** We can identify teachings in the early Buddhist texts that were used as the bases for the rise and growth of the Bodhisattva ideal in soon after the Buddha's passing and in later times. The early developments that led to the evolution of the Bodhisattva ideal can be summarized as going through these 3 basic stages:

- (1) The Buddha was glorified as a superhuman or divine being: **the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta** (M 123).
- (2) Gotama was recorded as aspiring to become Buddha: **the Buddha,vaṃsa** [1.2.3.2].
- (3) The Chinese version of M 123—**MĀ 63** of the Madhyama Āgama—introduced the notion that Gotama took a **vow** to become Buddha [3.1.5].

**3.1.3** (1) We have noted how **the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta** (M 123) represents what is apparently the beginning of the glorifying of the Buddha into a kind of superhuman, even divine, being. Not only is the newborn Bodhisattva depicted as some kind of superhuman endowed with the strength of an adult body, he is able to stand and speak, too.

His **lion-roar**—"Foremost am I in the world ... This is my last birth!" [§20]—is construed by some as suggesting that he was already enlightened, or that he would go through the gestures of struggling for enlightenment only *as a skillful means* so that humans and other beings were able to relate to him [2.4.1].

**3.1.4** (2) **The Buddha,vaṃsa** (the 14<sup>th</sup> book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, DA 1:29) gives a list of 24 past buddhas—those preceding Gotama—and the future buddha, Metteyya. Chapter 27 of the Buddhavaṃsa lists 3 other buddhas preceding even Dīpaṅkara, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 24 buddhas. Thus, the total number of buddhas mentioned in the Pali canon is 27.<sup>72</sup>

The rationale for the listing of these past buddhas was apparently to "historicize" or authenticate the Buddhahood of Gotama. Hence, he was said to have first aspired to Buddhahood at the feet of **Dīpaṅkara Buddha**, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 24 past buddhas (B 2.54).<sup>73</sup> After Sumedha has aspired (vowed) for buddhahood, he received a corresponding prediction by Dīpaṅkara Buddha (B 2.61).<sup>74</sup> Some traditions record that Gotama took the initial vow for Buddhahood much later.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> For the list of these buddhas, see B:H xxxii & SD 36.2 (3.4.3).

<sup>73</sup> B 2.55/9,27. For a comparative study of different versions of this event in Pāli literature: Matsumura, 2008. Nattier concludes that "Dīpaṅkara's complete absence from the Pāli sutta literature makes it virtually certain that traditions concerning this buddha did not gain currency until several centuries after Śākyamuni Buddha's death." (2004b:230)

<sup>74</sup> B 2.61/9 f. Dīpaṅkara Buddha's prediction can be found in EĀ 20.3 (T2.599b14) and EĀ 43.2 (T2.758b26). For evidence of later interpolations in this collection, see Analayo 2010f:13 n6. The prediction is also reported in Divyāvadāna (Cowell 1886:252,12); Lalita,vistara (Lefmann 1902:415,19); Mahā,vastu 1:239 (Senart 1882a:239,6); Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (T1428 @ T22.785b25), tr Bareau 1966a (qu in Eckel 2008:354,14); also Skilling 1997a: 609 (16), Dharmaguptaka Dharmapada also mentions this prediction. It is also referred in Lamotte 1944:248 n2; fragment Or. 1510/21+24 r7 (Karashima 2009:361). On traditions that do not record this event: Durt 2006:70. Nattier notes that the story of the meeting between Gotama Bodhisattva and Dīpaṅkara "is frequently depicted in art from the Gandhāra region ... suggesting that it may have originated at the northwestern fringes of the Indian cultural sphere" (2004a:72). See also Biswas who similarly notes that "the distribution of Dīpaṅkara images ... points to the likelihood that the story of Dīpaṅkara was first formulated on the further fringes of north-west India" (2009: 98). On the predominance of Dīpaṅkara in Gandhāran Jātaka tales, see Rhi 2003:157f; on other occurrences, see Vasant 1992.

<sup>75</sup> \*Mahāvibhāṣā (T1545 @ T27.891c29); Divyāvadāna (Cowell 1886:227,4); Mahā,vastu 1:39, 47 (Senart 1882a: 39,8 + 47,16). A study of a tale about Gotama's initial vow to buddhahood, found in different versions of Prabhāsa Jātaka, see Hahn 2006, 2009; Demoto 2009.



Gotama was recorded as being born variously as a brahmin (6 times), brahmin student (twice), kshatriya (6 times), world-monarch (twice), deva-lord, serpent-king (twice), a yaksha-general, a lion, a matted-hair ascetic (twice), and a district governor.<sup>76</sup>

Gotama's incarnation as **Joti,pāla**, a brahmin student (*māṇava*), during the time of the 24<sup>th</sup> buddha, Kassapa, was somewhat problematic—as related in **the (Majjhima) Ghaṭikāra Sutta** (M 81). Jotipāla was, in fact, totally reluctant to meet Kassapa Buddha, and had to be forcibly persuaded to do so by his potter friend, Ghaṭikāra. In fact, the Sutta highlights not Jotipāla, but the superior virtues of Ghaṭikāra.<sup>77</sup> Significantly, although Jotipāla subsequently renounces under Kassapa, he (Jotipāla) makes no aspiration to buddhahood. [1.2.3.1]

**3.1.5 (3)** The Chinese translations of the Āgama collection (the northern counterpart of the Nikāya collection) are often valuable in helping us to better understand the Pali suttas—especially where they keep to the spirit of early Buddhism. In this case, a comparative study of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta and its Chinese Āgama versions (MĀ 32) gives us some idea regarding the evolution of the Bodhisattva ideal.

In fact, the very first wonderful and marvellous quality of the Buddha that MĀ 32 lists is not the Bodhisattva's sojourn in the Tusita heaven (as in M 123), but the Bodhisattva's initial vow: “In the time of Kassapa Buddha, the Blessed One made his initial vow to attain buddhahood while living the holy life” (MĀ 32@ T1.469c24). It is likely that the Āgama editors and translators had interpolated this detail in keeping with the popularity of Mahāyāna.

In other words, by that time, the Mahāyāna Buddhists already had a different, more developed, notion of the Bodhisattva. For a better understanding of the significance of this development, let us examine the changes or evolution in the meaning of “Bodhisattva.”

### 3.2 THE EARLIEST MEANINGS OF BODHISATTA

#### 3.2.1 The historical bodhisattva

**3.2.1.1** The Pali term, *bodhisatta*, as used in the early suttas, refers to the “historical bodhisattva,” that is, Gotama from his birth (the nativity) on earth up to the great awakening. This is, in fact, the term as used in **the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta**, except that it includes his penultimate birth in Tusita heaven [3.4.2.3]. Notably, this is the broadest definition of *bodhisatta* as used in the suttas.<sup>78</sup>

The more canonical sense of *bodhisatta*—Gotama from his last human birth up to the moment of his awakening—is the import of the stock phrase, “Before my self-awakening, bhikkhus, when I was still unawakened, when I was still only the Bodhisattva” (*pubbe'va me bhikkhave sambodhā anabhisambudhassa bodhisattass'eva sato*), such as in **the Pubbe'va Sambodha Sutta** (A 3:101a).<sup>79</sup>

**3.2.1.2** It is clear from the context that *bodhisatta* [3.2.1.1]—especially with the emphatic *eva*—is the opposite of *buddha* as “the awakened one.” Hence, we can surmise that the *bodhisatta* is one “still unawakened.” We can even further deduce that ***an-abhi-sam-buddha***, “one still yet to awaken,” is a synonym for *bodhisatta*.

<sup>76</sup> For a summary, see B:H xlix-lii.

<sup>77</sup> M 81 (SD 49.3). On Ghaṭikāra's role in the Buddha's life, see SD 52.1 (10.3.5; 8.3.4.2)

<sup>78</sup> Comy def of *bodhisatta* is Gotama in all his past lives from the time of his aspiration of buddhahood in Dīpaṅkara Buddha's time right down to his last life on earth up to just before his awakening: this def is found in Buddha-varṇsa and the later texts.

<sup>79</sup> A 3.101a/1:258 f (SD 14.6a).

The word **bodhi,satta** is resolved as *bodhi* (awakening) + *satta* (a being). *Satta* is itself derived from *sant*, “to be, to exist.” *Sant* is the present participle of *atthi*, “to be,”<sup>80</sup> from the root *√AS*, “to be”;<sup>81</sup> or from *√SAT*, “to exist.” Hence, we have the literal meaning, “awakening being.” Idiomatically, a *bodhisatta*—or the anglicized *Bodhisattva*—as applied to the Buddha refers to “a being who is bound for awakening.” Indeed, this is the sense that is commonly understood amongst the informed Buddhists of south and southeast Asia, and those following their common tradition, **the Theravāda**, the doctrine of the elders, insofar as they keep to the early teachings.<sup>82</sup>

**3.2.1.3** However, when we consider the Sanskrit roots, we may be able to explain the term *bodhi-satta* in other ways. One of the early modern explanations of the term was suggested by the German scholar, K E Neumann, that **bodhisatta** is possibly derived from *bodhi* (“awakening”) + *sakta* (“intent, devoted to”), meaning “one who is intent on or devoted to awakening.”<sup>83</sup>

Neumann points out that this etymology of *bodhisatta*, derived from Skt *sattva* occurs in **the (Rādha) Satta Sutta** (S 23.2), where the Buddha declares: “One is stuck to (*satta*), deeply stuck to desire, lust, delight and craving for bodily forms, therefore one is called a “being” (*rūpe ... yo chando yo rāgo yā nandī yā tanhā tatra satto tatra visatto tasmā satto’ti vuccati*), with the same idea describing each of the remaining four aggregates.<sup>84</sup> The *satta* here is from *√SAT*, “to cling,” which reflects the Mahāyāna sense of *bodhisattva* [but see (3.2.1.4) for Buddhaghosa’s etymology].

A Chinese parallel in the Saṃyukta Āgama—**SĀ 122** (T2.40a6)—makes the same point but more briefly. There are two other suttas in the Udāna that applies *satta* in the same sense, that is, as “being stuck to.” **The (Udāna) Satta Sutta 1** (U 7.3) records the Buddha as declaring that the people in the city of Sāvattihī are “stuck to sensual desires,” their desires are like “fetters” (*samyojana*) to them.<sup>85</sup> The Buddha makes a similar statement in **the (Udāna) Satta Sutta 2** (U 7.4), comparing them to be like fish caught in a net, and that they pursue decay like a suckling calf pursuing its mother.<sup>86</sup> [3]

**3.2.1.4** There is one similar problem with all these Suttas that highlight the word *satta* as “(being stuck to)” —they are all used in a negative sense, whereas the element *satta* in *bodhisatta* has a positive sense of dedication and commitment. There are scholars who object to this negative undertone of the derivation.<sup>87</sup>

Vetter, on the other hand holds just the contrary view. He suggests that it is quite “possible that ... the Middle Indic *bodhi-satta* ... meant [*a being*] attached to, ie striving for, enlightenment and in Sanskrit

<sup>80</sup> See eg *sati* (Dh 146); *santa* (S 105). See PED: *atthi*.

<sup>81</sup> Sadd 450,10. See CPD: <sup>3</sup>Vas.

<sup>82</sup> It should be understood here that we are using **Thera,vāda** in a special sense as referring to the early Buddhist teachings or historical Buddhism, but excluding its ethnic or cultural aspects. “**Early Buddhism**” refers to the essential and authentic early teachings that go back to the Buddha and the arhats, whose teachings entail self-effort, self-restraint and self-awakening by means of the 3 trainings (**Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6), and whose goal is nirvana.

<sup>83</sup> Neumann 1896:1091 n5.

<sup>84</sup> S 23.2/3:190,3 (SD 52.2e).

<sup>85</sup> U 7.3/63/p75 (SD 52.2f).

<sup>86</sup> U 7.4/64/p75 f (SD 52.2f).

<sup>87</sup> Buddhaghosa derived *bodhisatta* from *bodhiyaṃ satto lagga*, “a being who is stuck (attached, *lagga*) to awakening” (MA 1:113,19-24). Woodward (S:W 1:156 n3) thinks that he confused *√SAT* (to exist) with *√SAJ* (to cling) (S:W 1:156n3). Oltramare, in fact, objects to such a derivation of *bodhisatta*: the term *sakta*—from the root *√SAJ*, or *saj* as past part of *sañj* → *sajjati*, to hang (on to)—does not seem to express a spiritual or moral form of attachment: “*Saj* ne semble pas avoir jamais exprimé l’idée d’un attachement spirituel ou moral.” (1923:251 n4). However, pace the scholars, it is likely that Buddhaghosa was simply applying *√SAJ* to highlight the fact the *Bodhisattva* is “dedicated” to awakening.

would be *bodhi-sakta*,” explains that the adoption of the term **bodhisattva** could have come about precisely because “*sakta* was perhaps felt to be used too much in a negative sense.” (1988:97 n16)

Words are how we use them. By our usage, we infuse the sense into the words. We should not be attached to the notion that a word must have only one meaning. In the case of **bodhisatta**, then, both senses are applicable according to their respective context or intended sense [3.2.2.1]. As far as the term goes, we can rest happily with the idea that the *bodhisatta* is a being who is wholesomely dedicated or committed to the task of awakening.<sup>88</sup>

### **3.2.2 Non-Pali derivations**

**3.2.2.1** Kajiyama notes that **the Pāli commentaries** employ this etymology (*satta* = *sakta*) [3.2.1.3] as only one of a number of explanations for the term *bodhisatta*, that is, a bodhisattva is “attached, wholly attached to awakening” (*bodhiyaṃ satto āsatto ti pi bodhisatto*, SA 2:21,13) (1982:258). In other words, we need not take *bodhisatta* as having only one narrow sense. Pali terms, especially those conveying important religious or spiritual senses, often are famously polysemous.<sup>89</sup>

A similar broader etymology is found in the Jain *Viyāhapaṇṇatti* 2.15: “He may be called ... *satta* because he is tied to righteous and non-righteous deeds” (*jamhā satte subhāsubhehi kammehi tamhā satte tti vattabbarṃ siyā*).<sup>90</sup> This shows that the term is well known enough, even outside of Buddhism, besides the fact that early Buddhism and early Jainism share many common religious terms.<sup>91</sup>

**3.2.2.2** It is well known that the term ***bodhisatta***, as used in early Buddhism, invariably refers to Gotama’s state of being before his awakening, especially from the moment of his last human birth. The Sanskrit cognate, **bodhisattva**, does, in fact, occur in Sanskrit texts relating to the Buddha’s pre-awakening experiences, such as in **the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra**, a Mahāyāna text where we find the phrase: “On another occasion, when the bodhisattva passed away from the heavenly host of Tusita and entered his mother’s side” (*punar aparāṃ yasmin samaye bodhisatvas tuṣitād devanikāyāc cyutvā mātuh kuṣāv avakrāmaty*).<sup>92</sup>

Similarly, another Mahāyāna text, **the Mahāvadāna Sūtra**—the Sanskrit version of the Pali Mahā’pa-dāna Sutta (D 14) [1.2.3.2]—uses the same term, *bodhisattva*, in reference to the Buddha Vipāśyī before his awakening. In fact, the term *bodhisattva* is often used in the Chinese translations of the early texts in the Āgamas.<sup>93</sup> In other words, both the Pali term *bodhisatta* in the suttas and its Sanskrit form *bodhisattva* in Mahāyāna works, do often overlap in meaning, referring to the pre-awakened state of a being bound for awakening. Such an overlap in the usage of the terms is likely to reflect the earliness of the text or the passage.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>88</sup> On the etymology *bodhi-sakta* see also Walleser 1914:5 n3; Dayal 1932:7; Thomas 1933:167 n1; Rahula 1978: 51; Basham 1981:22; Norman 1990:87; Schmithausen 2002:11 n40; and von Hinüber 2007:388.

<sup>89</sup> On the dynamism of Pali polysemy, see SD 1.1 (4.4.5); SD 10.16 (1.3.1-1.3.2).

<sup>90</sup> Lalwani (tr) 1973:150,1.

<sup>91</sup> On Buddhist terms in common with the Jain, see SD 10.7 (1.10.2). See also Ency Bsm 5:610 f.

<sup>92</sup> Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra 17.9: Fragment S 360 folio 176 R3 (Waldschmidt 1950:20).

<sup>93</sup> See Analayo 2010f:47 n89. For other occurrences of the term *bodhisattva* in relation to the Buddha’s pre-awakening experiences in Āgama discourses, see DĀ 3 (T1.31b20); SĀ 1177 (T2.317a26, in the context of a simile); on SĀ 604, see Analayo 2010f:12 n3); EĀ 24.2 (T2.616b9); EĀ 40.3 (T2.739a12; EĀ 44.7 (T2.766c26).

<sup>94</sup> On Gotama as a bodhisattva, see Analayo 2010f:15-53 (ch 1).

### 3.3 THE EVOLUTION OF MARVELS

#### 3.3.1 A definition of “marvels”

**3.3.1.1 The Dhammaññū Sutta** (A 7.64) mentions the 9 limbs of the Teacher’s teachings (*nav’aṅga satthu,sāsana*), which is a list of categories of the Buddha’s teachings.<sup>95</sup> The marvels of the Acchariya,-abhuta Sutta (M 123) fall into the limb (*aṅga*) of “**marvels**” (*abbhuta,dhamma*). However, M 123, as we know, does not merely include personal qualities of the Buddha. It also includes the qualities of *others*, that is, the early death of the Bodhisattva’s mother [2.2]. Hence, this limb now includes marvellous qualities of others, too.

**3.3.1.2** While the Majjhima commentary (such as MA 2:106,22) defines the limbs of **marvels** as encompassing marvels in general, it gives, as an example, a list of Ānanda’s marvels mentioned in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) and **the (Ānanda) Acchariya Sutta** (A 4.129).<sup>96</sup>

Another well known case is that of the long-lived and fiercely independent monk, Bakkula, as recorded in **the Bakkula Sutta** (M 124).<sup>97</sup> This Sutta, in fact, is located immediately after M 123, and it highlights Bakkula’s wonderful and marvellous qualities in a way that is very similar to the presentation in M 123.

Both the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta and the Bakkula Sutta are late canonical works, compiled after the Buddha had passed away. In both these suttas, we see a description of the marvels, not of the Buddha, but of disciples. The limb of marvels has been extended to include the qualities of disciples, too.<sup>98</sup> However, as we shall see this extension does not end here [3.3.2].

#### 3.3.2 The marvels as a limb of the teaching

**3.3.2.1** Clearly, in the early years of the Buddha’s ministry, accounts of marvels would understandably only describe those of the Buddha. Over time, we see the next stage of development in the concept of the limb (aṅga) of marvels (abbhuta,dhamma), that is, of qualities of the Dhamma,vinaya, such as the well-known parables of the 8 wonderful qualities of the ocean that reflect the teaching given in **the Pahārāda Sutta** (A 8.19).<sup>99</sup>

Cooray, in his Encyclopaedia of Buddhism entry on the “Acchariya,abhuta Sutta,” notes the case of **the Samudda Uposatha Sutta 2** (U 5.5),<sup>100</sup> where “qualities of the Dhammavinaya have also been admitted in the category of the wondrous and miraculous,” hence, the category of marvels was “not confined to qualities pertaining to individuals” (1963:172).

“The qualities of the Dhammavinaya” that Cooray refers to are the abovementioned “8 qualities of the great ocean.” These very same set of qualities are found in **the Pahārāda Sutta** (A 8.19), **the Samudda Uposatha Sutta 1** (A 8.20) and in **the Pātimokkha Ṭhapana Khandhaka** (Cv 9.1-2). In other words, this is a well-known set of similes comparing the Dharma,Vinaya to 8 wonderful qualities of the great ocean.

<sup>95</sup> The 9 limbs of the Teacher’s teaching (*nav’aṅga satthu,sāsana*) or *aṅga*, for short—sometimes also known as “the Buddha-word” (*buddha,vacana*)—are (1) the discourses (*sutta*), (2) the “hymns” of mixed prose and verse (*geyya*), (3) the expositions (*veyyakaraṇa*), (4) the verses (*gāthā*), (5) the inspired utterances (*udāna*), (6) the sayings (*iti,vuttaka*), (7) the birth-stories (*jataka*), (8) the marvels (*abbhuta,dhamma*), and (9) catechisms (*vedalla*). The Skt tradition has their 12 limbs (*dvādaśāṅga*) or the “12 limbs of the word” (*dvādaśāṅga pravacana*, sv Princeton Dict of Buddhism). See SD 30.10 (4); SD 26.11 (3.2.1.3).

<sup>96</sup> Respectively, D 16/2:145,3 (SD 9); A 4.129/2:132,17.

<sup>97</sup> M 124/3:124-128 (SD 3.15).

<sup>98</sup> Further, see Analayo 2010f: n56.

<sup>99</sup> A 8.19 (SD 45.18).

<sup>100</sup> U 5.5 (SD 59.2b).

The most famous of the 8 ocean qualities is that “just as the great ocean has only one taste, the taste of salt—so, too, this Dharma-Vinaya has only one taste, the taste of freedom.”<sup>101</sup>

The 8 qualities of the Dharma,vinaya and the 8 similes of the parable of the great ocean are given in at least 4 important texts, as follows:<sup>102</sup>

<b>Pahārāda Sutta</b>	A 8.19/4:197-204	SD 45.18
<b>(Samudda) Uposatha Sutta 1</b>	A 8.20/4:204-208	SD 59.2a
<b>(Samudda) Uposatha Sutta 2</b>	U 5.5/53,6-56,31	SD 59.2b
<b>Pātimokkha Ṭhapana Khandhaka</b>	Cv 9.1.2-4 (V 2:237-240)	SD 59.2c

**3.3.2.2** In sum, then, though the qualities of the Buddha initially played a central role in regard to the significance of this particular limb (*aṅga*) of the Dharma,Vinaya, apparently, the conception of marvels evolved to encompass a broader scope. Basically, the stages of **the evolution of the compass of the marvels** occurred to be more inclusive, thus:<sup>103</sup>

- (1) the Buddha’s personal marvels (probably during the 1<sup>st</sup> period),<sup>104</sup> eg, **Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (M 12), SD 2.24;
- (2) the wonderful qualities of the Dharma,Vinaya, eg **Paharada Sutta** (A 8.19), etc [3.3.2.1];
- (3) the wonderful qualities of the Bodhisattva, the Buddha, and others (probably soon after the Buddha’s passing away), eg **Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta** (M 123), SD 52.2; **Bakkula Sutta** (M 124), SD 3.15;
- (4) Gotama, as the ascetic Sumedha in past buddha Dīpaṅkara’s time, was said to have taken a vow of aspiration to buddhahood, followed by Dīpaṅkara’s prediction to his buddhahood: **the Buddha,varṃsa** [1.2.3.2];
- (5) the Mahāyāna notion that the Bodhisattva was an “enlightened being” like the Buddha;
- (6) that the Buddha appearing on earth was only a divine projection of a cosmic or eternal Buddha [2.4.1.2];
- (7) that an arhat still needed to aspire for enlightenment, that is, vow to be a Bodhisattva.<sup>105</sup>

It should be noted that (5)-(7) are not sequential, but merely reflect general developments in Mahāyāna that are clearly contrary to early Buddhist teachings. [3.1.1]

### 3.4 REFUGE AND CHARISMA

#### 3.4.1 Seeking refuge in the “dead” Buddha

**3.4.1.1** We will now examine one of the main reasons—even the key reason—for the composition of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta. Why does the Sutta speak of the Buddha in such glorious and miraculous terms that is uncharacteristic of the general trend of the early texts? How are we, as modern students and practitioners of Buddhism, to understand these fabulous stories that are often difficult, even impossible, to explain in the light of our current understanding of human nature and science?

Since the last question has been answered more fully elsewhere—in **The miraculous life of Gotama Buddha** (SD 52.1)—we will leave it aside, and only mention that those miraculous accounts should be

<sup>101</sup> Cv 9.1.-2 (V 2:236-241), SD 59.2c = A 8.20 (SD 59.2a) = U 45/5.5 (SD 59.2b).

<sup>102</sup> See SD 45.18 (2).

<sup>103</sup> For further details, see Analayo 2010f:37 n65.

<sup>104</sup> On the 2 periods in the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 1.1 (2.2); SD 40a.1 (1.3).

<sup>105</sup> On this wrong view, see **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10.

understood in the light of a psychology of myth.<sup>106</sup> We will hereafter address only the first question: **Why (for what purpose) was the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta compiled?**

**3.4.1.2 Analayo**, in his *The Genesis of the Bodhisattva Ideal* writes: “The recollective and evocative message of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta would have been of particular importance for the early Buddhist community after their founder had passed away, especially for disciples who had never met the Buddha. Lacking the experience of a personal encounter with the living Buddha, and given that during the early period the Buddha was not represented in sculpture or painting, discourses like the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta would have enabled new converts to engage in some form of emotional contact with their teacher, by memorizing and perhaps even visualizing his marvellous qualities.” (2010f:36)

Although the early Buddhists belonged to a literate culture, Buddhist teachings—like all other religious traditions of the day—were transmitted orally. However, the early Buddhists kept to the Buddha’s instruction of not having any representation of him for memorial or worship. In the introduction to **the Kalinga,bodhi Jātaka** (J 479), the Buddha is recorded, when asked about how he should be recollected, as instructing, “A memorial shrine is groundless and purely imaginative” (*uddesikam avatthukam manamattakena hoti*, J 4:228,21). Only a Bodhi tree may represent him (J 4:228).<sup>107</sup> A similar prohibition is alluded to in chapter 48 of the Sarvastivāda Vinaya.<sup>108</sup>

In the absence of any anthropomorphic representation of the absent Buddha, the early Buddhist faithful had to resort to Buddha-stories and -sagas (heroic accounts), the beginnings of which can be seen in **the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta** (M 123). Over time, based on such accounts, the Buddha legend evolved rich in mythic symbolism and psychological significance. Although they are not meant to be historical, their value lies in understanding them in the light of a **psychology of myth**.<sup>109</sup>

**3.4.1.3** To become a **Buddhist practitioner**—as is commonly understood—we begin by “going for the 3 refuges” (*ti,saraṇa,gamana*).<sup>110</sup> This was easy when the Buddha, our Teacher, was still alive. When we feel spiritually ready, we could simply approach him for a teaching and a meditation subject for our practice.<sup>111</sup> This becomes more difficult after his passing, especially when we have difficulty finding an experienced and proficient teacher or the right conditions for Dharma practice.

After the Buddha’s passing, new converts would have lacked an opportunity to connect directly with the 1<sup>st</sup> refuge, the Buddha.<sup>112</sup> In the major world religions, the passing away of the founder, as a rule, creates a vacuum, especially for those who are faith-inclined, who often form the majority of the faith’s following.<sup>113</sup> In the early centuries after the Buddha’s passing, the faith-inclined and the neophytes faced significant difficulties in learning and practising the Dharma without the close contact and charisma of the Buddha.

**3.4.1.4** As Analayo notes: “The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta’s taking up of common events like pregnancy and birth can be understood as a means of addressing such needs by uplifting and inspiring its audience

<sup>106</sup> On a psychology of myth, see SD 52.1 (1).

<sup>107</sup> See Piyasilo, *The Origin and Meaning of the Image of the Buddha*, Malaysia, 1988a. See Reflection, “What the Buddha really looks like,” RB 135B, 2012.

<sup>108</sup> See A K Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, 1935:63 n4.

<sup>109</sup> See SD 52.1 (1.0.2).

<sup>110</sup> See SD 45.11 (3).

<sup>111</sup> Such as in the case of Māluṅkya,putta: see **(Arahatta) Māluṅkya,putta S** (S 35.95,3-5), SD 5.9.

<sup>112</sup> For a survey of the importance that recollection of the Buddha had in Buddhist history, see Harrison 1992.

<sup>113</sup> In the years immediately after the Buddha’s passing, there were still a large number of arhats who had directly received and remembered the Buddha’s teachings. The sangha’s governance and fellowship were still well guided by the Dharma,Vinaya, as exemplified by **Gopaka Moggallāna S** (M 108), SD 33.5.

through a stimulating description of the marvellous way the Buddha-to-be passed through these experiences, common to all human beings.

By treating events familiar to anyone who had lived or still lived in an ancient Indian household, the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta treads common ground and at the same time creates distance and evokes awe through the medium of the marvels that accompany these events.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, **the didactic function** of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta would have been to stimulate and strengthen devotion based on the superior nature of the Buddha, evident in the marvels that accompany his god-like descent from heaven to the world of human beings.<sup>115</sup> (Analayo, 2010f:37, emphases added)

**3.4.1.5** Not everyone can understand the teachings fully and at once, or even over a short time. Most followers are grounded in faith and devotion, which keeps them going even when they do not fully understand the key teachings. These **marvels** serve a vital function in keeping such faith-centred followers moving closer to the path and even onto the path.

The point is that we can now appreciate why marvels were accepted by the early teachers as a profoundly skillful means of keeping faith in the neophyte and unawakened, and preparing them for the cultivation of wisdom. Judging from such a vital role that such marvels play, it is understandable that suttas on marvels have been included in the 9 “limbs” (*aṅga*). [3.3.1.1]

### **3.4.2 Charisma: Making marvels**

**3.4.2.1** We can have a better idea of how the marvels—such as those of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta—work in terms of the attribution of charisma to the Bodhisattva. **Charisma** (*pamaṇa*)<sup>116</sup> is defined in 2 ways:

- (1) compelling attractiveness or charm, and
- (2) a divinely conferred power or talent.

Either of these will easily inspire devotion in the faithful and religiously inclined because they are seen as the special personal gifts of the Bodhisattva.

**3.4.2.2 Definition (1)** is a general definition and clearly applies to the sutta notion of marvels as applied to the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva’s marvels described in the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta are to endow charisma on the Bodhisattva (and so the Buddha, too) to inspire devotion in others. In this way, the devotees would feel a strong connection with the Buddha, or rather, their image of the Buddha. This is the Buddhism of faith.

According to **the Rūpa Sutta** (A 4.65) and **the Puggala Paññatti** (Pug 4.22), we tend to “measure” a person (especially a teacher, a leader or an authority figure) in terms of looks (*rūpa*), voice (*ghosa*),

<sup>114</sup> For a study of the contrast between the suffering associated in ancient Indian thought with birth and the depiction of the marvels that accompany the same event in the case of the Bodhisattva, see Hara, 1980. On the miracles accompanying the Bodhisattva’s birth, Griffiths comments that such “miraculous signs are generally meant ... to inculcate astonishment in the ... hearer of the legend.” (1994:88). Robinson speculated that “the purpose of all the mythical elements in the nativity cycle is to show that the Bodhisattva was innately different from ordinary man.” (1970:7)

<sup>115</sup> E Senart (who thought the Buddha was a myth in the scholarly sense) comments that the Buddha, even before his birth, was a god, the highest of the gods; hence, he is not really born, but merely assumes a physical form among humans for their good and salvation: “le Buddha, avant sa naissance, est un dieu, le chef des dieux, à vrai dire il ne naît point, il s’incarne parmi les hommes en vue de leur bien et de leur salut.” (Mvst 1:432 = 1882b:432)

<sup>116</sup> *Pamāṇa*, lit “measure,” ie, how we measure or project power or greatness onto others in terms of their form (looks), voice (incl teachings), austerity or teaching. On charisma, see SD 3.14 (4-8).

austerity (*lūkha*) or teaching(s) (*dhamma*). This is likely to be the reaction when we are faith-inclined, so that we regard any such quality as the result of the person's "past good karma" or a divine "gift."<sup>117</sup>

However, this attribution of charisma to the Bodhisattva is very different from a secular process where charisma is attributed by admirers and ideologists to say, a leader, a politician, or even a religious leader or teacher. In the case of the Bodhisattva, he is both explicitly and implicitly understood in the suttas and later works as actually having those marvellous qualities, or they are latent or nascent in him. The purpose of the Sutta, then, is to highlight or reinforce those marvellous qualities for the adoration, inspiration and benefit of later generations.

**3.4.2.3 Definition (2)**—that **charisma** is "a divinely conferred power or talent"—as a rule, applies to theistic religions whose founders, prophets, saints, preachers and individuals are regarded as being favoured by their Deity or Divinity with *special gifts of personality and ability to spread and enforce their faith or agenda*. Although early Buddhism is, by definition, not a theistic faith, texts like **the Acchariya,-abbhuta Sutta** (M 123), suggest the beginnings of a deification or apotheosis of the Bodhisattva, a process that is accomplished later in Mahāyāna theology.<sup>118</sup>

The very first of the 19 marvels described by Ānanda is that of the Bodhisattva being reborn in Tusita heaven. Even the next two marvels depict the Bodhisattva in Tusita, and the 4<sup>th</sup> marvel describes his departure from Tusita with the end of his life-span. In other words, at the beginning of the Sutta, we see the Bodhisattva actually as a deva, a divine being in Tusita. In other words, by his own erstwhile state, the Bodhisattva endows himself with charisma.

### 3.5 RESURRECTING THE BUDDHA BY THE WORD

#### 3.5.1 The living Word

It is probable that the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta was compiled within a century or so of the Buddha's passing away. Although the Buddha is "dead" physically—he has attained final nirvana—the Acchariya,-abbhuta Sutta resurrects him and keeps him alive, at least in the hearts and minds of the faith-inclined. It is not hard to understand *how the Buddha in final nirvana could stay alive in our memories*. The rationale is probably that when the Buddha was alive, no one could really fathom him, on account of his fully awakened wisdom. How can we ever fathom him, now that he has passed away into final nirvana?<sup>119</sup>

As in the major world religions, after their respective founder's death, the living and leading followers had to keep the founder alive in some way—either in faith or in words. A surer way of keeping the founder living in their memory and faith is naturally to write about their living presence—this is one of the important senses of the expression, **the living Word** or **Words of life**, suggested by the expression "the eternal Dharma" (*dhamma sanantana*). [3.5.2]

#### 3.5.2 The eternal Dharma

**3.5.2.1** Even while the Buddha was still living, the early Buddhists were already familiar with the term, "**the eternal Dharma**" (*dhamma sanantana*).<sup>120</sup> The word **sanantana** (Skt *sanātana*, from *sanat*,

<sup>117</sup> A 4.65/2:71; Pug 4.22/53 f. See SD 3.14 (7+8).

<sup>118</sup> On the deified buddha, see SD 36.2 (7.1).

<sup>119</sup> On the Buddha's "death," see SD 9 (8.7+9.8).

<sup>120</sup> M 3:154,11; S 1:18,24, 1:189,22; Dh 5d; S 453d = Tha 1229b.



“old, ever, always”<sup>121</sup> means “eternal, ancient, primeval.” While the term *akālika dhamma* refers to how we experience true reality (as a time-free reality), *dhamma sanantana* refers to what it really is, the nature of true reality, that is, the timeless truth.

**3.5.2.2** Then, there is the teaching that **the Buddha**, with his awakening, *becomes the Dharma*, the nature of true reality itself, the eternal Dharma. One simple way to explain this idea is that the Buddha has attained full understanding of non-self (*anattā*), and non-self underlies all principles of existence.<sup>122</sup> In this sense, we can appreciate the famous saying: “Who sees Dharma, sees me; who sees me see Dharma” (*yo dhammaṃ passati, so maṃ passati; yo maṃ passati, so dhammaṃ passati*), as stated in **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87).<sup>123</sup>

In the permanent absence of the human Buddha, then, this idea of the Buddha being as real and as eternal as the Dhamma (true reality) is necessarily and easily appreciated especially by the faith-inclined. On account of the ineffability—the difficulty of explicating it intellectually or in words—of this notion, that the Buddha and the Dhamma are the same, at least in essence (as an idea), the faith-inclined need not *think* about it, but merely feel the presence of the Buddha in the Dhamma, or even in the suttas when they are properly understood. To see the Dhamma is to see the Buddha.

**3.5.2.3** Based on such an understanding of the nature of the Buddha and the faith of those who uphold or accept such a notion, we can now understand the implications of the Bodhisattva’s **1<sup>st</sup> lion-roar**. Immediately after the nativity, the Bodhisattva takes 7 steady steps, holds up his right hand, pointing up his index finger, and pronouncing:

“Foremost am I in the world! The eldest am I in the world! The best am I in the world! This is my last birth! There is now no more rebirth (for me)!” [§20.5]

We may well assume that the newborn Bodhisattva’s hand-gesture also signifies that there is and will be **only one Buddha** in this universe, and that *he has arrived!* Not only are these words significant in that sense—of announcing the arrival of the Buddha—and that he will be free from any more cyclic life or rebirth, it is also significant that it is the future Buddha who is saying these words. In short, they are words of truth, power and authority.

Apparently, the ability of speaking at one’s birth is not really a marvel—it is not who (a person or being) says it. **The Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 3), in fact, reports that the boy Kaṇha was also able to speak right after his birth. Instead of making a majestic proclamation, however, he asked his mother to wash him, because he had very dark skin. The Ambaṭṭha Sutta states that those who witnessed him speaking at birth concluded that he must be a goblin (*piśāca*)! [2.4.1.1 n]

**3.5.2.4** Besides the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta, a number of other sources record a proclamation made by the newly-born bodhisattva Gotama, but varying in their precise content.<sup>124</sup> Variations can also be

<sup>121</sup> As in Sanañ,kumāra, the “ever-young” brahma, a devout follower of the Buddha: **Jana,vasabha S** (D 18/2:210 passim), SD 62.3; **Sekha S** (M 53/1:358), SD 21.14; **Sanañ,kumāra S** (S 6.11/1:153), SD 86.13; **Mora Nivāpa S** (A 11.11/5:326-328), SD 86.14. See DPPN, sv..

<sup>122</sup> On non-self as the principle underlying all truths and reality, see **Dhamma Niyāma S** (A 3.134), SD 26.8.

<sup>123</sup> S 22.87,13 (SD 8.8); also SD 51.24 (2.5.2.1); SD 51.25 (2.2.2.6).

<sup>124</sup> The Bodhisattva’s proclamation of his own supremacy right after birth is recorded in several Buddha-biographies preserved in early Chinese trs: T184 (T3.463c14); T185 (T3.473c2); T188 (T3.618a19). Further, other sources add that he also declared that he had reached his last birth: SĀ 604 (T2.166c2, part of Aśokāvadāna, which is not part of the original Saṃyukta Āgama); see Analayo 2010f:12 n3; a parallel in Divyāvadāna (Cowell 1886:389,20); T189 (T3.-625a27); T190 (T3.687b10); Buddha,carita 1.15 (Johnston 1936:2); Lalita,vistara (Lefmann 1902:85,1). See also T186 (T3.494a27), where the last birth is not mentioned explicitly, and T187 (T3.553a21); Mahā,vastu 2:24 (Senart 1890:24,8); Saṅgha,bheda,vastu (Gnoli 1977:45,13); see also T1450 (T24.108a16).

found in regard to the proclamation made by the former Buddha Vipassī right after being born. While the Pāli version of this stanza is identical to the declaration made according to the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta by the Bodhisattva Gotama, the Dīrgha Āgama records the newborn bodhisattva Vipasyī (Skt; P *vipassī*) as declaring the liberation of sentient beings.<sup>125</sup>

### 3.6 BODHISATTVAHOOD – FROM IDEA TO IDEAL

#### 3.6.1 A temporal shift

**3.6.1.1 How does seeing the Buddha as the Dharma** inspire the faith-inclined or the unawakened to see the Buddha as a living presence, an immanence, say in a stupa or reliquary, or in their faithful hearts? The answer to this question apparently lies in another question, directly related to our discussion, that is: **What makes the Bodhisattva’s 1<sup>st</sup> lion-roar so unique?**

Now, we generally understand that the Bodhisattva is one who is “still unawakened” (*anabhisambud-dha*), one who is not yet a buddha—that is, a bodhisattva, or Bodhisattva (with the initial capital to specially refer to Gotama before his awakening) [3.2.1.2]. But what did he say? He spoke words of *awakening*, and only one who was awakened could speak such words.

The newborn Bodhisattva declared: **“This is my last birth! There is now no more rebirth (for me)!”** [§20.5]. In the suttas, the claim that this is one’s last birth, and so on, is invariably a statement made after someone has reached full awakening.<sup>126</sup> Most of these passages describe the Buddha’s own awakening, beginning with the declaration “This is my last birth! There is now no more rebirth (for me)” and then stating on that same occasion that the “knowledge arose” of having attained this condition.<sup>127</sup> **The Pāsādika Sutta** (D 29) even explicitly states that this knowledge attained by the Buddha is “born of awakening” (*bodhijam nāṇam*)<sup>128</sup>

<sup>125</sup> DĀ 1 (T1.4c1): “All over in heaven and on earth, I alone am to be honoured. [My] aim is to deliver sentient beings from birth, old age, disease, and death,” 天上天下唯我為尊, 要度眾生老病死 *tīan shàng tiān xià wéi wǒ wéi zūn, yào dù zhòng shēng shēng lǎo bìng sǐ*, thereby combining a reference to liberating sentient beings with a claim to being supreme, but without any declaration of this being Vipassī’s last birth. Vipassī’s proclamation in **Mahā’-padāna S** (D 14/2:15,10), SD 49.8, corresponds to Gotama’s declaration in **Acchariya,abbhuta S** (M 123,20.5). The Skt version to D 14, fragment 360 fol 123 V4 (Fukita, 2003:9+64), preserves a proclamation by Vipasyī (Skt) that “This will be my last birth” (*iyam me bha(ve)[t paśc]imā jā[tih]*) without a claim to being supreme and without a ref to liberating others.

<sup>126</sup> D 29/3:134,12; M 26/1:167,28 + 173,19; M 128/3:162,25; S 14.31/2:171,2; S 14.32/2:172,12; S 22.26/3:28,33; S 22.27/3:29,29; S 35.13/4:8,2; S 35.14/4:8,26; S 35.15/4:9,30; S 35.16/4:10,21; S 48.21/5:204,12; S 48.28/5:206,6; S 56.11/5:423,10; A 3.101/1:259,11+32; A 7.47/4:56,15; A 8.64/4:305,4; A 9.41/4:448,19. The suttas M 4/1:23,24; M 19/1:117,18; M 36/1:249,17; M 85/2:93,23; M 100/2:212,17; M 112/3:36,26; and A 8.11/4:179,7 speak of the same benefit of having destroyed birth. Notable exceptions to this stock passage, applied to the Bodhisattva, are found in Acchariya,abbhuta S (M 123,20.5), SD 52.2 + Mahā’padāna Sutta (D 14,1.31/2:15,12), SD 49.8a.

<sup>127</sup> As in **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26): “The knowledge and vision arose in me: ... This is my last birth. Now there is no more rebirth (for me)!” (*nāṇañ ca pana me dassanam udapādi ... ayam antimā jāti, n’atthi dāni punabbhavo*) (M 26/1:167,27), SD 1.11. The parallel MĀ 204 (T1.777a17) similarly indicates that on that occasion “Knowledge arose and vision arose that ... birth has been eradicated ... there will be no further experiencing of existence,” 生知生見...生已盡...不更受有 *shēng zhī shēng jiān ... shēng yǐ jì n... bù gèng shòu yǒu*.

<sup>128</sup> “But as regards the future, the time way ahead, there arises in the Tathagata’s knowledge born of awakening that ‘This is the last birth! There is no more rebirth now (for me)!’” (*Anāgatañ ca kho addhānam ārabha tathāgata-tassa bodhijam nāṇam uppajjati, ayam antimā jāti, n’atthi dāni punabbhavo*, D 29,27.4/3:134,11), SD 40a.6. The parallel DĀ 17 (T1.75b29) indicates that “regarding the future, [the Tathāgata knows it through his] knowledge born of the path,” 於未來世, 生於道智 *yú wèi lái shì, shēng yú dào zhì*, though DĀ 17 does not follow this with any further specification about knowing that this is his last birth, etc.

Surely, despite such passages—or because of them—we may surmise that the idea had not yet arisen in the Bodhisattva at his birth that he actually knew this was going to be his last birth.<sup>129</sup> In other words, the proclamation made by the Bodhisattva in the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta shows “a clear temporal shift of claim, originally made after awakening,”<sup>130</sup> to that moment when the Bodhisattva had just been born.<sup>131</sup>

**3.6.1.2** What is this “temporal shift of claim”? [3.6.1.1]. When we carefully examine the life of the Bodhisattva from his seeing the 4 sights, through his renunciation, to just before the great awakening—or, better, to reflect on the whole of his last earthly life<sup>132</sup>—we will clearly see that, in his progress towards awakening, the Bodhisattva had to struggle with various mental defilements, such as fear, sensual desire and temptation, whose roots must have been present in his mind since the time of his birth.<sup>133</sup>

Considering the developments described in these passages, the Bodhisattva would not have been able to claim supremacy in the world, when he was newly born nor even when he eventually renounced the world in the quest of awakening. Analayo thus rightly concludes:

“In contrast, from the perspective of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta, the simple fact of being the Bodhisattva, however much he may be just a newly born infant, enables him to profess to be foremost in the whole world and to have already transcended future becoming. In this way, the Bodhisattva’s announcement of having reached the last birth and his proclamation of being foremost in the world reflect a clear change in the conception of the nature of the Bodhisattva.” (2010f:44)

**3.6.1.3** The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta, in making this “temporal shift of claim” [3.6.1.2], causes a shift of perspective and focus away from the Bodhisattva’s gradual progress to awakening—a detailed study of which is found in **SD 52.1**. The perspective is now focused on the newborn Bodhisattva, which inevitably lessens the importance of the Bodhisattva’s gradual progress.

<sup>129</sup> The Mahāyāna who considers that the Bodhisattva was already enlightened and omniscient would not have this problem! We are, however, considering the historical Buddha of early Buddhism.

<sup>130</sup> Based on Analayo, who uses the phrase: “a clear shift of a claim, originally made after awakening” (2010f:43).

<sup>131</sup> **Nālaka S** (Sn 3.11) similarly reports the devas rejoicing: “The Bodhisattva ... | is born in the human world for its good and joy, | ... Supreme among beings, foremost person is he: | ... supreme among all mankind” (*Bodhisatto ... manussa,loke hita,sukhatāya jāto (Be hita,sukhattāya) ... sabba,satt’uttamo agga,puggalo ... sabba,pajānam uttamo*, Sn 683 f @ SD 49.18). These two verses likewise shift the Buddha’s supremacy to the time of his birth. Elsewhere, the suttas also associate human welfare and happiness with the Buddha as an awakened teacher: cf “a being of undeluded nature has arisen in the world for the good of the many, for the joy of the many, out of compassion for the world for the good and joy of gods and humans” (*asammoha,dhammo satto loke uppanno bahu,jana,hitāya bahu,jana,sukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya deva,manussānaṃ*, M 4/1:21,26 @ SD 44.3; M 12/1:83,14 @ SD 49.1). Notably, other suttas use the same register of terms on welfare etc to qualify the foll: the holy life (*brahma,carya*), D 16/2:119,27 (SD 9), D 29/3:127,19 (SD 40a.6), D 33/3:211,5; noble disciples who teach the Dharma, It 3.4.5/79,22 (SD 113.11); monks, incl individuals who are reclusive or withdrawn: M 31/1:211,31 (SD 44.11), S 4.5/1:105,24 (SD 61.19), S 16.5/2:203,20 (SD 96.10); and virtuous recluses and brahmins as a field of merit, D 23/2:332,9 (SD 39.4). Thus, the ideas of the “welfare and happiness of the many” and of having “compassion for the world” are not used exclusively for the Buddha, but may apply to others who teach the Dharma, or even to those who are a source of merit. Dharmaskandha, in fragment fol 18 r9, even uses *bahu,jana,hitāya bahu,jana,-sukhāya* for a layfollower who refrains from killing, etc, encourages others to do the same, and rejoices in restraint from killing, etc (Dietz, 1984:76,2).

<sup>132</sup> See esp SD 52.1; for an account of the Bodhisattva’s renunciation to just before the great awakening: (8-16).

<sup>133</sup> Silk takes up this contrast, where the Bodhisattva was “virtually fully awakened (‘enlightened’) from the moment of his birth,” whereas subsequent events show that he was still ignorant and under the influence of defilements, summarizing that whereas “the infant, upon his birth, knows everything; the young man he becomes knows nothing” (2003a:864).

If we accept that historically Gotama is already awakened, or in some way supreme, at birth, then the stages of his spiritual progress must necessarily have occurred earlier, that is, in some former life or lives. This shift of perspective, consciously or unconsciously made by the Sutta compilers, is evident in its application of the term *bodhisatta* to Gotama in his previous life in Tusita (as Seta, ketu).<sup>134</sup> However, in other suttas referred to earlier [eg, 3.6.1.1+n], the term *bodhisatta* only refers to his last life as an unawakened human before becoming the Buddha.

### 3.6.2 Vaticinium ex eventu

**3.6.2.1** Let us now examine the literary mechanism that the sutta compilers used to legitimize the marvels they claim to attribute supremacy to the Bodhisattva, that is by way of a “temporal shift of claim” [3.6.1.2]. This is a literary device or theological tactic known as *vaticinium ex eventu*, which is Latin meaning “prophecy after the event,” that is, postdiction, post-shadowing, or retroactive clairvoyance. This is a prediction after the fact, as an effect of hindsight bias<sup>135</sup> explains claimed predictions of significant events, such as plane crashes and natural disasters.

Religious critics, using this argument, claim that many religious prophecies that may appear to have come true were in fact written after the events supposedly predicted, or that their text or interpretation were modified after the event to fit the facts as they occurred.<sup>136</sup>

The application of the *vaticinium ex eventu* device by way of a “temporal shift of claim,” attributing marks of supremacy, even of awakening itself, to the unawakened Bodhisattva has serious consequences. For one, it projects the notion that the Bodhisattva was already at birth clearly destined to become a Buddha, no matter what challenges he might face.<sup>137</sup> [3.6.2.4]

**3.6.2.2** The same is also reflected in a listing of the Bodhisattva’s 5 great dreams in the **Mahā Supina Sutta** (A 5.196), which employs the “before the awakening” phrase. These 5 dreams are portents of the Bodhisattva’s future success:

- (1) in attaining full awakening,
- (2) in teaching the path of awakening,
- (3) in having a large congregation of lay-disciples,
- (4) in having monastic disciples from all the 4 classes, and
- (5) in receiving ample support without being attached to it.<sup>138</sup>

From the perspective of such passages, the Bodhisattva’s quest for awakening, described in the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta and elsewhere, is destined to end successfully.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>134</sup> See SD 52.1 (2.1).

<sup>135</sup> “Hindsight bias” is the inclination, after an event has occurred, to see the event as having been predictable, despite there having been little or no objective basis for predicting it.

<sup>136</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postdiction> & [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindsight\\_bias](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindsight_bias). See also SD 40b (3.4.4.2).

<sup>137</sup> Guang Xing comments that “the Acchariyābbhūtasutta provides some vital statements that served as repositories of the transcendental Buddha” conception (2004:45).

<sup>138</sup> A 5.196/3:240,15 (SD 63.13). Its Chinese (Āgama) versions give no parallels. However, a similar list of dreams is given in Mahā, vastu 2:136 (Senart 1890:136,14). According to *Divyāvadāna*, the bodhisattva experienced a number of premonitory dreams already at the time of the Buddha Dīpaṅkara (Cowell 1886:247,29). Rahula comments that although the Buddha’s teaching has no place for belief in premonitory signs and dreams, “zealous propagators” still fall for these popular ideas, “whence we find Siddhārtha having propitious dreams before his grand success” (1978: 259).

If these were true, then, the Bodhisattva did not need or did not make any human or spiritual effort in his quest. The Buddha-refuge then, is neither an exemplar of one who has walked the path nor that we can be liberated through self-effort. [3.6.2.4]

**3.6.2.3** Clearly then, the compilers of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta have introduced a significant, even drastic, change in the Bodhisattva idea.<sup>140</sup> According to the Sutta, even from birth itself, the Bodhisattva is endowed with the perfection that other suttas teach as the final fruit of his long and gradual quest for awakening. As a consequence of this shift of perspective, the supremacy associated with the Buddha state now becomes a birthright of the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva has become the Buddha, although not in name, but in fact.

The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta is, however, neither alone nor unique in this innovation. Later suttas, such as the Mahā'padāna Sutta, and later sectarian texts, too, show signs of a tendency to endow the Bodhisattva with fully developed qualities that the suttas teach as arising in the Buddha at the dawn of his awakening.

**The Mahā'padāna Sutta** [1.2.3.2], for example, innovatively states that the past buddha Vipassī was endowed with the deva-eye (dibba cakkhu)<sup>141</sup> at birth on account of his past karma.<sup>142</sup> **The Saṅgha.bheda,-vastu**, similarly, says that the Bodhisattva, too, was endowed with such a deva-eye.<sup>143</sup> **The Divyāvadāna**, too, states that the Bodhisattva was endowed with this ability even in a previous birth.<sup>144</sup>

**The Mahā,vastu**—which views the Buddha as being transcendental or supermundane (Skt *lokātara*)—claims that the Bodhisattva, in fact, gained dispassion at the time of Dīpaṅkara (the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 24 buddhas) [3.1.4] and had attained the perfection of wisdom countless crores of aeons ago.<sup>145</sup> In other words, to the Mahāyāna, the Bodhisattva was already enlightened and not human.

Hence, the Buddha, far from being uniquely “the awakened one,” became, to the Mahāyāna, merely a later, projected phantom of the enlightened Bodhisattva. This is effectively a role reversal: the Bodhi-

<sup>139</sup> Strong comments that “for the whole story of the Buddha’s quest to make good narrative sense, we must assume that he has, at least temporarily, forgotten ... who he is: a being whose buddhahood is certain” (2001:51).

<sup>140</sup> Similar ideas as those of Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta are briefly stated in **Adbhuta.dharma,paryāya**, where the Buddha and Ānanda are its protagonists, too. Its theme is the merit of building stūpas and images. In reply to an inquiry by Ānanda, the Buddha is made to proclaim that to construct for the Buddha a clay stūpa the size of a myrobalan with an image the size of a barley-grain and a relic the size of a mustard-seed is more meritorious than giving a quantity of precious gems as large as Jambudvīpa itself to those who have attained various stages of awakening: see Bentor 1988:35. Adbhuta.dharma,paryāya continues with increasingly larger amounts of precious gems that still fall short of matching the merits of the miniature stūpa. Though apart from the title and the protagonists there is nothing that suggests any direct relationship, the teachings of Adbhuta.dharma,paryāya “can nevertheless be seen to complement, from the perspective of later times, the presentation in the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta, by highlighting the superiority of devotion directed to the Buddha” (Analayo 2010f:45 n 82).

<sup>141</sup> This is not the divine eye (*dibba,cakkhu*) attained by the Buddha on his awakening, ie, the knowledge of the death and rebirth of beings, but is a weaker version of it: notice the term comprises 2 separate words.

<sup>142</sup> “Bhikkhus, on account of his karmic fruit, prince Vipassī was born with the deva-eye” (*jātassa kho pana, bhikkhave, Vipassissa kumārassa kammavipākajam dibbam cakkhum patur ahoṣi*), with which he was able to see around for a distance of a league day and night. (D 14,1.39/2:20,12), SD 49.8a.

<sup>143</sup> Gnoli: “On being born, the Bodhisattva was endowed with the deva-eye, through which he sees for a whole league by day and night” (*sāmpratajāto bodhisattva ... divyena cakṣusā samanvāgato yenāsu paśyati divā ca rātrau ca samantayojanam*) (1977:52,7). This, however, is not the divine eye attained by the Buddha on his awakening, ie, the knowledge of the death and rebirth of beings, but is a weaker version of it like the one mentioned in **Mahā'padāna S** (above). See also its Chinese version: T191 (T3.940c18).

<sup>144</sup> Cowell 1886:315,28.

<sup>145</sup> *Dīpaṅkaram upādāya vītarāgas tathāgataḥ ... kalpakotiṃ asaṅkhyeyāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ gatā* (Senart, 1882a: 170,3+5).

sattva was *the eternal cosmic essence of enlightenment*, and the Buddha was merely *his earthly phantom projection*—in theology, this is called the doctrine of Doceticism. The Bodhisattva *idea* had become **the Bodhisattva ideal**.<sup>146</sup>

**3.6.2.4** In conclusion, we can say that to see **the Bodhisattva** as being endowed with the marvels and supremacy of the awakened Buddha of early Buddhism, implies 2 grave consequences, both of which strongly go against the spirit of early Buddhism and the possibility of awakening through self-effort.

**(1) The 1<sup>st</sup> consequence** of the idea that the Bodhisattva was endowed with the marvels and supremacy of the awakened Buddha implies that the Bodhisattva was already at birth destined to become a Buddha, no matter what challenges he might face [3.6.2.1]. Apparently, in such an ideology, either the Bodhisattva was enlightened “all the time” (he was eternal) or that he was beyond the working of karma (he was transcendental)—or both. In effect, we have turned the Bodhisattva into an omniscient God-like figure—and thrown out the Buddha. For, even the Buddha who appeared on earth is not human, but a mere projection of some cosmic essence. This is, in fact, a well-known teaching in Mahāyāna.<sup>147</sup>

**(2) The 2<sup>nd</sup> consequence** of the idea that the Bodhisattva was endowed with the marvels and supremacy of the awakened Buddha implies that the Bodhisattva did not really make any effort to gain awakening. All the stories of his spiritual prowess as a child and youth up to his awakening, are merely a “play” or pretence to project to us that he was a “human.” There was no spiritual quest, as we understand it in the early suttas. [3.6.2.2]

This is a problem of self-effort. If the Bodhisattva were already awakened, then, he did not need to or did not actually make any human or spiritual effort in his quest. The Buddha-refuge, then, is neither an exemplar nor a goal that we can attain. Since the Bodhisattva did not really walk the path himself, we cannot say that there is a path to awakening, certainly not one to Buddhahood. There is no way that we can awaken and be liberated through self-effort.<sup>148</sup>

It is not difficult to see how such a transcendental notion of the Bodhisattva in due course diminished the state and status of the Buddha from being fully enlightened to being *unenlightened*, and that he needed to go on to gain full enlightenment. The Mahāyāna denied the Buddha his enlightenment!

In due course, in post-Buddha Buddhism, we see the Bodhisattva as an enlightenment-candidate going before a Buddha to get his endorsement for an enlightenment—like the modern certification of enlightenment in the Zen tradition.

This is as if the Bodhisattva Sumedha, for example, upon meeting Dīpaṅkara Buddha, became at once enlightened or that he was already enlightened long before that. If such were the case, then, we have a theological notion of **grace**—that enlightenment or Buddhahood was not attainable by self-effort but was a “gift” by the grace of some eternal God-like Buddha! The apotheosis of the Buddha was now complete.

**3.6.2.5 How are we then to understand** the teachings and spirit of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta? The following approaches are likely to help us see the Sutta as addressing a formidable challenge and keeping the Buddha’s teachings vitally relevant to the times:

- (1) The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta teachings are only skilfully innovative as a response to an outside challenge in the name of Buddhism.
- (2) The Sutta teachings should be understood in the light of a psychology of myth.
- (3) The Sutta teachings should be interpreted in terms of the “two teachings.”

<sup>146</sup> Further, see SD 52.1 (3.4.2.3).

<sup>147</sup> See Princeton Dict of Buddhism, sv trikāya.

<sup>148</sup> On the natural necessity of self-effort, see **Atta,kārī S** (A 6.38), SD 7.6.

**(1)** The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta teachings are only **skilfully innovative as a response to an outside challenge in the name of Buddhism**. That challenge is, of course, the rise of a populist form of Buddhism called Mahāyāna, “the great vehicle,” a term evoking the salvation of all beings contra the “old school” of the elders (Skt *sthavira*; P *thera*) (who adhere to the teachings of early Buddhism).

If there is a single theological<sup>149</sup> reason for the rise of the Mahāyāna, it is likely to be that their proponents’ inability to accept or cope with the Buddha’s death. The Mahāyāna significantly included those who were probably challenged by outside religious notions of a “living God” or continued divine existence of earthly avatars or prophets of such a God. But the Buddha was believed to be merely a human who had died, leaving behind his followers to work out their own salvation.<sup>150</sup>

The proponents of Mahāyāna and its devotees were likely to be the faith-inclined who yearned for emotional security and succour of an omniscient omnipresent all-loving all-powerful God-like figure. This very well described the Mahāyāna Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who were also viewed as vaguely eternal essences of such qualities as compassion (Avalokiteśvara), wisdom (Mañjuśrī), enlightenment as light (Amit’ābha) and so on.<sup>151</sup>

The consolation with this explanation is that the compilers of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta need not be seen as innovators. They were merely attempting to respond to real external challenges with some kind of suitable teachings that would be attractive to those who were overwhelmed by the new theories, or whose faith in early Buddhism would be jeopardized. Such Sutta teachings may not be sterling Buddha Dharma, but serve as stop-gap measures for those unable to rise beyond their formative faith.

**(2)** The Sutta teachings should be understood in the light of **a psychology of myth**. Our difficulties with the teachings of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta are inevitably serious when we regard the Bodhisattva and his marvels in historical terms. As is understandably common in all the major world-religions, their scriptures contain a significant amount of teachings, parables, prophecies, miracles and methods that employ symbolic language.

Taken as they are, such religious scriptures would, in the light of modern science, psychology and learning, be rendered inexplicable, even oppressive or ridiculous, except to their adherents with blind faith, the exploitative, the misinformed, the gullible and the ignorant.

Some theologians attempt to “**demythologize**” such difficult and discordant doctrines—that is, remove the false and exploitative façade of doctrines to reveal and reach the true, rich core of spirituality. It is this core that helps us to really see and understand our true self, tame it and free it for the higher good.<sup>152</sup>

**(3)** The Sutta teachings should be interpreted in terms of **the “two teachings.”** This teaching, given in **the Neyy’attha Nīt’attha Sutta** (A 2.3.5+6), says that when studying suttas, we should first examine whether it is a teaching “whose sense has been drawn out” (*nīt’attha*) or “whose sense needs to be drawn out” (*neyy’attha*), that is, whether they are respectively explicit or implicit.<sup>153</sup>

An “explicit” teaching is where its sense refers to or evokes the Dharma or true reality *directly*, such as the teaching of impermanence, the 5 aggregates, mindfulness, wisdom and so on. An “implicit” teach-

<sup>149</sup> OED def theology as “the study of science which treats of God, His nature and attributes, and His relations with man and the universe.” In our broader usage, *theology* refers to a system or theory that treats the Buddha or the Bodhisattva as some kind of supreme or God-like being in a transhistorical sense.

<sup>150</sup> Historically, Mahāyāna was very likely to have been influenced by Zoroastrianism (from Iran) and a revitalized Brahmanism in India itself. Moreover, Mahāyāna arose contemporaneous with the rise of early Christianity, so that their mutual influences were likely. See SD 52.1 (16.5.1).

<sup>151</sup> For a study of such Mahāyāna symbolisms, see Piyasilo, *Mandala of the Five Buddhas*, Malaysia, 1989a.

<sup>152</sup> See SD 52.1 (1.0.2.1 (5)); also SD 4.1 (3); SD 39.3 (3.3.4.3)

<sup>153</sup> A 2.3.5+6/1:60 (SD 2.6b).

ing shows the Dharma *indirectly*, especially through stories, figures, parables, similes and symbolic language. The marvels of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta fall into this latter category of teaching—they are not to be taken literally and their meaning needs to be teased out.

## 4 Related suttas

### 4.1 LIST OF RELATED SUTTAS

<b>(Saḷ-āyatana) Phagguna Sutta</b>	S 35.83/4:52 f	SD 52.2(4.2)	describing the past buddhas
<b>Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 1</b>	A 4.127/2:130 f	SD 52.2a	the Buddha’s 4 key life-events
<b>Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 2</b>	A 4.128/2:131 f	SD 52.2b	overcoming the 4 defilements
<b>Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 3</b>	A 4.129/2:132	SD 52.2c	Ānanda’s charisma
<b>Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 4</b>	A 4.130/2:133	SD 52.2d	The wheel-turner’s charisma
<b>(Rādha) Satta Sutta</b>	S 23.2/3:189 f	SD 52.2e	on <i>satta</i> as “being” and as “stuck”
<b>(Udāna) Satta Sutta 1</b>	U 63/7.3/75	SD 52.2f	we are fettered to sense-desires
<b>(Udāna) Satta Sutta 2</b>	U 64/7.4/75 f	SD 52.2g	we are caught in sense-desires

### 4.2 (SAḶ-ĀYATANA) PHAGGUNA SUTTA (S 35.83)

**4.2.1 The (Saḷ-āyatana) Phagguna Sutta** (S 35.83) is a short text in two parts. It opens with Phagguna asking the Buddha whether any of the 6 past buddhas--Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa [1.2.3.2]—can be described in terms of any of the 6 senses (the 5 physical senses + mind) [§§4-9].

This question means: “Do the past buddhas, on attaining the nirvana-element without residue, still retain the 6 sense-faculties?” These sense-faculties are conditioned states, but nirvana is unconditioned. Hence, the Buddha’s answer is quite obvious.

In the second part and closing of the Sutta, the Buddha replies that this cannot be done—which means that, a buddha, upon attaining final nirvana, no more exists in terms in any of the senses. They cannot be described (or spoken of) in any cognitive manner, or in any other way, because they have attained the unconditioned, nirvana.

**4.2.2 The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta** (M 123,2.2) actually opens with a statement reflecting the question, made by the monks during their discussion, that the Buddha is able to know about “the past buddhas, who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering,” that is, concerning their class, name, clan, moral virtue, samadhi, wisdom, dwelling and freedom.<sup>154</sup>

The Buddha then instructs Ānanda to explain to the monks what really are the 19 marvels of the Bodhisattva, and the 20<sup>th</sup> marvel of the Buddha himself, that is, his current mental clarity regarding feelings, perceptions and thoughts.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>154</sup> See M 123,2 (SD 52.2).

<sup>155</sup> See M 123,3-24 (SD 52.2).



## SD 52.2(4.2)

**(Saḷ-āyatana) Phagguṇa Sutta**The Discourse to Phagguṇa (on the 6 sense-bases) • S 35.83/4:52 f<sup>156</sup>Be **Phagguṇa Pañha**, Phagguṇa's Questions

Theme: The past buddhas cannot be described cognitively

- 1 (Regarding Phagguṇa.)
- 2 Then, the venerable Phagguṇa approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side.
- 3 Seated down at one side, the venerable Phagguṇa said to the Blessed One:

Phagguṇa's questions

4 “Bhante, is there any **eye** by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas,<sup>157</sup> those who have attained final nirvana, *parinibbute*  
 have cut off proliferation, *chinna,papañce*  
 have broken the cycle, *chinna,vaṭume*  
 have ended the rounds, and *pariyādiṇṇa,vaṭte*  
 have overcome all suffering?<sup>158</sup> *sabba,dukkha,vitivate*

5 Bhante, is there any **ear** by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering?

6 Bhante, is there any **nose** by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering?

7 Bhante, is there any **tongue** by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering?

8 Bhante, is there any **body** by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering?

9 Bhante, is there any **mind** by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering?”

<sup>156</sup> The text used here is that of the PTS ed Leon Feer, 1893; rev Peter Jackson 2014 (S 4:52 f), identical paging as the old ed.

<sup>157</sup> *Atthi nu kho bhante tañ cakkhuṃ yena cakkhunā atīte buddhe ... paññāpayamāno paññāpeyya*, lit, “Is there or not, bhante, any eye by which one describing the past buddhas could describe them?” **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14) shows in some detail the Buddha’s knowledge of the 6 past buddhas (D 14/2:1-54), SD 49.8.

<sup>158</sup> A similar passage, as a statement (about the Buddha) with “he is able to know” (*janissati*) instead of *paññāpeyya*, as in **Acchariya.abbhuta S** [§2.2]. Comy: “Proliferation” (*papañca*) is that of craving; the “rut” (*vaṭuma*) is that of ignorance (SA 2:370). Comys on **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14) and on **Acchariya,abbhuta S** (M 123) ad loc: The “rut” is a synonym for *samsara*, the flow or cycle of wholesome and unwholesome karma (DA 2:423; MA 4:167). The cycle or rolling on of all karma has ended (DA 2:425). “Has overcome all suffering” means that there is no more of future karmic fruiting (MA 4:167).

## The Buddha's answer

**10** “Phagguna, there is no eye by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering.

**5** Phagguna, there is no ear by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering.

**6** Phagguna, there is no nose by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering.

**7** Phagguna, there is no tongue by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering.

**8** Phagguna, there is no body by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering. **[53]**

**9** Phagguna, there is no mind by means of which one can rightly describe the past buddhas, those who have attained final nirvana, have cut off proliferation, have broken the cycle, have ended the rounds, and have overcome all suffering.

— evaṃ —

## Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta

### The Discourse on the Wonderful and Marvellous

M 123

**1** Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was residing in Anātha.piṇḍika's monastery-park in Jeta's grove outside Sāvattthī.

**2** Now at that time a large number of monks, having returned from their alms-round, after their meal, had gathered in the meeting hall, whereupon this discussion arose:<sup>159</sup>

2.2 “How wonderful, avuso [friends]! How marvellous, avuso! Great is the Tathagata's powers! Great is his glory<sup>160</sup>—

<sup>159</sup> *Atha kho sambahulānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ pacchā, bhattaṃ piṇḍapāta, paṭikkantānaṃ upaṭṭhāna, sālāyaṃ sannisin-nānaṃ sannipatitānaṃ ayam antarā, kathā udapādi.* As at **Kāya, gata, sati S** (M 119,2.1), SD 12.21.

<sup>160</sup> *Acchariyaṃ āvuso, abbhutaṃ āvuso tathāgatassa mah'iddhikatā mahā'nubhāvatā.* Stock: **Mah'āpadāna S** (D 14,1.13/2:8+1.14.2/2:9), SD 49.8; **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16,4.25/2:129x2), SD 9; **Acchariya, abbhuta S** (M 123,2.2/-

He is able to know<sup>161</sup> about **the past buddhas**,<sup>162</sup>  
 who have attained final nirvana,  
 have cut off proliferation,  
 have broken the cycle,  
 have ended the rounds, and  
 have overcome all suffering.<sup>163</sup>

that for those Blessed Ones such was their class [birth];  
*that for those Blessed Ones such was their* name;  
*that for those Blessed Ones such was their* clan [gotra];  
*that for those Blessed Ones such was their* moral virtue;  
*that for those Blessed Ones such was their* samadhi,<sup>164</sup>  
*that for those Blessed Ones such was their* wisdom;  
*that for those Blessed Ones such was their* dwelling,<sup>165</sup>  
*that for those Blessed Ones such was their* freedom!<sup>166</sup>

2.3 When this was said, the venerable Ānanda said to the monks:

“And wonderful, indeed, avuso, are the tathagatas!<sup>167</sup> They are accomplished in wonderful qualities!  
 And marvellous, indeed, avuso, are the tathagatas! They are accomplished in marvellous qualities!”<sup>168</sup>  
**[119]**

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3:118+119), SD 52.2. *Acchariyaṃ vata bho, abbhutaṃ vata bho ...*, **Suppavāsa S** (U 2.8/16,10); **Udapāna S** (U 7.9/-78,30 + 79,2); **Cunda S** (U 8.5/83,25+31); **Manussa,maṃsa,paṭikkhepa Kathā** (Mv 6.23.6 @ V 1:218,12).

<sup>161</sup> “Is able to know,” *janissati* (fut), lit, “will know.” **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,1.13.2 passim) parallel passages read this as “can recall” (*anussarissati*), lit, “will recall” throughout (D 2:8), SD 49.8a. On this special usage of the future form describing spiritual states, see SD 36.13 (6.1).

<sup>162</sup> **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14) shows in some detail the Buddha’s knowledge of the 6 past buddhas (D 14/2:1-54), SD 49.8. See **(Sa)āyatana) Phagguṇa S** (S 35.83), where the Buddha tells the monk Phagguṇa that the past buddhas cannot, in any way, be described in terms of any of the 6 senses (the 5 physical senses + mind) (S 35.83/4:52), SD 52.1(4.2). This means that, upon attaining final nirvana, a buddha no more exists in terms in any of the senses: they have attained the unconditioned.

<sup>163</sup> *Yatra hi nāma tathāgato atīte buddhe parinibbute chinna,papañce chinna,vaṭume pariyādinna,vaṭṭe sabba,-dukkha,vītivatte jānissati\**, Be Ee *jānissati*; Be:Ka *anussarissati jānissati*. Cf S 35/83/4:52 (SD 52(4.2)). Comy at **(Sa)āyatana) Phagguṇa S** (S 35.83): “Proliferation” (*papañca*) is that of craving; the “rut” (*vaṭuma*) is that of ignorance (SA 2:370). Comys on **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14) and on **Acchariya,abbhuta S** (M 123) ad loc: The “rut” is a synonym for samsara, the flow or cycle of wholesome and unwholesome karma (DA 2:423; MA 4:167). The cycle or rolling on of all karma has ended (DA 2:425). “Has overcome all suffering” means that there is no more of future karmic fruiting (MA 4:167).

<sup>164</sup> Comy says that *dhmma* here refers to the 2<sup>nd</sup> training of the 3 trainings—that of *samādhi*—which incl both the worldly as well as spiritual samadhis (*lokiya,lokuttarena samādhinā*) (MA 4:122 f). DA specifies that it is the samadhi of the paths and their respective fruits (DA 2:426). In short, these are the dhyanas and their benefits.

<sup>165</sup> The buddhas are abiders in the attainment of cessation (*nirodha,samāpatti*) (DA 2:426; MA 4:168), ie, the cessation of the perception and feeling (*saññā,vedayita nirodha*): see SD 48.7 (3.2).

<sup>166</sup> Comys list **5 kinds of freedom** (*pañca,vidha vimutti*), also called “abandoning” (*pahāna*), etc, by (1) elimination; (*vikkhambhana*), (2) displacement (*tad-aṅga*), (3) cutting off (*samuccheda*), (4) stilling (*paṭipassaddhi*) & (5) escape (*nissaraṇa*) (DA 2:426; MA 4:168). Basically, these refer respectively to samatha, vipassana, path, fruition and nirvana: they are freed in terms of all these. For details, see SD 13.1 (4.2.3.3).

<sup>167</sup> At **§2.2** the monks refer to the sg “the Tathagata’s power” (*tathāgata*) but here, Ānanda refers to pl “the tathagatas” in general, by way of validating that the Buddha is a living part of an ancient or eternal truth. Note also that the term **tathāgata** as addressing the Buddha is used by both the Buddha himself **[§2.6]** and others referring to him. See **§3** n on “Bodhisattva.”

And this was the discussion of these monks that was interrupted.

2.4 Then, the Blessed One, having emerged from his evening solitude, went to the assembly-hall,<sup>169</sup> sat down on the prepared seat, and then addressed the monks:

“Bhikshus, what talk are you having just now, sitting together here, and what is the topic of conversation that was interrupted?”<sup>170</sup>

2.5 “Here we are, bhante, sitting in the assembly-hall, where we have gathered, having returned from our alms-round, after our meal, when this discussion arose amongst us, thus:

“How wonderful, avuso! How marvellous, avuso! Great is the Tathagata’s powers! Great is his glory—He is able to know about the past buddhas, who have attained final nirvana,

have cut off proliferation,

have broken the cycle,

have ended the rounds, and

have overcome all suffering:

that for those Blessed Ones such was their class [birth];

that for those Blessed Ones such was their name;

that for those Blessed Ones such was their clan [gotra];

that for those Blessed Ones such was their moral virtue;

that for those Blessed Ones such was their samadhi;

that for those Blessed Ones such was their wisdom;

that for those Blessed Ones such was their dwelling;

that for those Blessed Ones such was their freedom!” [2.2]

This, bhante, was that discussion that was interrupted when the Blessed One arrived.”

2.6 Then, the Blessed One addressed **the venerable Ānanda**:

“In that case, Ānanda, declare<sup>171</sup> in some detail the Tathāgata’s wonderful and marvellous qualities!”

## THE MARVELLOUS QUALITIES

(*abbhuta, dhamma*)

(1) REBIRTH IN TUSITA<sup>172</sup>

**3** <sup>173</sup>“From the Blessed One’s mouth, bhante, I’ve heard this; from his mouth I’ve learned that:<sup>174</sup>

‘Mindful and clearly comprehending, Ānanda, the Bodhisattva<sup>175</sup> **was reborn** amongst the Tusita host.’<sup>176</sup>

<sup>168</sup> *Acchariyā c’eva āvuso tathāgatā acchariya, dhamma, samannāgatā ca, abbhutā ceva āvuso tathāgatā abbhuta, dhamma, samannāgatā cāti.* Alt tr: “ ... They are wonderfully accomplished by nature! ... They are marvelously accomplished by nature!”

<sup>169</sup> “Assembly-hall” (*upaṭṭhāna, sālā*): V 3:70,10; A 4:358,24; U 11,1. A broad term that refers to an assembly hall or a meeting-place or a refectory. See V:H 5 index, “refectory” & *Dictionary of Early Buddhist Monastic Terms*, sv.

<sup>170</sup> *Kāya nu’ttha bhikkhave etarahi kathāya sannisinā, kā ca pana vo antarā, kathā vippakatāti?* On the Buddha’s intervening in the monks’ discussion, see SD 49.8a (2.2).

<sup>171</sup> “Declare,” *paṭibhātu*, “Since you say that the tathagatas are wonderful, speak about it then!” (MA 4:168,25).

<sup>172</sup> The Bodhisattva’s birth in Tusita is his penultimate life, ie, after his birth as Jotipāla, as recorded in (**Majjhima Ghaṭikāra S** (M 81), SD 49.3, and before his last birth as Siddhattha and becoming the Buddha of this epoch. Comys, however, take Vessantara (**Vessantara J**, J 547), as his last birth, after which he is reborn in Tusita (J 1:47; BA 272). We must then deduce that the Jotipāla birth is just before the Vessantara birth.

<sup>173</sup> This is the start of Ānanda’s teaching, which closes at the end of §21.7.

<sup>174</sup> *Sammukhā m’etaṃ bhante bhagavato sutarā, sammukhā paṭiggahitarā.*

## REFRAIN

3.2 [120] Bhante, that *mindful and clearly comprehending, the Bodhisattva was reborn amongst the Tusita host*—

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

## (2) LIVING IN TUSITA

4 From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

'Mindful and clearly comprehending, Ānanda, the Bodhisattva **remained** amongst the Tusita host.'<sup>177</sup>

## REFRAIN

4.2 Bhante, that *mindful and clearly comprehending, the Bodhisattva remained amongst the Tusita host*—

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

## (3) FULL LIFE-SPAN IN TUSITA

5 (3) From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

'**For the full duration of his life-span**, Ānanda, the Bodhisattva remained amongst the Tusita host.'<sup>178</sup>

## REFRAIN

5.2 Bhante, that *for the full duration of his life-span, the Bodhisattva remained amongst the Tusita host*<sup>179</sup>—

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

## (4) PASSING AWAY FROM TUSITA

6 (4) From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

'Mindful and clearly comprehending,<sup>180</sup> Ānanda, the Bodhisattva **passed away** [fell] from the Tusita host<sup>181</sup> and descended into his mother's womb.'<sup>182</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Ānanda used "the Bodhisattva" (instead of "the Blessed One" as a gesture of respect) here because he is simply quoting the Buddha. In the refrain, however, he declares (speaking for himself) that this is how he remembers the "quality of the Blessed One." See **Analayo** 2010f:16 n3 on how the Buddha addresses himself and how the monks refer to him when reporting in the suttas.

<sup>176</sup> *Sato sampajāno ānanda bodhisatto tusitaṃ kāyaṃ upapajjīti.*

<sup>177</sup> *Sato sampajāno ānanda bodhisatto tusite kāye aṭṭhāsīti.*

<sup>178</sup> *Yāvat'āyukaṃ ānanda bodhisatto tusite kāye aṭṭhāsīti.* Comy explains that this is the result of his having fulfilled all the perfections (*pāramī*), there being nothing gift-worthy that he has not given, not a moral virtue that he has not observed (MA 4:170,1-3).

<sup>179</sup> The Chin version, does not mention the Bodhisattva's stay in Tusita in terms of his having mindfulness and clear comprehension. Instead, it says that during that time, the Bodhisattva excelled all the other devas in regard to such qualities as life-span, beauty and glory (MĀ 32 @ T1.470a2). These divine qualities of the Bodhisattva are mentioned in **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30), with further excellence in happiness, power, divine sights, divine sounds, divine smells, divine tastes and divine touches. (D 30,1.4/3:146,3), SD 36.9.

<sup>180</sup> The Bodhisattva passing away "mindful and clearly comprehending" (*sato sampajāno*) from Tusita recurs as amongst the qualities of the past buddha Vipassī in **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,1.17/2:12,4), SD 49.8a. The Chin version (DĀ 1 @ T1.3c16), however, only mentions the Bodhisattva's mental clarity on descending into the womb, 正念不亂 *zhèng niàn bù luàn* (T2 @ T1.152b26) without mentioning mindfulness or clear comprehension. In Jainism, Jinacariya 3 says that Mahāvīra was aware when he was about to descend into his mother's womb and of having descended, but only at the very moment of descending he was unaware (*caissāmi 'tti jāṇai, cayaṃāṇe na jāṇai, cue 'mi 'tti jāṇāi*) (Jacobi 1879:34,7, tr Jacobi 1884:219).

## REFRAIN

6.2 Bhante, that [120] *mindful and clearly comprehending, the Bodhisattva passed away from the Tusita host and descended into his mother's womb—*

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

## (5) THE CONCEPTION

7 From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

7.2 'When the Bodhisattva passed away from the Tusita host and **descended** into his mother's womb, a great boundless light,<sup>183</sup> surpassing the glory of the devas, appeared in the world with its devas, its maras and its brahmas, this generation with its recluses and priests, its rulers and people.<sup>184</sup>

7.3 Even in the groundless abysmal dark, the blinding darkness of the spaces amongst the worlds,<sup>185</sup> where even the lights of the moon and the sun, so mighty as they are, cannot prevail,<sup>186</sup> a great boundless radiance appears, surpassing even the divine glory of the devas.

7.4 And those beings that have arisen there (in the abysmal dark),<sup>187</sup> too, on account of that light, perceive one another, saying:

<sup>181</sup> **Pañca Pubba, nimitta S** (It 83) lists these 5 omens (*pañca pubba, nimitta*) by which a deva knows of his impending death (*cuti*): (1) his garlands wither, (2) his garments become soiled, (3) his armpits exude sweat, (4) his body gives a foul smell, (5) he delights not in his heavenly seat (It 83, SD 23.8a(1.2); also at DA 2:427 f).

<sup>182</sup> *Sato sampajāno ānanda bodhisatto tusitā kāyā cavitvā mātu, kucchim okkamīti*. As in **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16), where it is given as the 3<sup>rd</sup> reason for a great earth tremor (D 16, 3.15/2:108), SD 9. *Cavitvā*, absolute of *cavati*, "falls from (a heaven)," said of the celestial being when he dies; n *cuti*, *cavana* (comy).

<sup>183</sup> On this "great boundless light" and beings in the universe perceiving one another [§7.4], see SD 52.2a (2.5.2).

<sup>184</sup> *Yadā ānanda bodhisatto tusitā kāyā cavitvā mātu, kucchim okkamati, atha sa, devake loke sa, mārake sa, brahmake sa-s, samaṇa, brāhmaṇiyā pajāya sa, deva, manussāya appamāṇo uḷāro obhāso loke pātubhavati atikkamm'eva devānaṃ devānubhāvaṃ*.

<sup>185</sup> On its parallel in **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14, 1.18) & **Acchariya, abbhuta S 1** (A 4.127, 2), SD 52.2a. Cf **Andha, kāra S** (S 56.46/5:454) SD 53.2, where suffering is compared to the interworld darkness; **Mahā, vastu** (Mvst 1:35; Mvst:J 1:35). Comy: Amongst every 3 world-systems, there is a space measuring 8,000 yojanas (56,000 mi = 90,123 km). It is like the space amongst three cart-wheels or almsbowls touching one another (MA 4:177; AA 3:127; J 1:76; VbhA 4). The beings are reborn in these great interworld hells. What karma have those beings done to be reborn therein? They have committed serious and violent misdeeds against their parents and against righteous recluses and brahmins, and through other terrible crimes, such as killing living beings day after day—such as the bandit Abhaya and the bandit Nāga in on the island of Tamba, paṇṇī (Sri Lanka) (cf DA 2:433, 32). Their bodies are 3 gavutas long (5.25 mi = 8.45 km) and they have long fingernails like bats. As bats hang in trees, these beings hang by their fingernails on the foot of the world-system mountain. When creeping along, they stay in arm's length of one another. Then, thinking, 'We have found food!' they scurry about, roll over, and fall into the water that supports the world. They are just like honey-fruits (*madhuka, phala*) which, when struck by the wind, break off and fall into the water. As soon as they have fallen therein, they dissolve like a lump of flour in very caustic liquid. ... This radiance [when the Bodhisattva enters his mother's womb] does not even last long enough to take a sip of porridge, but only long enough for them to awaken from sleep and apprehend the object. But the Dīgha Nikāya reciters say that, like a flash of lighting, it shines forth merely for the duration of a finger-snap and disappears even as they say, 'What is that?' (MA 4:178; AA 3:127).

<sup>186</sup> *Yāpi tā lok'antarikā aghā asaṃvutā andha, kāra andha, kāra, timisā yattha'p'imesaṃ candima, sūriyānaṃ evaṃ mah'iddhikānaṃ evaṃ mah'ānubhāvānaṃ ābhā nānubhonti: D 14, 1.18.2/2:12, 11 (SD 49.8a) = M 123, 7.3/3:120, 9 (SD 52.2) = S 56.46/5:454, 17 (53.2) = A 4.127/2:130, 26 (SD 52.2a)*. On *aghā*, cf Mvst index & R Morris, JPTS 3, 1889: 200. This dark intergalactic "void" or empty space (*aghā*) is described as being "always open" (*nicca, viva-tā*). It is "groundless, abysmal" (*asaṃvuta*) in the sense of being "unsupported from below" (*heṭṭhāpi appatiṭṭhā*) (MA 4:177); "the lights ... cannot prevail" (*abhā nānubhonti*), "unable to light up on their own" (*attano pabhāya na-p, pahonti*) (MA 4:178).

<sup>187</sup> In a great hell (*mahā, niraya*) (MA 4:178).

“It appears, sirs, that there are other beings, too, that have arisen here!”<sup>188</sup>

7.5 And this 10,000-world system quakes, trembles, shudders. And a great boundless radiance fills the world, surpassing even the divine splendour of the devas.<sup>189</sup>

REFRAIN

7.6 Bhante, *that when the Bodhisattva passed away from the Tusita host and descended into his mother’s womb, a great boundless light, surpassing the glory of the devas, appeared in the world with its devas, its maras and its brahmas, this generation with its recluses and priests, its rulers and people.*

7.7 *Even in the abysmal dark, the blinding darkness of the spaces amongst the worlds, where even the lights of the moon and the sun, so mighty as they are, cannot prevail, a great boundless radiance appears, surpassing even the divine glory of the devas.*

7.8 *And those beings that have arisen there, too, on account of that light, perceive one another, saying: ‘It appears, sirs, that there are other beings, too, that have arisen here!’*

7.9 And this 10,000-world system quakes, trembles, shudders. And a great boundless radiance fills the world, surpassing even the divine splendour of the devas—

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

#### (6) THE WOMB PROTECTION

8 From the Blessed One’s mouth, bhante, I’ve heard this; from his mouth I’ve learned that:

8.2 ‘When, Ānanda, the Bodhisattva, having descended into his mother’s womb,<sup>190</sup> 4 devaputras [junior gods]<sup>191</sup> undertake to **protect the 4 quarters**, thinking, “Let not any human or non-human harm the Bodhisattva or the Bodhisattva’s mother!”

REFRAIN

8.3 Bhante, *that when the Bodhisattva, having descended<sup>192</sup> into his mother’s womb, 4 young devas [devaputras] undertake to protect the 4 quarters, thinking,*

*“Let not any human or non-human harm the Bodhisattva or the Bodhisattva’s mother!”—*

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

#### (7) THE MOTHER’S VIRTUE

9 From the Blessed One’s mouth, bhante, I’ve heard this; from his mouth I’ve learned that:

9.2 ‘When, Ānanda, the Bodhisattva having descended into his mother’s womb, the Bodhisattva’s mother is by nature morally virtuous. She is one who<sup>193</sup>

abstains from taking life,  
abstains from taking the not-given,  
abstains from sexual misconduct,  
abstains from lying,

<sup>188</sup> On the beings in the universe perceiving one another and the “great boundless light” [§7.2], see SD 52.2a (2.5.2).

<sup>189</sup> As at **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,1.32.5), SD 49.8a.

<sup>190</sup> Although the verb “descending” (*okkanto*) is present continuous, it implies not only conception, but also the gestation of the Bodhisattva, as is obvious from the contexts of the subsequent sections.

<sup>191</sup> The “4 junior gods” (*deva,putta*) are the 4 great kings who guard the 4 quarters: Dhata,raṭṭha the east, Virūḷha-ka the south, Virūpajjha the west and Vessavaṇa the north. They see themselves as protecting the Bodhisattva’s pregnant mother from any danger or fear (*bhaya*) arising from seeing any fearsome non-human or hearing their sounds (MA 4:179). See SD 52.1 (2.4.1.3(1)).

<sup>192</sup> *Okkanto*, “is descending” is pres continuous, but idiomatic English dictates it to be a gerund in perfect aspect.

<sup>193</sup> This 5-precept formula is stock: see **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14 ad loc n), SD 49.8a. Cf Mvst 1:145.

abstains from strong drinks, distilled drinks, and intoxicants that cause heedlessness.’

REFRAIN

9.3 Bhante, that when the *Bodhisattva, having descended into his mother’s womb, the Bodhisattva’s mother is by nature morally virtuous. She is one who abstains from taking life, abstains from taking the not-given, abstains from sexual misconduct, abstains from lying, abstains from strong drinks, distilled drinks, and intoxicants that cause heedlessness.*’ — this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One. [121]

(8) THE MOTHER’S CHASTITY [121]

10 From the Blessed One’s mouth, bhante, I’ve heard this; from his mouth I’ve learned that:

10.2 ‘When, Ānanda, the Bodhisattva, having descended into his mother’s womb, **no thought connected with a cord of sensual pleasure arises in the Bodhisattva’s mother towards men**, nor would the Bodhisattva’s mother commit any transgression, with a lustful mind, towards any man.’

REFRAIN

10.3 Bhante, that when the *Bodhisattva, having descended into his mother’s womb, no thought connected with a cord of sensual pleasure arises in the Bodhisattva’s mother towards men, nor would the Bodhisattva’s mother commit any transgression, with a lustful mind, towards any man*— this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

(9) THE MOTHER’S JOY

11 From the Blessed One’s mouth, bhante, I’ve heard this; from his mouth I’ve learned that:

11.2 ‘When, Ānanda, the Bodhisattva, having descended into his mother’s womb, the Bodhisattva’s mother enjoys **the 5 cords of sensual pleasures**, attended by them, fully endowed and engrossed with them.’<sup>194</sup>

REFRAIN

11.3 Bhante, that when the *Bodhisattva, having descended into his mother’s womb, the Bodhisattva’s mother enjoys the 5 cords of sensual pleasures, attended by them, fully endowed and engrossed with them*— this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

(10) THE MOTHER’S HEALTH

12 From the Blessed One’s mouth, bhante, I’ve heard this; from his mouth I’ve learned that:

12.2 ‘When, Ānanda, the Bodhisattva, having descended into his mother’s womb, **no illness whatsoever arises in the Bodhisattva’s mother**. The Bodhisattva’s mother is comfortable and physically at ease.’<sup>195</sup>

<sup>194</sup> *Yadā ānanda bodhisatto mātu, kucchirī okkanto hoti, lābhini bodhisatta, mātā hoti pañcannaṃ kāma, guṇānaṃ, sā pañcahi kāma, guṇehi samappitā samaṅgī, bhūtā paricāretīti.* This means that she is overwhelmed with joy and rapture at her marital state. This explains why she has no sensual interest in others, as noted in §1.21(5). Cf **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,2.4.3), SD 49.8a, where the same is described of prince Vipassī.

<sup>195</sup> *Yadā ānanda bodhisatto mātu, kucchirī okkanto hoti, na bodhisatta, mātu kocid eva ābādho uppajjati, sukhinī bodhisatta, mātā hoti akilanta, kāyā.*



12.3 And the Bodhisattva's mother sees the Bodhisattva, fully endowed with limbs and parts, free from any defect of faculty,<sup>196</sup> within her womb.<sup>197</sup>

12.4 Ānanda, just as if there were a **beautiful beryl**<sup>198</sup> gem of the purest water— eight faceted, well polished, clear, limpid, consummate in all its aspects, through which runs a blue, or yellow, or red, or white thread, or brown thread<sup>199</sup>— and a man with good eyesight, taking it in his hand, were to reflect on it, thus:

12.5 “*This is a beautiful beryl gem of the purest water—eight faceted, well polished, clear, limpid, consummate in all its aspects, through which runs a blue, or yellow, or red, or white, or brown thread,*”<sup>200</sup>

12.6 even so, bhikshus, when the Bodhisattva is descending into his mother's womb, that no illness whatsoever arises in the Bodhisattva's mother. The Bodhisattva's mother is comfortable and physically at ease.

12.7 And the Bodhisattva's mother sees the Bodhisattva, fully endowed with limbs and parts, free from any defect of faculty, within her womb.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>196</sup> “Free from any defect of faculty,” *ahīn'indriyaṃ* = *na + hīna + indriya*. *Hīna* (mfn) of *jahati*, “leaves, leaves behind, abandons, gives up (DP 2:219). Comy: The Bodhisattva sits cross-legged, facing frontwards (*puratthābhimukha*), like a Dharma teacher on a Dharma-seat (MA 4:181,25). **Mahāvastu**, however, says that he “stands” in the womb (*mātur yonim nīrāya tiṣṭhanti*, etc, Mvst 1:144).

<sup>197</sup> *Bodhisattañ ca bodhisatta, mātā tiro.kucchi, gataṃ passati sabb'aṅga, paccaṅgaṃ ahīnindriyaṃ*. Be Se *ahīnindriyaṃ*; Ce Ee *abhinindriyaṃ* [CPD sv]; Ke *abhinindriyaṃ*. See M 2:85, 3:121. See DA 2:436, cf 1:222. Note here that it is the Bodhisattva's mother, not everyone, who is able to see the baby. This is an allusion to a mother's visualization of her child as she bears him.

<sup>198</sup> *Veluriya*: from a metathesis of *veruliyā* comes Greek *beryllos*, “beryl,” whence German *Brille*, “spectacles” (originally, of beryl) (Walshe).

<sup>199</sup> “Through which runs ... etc,” *tatra suttam āvutaṃ nīlaṃ vā pītaṃ vā lohitaṃ vā odātaṃ vā paṇḍu, suttam vā*. Rhys Davids tr *pīta* here as “orange-coloured,” and *paṇḍu* as “yellow” (D:RD 1:87), while Bodhi has as “yellow” and “brown” respectively (1989:44). Cf “clearly visible as if with a yellow thread strung through a jewel” (*vipassanne maṇi, ratne āvuta, paṇḍu, suttam viya*, J 1:51). *Paṇḍu, sutta* is found in **Vidhura Paṇḍita J** (J 545/6:305), where E B Cowell & W H D Rouse tr it as “white thread” (J:C&R 6:147). Both *pīta* and *paṇḍu* sometimes refer to “yellow.” SED def *pāṇḍu* as “yellowish white, white, pale.” Comys offer no explanation, except that the gem “is like the physical body, and the thread running through it, is like insight knowledge (*vipassanā, ñāṇa*)” (DA 1:211). DANṬ (New Subcomy) corrects “insight knowledge” to “insight consciousness” (*vipassanā, viññāṇa*, DANṬ:VRI 2:126). **Jothiko**: “Generally, ‘knowledge and vision’ is the ability, the state of clarity, enabling one to see even hidden things clearly. So, the image of a transparent gem. It is both ‘higher than Jhāna’, if the absorptions are taken as ‘pleasant abiding in the here and now.’ And ‘less than the absorptions’ if they are used as a way of reaching full enlightenment. So, obviously, it is not the *sammā ñāṇa*—knowledge of liberation. The colors at old [sic] were often associated with natural phenomena. **Paṇḍu** is earthen colors, the word used even today to denote the dyeing of robes: various natural hues of brown, mostly. Just as *lohita* is both ‘blood’ and the color of ‘red,’ *pitta* [*pīta*] is ‘bile’ and its shades, mostly ‘light green,’ off yellow” (Jothiko's email, 13 Nov 2006). It is possible that the 6 colours represent the 6 sense-consciousnesses. The first 4 colours are those of the colour *kaṣiṇa* meditations: see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16,3.29-32/-2:110 f), SD 9. See **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a (4.1).

<sup>200</sup> *Seyyathā'pi ānanda maṇi veḷuriyo subho jātimā aṭṭhaṃso suparikamma, kato, tatrāssa suttam āvutaṃ nīlaṃ vā pītaṃ vā lohitaṃ vā odātaṃ vā paṇḍu, suttam vā, tam enaṃ cakkhumā puriso hatthe karitvā paccavekkhaya*. The beryl simile, relating to the Bodhisattva's gestation period (as a foetus), recurs at **Mahāpadāna S** (D 14,1.21/-2:13), SD 49.8 = **Acchariya, abbhuta S** (M 123,12/3:121), SD 52.1. The simile itself recurs at **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,85-88/1:76 f), SD 8.10 = **(Ānanda) Subha S** (D 10,2.21-22/1:209), SD 40a.13 = **Mahā Sakul'udāyi S** (M 77,52.2), SD 49.5a. *Paṇḍu, sutta* occurs in **Vidhura Paṇḍita J** (J 545/6:305), where E B Cowell & W H D Rouse tr it as “white thread” (J:CR 6:147).

<sup>201</sup> *Bodhisattañ ca bodhisatta, mātā tiro.kucchi, gataṃ passati sabb'aṅga, paccaṅgaṃ ahīn'indriyaṃ'ti*. In **Mahā Sakul'udāyi S** (M 77), SD 49.5a, this passage applies to the true nature of the body and mind, and their interdependence (M 77,29/2:17), SD 6.18.

## REFRAIN

12.8 Bhante, that when the *Bodhisattva*, having descended into his mother's womb, no illness whatsoever arises in the Bodhisattva's mother. The *Bodhisattva's* mother is comfortable and physically at ease.

12.9 And the *Bodhisattva's* mother sees the Bodhisattva, fully endowed with limbs and parts, free from any defect of faculty, within her womb.

12.10 Just as if there were a beautiful beryl gem of the purest water—  
eight faceted, well polished, clear, limpid, consummate in all its aspects,  
through which runs a blue, or yellow, or red, or white thread, or brown thread—  
and a man with good eyesight, taking it in his hand, were to reflect on it, thus:

12.12 'This is a beautiful beryl gem of the purest water—eight faceted, well polished, clear, limpid, consummate in all its aspects, through which runs a blue, or yellow, or red, or white, or brown thread,'

12.13 even so, bhikshus, when the *Bodhisattva*, having descended into his mother's womb, that no illness whatsoever arises in the *Bodhisattva's* mother. The *Bodhisattva's* mother is comfortable and physically at ease.

12.14 And the *Bodhisattva's* mother sees the Bodhisattva, fully endowed with limbs and parts, free from any defect of faculty, within her womb—

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

## (11) THE MOTHER'S DEATH [122]

13 From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

13.2 'Ānanda, 7 days after the Bodhisattva is born, **the Bodhisattva's mother dies**,<sup>202</sup> and is reborn amongst the Tusita host.<sup>203</sup>

## REFRAIN

13.3 Bhante, that 7 days after the Bodhisattva is born, the *Bodhisattva's* mother dies, and is reborn amongst the Tusita host—

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

## (12) THE GESTATION PERIOD

14 From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

14.2 'Ānanda, while other women give birth after bearing the child for 9 or 10 months,<sup>204</sup> the *Bodhisattva's* mother does not give birth until she has borne the child for exactly **10 months**.<sup>205</sup>

## REFRAIN

14.3 Bhante, that *while other women give birth after bearing the child for 9 or 10 months*, the *Bodhisattva's* mother does not give birth until she has borne the child for 10 months—

<sup>202</sup> Comy: Māyā's death is not because of any birth defect, but the expiration of her life-span. For, the *Bodhisattva's* tabernacle (her womb), is like a relic-chamber of a shrine (*cetiya, kuṭi*), and no other being could lay in or use, the mother who bore the *Bodhisattva* was reborn in the heavenly city of Tusita. (MA 4:182,2)

<sup>203</sup> *Satt'āha, jāte ānanda bodhisatte bodhisatta, mātā kālaṃ karoti, tusitaṃ kāyaṃ upapajjati.*

<sup>204</sup> Comy, reflecting the midwife tradition of the day, notes that those who gestated for 7, 11 or 12 months lived. Those born after only 7 (lunar) months were unable to endure heat or cold; but those born in the 8<sup>th</sup> month did not live (no reason is given); but the others lived. (DA 2:437). This seemed to refer to premature or to late-term babies. These were culture-bound comments which, as a rule, do not apply today where medical care is good or advanced. The idea is that the *Bodhisattva* was a full-term healthy child.

<sup>205</sup> *Yathā kho paṇ'ānanda aññā itthikā nava vā dasa vā māse gabbhaṃ kucchinā pariharitvā vijāyanti. Na h'evaṃ bodhisattaṃ bodhisatta, mātā vijāyati, das'eva māsāni bodhisattaṃ bodhisatta, mātā kucchinā pariharitvā vijāyati.*

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

## (13) THE DELIVERY POSTURE

**15** From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

15.2 'Ānanda, while other women give birth while sitting or reclining, the Bodhisattva's mother does not—she gives birth while standing.<sup>206</sup>

## REFRAIN

15.3 Bhante, that *while other women give birth while sitting or reclining, the Bodhisattva's mother does not—she gives birth while standing—*

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

## (14) THE GODS RECEIVE THE BODHISATTVA

**16** From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

16.2 'Ānanda, when the Bodhisattva issues forth from his mother's womb, **gods** receive him first, then humans.<sup>207</sup>

## REFRAIN

16.3 Bhante, that *when the Bodhisattva issues forth from his mother's womb, gods receive him first, then humans—*

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

## (15) THE ANNUNCIATION

**17** From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

17.2 'Ānanda, when the Bodhisattva issues forth from his mother's womb, before he could touch the ground, 4 young gods [devaputras] receive him and present him to his mother, declaring, "Rejoice, your majesty! Mighty glorious is the son who is born to you!"<sup>208</sup>

## REFRAIN

17.3 Bhante, that *when the Bodhisattva issues forth from his mother's womb, before he could touch the ground, 4 young gods receive him and present him to his mother, declaring,*

*"Rejoice, your majesty! Mighty glorious is the son who is born to you!"—*

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

## (16) THE BODHISATTVA IS BORN IMMACULATE

**18** From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

18.2 'Ānanda, when the Bodhisattva emerges from his mother's womb, he **emerges immaculate**, unsoiled by water, unsoiled by mucus, unsoiled by blood, **[123]** unsoiled by any impurity whatsoever, pure and clean<sup>209</sup>—

<sup>206</sup> *Yathā kho paṇṇānanda aññā itthikā nisinnā vā nipannā vā vijāyanti. Na h'evaṃ bodhisattaṃ bodhisatta, māṭā vijāyati, ṭhitā'va bodhisattaṃ bodhisatta, māṭā vijāyati. Cf Mvst 1:217.*

<sup>207</sup> *Yadā ānanda bodhisatto mātu, kucchimhā nikkhamati, devā naṃ paṭhamam paṭiggāṇhanti, pacchā manussā'ti.*

<sup>208</sup> *Yadā ānanda bodhisatto mātu, kucchimhā nikkhamati, appatto'va bodhisatto pathaviṃ hoti. Cattāro naṃ deva, - puttā paṭiggāhetvā mātu purato ṭhapenti, "Attamaṇā devi hohi, mahēsakkho te putto uppanno'ti. Cf Mvst 1:149 f. On 4 adoring kings (not 3) in some early Christian bas-reliefs, see Neumann, *Reden Gotamo Buddhos* (M tr of this Sutta), 1919 3:253 ff.*

<sup>209</sup> *Yadā ānanda bodhisatto mātukucchimhā nikkhamati, visadova nikkhamati amakkhito udena [Be udena; Ce Ee Ke Se uddenā] amakkhito semhena amakkhito ruhirena amakkhito kenaci asucinā, suddho visado [Se visuddho].*

18.3 Ānanda, just as a jewel were laid down on Kasī cloth, neither is the jewel soiled nor is the cloth soiled.<sup>210</sup>

And what is the reason for this? Because of the purity of both.

18.4 Even so, Ānanda, it is *when the Bodhisattva emerges from his mother's womb, he emerges immaculate, unsoiled by water, unsoiled by mucus, unsoiled by blood, unsoiled by any impurity whatsoever, pure and clean—*

18.5 *just as a jewel were laid down on Kasī cloth, neither is the jewel soiled nor is the cloth soiled.'*

REFRAIN

18.6 Bhante, that *when the Bodhisattva emerges from his mother's womb, he emerges immaculate, unsoiled by water, unsoiled by mucus, unsoiled by blood, unsoiled by any impurity whatsoever, pure and clean—*

18.7 *just as a jewel were laid down on Kasī cloth, neither is the jewel soiled nor is the cloth soiled. And what is the reason for this? Because of the purity of both.*

18.8 Even so, Ānanda, it is *when the Bodhisattva emerges from his mother's womb, he emerges immaculate, unsoiled by water, unsoiled by mucus, unsoiled by blood, unsoiled by any impurity whatsoever, pure and clean—*

18.9 *just as a jewel were laid down on Kasī cloth, neither is the jewel soiled nor is the cloth soiled—* this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

(17) THE DIVINE STREAMS OF WATER

19 From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

19.2 'Ānanda, when the Bodhisattva emerges from his mother's womb, **two streams of water**—one cool and one warm—appear from the sky.<sup>211</sup> On account of these waters, both the Bodhisattva and his mother are washed clean.<sup>212</sup>

REFRAIN

19.3 Bhante, that *when the Bodhisattva emerges from his mother's womb, two streams of water— one cool and one warm—appear from the sky. On account of these waters, both the Bodhisattva and his mother are washed clean—*

this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

(18) THE 1<sup>ST</sup> LION-ROAR

20 From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this:

20.2 'Ānanda, the Bodhisattva, as soon as he is born, stands firm on both his feet,<sup>213</sup> facing the north, and, while a white sunshade<sup>214</sup> is held over him, takes 7 strides.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>210</sup> *Seyyathā'pi ānanda maṇi'ratanam kāsike vatthe nikkhattam neva maṇi'ratanam kāsikam vattham makkheti, nāpi kāsikam vattham maṇi,ratanam makkheti.*

<sup>211</sup> Comys explain that as the streams of water were not needed to wash away any impurities, the warm one was for the Bodhisattva to play in, and the cool one for drinking (DA 2:438 = MA 4:184). Cf Mvst 1:220-222.

<sup>212</sup> *Yadā ānanda bodhisatto mātu,kucchimhā nikkhamati, dve udakassa dhārā anta,likkhā pātubhavanti, ekā sītas-sa ekā uṇhassa. Yena bodhisattassa udaka,kiccam karonti mātu cāti.* This washing may be understood as being done first, so that mother and child are washed clean. Their purity is mentioned first to highlight their purity. Or, this may be simply a ritual washing, as we are already told that the Bodhisattva is born pure from his mother's womb, which would also mean that his mother is unsoiled, too [§1.29]. Or, the gods feel their involvement would be to their own spiritual advantage—at least in the mind of the sutta editor.

<sup>213</sup> Comys explain the foll events as **foresigns** (*pubba,nimitta*) of the Buddha's attainments, thus: standing firm (*pāda*) on the ground presages his attaining the 4 bases of success (*iddhi,pāda*); his facing north, his rising above and beyond the crowd; his 7 steps, his attaining the 7 awakening-factors (*satta,bojjhaṅga*); the white parasol, of attaining

20.3 Then, looking around in every quarter,<sup>216</sup> he declares as with **a bull's voice**:<sup>217</sup>

<i>Aggo'ham asmi lokassa</i>	'Foremost am I in the world!
<i>jeṭṭho'ham<sup>218</sup> asmi lokassa</i>	The eldest am I in the world!
<i>seṭṭho'ham asmi lokassa</i>	The best am I in the world!
<i>ayam antimā jāti</i>	This is my last birth!
<i>n'atthi dāni punabbhavo'ti</i>	There is now no more rebirth (for me).'

REFRAIN

20.4 Bhante, that when the *Bodhisattva*, as soon as he is born, stands firm on both his feet, facing the north and, while a white sunshade is held over him, takes 7 strides.

20.5 Then, looking around in every quarter, he declares as with a bull's voice:

*'Foremost am I in the world!*  
*The eldest am I in the world!*  
*The best am I in the world!*  
*This is my last birth!*  
*There is now no more rebirth (for me).'*

—this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.

(19) THE UNIVERSAL RADIANCE

21 From the Blessed One's mouth, bhante, I've heard this; from his mouth I've learned that:

21.2 'When, Ānanda, the Bodhisattva mindfully and fully comprehending, leaves his mother's womb,<sup>219</sup>

21.3 in the world with its gods, with its maras and its brahmas, this generation with its recluses and priests, its rulers and people,

there appears a boundless glorious radiance surpassing even the divine glory of the devas.<sup>220</sup>

21.4 Even in the abysmal dark, the blinding darkness of the space amongst the worlds, where even the lights of the moon and the sun, so mighty as they are, cannot penetrate, [124]

there, too, a boundless glorious radiance appears, surpassing even the divine glory of the devas.

21.5 And those beings that have arisen there, too, on account of that light, perceive one another, saying:

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the parasol of freedom (*vimutti*); his surveying the quarters, of his omniscience (full awakening); his words in a bull's voice, of setting in motion the irreversible Dharma-wheel; his statement: "This is my last birth!" of his passing away into the nirvana-element without residue (final nirvana). (DA 3:439 f; MA 4:123 f). See SD 52.1 (3.4.3.2).

<sup>214</sup> "White parasol," *setamhi chatte*, or a sun-shade. Comy says this is a royal symbol (DA 2:439), which hints at his future greatness.

<sup>215</sup> Cf Mvst 1:221.

<sup>216</sup> Cf J 1:55.

<sup>217</sup> §§20.2-3: *Yam patijāto ānanda bodhisatto samehi pādehi pathaviyaṃ patiṭṭhahitvā uttarābhimukho satta, -pada, vītiḥārena gacchati, setamhi chatte anudhāriyamāne | sabbo ca disā viloketi, āsabhiñ ca vācaṃ bhāsati.* A "bull's voice" (*āsabhiṃ vācaṃ*). Comy glosses *āsabhi* (adj) as "highest, best" (*usabhan'ti uttaman*, DA 2:439; MA 4:185), ie, a sonorous voice of a true leader or teacher. The bull, here the bellwether, is regarded as a noble animal, a sort of lord of domestic animals, just as the lion is the lord of the jungle. On a deeper level, the bull imagery here represents Siddhattha "ultimate manhood and humanity," excelling whether in the world (as world ruler) or out of it (as world teacher). See John Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, Harvard, 2000.

<sup>218</sup> This follows Be Se with *jeṭṭho* as the 2<sup>nd</sup> and *seṭṭho* the 3<sup>rd</sup> quality. Ce Ee reverses their order.

<sup>219</sup> *Puna c'aparaṃ, bhikkhave, yadā bodhisatto sato sampajāno mātu'kucchimhā nikkhamati.* As in **Mahā,pari-nibbāna S** (D 16), where it is given as the 4<sup>th</sup> reason for a great earth tremor (D 16,3.16/2:108), SD 9.

<sup>220</sup> As at **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,1.18.2), SD 49.8a.

“It appears, sirs, that there are other beings, too, that have arisen here!”

21.6 And this 10,000-world system **quakes**, trembles, shudders. And a boundless and great radiance fills the world, surpassing even the divine splendour of the devas.<sup>221</sup>

REFRAIN

21.7 *Bhante, that when the Bodhisattva mindfully and fully comprehending, leaves his mother’s womb,*

21.3 *in the world with its gods, with its maras and its brahmas, this generation with its recluses and priests, its rulers and people,*

*there appears a boundless glorious radiance surpassing even the divine glory of the devas.*

21.4 *Even in the abysmal dark, the blinding darkness of the space amongst the worlds, where even the lights of the moon and the sun, so mighty as they are, cannot penetrate,*

*there, too, a boundless glorious radiance appears, surpassing even the divine glory of the devas.*

21.5 *And those beings that have arisen there, too, on account of that light, perceive one another, saying:*

*“It appears, sirs, that there are other beings, too, that have arisen here!”*

21.6 *And this 10,000-world system **quakes**, trembles, shudders. And a boundless and great radiance fills the world, surpassing even the divine splendour of the devas—*

21.7 *this, bhante, indeed I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One.”*

[20] THE SPECIAL QUALITY OF THE BUDDHA’S MIND

22 “That being the case, Ānanda, remember this, too, as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Tathagata:

22.2 Here, Ānanda,

for the Tathagata, feelings (*vedanā*) are known when they arise, are known when they are present, are known when they disappear;<sup>222</sup>

for the Tathagata perceptions (*saññā*) are known to arise, are known to be present, are known to disappear;

for the Tathagata thoughts (*vitakka*) are known to arise, are known to be present, are known to disappear.<sup>223</sup>

This, too, Ānanda, remember it as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Tathāgata.”

REFRAIN

23 “Bhante,

that for the Tathagata feelings are known when they arise, are known when they are present, are known when they disappear;

that for the Tathagata perceptions are known when they arise, are known when they are present, are known when they disappear;

that for the Tathagata thoughts are known to arise, are known when they are present, are known when they disappear

—this, too, bhante, I will remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Tathāgata.”

<sup>221</sup> As at §1.18.2. For a study on the remarkable coincidences and parallels in the lives of the child Bodhisattva and the baby Christ, see Z P Thundy, *Buddha and Christ: Nativity Stories and Indian Traditions*, Leiden: E J Brill, 1993.

<sup>222</sup> *Idh’ānanda tathāgatassa viditā vedanā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbattham gacchanti.* The Buddha says this clearly to highlight the most wonderful and most marvellous of his characteristics: the awakening itself.

<sup>223</sup> Comy: There is nothing that the buddhas do not know by insight—they are clear to him by way of the 3 characteristics (impermanence, suffering, and non-self) (MA 4:190). On the 3 characteristics (*ti,lakkhaṇa*), see SD 1.2 (2).

**24** The venerable Ānanda said this. The teacher approved of it. And the monks, satisfied, rejoiced in the venerable Ānanda’s word.

— evaṃ —

## Reading List

[For the full SD 52 Bibliography, see end of SD 52.1]

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