

SD 61.5a**Devadatta**

A study from early Buddhist sources

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1 Devadatta and Siddhattha

1.1 CHILDHOOD RIVALRIES

Deva,datta was the son of the Sakya Suppabuddha (maternal uncle of the Buddha). Sāriputta referred to Devadatta as Godhi,putta, “the son of Godhī.”¹ According to some accounts, Devadatta had a sister Bhadda,kaccānā (also known as Yaso,dharā),² who married Siddh’attha.³

Devadatta had a great dislike for Siddhattha even when they were young boys. Once Devadatta shot down a flying **goose** with an arrow.⁴ The goose fell to the ground near Siddhattha who then nursed its wing which was hurt by Devadatta’s arrow. Devadatta claimed that the goose he had shot down belonged to him. Siddhattha retorted that if it had died perhaps, but since he (the Bodhisattva) had nursed it and saved its life, the goose belonged to him (the Bodhisattva).⁵

The Sanskrit books (such as the Mahāvastu) give several stories of Devadatta’s youth which show his malice towards Siddhārtha. When Siddhārtha was about to show his skill in the martial arts, a white elephant was being brought for him, and Devadatta, out of envy, killed it. The carcass blocked the city gate until Siddhārtha threw it outside.

The Saṃyutta Commentary says that Devadatta had the strength of 5 elephants (SA 1:78,5 f). The Bodhisattva was, of course, much stronger.

1.2 PAST-LIFE ANIMOSITY

The Seriva,vāṇija Jātaka (J 3) relates that in the past the Bodhisattva was an itinerant pedlar (*kaccha,puṭa,vāṇija*)⁶ of Seri (a country, *raṭṭha*, in ancient India, J 1:111) and was also called Serivā. Once, in the company of a greedy merchant (*lola,vāṇija*), selling trinkets, also called Serivā, he crossed the Tela,vāha river and entered Andha,pura.⁷ In that city was a family fallen on bad times, survived by only a girl and her grandmother.

¹ Vinaya records Sāriputta as referring to him as Godhi,putta (V 2:189,24-26); as does Comy to **Devadatta S** (It 85); ItA 2:100,24 f), suggesting that his mother’s name is Godhī.

² Besides being called Yasodharā (BA 245; Divy 253), she is most often known as Rāhula,mātā (Rahula’s mother) (V 1:182; VA 5:1009; DA 2:425; AA 1:301, 364; DhA 1:116, 3:164, 4:89; ThaA 2:221; ThīA 81; ApA 63, 65, 67, 358, 532; BA 131, 276, 279, 280, 282, 298; CA 39; J *passim*); sometimes, she is called Bimbā,devī (J 2:392 f; DA 2:422; ApA 540; J 2:392) and prob also Bimbā,sundarī (J 6:478).

³ DhA 3:44; Mahv 2.22; MilnT 136. The Dulva (Tib Vinaya) calls Devadatta the son of Amit’odana and brother of Ānanda. This is supported by Mvst 2:69, which says that after the Buddha’s renunciation, Devadatta tried to seduce Bhadda,kaccānā. (W W Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha*, London, 1884:13, 83 f).

⁴ This was prob a bar-headed goose (*Anser indicus*) into which, the Jātakas tell us, the Bodhisattva was reborn a number of times, ie, as the “golden goose” of **Palāsa J** (J 370/3:208); **Neru J** (J 379/3:246), **Cūḷa Haṃsa J** (J 502/-4:423).

⁵ Found in the now lost (Skt) Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra (the discourse on the great renunciation), Chin 佛本行集經 *fó-běn xíngjí jīng*, Taishō ed, **T3n190,12 (705b22-c20)** [see scroll 12: [NTI Reader](#)] tr Jñānagupta of Gandhara (587-595 CE); T1450 [xxiv] 112a19-b14 = D a, *dulba ga*, 290b4-7 = Gnoli, *The Gilgit MS of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, pt 1, 1977: 63 f; see also Beal 1875: vi f. Brief ref: T190 (T2149-276a:4, T2154-540a:18). Cf T2154-501a:2 (tr Nieh Tao-chen, 280-312 CE). The story has been tr by S Beal, *The Romantic Legend of Śākya Buddha*, London, 1875: 72 f (ch 12). See S Dhammika, *Nature and the Environment in Early Buddhism*, Singapore, 2015:179 f.

⁶ *Kaccha,puṭa,vāṇija*, “a pedlar carrying his goods in pockets in a loin cloth” (CPD). Or, a pedlar who sells ornamental goods, carrying them in his garment’s pockets (ItA 1:98,2-6; VbhA 472,22-30). DP says that *kaccha,puṭa* (m) is “a box or bag with compartments or pockets (for carrying merchandise).”

⁷ Prob ancient Andhra Pradesh, now a state on the SE Indian coast just north of Chennai. Its capital is Amaravatī.

The greedy merchant went to their house with his wares. The girl begged her grandmother to buy her a trinket, and suggested that they should give the hawker in exchange the bowl from which they ate. The bowl was an heirloom, made of gold that had lost its lustre. The women either did not know its value or had forgotten about it. The hawker was called in and shown the bowl. He scratched it with a needle and knew it was made of gold. Desiring to have it for nothing, he said it was not worth one half farthing, threw it down and left.

Later, the Bodhisattva (also a merchant) came to the same street and was offered the same bowl. He told the women the truth, gave them all the money he had and his stock, leaving only 8 pieces of money for himself. These he gave to a boatman to take him across the river.

Meanwhile the greedy merchant went back to the women's house, hoping to get the bowl in exchange for a few trinkets. When he heard of what had happened, he lost control of himself, threw down all he had, and ran down to the river. Seeing the Bodhisattva's boat midstream, he shouted to the boatman to return but the Bodhisattva urged the boatman on.

The merchant, realizing what he had lost through his greed was so upset that his heart burst, and he fell down dead.

The story was told to a monk who had given up striving (*ossatṭha, viriya*). The greedy merchant is identified as **Devadatta**, and this, it seems, was the beginning of his enmity towards the Bodhisattva that festered until the Buddha's time. The Buddha then uttered this verse for the benefit of the monk:

<p><i>idha ce naṃ virādhesi saddhammassa niyāmataṃ ciraṃ tvaṃ anutappesi serivāyaṃ va vāṇijo ti</i></p>	<p>(J 3)</p>	<p>If you give up here (in this teaching), and fail to win the good Dharma's goal, then, you will long sorrow like that merchant of Serivā.</p>	<p>(J 3/1:110-113)</p>
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2 Early history of Devadatta

2.1 DEVADATTA JOINS THE SANGHA

2.1.1 Devadatta the Koliya kshatriya

2.1.1.1 When the Buddha visited Kapilavatthu after the great awakening and taught the Sākyas, Devadatta (a Koliya) was converted together with his Sakya relatives Ānanda, Bhagu, Kimbila, Bhaddiya, Anuruddha, and their barber, Upāli. Devadatta approached the Buddha at **Anupiyā** (in Malla country) where he joined the order.⁸

2.1.1.2 During the rainy season that followed, Devadatta acquired psychic powers within the reach of worldlings (*puthujjanika iddhi*).⁹ For some time he seems to have enjoyed great honour in the sangha, and at one time he is even mentioned in **the Brāhmaṇa Sutta** (U 1.5), in a list of 11 of the chief elders,¹⁰ all of whom the Buddha speaks in praise of being "brahmins," that is, noble monks who keep to the training. The term also refers to arhats, which all of them are, but two (Ānanda and Devadatta).¹¹

⁸ Cv 7.1.1-4 (V 1:180-183).

⁹ V 2:183; DhA 1:138. AA 1:191 says that Devadatta won the 8 attainments, and adds that Bhagu and Kimbila attained arhathood later. For details, see Rockhill, 1884:85.

¹⁰ U 1.5/3. The 11 are Sāriputta, Moggallāna, Mahā Kassapa, Mahā Kaccāna, Mahā Koṭṭhita, Mahā Kappina, Mahā Cunda, Anuruddha, Revata, Devadatta and Nanda. See R Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, Oxford, 1994:164.

¹¹ U 1.5/1:3. Vinaya records that while Sāriputta was in Rājagaha, he often openly praised Devadatta (V 2:189; see also DhA 1:64f).

2.1.1.3 Apparently for the first 12 years,¹² Devadatta was said to have diligently pursued the right path and enjoyed great fame. Both the Pali and the Chinese texts record that Devadatta was especially known for his mastery of suttas, meditation and ascetic practices.¹³ **The (Itivuttaka) Devadatta Sutta** (It 89), for example, notes: “It is heard that Devadatta is widely known to be wise, considered as one self-cultivated; he stands like a fire blazing with fame.”¹⁴ Further, he seems to have frequently given sermons, one of which is preserved as **the Silā,yūpa Sutta** (A 9.26).¹⁵

Hence, Devadatta was praised by the Buddha himself, as mentioned in **the Brāhmaṇa Sutta** (U 1.5) [2] and by the wisest and most compassionate of the monks (besides the Buddha). That is, Sāriputta, too, publicly praises Devadatta as being “powerful and mighty” (*mah’iddhiko godhi,putto mahānubhāvo godhi,putto*).

2.1.2 Devadatta and Ajātasattu

2.1.2.1 After the Buddha had stayed in Anupiyā¹⁶ as long as he was inclined to, he left with the saṅgha for **Kosambī** (in Vaṃsa country), where he stayed at Ghosita’s monastery. As for Devadatta, he felt dissatisfied seeing how his kshatriya colleagues were supported and honoured as monks while he was often ignored.¹⁷ The main reason for this was probably he was one from the Koliya clan living amongst the Sakyas. He was thus not as well honoured as the Sakya monks who were more familiar to their Sakya kinsmen. Another reason was probably Devadatta never got along well with his cousin Siddhattha (now the Buddha), which was a factor in his future resentment against the Buddha. Underlying all this, Devadatta had a poor moral character, driven by a desire for gain, honour and fame.¹⁸

2.1.2.2 About 8 years before the Buddha’s parinirvana,¹⁹ we begin to see Devadatta showing his true colours: he was drawn to gain and honour, and jealous of the Buddha’s fame. While in solitary meditation one day, he wondered who he could win over to provide him with gain and honour.²⁰ He thought:

“This prince **Ajāta,sattu** is young and has an auspicious future. Now if I were to please him, much gain and honour will accrue upon me.”

¹² Channa Li, “Devadatta,” *Brill’s Ency of Buddhism 2 Lives*. Leiden, 2019:146. Traditionally, it is said that the Buddha visited Kapilavatthu during the 2nd year of the ministry: J 1:86-88; Gnoli, *Saṅghabhedavastu* 1:187 f; Gnoli, *Adhikaraṇavastu The Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu and the Adhikaraṇavastu*, 1978:59-633; 毘奈耶破僧事 *pí nài yé pò sēng shì*, fasc 9 (T24.144a-145c); 佛本行集經 *fóběnxíngjī jīng*, fasc 52 f (T3.893a4-899c22).

¹³ T212.4.687b7-11; T383.12.1010b10-11. T1509.25.164c1-9; T2087.51.900a11-3.

¹⁴ *Paṇḍito ti samaññāto | bhāvit’atto ti sammato | jalaṃ va yasaśa aṭṭhā | devadatto ti me sutam* || (It 3.4.10/86).

¹⁵ A 9.26/4:402 = T99.2.131a25-b11. This teaching given by Devadatta, however, seems to be interpreted differently by those who heard them; hence, Sāriputta had to explain what Devadatta was actually teaching.

¹⁶ Cv 7.1.1 (V 2:180).

¹⁷ DhA 1.12b/1:138 f.

¹⁸ Such as noted in **Caṅkama S** (S 14.15/2:156), SD 34.6.

¹⁹ The full account has been culled from various sources, such as **Aṅguttara**, A 3:123, 402, 2:73, 4:160; **Vinaya**, Cv 7.2-4 (V 2:184-206), Saṅgh 10.1 (V 3:171 f), Saṅgh 11.1 (V 3:174 f), Pāc 32 (V 4:71); **Dhammapada Comy**, Devadatta wears an unbecoming robe **DhA 1.7/77-83**, Devadatta’s career **DhA 1.12/3:133-150** (also **J 542/6:129-131**, 533/-5:333-377, 466/4:158 f, 404/3:355-358); DhA 3:145, 147 f, 152, 154; **Jātaka Comy**, Seri Vāṇija J 3/1:113 f, Lakkhaṇa **J 11/1:142**, Mahilā,mukha **J 16/1:185 f**, Virocana **J 143/1:490 f**; Nigrodha **J 445/4:37**, Samudda Vāṇija **J 466/4:158**; Culla Haṃsa **J 533/5:333-337**.

²⁰ Cv 7.2.1 (V 2:184 f); cf **Mahilāmukha J** intro (J 26/1:185 f).

Devadatta then left for **Rājagaha**, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha, where Bimbisāra ruled and his son Ajātasattu lived. There, Devadatta, using his psychic powers, assumed the form of a young boy wearing a girdle of snakes, and appeared on Ajātasattu's lap, which terrified him.²¹

When the terrified prince asked who he was, Devadatta assumed his true form and introduced himself. Greatly impressed, the young prince waited on Devadatta morning and evening with 500 carts and 500 offerings of almsfood.²²

Then, Devadatta, overcome by his gains, honours and fame,²³ then longed, "It is I who will lead the sangha!"²⁴

With that very thought, Devadatta's psychic powers declined. (Cv 7.2.1 @ V 2:185)

2.2 TROUBLING DEVELOPMENTS

2.2.1 Rājagaha: Rumours of Devadatta's betrayal

Kakudha, a Koliya follower of Moggallāna, reborn as a deva with an astral body (*manomaya, kāya*),²⁵ divined Devadatta's plan and informed Moggallāna. The latter reported the matter to the Buddha, but the Buddha replied that it was unnecessary to discuss it as Devadatta would ultimately betray himself.

The Buddha then speaks of **the 5 kinds of teachers** (*pañca satthā*) to Moggallāna:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| (1) one impure in conduct | but claiming to be pure ... ; |
| (2) one impure in livelihood | but claiming to be pure ... ; |
| (3) one giving impure teachings | but claiming they are pure ... ; |
| (4) one giving impure explanations | but claiming they are pure ... ; |
| (5) one with impure knowledge and vision | but claiming they are pure |

(In each case:) "His disciples know about this, but think, 'It would be unpleasant for him if we inform the householders. And it's because of him that we're honoured with gifts of robes, almsfood, dwellings, and medicinal supplies. How, then, can we inform them?'²⁶ He'll be known through his own actions.' The disciples conceal (the faults of) such a teacher, and the teacher expects them to do so."

The Buddha, on the other hand, was *pure in conduct and livelihood, gave pure teachings and pure explanations, and had pure knowledge and vision*. "My disciples do not conceal my knowledge and vision, and I do not expect them to do so." (Cv 7.3 @ V 2:186)

²¹ Comy tells us that he had a snake around his hips (VA 1275). Dh Comy adds that there were 4 poisonous snakes, one on each hand and foot, and another around his neck, one coiling on his head, and one over each shoulder (DhA 1:139).

²² According to J 1:186, 508, Ajātasattu built for him a monastery at [Gayā, sīsa](#) and sent him, daily, 500 pots of 3-year-flavoured rice and the choicest dishes. These meals were so tempting that some of the Buddha's followers themselves would go there to savour them and return secretly. Cf V 3:15.

²³ As described in **Pañca, ratha, sata S** (S 17.36/2:242), SD 22.6b.

²⁴ See E J Thomas. *Life of the Buddha*, London, 1949, New Delhi, 1992:132-135.

²⁵ The mind-made (*mano, mayam kāyam*) deities have arisen in the form realm through the power of the past attainment of dhyanas (Cv 7.1.2 @ V 2:186). For a partial parallel: **Kakudha S** (A 5.100/3:122 f). **Manāpa, dāyī S** (A 5.44/3:50) mentions "a certain group of mind-made deities" (*aññataram manomayam kāyam*) where *kāya* seems to refer to "the heavenly host" (*kāya*)—in this case the pure abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*)—into which they are reborn, which is produced by a mind of dhyana (AA 3:254, 2 f; 5:26, 13). Similarly at A 3:348 f (- 5:139, 5-8) we see *tusitam kāyam*, where *kāya* simply means "group or host." Cf AA 1:209; PmA 3:666.

²⁶ The Pali is a bit obscure. **Vimati, vinodanī** explains: **Sammannatī** *ti cīvarādinā amhākaṃ sammānam karoti, parehi vā ayam satthā sammānīyatī ti attho*, "Sammannatī: the meaning is that he brings us honour by way of robes, etc, or this teacher is being honoured by others." (Vimv 4.7.344).

2.2.2 Devadatta enjoys his worldly gains

In Rājagaha, the Buddha stayed in the squirrels’ feeding ground in the Bamboo Grove outside the city. There, the Buddha was told by the monks,

“Bhante, prince Ajātasattu attends on Devadatta morning and evening, with 500 carriages along with a meal offering of 500 dishes of food.”

“Bhikshus, don’t envy Devadatta and his material support, honour, and fame [praise]. So long as prince Ajātasattu treats him like this, Devadatta can be expected to decline in good qualities.

Just as **a fierce dog** would get even fiercer if you break a gall bladder on its nose, so too, so long as prince Ajātasattu treats him like this, Devadatta can be expected to *decline in good qualities*.

Just as **a plantain tree** produces fruit to its own destruction and ruin, so too will Devadatta’s material support, honor, and praise cause his own destruction and ruin.

Just as **a bamboo** produces fruit to its own destruction and ruin, so too will Devadatta’s material support, honour and fame *cause his own destruction and ruin*.

Just as a nala reed produces fruit to its own destruction and ruin, so too will Devadatta’s material support, honour and fame *cause his own destruction and ruin*.

Just as a mule becomes pregnant to its own destruction and ruin, so too will Devadatta’s material support, honour, and fame *cause his own destruction and ruin*.”

Truly, the plantain’s fruit destroys the plantain; its fruit, the bamboo; its fruit, the reed.

Honour destroys the false person, just as the she-mule is destroyed by her foetus.

(Cv 7.2.5/V 2:186 f; S 597/6.12/1:154; S 17.35/2:241; A 4.68/2:73;

Netti §775/130; qu at DhA 3:156; cf Miln 166)²⁷

3 The Lord of the Sangha

3.1 WHY THE SANGHA NEEDS NO LEADER

3.1.1 The Buddha chides Devadatta

3.1.1.1 Later, Devadatta went to the Buddha and suggested that the leadership of the sangha should be handed over to him in view of the Buddha’s advanced age. The Buddha scoffed at the suggestion, saying,

“I wouldn’t even hand the sangha over to Sāriputta and Moggallāna,²⁸ so why then to you, **a corpse that eats rejects** [who eats what the noble ones spit out]?”²⁹

Devadatta predictably reacted with great resentment and vowed vengeance.

The Buddha’s strong remark may shock some of us; clearly, the remark is to highlight the preposterousness of the very notion of a “sangha leader”: **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) records the Buddha

²⁷ For parallel passages, see **Acira Pakkanta S** (S 17.35/2:241), SD 22.6a.

²⁸ Cf **Cātumā S** (M 67), where the Buddha states that “either I ... would look after (*parihareyyam*) the sangha of monks, or Sāriputta and Moggallāna would.” (M 67,13/1:459), SD 34.7. *Parihareyya* here refers to the training and discipline of sangha members, not in an administrative or power-centred way.

²⁹ *Sāriputta,moggallānānam pi kho ahaṃ devadatta bhikkhu,saṅghaṃ na nissajjeyyaṃ, kiṃ pana tuyhaṃ chavassa khe’āsakassā* [Ee -āpakassā] *tī*. (Cv 7.3.1 @ V 2:188 f; see Brahmali, [Theravāda Collection on Monastic Law](#) 5, Sutta Central, 2021, 2023:398). The matter of the Buddha making unpleasant remarks is mentioned in **Abhaya Rāja,kumāra S** (M 58,3/1:393), SD 7.12. The “rejects”—*gain and loss, fame and obscurity, honour and lack of honour, evil desires and bad friendship*—are listed in **Devadatta Vipatti S** (A 8.7), SD 61.5(3).

as telling Ānanda that of the idea of “leading the sangha” never occurred to him.³⁰ Devadatta saw **the sangha** as a successful, wealthy and powerful organization with numerous monastics in many monasteries, enjoying strong public and royal support. The reality is that **the sangha** is a spiritual fellowship of those going the “same path” (*samaggī*) of awakening and are thus “harmoniously unified” (*sāmaggī*) like milk and water in love, truth and vision.³¹

3.1.1.2 Even after the Buddha’s passing—as reported in **the Gopaka Moggallāna S** (M 108), the sangha remains a truly democratic community without a lord or leader, but well guided by the Dharma and the respect for morally virtuous and wise elders. Clearly the sangha is no personality cult: even the Buddha puts the Dharma above himself,³² and in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), the Buddha tells Ānanda that he has no thought of “leading the sangha,” thus:

“Ānanda, it does not occur to the Tathāgata to think, ‘I shall take care of [lead] the order,’ that ‘The order should refer to me.’ ...³³ (D 16,2.25.2/2:100)

What the Buddha bequeaths to us and posterity is the Dharma-Vinaya, thus:

Ānanda, it may be that you would think:

‘Gone is the Teacher’s word! We have no teacher.’

It should not be seen thus, Ānanda, for the Dharma and the Vinaya [the Teaching and the Discipline] that I have taught and explained to you, will, at my passing, be your teacher.

(D 16,6.1/2:154), SD 9

Hence, in **the Gopaka Moggallāna Sutta** (M 108), the elder Ānanda declares:

“The worthy ones [The elders] do not deal with us; the Dharma deals with us.”³⁴

(M 108,11/3:10), SD 33.5

3.1.1.3 A couple of important points before we go on to examine the key word in the Buddha’s chiding of Devadatta. **Why did the Buddha chide Devadatta?** As we have noted, it has to do with Devadatta’s total lack of understanding of the nature of the sangha [3.1.1.1]. It is vital that the Buddha highlights this point since this is what he has been teaching from the start.

As individuals, a renunciant is guided by the Dharma protected by the Vinaya; as a community, too, it is guided by the Dharma and protected by the Vinaya—in this sense, **the sangha** is truly a democratic community: it is guided and governed by the voice and vote of its Dharma-spirited and Vinaya-keeping members. There is only *one* Dharma; hence, it is a **consensus** when it comes to decision-making.

The sangha is neither a building nor a Church; it is a path, the path to awakening. We must walk this path—by keeping ourselves morally fit in body and speech, and mentally ready with calm and clarity. This is the noble path, an inward journey of first, overcoming our defilements rooted in views (leading to streamwinning); then, weakening the grosser defilements (lust and aversion, leading to once-returning);

³⁰ D 16,2.25.2/2:100 (SD 9).

³¹ A 2.43/1:70 = 3.95/1:243; Sn 281, 283; Dh 194; Thī 161.

³² **Gāraṇa S** (S 6.2/1:138-140), SD 12.3.

³³ *Tathāgatassa kho ānanda na evaṃ hoti “ahaṃ bhikkhu,saṅghaṃ pariharissāmi ti vā “mam’ uddesiko bhikkhu,-sanāho ti vā.* The vb *pariharissāmi* is fut of *pariharati*, “looks after, cares for; attends to; takes charge of” (for other senses, see DP *pariharati*). While here (D 16,6.1) it has the sense of “to lead,” at **Cātumā S** (M 67), it clearly has the sense of “take care of” (by way of advice, instruct, befriend, etc” (M 67,13/1:459, SD 34.7).

³⁴ *Na kira no bhavanto kārenti; dhammo no kāreti.* See SD 33.5 (2).

thirdly, to breaking the residual defilements (leading to nonreturning), and finally destroying all the defilements, we attain arhathood.³⁵

3.1.1.4 The Buddha, as **the first arhat** of our times, is the first amongst equals (*primus inter pares*), and the idea is to *keep up the count*. He is the “first” because there are followers; they all follow the same path of awakening. This is the reason and purpose that the Buddha teaches: to inspire us to walk the path. Indeed, *the path is the walking*, the progress in spiritual nobility; there is no path if we do not walk in nobility (*ariyattā*).³⁶

The path is open to all: we do not become “members” of the path; we *become* the path. In this way we keep the path going—by not becoming the last traveller. In **the Makhadeva Sutta** (M 83), the Buddha relates the story of king Makhadeva, who, noticing that he has reached old age, appoints his son as king, telling him,

“Continue this good tradition I have laid down, and **do not be my last man**.”³⁷

The Buddha bequeathed us the Dharma; he did not bequeath us the sangha. The good that we do, bodily and mentally, becomes the sangha. *Only so long as we follow the Dharma, there is the sangha*. **The noble sangha** exists neither by lineage nor empowerment, but on account of its members reaching the path and attaining arhathood. It is not a question of who leads the sangha; rather, it is who follows the Dharma to gain the path of awakening. So long as there are arhats and those on the path, the noble sangha exists. In this way, The Dharma-Vinaya has *no* “last person” (*antima purisa*, lit, “the last man”), meaning that the sangha lives and grows. We keep the sangha going by following the Dharma; the Dharma is kept going when there is no “last person.”³⁸

3.1.2 “What the Buddha says ... is the best of words”

3.1.2.1 One last point before we examine the key word in the Buddha’s chiding of Devadatta. We may think that the Buddha’s chiding of Devadatta was *harsh words*, unbecoming of the Buddha. This is, of course, a personal view; now we will examine the truth based on the teachings.

We have already examined the context of the Buddha’s chiding Devadatta: it is due to Devadatta’s ignorance of the nature of the sangha [3.1.1.1]. Further, we should understand **the task of the Buddha**: what the Buddha, as the true teacher, does is that he teaches the truth, always. We shall examine 2 suttas for a better understanding of this question, that is:

- **the Subhāsita Sutta** (Sn 3.3), where the Buddha’s speech is said to be “well-said” (*subhāsita*), that is, it has the fourfold qualities of being *well spoken, reality-based, pleasant and true* [3.1.2.2], and
- **the Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 58), which addresses the problem of whether the Buddha’s chiding is “unpleasant speech,” as some construe it to be [3.1.2.3].

3.1.2.2 The suttas tell us that “from the night of his awakening until the night of his nirvana without remains, everything the Buddha said and taught is true and not false”³⁹ (paraphrased). In **the Subhāsita Sutta** (Sn 3.3), this quality forms one of 4 comprising what is “**well-said**” [3.1.2.1], that is, one:

³⁵ See SD 61.4 (2.5.1.3) n.

³⁶ VvA 130.

³⁷ M 83,4.5/2:75 (SD 60.8).

³⁸ M 83,24/2:83 f (SD 60.8).

³⁹ **Pāsādika S** (D 29,29/3:135), SD 40a.6; A 4.23/2:24 = It 112/121,21 f (SD 15.7(2)). For non-Pali sources (Lamotte, “Did the Buddha insult Devadatta?” 1997:111 n27): MĀ T26.34.645b18-21. This passage was later modified (such saying the Buddha “did not speak a word” throughout his 45-year ministry: Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra 142 f; Prasannapadā 366, 539; Pañjikā 419).

- (1) speaks only what is well-spoken, not ill spoken;
 (2) speaks only what is dhamma,⁴⁰ not otherwise;
 (3) speaks only what is pleasant, not unpleasant; and
 (4) speaks only what is true, not untrue.” (Sn 450/78)

It is important to see what is *not* mentioned here: the Buddha does not say that this is the way that he himself speaks. This teaching is for “the good” (*santo*), which, says the Commentary, are “the Buddha and so forth” (SnA 2:398,23 f), that is, including the noble saints and others who are virtuous. Significantly, “unpleasant speech” is not mentioned. This is not an error of omission; rather we should consider *why* it is omitted.

Now from the awakening to nirvana, the Buddha only teaches what is true. That’s not the same as saying that the Buddha teaches only what was “**well said**” (*subhāsita*). “Well said” teachings are given to the good. The chiding was *not* “well said,” but that’s because it wasn’t given to the good, it was a conventional teaching to someone with wrong view.

We must then conclude that this is a teaching for a “**conventional**” situation where there are a significant number of the unawakened, and even more of those who are worldly and irascible, and the learning ambience is lacking—unlike during a Dharma instruction, or a teacher (like the Buddha) speaking to others in *a teaching or learning situation*, such as when the Buddha was chiding Devadatta. In other words, unpleasant speech is used by the Buddha in a proper way at the right time (*kālena*).⁴¹

3.1.2.3 The right speech or “ideal speech” teaching of **the Subhāsita Sutta** and the perception of the Buddha chiding Devadatta as unpleasant speech did not go unnoticed by non-Buddhists even in the Buddha’s time. **The Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 58), for example, records the Jain leader, Nāta,putta, instructing his then follower, prince Abhaya, to knock down the Buddha with a “double-horned” trick question, where answering either yes or no would discredit him all the same.

The trick question is as follows:

Would the Buddha utter **unpleasant speech**?

If he answered *yes*, then, what is the difference between the Buddha and an ordinary person? For an ordinary person, too, would utter *unpleasant speech*.

On the other hand, if the Buddha answered that he would **not** utter unpleasant speech, then why has he declared:

“Devadatta is destined for the suffering state, that Devadatta is destined for hell, Devadatta will remain there for the aeon, Devadatta is unredeemable?”⁴²

Devadatta was angry and displeased with the Buddha’s speech.

(M 58,3.3/1:392 f), SD 7.12

When Abhaya went to the Buddha and questioned him thus, the Buddha at once replied:

“My prince, is not this biased [one-sided]?”

Abhaya then knew that the Buddha had seen through the whole scam, and at once confessed that it was the Jain teacher, Nātaputta’s idea.

The Buddha then explains to Abhaya that the Buddha would only speak what is true, real and connected with the goal of awakening, **whether it is pleasant or unpleasant**, and he knows the *right time* to

⁴⁰ What is real, wholesome [good] and just.

⁴¹ See SD 7.12 (3.5).

⁴² “Unredeemable,” *atekiccha*. Comy glosses it as *buddha,sahassena*, “with a thousand Buddhas,” ie, after a thousand Buddhas have arisen (MA 3:108), ie, for a very long time indeed. The canonical texts however say that Devadatta will stay in Niraya (hell) for only an aeon (*kappa*) (V 2:202; M 1:393; A 3:402, 4:140, 160; It 85).

do so. The Buddha added that because he has penetrated **the Dharma-element** (the true nature of things), the answer occurs to him spontaneously.⁴³

The meaning of the last statement is that when the Buddha chided Devadatta, the Buddha had no premeditated negative emotion towards Devadatta, but a spontaneous response to the very nature of Devadatta's questions and his unwholesome intentions. In short, the Buddha fully understood the significance of the situation and answered accordingly. [3.1.1]

3.1.3 Did the Buddha insult Devadatta?

3.1.3.1 It is surprising and disappointing that even after over a century of modern Buddhist studies, scholars have failed to clearly understand the famous episode of the Devadatta wanting to take over the Buddha's position and the Buddha chiding him. The best-known translations we have to date and scholars reviewing this episode, as a rule, see the Buddha as "insulting" Devadatta (V 2:188,37), thus:

T W Rhys Davids & H Oldenberg, <i>Vinaya Texts</i> , 1885 (3:239)	"so vile and evil-living a person as you."
E W Burlingame, <i>Buddhist Legends</i> , 1921 (DhA:B 1:235)	"(The Teacher) ... called him lickspittle."
I B Horner, <i>The Book of the Discipline</i> , 1952 (V:B 5:264)	"a wretched one to be vomited like spittle."
E Lamotte, "Did the Buddha insult Devadatta?" (1997:4)	"corpse (<i>chava</i>), lickspittle (<i>kheḷāpaka</i>)."

Only one modern translation (that I know of), that by Bhikkhu Brahmali (2021), rendered this difficult passage correctly (that is, reflecting the related suttas and teachings):

Bh Brahmali, *Theravada Collection on Monastic Law*, 2021:398 "a wretched devourer of junk."

Brahmali's translation is based on the reading **kheḷ'āsaka** (Be Ce Se) instead of the wrong reading *kheḷāpaka* (Ee) or *kheḷāpika* (vl) (neither is found in any Pali dictionary). This translation, which is similar to my own [3.1.3.2], relates to the sutta teaching on the dangers of "gain, honour and fame [praise]" (*lābha, sakkāra, siloka*)⁴⁴ which should be rejected "like spittle" [3.1.3.2].

Those translators who adopted the reading *kheḷāpaka* or *kheḷāpika*, generally interpreted Devadatta himself as *kheḷa* (saliva, spittle, phlegm) [below]. This results in a perception of very strong and personal insult to Devadatta, quite uncharacteristic of the Buddha, thus misrepresenting him. In the Pali texts, *kheḷā* refers generally to *lābha, sakkāra, siloka* [above].

The Sanskrit for *kheḷa* is **kheṭa** or **kheḍa**, which means "phlegmatic or watery humor of the body, phlegm, snot, ... " (SED), "(a lump, mass of) phlegm" (BHSD); and *kheṭa, piṇḍa*, "a ball of phlegm," ie, anything useless (SED); used "generally as a symbol of worthlessness" (BHSD).⁴⁵ All this fits very well with the Pali usage, giving a more canonical understanding of the incident.

3.1.3.2 The Vinaya Commentary is very helpful in giving us the proper perspective of the Buddha's strong words, thus:

Kheḷ'āsakassā ti⁴⁶ *ettha micchājīvena uppanna, paccayā ariyehi vantabbā kheḷa, sadisā, tathā, rūpe paccaye ayaṃ ajjhoharatī ti katvā kheḷāsako ti bhagavata vutto.*

⁴³ For the full answer and parable, see M 58,8-11/1:395 f (SD 7.12).

⁴⁴ See esp the 43 suttas of **Lābha, sakkāra Saṃyutta** (S 17/2:225-243). S 17.31-36 specifically refer to Devadatta's spiritual failure due to attachment to gain, honour and fame.

⁴⁵ BHSD: Śikṣ 130.18, 139.11; Lalv 242.4; Mvst 2:398.22

⁴⁶ Ee *kheḷāpakassa* (wr). *Kheḷāsaka* (also *kheḷāsika*), *kheḷa* (Skt *kheṭa*, BHS *kheḍa*), "saliva, spittle, phlegm" + *āsaka* (or *āsika*), "one who eats what ought to be rejected (compared to spittle)."

“*Kheḷ’āsakassa* here means that those requisites he had acquired through wrong livelihood, which the noble ones would vomit up like spittle, such requisites he has swallowed down. *Kheḷā-sakassa* was said by the Buddha in this connection.” (VA 4:336/1275,17-19)⁴⁷

According to the Vinaya Commentary, it is Devadatta who “eats rejects” (*kheḷ’āsaka*) [3.1.1.1]. Gain, honour and fame are habitually rejected by the Buddha and the noble saints. The compound *kheḷ’āsaka* comprises *kheḷa*, “saliva, spittle,” + *āsaka*, “one who eats,” that is, literally, “an eater of spittle.” This metaphor refers to one who runs after *gain, honour and fame*. These 3 things and related defilements are collectively referred to as “spittle” (*kheḷa*) that Devadatta had been seeking and acquiring for himself.

The term *chava* (Ved *śava*) means “corpse,” but is often used figuratively (as BHS *śava, chava*) to refer to someone “vile, low, miserable, wretched” (PED). It refers to someone or something of poor quality, such as “a wretched wooden bowl” (*chavassa dāru, patassa karaṇā*, V 2:112,5). In English, we may refer to someone who has failed and suffering from its effects as being “wretched” or “a wretch.”

With the Vinaya Commentary, we can now better understand that the Buddha is commenting on Devadatta’s habit of socializing with the laity for the sake of “gain, honour and fame.” Since a renunciant works to free himself from the world, to be drawn to *gain, honour and fame* clearly shows that the renunciation spirit is lost. To highlight Devadatta’s backsliding, the Buddha sternly chides him as “one who eats rejects” since a noble disciple would surely *reject* such worldly habits.

Hence, Devadatta is like a “**corpse**,” dead to the Dharma life (running after gain, honour and fame), someone “wretched” for missing out on the great opportunity to progress on the path despite being so close to the Buddha. The Buddha’s words actually have a sense of compassion, pity, irony and regret, rather than being a nasty scolding.

Hence, I feel justified and confident in translating *chavassa kheḷ’āsakassa* as “a corpse that eats rejects” or alternately, “who eats what the noble ones (would rather) spit out.” [3.1.1.1]

3.1.3.3 Devadatta predictably did not take the Buddha’s public chiding of him very well at all. This is one of those occasions when the Buddha did not mince his words; he called Devadatta a spade. It may be argued whether it was this criticism by the Buddha that caused Devadatta to hate him. The point is that it was already clear that even before this occasion, Devadatta, noticing the Buddha aging, began to have political ambitions regarding the sangha. We may not be wrong to say that his old childhood habits of trying to outdo and demean Siddhattha were still there; it now had fuel sufficient for a huge blaze [1].

The Buddha did not insult Devadatta. The Buddha was making his point with us, the Buddha’s audience, on the true nature of the sangha and the purpose of learning the Dharma. Since Devadatta knew neither of these, he saw the Buddha’s chiding him as an insult. This was the beginning of Devadatta’s malice towards the Buddha, leading to his attempts on the Buddha’s life, and ending in Devadatta’s tragic death.

3.2 BEGINNING OF DEVADATTA’S END

3.2.1 The sangha denounces Devadatta

3.2.1.1 In due course, the Buddha announced to the sangha to make **a formal proclamation** (*pakāsa-niya, kamma*) that whatever was done by Devadatta in the name of the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha, was to be regarded (*daṭṭhabba*) as Devadatta’s action alone. The formal act (*kamma, vācā*) itself read:

⁴⁷ I have here mostly followed Brahmali’s tr (2023:398).

*Suṇātu me bhante saṅgho.
Yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ saṅgho
devadattassa rājagahe pakāsaniya, kammaṃ
kareyya
pubbe devadattassa aññā pakati ahosi
idāni aññā pakati,
yaṃ devadatti kareyya kāyena vācāya
na tena buddho vā dhammo vā saṅgho vā.
daṭṭhabbo
devadatto'va tena daṭṭhabbo ti.
esā ñatti.*

Bhantes, may the sangha listen to me.
If the sangha is right and ready,
it should perform a legal procedure for an
announcement about Devadatta in Rājagaha, thus:
“Devadatta’s character now differs
from what it was before. Whatever Devadatta
now does by body or speech
has nothing to do with the Buddha, the Teaching,
or the sangha,
but only with Devadatta.
This is the motion.”

(Cv 7.3.2 @ V 2:187)

The act-reciter recited the act one more time. They then told the conclave to remain silent if they accepted the motion or to speak up otherwise. “The sangha approves and is therefore silent. I will remember this.” (*Khamati saṅghassa, tasmā tuṅhī. Evam etaṃ dhārayāmi ti*). This is technically a consensus by **the silence of the conclave**.⁴⁸

With this formal sangha act, Devadatta is declared effectively *persona non grata*. He was still a monk but he has nothing whatsoever to do with the sangha. Devadatta remains a monk, but he is effectively excommunicado, so that the sangha is safe from his unwholesome intentions.

3.2.2 Devadatta’s plot thickens in Rājagaha

3.2.2.1 The Buddha then asked Sāriputta to formally announce the proclamation to Devadatta. Sāriputta was however initially reluctant to do this:

“In the past, bhante, I have praised Devadatta in Rājagaha, saying,
‘Godhiputta is powerful and mighty.’ How, then, can I now make this announcement about him?”
“Didn’t you praise him *truthfully* when you said that?”
“I did.”
“In the same way, you should make this announcement *truthfully*.”
“Yes, bhante.”

Sāriputta was then formally appointed before the sangha to announce the proclamation to Devadatta.

3.2.2.2 In **Rājagaha**, the foolish, those with little faith, unsympathetic, with little wisdom, said,
“These Sakyan recluses are envious of Devadatta’s gains and honour.”
But the wise, those with faith and sympathy, said,
“This must be a serious matter, seeing that the Buddha has had an announcement made about Devadatta in Rājagaha.”
(Cv 7.3.3 @ V 189 f)

3.2.2.3 It was at this time that Devadatta plotted with the young prince Ajātasattu with the idea of sharing the powers of “State and Church”—*aññā, cakka*⁴⁹ and *dhamma, cakka*—between themselves. Devadatta went to Ajātasattu and said casuistically:

⁴⁸ For its practical application in a sangha act, see SD 59.14 (1.2.1). In modern legal terms, this procedure is similar to *qui tacet consentire videtur*, “he who is silent is taken to agree” or “silence means consent.”

⁴⁹ CPD defines *aññā, cakka* and *dhamma, cakka* wrongly. The defs should be switched!

“In the past, my prince, people were long-lived but now they’re short-lived. It’s possible that you may die while still a prince. So then, kill your father and become the king. And I’ll kill the Blessed One and become the Buddha.”⁵⁰

Ajātasattu (young and naïve) trusted Devadatta:

“The noble Devadatta is powerful and mighty. He would know.”⁵¹

Ajātasattu then strapped a dagger (*poṭṭhanikā*) to his thigh, but he was troubled and agitated. In the middle of the day, he entered king Bimbisāra’s inner palace. Noticing his suspicious conduct, the ministers on duty (*upacārakā mahāmattā*) had him apprehended. On being questioned, Ajātasattu confessed that he wanted to kill the king. On further questioning, he said that he was instigated by Devadatta.

When the prince was brought before Bimbisāra and the matter deliberated, the ministers were divided as to who should be punished: the prince, Devadatta or his monks. The streamwinner king rejected all such ideas, since he had heard the Buddha’s announcement on Devadatta in Rājagaha.

“Why do you want to kill me?” Bimbisāra asked Ajātasattu.

“I want to rule, sir.”

“If you want to rule, the kingdom is yours!”

And Bimbisāra handed the rulership over to the prince. (Such was Bimbisāra’s love for his own son, and his generosity as a streamwinner.) (Cv 7.3.4 f @ V 2:190 f)

3.2.2.4 Now that **Ajātasattu** was king (r 492-460 BCE), Devadatta instructed him to order his men to kill the Buddha. The young king provided Devadatta with **royal archers** to shoot the Buddha. They were placed on different paths, one on one path, two on next, and so on up to 16; the plan was so laid that once the single archer had killed the Buddha, he would be killed in turn, so that not one of them would survive to tell the tale!

However, when the Buddha approached the first archer, he was so overwhelmed by the Buddha’s majesty that his body simply stiffened. The Buddha spoke kindly to him, and the man, throwing away his weapons, confessed his intended crime. The Buddha thereupon taught him Dharma and he became a streamwinner. Then, the Buddha sent him back by a different path.

The other groups of archers, tired of waiting, gave up the vigil and went away one after the other. They too were led to the Buddha by his psychic power; hearing the Dharma, they too became refuge-taking streamwinners. The first man returned to Devadatta saying that he was unable to kill the Buddha because of his great psychic power. Devadatta then decided to kill the Buddha himself.

(Cv 7.3.6-8 @ V 2:191 f)

4 Devadatta’s personal attempts on the Buddha’s life

4.1 THE BOULDER AND THE ELEPHANT

4.1.1 The boulder: causing the Buddha to bleed

4.1.1.1 Devadatta, having decided to kill the Buddha himself [3.2.2.4], found his first opportunity when he learned that the Buddha often walked in meditation. The Chinese pilgrim, Faxian (法顯 337-c 422)⁵² noted:

⁵⁰ *Ahaṃ bhagavantam hantvā buddho bhavissāmī ti*. This remark shows that Devadatta fails to see buddhahood as a state of awakening won by self-effort on the path, but sees it as a **status** that one could usurp (like kingship). Qu at DA 135; DhA 1.12/1:140.

⁵¹ *Ayyo kho devadatto mahiddhiko mahānubhāvo, janeyyā ti ayyo devadatto ti*.

⁵² On Faxian, see Max Deeg, “Faxian,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism Online*, Brill, 2021 (10 pp).

佛在石室前東西經行
fó zài shí shì qián dōngxī jīnxíng,

“The Buddha would walk back and forth from east to west
in front of his rocky cell.

調達於山北嶮巖間
diàodá yú shān běi xiǎn xī jiān

Devadatta, from the steep cliff on the northern side of the hill,

橫擲石傷佛足指處
héng zhì shí shāng fó jú zhǐ chù.

impetuously pushed a boulder down, hurting the Buddha’s foot.”

(T2082.51.862c26-27)⁵³

The rock, Nakamura writes, “is still there,” presumably meaning that it is to be seen there right where it fell after Devadatta pushed it down from the top of Mount Vulture Peak.⁵⁴

4.1.1.2 The Vinaya tells us that one day, when the Buddha was walking meditatively “in a shaded part” of Mount Vulture Peak (*gijjha, kūṭassa pabbatassa pacchāyāṃ*), Devadatta pushed down a large boulder from above him. Two peaks, it was said, “sprang up from the hill,” thereby arresting its trajectory, but a splinter flew off and struck the Buddha’s foot, causing blood to flow (Cv 7.3.9). Despite the nasty wound causing great pain, the Buddha mindfully and calmly took it as it was, as reported in **the (Devatā) Sakalika Sutta** (S 1.38) and **the (Māra) Sakalika Sutta** (S 4.13).⁵⁵

4.1.1.3 The wounded Buddha was carried on a litter to Maddakucchi, and from there to Jīvaka’s mango grove, where **the doctor Jīvaka**⁵⁶ personally attended to him. **The Jīvaka, pañha Vatthu** (DhA 7.1), “the story of Jīvaka’s question,” relates how Jīvaka applied an astringent to the wound and bandaged it up. Jīvaka then left for the city to attend to another patient.

Jīvaka later realized that it was time that the bandage had to be removed. Otherwise, the Buddha would be in pain during the night. However, he could not leave the city as the gates were closed for the night. The Buddha however, having read Jīvaka’s thoughts, had Ānanda remove the bandage late in the evening. The wound had disappeared like bark from a tree.

At early dawn, when Jīvaka hastened to the Buddha’s side and asked,

“Bhante, did you suffer intense pain?”

“Jīvaka, all suffering is stilled for the Tathagata, even as when he sat on the throne of awakening.”

In this connection, teaching the Dharma, the Buddha uttered this verse:⁵⁷

*gataddhino visokassa
vipparamuttassa sabbadhi
sabba, gantha-p, pahīnassa
pariḷāho na vijjati*

Dh 90

For one who has gone the distance, is sorrow-free,
is freed in every way.

To one who has left behind all bonds,
there is no fever [bodily or mentally].

(DhA 7.1/2:164-166)

⁵³ 高僧法顯傳 *gāosēng fǎxiǎn zhuàn* (T2085); tr James Legge, *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms*, Oxford, 1886:82-84; several reprs. For the story of Devadatta pushing the rock down the Peak and injuring the Buddha’s foot, see 增一阿含經 *zēng yī āhán jīng*, fasc 47 (T125.2.802b15-806a16), & fasc 48 (T0125.02.810b23-811a24); 大智度論 *dà zhì dù lùn*, fasc 41 (T1509.25.252b15-c3); 四分律 *sì fēn lǜ*, fasc 4-5 (T1428.22.591c24-596a20); and 大唐西域記 *dà táng xī yù jì*, fasc 9 (T2087.51.920c13-c17 + 51.921b2-b5 + 51.922a2-a4).

⁵⁴ For a recent description of Mount Vulture Peak, see Hajime Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha*, vol 2, tr G Sekimori, Tokyo, 2005:33.

⁵⁵ Respectively, **S 1.38**/1:27-29 (SD 61.4), and **S 4.13**/1:10 (SD 61.7); also in intro to **Cullahaṃsa J** (J 533/5:333).

⁵⁶ For details on **Jīvaka’s life**, see Mv 8.1/V 1:268-281.

⁵⁷ See SD 54.7 (2.3) n; SD 61.4 (2.6.1.1) *danto*.

4.1.1.4 After Devadatta’s attempt on the Buddha’s life [4.1.1.2], the monks decided to closely guard the Buddha. They walked back and forth on all sides of the Buddha’s cell, reciting loudly in an effort to guard him. When the Buddha heard the noise and learned its reason, he had Ānanda summon those monks. When they were assembled, he told them:

“It’s impossible, bhikshus, for anyone to kill the Buddha through an act of violence. The Buddha will not attain parinirvana through an act of violence.”

The Buddha then taught them about the 5 kinds of teachers as he had earlier taught Moggallāna [2.2.1]. Then, he dismissed the monks, reminding them that the Buddha did not need to be protected.

(Cv 7.3.9 f @ V 2:193 f)

4.1.2 The drunken elephant Nālāgiri tamed

4.1.2.1 Devadatta’s next attempt on the Buddha’s life was to bribe the elephant-keepers to let loose a fierce man-killing war elephant, **Nālāgiri** (also called Dhanapāla), drunk with toddy, on to the road which the Buddha would take. The news spread rapidly, and the Buddha was warned but he refused to turn back, reminding them that the Buddha would never die by violence.

Nālāgiri then charged down the street towards the Buddha, trumpeting, ears and tail bristling. Thrice people warned the Buddha about this impending disaster, but thrice the Buddha gave them the same reply.

While the foolish thought: “This elephant will harm the handsome recluse!”

the wise reflected: “The *nāga* and **the naga**⁵⁸ will now meet in battle.” (Cv 7.3.11 f)

4.1.2.2 The Buddha then pervaded Nālāgiri with a heart of boundless love. Feeling it, Nālāgiri lowered his trunk, went up to the Buddha, and stood in front of him. The Buddha, stroking Nālāgiri on his forehead with his right hand, spoke these verses:

Do not, elephant, attack <u>a naga</u> ;	painful it is to attack <i>a naga</i> .
For a killer of <i>a naga</i> ,	the next birth is not good.
Neither be intoxicated nor heedless,	for the heedless are not happily reborn.
Only do those things	that take you to a good destination. (Cv 7.3.12)

Nālāgiri sucked the dust from the Buddha’s feet with his trunk and scattered it overhead. He then walked backward while looking at the Buddha, and returned to his stall in the elephant stables. That is how tame Nālāgiri had become.⁵⁹

4.1.2.3 The crowd that saw the incident were generally angry, protested and criticized Devadatta, “How evil he is, this Devadatta, how indiscriminate he is, in that he tries to kill the recluse Gotama so powerful and mighty.”

On that occasion, people chanted this verse:

<i>daṇḍen’eke damayanti</i>	Some are tamed with a rod,
<i>aṅkusehi kasāhi ca</i>	or a goad or a whip.
<i>adaṇḍena asatthena</i>	With neither rod nor sword,
<i>nāgo danto mahêsina ti</i>	a naga is tamed by a great seer. ⁶⁰ (Cv 7.3.12)

⁵⁸ The word *nāga* means both “a powerful elephant” and “a noble person, an arhat”: SD 61.4 (2.1).

⁵⁹ See **Mahā,kapi J** (J 516) intro + SD 54.7 (2.3) n.

⁶⁰ This verse is also as **Tha 878** of Aṅgulimāla’s verses with the last line reading: *ahaṃ danto’mhi tādinā*, “but I was tamed by that one | with neither rod nor sword”: **Aṅgulimāla S** (M 86,25*/2:105), SD 5.11; also SD 61.4 (2.6.2 (1)).

Devadatta's gains and honour declined, whereas those of the Buddha increased. Due to a significant decline in public support and respect, Devadatta had to ask families repeatedly for invitations to meals. This led to more complaints about "Sakya monks" asking for meals and good food. The good monks, hearing about these complaints, reported the matter to the Buddha.

In response, the Buddha instituted **Pācittiya 32**, the Pāṭimokkha rule forbidding monastics from taking group meals—not more than 3 monks shall take a meal from a house at a time—except on proper occasions (that is, in times of sickness, giving robe material, making up robes, going on a journey, embarking on a boat, a special occasion or a recluse's meal).⁶¹ (Cv 7.3.10-13 @ V 2:194-196)

4.2 DEVADATTA'S SUBTERFUGE

4.2.1 "Breaking the sangha's authority"

4.2.1.1 Devadatta's acrimony towards the Buddha made Devadatta very unpopular, and even Ajātasattu was compelled by the force of public opinion to withdraw his patronage from Devadatta, whose gain and honour thus decreased even further.⁶² So strong were Devadatta's unwholesome roots, he was nonetheless determined to destroy the Buddha; perhaps even more so now. He approached the monks Kokālika, Kaṭa, moraka, tissa, Khaṇḍa, deviyā, putta, and Samudda, datta, to be his co-conspirators⁶³ to bring about a schism in the sangha by a subterfuge. He said to them:

"Let's cause a **schism** (*saṅgha, bheda*) in the sangha of the recluse Gotama. Let's break its authority" (*kathaṃ mayāṃ samaṇassa gotamassa saṅgha, bhedaṃ karissāma cakka, bhedaṃ ti*). (Cv 7.3.14)

4.2.1.2 *Cakka, bheda* is "break(down) in authority," as explained by the **Vinaya Commentary** (*cakka, bhedāyā ti āṇā, bhedāya*, VA 4:310). The Vinaya Subcommentary, **Vajira, buddhi, ṭīkā** defines it more broadly as "*cakka, bheda*: a break in the teaching [dispensation]," *cakka, bhedaṃ ti sāsana, bhedaṃ* (Vjb 4.343). The break in authority is clearly from both the Buddha and the Vinaya-based sangha. Although the Buddha was the only living authority in laying down rules, the sangha was autonomous in its decision-making through the Vinaya based on the Dharma [3.1.1.2]. For practical purposes, it was the sangha that Devadatta was breaking with.⁶⁴

4.2.2 The 5 strict rules

4.2.2.1 Kokalika, Devadatta's accomplice, was not sure how they could create a **schism** in the sangha: "The recluse Gotama is powerful and mighty. How can we achieve this?"

"Well," declared Devadatta, "let's go to the recluse Gotama and request 5 things, thus:

'In many ways, bhante, you praise fewness of wishes, contentment, self-effacement, ascetic practices, being inspiring, the fewness of things, and being energetic.

⁶¹ Cv 7.3.13 (V 2:196,19-26), V 4:77,30-34.

⁶² VA 4:811. At this time, [Kokālika](#) was very useful to Devadatta, J 2:438.

⁶³ Saṅgh 10.1 (V 3:171), Saṅgh 11.1 (V 3:174 f). Skt, Kokālika 孤迦里迦 or 瞿婆離, Kaṭamorakatiṣya 羯吒謨洛迦底灑, Kaṇḍadrava 寒茶達驪, and Samudradatta 三沒達羅達多. The Mahīśāsaka Vinaya names 3 other followers of Devadatta, ie, 類鞞分那 *Ē bīng fēn nà*, 婆藪般那 *Pó sǒu bān nà* and 盧醯 *Lú xī*, and on layman 和修達 *Hé xiū dá* (T1421.-22.164a20-b5). Then, there is Devadatta's uncle, the Sakya Daṇḍapānī (MA 1:298). For a discussion on the difficulties and confusion in the non-Pali accounts of Devadatta, his 5 rules and the 1st schism, see J W Borgland, "Devadatta and the extracurricular ascetic practices" (based on Saṅghabhedavastu), in (edd) Edward et al, *Reading Slowly: fest-schrift for Jens W Braarvig*, Wiesbaden, 2018:89-114.

⁶⁴ Brahmali 2021:408 n267.

And there are these **5 things** that lead to just that:

- “It would be good, bhante,
- (1) that the monks dwell all their lives in **the forest**,
and whoever dwelled near an inhabited area would commit an offence;
 - (2) that they ate **alms-food** (*piṇḍapāta*) for life,
and whoever accepted an invitation meal would commit an offence;
 - (3) that they wore **rag-rob**es for life,
and whoever accepted robe-cloth from a householder would commit an offence;
 - (4) that they should dwell at **the foot of a tree** for life,
and whoever took shelter would commit an offence; and
 - (5) that they **should not eat fish and meat** (that is, be meatless or vegetarian) for life,
and whoever did take fish or meat would commit an offence.”

The recluse Gotama will never allow this. We’ll then be able to win people over with these 5 points.”
(Cv 7.3.14)

4.2.2.2 As Devadatta had predicted, the Buddha’s reply was that *those who felt so inclined could follow these rules*—except that of sleeping under a tree during the rainy season—but he refused to make the rules mandatory. This refusal delighted Devadatta, who went about with his party, declaring that the Buddha was prone to luxury and abundance.

The foolish were impressed by the 5 rules and believed Devadatta. In spite of the Buddha’s warning against the heavy bad karma of causing schism in the sangha, Devadatta informed Ānanda of his intention of holding an *uposatha* conclave without the Buddha, and, having persuaded 500 newly ordained monks from Vesāli to join him, he went out to Gayā,sīsa.⁶⁵

Among Devadatta’s followers were some nuns, chief of whom was Thulla,nandā (fat Nandā), who never tired of singing his praises.⁶⁶ Kumāra Kassapa’s mother first joined the sangha under Devadatta, but when he denounced her, following the discovery of her pregnancy, she sought refuge with the Buddha. Some of the Sākyas, too—like Daṇḍapāṇī—seemed to have sided with Devadatta rather than with the Buddha.⁶⁷

4.2.2.3 In due course, the Buddha sent **Sāriputta and Moggallāna** to Gayā,sīsa to bring back the schismatic monks. Devadatta, believing that the duo had come to join him, rejoiced, and, in spite of Kokālika’s warning, welcomed them. That night, Devadatta taught the monks until it was very late, and, wishing to rest, asked Sāriputta to teach the assembly.

Sāriputta and Moggallāna taught the Dharma so effectively that they convinced the 500 monks to return with them. Kokālika kicked Devadatta on the chest to waken him and tell him the bad news. When Devadatta discovered what had happened, hot blood came forth from his mouth, and for 9 months he lay grievously ill.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ On this occasion, Devadatta imitated the Buddha by keeping 2 chief disciples beside him (DhA 1.12/1:144). Three suttas—the 2 **Devadatta Ss** (S 6.12/1:153 & A 4.68/3:73), and **Mahā Sāropama S** (M 29/1:192-197), SD 53.8—were taught after this incident in its connection. Cf **Pañca,ratha,sata S** (S 17.36/2:242), SD 22.6b.

⁶⁶ V 4:66, 335.

⁶⁷ MA 2:73.

⁶⁸ Vinaya omits the kicking, but it is mentioned in DhA 1.12/1:143 and in J 143/1:491.

4.2.3 Devadatta's end

4.2.3.1 As his end drew near, Devadatta wished to see the Buddha. However, the Buddha had declared that it would be impossible for Devadatta to see the Buddha again in this life. Devadatta, however, started his journey on a litter, and on reaching Jetavana, he stopped the litter on the banks of the lotus pond and stepped out to wash. It is said that just then the earth opened and swallowed him up into Avīci (the lowest of the hells).⁶⁹

On a bright note, it is said that, after suffering for 100,000 world-cycles in Avīci, Devadatta would be reborn as a pratyeka-buddha named Aṭṭhissara. At the moment of being swallowed by the earth, we are told, Devadatta uttered a stanza in which he declared that he had no refuge other than the Buddha. It was this last act of Devadatta's which the Buddha had in mind when he accepted Devadatta into the sangha.⁷⁰

(Cv 7.4/2:199-203)

4.2.3.2 According to the **Devadatta Vipatti Sutta** (A 8.7), Devadatta's failures (*vipatti*)—his bad karmic habits (*nati*)—are his attachment to the “8 bad conditions,” that is, *gain and loss, fame and obscurity, honour and lack of honour, evil desires and bad friendship*.⁷¹ **Bad friendship** (*papa, mittatā*), the opposite of spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇa, mittatā*),⁷² has only been briefly mentioned that is, how Devadatta befriended, or rather, exploited the young naïve prince, Ajāta, sattu [3.2.2.3].

Thus, bad friendship appropriately describes *Devadatta's influence on the young prince Ajāta, sattu* and his grooming him into a ruthlessly ambitious usurper. We do not know Ajātasattu's exact age; he could well be in his mid to late teens when Devadatta first recruited him. There seems to be no mention of any bad traits in Ajātasattu before his meeting with Devadatta, except perhaps the desire to be king in due course.

Devadatta induced Ajātasattu to expedite his taking over the throne. Ajātasattu later imprisoned his own father (probably to ensure that Bimbisāra would not change his mind about Ajātasattu's kingship) and made him suffer a slow painful death.⁷³

The Sāmañña, phala Sutta (D 2) relates how Ajātasattu later reconciled with the Buddha through the royal doctor, Jīvaka.⁷⁴ However, by then, Ajātasattu's patricide was a grave bad karma preventing him from attaining even streamwinning when he personally met the Buddha and heard the Dharma (D 2,104). Ajātasattu, too, would in time die at the hands of his own son, Udaya, bhadda (r 460-444) who, like him, usurped the throne (Mahv 4.1).⁷⁵

This study now continues with the nature of “**The Buddha's Karma**” (SD 61.5b) which discusses whether the Buddha had “bad karma”; the *Pubba, kamma, piloti* (on the Buddha's past bad karma); and “budhdhody” (on why the Buddha “suffers” or faces unpleasant experiences).

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⁶⁹ DhA 1.12/1:147; Miln 108. He was one of 5 people who were swallowed by the earth in the Buddha's time: Ciñca the brahmin girl (J 472/4:187; DhA 13.9/3:178-183; ItA 1:86), Suppabuddha the Sakya (DhA 3:44 f), Devadatta (DhA 1:147 f; Miln 205), the yaksha Nandaka (U 4.4; UA 244-246; Miln 100 f; ThaA 2:116), and the brahmin youth Nanda (V 3:35) only known as *māṇavaka*; (VA 1:273) *pāpa, purisa* (MA 4:8; DhA 2:49).

⁷⁰ On Devadatta being “dead” to the Dharma-Vinaya, see SD 52.3 (1.3.5.3).

⁷¹ See A 8.7/4:160 f (SD 61.5(3)). The above 8 “bad conditions” are a special set related to very negative people like Devadatta. “Normal” people, as a rule, mostly face one or other of the “8 worldly conditions” (*aṭṭha loka, dhamma*), ie, gain and loss, fame and obscurity, blame and praise, and joy and pain: **Loka, dhamma S 1+2** (A 8.5+6), SD 42.2+3. [5.2.1.1]

⁷² See **Spiritual friendship: Stories of kindness**, SD 8.1; **Spiritual friendship: A textual study**, SD 34.1.

⁷³ SD 8.10 (1).

⁷⁴ D 2/1:47-86 (SD 8.10).

⁷⁵ See SD 8.10 (1.3).