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Magha Vatthu

The Story of Magha | DhA 2.7¹

Ee Mahāli, pañha Vatthu The Story of Mahāli's Question

Theme: How Magha became Sakra, the lord of 2 heavens

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¹ DhA 2.7a is an almost verbatim version of Mahali S (S 11.13/1:230 f), SD 99.11 & SA 1:348,8-31. DhA 2.7b is a free version of Kulāvaka J (J 31/1:198-206), SD 86.23.

1 Story summary and composition

1.1 SUMMARY. The Magha Vatthu, “the story of Magha,” is a commentarial account of the origins and life of Sakra up to his marital days with his 4 wives in Tāva,tim̄sa. The story is divided into 2 unequal parts: a short “story of the present” [§§1-11, **2.7a**] and the very long feature “story of the past” [§§12-102, **2.7bcd**]. The story of the past is further divided into: **2.7b** How Magha became Sakra; **2.7c** Tāva,tim̄sa; **2.7d** The 4 wives of Sakra. A short conclusion follows: the Buddha highlights Sakra’s **heedfulness** (*appamāda*) [§§103-105].

1.2 STORY PARTS. The Magha Vatthu is divided into 4 main parts and a short conclusion, thus:

- 2.7a** (§§1-11) **THE STORY OF THE PRESENT:** Mahāli’s questions; Sakra’s special qualities.
It includes accounts of the origins of Sakra’s 7 names (**the Sakka,nāma Sutta**, S 11.13) and the nature of his 7 vows (**the Vata,pada Sutta**, S 11.11). A longer version of this “story of the present” is found in **the Mahāli Sutta** (S 11.13). This section closes with 2 well known “mother-father” verses (S 904 f = S 906 f) which also close S 11.11 and 11.12.
- THE STORY OF THE PAST:**
- 2.7b** (§§12-53) **Magha, his 33 companions and 4 wives**
It opens with the story of Magha, his 33 companions, Sakra’s 4 wives and their good works. Closes with the 2 well known “mother-father” verses (S 904 f = S 906 f) which also close S 11.11 and 11.12 (as in 2.7a). **2.7b** is an abridged and free version of **the Kulāvaka Jātaka** (J 31), which highlights Sakra’s compassion and leadership.
- 2.7c** (§§54-65) **Tāvatiṃsa and the asuras**
This story brings us back to the present with Magha being reborn as Sakra; the 33 as Tāva,tim̄sa devas, the builder as Vissa,kamma, and the elephant as Erāvaṇa. The “new devas” (Sakra and the 33) overthrow the asuras (the cause of the deva-asura war). Tāva,tim̄sa is described, highlighting the coral tree and Sakra’s throne.
- 2.7d** (§§66-102) **Sakra’s 4 wives**
Magha and the 33 live a celibate life as public workers. Despite their sidelining the 4 women (Sakra’s wives), the first 3 (Sudhammā, Nandā and Cittā) make important contributions, too. Sakra’s love and wisdom are attested by his concern for Sujā; his compassion is highlighted by deep respect for even lowly garuda nestlings.
- 2.7e** (§§103-105) **Conclusion**
The primacy of heedfulness; Dh 30; Mahāli’s streamwinning. This brings us back to the whole purpose of the Buddha relating the Sakra story: to highlight **heedfulness** (*appamāda*) (Dh 30), the root of Sakra’s success shown throughout his story. Mahāli gains streamwinning, and others gain various levels of the path, too.

1.3 MAHĀLI THE LICCHAVĪ

1.3.1 Mahāli’s question. Mahāli was a Licchavi chief who visits the Buddha in the pinnacled hall (*kūṭāgāra,sālā*) [§1] at Vesālī. Having heard the Buddha teach **the Sakka,pañha Sutta** (D 21) [§2], he asks the Buddha if he has actually met Sakra. The Buddha replies that he not only has met Sakra, but also knows his story and the nature of Sakrahood [§§2-4]. The Buddha then relates Magha’s story: briefly in **the (Sakka) Mahāli Sutta** (S 11.13) [§2], and in full detail in **the Magha Vatthu** (DhA 2.7) [1.1].

1.3.2 Mahāli 1. There are at least 2 persons named **Mahāli** in the suttas—as identified in the Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names (DPPN).² They are **Mahāli 1**, a Licchavī chief who visits the Buddha at the pinnacled hall at Vesālī to ask him if he has ever met Sakra—this is the Mahāli of the Magha Vatthu [1.3.1]. When he asks the Buddha about Pūraṇa Kassapa’s teaching, the Buddha teaches him on **the 5 aggregates**—as recorded in **the (Khandha) Mahāli Sutta** (S 22.60).³

2 The Sakra epic: a chronology

2.0 Here, we attempt to trace and list suttas and related texts concerning **the story of Sakra**,⁴ lord of the devas. This is more of a narrative sequence rather than a historical chronology, with overlapping texts and a few variant versions of episodes. Only narratively related texts are included here. The purpose of this chronology is to help us with a cohesive study of one of the most inspiring and fascinating mythical heroes in early Buddhism and world religion to enrich our sutta study, enhance our Dharma practice, and build and enjoy a wholesome community and society.

2.1 THE OLD SAKRA (*jara sakka*)

2.1.1 Magha Vatthu (DhA 2.7): Sakra’s origins as the youth Magha and his 33 friends and early in Tāvatiṃsa with his 4 wives. (DhA 2.7/1:263-281), SD 54.22. [Contents]

2.1.2 (Sakka) Mahāli Sutta (S 11.13): On being asked by the Licchavī Mahāli, the Buddha relates Sakra’s origins as Magha; his 7 names and 7 vows. (S 11.13/1:230-237), SD 99.11.

2.1.3 Rohinī Khattiya,kaññā Vatthu (DhA 17.1): Sakra’s love affair with Rohinī, Anuruddha’s sister. (DhA 17.1/3:295-299), SD 15.13(2.6). [SD 54.8 (636)]

2.1.4 Sakka,nāma Sutta (S 11.12): A brief diachronic (across-lives) account of the origins of Sakra’s 7 names. (S 11.12/1:229 f), SD 54.19.

2.1.5 Vata,pāda Sutta (S 11.11): Sakra’s 7 vows. How Sakra trains himself to respect family and society. (S 11.11/1:228), SD 54.12.

2.1.6 Kulāvaka Jātaka (J 31): A more detailed account of Magha and his 30 friends up to the story of Sujā living in Tāvatiṃsa [§§12-50]. (J 31/1:198-206), SD 86.23.

2.1.7 Kulāvaka Sutta (S 11.6): The devas are defeated in battle by asuras. Sakra, fleeing from the asuras, turns back his chariot to avoid harming some garuda nestlings. There is no mention of his elopement with Sujā [§§90-97]. (S 11.6/1:224 f), SD 86.22.

2.1.8 Sakra’s sons

2.1.8.1 (Sakka) Suvīra Sutta (S 11.1): Suvīra, a son of Sakra, is negligent in defending Tāvatiṃsa against the asuras; Sakra patiently admonishes him thrice. (S 11.1/1:216 f), SD 114.13.

2.1.8.2 (Sakka) Susīma Sutta (S 11.2): Susīma, a son of Sakra, is negligent in defending Tāvatiṃsa against the asuras; Sakra patiently admonishes him thrice. (S 11.2/1:217), SD 114.14

² See DPPN sv Mahāli 1. On the 2 Mahālis, see SD 53.4 (2).

³ S 22.60/3:68-70 (SD 99.12). For suttas related to Mahāli, see SD 53.4 (4).

⁴ For Sakra’s age, see **Sakka,pañha S** (D 31,49c*) n, SD 54.8.

2.1.9 The Vepa,citti Suttas

2.1.9.1 (Sakka) Vepa,citti Sutta (S 11.4): The captured Vepa,citti roundly abuses Sakra who bears it patiently. (S 11.4/1:220-222), SD 54.6a.

2.1.9.2 Subhāsita,jaya Sutta (S 11.5): Vepa,citti challenges Sakra to a debate on what quality defines the “well spoken word.” (S 11.5/122-224), SD 54.6b.

2.1.10 Isayo Araññakā Sutta (S 11.9): Sakra and Vepa,citti visit some forest seers. While Vepa,citti is rude to them, Sakra is respectful to them. (S 11.9/1:226 f), SD 54.21.

2.1.11 Sambari Māyā Sutta (S 11.23): Vepa,citti falls sick and asks Sakra to heal him. When Sakra asks Vepacitti to teach him the Sambari magic, the asuras refuse to allow it as it will further strengthen Sakra. (S 11.23/1:238 f).

2.2 THE YOUNG SAKRA (*taruṇa sakka*)

see D 21,2.8.2 (SD 54.8)

2.2.1 Sakka,pañha Sutta (D 21): Sakra’s **1st meeting** with the Buddha. Fearing his impending death, Sakra gets Pañca,sikha’s help so that he can meet the Buddha. While listening to the Buddha teaching, the “old Sakra” dies and is immediately reborn as the “young Sakra,” with a new life as lord of the devas. He also becomes a full-fledged **streamwinner**. (D 21/2:263-289), SD 54.8.

2.2.2 Dhaj’agga Sutta (S 11.3): Sakra admonishes the devas, when fear arises in them in battle, to look up at his banner, or Pajāpati’s banner, or Varuṇa’s banner, or Īsāna’s banner. For his part, the Buddha teaches us to recollect the virtues of the 3 jewels⁵ when in fear during meditation. (S 11.3/1:218-220), SD 15.5.

2.2.3 Cūla Tanhā,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 37): Sakra questions the Buddha on a teaching he learned during their 1st meeting [2.2.1]. Moggallāna visits Sakra who is celebrating the end of the deva-asura war with the building of the Vejayanta hall. (M 37,9-13), SD 54.9.

2.2.4 Na Dubbhiya Sutta (S 11.7): Vepa,citti secretly meets Sakra in Tāvatiṃsa. Sakra makes Vepa,citti promise never to harm him (Sakra). (S 11.7), SD 54.7.

2.2.5 Verocana Asur’inda Sutta (S 11.8): Verocana,⁶ lord of the asuras, and Sakra meet the Buddha and recite verses to the Buddha. Sakra praises patience. (S 11.8), SD 87.13.

2.2.6 (Saṃyutta) Sakka,pañha Sutta (S 35.118): Sakra asks the Buddha why some beings attain nirvana in this very life but some don’t. (S 35.118), SD 74.1.

2.2.7 Sakka Vatthu (DhA 15.8): Sakra, in his **last meeting** with the Buddha, personally ministers to the Buddha, ill with dysentery, at Beḷuva. (DhA 15.8), SD 54.20.

⁵ See the recollections of the virtues of the Buddha (SD 15.7), of the Dharma (SD 15.9) and of the sangha (SD 15.10a).

⁶ Apparently, in the suttas, Veroca or Verocana is only mentioned here and in **Mahā,samaya S** (D 20), which says that all the 100 sons of Bali’s sons are named after Veroca, their uncle (D 20,38*/2:259), SD 54.4. Comy says that Veroca is another name for Rāhu (DA 2:689,25-27). Possibly, with Vepa,citti’s death, Verocana is their new lord.

3 Story commentary

3.1 STORY AND MYTH

3.1.1 A story as myth. When a story applies to us in a real and personal way, giving us some insight into the true nature of life—how we experience things and interpret them against true reality—we call it a **myth**. We recall fairy tales and stories that we love as children, when we even imagine living in them, or identifying with a story’s hero or character. The fairy tales and moral fables remain with us for the rest of our lives. We often forget them, but they continue to influence us, often profoundly. When we do recall and relate to them, they enrich our lives in an insightful and liberating way.

3.1.2 When a story becomes a personal myth. When we are thoughtful enough, as we age, we see deeper meanings and broader dimensions of the stories we knew as a child. The stories present to us a new meaning to our life and present experiences, and to what we can expect to come. The better we understand such stories, the greater the wisdom we glean from them to enrich our lives and those of others.

When we see some depth of **meaning** or meanings behind these stories—such as the 4 sights of Siddhattha,⁷ or the stories of Magha and of Sakra [3.1.5]—then, we are more likely to see a higher **purpose** in our present life. We will see a “bigger picture” of things around us, of the past, and of a likely or possible future. With such wisdom, we are empowered to contribute to present happiness and future growth in a wholesome community, society, even world.

3.2 STORIES OF MAGHA AND SAKRA

3.2.1 The stories of Magha and Sakra are “**myths**” in the sense that they help us see a true meaning in our life and the world; they give us a real vision and purpose of what we can and should do to better ourself, others and society. It is not the point whether these stories are “true” or not: they are as true or correct as the way we remember, or rather, construct, our past!

The point is that they are **real** enough to us to serve as mirrors of the daily realities we are and the personal visions we see. How we act or do not act *now* often enough is guided, even propelled, by how we remember our **past**, how we envision the **future**; thus, we read our present. A **myth** then helps us make better sense of our past, future and present—and what good we can or must do next.

In an important sense, **the past** acts like causes or reasons for our *present* conditions; and **the future** will be the fruition of how we understand the nature of these causes and effects—the immanent⁸ conditionality of life. The myths that we love help us understand conditionality and work with them. The truly great myths—especially the stories of the Buddha and the saints—not only help us *understand* conditionality but also to use them or be inspired by them, to wholesomely create and sustain present happiness and a favourable future.

3.2.2 The stories of Magha, Sakra, the 33 and the colourful cast of devas, asuras and other beings attest to the nature of myths and why we create them. There are, then, good myths and bad myths, myths of light and of darkness, myths that free us or that hold us. Psychologically, we can speak of myths of awakening and myths of the unconscious.

Simply, a **myth of the unconscious** relates to stories rooted in our lust, ill will and ignorance. A **myth of awakening** presents stories of the struggle of the heroic, even the divine, that awakens us to a space or freedom beyond worldliness, its measurability and limits. The stories of Magha and Sakra are the

⁷ On the 4 sights, see SD 52.1 (7).

⁸ “Immanent” here means that conditionality can be both a mental *reality* as well as an external *construction*.

myths of awakening: struggle of the hero, Magha, to become the divine, Sakra, who then gains stream-winning, assured of awakening and salvation.

3.2.3 Since our study here is based on the myth of awakening, it is wise for us to understand the nature of the other kind of myth and its making—**the myth of the unconscious**. One of the most powerful mythical process—perhaps *the most powerful*, considering how it has affected our history and the present—is that of how we create God and gods. **Theogony**—how we create and propagate creation myths: the generation or birth of worlds,⁹ gods (God is subsumed here), especially their theories, beliefs and practices.

3.3 MISUSE OF MYTH

3.3.1 Since man (I use this word as a universal common noun) begets himself and is able to propagate himself, he becomes aware of what is “outside” of himself, of ourself. During the descent of man, our sense of self and other took millennia to evolve. A newborn child, for example, begins life with a growing sense of the outside: his sense of “self” is awakened and fixed as he interacts with things around him, close to him, and as he accepts (with understanding or not) what knowledge is.

As the earliest man, we must have learned this self-other dichotomy when we were confronted with the forces of nature: the elements of **earth, water, fire and wind**. Those of us who survived the ravages of the elements evolve to understand them as being more “powerful” than we were. This “power” relationship is not only primitive, but clearly an **unconscious** one: we may learn what these elements *are*, even how they work—but we are still not fully clear **why** they are or work the way they do. To understand this, we need **reasoning**, a faculty that we still struggle with even today, and this continues to divide us in many ways, especially as tribes and religions.

3.3.2 Arguably, as early man, we reasoned less, but more often **felt**, the impact of the elements. Even now, we sense the power of these elements through our sense-faculties, through which we understand, or at least, knew what *was* pleasurable, and what *was* painful (basically, we can only experience what has happened). We learn to *like* the pleasurable and to *fear* the painful. Our first fears were then towards the elements: we learn to **fear** the various forms and actions of earth, water, fire and wind.¹⁰

Our first impulse was and is, surely, to flee from what we fear, and where possible to *avoid* it. Since the impact of the elements is everywhere, we have to come to terms with them. We learn to submit to them, to *fear* them in a habitual and hopeful way: we start to *worship* them. This is the beginning, and the root, of our idea of religion, even to this day.

This primordial notion of worship must surely have arisen from noticing, remembering and then predicting the cycle of the elements. Our familiarity with what we *fear*, helps us fear it less—we learn to *respect* it for what we imagine it is. We were able to evolve and prosper partly because we communicated this fear and respect for these powerful elements to others, especially our offspring, which made future generations possible. Ours, then, is not merely a biological genealogy, but a genealogy of myths, of stories that empower and free us, and that warn us of how we can lose that power and freedom.

Religion, then, has this protecting and preserving effect on man—these are hypostatized or imagined to be God/gods and Soul/self.¹¹ These mental skills of survival were effectively handed down by way of

⁹ The creation of worlds and its theories, beliefs and practices are called **cosmogony**. Here, for our present purposes, we take it as a part of theogony.

¹⁰ There was, of course, the fear of “others,” the destructiveness of poisonous plants, wild beasts, unfriendly strangers, and the dark and of death. However, we shall keep our discussion merely introductory, basically to help us better understand the rise of **theogony**, and how this helps our understanding of Buddhist mythology.

¹¹ On the notions of self-protection and self-preservation, see SD 2.16 (2).

instincts (through social rites and religious rituals) and stories, or better, **myths**, since they reflect true realities and help us, even as early man, to survive so that we exist to this day.

3.3.3 As man noticed and understood better the nature of causes and effects, his faculty of **reasoning** evolved. He began to tell better stories about the elements; he better understood how his past affected his present; he began to plan his future; and to hand down such ideas and plans. He understood the great challenges that often thwarted all these well reasoned actions and plans.

Man also learned that **working together** and living together, especially as a tribe, we had a better chance for survival, indeed, to prosper, to do greater and better things. We learned to work with a growing tribe: first, nurturing our own family; then, working with other families; then, even more families, forming a **tribe**. As we moved around, we discovered *other* tribes, with which we would war or work together, or to co-exist. Either way, we learned to be better at both destroying and building.

As we grew in number to become a crowd or became legion, we naturally felt the need to preserve and propagate ourselves as a tribe. We created and used stories for our self-protection and self-preservation. These stories of **power**, told and retold, empowered us to defend ourselves, entitled us to attack and defeat others, especially those we saw as threats to us or disagreeing with us. We raided and battled other tribes, and our “powers” thus harvested became the “God” of the greater tribe: God *was* the tribe. When this process worked peacefully enough, this vision of a common and greater good grew into a **civilization**.

3.4 ANCIENT INDIAN MYTHS

3.4.1 The founders and leaders of the earliest civilizations were, as a rule, both lords and gods to their masses, as it was in the ancient civilizations of Sumeria, Egypt, the Indus valley, India and China. These lords presented themselves as gods or used god-stories to legitimize their conquests and then entrench themselves in positions of power to dominate the conquered.

We see the nomadic Aryans spreading out from the steppes of Central Asia, invading the Gangetic plains of north India. Their movement and actions were rooted in **a myth of domination**. And so began the Aryan conquest of northern India. Like most nomadic tribes (such as the Kushans in the Bactrian region in the early 1st century), the Indo-Aryans were versatile conquerors who quickly imposed their will and ways on the conquered through their warriors, and then their priests.

3.4.2 In the Gangetic plains of ancient India, **the brahmins** (ts *brāhmaṇa*; angl brahmin) or priests invented stories of primal Man or “God” from whose mouth they issued; hence, they anointed themselves as godly spokesmen. **The warrior nobles** (khattiya; Skt *kṣatriya*; angl “kshatriya”) were God’s arms: they were to protect the priests and lords; from his thighs came **the merchants** (*vessa*; Skt *vaiśya*; angl “vaiśya”) to support and enrich these two classes; and from the feet came **menial workers** (*sudda*; Skt *śūdra*; angl “shudra”). *Outside* of these classes were the “outcastes,” non-person of such a class system, barely tolerated but socially distanced or ostracized: the subjugated dark-skinned natives were relegated to society’s inhuman fringes.¹²

This is the brahminical **myth of the unconscious**, rooted in the lust, ill will and ignorance of those who saw their life in terms of congenial classes and hierarchical exploitation by an upward social osmosis with the brahmins at the peak. The brahmins, driven by their latent ignorance and unconscious drive

¹² On caste or social classes in ancient India, see SD 10.8 (6).

to lord over others created a theogony of social exploitation that the Buddha exposed and rejected in discourses like **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27), SD 2.19, and **the Tevijja Sutta** (D 13), SD 1.8.¹³

3.5 GOD MYTHS

3.5.1 We have seen how **religion** epitomizes power and class consciousness as the myths of the exploitative brahmins [3.4]. To the extent that the brahmins used their theistic myths to dominate and exploit Indian society, they were as disastrous as a local flood. Worse than this—perhaps the worst expression of the myth of the unconscious—is the one almighty God-idea: this was fire and brimstone from heaven. [3.4]

This power-based notion may begin as some divine promise of a “God-favoured nation,” such as Israel. When that promise disastrously failed, the idea was exploited by Rome-centred Christianity that hoped to unite Europe into a religious empire after the fallen Roman empire. This idea, too, failed miserably basically because of the gross immorality at the very core of the system—especially that of the Borgia Pope (1492-1503) and his family—one of the main reasons for the Reformation that divided Europe into a predominantly Catholic south and Protestant north.¹⁴

3.5.2 The Roman Catholic Church believed that God was on their side and that it was answerable only to God. This meant that worldly and secular power were subservient to the Church. Indeed, the Church took it as their God-given task to convert the non-Christian world (the countries outside of Europe and Russia) by colonization and slavery. After all, to the pious colonizers, the indigenous natives were heathen and *not* human.¹⁵

The Pope had—by the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494)—conveniently divided the world along a meridian 370 leagues¹⁶ west of the Cape Verde islands (off the west coast of Africa). The lands to the east would “belong” to Portugal and the lands to the west to Castile (Spain). This was a God-given right from Rome for the Portuguese to conquer the east, and Spain the Americas and the Philippines for the sake of “God, glory and gold.”

So powerful was this “almighty God” myth that even the Roman Church’s opponents, the Protestant countries of western Europe, too, decided that they must heed God’s call to conquer in His name. Most of the Protestant colonizing were done by the British and the Dutch. They were driven by the myth of the biblical “Great Commission” to convert all mankind to God, or at least for the blessings of “Christianity, commerce and civilization.”¹⁷

3.6 CONVERSION OF MAHĀ BRAHMĀ

3.6.1 The brahmins of ancient India, despite their colourful polytheism, had an ideology of an almighty God-idea, that of **Mahā Brahmā**, such as the one described in **the Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11), who declares, “I am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Supreme Seer of All, the All-

¹³ The first 13 suttas of **Dīgha Nikāya** (D 1-13) expose the falseness and frailties of the Brahminical system in favour of the 3 trainings. See SD 21.3 (2.1).

¹⁴ For details, see SD 39.1 (7.3.4).

¹⁵ See eg Michael Wood, *Conquistadors*, BBC Publications, 2000:20.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_and_colonialism.

¹⁶ 370 leagues = 2,193 km, 1,362 statute mi, or 1,184 nautical mi.

¹⁷ This motto was attr to David Livingstone (1813-1873), Scottish Congregationalist explorer-missionary who worked in Africa during the British colonial days.

powerful, the Lord God, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief, the Ordainer, the Almighty, the Father of all that are and that will be.”¹⁸

The ancient Indian pantheon had a number of Great Brahmas, each the God of their vast cosmic system.¹⁹ The Buddha converts the highest of them all, **Brahmā Sahampati**, who, in fact, became a non-returner.²⁰ Hence, the Buddha converts both, Sahampati, the highest of the brahmas (of the form-dhyana world), and **Indra**, the most popular Vedic god of the sense-world. The Buddhists fondly know him as **Sakra**, amongst other names, attesting to his popularity [2.1.4].

3.6.2 The Sakra myth is clearly *not* a myth of the unconscious: it was not invented out of lust, ill will or ignorance, nor is it aimed at promoting greed, hate or delusion. It is a **myth of awakening**, where even the highest brahma and the most popular deva are capable of attaining higher spiritual states and awakening—not merely being worshipped to serve the agenda of the brahmins, priests and gurus. These gods have astronomically long lives. Despite their lives’ length, they must still fall from their god-state, but not when they work for a transdivine awakening.

The **Sakra myth** is an **epic of spiritual evolution** from man into a divine hero; then, into a saint of the path. As man, Magha does public good works and keeps the moral precepts (the 1st training); as lord of the devas, Sakra shows love, ruth, joy and peace, even in the face of battle (this is the 2nd training, of the mind). In his wisdom, Sakra realizes his own impermanence and impending death, and seeks to overcome this worldliness: he meets the Buddha and becomes a streamwinner (this is the 3rd training, of wisdom that liberates).

A **myth**, then, is about the patterns of the past that can show us what and the nature our **present** realities are, and how we can work for a better future. A myth is a window into the eternal now that is going on right before us. When we see them and read them rightly, and reach out to them wisely, we become ourselves myth-makers and story-tellers who have **the greatest story ever told** to tell—just as the Buddha and his saints have done.

4 SAKRA AND INDRA²¹

4.1 Historical background

4.1.1 Sakka (Skt *śakra*; anglicized as Sakra or Shakra) titled “the lord of the devas” (*devānam-inda*) is a leading Buddhist deity, identified with the Vedic god **Indra** (P *inda*)²² with whom he shares many epithets. **Indra** is the personified powers of nature such as fire, the sun, rain and thunderstorm. His weapon is the thunderbolt (*vajra*), highlighting his Iron-Age origins where the sight of **glowing molten iron** evokes his powers. He is well known amongst Vedic believers as a powerful warring god and conqueror. [4.3.1]

¹⁸ *Aham asmi bhikkhu Brahmā Mahā, brahmā abhibhū anabhibhūto aññad-atthu, daso vasavatti issaro kattā nim-mātā seṭṭho sañjita vasī pitā bhūta, bhavyānam* (D 11,81.2/1:211), SD 1.7. This is stock: for a humorous riposte to this, see **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1,42/1:18), SD 25.2. For the Mahā Brahmā pericopes, see SD 11.7 (5) n.

¹⁹ See eg **Saṅkhār’upapatti S** (M 120,12-18), SD 3.4; **(Tika) Abhibhū S** (A 3.80/1:227), SD 54.1; SD 49.8b (15.1.3).

²⁰ On Sahampati, see SD 12.1 (2.3.4).

²¹ Here we briefly examine Sakra as the Vedic god, Indra, before his conversion by the Buddha. On Sakra as an early Buddhist deity, see SD 15.13 (2).

²² The name **inda** (Pali form for Skt *indra*; ThaA 2:265,5; Sadd 378,1) is sometimes found in the suttas, mostly in old verses (*gāthā*): **D** 21,40c*/2:274,9*, 43a*/275,19*, **30/3**:160,6* = 176,8*; **Sn** 310, 316, 679, 1024; **Thī** 121; J 3:-146,26*, 5:153,2* (cf Sadd 378,3-9*), 243,20*, 322,22*. See C Godage, *the Place of Indra in Early Buddhism*, Univ of Ceylon Review 3,1 1945: 41-72. See *inda*: CPD & DPL.

4.1.2 The worship of Indra began around 1200 BCE, in the Ṛgveda. His qualities can, however, be traced back to proto-Indo-European mythology, through his connections with Zeus and Wotan. Even though the Ṛgveda refers to a “sky father” called Dyaus-pitr̥ (literally cognate with Zeus-patēr and Jupiter), it is Indra who truly fills the shoes of the Indo-European celestial ruler.

Indra wields the thunderbolt, drinks the ambrosial *soma* (a psychotropic elixir) to excess, bestows fertility upon human women (often by sleeping with them himself), and leads his band of Maruts, martial storm-gods, to win victory for the conquering Indo-Aryans. This divine origin of soma, and that it is a powerful psychotropic drink, are amongst the reasons for its being a major offering in the Vedic sacrifice. [3.2.4]

4.2 INDRA'S BIRTH

4.2.1 In the Ṛgveda, Indra's family life is troubled in ways that remain unclear. Indra is unique amongst the Vedic gods in that the Ṛgveda (4.18) describes his birth. **His birth**, like that of many great heroes and warriors, is unnatural. Kept against his will inside his mother's womb for many years, he bursts forth out of her side and kills his own father (Ṛgveda 4.18), which reminds us of Zeus in Greek mythology. He, too, is, in turn, challenged by his own son, whom he apparently overcomes (Ṛgveda 10.28).

4.2.2 We see here a couple of interesting parallels in the life of **Siddhattha**, the Bodhisattva. The child Siddhattha is said to have entered his mother's womb by the right (in her dream of the 6-tusked albino elephant) and to have emerged from her right side, too.²³ A week later, we are told, his mother, Māyā, passes away; but we are not told of the reason for this.²⁴

Siddhattha, far from “killing” his father, Suddhodana, does, however, kill his father's hope of having him to take over rulership of the realm or even becoming a world monarch, as predicted by the wise men.²⁵ We should not speculate too much over such parallels. They form a cohesively integral part of the Buddha narrative. After all, parallels, interesting as they may be, never meet.

4.3 INDRA'S ROLES

4.3.1 In his heyday, Indra is **the chief of the Vedic gods**; he is also the god of the atmospheric sky and the warrior leader of the gods. His weapons, understandably, are lightning and thunderbolt [4.5.3.1], and for his feats, especially in battle, he is strengthened by drinks, *soma* [4.2.5]. Among his allies are the Maruts, sons of Rudra, who ride the clouds and direct storms; the Aśvins, twin horsemen; and Viṣṇu, who later evolve into one of the principal gods of Hinduism. [4.1.1]

In a struggle of cosmic proportions to which the Vedas often refer, Indra wields his thunderbolt to defeat the demonic Vṛtra (“obstacle”), releasing the waters and cattle it has held captive and thus establishing the conditions requisite for social order and prosperity (Ṛg 1.32-33). Indra is often praised for intervening in human affairs and aiding those who worship him (such as in Ṛgveda 7.18). The Buddhists are familiar with this almost human aspect of Indra, as the staunch ally of his generous worshippers, to whom Indra is, in turn, equally generous: Maghavan, “the munificent,” is one of his most popular titles. [5]

4.3.2 Indra's association with **cattle** is perhaps the central myth of the Ṛgveda, with several levels of meaning. Indra helps the worshipper to obtain cattle, as he was so often implored to do. He also finds the sun and the world of life, life and fertility in general, for all of which **cows** often serve as a Vedic meta-

²³ See SD 52.1 (3.2.2).

²⁴ On the possibility that Siddhattha was delivered by a caesarean section, see SD 53.1 (3.2.4).

²⁵ On the soothsayers' prediction, see SD 52.1 (2.6).

phor. Cows also were the main measure of wealth in ancient India [4.3.1]. However, the cow was then never regarded as *sacred* as is the case in modern times.

Indra is said to have created the universe by propping apart heaven and earth (like other Vedic creator-gods, notably Viṣṇu and Varuṇa) and finding the sun (Ṛgveda 3.31). Indra is, after all, the chief god of the Ṛgveda. Of **the 1,028 Ṛgveda hymns**, 289 were composed glorifying his heroic deeds (the most verses for any Vedic god). Clearly, he is the most popular of the Vedic gods.

4.4 INDRA AND SOMA

4.4.1 It is Indra who, in the shape of a **falcon** or riding on a falcon, brings down the **soma** plant from heaven, where it is guarded by demons, to earth, where it becomes accessible to humans (Ṛgveda 4.26-27). Here, he is like Greek Titan Prometheus who steals fire from Zeus and gives it to the primordial humans. Indra himself is the soma drinker par excellence; when he gets drunk, as he is wont to do, he brags (Ṛgveda 10.119), and the worshipper who invites Indra to share his *soma* also shares in the euphoria that *soma* induces in both the human and the divine drinker (Ṛgveda 9.113).

4.4.2 Middle and late Vedic literature describe in detail the classical Vedic rituals, the most prestigious and complex of which is that of the **soma**.²⁶ In these rites, stalks of the *soma* plant are soaked in water and then crushed. The extracted liquid is poured through a filter into vessels. Book 9 of the Ṛgveda contains the 114 hymns chanted as the soma was pressed and poured through the filters into vessels.

Left plain, or mixed with milk and various oblations, it is then offered into the fire for the gods and drunk by the priests and the sacrificer of the rite (Ṛgveda 8.48.3). The roots of this ritual go back to the *haoma*, an equivalent in the Zoroastrian ritual in ancient Persia.²⁷ Both are entheogenic, inducing hallucinatory visions which are taken to be religious experience (Ṛgveda 8.48).²⁸

4.5 INDRA AS A WARRIOR

4.5.1 Indra is a hypostasis (essential nature) and personification of the Aryan conquest of the northern Indian plains. Hence, his principal function is to kill enemies—non-Aryan humans and “demons,” who are often conflated. As the supreme god of the kshatriyas (Skt *kṣatriya*), the royal warrior class, Indra is invoked as a destroyer of cities and router of armies.

4.5.2 The invading **Aryans**, over time, subjugated or pushed the autochthonous dark-skinned natives of the rich Ganges plains of northern India southwards. These “enemies” (of whom the most famous was Vṛtra) are often called Dāśas or Dasyus, “slaves or servants,” whom they often were under the Aryans.

Indra is notorious as the “destroyer of strongholds” (***purandara***)²⁹ [4.2.7.4], a title mentioned at least 11 times in the Ṛgveda.³⁰ This name probably suggests that Aryans devastated the twin cities, Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, in the Indus Valley. The Dāśas were, however, also frequently identified

²⁶ Various authorities have suggested what *soma* really is but without certainty except that it is an entheogenic (religious-experience inducing) plant: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soma_\(drink\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soma_(drink)).

²⁷ In the Avesta (primary sacred texts of the Zoroastrians), the entire Yasht (hymn) 20 and Yasna (ritual) 9-11 deal with haoma, where its preparation is very similar to that described in the 114 hymns of the Soma Maṇḍala (Ṛgveda 9), dedicated to *soma pavamāna*, “purifying soma.”

²⁸ On the botanical identity of soma and haoma, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Botanical_identity_of_soma-haoma.

²⁹ SED: *pur* → *puram* gives *puramda* and *puramdara*—both meaning “destroyer of strongholds.” See **Upāli (Gaha,pati) S** (M 56,26 (6d) n on “the capable destroyer of cities”), SD 27.1.

³⁰ ṚgV 1.102.7c, 1.109.8a, 2.20.7a, 3.54.15c, 5.30.11c, 6.16.14c, 7.6.2c, 8.1.7c, 8.1.8a, 8.61.8c, 8.61.10a.

with **the asuras**³¹ or demonic enemies of the gods themselves. The battles thus occur simultaneously politically on the human level and mythically on the divine level.

4.5.3 Indra's vajra

4.5.3.1 The Vedic period in India coincided with its **Iron Age** (beginning around 1200 BCE) up to the rise of Buddhism. Molten iron is reminiscent of a blindflashing³² **thunderbolt** (to be exact, a lightning-thunderbolt: Skt *vajra*; P *vajira*)—as a divine weapon, it is like Mjöllnir, the famed hammer of the Norse god Thor.

It was iron and the horse that served as reliable and powerful weapons that gave the Aryan armies their military advantage and conquering power. It is thus no coincidence that Indra's weapons are lightning and the thunderbolt³³ [4.3.1]. And like ale to the Norse gods,³⁴ especially during battle and after, Indra was further strengthened by the sacred psychotropic drink, *soma*. [4.2.4]

4.5.3.2 Sakra continues to play the role of Indra, the lightning-thunderbolt wielder, as **Vajira, pāṇī** (Skt *vajra, pāṇī*, “thunderbolt holder”), a guardian of the Buddha.³⁵ He is mentioned in **the Mahā, samaya Sutta** (D 20) as Vajira, hattha (“thunderbolt in hand”). It is said that he made this promise to be the Buddha's guardian in this role before Brahmā on the occasion when he invites the Buddha to teach the Dharma (V 1:5 f).³⁶

Apparently, this guardianship is a very specific one, or that the Buddha does not seem to need his protection, except where the Buddha has asked “a reasonable question” (*saha, dhammika pañha*) in a debate or when someone challenges him, and the other party cunningly or dishonestly tries to evade the obvious answer up to three times.

On the third occasion of dishonest silence, Vajrapani will appear in ferocious form, ready to hurl his thunderbolt at the cheat so that his head will shatter into 7 pieces!³⁷ Such is the case with Saccaka Nigaṇṭha, putta, as reported in **the Cūḷa Saccaka Sutta** (M 35).³⁸ Vajrapani however, is only seen by the Buddha and the cheat.³⁹

4.6 INDRA'S DECLINE

4.6.1 Indra's reputation (as a war god) began to decline when the Aryans became more settled in northern India. More specifically, his decline is clearly seen in the Brāhmaṇas,⁴⁰ about 900 BCE, where his

³¹ On the asuras, see SD 54.3a (3.5.4.2).

³² This is a neologism which aptly describes the effect of such a lethal weapon that precedes but echoes the power of a nuclear blast.

³³ In the west, Indra became the Donner (“Thunderer”) of the Teutonic (Germanic) tribes, the Porr (Porr) of Old Norse mythology, Old English Punor (Punor), and in ancient Greece and Rome, he was associated with Zeus-Jupiter (Skt *dyaus, pitar*). Like Thor of Norse mythology, he is described in the R̥gveda as red- or tawny-bearded (RV 10.23.-4). See R̥gveda 1.32.1-15.

³⁴ On the Norse gods, see SD 54.3a (3.5.4.3).

³⁵ MA 2:277.

³⁶ DA 1:264 (where he is said to be a yaksha, *yakkha*); MA 2:277; cf Divy 8.27.

³⁷ On this “head-shattering,” see SD 21.3 (4.1).

³⁸ M 35, 13 f/1:231 f + SD 26.5 (3.3.2).

³⁹ On Vajrapani, see SD 21.3 (4.2).

⁴⁰ The Brāhmaṇas are the oldest Indian Skt prose texts, usu dated from the 1st half or the middle of the last millennium BCE. The word *brāhmaṇa* means a statement on *brahman*, ie, on the cosmic importance or meaning of the Vedic sacrificial ritual, whether of each individual act (*karman*) and formula (*mantra*), or of the combination of

supremacy is preempted by Prajāpati, the primordial creator. Indra still drinks the *soma*, but now he becomes badly hung over and has to be restored to health by the worshipper. Similarly, the killing of Vṛtra leaves Indra weakened and in need of purification and respite.

4.6.2 In the Indian **epics**, Indra is mocked for weaknesses associated with the phallic powers that were his great glory in the *Rgveda*. His notorious womanizing, on one occasion (when the sage Gautama catches Indra in bed with Ahalyā, the sage's wife), results in Indra's castration, though his testicles are later replaced by those of a ram (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.47-48)—but this was probably a post-Buddha development.⁴¹ In another version of this story, Indra was cursed to be covered with a thousand vaginas (*yoni*), a curse which was later, on Brahma's appeal to Gautama, modified into a thousand eyes.

Apparently, wary of ascetics who may cause his fall, Indra sometimes sends one of his voluptuous nymphs, the *apsaras* (*P accharā*), to seduce those ascetics who have attained sufficient power, through *tapas* ("meditative austerities"), to heat up his heavenly throne. As for Indra himself, when his excesses weaken him, he becomes vulnerable in battle. Then, he is more easily overcome by demons and must enlist the aid of the now supreme sectarian gods, **Śiva and Viṣṇu**, to restore his throne.

4.7 INDRA AS SAKRA AND AS ŚIVA

4.7.1 The old Vedic gods do not die but, in due course, morph into new Hindu gods. Indra remains a kind of figurehead in Hindu mythology with his positive aspects largely emulated by **Śiva**, currently, the most powerful and most popular of the Hindu gods. Both Indra and Śiva are associated with the Maruts or Rudras, storm gods; both are said to have extra eyes (three or a thousand) that sprouted so that they can better look at the voluptuous dancing apsaras; both are associated with the bull and with the erect phallus; both are castrated; and both come into conflict with their fathers-in-law.

4.7.2 The Buddhist Sakra is often at war with **Vepa,citti** ever since the asuras were evicted from Tāva,tiṃsa. However, with Sakra taking **Sujā**, Vepa,citti's beautiful daughter, as his wife, he finally reconciles with his father-in-law, happily ending the deva-asura war. Further, we see, on a few occasions, both of them (father-in-law and son-in-law) visiting holy men⁴² and amicably debating over life's ideals.⁴³

4.7.3 In addition to these themes, which are generally characteristic of **fertility gods**, Indra's exploits are also reflected in Śiva. Śiva, too, seduces the wives of brahmin sages; he has to safely distribute the excessive and destructive forces he has gained; he is associated with anti-brahmin acts; and he, too, loses his right to a share in the sacrifice.

Further, just as Indra beheads a demon (Vṛtra) whose head pursues him until he is purified of this deed, so, too, Śiva, having beheaded Brahmā,⁴⁴ is plagued by Brahmā's skull until he is absolved in Bena-

such acts and formulas that constitute a particular sacrifice. *Brāhmaṇa*, then, becomes the generic term applied to such collections of statements or commentaries. As a class of texts, they deal in a step-by-step, rite-by-rite manner with the whole of the *śrauta* ("solemn") ritual. Together with the usu metrical *mantras*, the prose *Brāhmaṇas* constitute the *śruti* (whence the adjective *śrauta*), the corpus of the "revealed" Veda.

⁴¹ Although the roots of the *Rāmāyaṇa* go back to 7th-4th cent BCE, its composition was completed only in the 3rd cent CE: J L Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, Leiden: Brill, 1998:379.

⁴² See eg **Isayo Araññakā S** (S 11.9), SD 54.21.

⁴³ See eg **Subhāsita,jaya S** (S 11.5), SD 54.6b.

⁴⁴ Brahmā is another high god of the brahmins converted by the Buddha, and since then has been downgraded, even rejected, by brahmin theologians: see SD 49.8b (9.2.2.3).

res. Thus, although Indra seems to conflict with the ascetic aspect of Śiva, this versatile new god is burdened with what Indra (especially as Buddhist Sakra) has renounced.⁴⁵

4.7.4 Both Brahmā, the highest of the Vedic gods, and Indra, the most popular of the Vedic gods, are now disciples of the Buddha. **Brahma** is a non-returner; **Sakra** (Indra) a streamwinner. In the Ṛgveda, Indra's title of *purandara*, "destroyer of cities" [4.2.5.2], becomes, as a Buddhist, more amicably, *purindada*, "the one who gives offerings in city after city" (*pure pure dānaṃ adāsi*).⁴⁶ With the Brahma and Sakra becoming the Buddha's saints, the brahmins unhappily worked to remove them from the Vedic pantheon and induced followers not to worship them any more.⁴⁷

4.7.5 Indra, since his conversion by the Buddha, has taken up a most genial position in the early Buddhist pantheon. As a Buddhist deity, he is known as **Sakka** (Skt śakra), anglicized as Sakra or Shakra. His Vedic name *indra* ("lord, leader") now serves as part of his title, *devānam inda*, "lord of the devas." While his past is often related with mythical humour reflective of his exploits as a Vedic god, in **Buddhist mythology**, he becomes the most loved deity and supreme moral exemplar in the sense-world.⁴⁸

Sakra serves as a divine reminder that any human can attain the divine, not through religious devotion, but through devotion to good works—we must be willing to work for what we pray for. And with the Buddha's Dharma, we can work further to reach the path of awakening—as Sakra himself has done as a **streamwinner**.

5 Magha

5.1 MAGHA THE MUNIFICENT

5.1.1 Magha and Maghavan. We have earlier noted that **Magha** ("the munificent") was one of the most popular titles for Indra, also known as Maghavan in the Vedic form of Sakra [4.2.3.1]. The Vedic Maghavan was a staunch and generous ally of his worshippers. The Buddhist Magha, on the other hand, is an exceptionally compassionate and public-spirited youth (*māṇava*). Magha was, in fact, the Bodhisattva himself in his past life. [5.2]

5.1.2 The youth Magha

5.1.2.1 The Magha story is given with greater but differing details in **the Kulāvaka Jātaka** (J 31).⁴⁹ It says that as an infant, Magha is called "**the boy Magha**" (*magha, kumāro*): it is unlikely that *kumara* here means "prince" (which would then be *raja, kumara*).⁵⁰ The Jātaka goes on to say that he is "the son of a great family" (*mahā, kulassa putto*).

⁴⁵ Indra may be regarded as being inferior to the new triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahēsvara (later Siva). However, he is still the chief of all the other gods. See Dowson, *Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, 1879:125.

⁴⁶ *Pura* is polysemic and can mean either (n) "city" or (adv) "before." Both senses apply here although the former reflects the mythical reality of Sakra's story. **Sakka, nāma S** (S 11.12, 4.2/1:229,8) + SD 54.19 (1.2.3.3); DhA 1:264,9. [2.1.4]

⁴⁷ Understandably, from the Puranic period, both these gods stopped being worshipped by the brahmins to forestall Buddhist influence.

⁴⁸ On Sakra, see SD 54.1 (3.2.3.6). On Indra, see S Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, 1970:249-283; Doniger, *Hindu Myths*, 1975:56-96, 317-321.

⁴⁹ A free tr of J 31 is found in J:C 1:76-83. This tr may be used judiciously in face of the lack of a recent or better tr.

⁵⁰ For a similar situation of a boy's name, see Siddhattha's case: SD 52.1 (4.3.3).

5.1.2.2 During his naming ritual (*nāma, gahaṇa*)—which is traditionally on the 5th day after his birth⁵¹—he is called **“the youth Magha”** (*magha, māṇava*), which suggests that he comes from a brahmin family. The term *māṇava* specifically refers to a “brahmin student (of the Vedas),” but often applies to the person for life.⁵²

5.1.2.3 We are then told that his parents arranged for his marriage to a girl from a family of the same class (*samāna, jātiyaṃ kulato dārikam ānayaṃsu*). He then has a family prospering with sons and daughters and is a “master giver” who keeps the 5 precepts.⁵³ [5.1.3]

5.1.3 The fact that **the Kulāvaka Jātaka** (J 31) tells us that Magha keeps **the “5 precepts”** (*pañca, sīlāni*) and that he is a “master giver” (*dāna, patī*), suggests that he is born in the time of a buddha, from whom or whose disciple he has learned the practice. Clearly, this cannot be in Kassapa Buddha’s time, when the Bodhisattva was the brahmin youth Jotipāla, as related in **the (Majjhima) Ghaṭikāra Sutta** (M 81).⁵⁴ Of course, it is possible, but not probable, that the 5 precepts were known to Magha in a non-Buddhist context—unless they refer to some other set of “precepts” (about which we have no information). [6.1]

5.2 PARALLEL LIVES?

5.2.1 At the start of **the Kulāvaka Jātaka** (J 31), we are told: **“Then, just as the present Sakra took birth in the past in the village of Macala in Magadha country, even so did the Bodhisattva ...”**⁵⁵ Further, at the close of this Jātaka, the Buddha identifies himself as “Sakra” (*sakka*) and Ānanda as “Mātali the chariot-eer.”

The Kulāvaka Sutta (S 11.6), too, relates the story connected with Sakra, Mātali and the nestlings⁵⁶—the two devas here clearly are the present Sakra and his charioteer, Mātali. However, the Sakra of J 31, in the end is said to **“have lived as long as life lasted, then fared on according to his karma”** (*yāvat’ayukam ṭhatvā yathā, kammaṃ gato*)⁵⁷—in other words, he dies; hence, this cannot refer to the current Sakra. He is, as we have noted above, our Buddha as the Bodhisattva Sakra.

5.2.2 Thus, we have here the Buddha and Ānanda, in their past lives together, respectively, reborn as Sakra and Mātali, going through the “same” experience as the present Sakra and Mātali of our own time! In the intricate web of countless rebirths, we are reminded that situations often repeat themselves.⁵⁸ In our own times, we can imagine this to be some kind of account from a parallel universe, where we take up different roles in parallel situations.⁵⁹

5.3 THE 30

Another interesting point is that **the Kulāvaka Jātaka** informs us that in Magha’s village, there are **“only 30 families”** (*tiṃs’eva kulāni honti*) [7]. From each of these families comes a youth, all of whom

⁵¹ Cf Siddhattha’s naming ceremony: SD 52.1 (4.3.1).

⁵² On *māṇava*, see SD 38.6 (2.1).

⁵³ *So putta, dhītāhi vaḍḍhamāno dāna, patī ahoṣi, pañca sīlāni rakkhati.*

⁵⁴ M 81,25 (SD 49.3).

⁵⁵ *Tadā bodhisatto yathā etarahi sakko purime atta.bhāve ...*

⁵⁶ S 11.6/1:224 f (SD 86.22).

⁵⁷ J 31/1:206,8 (SD 86.23).

⁵⁸ See, eg, S 15.14-19; also SD 54.20 (2.3.2.2).

⁵⁹ On teachings suggestive of parallel universes or other worlds, see **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29,2), SD 16.15; **(Ānanda) Abhibhū S** (A 3.80), SD 54.1; SD 10.9 (8.2.3); SD 2.19 (9.5).

gather together to do “village work” (*gāma,kammaṃ*). Magha, too, is in the village centre (*gāma,majjhe*), standing in a comfortable spot, but he gets shoved around.

Later, we are told, the 30 youths befriend Magha (the village is small). (The Magha Vatthu adds that they approach him one by one, asking him what he is doing. [§17]) He teaches them the 5 precepts. The rest of the story, more or less, follows the Kulāvaka Sutta (S 11.6), but gives more details, with interesting variations.⁶⁰ [7.1.1]

6 Sakra's women

6.1 YOUNG MAGHA AND HIS FAMILY

6.1.1 The Kulāvaka Jātaka (J 31), which gives the most detailed account of the life of Magha of Macala, says that when he came of age, his parents arranged for his marriage to a girl of the same social class as theirs. They prospered as a family with sons and daughters, and he became a “master giver” who kept to the 5 precepts [5.1.2]. We are not told of his wife's name or anything further.⁶¹

6.1.2 A logical possibility is that she could be one of the “4 wives” mentioned later in the Magha Vatthu; perhaps Sudhammā. In due course, Magha, being well to do and loving, accepted the three other women into his life. However, this is purely speculative since we have no textual evidence for this. All we can say, from the Magha Vatthu, is that Magha begins marital life as a happy and prosperous family and in due course, has a total of 4 “wives” (*pāda,paricārikā*) [6.2].

6.2 MAGHA AND HIS 4 WIVES

6.2.1 The Commentaries tell us that there are 4 “women” (*itthī*) in Magha's house [§33+n], and that they are his “wives” (*pāda,paricārikā*).⁶² Although this last term literally means “foot-servant,” or “hand-maid,” and even suggests “concubine,” its commentarial sense or usage clearly is “wife.” Polygamy, although not widespread then, was common enough, not only amongst royalty and the wealthy, but even the poor, such as hunters and cowherds.⁶³

6.2.2 Magha's 4 wives are **Sudhammā, Nandā, Cittā and Sujā** (or Sujātā). This listing is probably according to seniority or age, with the last as the juniormost or youngest. Each of the first three, we are told, made significant contributions alongside those of Magha and his companions. **Sudhammā** has the main hall or resthouse named after her [§§35-44]; **Nandā** has a lotus-pool constructed [§§45 f]; and **Cittā** a flower-garden [§§47-49]. Their wholesome karmic works bring them rebirth with Sakra in Tāva,tiṃsa, where arise, too, the Sudhammā hall, the Nandā lotus-pool and the Citta, latā garden as its prominent features.

⁶⁰ Cf §23 where J 31 instead says that other elephants were brought in [§23 n]. On Magha, see [1]; also SD 54.19 (1.2.3.1).

⁶¹ J 31/1:198-206 (SD 86.23).

⁶² On *pāda,paricārikā*, see SD 54.8 (1.4.3).

⁶³ See A M Shastri 2001:1312. Interestingly, the children of such wives were named after the mothers' gotra, rather than their father (a name known as a “matronymic” or “metronymic”), such as Gautamī,putra, Kāśī,putra and Vāsiṣṭhī,putra. However, it is uncertain whether this practice explained names like Sāri,putta, Mantānī,putta, Māluṅkya,putta and Moggalī,putta.

6.2.3 Sujā or Sujātā, probably the youngest of Magha's 4 wives, content herself with being his first cousin: she does no good works at all, but spent her time adorning herself [§50]. Although a close relative and wife of Magha, Sujā was merely enjoying her past good karma. Without any good karma compatible with those of Magha, she is not reborn with him in Tāva,tim̐sa.

While Sakra is in Tāva,tim̐sa, Sujā is first reborn as a crane in a mountain cave [§§69-79]. Sakra teaches her to keep the precepts, the good karma of which fruits in her being reborn a human, as the daughter of a Benares potter. Sakra again meets her and reminds her of keeping the precepts [§§80-85]. Finally, she is reborn in heaven, but as the daughter of Sakra's sworn enemy, Vepa,citti, lord of the asuras!

Sakra shows his undying loyalty and love for her by eloping with her during an asura-gathering where she is to choose her own husband [§§86-93]. As the only asura amongst the devas in Tāva,tim̐sa, she understandably requests to be constantly with Sakra [§§98-102].

Sujā can be said to act as a foil for Sakra's **compassion**: despite her lack of spiritual initiative, even vanity, Sakra showed her his unconditional loyalty and love to her benefit. Moreover, their marriage also ends the deva-asura conflict, reconciling the two celestial parties.

6.3 ROHINĪ

6.3.1 Before becoming a streamwinner and probably before the arrival of his 4 wives in Tāva,tim̐sa, Sakra has an amorous affair with the female deity Rohinī (erstwhile of Kapila,vatthu and the elder Anuruddha's sister). In her existence in Kapila,vatthu, she had a skin eruption and refused to see anyone, including her brother and the Buddha. She was, however, persuaded to make a meal-offering to the Buddha, listened to his Dharma teaching, and later on build an assembly-hall for the monks. Through her good works, she is able to break the 3 fetters of self-identity view, attachment to ritual and vows, and doubt, to become a streamwinner.

6.3.2 Upon dying, Rohinī is reborn as a young female deity (*deva,puttā*) in Tāva,tim̐sa at the junction of the boundaries of four deities. On account of her beauty, a deity from each of these zones claims her as his. When the matter is brought before Sakra, he asks them how much they each love her since they saw her.

The 1st deity says that his heart-beats like a battle-drum for her. The 2nd declares that she makes his mind run wild like a mountain torrent. The 3rd claims that when he first saw her, his eyes popped out like those of a crab. And the 4th confesses that his thoughts for her make his heart flutter like a banner on a shrine.

But Sakra dismisses them and declares that if he cannot have her for himself, he will surely die! Either out of respect for their leader or out of the fear of losing him, the other devas relent and let Sakra have her. She is Sakra's darling and delight. Whenever she says, "Let's go and sport in such and such," he could not refuse her.⁶⁴

6.3.3 The story of Sakra's encounter with Rohinī is a **humorous** one. It highlights his amorous nature, and one who would let nothing stand in his way to win whomever is after his heart. It also hints at the general helplessness of women in ancient India. Note that the female deity is neither named nor does she speak a word throughout the trial. She has, it seems, no say in the whole affair; but this is not for her faults but rather for her fairness.

This almost impulsive and frivolous encounter of Sakra is apparently recorded only here (in **DhA 17.1**). The encounter probably occurred before the arrival of Sakra's 4 wives in Tāvatiṃsa. It is unlikely that someone like Sujā would have tolerated another favourite wife of Sakra's. Moreover, Rohinī was a

⁶⁴ **Rohinī Khattiya,kaññā Vatthu** (DhA 17.1/3:295-299). For a fuller account of Rohinī, see SD 54.8 (6.3.6).

streamwinner who must have had some good influence over Sakra's own decision to gain that state, an aspiration that became urgent when Sakra sees the signs of his own impending death.⁶⁵

7 Tāva,tim̐sa

7.1 The 30 or the 33?

7.1.1 Sakra's heaven is not always referred to as "the 33" [7.2].⁶⁶ **The Magha Vatthu**, for example, tells us that Magha's village of Macala has only 30 households, and that a youth from each house befriends Magha, and so are known as "**the 30**" (*ti,dasa*)⁶⁷ [5.3]. **The Nandana Sutta** (S 1.11) refers to them, too, in the same way: they are, in fact, often referred to thus in various sutta verses.⁶⁸

7.1.2 Clearly, the forms, *ti,dasa* (literally, "the three tens") and *ti,diva* ("the 3rd deva-world" or better "the threes deva-world") are simply a poetic shorthand for "the 33." **The Abhidhana-p, padīpikā** (the earliest Pali dictionary, 12th century), in fact, lists the terms *ti,ādibhū* or *tidiv'ādibhū*, "the prime lord of the 33" (a reference to "Indra," that is, Sakra, Abh 19). There is also the form *ti,abhibhū*, "the overlord of the 33."⁶⁹ Lexically, *ti* means "three," sometimes "the third," but the 3rd deva-world is actually the Yāma devas.⁷⁰ Perhaps *ti* here serves as a shorthand for "30" or "33," as suggested by the commentarial glosses referred to here.⁷¹

7.2 THE 33

7.2.1 The heroes of the Magha epic

7.2.1.1 Other than the Magha Vatthu mentioning that Magha's 30 friends came from the 30 houses of his village, Macala, we have no other information as to who "**the 33**" (*tāva,tim̐sa*)⁷² are. Could it be that the 33 comprise the 30 friends from the 30 village houses + Sakra + the builder (Vissa,kamma) + the elephant (Erāvaṇa)? They are, after all, closely related to Magha in Macala. Yet, this is at best only conjectural. However, if this were the case, then we should refer to "Sakra of the 33," and not "Sakra and the 33."

7.2.1.2 Vissa,kamma (Skt *viśva,karma*, "all-maker") is Sakra's celestial architect, well known for constructing buildings, lakes and such structures. He is like the Buddhist Hephaestus (Roman: Vulcan), Graeco-Roman mythical celestial blacksmith, associated with fire, metals and precious stones, and their products

⁶⁵ See **Sakka,pañha S** (D 31,49*+50*) nn, SD 54.8.

⁶⁶ For details on the mythology of *tāva,tim̐sa*, see SD 54.3a (4). On the origins of Tāva,tim̐sa, see SD 54.3a (2.2.1.3).

⁶⁷ S 1.11,20d* (SD 54.3a). **Ti,dasa** ("3 x 10," *tikkhattuṃ dasannaṃ*, SA 1:30,26).

⁶⁸ **Ti,diva** (m, n) (S 1:96,16*) + *ti,divā* (m pl): S 1:181,8* (SA 1:265,16); A 3:40,19*; Vv 53.4; Tha 534; ThaA 2:225,-31 *tusita,deva.loke*; J 3:194,31*, 195,17 f, 4:274,16*, 5:18,11*, 19,24 f ~*āti tāvatim̐sa,deva.lokā*, 407,14*, 6:568*; Ap 49,14; As m pl: the inhabitants of that deva-world; the gods: D 2:167,26*; Vv 53,18.

⁶⁹ Also C 1.1,4; CA 24,14 qu Sadd 77,17 (*ti,ādibuū*).

⁷⁰ For a table of the 31 planes of existence, see SD 1.7 App.

⁷¹ See also SD 54.3a (2.2.1.1).

⁷² *Tāva,tim̐sa*, also spelt *te-t,tim̐sa*, *te-t,tim̐sati*: (1) (mfñ; m pl) numbering 33, (one of) the 33 gods: Abhp 11 (~*ā tv amarā deva*); S 1:5,27*; Vv 18.14 (VvA 97,4 f); Thī 121; J 3:305,18*; Ap 34,20, 344,1; Sadd 477,25*, 924,30; (2) (mfñ) of the 33 gods: Ap 146,26, 375,21, 555,24; B 28.10; (3) (n) the world of the 33 gods: Ap 33,23, 49,19, ApA 298,18.

such as weapons and contraptions. Sakra sends Vissa,kamma to build Mahā Sudassana’s Dharma-palace, as recorded in **the Mahā Sudassana Sutta** (D 17).⁷³

7.2.1.3 Erāvaṇa is one of the animals reborn in Tāva.tiṃsa as Sakra’s elephant. He is the elephant of the rajah of Magadha who instructs him to trample Sakra and his companions to death, following the false accusation of the jealous village headman [§21]. The elephant refuses to harm Sakra and his band not only because they are innocent but because they show him lovingkindness.

When the rajah learns the truth about Sakra and his band, revealing not only their innocence but their goodness, he gives the elephant to them—along with other compensations [8.2.6.3]—to help them with their public works. As a result, when Magha and the others are reborn in Tāvatiṃsa, the elephant, too, is reborn there, as Erāvaṇa, as their companion. He is one of the chief features of Tāva,tīṃsa (V 6:278).

Ordinarily, Erā,vaṇa is a deva like the others, because there are no animals in the deva-world.⁷⁴ When they went to the park to sport, Erāvaṇa takes the form of an elephant,⁷⁵ 150 yojanas high. With his powers, he turns himself into a fabulous gargantuan chimera of an elephant, as fully described in the text [§§62-65].

The Dhammika Sutta (Sn 379) mentions Erāvaṇa as a “noble elephant” (*nāga,rāja*) among the devas who visits the Buddha to pay him homage. He is also amongst the nagas present at the teaching of **the Mahā,samaya Sutta** (D 20, v32d), where he is titled, “the great naga” (*mahā,nāga*).⁷⁶ **The Commentaries** inform us that Erāvaṇa is a devaputra who is a “great noble elephant” but he is not born an elephant (in Tāva,tīṃsa).⁷⁷ The Jātakas (eg J 5:137) mention Sakra as riding Erāvaṇa, especially when comparing kings parading on the backs of elephants (eg, V 3:392).

7.2.2 Another interesting problem is that of **the heaven** called “the 33,” *tāva,tīṃsa*, as the name of the realm that they inhabit. We know, according to one etymology or sets of etymologies, that the previous inhabitants of “Tāvatiṃsa” (before Sakra’s advent) were also devas or *sura*. However, since their downfall from that heaven into the ocean (either earth’s ocean—the Indian ocean?—or the cosmic “ocean” at the far end of the cosmic mountain, Sineru), they are known as **asuras**. The Subcommentaries give the following etymologies:

(1) The Saṃyutta Subcommentary:

“Some say that **asura** means that they do not sport like the gods (*sura*)” (*na suran’ti dibbantīti asurā-ti keci*, SAṬ:Be 1:330)

(2) The Aṅguttara Subcommentary:

“**The asuras** are neither gods who sport about nor shine like the devas; hence, they are called *asura*” (*asurāti devā viya na suran’ti na kīlanti na virocantīti asurā*, AAṬ:Be 3:227)

(3) The Vinaya Subcommentary:

“They are **asura** in the sense that they are neither courageous, nor are they lordly, nor do they shine like the devas; hence, they are *asura*” (*asurāti devā viya na suranti na īsanti na virocantīti asurā*, VAṬ:Be 3:428).

⁷³ D 17,1.26-1.32 (SD 36.12).

⁷⁴ PugA 187. Animals form one of the subhuman realms (the pretas, the animals, the asuras and hellbeings): SD 2.22 (1.7).

⁷⁵ ShA 1:273; VvA 15.

⁷⁶ D 20,33d*/2:258 (SD 54.4). Here *nāga* is a word for elephant”: see also: Abhp 360, 849; D 2:266,5*; M 1:415,2; A 2:116,24; Dh 329; Sn 29; Thī 49.

⁷⁷ **Erā,vaṇo mahā,nāgo’ti erāvaṇo ca deva,putto, jātiyā nāgo na hoti** (DA 2:688). See also MA 2:298; SnA 1:3469; VvA 15; Kvu 2:599.

The Saṃyutta Subcommentary adds that the meaning of *asura* comes from their exclamation: “No more of this strong drink (for us)! No more did they take strong drinks.” (*Sā surā na hoti, na suram pivimhāti adhippāyo*, SAṬ:Be 1:330).⁷⁸

As asuras, they have their own domain, said to be at the foot of Mount Sineru, under the great ocean, and which is known as “asura domain” (*asura bhavana*).⁷⁹ This domain has arisen from the good karma of the asuras themselves.

8 Heedfulness and diligence

8.1 STORY THEMES

8.1.1 At the close of the Magha Vatthu (DhA 2.7), the Buddha declares, “Thus, Mahāli, the youth Magha practised the path of **heedfulness** (*appamāda*) (that is, heedfulness and diligence). And because he was thus heedful, **he gained such lordship as this, that he came to rule over the two worlds of the devas.**” [§103]. Throughout the Magha Vatthu, we see heedfulness and diligence being applied by Sakra in all his actions [Part 2.7a], by Magha in his life [Part 2.7b], by Sakra when dealing with negative situations [Part 2.7c], and with his wives, who also show heedfulness [Part 2.7d]. [8.2]

8.1.2 Appamāda as heedfulness and diligence

8.1.2.1 *Appamāda* is a pregnant Pali word, meaning “heedfulness and diligence,” where heedfulness is the *passive* aspect of being positively patient (a wholesome karmic omission) and diligence is *active* aspect being wholesomely exertive (a wholesome karmic commission). Each helps and complements the other with both omission and commission as the situation properly demands. Where “**heedful(ness)**” is used alone, it should be understood to include both senses.

8.1.2.2 “Heedfulness is praised by those like the buddhas. For, it is on account of heedfulness that **all attain the distinctions that are worldly as well as spiritual.**” (*Appamādam hi nissāya sabbesaṃ pi lokiya, lokuttarānaṃ visesānaṃ adhigamo hotīti*). “Heedfulness” (*appamāda*) is the singular quality of those like the buddha, the pratyeka buddhas, the arhats, the learners and true practitioners because it is the foremost of wholesome states—as stated in **the (Chakka) Appamāda Sutta** (A 6.53).⁸⁰

Appamāda is resolved *a* (“not”) + *pa-māda* (“whatever strengthens intoxication”). *Pamāda* itself is further resolved as *pa* (a prefix signifying strength or excess) + *mada* (“intoxication, drunkenness, sensual excess”). The best-known application of *mada* is in the 3 negative ways, that is, being intoxicated with youth (*yobbana mada*), with health (*ārogya mada*) and life (*jīvita mada*).⁸¹ This is to be understood and avoided. [8.1.2.3]

8.1.2.3 Essentially, when we are **young**, it is the best time to start learning about the reality of impermanence: its truth becomes only clearer and more real as we mature (maturing itself is an experience of impermanence!). Being **healthy** in body is the best, even ideal, time for us to train our mind to be heal-

⁷⁸ See SD 54.21 (2.2.1).

⁷⁹ See SD 52.1 (2.2.1.6).

⁸⁰ Defined in **(Chakka) Appamāda S** (A 6.53) @ SD 42.22 (2). See also **Pamāda Vihāri S** (S 35.97), SD 47.6; **(Dasa-ka) Appamāda S** (A 10.15), SD 42.23; **Sāra, gandha S** (S 45.143), SD 42.24; **Paṭisallāna S** (It 45), SD 41.4; Dh 21, SD 46.15 (2.7.2.3); **(Sotāpanna) Nandiya S** (S 55.40,5) + SD 47.1 (1.1.2.5); SD 47.17 (2.3.4.1).

⁸¹ **Mada S** (A 3.39), SD 42.13; **Sukhumāla S** (A 3.38), SD 1.11 (3.2).

thy, too: a healthy mind in a healthy body⁸² is a great way of living as a practising Buddhist. Finally, we should never take **life** for granted: we don't need to wait for signs of danger or impending death to aspire for streamwinning. When we are familiar with the spiritual life, then, we have cultivated a wholesome mind and a sustainable life, even in the face of danger and death we are safe, happy and at peace.

This is the nature of **diligence**: that of not taking anything in life—especially youth, health and life itself—for granted. Diligence implies the wisdom to see and understand true reality, and the unrelenting effort to apply that wisdom. Since diligence plays a key role in spiritual training and underlies spiritual growth, it is found in all the Buddha's teachings.⁸³

8.1.3 The worldly and the supermundane

8.1.3.1 The “**worldly**” or the mundane (*lokiya*) refers to all those states of consciousness and mental factors (*cetasika*) arising in a worldling (*puthujjana*) or a noble saint (*ariya puggala*), which are not associated with the supermundane (*lok'uttara*) paths and fruitions. Simply, it means “ordinary” mental states which include both unwholesome and wholesome in a worldling and the learners, but only the wholesome in the arhat. The Buddha, for example, feels joy at the excellence of the arhats and praises this, as shown, for example, at the opening of **the Ānāpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118).⁸⁴

The “**supermundane** or supramundane” (*lok'uttara*) refers to any of the 4 paths (*magga*) and 4 fruitions (*phala*) of the streamwinner, the once-returned, the non-returned and the arhat, that is, the noble individuals (*ariya puggala*), with nirvana (*nibbāna*) as the ninth, forming the 9 supermundane states (*nava lok'uttara dhamma*). This term refers to only the wholesome states attending these individuals, that is, the states that are conducive to progress on the path of awakening or the natural state of mind of the arhat.

Technically, however, the arhat's mind (including that of the Buddha) is said to be beyond the unwholesome and the wholesome, because they have “abandoned both good and evil” (*puñña,papa,pāhīnam*). This does *not* mean that they “do not” have to keep the precepts or are above the Vinaya: it means that they would *naturally* never break any such precepts nor behave oddly as depicted by some later sectarian writings.⁸⁵

8.1.3.2 Here, the “**distinctions**” (*visesa*) may refer to any worldly wholesome happiness, the dhyanas or any of the 9 supermundane states [8.1.3.1], especially the latter. Worldly wholesome happiness refers to the joy experienced by one who has not attained the path yet. This kind of wholesome karma is “samsaric”: it keeps us continuing within the cycle of births and deaths. However, properly understood and channelled, it can bring us to the path: this means it must include some kind of reflection of the impermanence.

This, then, is where we truly start our spiritual training, and build it up—this is called “**doing more**” (*uttariṃ karaṇīyaṃ*).⁸⁶ This means that we keep up our practice of understanding the nature of impermanence and reflecting on it until we understand how to aspire for **streamwinning**. This way, we are assured of attaining the path in this life itself.

⁸² See **Nakula,pitā S** (S 22.1), SD 5.4.

⁸³ Ie, in the 7 sets, comprising the 27 limbs of awakening (*bodhi.pakkhiya,dhamma*): see **Sāra,gandha S** (S 45.143-144), SD 42.24. On the “7 sets,” see **Bodhi.pakkhiyā,dhamma**, SD 10.1 (1).

⁸⁴ M 118,1-4/3:78 f (SD 7.13).

⁸⁵ SD 2.10 (3.2.3.4). See also **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7.

⁸⁶ (**Ānanda**) **Subha S** (D 10,1.31 + passim), SD 40a.13; **Sevittabasevitabba S** (M 114), SD 39.8 (1.1.1.8); (**Gaha,-pati**) **Potaliya S** (M 54,14), SD 43.8; SD 51.17 (3.4.2.5).

8.2 SAKRA'S HEEDFULNESS AND DILIGENCE

8.2.1 Sakra's qualities. At the start of the **Magha Vatthu**, we see [Part 2.7a] heedfulness and diligence (*appamāda*) as his characteristic quality reflected in his **7 names** [§5] and his characteristic actions, reflected in his **7 vows** [§§6-8]. In his **7 names**: as **Maghava**, he is munificent [8.2.2];⁸⁷ as **Purin,dada**, he is generous and grateful;⁸⁸ as **Sakka**, he is assiduous;⁸⁹ as **Vāsava**, the public-spirited, he builds a resthouse open to anyone who needs it;⁹⁰ as **Sakk'akkha**, his quick wit seizes the moment in overthrowing the intoxicant-taking asuras in a bloodless coup;⁹¹ and as **Sujam,pati**, husband of Sujā, he guides the vain Sujā in moral conduct so that she gains rebirth in Tāva,timśa.⁹²

8.2.2 Sakra's previous life. The Magha Vatthu **part 2.7b** (the story of Sakra's immediate past life) records the heedfulness and diligence of Magha in his public works and the challenges he and his band have to face. He shows amazing patience and humility [§§12-14]; he is public-spirited [§§15-17], determined in good [§§18-21], non-violent [§§22-23], loving [§24], truthful [§§25-29], dedicated [§§30-32], amenable to good advice [§§35-40] and wisely practical [§§41-44].

8.2.3 Heedlessness. **Part 2.7c** of the Magha Vatthu records Sakra's heedfulness (*appamāda*) in noticing the heedlessness (*pamāda*) of the asuras who take to drinking intoxicants. At once seeing the dangers of intoxication, Sakra forbids the devas from joining the asuras in their drinking binge. When the asuras have become inebriate, he signals to the devas and they throw the asuras out of Tāva,timśa down into the great ocean where the asuras make their new abode (*asura bhavana*).

This may be said to be a most "political" move; hence, the most controversial, of Sakra's act as lord of the devas. However, Sakra's decisiveness shows his resolute leadership. As a result of this, the asuras become the devas' sworn enemies, leading to constant battles and intrigues between the two parties. Happily, the devas and the asuras reconcile following Sakra's marriage with Sujā [§§90-102].

8.2.4 Sakra's first 3 wives

8.2.4.1 Part 2.7b shows how Sakra's first 3 wives—**Sudhammā** [§§35-41], **Nandā** [§§42-44] and **Cittā** [§§45-46]—present themselves to be diligent in their own way [§§]. There is no mention of Sakra having to instruct or encourage them to join in his public works. On the contrary, **the Kulāvaka Jātaka** (J 31) tells us that, with the building of the resthouse on the crossroads, Magha and his companions "had lost all

⁸⁷ On Maghava or Magha, see SD 54.19 (1.2.4.1).

⁸⁸ Sakra's generosity and gratefulness are exemplified at the end of **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21), when he rewards Pañca,sikha for arranging his 1st meeting with the Buddha, by adopting him as a son, making him king of the gandharvas, and giving him the hand of Suriya,vacchasā in marriage: D 21,2.10.1 (SD 54.8). On *purin,dada*, see SD 54.19 (1.2.4.3).

⁸⁹ Sakra's assiduity, patience and humility are reflected in his dealings with the "anger-eater" in **Dubbañña S** (S 11/22), SD 54.19. He praises patience in **Verocana Asur'inda S** (S 11.8), SD 87.13. On the name *sakka*, see SD 54.19 (1.2.1.2).

⁹⁰ The "resthouse" (*vissamana,sālā* or *āvasatha*) is mentioned at **§32** (DhA 1:269 f; DhA:B 1:317 f). For its etym, see SD 54.19 (1.2.4.2).

⁹¹ On Sakra's quick thinking further see (8.2.6.4). On *sahass'akkha*, see SD 54.19 (1.2.4.4).

⁹² As the expression "Sujā's husband," *sujam,pati*, see SD 54.19 (1.2.4.5).

desire for women” (*mātu, gāmesu pana vigata-c, chandatāya*).⁹³ Hence—according to **the Magha Vatthu** (DhA 2.7), too—they exclude women from any part in their good works.⁹⁴

8.2.4.2 The Commentaries give no reason for this development. We can only surmise that either Magha and his companions feel some profound religious fervor for their public works, or that they find the women distracting to their vocation. There is no evidence for the latter; hence, it can only be that they feel an overwhelming religious purpose so that they invest all their energies in their works, leaving no surplus feelings for anything else, even women. [8.2.6.1]

8.2.4.3 It is clear from **the Magha Vatthu** (DhA 2.7) and **the Kulāvaka Jātaka** (J 31) that Magha’s first 3 wives would tolerate no exclusion from their husband’s good works. They show diligence in playing the wife’s karmic role not only for the sake of present love, but also as an investment for being together again in their next lives.

Hence, Sudhammā contributes the central pillar of the resthouse; Nandā builds a lotus pool to provide water for drinking and washing; and Cittā constructs a remarkable flower-garden as a pleasure and also to provide flowers for garlands (often used in social occasions). In other words, these are no mere frivolities: they are vital contributions to value-add and complete the works of the man of their lives.

8.2.5 Sakra and Sujā

8.2.5.1 Although Sakra’s first 3 wives showed great diligence and ingenuity in being part of Magha’s life-work, **his 4th wife**, probably the youngest, and also his maternal cousin, **Sujā**, sees no need for any such effort on her part, and spends her time adorning herself. Her rationale for her non-action is, thus: “I am **Magha’s cousin**, daughter of his mother’s brother, and also **Magha’s wife**. What work he has done is mine, too; what I’ve done is his, too!” [§50]. This is not a good understanding of karma; it reflects her lack of wisdom which will handicap her in due course.

This is a time when consanguinity is tolerated, even valued. Hence, Sujā sees herself as being *doubly blessed* in being with Magha. Karmically, we can say that she is resting on her laurels: the wise lady Visākhā would warn Sujā that she is eating “stale fare”⁹⁵—that is, enjoying her past good karma without working on replenishing it. In fact, this is just the point, and she will face her sad karmic fruits as such.

8.2.5.2 Since Sujā is simply **heedless** while living with the heedful Magha and his diligent first 3 wives, she has to face the music that is her bad karma. While the 3 wives are reborn in Tāva,tiṃsa in deserving glory, along with the resplendent fruits of their earthly karma, Sujā is reborn as a **crane** inhabiting a cave—we must imagine that she has pleasant plumage.

With Sakra’s coaching, she manages to muster some good karma, but not enough to be back with him. She is reborn as the daughter of a Benares potter. Again, Sakra comes to her rescue with more karmic coaching. This time, there is a twist of karmic irony: since she is not personally responsible for all those good karma, she only obtains partial benefits from it.

⁹³ J 31/1:200,30-201,1.

⁹⁴ “They gave no share (of the work) to women,” *mātugāmassa pattim nādaṃsu* (J 31/1:201,1); “We give no share (of the work) to women,” *mayarṃ mātu, gāmānaṃ pattim na damhā* (DhA 1:270,4).

⁹⁵ See the story of Visākhā & her father-in-law, Migāra: see SD 14.11 (1).

She is then reborn as the daughter of the asura leader, Vepa,citti, Sakra's sworn enemy! We have now the makings of a kind of celestial "Romeo and Juliet" love-story.⁹⁶ Fortunately for the couple, all's well that ends well. Sakra dramatically elopes with her right in the midst of an asura assembly, with the asuras in hot pursuit. After their famous journey outrunning and "routing" the pursuing asuras, they happily and finally arrive in Tāva,tiṃsa. But she is the only asura in the realm of devas. Sakra, showing her unconditional love, constantly keeps her safely close by him. [§§69-102]

8.2.5.3 Of Sakra's 4 wives, Sujā is given the most story time. This is understandable, not merely for her beauty but more so because she is the daughter of Sakra's sworn enemy. Their love and marriage bring an end to the deva-asura war, and restores peace in heaven and the asura realm. In fact, Sujā's story is a remarkable testimony to Sakra's **patience and unconditional love** for her.

Not once has Sakra ever chided Sujā (or his other wives, for that matter). The only time Sakra makes a negative remark about Sujā is probably when he learns that she is reborn as a crane: "**Having worked no merit, the foolish girl has been born as an animal.**"⁹⁷ It is more a spontaneous quip of regret. [§70]

This expression of regret only reveals his deep love and concern for Sujā. His is an instructive love: he explains to her about her lack of karmic advantage, and how to work up some karmic strategy. We again see Sakra's "caring teacher" diligence in his patient instructions to his two sons, Suvīra and Susīma, when they are negligent in the face of an asura attack. Yet, Sakra shows no anger on those occasions, only his concern and wisdom.⁹⁸

Not only is Sakra a loving husband; he is also a loving father. Above all, he is the most loving and most beloved of the gods. He is a streamwinner, too, that is, one on the path of awakening. It is easy to be inspired by such an affable person: we ought to follow his good example, too.

8.2.6 Sakra's apparent weaknesses and difficulties

8.2.6.1 We have noted that Sakra and his companions try to totally exclude women from their work [8.2.4]. The only explanation we are given is that they "had lost all desire for women" [8.2.4.1]. And we may surmise that this is probably because of their dedication to their work, and that they do not want to be distracted from it in any way.

There is no reason for attributing any notion of anti-feminism to their attitude. Firstly, there is no such concept or category in those days. Secondly, we do see Sakra taking the trouble to help Sujā gain rebirth in Tāva,tiṃsa so that they are together again. Then, we also have Sakra's involvement with Rohinī [6.3]. Sakra is clearly *not* against women; he *loves* them.

8.2.6.2 We are told that Magha and his companions live in a small village of only 30 families. Their village is probably near a bigger village or a town, perhaps a market-town (nigama),⁹⁹ considering that a "crossroads" is mentioned, and at which they build their resthouse [§32]. They are able to do so because of the support of the king of Magadha who gives them all the village's resources and more. [8.2.6.3]

Apparently, before being involved in their public works, the 30 young men, or at least Magha, were already economically productive—bringing meat, fish and other products from the forest—and they were

⁹⁶ *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) is a tragedy by William Shakespeare about two star-crossed lovers from feuding families with both of them committing suicide in the end.

⁹⁷ Sakra's 3 wives, on meeting Sujā the crane in Tāva,tiṃsa, however, teased her sarcastically [§73]. When Sakra learned about this, he knew that she would be happy to live there as a crane. [§§74-75]

⁹⁸ **Suvīra S** (S 11.1), SD 114.13 [2.1.8.1]; **Susīma S** (S 11.2), SD 114.14 [2.1.8.2].

⁹⁹ On "village" (*gāma*) and "market town" (*nigāma*). A *nigama* was larger than a *gāma*, and usu arose at crossroads or places convenient for trading and resting: see (**Sāla,vatikā**) **Lohicca S** (D 12,1 n on Sāla,vatikā), SD 34.8.

profit-bringing customers at the local headman’s tavern or entertainment businesses [§18]. **The Kulāvaka Jātaka** (J 31) adds that before this, the young men used to get drunk and commit crimes, and the headman profited from selling drinks and from collecting the fines and dues from the perpetrators.

This loss of goods and income angered the headman to the extent that he plotted against Magha and his companions by falsely reporting to the rajah that they were bandits roving the countryside. The rajah ordered that they be arrested and punished. [§§18-21]

The point of this development is that the public works of Magha and his companions have brought much good to their area. The youths are better behaved and contributing a growing number of public amenities. Such good works are bound to invite opposition and trouble from those who see themselves as being deprived of the shady dealings otherwise.

8.2.6.3 Following the headman’s false accusation [§21], the Magadha rajah had Magha and his companions summarily arrested and punished without trial. This gives us some idea of the kind of law and justice that prevailed at that time and place. This is literally a **great trial** for Magha and his companions: he instructs his companions to show no anger at those against them, including the system, but to show them all lovingkindness.

Their positive response to this negative situation shows that they are not merely doing some public works—the way we would do social or humanitarian work today—but that they are doing so with a pure heart and noble intentions. Indeed, Magha has earlier on declared that he is clearing “a path to heaven” [§17]. Such an aspiration means that he is also ready to face its challenges; hence, his non-violence to the false accusations and summary punishments. [§23]

Human justice seems to have failed, but not “natural” justice. The “executioner”—a fierce elephant—could sense, not their innocence (he was no judge), but more than that, their goodness. Fortunately, the good rajah reads this ironic development correctly and frees Magha and his companions [§§24-25].

When Magha tells the rajah the truth and the rajah realizes his mistake, the rajah not only apologizes [§29], but rewards Magha and his companions by the laws and traditions of the day: the village headman, along with his wife and children become their slaves; they are given the elephant (that was meant to kill them), and the village, too (its revenue is now theirs).¹⁰⁰ The gift of the village is known as **brahmadeya** (*brahma,deyya*).¹⁰¹ After their trial, Magha and his band are rewarded with more than what they need to continue with their public works. [§§22-29]

8.2.6.4 One of the most beautiful episodes of **the Magha Vatthu** is that of Sakra and the garuda nestlings, related in **part 2.7d**. When Sakra elopes with Sujā from the asura-realm, they flee in his huge chariot, Vejayanta, drawn by a thousand Sindh horses and driven by Mātali. As they speed through the air, they race close over the silk-cotton forest with the nests of garuda nestlings.

The helpless little birds begin to panic and cry out. Sakra hears them, and on learning that they fear being crushed by his chariot, at once instructs Mātali to turn back—he would rather surrender to the asuras than make these helpless nestling nestless! When the asuras, from the distance, see Sakra’s chariot turning around, they think that reinforcements have arrived for him, and they themselves retreat without as much as looking back! [§§94-97]

¹⁰⁰ **Kulāvaka J** (J 31) says of the slandering headman’s punishment, that he only lost all his house’s wealth (*geha, vibhava*) and became the slave of Magha and his band (J 31/1:200,26-28), SD 86.23. In overall length, however, DhA 2.7 is the longer story.

¹⁰¹ *Brahma,deyya*, “the perfect gift,” said of donations of tax-free land to the brahmins. The income derived from such lands were the personal property of the brahmins (Magha was a brahmin), who used it for agriculture and brahminical sacrifices. See SD 11.7 (3.1).

This beautiful story of Sakra's courage, compassion and quick thinking comes from **the Kulāvaka Sutta** (S 11.6), which the Buddha teaches to show how Sakra won a victory by means of mere righteousness (*dhammen'eva jayo*), that is, by a Dharma-victory (*dhamma, vijaya*).¹⁰² So well loved is this tale that it is the basis for a birth-story: **the Kulāvaka Jātaka** (J 31),¹⁰³ which gives the most detailed account of Magha's life, paralleling that in **the Magha Vatthu** (DhA 2.7),

8.2.6.5 The full story of Magha and the origin of Sakra and Tāva,tiṃsa are found as parallel accounts in **the Magha Vatthu** (DhA 2.7) [2.1.1] and **the Kulāvaka Jātaka** (J 31) [2.1.6]. They are given different titles because they are based on different themes. While the Magha Vatthu highlights *appamāda*, referring to the twin qualities of heedlessness (the omission aspect) and diligence (the commission aspect) [§103; 8.1.2], the Kulāvaka Jātaka is about the respect for life, even the most helpless.

The occasion for the Kulāvaka Jātaka was that of a monk who drank unfiltered water, thus killing a number of small living beings. The Jātaka shows how the mighty Sakra readily avoids harming the helpless garuda nestlings by turning his chariot back, even if this means being captured by the advancing asuras. Even the lord of the devas has respect for helpless nestlings, why not a renounced monk?

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¹⁰² S 11.6/1:224 f (SD 86.22).

¹⁰³ **Kulāvaka J** (J 31/1:198-206), SD 86.23.

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2.7b: §§12-53	Story of the past: How Magha became Sakra	} 2.7b is an abridged and free version of Kulāvaka Jātaka (J 31), SD 86.23, which highlights Sakra's compassion.
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Magha Vatthu

The Story of Magha

DhA 2.7

1 *Appamādena maghavā'ti* (Dh 30). This Dharma teaching was given by the Teacher while he was staying in the pinnacled hall (*kūṭāgāra,sālā*)¹⁰⁴ outside Vesālī with reference to **Sakra**, the king of the devas.¹⁰⁵ [263]

2.7a STORY OF THE PRESENT: MAHĀLĪ'S QUESTION

Mahāli asks the Buddha about Sakra

2 For, **Mahāli**¹⁰⁶ the Licchavī of Vesālī, hearing the Teacher teaching on **the Sakka,Pañha Sutta** (D 21),¹⁰⁷ thought:¹⁰⁸

“The fully self-awakened one has spoken about Sakra’s great glory. Has the Teacher seen Sakra, or has he not seen Sakra? Does the Teacher know Sakra, or does he not know Sakra? I will ask him.”

3 So Mahāli the Licchavī approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and sat down at one side. Sitting down at one side, Mahāli the Licchavī said to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, **have you seen Sakra**, the lord of the devas?” [264]

“Mahali, I have indeed seen Sakra, lord of the devas.”

4 “Bhante, surely, it must have been a counterfeit of Sakra! For, bhante, **it is difficult to see Sakra**, lord of the devas!”

“Nevertheless, Mahāli, I know Sakra. I know the qualities that make him Sakra. I know what tasks and conditions that should be undertaken by which Sakra attained Sakrahood.¹⁰⁹

Sakra’s 7 names [2.1.4]

- 5** (1) Mahāli, in the past, when Sakra, lord of the devas, was a human being, he was a youth (*māṇava*) named Magha. Hence, he is called **Maghavā**.¹¹⁰
- (2) Mahāli, in the past, when Sakra, lord of the devas, was a human being, he gave offerings (*pure dānaṃ adāsī*). Hence, he is called **Purin,dada**, the City-giver.¹¹¹
- (3) Mahāli, in the past, when Sakra, lord of the devas, was a human being, he gave assiduously (*sakacca*).¹¹² Hence, he is called **Sakka**, the assiduous.¹¹³

¹⁰⁴ On *kūṭāgāra,sālā*, see SD 45.2 (2); M 35,1 n, SD 26.5.

¹⁰⁵ “The king of the devas,” *deva,raja*. In the suttas, Sakka is usu referred to as “lord of the devas” (*devānam inda*) [§5 (7)] + **Sakka,nāma S** (S 11.12,4.7), SD 54.19.

¹⁰⁶ This is Mahāli 1 [1.3].

¹⁰⁷ **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21/2:263-289), SD 54.8.

¹⁰⁸ This passage on Mahāli questioning the Buddha about Sakra recurs at the start of **(Sakka) Mahāli S** (S 11.13/-1;230), SD 99.11.

¹⁰⁹ *Sakka,karaṇe ca dhamme yesañ ca dhammānaṃ samādinattā sakko sakkattaṃ ajjhagā pajānāmi*. This is the thesis paragraph of the story.

¹¹⁰ On Maghava or Magha, see SD 54.19 (1.2.4.1).

¹¹¹ On *purin,dada*, see SD 54.19 (1.2.4.3).

- (4) Mahāli, in the past, when Sakra, lord of the devas, was a human being, he gave a resthouse (*āvasatha*). Hence, he is called **Vāsava**.¹¹⁴
- (5) Mahāli, Sakra, lord of the devas, is able to think of a thousand matters (*sahassam attham*) in an instant. Hence, he is called **Sahass’akkha**, the thousand-eyed.¹¹⁵
- (6) Mahāli, Sakra, lord of the devas, is the husband of the asura maiden Sujā [Sujātā] (*sujā paja,pati*). Hence, he is called **Sujam,pati**, Sujā’s husband.¹¹⁶
- (7) Mahāli, Sakra, lord of the devas, rules and lords with supreme authority over the Tāvatiṃsa devas.¹¹⁷ Hence, he is called **Devānam-inda**, Lord of the Devas.¹¹⁸

Sakra’s 7 vows [2.1.5]

6 Mahāli, in the past, when Sakra, lord of the devas, was a human being,¹¹⁹ he undertook and fulfilled¹²⁰ 7 vows. From this undertaking, Sakra [**265**] came to his Sakrahood.¹²¹

7 What are **the 7 vows**?¹²²

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) As long as I live, may I support my parents. | <i>yāva,jīvaṃ mātā,petti,bhara assaṃ</i> ¹²³ |
| (2) <i>As long as I live</i> , may I respect the family elders. | <i>yāva,jīvaṃ kule jeṭṭhāpacāyī assaṃ</i> |
| (3) <i>As long as I live</i> , may I speak gently. | <i>yāv,jīvaṃ saṇha,vāco assaṃ</i> |
| (4) <i>As long as I live</i> , may I not speak divisively. | <i>yāvajīvaṃ apisuṇa,vāco assaṃ</i> |
| (5) <i>As long as I live</i> , may I dwell at home with a heart free from the stain of miserliness, devoted to charity, open-handed, delighting in giving, devoted to charity, delighting to have a share in giving. ¹²⁴ | <i>yāva,jīvaṃ vigata,mala,maccherena cetasā agāraṃ ajjhāvaseyyaṃ mutta,cāgo payata,pāṇi vossagga,rato yāca,yogo dāna,samvibhāga,rato</i> |
| (6) <i>As long as I live</i> , may I speak the truth. | <i>yāva,jīvaṃ sacca,vāco assaṃ</i> |
| (7) <i>As long as I live</i> , may I be free from anger, | <i>yāva,jīvaṃ akkodhano assaṃ</i> |

¹¹² *Sakacca* (ger of *sakkaroti*), respectfully, carefully, duly, thoroughly. Often with *uppaṭṭhahati*. To attend, serve (with due honour). *Sakkaccaṃ* is the older and common form: V 4:190,3, 275,16; D 2:356,1+6, 357,6+15+22+28+35; S 4:314,34; A 4:392,14; Tha 1054; J 1:480,18; Dh 392; PvA 26,26, 121,15; *sakkaccaṃ dānaṃ*, M 4:52,17.

¹¹³ On the name *sakka*, see SD 54.19 (1.2.1.2).

¹¹⁴ The “resthouse” (*vissamana,sālā* or *āvasatha*) is mentioned at §32 (DhA 1:269 f; DhA:B 1:317 f). For its etym, see SD 54.19 (1.2.4.2).

¹¹⁵ On *sahass’akkha*, see SD 54.19 (1.2.4.4).

¹¹⁶ On *sujam,pati*, see SD 54.19 (1.2.4.5).

¹¹⁷ *Devānam tāva,timsānaṃ issariy’ādhipaccaṃ rajjaṃ karesi*.

¹¹⁸ On *devānam inda*, see SD 54.19 (1.2.1.1).

¹¹⁹ In his previous life as the youth Māgha and his 33 friends: see SD 54.12 (1.1).

¹²⁰ “Undertook and fulfilled” (*samattāni samādināni*), see SD 54.12 (2.2).

¹²¹ The whole para: *Sakkassa mahāli devānam indassa pubbe manussa,bhūtassa satta vata,padāni samattāni samādināni ahesuṃ, yesaṃ samādinattā sakko sakkattaṃ ajjhagā*.

¹²² On *vata,pada*, see SD 54.12 (2.1). Cf Miln 90 where a different set of 8 vows are given in detail: SD 54.12 (2.1.2). For comys on these **7 vows**, see SD 54.12 (1.3.2).

¹²³ *Assaṃ* is 1 sg pot of *atthi*, “it is.”

¹²⁴ This is stock: also in **Nakula,māta S** (A 8.48/4:268 f) = (**Agata,phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.6/3:287 = SD 15.3). At **Dīgha,jānu S** (A 8.54.14/4:284), this serves as the def for “the accomplishment in charity” (*cāga,sampadā*). Commented upon at Vism 7.101-106.

and, should anger arise in me,
may I quickly dispel it.

*sace'pi me kodho uppajjeyya,
khippam eva naṃ paṭivineyyan'ti*

8 *Mahāli, in the past, when Sakra, lord of the devas, was a human being, he undertook and fulfilled 7 vows. From this undertaking, Sakra came to his Sakrahood.*

The mother-father verses¹²⁵

9 ¹²⁶*Mātā,petti,bharam̐ jantum̐
kule jeṭṭhāpacāyinaṃ
saṅham̐ sakhila,sambhāsam̐
pesuṇeyya-p,pahāyinaṃ*

A person supports his parents,
respects the elders in the family,
gentle and courteous in speech,
refrains from divisive speech,

10 ¹²⁷*macchera,vinaye yuttam̐
saccam̐ kodhābhibhum̐ naram̐
tam̐ ve devā tāvatimsā
āhu sappuriso itīti*

devoted to removing his meanness,
a truthful man, who vanquishes anger—
him, the devas of Tāvatiṃsa
call “a true person.”

11 When the Teacher said,

“This, Mahāli, was what Sakra did in the time when he was the youth Magha,”

Mahāli, desiring to hear the details of what he did, asked the Teacher:

“But, bhante, how did the youth Magha conduct himself?”

“Well, then,” said the Teacher, “In that case, listen!” So saying, he related his past, thus:

2.7b STORY OF THE PAST: HOW MAGHA BECAME SAKRA

Magha of Macala [2.1.2]

12 In the past, in the village of Macala, in the kingdom of Magadha, there was a brahmin youth (*māṇava*) named Magha.¹²⁸ **[266]**

13 One day, he went to the village's business centre,¹²⁹ cleared away the dirt with his foot just where he stood, and having made a comfortable spot for himself, stood there.

Then, another person shoved him with the arm, pushed him aside and took his place. Instead of becoming angry, he moved to another spot, cleared it up, made himself comfortable and stood there.

Then, yet another person shoved him with the arm, pushed him aside and took his place. Again, without becoming angry at all, he moved to yet another spot, cleared it up, made himself comfortable and stood there.

In this way, one man after another, came from their house, shoved him, pushing him away from the place that he had cleared for himself.

¹²⁵ Recurs in **Sakka,nāma S** (S 11.12,9-10 = S 906 f) as “the closing verses” (SD 54.19) & in **Kula,vāka J** (J 31/1:202,-2-6). See SD 54.12 (2.1.1).

¹²⁶ = S 904 (S 11.11), SD 54.12.

¹²⁷ = S 905 (S 11.11), SD 54.12.

¹²⁸ In Slt *maghavan* [5.1.2].

¹²⁹ “The village's work and business centre,” *gāma,kamma,karaṇa-ṭ,ṭhāna*. I take *kamma,karaṇa* as meaning any work-related activity which includes people working and running businesses. It is like a town or city square. [8.2.6.2]

14 He thought: “All these men seem to be pleased. Since this work of mine brings such happiness, it must be meritorious work.”

Magha clears a path to heaven

15 On the following day, he took a spade and cleared up a pleasant space the size of a threshing-floor. All the men then stood right just there!

When the weather was cold, he built a fire to warm them, so that the place became popular with them all.

16 Then, he decided, “Let me take up the task of smoothening the road for the sake of those traveling on it. Early in the morning, he began the work of smoothening the road, trimming the tree-branches and removing them.

17 Another man saw him and said to him: “Friend, what are you doing?”

“I’m making a **path to heaven** for myself, friend!”

“I am your companion, then.”

“Be so, friend! Heaven is pleasant for many.”

Then, seeing these two persons, **[267]** a third similarly asked and received a similar reply. This went on until there were 33.¹³⁰

The jealous village headman

18 Now, the village headman¹³¹ saw them and thought: “These people are all engaged in the wrong occupation. If they were only to bring meat, fish and so on from the forest, or indulge in strong drinks, or do something else of this kind, I should profit by it.”

19 So he sent for them and asked them: “What are you working at for a living?”¹³²

“A path to heaven, master.”

“This is not the proper thing for householders to do. You should instead bring meat, fish and so on from the forest, indulge in strong drinks, and have a general good time!”

20 But they refused to follow his suggestion, and the more he urged them, the more firmly they rejected it.

21 The village headman became angry and thought, “I will destroy them!”¹³³

He went before the rajah and complained, “Sire, I see thieves ganging up and roving about!”¹³⁴

“Go catch them and bring them here,” said the rajah.

22 So the village headman arrested the 33 youths and let the rajah see them.

Without making any inquiry into the matter, the rajah summarily ordered: “Let them be trampled to death by an elephant!”¹³⁵

23 Thereupon Magha instructed his companions thus:

¹³⁰ On the composition of the “33”: (7.2).

¹³¹ “Village headman,” *gāma, bhojaka*, “a village chief (who lives off the village), a squire: MA 2:252,8; SA 252,8; DhA 1:69,5; J 1:199,27, 2:134,24; Sadd 471,9.

¹³² *Kiṃ karontā carathāti*.

¹³³ On the headman’s false accusation, see (8.2.6.2).

¹³⁴ *Core te deva vaggā, bandhanena vicarante passāmīti vatvā*.

¹³⁵ On the elephant, see (7.2.1.3).

“Friends, we have no refuge but **lovingkindness**. Calm your hearts and show no anger to anyone. Let your hearts be full of love for the rajah, the village headman and the elephant that will trample you under his feet.”

The 33 did so. By virtue of their lovingkindness, the elephant dared not approach them.¹³⁶

24 When the rajah heard this, **[268]** he said:

“When the elephant sees so many men, he does not dare to trample them. Have the men covered with matting,¹³⁷ and then order the elephant to trample them.”¹³⁸

So, they had the men covered with matting and drove the elephant forward to trample them. But when the elephant was yet a long way off, he turned around and retreated.

25 When the rajah heard what had happened, he thought: “There must be some reason for this.”

So, he had the 33 youths brought before him. He asked them,

“My dears, is there any means of support that you have failed to receive at my hands?”

26 “Sire, what do you mean?”

“I’m informed that you are a gang of thieves and that you rove about the forest plundering.”

27 “Sire, who said that?”

“My dears, the village headman informed me so.”

28 “Sire, it is not true that we are thieves. We are, in fact, doing this and that, clearing a path to heaven for ourselves. The village headman tried to persuade us into some unwholesome acts. When we rejected his proposals, he became angry with us and wished to destroy us. That is why he spoke thus about us.”

29 “My dears, this animal knows your goodness; but I, who am human, was unable to discern it. Forgive me.”

So saying, the rajah made the village headman, along with his children and wife, their slaves; gave them a riding-elephant, and presented that village to them to do as they saw fit.

More works of merit

30 The 33 youths thought among themselves: “Even in this life, the benefits from works of merit are clearly seen.”

31 Mounting the elephant by turns, they rode about the village.

As they went about the village, they discussed with one another, saying, **[269]**

“We should do yet even more works of merit. What shall we do?”

32 Then, it occurred to them:

“Let’s build for the public at the crossroads of the four highways **a resthouse**, secure and strong.”¹³⁹

So they summoned a builder and ordered him to build a hall for them. Since they are not rid of the desire for women, they decided to give women no share in the building of the hall.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ **Kulāvaka J** (J 31) adds that when the first elephant does not trample them, “elephant after elephant are brought up” (*aññam-aññam hatthim ānayimsu*) (J 31/1:200,12 f) and that the king thought Magha used a drug or potion (*osadha*), or recited a mantra (*manta*) to ward off the elephants (J 31/1:200,12 f), SD 86.23. [5.3 n].

¹³⁷ “Matting,” *kaṭa,sāra*; cf *kaṭa,sāraka*, “a straw mat”: VA 895,29, 1088,6; DA 137,20; DhA 3:212,7; J 4:248,25.

¹³⁸ On the elephant refusing to harm Magha and his band, see (8.2.6.3).

¹³⁹ *Cātum,mahā,pathe thāvaram katvā mahājanassa vissamana,sālam karissāmāti. Vissamana,sālā*, “resthouse,” called *āvasatha*, “resthouse, dwelling place” at **Sakka,nāma S** (S 11.12,4.4), SD 54.19. On the resthouse at the crossroads, see (8.2.6.2).

¹⁴⁰ On this exclusion of women, see (8.2.4), (8.2.6.1).

The 4 women

33 Now, there were 4 women¹⁴¹ in Magha's house: **Nandā, Cittā, Sudhammā and Sujātā**.¹⁴²

Sudhammā secretly went to the builder, gave him a bribe, and said,

"Brother, give me the main share in the building of this hall."¹⁴³

"Very well," replied the builder.

34 Accordingly, he first marked a tree from which to make **the pinnacle**,¹⁴⁴ felled it, and left it aside to season. In due course, he hewed it, planed it, bored it, and having fashioned it into a pinnacle, carved the following inscription on it: "This is the Sudhamma Hall." Having done so, he wrapped it in cloth and stored it away.

Sudhammā's pinnacle

35 Now, when the builder had completed the hall, and the day came to erect the pinnacle, he told the 33 youths, "Noble sirs, there is something we have forgotten."

"What is it, sir?"

"**The pinnacle.**"

"Get one, then."

36 "It is impossible to make a pinnacle from a freshly felled tree. We need one that has been cut down and left to season."

37 "What shall we do about this, then?"

"If in any house [270] there is a seasoned pinnacle that is for sale, that is what we seek."

38 While searching for it, they saw one in Sudhammā's house. They offered her a thousand pieces of money for it. Despite their offer, they were unable to obtain the pinnacle.

39 Sudhammā then said, "I will give you the pinnacle if you give me a share in the building of the hall."

But they replied, "We have resolved that no women shall have a share in the building of this hall."

40 Then, the builder said to them, "Noble sirs, what are you doing? Except for the brahma world, there is no place from which women are excluded! Take the pinnacle. For, when you do, our work will be expedited."

"Very well," they conceded.

Sudhammā hall

41 So they took the pinnacle and completed the hall. They divided the hall into 3 sections, allocating one chamber for lords, another for the poor, and a third for the sick.¹⁴⁵

42 Then, the 33 men built **33 seats of wooden planks** (*phalaka*), and having done so, instructed the elephant, thus:

¹⁴¹ "Women" (*itthī*), a general term, but below [50], *pāda, paricārikāi* (lit, "handmaiden") is used: see n there.

¹⁴² *Maghassa pana gehe nandā cittā sudhammā sujātā'ti casso itthiyo honti*. Sujātā is also known as Sujā. These 4 are Magha's wives.

¹⁴³ *Bhātika imissā sālāya maṃ jeṭṭhikaṃ karohīti vatvā lañcaṃ adāsī*.

¹⁴⁴ Inscribed on its "lower surface" (*heṭṭhima, tale*, DA 3:714,33). "Pinnacle," *kaṇṇika* (neut), *kaṇṇikā* (fem), the part forming the central section of a root, a circular roof-plate into which the ends of the rafters are inserted (prob similar in shape to the pericarp of a lotus). See Coomaraswamy, JAOS 50,3 1930:238-243.

¹⁴⁵ *Tidhā vibhajimsu, ekasmim koṭṭhāse issarānaṃ vasaṇaṭṭhānaṃ karimsu, ekasmim duggatānaṃ, ekasmim gilānānaṃ*.

“When a visitor comes and sits down on a seat, take him and lodge him in the house of whomever built and owns that seat. It is then the seat-owner’s duty to see that the guest’s feet and back are rubbed, to provide him with food, hard and soft, and with lodging; in other words, to discharge all the owner’s duties for the day.”

43 Hence, whenever a visitor came and sat in any of the seats, the elephant would take him to the house of that seat’s owner. He would on that day discharge all the duties of hospitality.

44 Magha planted a **bauhinia tree**¹⁴⁶ near the hall and installed a stone seat at its foot. Whenever anyone entered the hall, he saw the pinnacle, read the inscription that said: “This is Sudhammā hall.” The names of the 33 youths were not seen.

Nandā’s pool

45 **Nandā** thought: “I had no share in the building of this hall. **[271]** As for Sudhammā, by her own cleverness, she obtained a share. I must do something, too. What can I do now?”

46 It occurred to her: “Those who come to the hall should be provided with drinking water and bath water. I will have a pool dug. Accordingly, Nandā had a lotus-lake (*pokkharāṇī*) constructed.

Cittā’s flower-garden

47 **Cittā** thought: “Sudhammā had given a pinnacle, and Nandā had a bathing pool built. Now what can I do?”

48 It occurred to her: “After those who come to the hall have drunk water and bathed, they should be decked with garlands at the time of their departure. I will have a pleasant flower-garden laid out.”

49 So **Cittā** had a beautiful garden laid out. So numerous, so various, were the plants that grew therein that it was impossible for anyone to say: “Such and such a flower-bearing or fruit-bearing plant does not grow in this garden.”

Sujā

50 Now **Sujā** thought: “I am Magha’s cousin, daughter of his mother’s brother,¹⁴⁷ and also Magha’s wife.¹⁴⁸ What work he has done is mine, too; what I’ve done is his, too!¹⁴⁹” Hence, she did nothing but spent her time adorning herself.

¹⁴⁶ “A bauhinia tree,” also “mountain ebony,” *kovilāra,rukka* (Be Ce Se so; Ee *kuvilāra*, J 5:69,2* prob wr), *Bauhinia variegata* (Skt/BHS *kovidāra*; Marathi *kavidara*; Nepalese *koiralo*; Hindi *kachnar*); but see SD 54.16 (1.2.3.1) n coral tree. <https://www.flowersofindia.net/catalog/slides/Kachnar.html>.

¹⁴⁷ “Magha’s cousin,” *mātula,dhītā*, ie, maternal uncle’s daughter. [8.2.5.1]

¹⁴⁸ “Wife,” *pāda,paricārikā*, lit “handmaiden;” cf above, where they are referred to as “4 women” (*catasso itthiyo*) [§33]. *Pāda,paricārikā* is prob used in a polygamic sense; Comy usage clearly suggests “wives”: SD 54.8 (1.4.3).

¹⁴⁹ *Etena kata,kammaṃ mayham eva, mayā kataṃ etass’evāti cintetvā*. *Kamma* here clearly has no technical sense, but simply means “work.” It is unlikely that **Sujā** would think that “Magha’s karma is mine, and mine is his, too”—which is, of course, a wrong view. Cf **Sādhīna J** (J 494), when the Bodhisattva was **Sādhīna**, the king of Mithila, who (on Sakra’s invitation) lived, enjoying the bliss of Tāvātimsa for 700 years. Near its end, when Sakra offered to extend his time, *Sadhina* replied: “I’ve no wish for this gift or support from another, | the merits I’ve done myself, only that is my personal treasure.” (*Na cāhaṃ etaṃ icchāmi yam parato dāna,paccayā, | sayankatāni puññāni tam me āveṇiyaṃ dhanāṃ*, J 494/4:358,4 f). Grace is rejected; it creates new karma beyond our control and implies lack of free will and independence. Cf J G Jones, 1979:40 f. On **Sādhīna**, see SD 54.16 (1.2.3.2).

Sakra's 7 vows

51 Thus did Magha minister to his mother, minister to his father, honour his elders, speak the truth, avoid harsh words, avoid slandering, push away avarice, hold no anger.¹⁵⁰ Thus, he fulfilled these **7 vows**, as it said:¹⁵¹ [272]

52¹⁵² *Mātā,petti,bharam jantum
kule jeṭṭhâpacāyinarṃ
saṅham sakhila,sambhāsam
pesuṇeyya-p,pahāyinarṃ*

A person who supports his parents,
respects the elders in the family,
gentle and courteous in speech,
refrains from divisive speech,

53¹⁵³ *macchera,vinaye yuttam
saccam kodhâbhibhum naram
tam ve devā tāvatimsā
āhu sappuriso itīti*

devoted to removing his meanness,
a truthful man, who overcomes anger—
him, the devas of Tāvatiṃsa
call “a true person.”

2.7c TĀVA,TIṂSA

54 Having attained such a praiseworthy state, Magha, upon reaching life's end, was reborn in **the realm of Tāva,tīṃsa** (*tāva.tiṃsa,bhavana*) as the king of the gods.¹⁵⁴ His companions, too, were reborn there. The builder was reborn as the devaputra¹⁵⁵ **Vissa,kamma**.¹⁵⁶

The asuras

55 Now at that time the **asuras** were dwelling in the heavenly city of the 33 (*tāva.tiṃsa,deva.nagara*). When they learned that the new gods had been reborn there, they prepared celestial drinks for them. But Sakra instructed his retinue that no one should take that drink. The asuras, however, drank freely and became intoxicated.

56 Thereupon, Sakra thought: “Why should I share my kingdom with these deities?”

Giving a signal to his retinue, he made them grasp the asuras by the heels and hurl them down into the great ocean (on earth). The asuras fell headlong into the ocean.

57 By the power of the asuras' merits, there sprang up at the foot of Mount Sineru **the asura mansion** (*asura vimāna*) and the tree called **Citta,pāṭali**, the pied trumpet-flower tree.

¹⁵⁰ *Magho pi mātūpaṭṭhānaṃ pitūpaṭṭhānaṃ kule jeṭṭhâpacayika,kammaṃ sacca,vācam aphausa,vācam apisu-
ṇa,vacam macchera,vinayaṃ akodhdhanan'ti imāni sattā vata,padāni pūretvā.*

¹⁵¹ These 2 verses are the closing verses of **Vatapada S** (S 11.11,6+7), SD 54.12 [2.1.5]. These are given in full in **S 11.11,4** with comys (SD 54.12) + **Sakka,nāma S** (S 11.12,5), SD 54.19. [2.1.4]

¹⁵² = S 904.

¹⁵³ = S 905.

¹⁵⁴ “The king of the gods,” *deva,raja*. He is usu titled “lord of the devas,” *devānaṃ inda* [§5 (7)].

¹⁵⁵ “Devaputra,” anglicization of *deva,putta*, “deva's son,” ie, a young or male, or young male, celestial being of the sense-world): SD 15.13 (2.6); SD 50.13 (1.3.2.4) n on *devata*; SD 54.2a (3.2.2.2).

¹⁵⁶ On Vissa,kamma (Skt *viśva,karma*, “all-maker”), the celestial architect, see (7.2.1.2).

The heavenly city

58 After the **deva-asura war**,¹⁵⁷ when asuras were defeated, the city of the Tāva,tiṃsa devas (*tāva-tiṃsa,deva.nagara*), measuring 10,000 yojanas across, came into being.¹⁵⁸

50 The distance from the eastern gate to the western gate was 10,000 yojanas (leagues),¹⁵⁹ and the distance from the southern gate to the northern gate was the same.

Now, this city was provided with a thousand gates and was adorned with pleasure-parks and lotus lakes.

60 In the midst of it all, **[273]** there arose **Vejayanta**, the palace of victory,¹⁶⁰ 700 yojanas¹⁶¹ high, decked with banners 300 yojanas long.

On the flag-staffs were banners of jewels. There were jeweled staffs with banners of gold; staffs of coral with banners of pearl; staffs of pearls with banners of coral; staffs of the 7 jewels¹⁶² with banners of the 7 jewels.¹⁶³

The palace was 1000 yojanas high, and was made of the 7 jewels. Such was the palace that arose as the fruit of the building of the hall (*sālā*).¹⁶⁴

The tree and the throne

61 As a result of planting the bauhinia tree, there arose **the coral tree**,¹⁶⁵ 100 yojanas in circumference. As a result of the building of the stone seat, there arose at the foot of the coral tree, **the yellow-stone throne**, of a ruddy colour like that of the mid-day flower, 60 yojanas long, 50 yojanas wide and 15 yojanas thick.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁷ This is an account of the origin of “the deva-asura war,” *devāsura,saṅgāma*, a period of intermittent but frequent battles between them starting from the asura’s downfall until soon after Sakra’s marriage with Sujā, Vepacitti’s daughter [§§88-90, 95]. On the war, see **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21,2.7.12/2:285), SD 54.8; **Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 37,9/1:253), SD 54.9; (**Sakka**) **Suvīra S** (S 11.1/1:216), SD 114.13; (**Sakka**) **Susīma S** (S 11.2/1:217), SD 114.14; **Yava,-kalāpi S** (S 35.248/4:201), SD 40a.3; **Loka,cintā S** (S 56.42/5:447 f), SD 77.11; **Devāsura Saṅgāma S** (A.9.39/4:432), SD 61.20.

¹⁵⁸ We are not told the name of the heaven before the arrival of Sakra and his 33 friends. Understandably, whatever its name was, with these new devas, their realm, too, takes on a new name: **Tāva,tiṃsa**. This para omitted from DhA:B.

¹⁵⁹ A **yojana** or league (*yojana*), ie, the “**greater yojana**,” a measurement of distance: as far as a yoke of oxen can go in a day, ie, about 11.25 km or 7 mi (DhA 1:108, 2:13) = 4 *gāvutas*. See SD 4.17 (1.2.2); SD 47.8 (2.4.4.1). Note that the “modern” league is 3.45 mi = 5.55 km. Cf the “**lesser yojana**” (for measuring height or size) or fathom which is 6 ft = 1.8 m (an imperial fathom), prob the length of an Indian plough (J 6:38, 42): see **Pahārāda S** (A 8.19,-9.1 n), SD 45.18.

¹⁶⁰ On the deva’s victory and the construction of Vejayanta, see **Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 37/1:251-256), SD 54.9.

¹⁶¹ This is prob the “lesser yojana”: see §50 n.

¹⁶² “The 7 jewels,” *satta,ratana*, or 7 “treasures”: (1) beryl, (2) gold, (3) crystal, (4) silver, (5) sapphire, (6) pearl and (7) ruby (VvA 300): SD 45.18 (2.8.1).

¹⁶³ On this dazzling description of Vejayanta, see the even more elaborate description of Mahā Sudassana’s fabulous city, **Kusā,vātī** (D 17,1.3-1.6); the lotus lakes (1.22 f), SD 36.12. Cf n above §54 on Vissa,kamma.

¹⁶⁴ This is a reference to the building of **the resthouse** by Sakra and his 33 companions [§32].

¹⁶⁵ “The coral tree,” *koviḷāra*. On earth, this tree is prob the Bauhinia variegata: §44 n bauhinia tree.

¹⁶⁶ *Pāsāṇa,phalakassa nissandena pāricchattakassa mule dīghato saṭṭhi,yojana, puthulato paññāsa,yojana, bahalato pañca,sata,yojana, jaya.sumanālattaka,pāṭala,vaṇṇa,paṇḍu,kambala,silā nibbati*. See SD 54.16 (1.2.3).

When Sakra sits on this throne, it sinks down to the middle of his body; when he rises, it is all above the ground.¹⁶⁷

Erāvaṇa

62 The elephant was reborn as the devaputra¹⁶⁸ **Erāvaṇa**.¹⁶⁹ There are no animals in the deva world. Hence, when he went into the garden to play, he would give up his godly form and become the elephant Erāvaṇa, 150 yojanas tall.¹⁷⁰

63 For the 33 youths, Erāvaṇa created 33 heads,¹⁷¹ each two or three quarters of a yojana around. In the centre of it all, Erāvaṇa created for Sakra an elephant-head called **Sudassana**, “beautiful to see,” 30 yojanas tall. Above it was a jeweled canopy, 12 yojanas wide. **[274]**

64 At regular intervals around the canopy there were banners a yojana long, made entirely of the 7 jewels.

From the lower edge of each banner hung a row of tinkling bells, which, when shaken by a gentle breeze, make sweet music like the mingled strains of the 5 kinds of musical instruments or the singing of a celestial choir.¹⁷²

65 In the centre of the pavilion was laid out for Sakra a jeweled couch a yojana long. There Sakra sat. Erāvaṇa created 33 elephant-heads, one each for the 33 devas. Each head bore 7 pairs of tusks, each 50 yojanas long. At each tusk were 7 lotus pools; each lotus pool bore 7 lotus-plants; each lotus-plant, 7 lotus flowers; each flower, 7 leaves; and on each leaf danced 7 apsaras.¹⁷³

Thus, on all sides for a space of 50 yojanas there were dancing-troupes poised on elephants’ tusks. So great was the glory that Sakra, king of the gods, enjoyed.¹⁷⁴

2.7d THE 4 WIVES OF SAKRA [6.2; 8.2.4]

66 When **Sudhammā** died, she, too, was reborn there. At the same time, too, there came into being **Sudhammā**, the moot-hall of the devas, 900 yojanas across; no other place was more charming than it. **[275]** Here, on the 8th day of the month, they hear the Dharma taught. To this day, when humans behold a charming place, they say: “It is like Sudhammā, moot-hall of the devas!”¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁷ On the yellowstone throne, see also SD 54.16 (1.2.3.1).

¹⁶⁸ “Devaputra,” see §54 n.

¹⁶⁹ On Erāvaṇa, see (7.2.1.3).

¹⁷⁰ We see here a play on mental projections like 3-D holograms on a large scale as in a holodeck of the Star Trek TV series.

¹⁷¹ “Heads,” *kumbha*. Technically, it is the frontal globe or protuberance on an elephant’s forehead (*hatthi,siro,-piṇḍo*, Abh 363, 853). The Indian elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*) has a broader skull and more prominent upper forehead than its African counterpart, and has twin domes (which swell when rutting). Erāvaṇa prob projects numerous heads or foreheads on this occasion. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_elephant.

¹⁷² *Pariyante kiṅkiṇika,jālaṃ olambati yassa manda,vāt’eritassa pañc’āṅgika,turiya,sadda,sammisso dibba,saṅgīti,-saddo viya ravo [Ke saro] niccharati*. Comy explains that the 5 kinds of divine music are produced by: single-sided drums (*ātata*), double-sided drums (*vitata*), strings (*ātata,vitata = tanti,baddha,paṇav’ādi*), winds (*susira*, “holed, hollow”) and percussion (*ghana*) (MA 2:300,17-23; Vv 5,4, 39,1; VvA 37, 257). Cf **Cūḷa Taṇha,saṅkhaya S** (M 37,7+n), SD 54.9.

¹⁷³ This is, of course, a psychic projection or holographic display. “Apsaras” (*accharā*) are celestial nymphs: SD 54.3a (2.3.2).

¹⁷⁴ DhA 2.7,63-65/1:273,13-274,15 (SD 54.22). Also, with some variations, at SnA 1:368,24-369,13 (on Sn 379 of **Dhammika S**, Sn 2.14).

¹⁷⁵ *Yattha uppanna,pubba.nimutte deva,puitte netvā modayamānā vicaranti [Ee mohayamānā caranti]*.

67 When **Nandā** died, she, too, was reborn there. At the same time, too, there came into being a lotus lake called Nandā, 500 yojanas across.

68 When **Cittā** died, she, too, was reborn there. At the same time, too, there came into being the Cittā, latā, vana, Cittā's creeper grove, 500 yojanas across. The devas whose omens of death¹⁷⁶ had appeared, having been brought there, wander about happily.

Sujā the crane [6.2.3; 82.5]

69 But when **Sujā** died, she was reborn as a crane in a certain mountain-cave.

70 Sakra surveyed his wives and thought: "Sudhammā has been reborn right here; likewise Nandā and Cittā. Now where has Sujā been reborn?"

Perceiving that she has been reborn as **a crane** in a mountain-cave, he thought:

"Having worked no merit, the foolish girl has been born as an animal.¹⁷⁷ I'll have her make some merit so that she is brought here."

71 So saying, he laid aside his normal form, and disguising himself, went to meet her.

"What are you doing here?" he asked her (the crane).

"But, master, who are you?"

"I'm your husband, Magha."

"Where were you reborn, husband?"

"I was reborn in Tāva, timśa heaven. Do you know where your companions were reborn?"

"No, husband, I do not."

"They, too, have been reborn in Tāva, timśa heaven as my wives. Would you like to see your companions?"

"How can I get there?"

"I will bring you there," said Sakra.

73 Placing her in the palm of his hand, he brought her to the deva world, and set her down on the shore of the Nandā lotus lake.

Then, he said to the other three, "Go and see your companion, Sujā?"

"Sire, where is she?" **[276]**

"On the shore of the Nandā lotus lake."

73 So the three went to see her.

"Alas!" they cried, "see what is the fruit of the noble woman's spending her time adorning herself! Look now at her beak! Look at her feet! Look at her legs! She has a beautiful appearance indeed!"

Thus, they mocked her and departed.¹⁷⁸

74 Sakra once again went to her and said, "Did you see your companions?"

"I saw them. They ridiculed me and went their way. Please take me back!"

So Sakra took her back again and left her in the water.

¹⁷⁶ There are these 5 omens of impending death of a (sense-world) deva: (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 own celestial seat: **Pañca Pubba, nimitta S** (It 83), SD 23.8a (1.2). Cf DhA which gives 4 reasons for the gods' falling (*cuti*) from their heaven, ie, through: (1) exhaustion of lifespan, (2) exhaustion of merit; (3) exhaustion of food; (4) anger (DhA 2.1/1:173 f). Other Comys mention only 2 reasons: the exhaustion of lifespan and of merit (DA 1:110 f; ItA 2:76).

¹⁷⁷ *Bālā kiñci puññaṃ akatvā tiracchāna, yoniyam nibbattā.* [8.2.5.3]

¹⁷⁸ *Keḷim katvā pakkamimsu.*

75 Then, he asked her, “Did you see their celestial glory?”

“Yes, sire, I did.”

“You should employ such means that will bring you to be reborn there.”

“Sire, what shall I do?”

“If I advise you, will you follow it?”

“Yes, sire, I will.”

76 So, Sakra gave her the 5 precepts. Having so done, he said to her, “Keep them heedfully [diligently],” and departed.

77 From then on, she looked for and ate only those fish that had died.

So Sakra visited her and, taking the form of a fish, lay down on his back on the sand, pretending to be dead. When she saw the fish, thinking it was dead, she took it in her beak.

Just as she was about to swallow the fish, it wriggled its tail.

Thinking: “The fish is alive!” she freed it into the water.

78 Sakra waited a little while, and then lay down before her again on his back once more.

Again, thinking that it was a dead fish, she took it in her beak.

But just as she was about to swallow the fish, it moved the tip of its tail.

The instant she knew it was alive, she let it go.

79 When Sakra had thus tested her thrice and had satisfied himself that she was indeed keeping the precepts, he revealed his identity to her, and said,

“I came here for the purpose of testing you. You are keeping the precepts well. Doing so, [277] you will before long be with me again. Be heedful!” So saying, he departed.

Sujā the potter’s daughter

80 Thenceforth, she determined to take as food either a dead fish or none at all. After only a few days, she wasted away and died. Merely by the fruit of her virtuous conduct, she was reborn in **Benares** as a potter’s daughter. When she was about 15 or 16 years old, Sakra wondered: “Where has she been reborn?”

81 Perceiving that she had been reborn in Benares as a potter’s daughter, he decided: “I must now go to her.”

82 Filling up a cart with the 7 jewels disguised as cucumbers, he drove into the city of Benares.

“Come, get cucumbers!” he cried, as he entered the street.

But when people came to him with coins in their hand, he said,

“I’m not giving any for a price.”

“How are you giving them away, then?” the people asked him.

“I give them to the woman who keeps the precepts!” he replied.

83 “Master, what do you mean by ‘precepts’? Are they black or brown or of some other colour?¹⁷⁹”

“I see that you don’t even know what precepts are; much less you keep them! I’m looking for the woman who keeps the precepts; I will give them to her.”

“Master, there is a potter’s daughter who is always going about saying: ‘I keep the precepts.’ Give them to her.”

84 The potter’s daughter said to him, “Very well, master, give them to me.”

“Who are you?”

¹⁷⁹ *Kiṃ kālaṃ udāhu sāmā’ādi,vaṇṇan’ti.*

"I've never failed to keep the precepts."¹⁸⁰ [278]

"For you alone have I brought these," said Sakra.

85 Driving his cart to her house, he gave it to her, in the guise of cucumbers, celestial treasures which cannot be taken away by others.

Revealing his identity to her, he said, "Here is wealth sufficient for you to live on. Keep the precepts unbroken."

So saying, he departed.

Sujā, daughter of Vepa,citti

86 At the end of her existence as a potter's daughter, she was reborn in **the world of asuras** as the daughter of Vepa,citti, the chief of the asuras,¹⁸¹ the deadly enemy¹⁸² of Sakra.

87 Since she had kept the precepts in two successive lives, she was remarkably beautiful, with a golden complexion, endowed with form and grace unlike any other.¹⁸³

88 Vepa,citti, lord of the asuras, said to all the asuras who had come to him (seeking Sujā in marriage),¹⁸⁴ "You are not fit to marry my daughter!"

Having thus refused to give her away to any of these asuras, he declared,

"My daughter will choose for herself a husband whom she sees fit."

89 So saying, he assembled the full might of the asuras,¹⁸⁵ and placing a garland of flowers in his daughter's hand, said to her, "Choose for yourself a husband who suits you."

How Sakra won Sujā

90 At that moment, Sakra surveying to see where she had been reborn, learned what was taking place. Thinking: "I shall go there to take the one who's rightly mine!"¹⁸⁶ he assumed the form of an old asura, went there and stood in the outer circle of the assembly.

91 She surveyed the gathering this way and that. Then, on account of their previously living together, (on seeing him,) her heart was swept over as if by a mighty torrent by the power of love for him.¹⁸⁷

Thinking: "He is my husband!" she threw the garland of flowers just above him.

92 Said the asuras: "All this time, our king has been unable to find a husband suitable for his daughter. But now he has found one. This fellow is old enough to be his daughter's grandfather!" [279] Hanging their heads in shame, they departed.

93 Sakra, taking her hand, cried out, "I am Sakra!" and flew up into the air (with her).

The asuras exclaimed: "We have been fooled by Old Sakra!" and started in pursuit.

¹⁸⁰ *Ahaṃ avijahita,pañca.sīlaṃ.*

¹⁸¹ "The chief of the asuras" (*asura,jeṭṭhaka*). Although *jeṭṭha* or *jeṭṭhaka* may refer to the "eldest" in terms of age or seniority, here we must see it as referring to the "chief" or "leader" of a warring tribe, the asuras.

¹⁸² "Sworn enemy," Be *veri,ghare*; Ee *veriya,ghare*. *Veri*, "enemy"; *ghara*, "poison" (PED: ghara 2).

¹⁸³ *Dvīsu pana atta,bhāvesu sīlassa rakkhit'attā abhirūpa ahoṣi suvaṇṇa,vaṇṇā asādhāraṇāya rūpa,siriyā samannāgatā.*

¹⁸⁴ *Vepa,citti asurindo āgatāgatānaṃ asurānaṃ tumhe mama dhītu anucchavikā na hothāti.*

¹⁸⁵ "The full might of the asuras," *asura,balaṃ*. This presumably referred to all the young and eligible asura warriors who would be eligible and willing to be Sujā's husband.

¹⁸⁶ *Idāni mayā gantvā ānetuṃ vaṭṭatīti*, lit, "Having gone to this (gathering) for making proper by taking."

¹⁸⁷ This sentence and the next: *Sā ito c'ito ca olokeṇti pubba,sannivāsa,vasena uppannena pemena mah'oghen'e-va ajjhotthaṭa,hadayā hutvā, eso samiko'ti tassa upari puppha,dāmaṇṇhi khipi.*

The nestlings [8.2.6.4]

94 Mātali the charioteer brought up **the Victory chariot** and stopped along the way. Thereupon, Having mounted into the chariot (with her), Sakra headed for the city of the devas.¹⁸⁸

95 Now, when they reached **the silk-cotton forest** (*simbali,vana*), the garuḍa fledglings,¹⁸⁹ hearing the sound of the chariot and fearing that they would be crushed to death, cried out.

When Sakra heard their cries, he asked Mātali, “What is that crying?”

“Garuḍas, sire.”

“Why are they crying?”

“They hear the chariot’s sound and fear that they will be crushed to death.”¹⁹⁰

96 “Let not so many beings perish, crushed by the speeding chariot just because of me alone. Turn back the chariot!”¹⁹¹

Thereupon, Mātali signalled with his lash to the thousand Sindh horses and made the chariot turn back.

Deva-asura connections

97 When the asuras saw that the chariot had turned back, they exclaimed:

“Old Sakra started out in flight from the city of the asuras, but has just made his chariot turn back. Surely, he is receiving reinforcements!”

Turning back, the asuras took the same road by which they had come, and entered the city of the asuras without as much as lifting up their heads.

98 Sakra brought the asura maiden, Sujā, to the city of the devas and installed her as the chief of 25 million apsaras.¹⁹²

99 Then, Sujā asked Sakra for a boon, saying, “Maharajah, in this world of the devas, I have neither mother nor father, neither brother nor sister. Hence, pray take me along wherever you go.” **[280]**

“Very well,” replied Sakra, promising to do what she had asked.

100 From that time on, whenever the tree called **Citta,pāṭali**, the magical trumpet-flower tree¹⁹³ [§57], bloomed, the asuras cried out:

¹⁸⁸ This episode of **the garuda nestlings** (attesting to Sakra’s compassion) is found, in greater detail, in **Kulāvaka S** (S 11.6/1:224 f), SD 86.22 and **Kulāvaka J** (J 31/1:198-206), SD 86.23.

¹⁸⁹ “Garuda nestlings,” *garuḍa,potakā*. A **garuda** (*garuḍa*; Skt *garuḍa*) is a mythical bird, harpy (MA 2:196 = Nc 235, 3 f; Vism 206; VvA 9 = *supaṇṇa*; DhA 1:144, 279; see SD 27.5a (6.2.0) n. Also called suparna (eg J 1:203.12’: SD 52.1 (11.2.1.1) n. The garudas are the mortal enemies of the nagas (serpent-beings): see eg **Uraga J** (J 31/2:12-14).

¹⁹⁰ *Ratha,saddam sutvā maraṇa,bhayenāti*, lit, “Because of the fear of death, having heard the chariot sound.”

¹⁹¹ *Maṃ ekam nissāya ettakā janā* [Ce *ettake jane*; Be Ee *ettakko jano*] *ratha,vegamvicuṇṇito ma nassi, nivattehi rathan’ti*. The fuller canonical version of this episode in **Kulāvaka S** (S 11.6) and **Kulāvaka J** (J 31) have here this verse by Sakra: “The bird-nests in the silk-cotton, Mātali: | avoid them with your chariot-pole! | | Let’s rather give our lives to the asuras— | but let not these twice-born be nestless!” | | (S 892), SD 86.22 = J 1:203,8-11* (SD 86.23).

¹⁹² On *apsaras* (*accharā*) or celestial nymphs, see §65 n.

¹⁹³ On earth, this is the *Bignonia suaveolens*. In the phrase **citta,pāṭali**, *citta* can either mean “variegated, exquisite” or “wish-fulfilling (from the sense of *citta* as “thought”). It is said to live for a whole world-cycle, and is a landmark for the asura’s realm and their emblematic tree (S 5:238,16) (just as the coral tree is to the devas [§61] and the silk-cotton to the garudas, AA 2.35) (MA 2:303; SA 1:340; AA 4:202; J 1:202,15; SnA 2:485; DhA 1:272; BA 168,-20; DhsA 298,28). In a later myth, the tree became a “wish-fulfilling tree” (*kalpa,vṛkṣa*, *kalpa,druma*) that roots in the asura realm but flowers and fruits in Tāva,timsa. And the devas have to prevent the asura from cutting it down

“Now is the time when our heavenly coral tree blooms!”¹⁹⁴ [§61]

101 They sallied forth to battle Sakra. Hence, Sakra gave protection to the nagas in the ocean below, and likewise **the 4 great kings** and to the suparnas, the kumbhandas and the yakshas.¹⁹⁵

102 In all, for the purpose of preventing disaster, he placed before the gates of the city of the devas **images of Indra bearing the thunderbolt in his hand.**

When the asuras, after defeating the nagas and other celestial beings, advancing, saw the images of Indra, they cried out, “Sakra is sallying forth!” and fled.

2.7e END OF THE STORY OF THE PAST

103 “Thus, Mahāli, the youth Magha practised the path of **heedfulness**¹⁹⁶ (*appamāda*). And because he was very heedful, he gained such lordship as this, that he came to rule over the two worlds of the devas.¹⁹⁷

Heedfulness is praised by those like the buddhas. For, it is through heedfulness that all attain the distinctions that is worldly as well as spiritual.¹⁹⁸”

104 So saying, he uttered the following verse:

<p><i>Appamādena maghavā devānaṃ seṭṭhataṃ gato appamādaṃ pasaṃsanti pamādo garahito sadā'ti</i></p>	(Dh 30)	<p>By heedfulness [diligence] Maghava won excellence [lordship] over the devas. They (the wise) praise heedfulness, heedlessness is always blamed.</p>
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[The commentarial section has been omitted.]

[281]

105 At the conclusion of the verse, the Licchavī Mahāli was established in streamwinning. Many, too, in the assembly attained streamwinning and so on.

— evaṃ —

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just for its fruits (which gives longevity to its eater). This is a myth like the fable of “the goose that lays the golden egg.”

¹⁹⁴ The asuras recall the coral tree they left behind in Tāvatiṃsa.

¹⁹⁵ The realm of “the 4 great kings” (*cātum, mahā, rājika*), the lowest of the sense-world heavens are just below Tāvatiṃsa, but with which they are contiguous, since both are the only 2 “earth-bound” heavens in Buddhist cosmology: SD 54.3a (3.5.1). **The 4 great kings** (*mahā, rāja*) are guardians of the quarters with their armies: Dhataratṭha (east) and gandharvas (*gandhabba*); Virūdhaka (south) and kumbhandas (*kumbhaṇḍa*); Virūpakkha (west) and nagas (*nāga*); and Vessavaṇa (north) and yakshas (*yakkha*). See SD 54.3a (3.4.2).

¹⁹⁶ **Appamāda** is a pregnant Pali word, meaning “heedfulness and diligence” [8.1.2].

¹⁹⁷ “**The two worlds of the devas**” are those of Tāvatiṃsa and of the 4 great kings (*cātum, mahā, rājika*). These are the 2 “earth-bound” heavens, the lowest of the heavens, located in the sense-world. [§98 n]

¹⁹⁸ *Appamādam hi nissāya sabbesaṃ pi lokiya, lokuttarānaṃ visesānaṃ adhigamo hotīti*. See (4.6.1.2).