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Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 4

The Fourth Discourse on the Wonderful and Marvellous | **A 4.130**
Cakka,vatti Acchariya Sutta The Wheel-turner Discourse on the Wonderful
 Theme: Ānanda's charisma is like that of a wheel-turner
 Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 Overview

1.1 The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 4 (A 4.130) is the fourth and last of a series of 4 suttas in **the Bhava Vagga** (the chapter on existence) in the Book of Threes (Tika Nipāta) of the Aṅguttara Nikāya. The 4 suttas are as follows:¹

Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 1	A 4.127/2:130 f	SD 52.2a	the Buddha's 4 key life-events and radiance
Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 2	A 4.128/2:131 f	SD 52.2b	attachment, conceit, non-stillness, ignorance
Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 3	A 4.129/2:132	SD 52.2c	Ānanda's fourfold charisma
Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 4	A 4.130/2:133	SD 52.2d	Ānanda's charisma is like that of a world-monarch

1.2 The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 4 (A 4.130) contains one of the earliest descriptions of the wheel-turner (*cakka,vatti*), that is, a just world monarch who unifies and rules his realm in a non-violent way.² The Sutta opens with the 4 charismatic qualities of a wheel-turner, who is adored by the 4 assemblies of the kshatriyas, the brahmins, the householders and the recluses [§§1-6].

The Buddha then attributes the same 4 charismatic qualities to Ānanda, who is loved by the 4 assemblies of the monks, the nuns, the men lay-followers and the women lay-followers [§§7-12]. In doing so, the Buddha hints at Ānanda's personality is like that of a wheel-turner, that is, one who is articulate and wise in dealing with people.³

1.3 The contents of the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 4 are also found in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), but the two main sections are arranged in reverse,⁴ with the wheel-turner's qualities mentioned first.⁵ Such special qualities of a person constitute "marvels" (*abbhuta,dhamma*), like those mentioned of the Buddha, especially while he is still a Bodhisattva, as listed in **the Abbhuta Dhamma Suttas** [1.1].⁶

2 The wheel-turner

2.1 THE WHEEL-TURNER'S 4 WHEELS

2.1.1 The wheel-turner is a Dharma king (*dhamma,rāja*), where **dhamma** (Skt *dharma*) has at least these key senses:

¹ See SD 52.2 (4.1).

² See Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S (D 26), SD 36.10.

³ On Ānanda's being foremost of monks with *gatimantānaṃ*, see SD 52.2 (1.3).

⁴ D 16,5.16-16A (SD 9).

⁵ A tr of this same Sutta is also at **SD 36.10(2.1)**.

⁶ On such marvels constituting a "limb" of the teaching, see SD 52.2 (3.3).

- (1) duties (*vatta*), that is, his tasks as a ruler to his realm and people;
- (2) justice, that is, a problem-based solving of issues and difficulties with the person-based bias, which today we call the rule of law (*dhamm'ādhipateyya*), and
- (3) natural truth (*dhammatā*), that is, his position is not something gained through political or military power, nor sustained by it, but naturally arising to him as a result of his own good karma⁷ and present moral conduct [§4.2], so that his actions and compassion, too, attract and sustain goodness and prosperity in his realm.

2.1.2 Besides these qualities, the wheel-turner is invariably also attributed the following epithets, reflecting his goodness and supremacy:⁸

- *dhammika*, he is just;
- *dhamma,rājā*, a Dharma-spirited king, one who keeps to his code of royal duties;⁹
- *vijitāvī cātur-anta*, a conqueror of the 4 quarters, a world conqueror;
- *janapada-t,thāvariya-p,patta*, who has brought social stability, and is secure in the country;
- *satta,ratana,samannāgata*, a possessor of the 7 jewels.¹⁰

2.1.3 The wheel-turner is said to have these “4 wheels” which facilitate the following benefits:

- (1) he lives in a place that is *strategically located* (in a central position and where the socio-political conditions are right);
- (2) he has a loyal following who are wise and resourceful, and a populace that is intelligent, mature, healthy and capable;
- (3) he has set himself on a proper course of kingship (such as keeping to protocol); and
- (4) this is the result of his having done many great good deeds in past lives.

2.1.4 A number of suttas, furthermore, say that he has “more than a thousand sons.” His dominion extends throughout the continent bound by the seas (*sāgara,pariyanta*); and is established neither by the rod nor by the sword, but only by righteousness (*adaṇḍena asatthena dhammen'eva abhivijiva*).¹¹

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⁷ Lakkhaṇa S (D 30.1.3.2/3:145) and the rest of the Sutta details on the karmic background of the great man's 32 marks (D 10.1.4.1-2.31/3:145-178), SD 36.9.

⁸ See **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26,2.1), SD 36.10.

⁹ See **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26,5.1-5.5), SD 36.10. On the duties of a rajah, see (5.4.1.4).

¹⁰ See SD 36.10 (2.3).

¹¹ Mahā'padāna S (D 14,1.31/2:16), SD 49.8b; Mahā,sudassana S (D 17,1.8-11/2:172), SD 36.17; Cakka,vatti Sīha,-nāda S (D 26,2b/3:59), SD 36.10; Ambaṭṭha S (D 3,1.5/1:88), SD 21.3; ItA 77.

Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 4

The Fourth Discourse on the Wonderful and Marvellous

A 4.130

1 Bhikshus, these 4 wonderful and marvellous qualities are those of a **wheel-turning king** [a just world ruler]:

(1) The kshatriyas

<p>2 If a company of <u>kshatriyas</u> visits a wheel-turning king, and if the wheel-turning king talks, but when the wheel-turning king is silent,</p>	<p>they are pleased at the sight of him; they are pleased at the talk; they are disappointed.</p>
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(2) The brahmins

<p>3 If a company of <u>brahmins</u> visits a wheel-turning king, and if the wheel-turning king talks, but when the wheel-turning king is silent,</p>	<p>they are pleased at the sight of him; they are pleased at the talk; they are disappointed.</p>
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(3) The houselord

<p>4 If a company of <u>houselords</u> visits a wheel-turning king, and if the wheel-turning king talks, but when the wheel-turning king is silent,</p>	<p>they are pleased at the sight of him; they are pleased at the talk; they are disappointed.</p>
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(4) The recluses

<p>5 If a company of <u>recluses</u> visits a wheel-turning king, and if the wheel-turning king talks, but when the wheel-turning king is silent,</p>	<p>they are pleased at the sight of him; they are pleased at the talk; they are disappointed. [146]</p>
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6 Even so, bhikshus, these four wonderful and marvellous qualities are found in Ānanda:
If any of the fourfold companies comes to see Ānanda, it will be pleased to see him, it will be pleased when he talks on Dharma, but will be disappointed if he is silent.

Ānanda's 4 wonderful qualities

7 Even so, bhikshus, these are 4 wonderful and marvellous qualities found in Ānanda. What are the four?

(1) The assembly of monks

8 If an assembly of **monks** comes to see Ānanda,
and if Ānanda then talks on the Dharma
to that assembly of monks,
but when Ānanda is silent,

they are pleased at the sight of him;¹²

they are pleased with the talk;¹³
they are disappointed.¹⁴

(2) The assembly of nuns

9 If an assembly of **nuns** comes to see Ānanda,
and if Ānanda then *talks* on the Dharma
to that assembly of nuns,
but when Ānanda is *silent*,

they are pleased at the sight of him;

they are pleased with the talk;
they are disappointed.

(3) The assembly of men lay-followers

10 If an assembly of **men lay-followers**
comes to see Ānanda,
and if Ānanda then *talks* on the Dharma
to that assembly of men lay-followers,
but when Ānanda is *silent*,

they are pleased at the sight of him;

they are pleased with the talk;
they are disappointed.

(4) The assembly of women lay-followers

11 If an assembly of **women lay-followers**
comes to see Ānanda,
and if Ānanda then *talks* on the Dharma
to an assembly of women lay-followers,
but when Ānanda is *silent*,

they are pleased at the sight of him;

they are pleased with the talk;
they are disappointed.

12 These, bhikkhus, are the 4 wonderful and marvellous qualities about Ānanda.

— evaṃ —

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¹² *Sace bhikkhave bhikkhu, parisā ānandaṃ dassanāya upasaṅkamati dassanena sā attamanā hoti.*

¹³ *Tattha ce ānando dhammaṃ bhāsati bhāsitena pi sā attamanā hoti.*

¹⁴ *Atittā va bhikkhave bhikkhu, parisā hoti atha ānanda tuṅhī bhavati.*