

# SD 62.11 Aspiration for Buddhahood and Discipleship

Becoming Buddha, Pacceka-buddha, Disciple and Practitioner

A study by Piya Tan ©2025

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## 1 Aspirations to awakening

### 1.1 THE ASPIRANTS

#### 1.1.1 Lives of the buddhahood-aspirant

**1.1.1.1** One may make an **aspiration** (*abhinīhāra*) to achieve 3 distinct goals—those of becoming:

- (1) a fully awakened buddha,
- (2) a pacceka (“lone”) buddha, or
- (3) a disciple (*sāvaka*), that is, a great disciple (*mahā,sāvaka*)<sup>1</sup> or foremost disciple (*agga,sāvaka*).<sup>2</sup>

Any such aspiration must be made before the living Buddha of the epoch. **The aspirant to buddhahood** (*buddhattā*)<sup>3</sup> must fulfill **the 10 perfections** (*dasa,pāramī*): those of giving, moral virtue, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truthfulness, determination, lovingkindness and equanimity.<sup>4</sup> These 10 perfections<sup>5</sup> are cultivated on 3 levels of “self-sacrifice” (*atta,pariccāga*), that is, those of:

- |                        |                           |   |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| (1) perfection         | <i>pāramī</i>             | sacrificing of what we have (external),     |
| (2) higher perfection  | <i>upapāramī</i>          | sacrificing what we are (one’s limbs), and  |
| (3) highest perfection | <i>param’attha,pāramī</i> | sacrificing one’s life itself. <sup>6</sup> |

For example, in the case of giving,

- (1) as the perfection of giving, one is willing and able to give or give up *all* that one has;
- (2) as higher perfection, one is willing and able to give one’s limbs;
- (3) as the highest perfection, one is willing and able to give one’s own life.

In the other perfections, one cultivate that perfection (such as moral virtue) even when it entails giving or giving up all that one has. In the cultivation of higher perfection, one is willing and able to sacrifice one’s limbs. In the case of the highest perfection, one is willing and able to sacrifice one’s life to cultivate moral virtue), and so on.<sup>7</sup>

In this way, there are a total of 30 perfections of the aspirant (bodhisattva).

**1.1.1.2** The 10 classic stories that close the Jātaka Commentary (*jātak’aṭṭhakathā*)—forming **the Mahā,nipāta**—centre on the remarkable and noble acts of the bodhisattva which illustrate not just *one* perfection but as number of them. The Siamese Buddhist tradition have long associated, or highlighted,

<sup>1</sup> A “great disciple” usu refers to one of the 80 great disciples (*asīti mahā,thera*), SD 15.10a (7).

<sup>2</sup> These are disciples who are “foremost” (*agga*) in certain qualities, such as wisdom (Sāriputta) and eidetic memory (Ānanda).

<sup>3</sup> On *buddhattā* and *sāvakattā*, see PmA 3:537; cf AAT:Be 1:137.

<sup>4</sup> *Dāna,pāramim pūretvā sīla,nekkhamma,paññā,vīriya,khanti,sacca’adhiṭṭhāna,mettā,upekkhā,pāramim pūretvā*: ItA 1:117,26-29. On the Buddha being called **tathāgata** and its detailed meanings, see UA 133-159.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed study of the 10 perfections, see CA 276-332 (tr in Bh Bodhi, *All-embracing Net of Views*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Kandy, 2007:254-330).

<sup>6</sup> ItA 1:117,27-30.

<sup>7</sup> **BA 59** notes that the sacrifice of one’s wealth is an example of the perfection of giving; the sacrifice of one’s limb is the higher perfection of giving; and the sacrifice of one’s life is the highest perfection. Cf **Dasa,bodhisatt’upatti,katha**: Dbk 10.

each of these 10 Jātaka stories with one of the 10 perfections.<sup>8</sup> However, there is no known tradition in the suttas or the Commentaries that show any consistent identification of these 10 stories with a particular perfection.

Mahā,nipāta, Mahā,jātaka or Dasa,jātaka		Occasion for story in Jātaka Commentary	Perfection ( <i>paramī</i> )	
Temiya <sup>9</sup>	J 538	discussion of the great renunciation	renunciation	<i>nekkhamma</i>
Mahā Janaka	J 539	discussion on the great renunciation	effort	<i>virīya</i>
Suvaṇṇa,sāmā <sup>10</sup>	J 540	debate on supporting one's parents	lovingkindness	<i>mettā</i>
Nimi <sup>11</sup>	J 541	a smile (renunciation)	determination	<i>adhiṭṭhāna</i>
Mahōsadha <sup>12</sup>	J 546	on perfection of wisdom	wisdom	<i>paññā</i>
Bhūridatta	J 543	discussion on keeping the uposatha	morality	<i>sīla</i>
Canda,kumāra <sup>13</sup>	J 542	discussion on Devadatta's attempts on the Buddha's life	patience	<i>khanti</i>
Mahā Nārada,kassapa	J 544	on the conversion of Uruvelā Kassapa	equanimity	<i>upekkhā</i>
Vidhūra (Paṇḍita) <sup>14</sup>	J 545	on perfection of wisdom	truth	<i>sacca</i>
Mahā Vessantara	J 547	on the rain shower over the Sakyas at Kapilvatthu	giving	<i>dāna</i>

**Table 1.1.1.2 The perfections highlighted by the 10 the Mahā,nipāta Jātakas (Siamese tradition)<sup>15</sup>**

**1.1.1.3** For countless lives preceding the 10 classic Jātaka stories given in the Mahā,nipāta [1.1.1.2], the bodhisattva lived his lives cultivating some kind of perfections not only as a human, but also as an animal, or even as a deva (usually of Tāvātimsa, and as lord of the devas). In some stories, the bodhisattva commends another for the perfection or virtue.

Here is a **brief list of shorter Jātaka stories (other than those of the Mahā,nipāta) highlighting each of the 10 perfections.**

<sup>8</sup> The earliest Western edition of the Jātaka Commentary (JA), done by V Fausboll (1887-97) followed the J titles of the Ce (Sinhala) editions.

<sup>9</sup> Se so; Be *mūga,pakkha jataka*; Ce Ee *muga-*.

<sup>10</sup> Be Se so; Ce Ee *sāma jataka*.

<sup>11</sup> Be Ce Ee so; Se *nemi,rāja jataka*.

<sup>12</sup> Se so; Be *umaṅga jataka*; Ce *ummagga jataka*; Ee *mahā ummagga jataka*.

<sup>13</sup> Be Se so; Ce Ee *khaṇḍahāla jataka*.

<sup>14</sup> Be Ee Se *vidhura jataka*; Ce Ee *vidhura,paṇḍita jataka* (uddāna).

<sup>15</sup> For studies on these variations, see **Oldenberg** [St Petersburg, 1892; Russian], "On the Buddhist Jātakas," *J of the Royal Asiatic Soc* 1893:301-356; **Bh Bodhi**, "A treatise on the Pāramīs" (tr CA 276-332), in *The Discourse on the All-embracing Net of Views*, Kandy, 1978:254-330; **Appleton**, *Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism*, 2010:71-78. **N Appleton & S Shaw** (tr), *The Ten Great Birth Stories of the Buddha* vol 1, Bangkok, 2015:1-7.

**1. Giving (dāna)**

Sasa J (J 316); Dassanaka J (J 401); Kummāsa,piṇḍa J (J 415); Āditta J (J 424); Saṅkha J (J 442); Bilāri Kosiya J (J 450); Akitti J (J 480); Bhikkhā Paramparā J (J 496); Sivi J (J 499).

**2. Moral virtue (sīla)**

Tittira J (J 36); Sīla Vīmaṃsana J (J 86); Amba J (J 124); Sīl'ānisaṃsa J (J 190); Sādhu,sīla J (J 200); Kacchapa J (J 215); Kuru,dhamma J (J 276); Seyya J (J 276); (Tika) Sīla,vīmaṃsa J (J 290); Eka,rāja J (J 303); (Catukka) Sīla,vīmaṃsa J 1 (J 305); (Catukka) Sīla,vīmaṃsa J 2 (J 330); Gijjha J (J 399); Baka Brahmā J (J 405); Gaṅga,māla J (J 421); Cakka,vaka J (J 451); Suruci J (J 489); Mahā Mora J (J 491); Dasa Brāhmaṇa J (J 495); Campeyya J (J 506); Kumbha J (J 512); Saṅkha,pāla J (J 524).

**3. Renunciation (nekkhamma)**

Makha,deva J (J 9); Sukha,vihāri J (J 10); Kuddāla J (J 70); Maṅgala J (J 87); Pañca,garu J (J 132); Asadisa J (J 181); Sayha J (J 310); Kumbha,kāra S (J 408); Susīma J (J 411); Harita J (J 431); Pāṇīya J (J 459); Culla Nārada J (J 477); Akitti J (J 480); Bhisa J (J 488); Somanassa J (J 505); Hatthi,pāla J (J 509); Ayoghra J (J 510); Sarabhaṅga J (J 522); Saṅkha,pāla J (J 524); Culla Sota,soma J (J 525).

**4. Wisdom (paññā)**

Baka J (J 38); Athassa,dvāra J (J 84); Mahā,sara J (J 92); Paro,sahassa J (J 99); Sabba,saṅkhāraka,pañha J (J 110); Gadrabha J (J 111); Amara,devī J (J 112); Mita,Cinti J (J 114); Kusa,nāli J (J 121); Naṅguṭṭha J (J 144); Tiṇḍuka J (J 177); Puṇṇa,nadī J (J 214); Kūṭa,vaṇija J (J 218); Mūla,pariyāya J (J 245); Chavaka J (J 309); Mata,rodana J (J 317); Devatā,pañha J (J 350); Sujāta J (J 352); Dabbha,puppha J (J 400); Maṭṭa,kuṇḍali J (J 449); Mahā,maṅgala J (J 453); Siri,manda J (J 500); Pañca,paṇḍita J (J 508); Sambhava J (J 515).

**5. Effort (viriya)**

Vaṇṇu,patha J (J 2); Cullaka Setṭhi J (J 4); Gāmani J (J 8); Kaṇha J (J 29); Culla Janaka J (J 52); Kāka J (J 146); Saṅgāmāvacara J (J 182); Khurappa J (J 265); Saṃvara J (J 462).

**6. Patience (khanti)**

Khanti,vaṇṇana J (J 225); Seyya J (J 282); Eka,rāja J (J 303); Khanti,vādi J (J 313); Kāla,bāhu J (J 329); MAṇi,kuṇḍala J (J 351); Ghaṭa J (J 355).

**7. Truthfulness (sacca)**

Taṇḍula,nāli J (J 5); Naḷa,pāna J (J 20); Vaṭṭaka J (J 35); Saacaṇ,kira J (J 73); Maccha J (J 75); Sigāla J (J 113); Kāya,vicchinda J (J 293); Cetiya J (J 422); Kaṇha,dīp'āyana J (J 444); Suppāraka J (J 463); Mahā,-paduma J (J 472); Mittāmita J (J 473).

**8. Determination (adhiṭṭhāna)**

Naḷa,pāna J (J 20); Khadiraṅgāra J (J 40); Khurappa J (J 265); Kacchapa J (J 273); Visayha J (J 340).

**9. Lovingkindness (mettā)**

Uruga J (J 154); Nakula J (J 163); Araka J (J 169); Kesava J (J 346).

**10. Equanimity (upekkhā)**

Anabhirati J (J 65); Loma,haṃsa J (J 94); Araka J (J 169); Vāl'okaka J (J 183); Mahisa J (J 278); Ananu-sociya J (J 328); Piṭha J (J 337); Culla Dhamma,pāla J (J 358); Nandiya,miga J (J 385); Kaṇha J (J 440); Culla,bodhi J (J 443); Dasa,ratha J (J 461); Bhisa J (J 488); Rohanta,miga J (J 501); Jayaddisa J (J 513).

### 1.1.2 Qualities of the buddhahood-aspirant

**1.1.2.1 The aspirant to Buddhahood** is attributed numerous wholesome qualities. Of special mention are **the “5 great sacrifices”** (*pañca mahā,pariccāga*), as a category of their own, by a buddhahood-aspirant, that is:

		<b>significance</b>
(1) the sacrifice of limb	<i>aṅga,pariccāga</i>	giving up what are most vital to one;
(2) the sacrifice of self (one’s life) <sup>16</sup>	<i>atta,pariccāga</i>	giving up what is most precious to one;
(3) the sacrifice of wealth	<i>dhana,pariccāga</i>	giving up what one has (material wealth);
(4) the sacrifice of wife (and children)	<i>dāra,pariccāga</i>	giving up one’s family and lineage;
(5) the sacrifice of kingdom	<i>raja,pariccāga</i>	giving up one’s worldly power.

It should be understood here that such sacrifices are not “standards of practice” for the ordinary person, but challenges and “karma neutralizers” for one who is to become a world saviour or cosmic liberator, a buddha. When such sacrifices are made, ironically, nothing is really lost; they are only *hastening* or *compounding* such losses, as it were, to tweak the samsaric cycle, speeding it up. By giving up all these worldly things, the bodhisattva gains spiritual goodness and greatness: he is liberated as the Buddha and is thus able to liberate others, without their each having to make such great sacrifices.

**1.1.2.2** In short, a buddha-to-be supremely excels in giving (including self-sacrificing) inspired by moral virtue.<sup>17</sup> In fact, all **the perfections** (other than the first) are various forms of *giving* or *giving up* (renunciation) on 3 different levels, those of “perfection,” or “higher perfection,” and of “highest perfection” [1.1.1.1]. In summary, all these levels of perfections encompasses the following:

the bodhisattva’s <b>giving</b> ,	encompasses various levels of sacrifices;
his <b>moral virtue</b> ,	encompasses giving up of wrong speech and wrong action;
his <b>renunciation</b> ,	encompasses giving up the world and worldliness;
his <b>wisdom</b> ,	encompasses giving up wrong views and ignorance;
his <b>effort</b> ,	encompasses giving all his physical and mental energies in his endeavours;
his <b>patience</b> ,	encompasses giving his time in the face of failures and evil states in others;
his <b>truthfulness</b> ,	encompasses giving up falsehood, and teaching truths beneficial to others;
his <b>determination</b> ,	encompasses giving all his attention in right speech and right action;
his <b>lovingkindness</b> ,	encompasses giving up negative emotions; and
his <b>equanimity</b> ,	encompasses giving up all expectations of others and the world, accepting them as they are in accordance with their conditions.

**1.1.2.3** Before making the initial resolve for buddhahood, the aspirant has to fulfill the following **8 prerequisites** (*aṭṭha dhamma samodhāna*):

(1) he is human;	<i>manussa</i>
(2) he is male;	<i>liṅga sampatti</i>
(3) the supporting spiritual conditions;	<i>hetu</i>
(4) seeing the teacher (meeting the Buddha);	<i>satthāra dassana</i>
(4) going forth;	<i>pabbajjā</i>
(5) attainment of virtues;	<i>guṇa Sampatti</i>

<sup>16</sup> BA 59,25-28 oddly mentions “sacrificing one’s limbs” as the perfection of giving (*tāva aṅga,pariccāgo pāramī nāma*), and sacrifice of “external things” as the higher perfection (*bahira,bhaṇḍa,pariccāgo upapāramī nāma*).

<sup>17</sup> ApA 49 f; BA 59 f; CA 273; J 1:45; DhsA 32.

- (6) act of merit; and  
(7) will-power.

*adhikāra*  
*chandatā*

These prerequisites are only briefly stated here by way of introduction, and they will be explained in some detail below [2.2].

## 1.2 ASPIRATION TO PACCEKA-BUDDHAHOOD

### 1.2.1 The pacceka-buddhahood aspirant

**The aspirant to pacceka-buddhahood** (\**pacceka,buddhattā*)—that is being a solitary buddha who does not establish a dispensation (*sāsana*)<sup>18</sup>—should at least possess these 4 conditions: he should *be a human, a male, the act of merit and will-power* [2.2.0]. He must have also “seen” (that is, has lived with) arhats, those who have destroyed their influxes (*vigat’āsava,dassana*).<sup>19</sup> The term arhat of course includes the Buddha himself, who is the first arhat [2.2.3.1(1)]; the pacceka-buddha, too, is an arhat. In short, an aspirant to pacceka-buddhahood *sees* that he will himself become an arhat and a recluse.

When buddhas arise in the world after having fulfilled the perfections (*pāramī*) that they have aspired to and have undertaken them for the duration mentioned [2.1.4.1], they arise in the world either in a kshatriya family or a brahmin family. What about pacceka-buddhas?

### 1.2.2 The pacceka-buddha

**1.2.2.1 Pacceka-buddhas** arise in a family of kshatriyas, brahmins, or householders. But **the chief disciples**, like the buddhas, arise only in families of kshatriyas or brahmins. Buddhas never arise when the aeon is devolving, but they arise when the aeon is evolving (that is, the phase just before open stasis or stable state).<sup>20</sup> Buddhas attain awakening themselves and awaken others. Pacceka-buddhas attain awakening themselves but do not awaken others.

They penetrate the taste of the goal (nirvana) only but *not the taste of the Dharma*. For they are not able to apply conceptual description to the world-transcending Dharma and thereby teach it. Their breakthrough to the Dharma is like that of a dumb person trying to describe the things he has seen in an amazing dream or like a country-dweller trying to describe the exquisite dishes he tasted in the city.

Apparently, as we shall see below, some pacceka-buddhas do teach, but not as successfully as the Buddha or the great arhats. [1.2.2.2]

**1.2.2.2** Pacceka-buddhas achieve all the psychic powers [2.2.6.2], meditative attainments [2.2.6.1], and analytic knowledges.<sup>21</sup> Their excellent qualities are however inferior to those of the buddhas but superior to those of disciples. They give others the going-forth, train them in moral conduct, and in mental effacement but this practice does not reach the goal of awakening.

This is based on **the Sutta Nipāta Commentary** reading of the Sinhala (Ce) and PTS (Ee) manuscripts.<sup>22</sup> The Burmese and Siamese manuscripts read the contrary: “They *neither* give others the going-forth *nor* train them in proper common conduct.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Which means that the Dharma as teaching does not continue after his death.

<sup>19</sup> SnA 1:51; ThaA 1:12; ApA 142.

<sup>20</sup> Also at ApA:Be 1:150, where it adds: “so too pacceka-buddhas” (*tathā pacceka,buddhā*).

<sup>21</sup> The 4 analytic skills (*paṭisambhidā*) are those of: (1) meanings (*attha,paṭisambhidā*); (2) teachings [truths] (*dhamma,paṭisambhidā*); (3) language (*nirutti,paṭisambhidā*); and (4) ready wit (*paṭibhāṇa,paṭisambhidā*): SD 28.4 (4); SD 41.6 (2.2); SD 58.1 (5.4.2.13).

<sup>22</sup> SnA: Ce + Ee read: *aññe pabbājetvā ābhisamācārikaṃ sikkhāpentī*.

<sup>23</sup> SnA: Be Se read the opposite: *na aññe pabbājetvā ābhisamācārikaṃ sikkhāpentī ...*, “they do not give others the going-forth and train them in proper common conduct.” On *ābhisamācārika*, see SD 55.8 (3.3.2). SnA accounts



**The Sutta Nipāta Commentary** states that buddhas self-awaken and awaken others; pacceka-buddhas self-awaken but do *not* awaken others.<sup>24</sup> Pacceka-buddhas, however, do teach others. **The Aṅguttara Commentary**, however, speaks of the elder Nāḷaka, who was taught by a pacceka-buddha and gained the state of a pacceka-buddha (*pacceka, bodhi*), that is, became an arhat.<sup>25</sup>

Pacceka-buddhas however observe the uposatha with this teaching: “One should practice mental effacement, one should not stop practising” (*citta, sallekho kātabbo, vosānaṃ nāpajjitabban ti*), or else they merely say: “Today is the uposatha.” When observing the uposatha, they do so after they have assembled on the jewelled terrace at the foot of the Mañjūsaka tree on Mount Gandha, mādana.<sup>26</sup>

**1.2.2.3 The Sutta Nipāta Commentary** states that the above account was given by the Buddha himself, explaining the nature of pacceka-buddhas,<sup>27</sup> to Ānanda. This serves as an introduction to **the Khagga, visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 1.3/35-75), the discourse of the rhinoceros, beginning with the words, “Having laid down the rod toward all beings.” (SnA 52,3-8) [1.2.2.5]

Such accounts show that the common conception of the pacceka-buddha—such as that amongst some Sinhala Buddhists—as “a silent buddha” and one who lives in complete solitude is mistaken. However, due to their near-solitary nature and because they do not establish a dispensation (*sāsana*), we may call them “**solitary buddhas**.”

**1.2.2.4** The Pali Commentaries seem to agree that pacceka-buddhas do not meet the buddha, and arise only when no buddha has arisen.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the suttas nowhere record that the Buddha speaks of any contemporary pacceka-buddhas, but do mention pacceka-buddhas, such as 500 of them, in the past, dwelling on Mount Isigili, one of the 5 mountains around Rāja, gaha,<sup>29</sup> and that alms were offered to them; after the Buddha, pacceka-buddhas are most worthy of alms-offering.<sup>30</sup> [1.2.2.5]

However, as we have noted [1.2.2.2], the Sinhalese and the PTS commentarial tradition say that pacceka-buddhas *do* teach: “having ordained others, they are trained in the common moral conduct” (*aññe pabbājetvā ābhisamācārikaṃ sikkhāpentī*); but the Burmese and the Siamese commentarial traditions say that the pacceka-buddhas *neither* ordain others *nor* train them (*na aññe pabbājetvā ābhisamācārikaṃ sikkhāpentī*).

Such contradictory traditions support the view that the idea of pacceka-buddhas was a late teaching. In fact, the Buddhist *pacceka, buddha* doctrine closely parallels the Jain teachings on **patteyabuddha**. This could mean that either the Jain idea was assimilated by the early Buddhists into their idea of *pacceka, buddha*, or vice versa; or perhaps there is a third explanation, that both traditions developed their own

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of pacceka-buddhas never mention them as giving the going-forth or basic moral conduct to their pupils, Be and Se must be correct here. [SnA:B n380 states the opposite!] On this textual contradiction, see [1.2.2.4].

<sup>24</sup> *Buddhā sayañ ca bujjhanti pare ca bodhenti, pacceka, buddhā sayañ bujjhati na pare bodhenti* (SnA 2:51,21-23).

<sup>25</sup> *Nāḷaka, thera, sadiso ... pacceka, buddhānaṃ santuke ovādaṃ labhitvā paṭividda, pacceka, bodhi, ñāṇa ca* (AA 2:192,7-9).

<sup>26</sup> SnA 51,14-52,3. Gandha, mādana is one of the 5 mountains surrounding lake Anotattā (Akt *anavataptā*, “not heated”), prob is Mt Kailash today. **Anotattā** is prob Aral Sea, lying between Kazakhstan (north) and Uzbekistan (south). It began to shrink in the 1960s when Russian irrigation projects diverted rivers feeding it to cotton fields in Central Asia. By 2007, the lake had declined to 10% of its original size, splitting into 4 lakes. [Wiki] 14 Feb 2024.

<sup>27</sup> SD 22.5 (3); SD 34.8 (2.3); SD 36.2 (2.2.2).

<sup>28</sup> SnA:Ee 1:51, also Be Ce Se read here: *pacceka, buddhā buddhe appatvā buddhānaṃ uppajjana, kāle yeva up-pajjanti*. ApA:Be 1:150, similarly states: “But pacceka-buddhas do not arise at a time when buddhas arise” (*te pana buddhānaṃ uppajjana, kāle na uppajjanti*).

<sup>29</sup> M 116/3:68-71.

<sup>30</sup> **Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 142,5(2)) n, SD 1.9.

*pacceka, buddha* or *patteyabuddha* teachings from a common older source, perhaps an urtext.<sup>31</sup> A 4<sup>th</sup> possibility—which I think is the most likely—is that the early Buddhists found that the term *pacceka, -buddha* best describes the kind of arhat who is like the Buddha but does not establish a dispensation (*sāsana*).<sup>32</sup>

**1.2.2.5 R F Gombrich**, in his review of Kloppenberg, *The Paccekabuddha: A Buddhist ascetic* (1983), points out that in early Buddhism one might differentiate a buddha who discovered the Dharma for himself and taught it to others, that is, his disciples (*sāvaka*), making the teacher *sammā, sambuddha*. This raises the possibility of an interstitial (in-between) category, one who, like a buddha, discovers the Dharma for himself, but unlike him, does not teach it.<sup>33</sup>

**K R Norman**,<sup>34</sup> on the other hand, thinks that early Buddhism and Jainism learned of a category of buddhas (from another sect, teaching in a different dialect of Middle Indo-Aryan), and from whom they assimilated the idea into their own systems. There was a gap in between buddha and sāvaka, and it was into that gap that they located the pacceka-buddha. Gradually, they defined attributes until they exactly filled the gap as suggested by Gombrich.<sup>35</sup>

**1.2.2.6** Theravāda similarly shows signs of **inconsistency** in its attitude towards pacceka-buddhas. Although pacceka-buddhas do not arise in a buddha's time (*buddha, kāla*), pacceka-buddhas are mentioned in the following **canonical texts**:

- **Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16/2:142,16), SD 9  
Pacceka-buddhas, after death, are said to be worthy of stupas.<sup>36</sup>
- **Isigili Sutta** (M 116/68-71), SD 99.6  
The Buddha mentions that 500 pacceka-buddhas once lived on this hill.<sup>37</sup> [1.2.2.4]
- **Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 142/3:253-257), SD 1.9(3)  
After the Buddha, pacceka-buddhas are most worthy of offerings.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See J **Charpentier**, *Paccekabuddhageschichten*, Uppsala, 1980:35-44. See also M **Wiltshire**, *Ascetic Figures Before and in Early Buddhism*, Berlin & NY, 1990: xxxix f, 124-127, 130. Wiltshire proposes the thesis that *pacceka, -buddhas* were pre-Buddhist and pre-Jain “proto-śramaṇas” and that the idea later evolved into Buddhist *pacceka, -buddhas* and Jain *patteyabuddhas* (1990:xiii, xv f, 20, 46, 125, 128, 153, 156, 160, 165, 190, 202, 226 f, 239, 295). However, reviewers have pointed out (eg, **Collins**, “Problems with Pacceka-Buddhas” (rev of Wiltshire 1990), *Religion* 22,3, 1992b:271 f; **Norman**, rev of Wiltshire 1990. BSOAS 55,1 [1992](#):144 f), some serious problems with Wiltshire's hypothesis, and his grasp of the sources (and the languages of their composition) leaves much to be desired. [N Appleton, “[On pratyekabuddhas](#),” “[Pratyekabuddhas continued](#)” & “[Hanging out with solitary buddhas](#)”] 9 Sep 2025.

<sup>32</sup> For a study, see R Kloppenberg, *The Paccekabuddha: A Buddhist ascetic: A study of the concept of the pacceka-buddha in Pali canonical and commentarial literature*, Kandy, 1983, WH 305-7; [online](#) 2006. 14 Feb 2025.

<sup>33</sup> *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 74 1979:78 f.

<sup>34</sup> K R Norman, “The Pratyeka-buddha in Buddhism and Jainism” in Denwood & Piatigorsky (edd), *Buddhist Studies, Ancient and Modern* 4, 1983a: 100 f (= *Collected Papers II*, PTS, 1992f:246-248).

<sup>35</sup> Norman, 1983:101 f. Norman himself notes that his suggestion is similar to that of Fujita's theory: K Fujita, “One vehicle or three?” (tr L Hurvitz), *J of Indian Philosophy* 3 1975: 79-166.

<sup>36</sup> Cf parallels: DĀ 2 (T1.20b23 + T7 @ T1.200a24), EĀ 26.9 (T2.642b20), and A 4.245/2:245,17; cf also Kloppenberg 1974:23.

<sup>37</sup> See Analayo, “Paccekabuddhas in the Isigili-sutta and its Ekottarika-āgama parallel,” *Canadian J of Buddhist Studie* 6, 2010:5-36. Cf Analayo, “Pratyekabuddhas in the Ekottarika-āgama,” *J of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 8 2015: 10-27 esp 17.

<sup>38</sup> See also **S 3.20**/1:92,4 and its parallels SĀ 1233 (T2.337c8), SĀ 2.60 (T2.394b15), and EĀ 23.4 (T2.613a5) report the fruitfulness of giving to a pratyekabuddha in the past combined with the dire consequence of not having had



- **Khagga,visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 1.3/\*35-\*75/6-12)

One of the oldest Theravāda texts, suggesting that the pacceka-buddha concept was assimilated into Buddhism at a very early stage. [1.2.2.3]

- **Puggala,paññatti** (Pug 9.1/73,17-22)

This means that at the start of the Abhidhamma period, the Buddhists (like the Jains) still regarded both sammā,sambuddhas and pacceka-buddhas as being “self-enlightened) (*sāmaṇ*); their difference lie in their attributes and powers; not in the way of their awakening.

Only in the Commentaries do we find the difference of awakening (*bodhi*) being mentioned (eg SnA 51,21-23). [1.2.2.2]

**1.2.2.7** Norman, in his paper, “The pratyeka-buddha in Buddhism and Jainism” (1983:102), gives his conclusions as follows:

The fact that the concept of the pratyeka-buddha is pre-Buddhism and pre-Jainism is shown not only by its presence in both religions, but also by the fact that there are differences in the treatment of the stories about the pratyeka-buddhas in the oldest Buddhist and Jain texts of such a kind that they could only have arisen over a long period of time. The non-Jain nature of the concept is emphasized by the fact that the form of the term *patteya-buddha* is anomalous in Jain Prakrit, and must be a borrowing from another dialect, and probably another religion.

The philological evidence shows that it is possible for the terms *patteya-buddha*/*pacceka-buddha* to be derived from **pratyaya-buddha**. The form *pratyaya-buddha* allows an interpretation which might be thought to be more appropriate than the customary “individual buddha, buddha for himself” which is given for *pratyeka-buddha*.

The inconsistent and changing views about the pratyeka-buddha both in Jain and Buddhist texts indicate an attempt to assimilate a concept which was alien to early Jainism and Buddhism,<sup>39</sup> to find a place for pratyeka-buddhas in both religions, and to define more clearly the differences between them and the recognized buddhas of Jainism and Buddhism.

(Norman, “The pratyeka-buddha in Buddhism and Jainism,” 1983. Paragraphed with highlights)<sup>40</sup>

### 1.2.3 Nothing is worth clinging to

**1.2.3.1** We are used to the notion that (my) religion is *perfectly worded, powerfully preached, faithfully right and eternally true for us*. Yet, for all that, our lives remain unchanged; perhaps it has gotten worse in terms of self-view. Of course, that is not the way we see it. After all, we have pronounced what *our* religion is; it should prove us right. The reality is that we have created religion in our own image.

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an attitude of faith towards him; cf also **U 5.3**/50,16 where it is not not-giving to a pacceka-buddha but being disrespectful to him brings disastrous results. Another similar instance is at MĀ 66 (T1.508c26), which reports that in a past life Anuruddha had offered food to a pratyekabuddha, which brought abundant merit. Parallels to this in Chin canon incl T44 (T1.829b19), T190 (T3.928b21), and T203 (T4.470c25). In Pāli, versions of this tale are found only in **Comys**; cf. a brief ref at **ThaA** 3:72,23 (comy on Tha 910) and a more detailed version in **DhA** 4:120,23. For another account of offering to a pratyekabuddha: EĀ 52.2 (T2.824b18).

<sup>39</sup> The fact that the pacceka-buddhas were thought of as being inferior to the sammā,sambuddhas seem to have led to the idea that the word *pacceka* meant “inferior.” This prob accounts for such cpds as *pacceka-brahma* (a brahma without a retinue) in Pali, and pratyeka-brahman and *pratyeka-rājan* in Buddhist Skt.

<sup>40</sup> See K R Norman, “The pratyeka-buddha in Buddhism and Jainism,” in P Denwood & A Piatigorsky (edd), *Buddhist Studies, Ancient and Modern, (Collected Papers on South Asia, 4)*, London & Dublin: Curzon, 1983:92-106; repr Norman, *Collected Papers* 2, 1991:233-249.

When we look at our own image in the water of life, we see it echoes every act we do or don't do. We fall in love with this obedient follower. When we look at others, they do not repeat our actions like our watery follower. Those others must surely be wrong. We are but image-worshippers.<sup>41</sup>

**1.2.3.2** Difficulties and contradictions like the above teachings [1.2.2.7] can well teach us to be wise just as any well-taught doctrine can inspire us to be better persons. If and when we courageously and clearly reflect on how we view Dharma problems as mentioned, we will discover that we can have a better view of things (instead of being caught up in controversies or creating them).

The Buddha reminds us that “**Nothing is worth clinging to**” (*sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāyā*, literally, “all dharmas are not worth grasping”).<sup>42</sup> *Dhammā* (pl) here means “states, truths, teachings, views” or whatever we are experiencing (whether speech, action or thought). Let's apply this understanding to the *pacceka-buddha* controversy. We are here looking at ancient views that the early Buddhists and Jains struggled with.

**1.2.3.3** A **view** is simply a perception of something bigger, like looking at one side of a huge mountain. There are other views of the mountain, depending on where we stand. Then, when we are on the mountain itself or its peak, we have a broader view of it. Hence, there is no single right “view”; there is only a “vision” of the whole mountain, that is, the nature of the mountain and of our seeing [wisdom].

We may reflect right here and now—that reading this will end in a moment—how time flies. Often, we have read a passage or seen a word; then we have a new and better understanding of it. We have cast off an old empty shell; we know better.

**Time** is the value and priority we give to things in our life. If we love people, we always have time for them; if we love Dharma, we always have time for it—time for Dharma is the best time for our spiritual growth. When such time is spent with others, it is called **spiritual friendship**.

The truth is that when we leave this life, we cannot take anything with us except our karma, the good and bad we have done, along with our views. We cannot take with us anything we have, not even our body. Even our breath—what we take in—we have to give back.<sup>43</sup> We cannot bring with us any thing we have gotten or received—only the good that we have and have happily given away.<sup>44</sup> The more good we give away, the better and more of it we get.

### 1.3 ASPIRATION TO DISCIPLEHOOD

**1.3.1** The aspirant to **disciplehood** (*sāvakattā*)<sup>45</sup>—that is, arhathood-aspirant—is also ready, *if necessary*, to make sacrifices for Dharma in the literal sense (sacrifice of limb or life) (*atta,pariccāga*), and, *necessarily*, in the spiritual sense (giving up of self-view) and to show great compassion and skillful means to assert Dharma-spirited effort (*kattu,kamyatā*). The term *kattu,kamyatā* refers to one's willingness and ability to make every wholesome effort to *avoid evil, do good, purify the mind and attain awakening*. [3.1.2]

**1.3.2** It should be noted here that **arhathood** has both a broad sense and a narrow sense. The broad sense is the self-awakening that characterize all awakened beings, buddhas, pacceka-buddhas and arhats

<sup>41</sup> On the significance of the Narcissus myth, see SD 34.1 (2.5.2.2); SD 60.1d (7.7.5.4).

<sup>42</sup> This is the advice the Buddha gives Moggallāna at the close of **Pacalā S** (A 7.58), SD 4.11.

<sup>43</sup> On meditation as renunciation, see **Hālidakkāni S 1** (S 22.3/3:9-12), SD 10.12; **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (14.7); **Sexuality**, SD 31.7 (1.6.2).

<sup>44</sup> On the arhat's charity (*cāga*), see **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,27), SD 4.17.

<sup>45</sup> I use “disciplehood” for *sāvakattā*, the state of being the Buddha's direct disciple, esp arhathood. “Discipleship” has a broad sense of commitment to the Dharma-spirited life in the modern sense.

themselves. In the narrow sense, the arhat are those awakened by their own effort, or guided by the buddha, but are neither sammā-sambuddhas nor pacceka-buddhas (these are the disciples, *sāvaka*).

## 2 The duration of aspirant transformation

### **2.1 THE AEON (*KAPPA*)**

#### **2.1.1 The length of an aeon**

**2.1.1.1** The duration for aspirant transformation, attaining their respective awakened goals of buddhahood, pacceka-buddhahood or disciplehood, are described in terms of **incalculables** (*asaṅkheyya*) and **aeons** (*kappa*). **An aeon** is a “world-period”—technically, a “great aeon” (*mahā,kappa*) [2.1.3]—that is, a cycle of 4 phases of our universe [2.1.3.1]. At least 2 well-known metaphors are used in the suttas to illustrate the “incalculability” of an aeon, that is:

- **(Kappa) Pabbata Sutta**      S 15.5/2:182 f      the mountain metaphor;      SD 2.19 (9.2)
- **(Kappa) Sāsāpa Sutta**      S 15.6/2:183      the mustard seed metaphor.      SD 2.19 (9.2)

**2.1.1.2 The mountain metaphor** is explained by the Buddha, thus:

6 Suppose, bhikshu, there were a great mountain of rock, a yojana [league]<sup>46</sup> long, a yojana wide, and a yojana high, with neither holes nor crevices, one solid mass of rock. At the end of every hundred years, a person would stroke it just once with a piece of Kāsī cloth.<sup>47</sup> That great mountain of rock might, by this effort, be worn away and eliminated, but **the aeon**, bhikshu, would still not have come to an end. Bhikshu, so long is an aeon.

7 And for aeons of such length, we have wandered through so very many aeons, so very many hundreds of aeons, so very many thousands of aeons, so very many hundreds of thousands of aeons.

8 And what is the reason for this? Because, bhikshus, this cycle of lives (*saṃsāra*) is without discernible beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on shrouded by ignorance and fettered by craving. For such a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced suffering, anguish, and disaster, and filled the cemetery full. It is enough to feel revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be free from them. (S 15.5/2:182 f)

**2.1.1.3 The mustard seed metaphor** is worded thus:

Suppose, bhikshu, there were a city with iron walls a yojana long, a yojana wide, and a yojana high, filled with mustard seeds as dense as a topknot. At the end of every hundred years, a person would remove just *one* mustard seed from there. That great heap of mustard seeds might, by this effort, be depleted and eliminated, but **the aeon** would still not have come to an end. Bhikshu, so long is an aeon.

[The rest reads just as paragraphs 7 + 8 of the mountain metaphor above.] (S 15.6/2:183)

<sup>46</sup> A “league” (*yojana*) is the distance travelled by a yoke of oxen, ie, about 7 miles (11.3 km), and is divided into 3 *gāvutā* (DhA 2:13; cf DhA 1:108). See SD 47.8 (2.4.4.1); also Dh 60, J 5:37.

<sup>47</sup> “With a piece of Kāsī cloth,” *kāsikā vatthēna*. This cannot be silk since it was not found in India in the Buddha’s time. Comy explains that this is very delicate cloth made of thread spun from 3 cotton fibres. (SA 2:158,3-5)

### 2.1.2 How many aeons have passed?

**2.1.2.1** Two other suttas in the **Anamatagga Saṃyutta** (S 15) employ metaphorical language to help us imagine the number of aeons that have since passed (from our time); that is, the (Kappa) Sāvaka Sutta (S 15.7) and the (Kappa) Gaṇḍa Sutta (S 15.8).

**2.1.2.2 The (Kappa) Sāvaka Sutta** (S 15.7) gives an interesting simile in terms of 4 monks trying to recollect the world-cycles that have since passed. Suppose that there were **4 disciples** (*sāvaka*), each living for 100 years. Every day each of them would recollect 100,000 world-cycles.<sup>48</sup> Even if they were able to do so to the end of their days, they would still not have recollect all the world-cycles that have passed. (S 15.7/2:182 f)

**2.1.2.3 The (Kappa) Gaṇḍa Sutta** (S 15.8) records the Buddha pointing to the number of sand-particles that there are in the Ganges banks from its source right down to where it enters the great ocean. Even very much more than all this huge number of sand particles is the number of world-cycles that have passed. (S 15.8/2:183)

The aeon, despite its “incalculability,” is still finite; the universe evolves in 4 stages [2.2.5.3], we may not know its beginning, but we can get out of it, that is, we can end it for ourselves.

### 2.1.3 The great aeon (*mahā,kappa*)

**2.1.3.1 A great aeon (*mahā,kappa*)** (often spoken of as simply *kappa*) consists of **4 incalculables**—that is, the 4 phases of the universe.<sup>49</sup> **The 4 phases of the cosmic cycle** are described in the (**Catukka**) **Kappa Sutta** (A 4.156),<sup>50</sup> as follows:

- (1) the universe rolls back [collapses],<sup>51</sup>
- (2) it remains in a rolled-back (stable) state,<sup>52</sup>
- (3) it rolls open [expands],<sup>53</sup> and
- (4) it remains in a rolled-open state [expanded (stable) state],<sup>54</sup>

#### modern parallels

- a “big crunch”;
- a black hole;
- a “big bang”;
- a steady state.

This whole 4-stage world-cycle is called **an aeon** (*kappa*; Skt *kalpa*), and each of these 4 phases is called **an incalculable** (*asaṅkheyya*) or incalculable aeon (*asaṅkheyya kappa*), and is described by the Sutta as “cannot easily be reckoned as so many years, or so many hundreds of years, or so many thousands of years, or so many hundreds of thousands of years.”<sup>55</sup> This should not be confused with the term “incalculable” as a time-period of itself [2.1.4.1].

<sup>48</sup> Comy: One would recollect 100,000 world-cycles beginning with the stable phase (incalculable) (*ṭhita-ṭ, ṭhānato*); the 2<sup>nd</sup> would recollect from there for another 100,000 world-cycles; and so on, totalling 400,000 world-cycles. (SA 2:158,11-14)

<sup>49</sup> Our universe is only *one* amongst numerous others, separate universes in a multiverse. See SD 2.19 (9.5).

<sup>50</sup> A 4.156/2:142; see SD 2.19 (8.3).

<sup>51</sup> “Rolls back,” *saṃvaṭṭati*, ie, closes into itself, a collapsing universe, a “big crunch.”

<sup>52</sup> “Remains in a rolled-back state,” *saṃvaṭṭato* [vl *saṃvaṭṭate*] *tiṭṭhati*, ie, a collapsed universe or “black hole.”

<sup>53</sup> “Rolls open,” *vivaṭṭati*, ie, closes into itself, an evolving universe, a “big bang.”

<sup>54</sup> “Remains in a rolled-open state,” *vivaṭṭato* [vl *vivaṭṭate*] *tiṭṭhati*, ie, an expanded or steady-state universe.

<sup>55</sup> See SD 2.19 (9.4).

**2.1.3.2** This description clearly reflects a kind of “**pulsating**” **universe**, a concept with which we are very familiar today. Such a universe, despite being said to be “incalculable”<sup>56</sup> and comprising of 4 “incalculables,” is still *finite*. Since the aeon (or the universe) will end at some point in time, so too will an incalculable.

The connotation of this metaphorical language is to remind us not to take “all our time” to see the way out of suffering. After all, **time** is what keeps us alive and suffering in samsara.

#### **2.1.4 Incalculable (*asaṅkheyya*) and aeon (*kappa*)**

**2.1.4.1** In the case of **the buddhahood-aspirant**, the duration of learning for awakening will be at least be 4 incalculables (*asaṅkheyya*) and 100,000 aeons (*kappa*).

**The pacceka-buddhahood-aspirant** will take 2 incalculables and 100,000 aeons.

And the duration for **the disciplehood-aspirant** varies, depending on whether one aspires to be a chief disciple (*agga,sāvaka*) (1 incalculable and 100,000 aeons) or a great disciple (*mahā,sāvaka*) (100,000 aeons).<sup>57</sup>

Here, the term **incalculable** (*asaṅkheyya*) should not be confused with *asaṅkheyya,kappa* (which is often referred to also as an “incalculable”). In the phrase, “4 incalculables and 100,000 aeons” and similar expressions, **incalculable** is *not* a stage of an aeon but a time-period of its own and is “incalculably” longer than an aeon. It can get more confusing here as the scholiasts delve into astronomical numbers.<sup>58</sup> So what is suggested here can only be tentative.

In terms of aspiration time, especially where “incalculables” and “aeons” are used, an **incalculable** is a fabulously long period of time. The most common values given for an incalculable are 10<sup>51</sup>, 10<sup>59</sup>, or 10<sup>63</sup> years.<sup>59</sup> Childers says that an incalculable is “10,000,000<sup>20</sup> or 1 followed by 110 cyphers” (DPL 59).

All such aspirations will take an astronomically long time, during which the aspirant lives *learning from suffering in a meaningful and purposeful manner*. From physical and emotional sufferings, the aspirant learns the nature of suffering that is the aggregates—the true nature of *form, feeling, perception and consciousness*, seeing them ever more clearly over time as the working of **conditionality**.

**2.1.4.2** We will here briefly look at the ability of people to recollect past lives (their own and those of others). Buddhaghosa, in his **Visuddhi,magga** states the following:

Six classes of people are able to recall past existences: outside sectarians, ordinary disciples, great disciples, chief disciples, pacceka buddhas, and buddhas. Of these, **sectarians** recall 40 aeons and no more. Why not? Because of their weak understanding; they at best have a weak understanding of the classification of mind and matter (*nāma,rūpa,pariccheda*). **Ordinary disciples** recall a 100 or a 1000 aeons, because their deep understanding. **The 80 great disciples** recall a 100,000 aeons. **The 2 chief disciples** recall an incalculable and a 100,000 aeons. **Pacceka-buddhas** recall 2 incalculables and 100,000 aeons, for to such extent carries their aspiration. As to the buddhas, there is no limit to their recollection. (Vism 13.15 f/3411)

<sup>56</sup> See SD 2.19 (9.3).

<sup>57</sup> **MA 2:155**: The aspirations to disciplehood of **Puṇṇa** (foremost of monks who are Dharma-speakers, A 1:23) took 100,000 world-periods; **Sāriputta** 100,000 world-periods and 1 incalculable (*puṇṇa-t,thero kappa,sata,sahas-sarā abhinīhāra,sampanno sāriputta-t,thero pi kappa,sata,sahass’ādhikarā ekam-asaṅkheyyarā*, MA 2:155,10-12; AA 1:153,17 + 21). Sāriputta took longer for his aspiration to fruit because he (and Moggallāna) aspired to the position of chief disciple (*agga,mahā,sāvaka*), ie, as the Buddha’s right-hand disciple (and left-hand disciple).

<sup>58</sup> Further confusion may arise when “incalculable aeon” or “uncountable kalpa” is used in place of simply, “incalculable.”

<sup>59</sup> D Keown, *A Dict of Buddhism*, Oxford, 2003: kalpa.

## 2.2 CONDITIONS FOR ASPIRATION TO BUDDHAHOOD

### 2.2.0 The 8 prerequisites (*aṭṭha dhamma, samodhānā*)

The **Buddha,vaṁsa** and the Commentaries list a set of 8 prerequisites<sup>60</sup> for an aspirant to buddhahood so that he is able to successfully make the initial resolve (*pubba,patthāna* or *mūla,paṇidhāna*), namely: [1.1.1.4]

<i>manussataṁ līṅga, sampatti</i>	(1) The human state, (2) the attainment of gender,
<i>hetu satthāra, dassanaṁ</i>	(3) the cause, (4) seeing the teacher,
<i>pabbajjā guṇa, sampatti</i>	(5) going forth, (6) attainment of virtues,
<i>adhikāro ca chandatā</i>	(7) act of merit and (8) will-power—
<i>aṭṭha, dhamma, samodhānā</i>	with these 8 things coming together
<i>abhinihāro samijjhati.</i>	the aspiration succeeds.

(B 2.59/9 = J 1:14; B:H IIA.59/15)<sup>61</sup>

The 8 prerequisites for buddhahood aspirants have been explained in **the Sutta, nipāta Commentary, the Udāna Commentary, the Jātaka Commentary, the Buddha,vaṁsa Commentary** and **the Cariyā, -piṭaka Commentary**, and a summary follows.<sup>62</sup>

### 2.2.1<sup>63</sup> The human state (*manussatā*)

**2.2.1.1** The aspirant to buddhahood succeeds only when he is a **human**, not one born as a naga,<sup>64a</sup> suparna,<sup>65</sup> or even a deva, a brahma,<sup>66</sup> and so on. This is because such non-human states lack the 3 wholesome root-causes (*ahetuka, bhāva*) and 8 prerequisites [2.2.0].<sup>67</sup> If one is a woman, or a non-human, such as a deva, one should first aspire to be a human male. As a human male, having done good such as giving, one should then dedicate the merit, resolving for the right conditions for aspiration to buddhahood and so on.<sup>68</sup> [2.2.0]

**2.2.1.2** The term *manussatā* is derived from *manussa*, “human,” + *-tā*, a suffix for a state, that is, as an abstract noun such as “-ness, -ity, -hood.” We can thus translate *manussatā* as “the human state, humanness, **humanity**.” Similarly, we have rendered *sāvakatā* (the state of a disciple) both as “disciple-

<sup>60</sup> The term *aṭṭha dhamma, samodhānā* lit means “combination of 8 conditions.”

<sup>61</sup> Also at MA 4:122; AA 2:15; UA 133; ItA 1:121; SnA 1:48, 51; ThaA 1:11 f; J 1:14, 44; ApA 16, 48, 140, 142; BA 91, 271; CA 16, 282; DhsA 32; VbhA 437; NetA:Be 159; Upās:Ce 149.

<sup>62</sup> SnA 148 f; UA 133; J 1:14, 16-33; BA 91 f; CA 276-332.

<sup>63</sup> This last digit is *italicized* to denote the numbering sequence of the 8 prerequisites of Buddhahood-aspiration.

<sup>64</sup> Naga (*nāga*), a serpent spirit or Indian dragon; some of whom are able to shape-shift [foll n]; SD 27.5a (6.2.0) n. The best known *nāga* was Mucalinda: SD 27.5a (6.2.1.1); SD 63.1.

<sup>65</sup> Suparna, anglicization of *supaṇṇa* (“well-winged”); in ancient Indian mythology, a fabulous harpy-like being with bird-like lower torso and wings, and a human upper torso. The most famous suparna was called **Garuḍa**. Suparnas were the mortal enemies of the **nagas** (*nāga*) [prec n]. Historically, they were prob the falcon-worshipping or falcon-rearing Iranians who conquered the Naga territories of north-west India. Sometimes, they might refer to the ancient dragon-worshipping Chinese. Some believe that they were a race of intelligent Dragons in the family of Dinosaurs, that became extinct during the dawn of human civilizations. SD 27.6a (6.2.0) n.

<sup>66</sup> *Deva* usu refers to celestial beings of the sense-world, and whose form is characterized by pure light. *Brahmā* are the celestial beings of the form heavens and formless heavens, characterized by pure energy.

<sup>67</sup> The wholesome root-conditions are *non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion*. Cf VbhA 402, 417, 419; Vism 456.

<sup>68</sup> SnA 1:48, 18-23.



hood,” the state of being the Buddha’s direct disciple [1.3, 3.1], and as “discipleship,” an inspired commitment to Dharma [3.2]

The term **humanity** is especially significant in connoting the spirit of the person who is a buddha-aspirant. Buddhas arise among humans *not* because it is the highest existential state, which would be the “peak of existence” (*bhav’agga*), a superhuman state of mental freedom. Thus, it is stated in **the Arahata Sutta 1** (S 22.76)<sup>69</sup> and **the Bhaddaji Sutta** (A 5.170)<sup>70</sup> (among others)<sup>71</sup> that the foremost state of existence is the base or attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*n’eva,saññā,nāsaññā*), the highest of the 4 formless realms and of the 31 states of existence.<sup>72</sup>

**2.2.1.3** Buddhas arise *only* amongst humans because **humanity**, that is, human beings, firstly, have the ability to think and reason, see conditionality, and distinguish between good and evil, and choose the wholesome path.

Secondly, humans undergo both suffering and pleasure, and are able to understand, in the long run, their difference and its significance.

Thirdly, humans have a mind embodied as the 5 sense-faculties, which are both the tool and the personal state of being that transforms itself by rising out of craving and ignorance to attain freedom and awakening.

Fourthly, humans—with the benefit of the first 3 reasons—are capable of wholesomely relating to others, that is, both to other *humans* and to *life* as a whole, and appreciating the value of life and living. Hence, buddhas do *not* “die for the world”—loud but delusive words that signifying nothing. Buddhas **live** so that beings *live* better lives and awaken to mental freedom.

Buddhas *die* simply because they have arisen as humans in the world to manifest awakening of which only humans can attain. To exist is to be impermanent: the buddha’s body is impermanent, capable of suffering and is nonself—just like any living being. Awakening is expressed through the buddha-mind, of which we are all capable of attaining.

Other beings, too, can attain awakening, but they must evolve through humanity to experience *impermanence, suffering and nonself*, and by fully understanding this reality, awaken to buddhahood. Hence, the buddha is may be said to the ideal of human awakening.

**2.2.1.4** The word **manussa** (“human”; Skt *mānuṣa*),<sup>73</sup> in the Sanskrit tradition, derives from *manu*, the Vedic term for the first man; hence the mythical derivation, *manuno apaccā ti manussā*, “they are humans (*manussa*) because they are the offspring of Manu.” The Ancients (early Buddhist fathers) however prefer: *manaso ussannatāya manussā*, “they are humans because of the prominence of mind,”<sup>74</sup> with alternative readings, *manassa ussannatāya manussā*,<sup>75</sup> and *mano ussannamassā ti manusso* (sg), “one is human because of the prominence of mind.”<sup>76</sup>

The early Buddhists see the human state as the “**prominence**” (*ussanata*) of the mind; that is, we rely on the minds or intention by which we act creatively or productively, unwholesomely or wholesomely. The mind defines the moral quality of our being. The emphasis on the mind here clearly shows that a human is capable of mental and spiritual cultivation, that is, to see the true nature of reality.

<sup>69</sup> S 22.76,10/3:83,14 (SD 26.7); SD 40a.12 (3.5.2).

<sup>70</sup> A 5.170/3:202.17 (SD 95.4); SD 57.17 (2.8.3).

<sup>71</sup> See A 4.75/2:79,5, 4.75/2:79,5; Vbh 426,8 and often in Comys.

<sup>72</sup> On the 31 states of existence, see SD 1.7 App; SD 57.10 (2.2).

<sup>73</sup> The form *manusa* occurs at It 94; Pv 2.9,21 + 56. Pl *mānusā* Sn 361, 644; Pv 2.22,7. The rare form *manuja* is found at Sn 458. As neut *mānusaṃ*, “mankind, humankind,” Pv 2,22,3.

<sup>74</sup> MA 2:37; KhpA 123; UA 140,16; ItA 1:128; NcA 69.

<sup>75</sup> SnA 1:300; VvA 18, 19; BA 32; VbhA 454.

<sup>76</sup> Only in the early Pali dictionary **Abhidhānap-p, padīpikā** (Abhp:Be 164).

The prominence or advantage placed on **the human mind** rather than *the human body* means that it is not speciesism (the assumption of human superiority, leading to the exploitation of animals and other beings). It means that of all the existential states—the celestial, the human, the asura, the preta, the animal, and hell-being—humans have the greatest capacity for not only using their mind, but also cultivating it to rise above its dependence on the physical senses to gain spiritual liberation.

Moreover, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 3 trainings—that of **moral conduct**—is the cultivation of the body by way of restraint and refinement of *speech and bodily action*. This is done out of regard for other beings and the environment. This should not be done merely as a “moral duty” but out of love (*mettā*), with a joyful mind in a simple appreciation of being<sup>77</sup> of others, human and non-human. Hence, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 5 precepts is that of *the value and respect for life*. Life means we can grow physically, mentally and spiritually.

Furthermore, of all religions, only early Buddhism speaks of **nonself**, less so in a religious or philosophical manner, but more so as a spiritual determination to see and show the meaninglessness and disadvantages, even dangers, of self-centredness, including speciesism. Psychologically, nonself means that there is no fixed or eternal state called human, celestial, asura, preta, animal or hell-being. Even though they each may seem to be abiding states for some, they are all conditioned states that depend on how well their minds are used to facilitate the right conditions for spiritual development whenever such conditions appear. In this sense, we can meaningfully speak of nonself as the basis for an existential spiritual ecology (that is, we must turn away from “ego” and cultivate and respect the “eco”).

**2.2.1.5 The human state** or the human world is the ideal place for the aspiration to buddhahood because it straddles midway, as it were, between the heavens (where devas and brahmas have wholesome conditions but are too drawn into their heavenly pleasures and state) and the subhuman states of deprivation, suffering, downfall, hell (*apāya duggati vinipāta niraya*) (that is, the asuras, pretas, animals, and hell-beings).<sup>78</sup> Therein beings are so caught up with *greed, hate, delusion and fear* that it is very difficult for them to attain even the human state, much less aspire to buddhahood.

The human state, on the other hand, is the best condition for cultivating the wholesome qualities of non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), non-delusion (*amoha*) and moral courage (*vesārajja*). The last, **moral courage**, is mentioned because it is the basis for the diligence and determination to face suffering and overcome it, and to bring wisdom and joy to others.<sup>79</sup> It is another term for *kattu, kamyatā*. [1.3]

Moral courage also means that we are willing to set aside the accumulation of “merits” (*puñña*)—merits are for averting suffering and attaining good rebirths—and to be joyfully inspired to cultivate the “wholesome” (*kusala*): *faith, moral virtue, wide learning, energy and wisdom*.<sup>80</sup> These qualities build up our intrepidity, resolute courage, to learn from **suffering** so that we understand what suffering really is, why it arises, how we can end it, and live that path for ending suffering for ourselves and for the many. This courage is called **humanity**.

## **2.2.2 The attainment of gender (*liṅga, sampatti*)**

**2.2.2.1** As a human, the aspirant must be a male. The aspiration does not succeed for women or for eunuchs, or for those of indeterminate gender, or for hermaphrodites.<sup>81</sup> This is regarded as the incompleteness of characteristics. For women in traditional Chinese society, their 3 stages of life is not a very

<sup>77</sup> “Appreciation of being,” ie, the fact that they are living beings.

<sup>78</sup> The 4 “states of deprivation” (*apāya*), a shorthand for *apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ nirayaṃ*, ie, respectively, the pretas, animals, asuras and hell-beings. See SD 2.22 (1.7).

<sup>79</sup> On moral courage, see SD 28.9a (3).

<sup>80</sup> See *Sāraṅga S* (A 5.101), SD 28.9a(3).

<sup>81</sup> Among the benefits (*ānisaṃsa*) of the Buddhahood aspirant is that “he will be reborn as neither as a female nor a hermaphrodite” (*itthi, bhāvaṃ na gacchanti ubhato, vyañjana, paṇḍakā*, CA 330,20).

happy one, even as they age; so too with women, especially, in ancient India and to some extent in modern India, too.<sup>82</sup>

According to the Confucian notion of the “3 obediences” (Chinese 三從 *sāncóng*), women have to lead a servile life, obeying the men in their lives. Before marriage (when young), a woman must obey her father; during marriage, she has to obey her husband; and after her husband’s death, she must obey her son (禮記 *lǐjì*, “Book of Rites”).<sup>83</sup>

Although any human or divine being with the right conditions can awaken to the path, only a human male can become buddha. Hence, **the Bahu,dhātuka Sutta** (M 115) and **the Aṅguttara Nikāya** (Eka,nipāta ch 15 *Aṭṭhāna*) speak of “5 impediments” for women, that is, it is “impossible and inopportune” (*aṭṭhānam ... anavakāso*) that a woman could be *a buddha, a universal monarch, Sakra, Māra or Brahmā*.<sup>84</sup> In other words, there is neither possibility nor opportunity for a woman to become **an arhat, fully self-awakened one** in any patriarchal society.

**2.2.2.2 Advocates of feminism**<sup>85</sup> may try to counter patriarchy; but patriarchy had persisted, persists today, and will still persist in yet subtler or grosser widespread forms.<sup>86</sup> Patriarchy persists because it serves a psychological function. By requiring us to forego love for the sake of power (via control and hierarchy), patriarchy apparently shields us from the challenges and vulnerability of loving and works as a defense mechanism against loss or lack. Patriarchy is especially dominant in power-based systems whether it is religion or politics.<sup>87</sup>

Patriarchy causes many men to experience or interpret their affability as well as vulnerability as weak and shameful. It causes some women to perceive self-confidence and self-care as selfish—or expressing their mind and heart, one that stands up for what they really think or feel, as aggressive. Patriarchy thus tends to reinforce stereotypes (eg, masculinity or machismo) that one might consciously disagree with.<sup>88</sup>

In a positive way, feminism helps in exposing and addressing the violence, falsity, frailty of patriarchy, and the flaws and disadvantages of fixing gender roles (that is denying women roles outside of culturally defined ones). Unaddressed, this only leads to **sexism**, which is discrimination against or subjugation of women or men on account of gender and sexuality. Sexism is inherent to patriarchy, but it

<sup>82</sup> See Dharma,śāstra, eg Vāśiṣṭha 5.1-2; Baudhāyana 2.2.3.44-45; Viṣṇu 25.12-13; Manu 9.2-3.

<sup>83</sup> See SD 66.13 (3.7.1.3). On the traditional lot of Indian women, see SD 54.2c (1.2.1.3); also K Muta & S Gregory, “Images of the family in Meiji journals,” *US-Japan Women’s J, Eng Supple* 7 1994:53-82 (58 f). On religious attitudes towards women in Japan, see also R Jaffe, “Meiji religious policy, Sōtō Zen, and the clerical marriage problem,” *Japanese J of Religious Studies* 25,1-2 1998:45-85.

<sup>84</sup> **M 115**,15(12)/3:65), SD 29.1a; **A 1.279-283**/1:28. The fact is that so far only men have become buddhas, but this does not mean that a woman cannot become buddha in due course. However, in time, she would be reborn as a man.

<sup>85</sup> **Feminism** is the belief and activity in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the West, feminism occurs worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests. A similar term, **femininism**, is the promotion or appreciation of femininity or “womanliness,” and is the direct counterpart to masculinism [F Christensen, “Masculinism,” in T Honderich (ed), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), 2005:562 f]. The concept goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. It is a philosophy of elevating and attempting to live by traits or virtues that accentuate the femininity of women, while still supporting intellectual equality between the sexes. It is acceptance of womanhood as strength. Feminism specifically refers to the advocacy of the rights and interests of women and girls, with the goal of gender equality, and is the direct counterpart to masculinism (Christensen 2005).

<sup>86</sup> See C Enloe, “The persistence of patriarchy,” *New Internationalist* 1 Oct 2017.

<sup>87</sup> See eg C Gilligan & N Snider, *Why Does Patriarchy Persist?* Polity Press, 2018.

<sup>88</sup> See Naomi Snider, “Patriarchy hurts men and women—how can therapy help us get rid of it?” *International Psychoanalytical Assoc*, nd. [IPA] 12 Feb 2025.

can also occur in powerful women. However, since both feminism (and matriarchy) and patriarchy are *sex-based*, they each may lead to ideas of stereotypes; that our *sex* is the basis for our roles and rights.

**2.2.2.3 The Saññoga S** (A 7.48)<sup>89</sup> records the Buddha as exhorting us not to see ourselves merely as sexual beings; we will then be incomplete and insecure.<sup>90</sup>

**2 A woman** considers her own womanly faculty, her own womanly ways, her womanly looks, her womanly pride, her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments. She is aroused by them and delights in them.

2.2 Thus aroused, she considers another in terms of a man's faculty, his manly ways, his manly looks, his manly pride, his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments.

She is aroused by them and delights in them.

2.3 Thus aroused, she desires external union, and she desires the (physical) pleasure and (mental) joy arising on account of such a union.

Bhikshus, attached to her womanliness, she enters into union with men.

2.4 In this way, bhikshus, **a woman does not rise above her womanliness.**

The same is then said of **a man**, with the appropriate changes in context:

"Attached to his manliness, he enters into union with women.

In this way, bhikshus, **a man does not rise above his manliness."**

**2.2.2.4** Interestingly, the suttas do *not* mention the practice of aspiring for buddhahood at all; the idea is post-Buddha. Siddhattha, feeling disillusioned with worldly life (represented by the 4 sights),<sup>91</sup> renounces his worldly status to seek freedom from *decay, disease and death*. Using and building on traditional yogic meditation, he attains dhyana, and with his calm and clear mind directly sees into the true reality of *impermanence, suffering and nonself*, thus awakening to total spiritual freedom, nirvana.

Anyone, using the Buddha's teachings and methods can awaken to spiritual freedom. Thus the implication here is not that a woman cannot become fully self-awakened *in a future life* but that the Buddha is always male—not as a Dharma teaching but rather as a reflection of social reality. [2.2.2.2]

When a woman is determined to aspire for buddhahood, she will be reborn as a male, and *he* will progress on the path to buddhahood. This is simply because, despite feminism and sexual harmony being justified, **patriarchy** will persist in some form. This was (and is) certainly the case in India, where authority is, as a rule, in the hands of men (as noted above).

According to later texts, such as **Buddhavaṃsa**, if a woman resolves to attain buddhahood in the presence of the Buddha, her resolution does not succeed (ie, the sutta compilers state that she does not receive the prediction of future buddhahood). For the resolve to succeed, the aspirant must be a male renunciant.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> A 7.48/4:57-59 (SD 8.7). Also SD 61a (2.4.4.3 (11)).

<sup>90</sup> On the dichotomy of male and female, see SD 52.1 (18.4.1.1).

<sup>91</sup> **The 4 sights** are said to be "divine messengers" (*deva, dūta*), ie, devas appearing as the 4 visions to the young Siddhattha. They are actually metaphorical or visual representations or signs (*nimitta*) of the fundamental universal realities of decay (the old man), disease (the sick man) and death (the corpse). Freedom from these 3 "great evils" is represented by the vision of the renunciant, letting go of the worldliness by cultivating the mind. See **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,2.1-2.14) + SD 49.8b (1.0.4.4 + 1.0.4.5).

<sup>92</sup> BA 91 f. **MĀ 181**, a Chin parallel of M 115, omits the section on the inabilities of women. However, the declaration that a woman cannot become a buddha is found at **T17.713b20-22**, another Chin parallel of M 115. It

**2.2.2.5** As a woman, one should dedicate merits for rebirth as a male living in the right conditions for aspiring for buddhahood and so on.<sup>93</sup> Such was the case with wise **Sumedha** (the bodhisattva);<sup>94</sup> for having gone forth at the feet of the Buddha Dīpaṅkara, he was capable of attaining arhathood in that same existence.<sup>95</sup>

Although it is said that Sumedha “was capable of attaining arhathood” we are not told that he actually became one as a disciple of Dīpaṅkara. This probably means that Sumedha has attained at least the path as a streamwinner; which means that he would never be reborn in any suffering state. This is in fact the ideal condition for his cultivation for buddhahood.

This should not be interpreted as Sumedha “postponing” arhathood since he did not aspire for it. He aspired for Buddhahood which meant that he had to take that *path* to experience and vanquish “the suffering of **the all** [all that is suffering]” (*sabba,dukkha upaccagum*),<sup>96</sup> that is, courageously face and overcome all suffering (*sabba,dukkhātikkantā nāma honti*).<sup>97</sup> The “all” (*sabba*)<sup>98</sup> refers to the roots of suffering, craving, the activity of the formations aggregate (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*) arising in our existence, and the aggregate of form (*rūpa-k,khandha*). Through the all, our sense-faculties and sense-objects arise the aggregates of feelings (*vedanā-k,khandha*), of perception (*saññā-k,khandha*) and of consciousness (*viññāṇa-k,khandha*). [2.2.8.2]

### 2.2.3 The cause (*hetu*)

**2.2.3.1 The cause** is the attainment of the supporting conditions for arhathood. The buddhahood aspirant should have fulfilled all the necessary conditions such as the perfections (*pāramī*) [1.1.1.1], culminating in the attaining of arhathood in his last life. Such was the case with the wise Sumedha; for having gone forth at the feet of the Buddha Dīpaṅkara, he was capable of attaining arhathood in that same existence [2.2.2.5].<sup>99</sup>

**2.2.3.2** Understandably, to become a buddha one must first become an arhat. The suttas tell us that the Buddha is himself **an arhat** (*arahata*), thus:

(1) **The Sambuddha Sutta** (S 22.58). Both the Buddha and the arhats are said to similarly awaken “on account of revulsion towards ⟨the 5 aggregates⟩, through dispassion [letting go], through cessation (of suffering).” Hence, the Buddha and the arhats awaken in the very same way; it is a state of spiritual freedom, not some *status* of a supreme being. The only difference between the two is that the Buddha is the first to awaken, and the arhats awaken after the Buddha (*anubuddha*).<sup>100</sup>

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also occurs in a sutra quoted in Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣā (T26.502bi6-i8), and in \*Śāriputrābhidharma Śāstra (T28.600bio-i2). See A:B n157; Bodhi, *All-embracing Net of Views*, [1978:262-264] 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Kandy, 2007:251-253.

<sup>93</sup> See **Jina,kāla,mālī** (Ratana,paññā, 16<sup>th</sup> cent Siam), where it is said that our Buddha was a woman in a distant past life (Jink:J 1978:3); see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004: §18.

<sup>94</sup> Sumedha was a past birth of Gotama Buddha in which he made his vow to attain Buddhahood. He did this at the feet of the Buddha Dīpaṅkāra and received the prediction or confirmation of future Buddhahood. (B 2.34-69)

<sup>95</sup> SnA 1:49,23-27.

<sup>96</sup> **M 130**,34/3:187, SD 2.23.

<sup>97</sup> MA 4:238.

<sup>98</sup> **S 35.23**, SD 7.1.

<sup>99</sup> SnA 1:48,29-49,4; BA 91,30 f; CA 282,24-26.

<sup>100</sup> S 22.58,5/1:190 f (SD 49.10).

(2) **The Pavāraṇā Sutta** (S 8.7). The Buddha discovers the path of awakening for himself, and then teaches it to others for their own liberation. In terms of awakening, there is no difference between the Buddha and the arhats, only that the Buddha is the pathfinder, the arhats those who walk the path; both have attained nirvana.<sup>101</sup>

Hence, the Buddha declares:

<i>tumhehi kiccam ātappaṃ</i>	You yourself should make the effort:	
<i>akkhātāro tathāgatā</i>	the tathagatas [buddhas] are teachers—	
<i>paṭipannā pamokkhanti</i>	meditators who practise the path	
<i>jhāyino māra,bandhanā</i>	are freed from Māra’s bonds.	(Dh 296) <sup>102</sup>

**2.2.3.3** Since there is **the Buddha**—we are living in his dispensation (*sāsana*)—we do not need to become *the* Buddha; he is historically the *first* to arise in our epoch in this world-system. Broadly speaking, we need not become a buddha but an arhat. It’s like we each already have a father and a mother; we do not need to usurp the status of our parent. We can however become a parent with wisdom and compassion for our children.

For most of us, especially with our worldly priorities and commitments, we will claim that it is very difficult, even impossible, to be an arhat, what to say of being a buddha. We also understand that taking such an aspiration merely as a ritual or vow would not work. The aspiration to buddhahood needs the confirmation from a living buddha himself [2.2.3.1, 2.2.4.1]. Merely to “vow” for buddhahood as a ritual or vow is clearly a fetter that prevents us from ever attaining the path, even as a streamwinner.<sup>103</sup>

## **2.2.4 Seeing the teacher (*satthāra, dassana*)**

**2.2.4.1** “Seeing the teacher” means to be in the presence of the teacher, the Buddha. The aspiration only succeeds when it is made before a living Buddha. The aspiration does not succeed when it is made after the Buddha has passed into parinivana, whether before a shrine, at the foot of the Bodhi tree, in front of an image, or in the presence of pacceka-buddhas or the Buddha’s disciples. Why? Because they lack the power to confirm the aspiration. The aspiration only succeeds when made before the Buddha, for he alone possesses spiritual power adequate to the loftiness of the aspiration.

Why? Though knowing those beings who are fit and unfit for buddhahood,<sup>104</sup> because they lack the knowledge of the delimitation of karma and its fruitions (*kamma, vipāka, pariccheda, ñāṇa*), these witnesses are incapable of declaring the success of the aspiration.

Wise Sumedha’s successful resolution was made before Dīpaṅkara Buddha.<sup>105</sup>

**2.2.4.2** Why should the aspirant meet the living historical Buddha himself? How do we really know what we are aspiring to if we do not see for ourselves the kind of awakened person we are aspiring to be? Otherwise—not seeing a living buddha ourselves—we can only rely on the religious views, theologies and philosophies that have conditioned us. Then, we are only aspiring to what those unawakened worldlings have thought out or fabricated. We are then following Buddhism, not **Buddha Dharma**.

<sup>101</sup> S 8.7/1:190-192 (SD 49.11).

<sup>102</sup> Dh 296; SD 26.3 (4.3.4); SD 39.5 (1.3.3 n); SD 45.8 (4.3.1); SD 60/1d (2.1.2.4). Cf M 131,3.3n (SD 8.9).

<sup>103</sup> “Attachment to vows and rituals” (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*) is one of the 3 fetters (*saṃyojana*); the other 2 being those of self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*) and doubt (*vicikicchā*): SD 56.1 (4.4.1).

<sup>104</sup> *Bhabbābhakkas*, refers to those who have the capacity for aspiration (those who are not obstructed by bad karma and fruition, defilements, and so on) and those who do not have the capacity for it (due to karmic obstruction, defilements and so on) (Vbh 341 f).

<sup>105</sup> SnA 1:49,4-6; BA 91,32-92,2; CA 282,26-33.



Thus, seeing the Buddha as teacher, we are truly inspired to abandon our self-views, doubts, and attachment to rituals and vows (superstitions). In important ways, we are seeing the path and nirvana, and making that initial move on the path of awakening. We are then following Buddha Dharma, not Buddhism. This is not to say that “Buddhism” is not useful at all. They are mostly the views and teachings of the unawakened, which may or may not reflect Buddha Dharma. However, they may serve as signs directing towards a better understanding of Buddha Dharma. But only our self-effort in practising Buddha Dharma brings self-realization and the freedom of the path of awakening.

### **2.2.5 Going forth (*pabbajjā*)**

**2.2.5.1** One should not only see the Buddha but be some kind of **renunciant** (*pabbajita*), either a hermit (*isi*) or an ascetic (*tāpasa*) like Sumedha, or a homeless monk (*bhikkhu*); in any case, one understands or at least accepts the teaching of karma, that is, the efficacy of moral action (of body, speech and mind).

Even, for a householder meeting the Buddha, the lay follower’s aspiration would not succeed. Why? Because the household state is not that of the Buddha (who has himself gone forth). The great bodhisattvas (buddhahood-aspirants in their last existence) attain supreme awakening only after they have gone forth into homelessness, not while they are still householders. Therefore, at the time of making the resolution,<sup>106</sup> it is only one who has gone forth, endowed with the appropriate qualities and determination, who can succeed.<sup>107</sup>

Again, the example is wise Sumedha; for Sumedha was a hermit when he made his resolution before Dīpaṅkara Buddha.<sup>108</sup>

**2.2.5.2 Going forth** means that even for one aspiring before the Buddha, the aspiration succeeds only for one who has gone forth as a renunciant who upholds the efficacy of karma, not for a household-er. Why? The short answer is that the Buddha was himself a renunciant and trained other renunciants as monks and nuns who were his disciples.

The term *saṅgha* (monastic community) evinces the significance of renunciation, especially the “noble sangha,” that is, the community of noble disciples: *the streamwinners, once-returners, non-returners and arhats*. These disciples are called “noble” (*ariya*) because they have reached the noble eightfold path as “true learners” (*sekha*) or have attained awakening (as arhats) who are “spiritual adepts” (*asekha*). These noble saints comprise both monastics and the laity; for anyone who properly traverses the path can attain it and awaken. However, arhathood, as a rule, is attained almost only by renunciants.

Understandably, then, one who aspires for buddhahood (which includes arhathood) must be a renunciant and attain arhathood.

### **2.2.6 Attainment of virtues (*guna, sampatti*)**

**2.2.6.1 Attainment of virtues (special qualities)** means that the aspiration succeeds only for one who has gone forth and has obtained the 8 attainments (*attha, samāpatti*) and the 5 superknowledges (*pañcābhīññā*) [2.2.6.2], and not for one who lacks these special qualities. Why? Because of not-becoming that state from the lack of the special qualities (*nigguṇassa tad-abhavato*).<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Cf a princess’s aspiration (*paṇidha*) before Vipassī Buddha (VvA 270).

<sup>107</sup> CA 282,26-283,33; BA 92,3-7.

<sup>108</sup> SnA 49,4-7.

<sup>109</sup> BA 92,8-10.

**The 8 attainments** are the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa-j,jhāna*) and the 4 formless attainments (*arūpa,-samāpatti*).<sup>110</sup> To master these 8 attainments is the ideal and full meditative accomplishment. In fact, one who masters the 4<sup>th</sup> form dhyana may go on to develop various psychic powers (*iddhi*).<sup>111</sup> Yet even with the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana (dhyanas must be developed successively), one may use the ensuing calm and clarity of mind to see directly into true reality and gain awakening.<sup>112</sup>

**2.2.6.2 The 5 superknowledges** are mundane psychic powers (any, a few, or all of them) that any accomplished yogi (a meditative seer, recluse or renunciant) may have. These 5 superknowledges are:

- (1) psychic powers (*iddhi,vidha*);<sup>113</sup>
- (2) divine ear (*dibba,sota*), that is, clairsaudience;
- (3) mind-reading (*ceto,pariya,ñāṇa*); also called *ādesanā pāṭihāriya*;
- (4) retrocognition (*pubbe,nivāsānussati*), recollection of one's own past lives;
- (5) divine eye (*dibba,cakkhu*), that is, recollection of the karmic destinies of others (*cutūpapāta,ñāṇa*).

The sage Asita, who visited the infant Siddhattha, was said to have both the 8 attainments and these 5 superknowledges, but not the 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>114</sup>

- (6) knowledge of the destruction of influxes (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*)<sup>115</sup> or full awakening knowledge.

Only an arhat has this 6<sup>th</sup> knowledge, which is his “direct knowledge” of full awakening.<sup>116</sup> With this knowledge, he knows that he has attained total spiritual freedom from the 4 influxes (*āsava*)—sensual desire, existence, views and ignorance—they bind one to samsara, the endless cycle of births and deaths. Overcoming these 4 influxes, one becomes **an arhat**, who is also known as “one whose influxes are destroyed” (*khīṇ'āsava*), that is, one who has won nirvana.

**2.2.6.3** It is difficult to understand the meaning of the closing sentence of **the Buddha,vaṃsa Commentary** above: *nigguṇassa tad-abhavato*, (literally, “that non-state of non-virtue”). **The Cariyā,-piṭaka Commentary** explains why one who lacks these qualities will fail in his aspiration. Why? Because one devoid of them is incapable of investigating the perfections (*pāramī*). With all these necessary supporting conditions—at least all the 6 prerequisites mentioned so far—the aspirant is a “great man” (*mahā,purisa*) (which serves here as a synonym for “bodhisattva”).<sup>117</sup>

The wise Sumedha, for example, had already acquired the 8 attainments and the 5 kinds of super-knowledge when he made his buddhahood resolution before Dīpaṅkara Buddha.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>110</sup> The 4 formless attainments (*arūpa,samāpatti*) are those of (1) the base of infinite space (*ākāśānañc'āyatana*); (2) the base of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇāñc'āyatana*); (3) the base of nothingness (*ākāśānañc'āyatana*); and (4) the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*n'eva,saññā,nāsaññ'āyatana*); see **Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.1), SD 24.11 (5); on *arūpī*, see SD 53.23 (2.1.3).

<sup>111</sup> SD 25.5a (5.3.7).

<sup>112</sup> See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

<sup>113</sup> SD 27.5a (6).

<sup>114</sup> SD 49.18 (1.1.4.2).

<sup>115</sup> See **Jhānābhīññā S** (S 16.9,29) SD 50.7; **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,42-44), SD 49.4; SD 1.12 (excerpt).

<sup>116</sup> On the 6<sup>th</sup> superknowledge: SD 27.5a (5.6.1).

<sup>117</sup> CA 283,6-12.

<sup>118</sup> SnA 1:49,10-13.

### 2.2.7 Act of merit (*adhikāra*)

**2.2.7.1** By “act of merit” is meant the willingness to make self-sacrifice, that is, even give up one’s life like no other.<sup>119</sup> This is a mark of total dedication (*adhikāra*), unexcelled devotion and sacrifice. In fact, the aspirant must be prepared to sacrifice even his own life for the Buddha and his disciples.<sup>120</sup> Again, the example is that of wise Sumedha; for he made the resolution after showing his willingness to sacrifice his life, thus:

<i>akkamitvāna maṃ buddho saha sissehi gacchatu mā naṃ kalale akkamittho hitāya<sup>121</sup> me bhavissati</i>	Let the Buddha with his pupils proceed stepping upon me. Tread not upon this mud: that will be for my good.” <sup>122</sup> (Bv 2.52)
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**2.2.7.2** It is important to understand the devotion and sacrifices of aspirants like Sumedha. We must understand that Sumedha is aspiring not only to be awakened, but to be the future Buddha, that is, our Gotama. While we are often admonished to follow the Buddha’s example, we are not advised to take Sumedha’s example as our daily or normal practice. The point of the Sumedha story is to show the difficulties and heroism in the attaining of Buddhahood.

The Buddha is like some heroic ancestor who has, say, brought independence, freedom, development and wholesomeness into our country and society. Now that we have such a society, we can live productive, creative and spiritual lives. We do not have to reinvent the country, be another “hero” or pioneer to revise the good that works.

We need to live morally spirited social lives that conduce to wholesome social and mental development of oneself and of others. So long as we continue to enjoy these benefits, our task is to live and let live in wholesome ways. We need to wisely, compassionately and diligently see and live these fundamental values, rights and freedom, in order to improve the situation *even if we must do it alone*—just as the Buddha had done. In this matter, we must truly prepare well for the extraordinary undertaking.

### 2.2.8 Will-power (*chanda*)

**2.2.8.1** The 8<sup>th</sup> and last prerequisite for the buddhahood aspirant is that he must possess whole-some **desire** (*chanda*), strong enough to keep his resolve even though he fully knows that he has to suffer much through repeated births, even in woeful states, to reach the goal of buddhahood. Here is a parable for the greatness of his will-power:

Whoever, by the power of his own arms, will cross over the whole universe that has become one mass of water and reach the far shore, he will achieve buddhahood. And if he does not deem this a difficult task for himself but thinks: “I, having crossed over this, will get to the far shore,” and if he is thus possessed of great will-power and endeavour, the aspiration succeeds for him.<sup>123</sup>

**2.2.8.2** The other Commentaries, in fact, give **4 parables** for the aspirant’s desire to act. For the aspiration succeeds for one who has will-power. And the strength of that will-power should be understood in this way.

<sup>119</sup> ApA 140,28-30.

<sup>120</sup> CA 283,12-15.

<sup>121</sup> All 4 Bv eds, SnA:Be Se, BA 88, J 1:13, ApA 15 = 140, DhsA 32 read *hitāya*. But SnA:Ce Ee read *sukhāya*, “happiness,”

<sup>122</sup> SnA 1:49,13-19; BA 92,11-13.

<sup>123</sup> BA 92,14-22; ApA 1:17,7-20.

If he were to hear:

“Who desires buddhahood after walking across the universe filled with flameless hot coals?” —  
he would say: “I do.”

If he were to hear:

“Who desires buddhahood after walking across the whole universe that has become a solid mass of sharp-pointed stakes?” —

he would say: “I do.”

If he were to hear:

“Who desires buddhahood after crossing the whole universe filled with water up to the brim?” —  
he would say: “I do.”

If he were to hear:

“Who desires buddhahood after trampling upon the whole universe covered with bamboo thickets, with no space in between?” —

he would say: “I do.”

If he were to hear:

“Who desires buddhahood after being tortured in hell for 4 incalculables and 100,000 eons?” —

He would say, “I do.”

Wise Sumedha possessed such will-power when he made the aspiration.<sup>124</sup>

Note the language here; it does not say that these are preconditions he must fulfill, but rather the kinds of trials or tribulations he is willing to undergo for the sake of attaining Buddhahood.

## 2.3 THE 18 IMPOSSIBILITIES FOR THE BODHISATTVA

### 2.3.0 Bodhisattvahood

**2.3.0.1** When the resolve of the buddhahood-aspirant succeeds, he becomes a bodhisattva (a buddha-to-be). As a **bodhisattva**, there are 18 impossible conditions or moral impossibilities (*aṭṭhārasa abhabba-ṭ, ṭhānāni*)<sup>125</sup> that will not befall him. My comments and explanations follow each condition with cross-references for further details where applicable (below); that is, the buddha-aspirant or bodhisattva.<sup>126</sup>

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| (1) he is never born blind or deaf;  | [2.3.1]  |
| (2) he does not become insane;   | [2.3.2]  |
| (3) he is neither dumb nor crippled;   | [2.3.3]  |
| (4) he does not take birth among the uncivilized;                                  | [2.3.4]  |
| (5) he is not born of a slave woman;   | [2.3.5]  |
| (6) he does not hold any wrong view with fixed consequences;                       | [2.3.6]  |
| (7) he does not undergo gender change;   | [2.3.7]  |
| (8) he does not commit any of the 5 deeds with immediate retribution;              | [2.3.8]  |
| (9) he is not a leper;   | [2.3.9]  |
| (10) he does not become an animal smaller than a quail or bigger than an elephant; | [2.3.10] |
| (11) he does not arise among pretas, afflicted with insatiable hunger and thirst;  | [2.3.11] |

<sup>124</sup> SnA 49,19-33 = ApA 1:141,1-15; J 1:14,33-15,9; CA 283,19-284,3.

<sup>125</sup> SnA 49,33-50,12 = ApA 1:141,15-25.

<sup>126</sup> Following the Pali, if we list every discrete condition, the total is actually 21. To make 18 conditions, (1) has 2 conditions; (3) has 2; and (13) (qv) has 2, too. The reason for these combinations is explained or is implicit in the main notes.

- (12) he does not arise among *kāla,kañjaka* asuras; [2.3.12]
- (13) he arises neither in Avīci hell nor in the intergalactic regions; [2.3.13]
- (14) in the sense-world, he does not become Māra; [2.3.14]
- (15) in the form world, he does not arise in the non-conscious plane; [2.3.15]
- (16) he does not arise in the pure abodes; [2.3.16]
- (17) he does not arise in a formless world; [2.3.17]
- (18) he does not migrate to another universe. [2.3.18]

**2.3.0.2** Since the aspiration is to Buddhahood comprising the wisdom of self-awakening and the compassion of the liberating welfare of the whole world of immeasurable beings, it should be seen as the loftiest, most sublime of aspirations and greatest distinction of merit, endowed with boundless potency, the root-cause of the states culminating in buddhahood.

With his successful aspiration to buddhahood, the great man (*mahā, purisa*) enters into the practice of the true great vehicle to awakening (*mahā, bodhi, yāna, paṭipatti*). His destiny is fixed, irreversible and therefore properly gains the designation **bodhi, sattva**, “the being bound for awakening” (*bodhi, satta*).<sup>127</sup>

### **2.3.1 (1) The buddha-aspirant is never born blind or deaf**

The bodhisattva has to be able to see and hear so that he can be of service to others and to be able to learn from every situation, whether difficult or pleasant. In the remarkable **Temiya or Mūga, pakkha Jātaka** (J 538), the first of the last 10 classic jātakas,<sup>128</sup> however, the bodhisattva, recollecting how the absolute powers of kingship only bring hellish suffering, pretends to be a deaf-mute paraplegic for 16 years.<sup>129</sup>

### **2.3.2 (2) The buddha-aspirant does not become insane**

The bodhisattva needs a calm and clear mind to be able to grow in virtue and perfection. Moreover, he is already one with a mind growing in calm and clarity, realizing greater wisdom and showing greater compassion. He is one who, on account of greater control over *greed, hatred and delusion*, and with ever clearer vision of the true reality of *impermanence, suffering and nonself*, will never go mad, as happens when one clings to wrong views, fails to see true reality, or is habitually caught in ritual behaviour.

### **2.3.3 (3) The buddha-aspirant is neither dumb nor crippled**

He must be able to speak articulately, wisely and freely, and move around adroitly and unaided, to communicate with others or help them. An abundance of good karma, especially that of wisdom, has brought the aspirant to his aspiration. This abundant karma can only snowball into liberating wisdom. In the meantime, his good karma provides him with proficiency of his karmic deeds, that is, his thoughts, speech and actions are all wholesome.

### **2.3.4 (4) The buddha-aspirant does not take birth among the uncivilized<sup>130</sup>**

The Pali for “uncivilized” here is *milakkha* (Skt *mleccha*)<sup>131</sup> which means “a barbarian, foreigner, out-caste, hilltribesman.” Basically, *milakkha* refers to pre-literate people living in groups or tribes remote from the areas of the 2<sup>nd</sup> urbanization of northern India that was seeing the rise of the 16 great countries

<sup>127</sup> See CA 276,5-20.

<sup>128</sup> The last 10 jātakas for the “great collection” (*mahā, nipāta*) of the Jātaka Commentary.

<sup>129</sup> J 538/6:1-30; told in ref to the Buddha’s renunciation, the story is versified in **Temiya Paṇḍita Cariyā** (C 3.6/96 f) and qu in BA 51 as an example of the bodhisattva’s great determination. (**Chakka**) **Dhammika S** (A 6.54/3:373) mentions a Mūga, pakkha in a list of ancient teachers. For a tr of **Temiya J**, see “The Birth Story of Temiya, or of the Dumb Cripple,” Appleton & Shaw, *The Ten Great Birth Stories of the Buddha*, Bangkok, 2015: Figs 1-11, pp 51-79 (ch 1).

<sup>130</sup> *na milakkhesu uppajjati*.

<sup>131</sup> S 5:466; J 6:207; DA 1:176; SnA 236.

(*mahā janapada*),<sup>132</sup> especially in the central Gangetic plains of the Buddha's time (600-500 BCE). The 16 great states and the smaller urbanized cultures of the central Gangetic plains for "the Indian civilization" of the Buddha's time.

The **bodhisattva** is reborn in the heart of such a civilized society, usually amongst the kshatriyas (ruling or warrior class) or the brahmins (the priestly class), the two dominant classes of Indian society at that time. The future Buddha Gotama was born into a Sakya kshatriya (*khattiya*) clan amongst its ruling elite. Historically, the Buddha has arisen in India, which then had the ideal conditions for such a human awakening. This should be understood that the Buddha arises only in India (which is a modern name for the country) but that he arises where *the social and spiritual conditions are ideal for the Buddha to arise*.

### **2.3.5 (5) The buddha-aspirant is not born to a slave woman**

When reborn of a slave woman, the bodhisattva would also be a slave, compelled to always be servile and serve others, yet usually badly treated socially. Hence, he will lack any social standing with which to perform acts of wisdom and compassion. In modern language, it may be said that the bodhisattva would not be born in a low servile class.

The size and prosperity of the civilized society the buddha-aspirant is born into would be characterized by political peace, social stability, fertile agriculture, burgeoning commerce, a stable economy and travels beyond India (especially to the South and to Southeast Asia). Hence, it is a wealthy society deeply divided by **class**. In order to reach out to such a class-minded society, the bodhisattva has to arise in the most dominant class of that society to be able to command respect, charisma and resources.

### **2.3.6 (6) The buddha-aspirant does not hold any wrong view with fixed consequences<sup>133</sup>**

**2.3.6.1** "Wrong views with fixed consequences" (*niyati micchā, diṭṭhi*) are mechanistic beliefs and views that all actions have fixed consequences, meaning that **karma** is denied its fruits, the validity of moral distinctions, and causes for defilement and purification. This wrong view often overlaps with those that reject karma (*n'atthika, vāda*), that hold that there is neither good nor evil, neither karma nor moral accountability (*akiriya, vāda*), and that there is no such thing as conditionality (causes and effects of good and bad) (*ahetuka, vāda*). Such views are said to prevent higher rebirths and block the path to liberation.<sup>134</sup>

**2.3.6.2** For nirvana to be understood and accepted as total freedom from the enslavement of worldliness, people must know that they are capable of **self-effort**, so that they are neither subjugated by the God-dogma and Soul-idea of the brahmins and God-believers, nor led astray by the false pride and promises of materialism (that this is our only life, or that nirvana is here and now).

The path to salvation is **the middle way** that avoids these two extremes, by way of ethical regulation of action and speech, and the sustained cultivation of a wholesome mind. In this way, **the mind** is able to free itself from the distractions of the senses and gain the full mental development and acumen to dismantle self-views, doubts and superstitions bringing one full spiritual freedom.

### **2.3.7 (7) The buddha-aspirant does not undergo gender change<sup>135</sup>**

This condition can be interpreted in either of 2 ways, both of which apply.

(1) He will not be reborn in a different sex (that is, as a woman, or hermaphrodite).

<sup>132</sup> SD 4.18 App; SD 9 (16): map (16.3): **Mahā Assa, pura S** (M 39) @ SD 10.13 (1); (**Tad-ah'**) **Uposatha S** (A 3.70,-18), SD 4.18 & App; SD 57.8 (3.2.2.1); SD 6.1 (1).

<sup>133</sup> *na niyata, micchā, diṭṭhiko hoti.*

<sup>134</sup> See VismMHT 1:187.

<sup>135</sup> *nāssa liṅgaṃ parivattati.*



- (2) In that life itself (such as that of Sumedha), he will not undergo any gender change (such as becoming a eunuch).

The first is clear enough, that is, once the aspirant is confirmed and becomes a bodhisattva, he will always be born a male.

The second case means that he will not commit any karmic act that will make him a female, as illustrated by the case of **the elder Soreyya**.<sup>136</sup> A seth's son<sup>137</sup> (*setthi,putta*), Soreyya was named after the city where he was born. He married and had 2 sons. One day, he saw the golden-skinned elder arhat Mahā Kaccāna adjusting his robes and fantasized what a great “wife” Mahā Kaccāna would make for him. At that very thought, he physically changed into a woman.

Ashamed, Soreyyā (feminine form of Soreyya) fled, following a caravan to Takkasilā (in Pakistan today), where he became the wife of the seth there. They had 2 sons. In due course, a former friend invited her to his home. Upon revealing her true identity, her friend compassionately advised her to seek forgiveness from the elder.

Following the friend's advice, Soreyyā went to Sāvattihī, approached Mahā Kaccāna, and bowed at his feet. She related to him what had happened and asked for his forgiveness. The elder forgave her; and she reverted to a male Soreyya. People who heard about this remarkable transformation, asked him which of these sons he loved more—those he *sired* or those he *mothered*—and he replied, “Of the two of whom I'm *mother*.”

Realizing the difficulties of life as a man and as a woman, he decided to renounce under Mahā Kaccāna. In due course, going into solitary meditation, he became an arhat. When people asked him the same question about his sons, he then replied: “My affections are set on no one.”

### **2.3.8 (8) The buddha-aspirant does not commit any of the 5 deeds with immediate retribution**<sup>138</sup>

**2.3.8.1** The 5 karmic acts of immediate retribution (*pañc'ānantariya,kamma*)—or simply, the 5 immediate karmas—are *matricide, patricide, murdering an arhat, drawing the blood of the Buddha with a mind of hatred, and causing a schism in the sangha*. While these teachings are mentioned in such texts as **the Voropitā Sutta** (A 6.87)<sup>139</sup> and **the Abhabba-ṭṭhāna Sutta 3** (A 6.94),<sup>140</sup> the term *ānantariya(ka)-kamma* is found only in the Vinaya and the Commentaries.<sup>141</sup>

The 5 bad karmas are clearly, in societal and spiritual terms, the most heinous. The formulation of these teachings is not punitive in nature (karma works on its own) but a cautionary warning to others that in this life itself the perpetrator would fall into the subhuman states, especially the hells, remaining there for a long period where it is impossible to give rise to wholesome karma. Hence, one would have no opportunity to aspire for buddhahood.

<sup>136</sup> **Soreyya-t,thera Vatthu** (DhA 3.9/1:325-332) on Dh 42 f; tr Dha:B 2:23-28.

<sup>137</sup> A **setthi** (Skt *śreṣṭhin*)—anglicized as “seth”—was a finance banker who had abundant liquid funds with which he loaned or invested in agriculture, business or trade (see U Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, New Delhi, 1996:73-79). The suffix *-putta* can mean (1) “a son of ...”; (2) simply someone “young”; or (3) a member of a group, eg, *sakya,putta*, “a Sakya male,” but in this case, it can also mean, “a true offspring of the Sakya (viz, the Buddha).”

<sup>138</sup> Also *ānantarika, ānantariyaka*.

<sup>139</sup> A 6.87/3:436. It has a 6<sup>th</sup> quality: (6) one is “unwise, stupid, obtuse.”

<sup>140</sup> A 6.94/3:439 (SD 97.5). It has a 6<sup>th</sup> case of incapability: (6) “incapable of acknowledging another teacher (other than the Buddha).” Other suttas that list the “5 immediate karmas” are **Bahu,dhātuka S** (M 115,13/3:64), SD 29.1a; **Aṭṭhāna Vagga** (A 1.271-275/1:27) separately; (**Catukka**) **Kamma S** (A 4.234,7/2:234 f), SD 89.14; **Parikuppa S** (A 5.129/3:146); **Vbh** 336,10-19; **Kvu** 12.7/471, 22.1/593; **Paṭṭh:Be** 1:148 + *passim*.

<sup>141</sup> V 2:193,70; AA 2:27,16 f; PugA 185,15; Sārs 116,26; Vvn 286, Uttvn 740.

**2.3.8.2 MOGGALLĀNA’S PARINIRVANA.** However, it is possible, at the right time, for one to aspire to or attain disciplehood, as in the case of **Moggallāna**. In the arhat Moggallāna’s last life, outside sectarians (followers of wrong views) were deeply annoyed by Moggallāna’s knowledge of how merits brought heavenly rebirths for Buddhist practitioners, and how bad karma relegated outside sectarians to sub-human suffering states; thus, attracting huge followings and offerings to the Buddhist sangha and community. The sectarians paid a thousand pieces to some wandering brigands to assassinate Moggallāna at the black rock (*kāla,silā*), by the side of Mount Isigili.

For 2 months, the brigands tried to kill Moggallāna but, using his psychic powers, Moggallāna eluded them. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> month, recollecting his karma, Moggallāna realized that the brigands’ attempt on his life was the result of some bad karma he had committed in the distant past. Although arhats do not create new karma, they can still be subject to the certain heinous past karma; in this case, his attempt to kill his own parents in a past life.<sup>142</sup>

**2.3.8.3 MOGGALLĀNA TRIED TO KILL HIS OWN PARENTS.** In Moggallāna’s story of the past, the Commentaries relate that he married a young woman who had to care for his old blind parents. Annoyed by these duties, she badgered Moggallāna about them. Moggallāna then decided to get rid of his old parents. Pretending to take them to some relatives’ house, he instead led them into the forest. There he made a ruckus, as if being attacked by a band of thieves, and then to kill his parents. His parents then cried out in desperation to the supposed thieves to spare their son. Moved by shame, Moggallāna gave up the whole charade.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> month, Moggallāna let the brigands beat him, breaking all his bones, leaving him for dead. Before passing into nirvana, Moggallāna went to the Buddha to take leave. He talked on Dharma to the Buddha, and at his request, performed many miracles. Then Moggallāna returned to Kālasilā to die.<sup>143</sup>

**2.3.8.4 MOGGALLĀNA’S PAST ASPIRATION.** In the time of Anoma,dassī Buddha,<sup>144</sup> Moggallāna was the brahmin youth (*māṇava*) **Sarada** who renounced as an ascetic. One day, when Sarada witnessed the Buddha established 2 of his monks as his chief disciples, Sarada was inspired to do the same. He intimated this desire to his close friend, the householder (*kuṭumbika*) Sirivaddha (the future Sāriputta), who agreed to it. They made their aspiration before the Buddha who confirmed that their aspiration would fruit in Gotama Buddha’s time.<sup>145</sup>

### **2.3.9 (9) The buddha-aspirant is not a leper**

**2.3.9.1** In the Buddha’s time, **5 diseases**—leprosy (*kuṭṭha*), abscesses (*gaṇḍa*), white leprosy (*kilāsa*), tuberculosis (*sosa*), epilepsy (*apamāra*)—were common and feared because they were contagious, infectious, debilitating or incapacitating. Although **leprosy** was described in India as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE,<sup>146</sup> it probably ravaged ancient northern India since 2000 BCE. The word *kuṭṭha* is derived from *kutha-ti*, “to become putrid, stink,” or Skt *kusnati*(?), “to tear away,” that is, “eating away” (the limbs and

<sup>142</sup> Intro to **Sarabhaṅga J** (J 522), J 5:125-127.

<sup>143</sup> DhA 10.7a/3:68-71.

<sup>144</sup> Anoma,dassī was the 18<sup>th</sup> buddha from Gotama, our buddha.

<sup>145</sup> On the conversion and renunciation of Sāriputta and Moggallāna: Mv 1.23 f (V 1:39 f). Their past lives: AA 1:148-152; Ap 3.2/31-33 (tr Ap:W 54-57), ApA 238 f; Comy on **Dhamma S** (Sn 2.8), SnA 1:325-328 (tr SnA:B 801-803).

<sup>146</sup> Analysis of pathological conditions in skeletal remains shows that leprosy existed in India from as far back as 2000 BCE: G Robbins et al, “Ancient skeletal remains evidence for leprosy in India (2000 BC),” 27 May 2009, [PLoS ONE](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0056669) 4,5: e5669.

face).<sup>147</sup> **White leprosy** (*kilāsa*) causes the skin to become spotted but without ulcers, probably a type of tuberculoid leprosy.

**2.3.9.2 Abscesses** (*gaṇḍa*) was probably a palpable symptom of a venereal disease, suggesting that it was painful and infectious.<sup>148</sup> These were merely symptoms and probably included the anal fistula (*bhag-andalābādha*) of king Bimbisāra which was healed by Jīvaka, a renowned Buddhist doctor, with a single dose of ointment.<sup>149</sup> Most abscesses are caused by the Staphylococcus bacteria infecting the body causing an inflammation, filled with pus, and killing the tissues nearby—they can occur on the skin, the face, throat, armpits or groin, or as dental abscesses (inside the tooth or gum); pilonidal abscesses or cysts (occurring near the tailbone usually in the upper end of the intergluteal cleft). These are painful and troubling, which would be difficult for a renunciant, especially when he was living alone in some remote retreat.

**2.3.9.3** The oldest non-European references to **tuberculosis** are probably those in the Ṛgveda (1500 BCE), which called it *yakṣma*.<sup>150</sup>

**2.3.9.4 Epilepsy** (*apamāra*)<sup>151</sup> was understood in ancient India as being internally caused by some mental condition that makes one lose normal consciousness, or externally, caused by Māra or some spirit, that is, the environment (which perhaps could be repetitive loud sounds, religious belief or some kind of suggestion). An epileptic seizure includes falling down; shaking of the hands, legs, and body; rolling up of the eyes; teeth grinding, and foaming at the mouth. Such symptoms can be simply embarrassing when they occur in a monk or nun.

In fact, anyone afflicted with any of these 5 conditions are forbidden by the Vinaya from being ordained.<sup>152</sup>

### **2.3.10 (10) The buddha-aspirant does not become an animal smaller than a quail or larger than an elephant**<sup>153</sup>

**2.3.10.1** This condition can be read in either of 2 ways:

- (1) the bodhisattva is not reborn as an animal (one of the subhuman planes) [2.2.1.4], whether small like a quail or large like an elephant; or
- (2) the bodhisattva, when reborn as an animal (such as in the Jātaka stories) will never be reborn smaller than a quail (which makes him an easy victim for other animals and humans) or larger than an elephant (which would make him grotesque and unapproachable for humans).

Should a bodhisattva be reborn as an animal, he would still be *wise, compassionate and courageous*, as he would be as a human being.

<sup>147</sup> N Rastogi, "Leprosy in ancient India," *International J of Leprosy and Other Mycobacterial Diseases* 52,4 Jan 1985:541-543. 16 Feb 2025.

<sup>148</sup> P R Bhat & T A Vipin, "Complex anterior supravulvar anal fistula with prostatic abscess treated with kshara-sutra: A case report," *Case Report in Surgery* vol 2024, art ID 6019946. [Wiley] 16 2 2025.

<sup>149</sup> On Bimbisāra's fistula being successfully treated by Jivaka: Mv 8.14 f (V 1:272 f).

<sup>150</sup> K G Zysk, *Medicine in the Veda: Religious Healing in the Veda*, Delhi. 1998:12.

<sup>151</sup> Its Skt form, *apa-smāra*, is found at AA 2:191,9.

<sup>152</sup> Mv 1.76.2 @ V 1:93 f.

<sup>153</sup> *na tiracchāna, yoniyam vaṭṭakato pacchim'attabhāvo hatthito adhik'attabhāvo hoti.*

**2.3.10.2 The Tittira Jātaka** (J 37) is a tale of a wise partridge (the bodhisattva) who showed his companions, a monkey and an elephant, that he was the eldest of the 3. The monkey and the elephant said that they each recalled the banyan tree that sheltered them when its crest just touched their belly. The partridge said that he was the one who had voided the seed that grew into the tree. On account of his age and wisdom he was respected by the other two. (J 37/1:217-220)

**2.3.10.3 The Mahā Kapi Jātaka** (J 407) relates how the monkey king (the bodhisattva) saved his entire troop by having them cross over the river to the safety of the far shore to avoid being killed by a human king who loved the mangoes in the tree they inhabited. The monkey king tied a vine around himself, swung across the river and just barely managed to hold on to the branch of a tree on the other bank. The last monkey (Devadatta), seeing his opportunity, jumped on the monkey king's back and broke it, killing him. The human king, inspired by the monkey king's compassion, cremated the monkey king's body, inlaid his skull with gold and enshrined it in a stupa for public veneration. (J 407/3:369-375)

**2.3.10.4 The Sasa Jātaka** (J 316) is about the bodhisattva being reborn as a hare. He ate only grass and one day realized he would have nothing to give any beggars who came asking for food. So he vowed to give his own flesh. Noticing this, Sakra, king of the gods, came to test the hare's pledge, and asked for food. True to his word, the bodhisattva jumped into a fire (conjured by Sakra). But Sakra spared his life (the fire was cool, just an illusion) and painted a hare's image on the moon so everyone knew about the hare's courage to this day. (J 316/3:52-56)

### **2.3.11 (11) The buddha-aspirant does not arise among pretas, afflicted with insatiable hunger and thirst**

**2.3.11.1** Although the bodhisattva may be reborn as an animal (10), he will not be reborn in any of the other 3 subhuman states, that is, the *pretas*, *asuras* and *hell-beings*. Beings in these “fallen” states have great difficulties in generating wholesome thoughts, and remain in their suffering state for indefinite durations. Hence, a bodhisattva does not arise amongst them, and none of them (as they are) can aspire to Buddhahood or even awakening itself. They are burdened and blinded with the unwholesome roots.

**Pretas** (*peta*) do not have any specific form but tend to look like their past habitual unwholesome demeanour and more grotesquely so, but sometimes have divine-like forms—depending on their past karma. Pretas are (as in the caption here) said to be “afflicted with hunger craving [with the hunger that is craving] and thirst” (*nijjhāma, taṇhā khippipāsā*).<sup>154</sup> Or to elaborate: “they are those who feed on vomit, who are dependent on what is given by others, who are tormented by hunger and thirst, [consumed by craving]; as departed ones, they receive dependent on what is given by others only when they recall them as departed ones.”<sup>155</sup>

Pretas, as a rule, spend their existence wandering in a futile search for food and drink (echoing their acquisitive nature as humans). When they approach a river to drink, the water turns into blood and pus, and when they find food, it turns into phlegm or snot (*khela, siṅghāṇikādi, vasena* (AA 5:75). Or they are unable to swallow it due to various impediments, such as knots in their throats, or suffer when it is swallowed, when food turns into spears and molten iron; hence, their insatiable hunger and thirst (like their insatiable greed when they were humans).

<sup>154</sup> This phrase is also at Miln 294,16 f; KhpA 214. *Khuppipāsā*: Pv 1.11.10, 2.2.2.; PvA 10, 32, 37, 50, 80; Vism 601.

<sup>155</sup> *Vantāsikā khuppipāsino nijjhāma, taṇhikā, labhanti petā para, dattūpajīvino, te pi saramānā yeva labhanti ti* (Miln 294,16 f). More briefly, “those who are tormented by hunger and thirst, who feed on vomit, [consumed by craving]” (*khuppipāsika, vantāsa, para, dattūpajīvi, nijjhāma, taṇhikā ...*, KhpA 241,27 f).

**2.3.11.2** In significant ways, the “**preta-mind**”—or “asura-mind,” or “animal-mind” or “hellish mind”—can arise, and often arises in humans amongst us.<sup>156</sup> It is more meaningful for us to understand these are not disembodied states or pious “stories.” They are actual states we can see around us in our daily lives, often enough even within ourselves. If we see them merely as dreadful disembodied “forms,” then, they may be said to be “mythical.”<sup>157</sup> However, when we understand them *also* as being actual psychological states into which we fall with the negative biases of *greed, hatred, delusion and fear*,<sup>158</sup> then, knowing the symptoms, we can better treat the disease and heal ourselves with Dharma as salve.

We may have a human body, but rarely are **our minds** human. The mind tends to fall into the preta state (when we are driven by insatiable desires); into the asura state (when we habitually demean and exploit others); into the animal state (when we are driven by fear and ignorance); or into the hell-state (when we habitually think and act with hatred and violence). These subhuman beings are all caught in protracted repetitive unwholesome routines, seeing and running after “something” out there. The *preta* runs after food; the *asura* seeks power [see (12) below]; the *animal* is driven by sense-pleasure; the *hell-being* lives in violence [see (13) below].

Pretas do not have a locational realm like the devas. Like the pure abodes of the nonreturners, the “**preta range**” (*petti- or pitti.visaya*) is an existential dimension that is neither physical nor organized (like those of the sense-world devas). Often, they exist right amongst us (they had human bodies before, but preta-minds), invisible like radio waves or sound waves. Their presence amongst humans is because they are dependent on us to feed them; yet they are unable to enjoy the kind of food we take or offer them. Such offerings only benefit them—such as lessening their sufferings—by our recalling their past good and by our radiating lovingkindness towards them.<sup>159</sup>

### **2.3.12 (12) The buddha-aspirant does not arise among *kāla,kañjaka* asuras<sup>160</sup>**

**2.3.12.0** According to the *Kathāvatthu* (a canonical Abhidhamma text), **asuras** do not form their own destiny-plane (*gati*) [below], although they are collectively known as the “asura host” (*asura,kāya*),<sup>161</sup> less commonly, “asura group” (*asura,gaṇa*).<sup>162</sup>

The asuras fall into 2 distinct classes:<sup>163</sup>

(a) the *kāla,kañjaka*<sup>164</sup> asuras and (b) Vepacitti’s host (*vepacitti,parisā*). (Kvu 360 f)

<sup>156</sup> The depiction of pretas as pot-bellied, flat like a leaf with a pin-like neck does not appear in Pāli and South-east Asian sources until late cosmological texts that date to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium CE, suggesting that this is a Sanskrit or northern (esp Chinese) tradition.

<sup>157</sup> See eg “Who are hungry ghosts?” R97 090826 RB3 Hungry ghosts.

<sup>158</sup> The 5 biases (*agati*) or “motives” (*thāna*): **Sigal’ovāda S** (D 31,5), SD 4.1; **Āgati S 1** (A 4.17), SD 89.7, **Saṅgha Bala S** (A 9.5,6.4) n, SD 2.21; SD 31.12 (6.4.1.3); SD 53.5 (2.2.1.1).

<sup>159</sup> On how pretas can benefit from our dedication of merits to them, see **Tiro,kuḍḍa S** (Khp 7 = Pv 1.5) + SD 2.7 (2, 4); also SD 2.6a (6); SD 2.6b (3); SD 61a (2.6.3) (18). On the evolution of preta doctrine, see SD 37.10 (3.2.5).

<sup>160</sup> **D 20,12/2:259,9** (DA 2:689), 23,1.7/3:7,17 f; DA 510, 789, 820; BA 271,18. J Comy glosses the “asura host” as those that prosper or grow in the “womb” (realm) of *kāla,kañjaka* asuras: **asura,kāyan ti kāla,kañjaka,asura,yoniñ ca vaḍḍhenti ti attho** (J 5:187).

<sup>161</sup> Kvu 361,1-4 (KvuA 105,1). Also D 3:7,17-8,11, 264,11; Thī 475 (ThīA 285,29); J 5:186,24\*; SA 2:97,5; ItA 2:118,17; UA 418,18; Vism 427,22; pl *dibbā kāyā parihāyissanti, paripūrissanti asura,kāyā*, A 1:143,17 (= *cattāro apāyā*, AA); in cpd *asura,tama(s)*, SnA 310,21. Sakra is known as *asura,gaṇa-p,pamaddana*, “defeater of the asura group” (*sa deva-rājā* ~o [on metre, cf Sn 685b 697d 698a], J 5:139,18). On Sakra overthrowing the asuras: SD 61.21 (2.1.2).

<sup>162</sup> MA 2:302,29.

<sup>163</sup> Pañcagā 69.

<sup>164</sup> So Ee; also spelt *kāla,kañjika* (Ce Ke Se); *kāla,kañcika* (Be); also *kāla,kañja* (D:Ce D:Ee).

(a) *THE KĀḶA,KAÑJAKĀ*

**2.3.12.1 The *kāḷa,kañjakā*** (“born of black lotus” or “the dark one, lotus-born”). It is possible that they dwell in lotus-lakes, and that they are dark-looking. These asuras are little different from the pretas, and are sometimes regarded as *a kind of preta*. The **Buddha,vaṃsa Commentary**, in fact, describes them as being “afflicted with craving and thirst” (*nijjhāma,taṇhā khippīpāsā*, BA 271); these are the same words that describe the pretas (11). They are also said to be of the same complexion as pretas, with whom they intermarry.<sup>165</sup> Due to their suffering state, they are said to look “very terrifying” (*mahā’-bhimsā*)<sup>166</sup> and are “all wretched” (*sabba,nihīna*).<sup>167</sup>

(b) *THE VEPACITTI,PARISĀ*

**2.3.12.2 The *vepacitti,parisā*** (Vepacitti’s host) (Kvu 360,21) were the old devas of Tāva,timsa. On account of their drunken nature they were overthrown by Sakra and his host.<sup>168</sup> This also launched the protracted war between the devas and the asuras (*devāsura saṅgāma*).<sup>169</sup> Being former devas, the Vepacitti asuras, especially their leaders (*asur’inda*, “asura lord”) Vepacitti, Sucitti, Pahārāda, Verocana, and Rāhu, have asura magic (*asura,māyā*).<sup>170</sup> Asura lord **Vepa,citti**’s original name was Sambara and is said to be the eldest of them all (*asurānaṃ sabba,jeṭṭhako*).<sup>171</sup>

Sakra, lord of the devas, later married **Sujā**, Vepacitti’s daughter (which thus showed she still had deva-nature).<sup>172</sup> The marriage ended the war between the devas and the asuras, and unified them. Understandably the Vepacitti asuras have their deva status again. Hence, they are not included amongst the traditional asuras. This leaves the Kāḷa,kañjakā as “the asuras” amongst whom no bodhisattva is reborn.

**2.3.13 (13) The buddha-aspirant arises neither in Avīci hell nor in the intergalactic regions**

**2.3.13.0** This condition for the Buddhahood-aspirant mentions “Avīci-hell,” and, since “the intergalactic regions” are also said to be hells by the early Buddhists, the two have been placed together to help adjust the numbering so that we have a total of 18 conditions.<sup>173</sup>

(a) *AVĪCI HELL*

**2.3.13.1 Avīci** is the nethermost (the lowest) of the 8 hot hells, containing those who have committed the most evil karma—such as any of the 5 heinous karmas with immediate effect [2.3.8]—who must endure excruciating torments there, which though not eternal, seem unending and to be “without a break” (*avīci*), lasting for millions of years.

<sup>165</sup> *Kāḷa,kañjakā asurā petānaṃ samāna,vaṇṇā ... petehi saha āvāha,vivāhaṃ gacchanti*, Kvu 360,12; cf DA (3) 1061,9 f, 820,27-31; UA 140,14; BA \*271; BA:Ce 224,10\*. Cf J 1:44,32\*, 525/5:187,1 f; SA 2:290,26-291,14 = VbhA 5,6-30; D 2:259,9\*.

<sup>166</sup> **D 20,12/2:259** (SD 54.4); D 2:259, 3:7; also 3:789-820; J 5:187; PvA 272.

<sup>167</sup> D 24/3:7,17; Pañcgd 69 *sabba,nihīno asura,kāyo*.

<sup>168</sup> SA 1:342,9.

<sup>169</sup> On the deva-asura war, see **Devāsura,saṅgāma S** (A 9.39,1) SD 61.20.

<sup>170</sup> J 5:19,26; (cf *Sambarī māyā* (Vepacitti’s former name was Sambara), S 1:239,1; SA 1:355,3-9); D 2:259,7\* f ≈ *Königlich Preussische Turfan-Expeditionen*, kleinere Skt texte, Berlin, 1911 4:179,11\*.

<sup>171</sup> On his change of name, see **Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 11.10/1:227 f) + SD 39.2 (2). See **Vepacitti S** (S 11.4), SD 54.6; also DPPN: Vepacitti.

<sup>172</sup> SD 54.8 (6.3.5).

<sup>173</sup> SnA 1:50; ApA 141.



**The Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 26) describes Avīci as crowded, tightly packed with hell-beings,<sup>174</sup> “as a jungle is thick with reeds and rushes.”<sup>175</sup> The hell-beings are tortured by hell-wardens<sup>176</sup> in gruesome ways, whereas other hell-beings violently kill one another.<sup>177</sup> This is an imagery of **the crowd and crowdedness**. It seems that Buddhist cosmology shows a structural progression from violently crowded living conditions of the hells to the relatively space for human development, and **the radiant vastness** of the blissful heavens.

**2.3.13.2** Now, it is said that the hells are crowded places of violence and suffering. The hell beings are inflicted with all kinds of horrendous tortures, repeatedly—but they do not die from them. If they were to die, then the tortures would have been meaningless. It also means that such sufferings are *not* bodily but mental. We keep on suffering the kinds of pain we have contemplated or inflicted upon others. Of course, such pain can also come from others inflicting it upon us.

Greek mythology has a similar story about recurrent hellish pains, but they are inflicted not by karma but by capricious gods. The Titan **Prometheus**, for example, was punished by Zeus (the king of the gods) for bringing fire from the heavens to the humans in mythical times. Fire was beneficial to humans but the god did not think that humans should have such a benefit.

Prometheus was then caught and punished by the gods who chained him to a mountain-rock, where an eagle comes each dawn to tear him open and feast on his liver. He suffers hellish pains, but does not die. His liver regenerates in the night. The whole samsaric cycle of bodily suffering recurs every day until he was released by the demi-god Hercules. In Buddhist light, Hercules may be seen as representing a human who has accumulated enough good karma to give him divine powers that benefit others.

The point remains that, while Prometheus was tortured by the gods *for doing good*, that is, for bringing fire to the early humans, the hell-beings were punished by their own karma for doing bad to others!<sup>178</sup> It seems that in ancient Greek religion, the gods controlled human lives and fate. This idea became more sophisticated in modern God-religions, where humans and all “creation” are dependent of “God’s will.” A poet compared such sophistication to a hippopotamus going to heaven!<sup>179</sup>

The Buddha, on the other hand, teaches **self-reliance and self-accountability**; by our actions (karma), we evolve as humans, become gods, or devolve into subhumans *even in our human form* (that is, mentally). This is basically early Buddhist psychology. Hence, we see early Buddhism as a mind-centred teaching. Or we may speak of humans being reborn as *gods* or as *subhumans*; this is Buddhist mythology.<sup>180</sup>

**2.3.13.3** The excruciating pains and sufferings of the hells are very real all right. The Buddha and early teachers employed well-structured metaphors and mythology to impress upon the Indian audience (and us today) the reality of suffering when our karma ripens. This reality creates a karmic problem iden-

<sup>174</sup> There are the only two places—D 26 + A 3.56—in the 4 Nikāyas where the word *avīci* is used in this way. Perhaps, for this reason, some scholars think that “hell” does not seem to be its meaning.” See T W Rhys Davids (D:RW 3:73 n1) and M Walshe (D:W 602 n801). F L Woodward, in his tr of **A 3.56** renders *avīci* as “the Waveless Deep” (A:W 1:142). On the hells as allegories, see **Deva,dūta S** (M 130), SD 2.23 (3).

<sup>175</sup> The simile recurs in **Paloka S** (A 3.56/1:159), SD 72.3, regarding the pre-Buddhist population of ancient India (*jambu,dīpa*); clearly this refers to the central Gangetic plains in northern India, not the whole of the sub-continent, much of which would still be jungle and unpopulated areas. See D 26,23/3:75 (SD 36.10).

<sup>176</sup> See Reflection **R494** “Hell robots,” RB177, 2017. 21 Feb 2025.

<sup>177</sup> M 3:182 f; A 1:14; J 3:46;

<sup>178</sup> SD 1.4 (2.1(7)).

<sup>179</sup> T S Eliot’s “The Hippopotamus” (1919) is a satirical poem on the hypocritical and self-important nature of the established Church, and of Eliot’s journey from one Christianity to another. The poem can be read as a delightful and profound criticism of God-religion.

<sup>180</sup> See esp SD 51.11 (3.1.2). For a study, see **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 & 49.8b (9.1.3). On Buddhist mythology, see SD 2.19 (1); SD 57.10 (5.4.1.1); SD 60.1c (1.16.1).

tified in the Commentaries: if the hell-wardens who torture the hell-beings were real (conscious of their actions) then imagine the kind of karma that they themselves would have to face!

**The Kathā,vatthu**, discussing this controversy, recorded **the Andhaka sect**<sup>181</sup> as suggesting that the hell-wardens must be like “mechanical forms” (*yanta,rūpaṃ viya*), or what we today know as “**robots or androids**.”<sup>182</sup> This futuristic imagination suggests that hell-wardens were simply an imagery that the hell-being’s karma works on its own, without the need of any conscious external agency.<sup>183</sup>

The Andhakas quoted a sutta teaching they recalled as follows:

<i>na vessabhū no pi ca petti,rājā</i>	’Tis neither Vessabhū nor the preta-king,
<i>somo yamo vessavaṇo ca rājā</i>	nor the kings Soma, Yama or Vessavaṇa.
<i>sakāni kammāni hananti tattha</i>	One’s own karma punishes one,
<i>ito paṇunnaṃ para,loka,pattan ti</i>	who ending here reaches other worlds.

Kvu 597,1-4 (untraced quote)

In reply, the Theravāda side then quotes a passage on hellish tortures from **the Deva,dūta Sutta** (M 130), thus:

Now, the hell-wardens **[183]** torture him with **the fivefold pinion**:<sup>184</sup>

They drive a red-hot iron rod through	one hand;
then another red-hot iron rod through	the other hand.
They drive (another) red-hot iron rod through	one foot;
then another red-hot iron rod through	the other foot.
They drive (another) red-hot iron rod through	the middle of his chest.

There, he suffers feelings that are sharp, piercing, racking pains.<sup>185</sup>

Yet, he does not die, so long as the result of that bad deed [bad karma] is not exhausted.<sup>186</sup>  
(M 130,10/3:182 f), SD 2.23

The Theravādins (at least the Kathā,vatthu compilers) thus interpret this passage *literally* as referring to the hell-wardens torturing the hell-beings. Modern Buddhists are likely to find the Andhaka view more reflective of the spirit of early Buddhism, that is, if we actually take the spirit of sutta teachings seriously. In this same spirit, we are reminded of **the Pātāla Sutta** (S 36.4), where the Buddha explains thus:

Bhikshus, when the untutored ordinary person makes the statement:  
“In the great ocean there is **a bottomless abyss** (*pātāla*),”  
he makes such a statement about something that is non-existent and false.  
This “bottomless abyss,” bhikshus,  
is only a designation (*adhivacana*) for painful bodily feelings.<sup>187</sup> (S 36.4), SD 2.25<sup>188</sup>

<sup>181</sup> This could be a Telegu sect from South India that broke away from the Theravāda.

<sup>182</sup> Kvu 20.3/596. See also MA 3:388,1 f, 4:231,5 f; AA 2:227,24-29; NmA 2:424,14-19.

<sup>183</sup> See [SD 2.23](#) (3.4.3.1).

<sup>184</sup> This description of hell is found in **Bāla,paṇḍita S** (M 129,10-16) & A 1:141 f; also mentioned at J 1:174.

<sup>185</sup> *So tattha dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā vedeti.*

<sup>186</sup> *Na ca tāva kālaṃ karoti yāva na taṃ pāpaṃ kammaṃ vyanti,hoti.*

<sup>187</sup> *Sārīrikānaṃ kho etaṃ bhikkhave dukkhānaṃ vedanānaṃ adhvānaṃ yad idaṃ pātālo ti.* Cf **Ajjuna Tha** (Tha 88bc) & **Deva,sabha Tha** (Tha 89b) for similar figures. See also **Tāla,puṭa Tha** (Tha 1104) & SD 20.9 II:1104 & SD 10.9 (8.4.3).

<sup>188</sup> SD 2.23 (3); SD 89.10 (1); SD 53.16 (2).

Anyway, the point remains that a buddha-aspirant does not arise in Avīci or any of the hells for the simple reason they have not done any heavy bad karma that would fruit in hellish suffering. Moreover, hell-beings spend very long periods in hellish suffering; this would not be expeditious for one aspiring to become buddha to train in the various spiritual perfections.

#### (b) THE INTERGALACTIC REGIONS (LOKĀNTARIKA)

**2.3.13.4 The Andha,kāra Sutta** (S 56.46) records the Buddha using the imagery of darkness as a metaphor for the **ignorance** that prevents us from seeing the 4 noble truths and so be liberated from suffering. The metaphor is remarkable since the Buddha is apparently alluding to the remote reaches of outer space:

There is, bhikshus, a groundless [bottomless] abysmal dark, **a blinding darkness of the spaces amongst the worlds** [an intergalactic dark],<sup>189</sup>  
where even the lights of the moon and the sun, so mighty as they are, cannot prevail.  
(S 56.46/5:454 f), SD 53.2

The **Commentaries** explain (in identical words)<sup>190</sup> that amongst every 3 world-systems, there is an intergalactic space (*lok'antarika*) measuring 8,000 yojanas (56,000 mi = 90,123 km). It is like the space amongst 3 cart-wheels or almsbowls touching one another. This is a zone of total blinding darkness.<sup>191</sup> Beings are reborn in this “**great interworld hell**” (*lok'antarika mahā,niraya*)—a kind of phantom zone—as a result of something great evil, such as the 5 heinous karma [2.3.8]. The hell-beings there look like huge bats, three-quarter yojana high,<sup>192</sup> long-clawed, clinging onto “the edges of cliff-sides” (*pabbata,pāde ... laggitvā*).<sup>193</sup>

An aspirant to buddhahood will not arise in such a hell for the simple reason that he does not perform any kind of karma that would fruit in his being reborn there.

#### 2.3.14 (14) The buddha-aspirant, in the sense-world, does not become Māra

**2.3.14.0** A detailed study of Māra from the perspectives of early Buddhism and ancient India is found in **SD 61a**. Early Buddhism speaks of Māra in different ways: ethical, psychological, spiritual, cosmological and existential terms (respectively as *kilesa,mārā, khandha,māra, abhisāṅkhāra,māra, deva.putta,māra, maccu,māra*). If you are not familiar with these, stop here and go on to read about them in SD 61a (3.2).

**2.3.14.1** In our contemporary lives, we can encounter Māra in either of 2 realistic ways, that is, (1) existentially and (2) personally.

(1) Māra works existentially from within us working on our greed, hatred and delusion to keep us driven by our lust, negative emotions and wrong views. This is the kind of Māra often spoken of in the suttas.<sup>194</sup> This is the Māra we are unlikely to recognize when we lack Dharma training and mindfulness.

<sup>189</sup> On its parallel in **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,1.18) & **Acchariya,abbhuta S 1** (A 4.127,2), SD 52.2a. Cf **Mahā,vastu** (Mvst 1:35; Mvst:J 1:35).

<sup>190</sup> DA 2:433,11-26 = MA 4:177,13-178,4 = AA 3:126,14-127,6.

<sup>191</sup> DA 2:433,11 = MA 4:177,13 = AA 3:14; see SD 53.2 (1.2.2.3).

<sup>192</sup> 3-*gāvuta* = 5.25 mi = 8.45 km. 4 *gāvuta* = 1 *yojana* = 11.25 km or 7 mi.

<sup>193</sup> Excerpts from: DA 2:433,27-434,12 = MA 4:178,5-26 = AA 3:127,7-128,3; VbhA 4,14-31. See SD 53.2 (1.2.3.2).

<sup>194</sup> A number of such suttas are found in SD 61b.

Here, Māra is likely to distract or manipulate us so that we are drawn to the crowd, seeking its approval, measuring ourselves against others, and ignoring people we feel have no worth for us. We are likely to be *narcissists, collectors and seekers of “something.”*

**Narcissists** are those who are asura-like, seeing themselves as above others, arrogantly or deviously demanding the attention and deference of others on account of their perceived status and power. A narcissist only sees himself; a narcissist cannot really see another person. He only perceives the effect that other people are having on him.

**Collectors** are preta-like persons who see others as objects being worthy of their attention or unworthy of it; what they see as worthy—whether it is teachers, teachings or things—they tend to “collect” by having some kind of addictive connection with them, without any appreciation for them but seeing them as trophies and specimens to pride themselves with.

**The something seeker** predictably moves animal-like in the rut of instinctively running after what they see as palpable, something pleasing or comforting to their senses or emotions, even if it is an idea of “something” that seems to give meaning to them. Māra here works in very subtle ways with our minds. With what we know we would rationalize why we should *be* at the centre of things, why we should *have* those things, and why there are those “things” in the first place.

(2) At some point in our lives, especially when we are deeply moved *to avoid evil, do good and tame the mind*, or to be deeply devoted to Dharma work, or to some human-centred endeavour, there is likely to be someone or some group who would dislike or distract us. Often these distractors are *narcissists, collectors or something-seekers*—who would hate us mainly because they perceive that we are a threat to the attention and admiration that they seek and demand for themselves, or that we are depriving them of their object of desire or something they are seeking or collecting.

They are our **personal Māra and his horde** who will work in every way to distract us, to distract others from us, and hopefully to destroy our work or our faith in our work or ourself, even in the Dharma—they would deeply delight when we fail or give up.

We are unlikely to understand that this Māra is dedicating himself personally to our misery, failure even destruction. The more dedicated we are to our work, the less likely we are to unveil the personal Māra’s machinations against us. In fact, we may even mistake Māra as being friendly and kind to us.

Perhaps with a deeper understanding of the Dharma, understanding how the deity Māra works against the Buddha, we may realize that we have **a personal Māra**. By then it may be all over, and looking back at our inexplicable difficulties and sufferings we then realize it was Māra’s past attention to us. Perhaps, by then, Māra had already faced his own dark dues and vanished from our life.

The bodhisattva would never be an existential Māra (such as the *devaputta māra*). The bodhisattva is in fact working to be just **the antithesis of Māra**, the conqueror of Māra, and to teach us how to deter, even overcome, Māra, and progress spiritually. Even less so would the bodhisattva ever be our “personal Māra,” since he is dedicated to the welfare and happiness of all beings, including ourself.

**2.3.14.2** We are not likely to notice Māra, or Māra may not notice us, when we are naturally **giving** and forgiving to others, moved by lovingkindness to cultivate **morally virtuous** speech and action. For ourself, our Dharma joy inspires us to **renounce** not only bad speech and wrong action, but also wrong views and violent thoughts. We are eager to learn Dharma neither for status nor for gain, but for **wisdom**, seeing things more clearly and truly.

All this goodness empowers us with **effort** in good, and loving **patience** at the faults and weaknesses of others. We understand and speak **truth**, timely and proper for others or each person or situation. Our unswerving **determination** is to know true Dharma and make it known, to inspire others not in the arrogance of being learned, but with radiant **lovingkindness** to accept themselves unconditionally and to

embrace others just as they are. Even in the face of great challenges, we look on with **equanimity**, learning how karma works, standing like the bodhi tree heading heavenward, while sheltering those under it.

This is what the bodhisattva aspired to, and this is what we can do, even without aspiring for buddhahood, because we are followers of Buddha Gotama, in whose dispensation we live. The Buddha teaches, we listen and practise—that is the Buddha’s dispensation. [1.1.1.1]

**2.3.14.3** It is well known that the bodhisattva is reborn in **Tusita** (heaven of the contented devas) in his penultimate birth, that is, before “descending” into a human birth to become buddha. However, no buddha arises in any of these sense-world heavens, since they are populated by celestial beings who enjoy the pleasures and powers of their past good karma in a divine setting. Hence, as a rule, they are unlikely to care about events in the lower worlds.

The sense-world deva realms, by way of increasing length of lifespan are as follows:<sup>195</sup>

		<u><b>lifespan</b></u>
Cātu,māha.rajika heaven	the 4 great kings (protectors of Tāvātimsa)	500 cy
Tavatimsā heaven	the heaven of the 33 devas (Sakra’s heaven)	2,000 cy
Yāma heaven	the heaven of the Yāma devas	8,000 cy
Tusita heaven	the contented devas	16,000 cy
Nimmāna,ratī heaven	devas who delight in creation	64,000 cy
Para,nimmita Vasa,vattī heaven	devas who lord over others’ creations	128,000 cy

### **2.3.15 (15) The buddha-aspirant, in the form world, does not arise in the non-conscious plane**

**2.3.15.1 The non-conscious beings (*asañña,sattā*)<sup>196</sup>** are the 4<sup>th</sup> formless plane just below those of the pure abodes,<sup>197</sup> or the 4<sup>th</sup> of the 9 abodes of beings (*satt’āvāsa*).<sup>198</sup> These beings have neither perception nor feeling;<sup>199</sup> hence, they are *unconscious* and experience nothing.<sup>200</sup> However, as soon as an idea occurs to them, they fall from their state. Brahmin ascetics, having a sustained practice of meditation and attained the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana, seeing the disadvantages attached to thinking, try to do away with it altogether. Dying in this condition, they are reborn among the *Asañña,sattā*, having form only but without feelings, perceptions, formations or consciousness. Their lifespan is only as long as their power of dhyana; then an idea occurs to them, and they die at once and are reborn.<sup>201</sup> These devas are long-lived,<sup>202</sup> lasting 500 aeons.<sup>203</sup>

**2.3.15.2** Interestingly, this unique plane of existence is one of virtual *non-being*, characterized by the suspension of consciousness. Since these beings exist in a state of suspended animation, they actually *do nothing* and nothing happens to them. The bodhisattva, on the other hand, lives proactively, cultivating spiritual qualities, wholesomely responding to the needs of others, and learning from it all. Understandably, a bodhisattva would not want to be reborn amongst the *Asañña,sattā*.

<sup>195</sup> “Cy” = celestial years. For further details, see **Early Buddhist** cosmology (SD 57.10 esp 1.5.4.6).

<sup>196</sup> DhA 4:132,2; cf SnA 359,26.

<sup>197</sup> On the 31 realms, see SD 1.7 (App).

<sup>198</sup> On the 7 stations of consciousness: **Satta Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti S** (A 7.41), SD 57.17; on the 9 abodes of beings: **(Navaka) Satt’āvāsa S** (A 9.24), SD 57.18.

<sup>199</sup> D 33,3.2(3)/3:263.

<sup>200</sup> A 9.24/4:401.

<sup>201</sup> D 1,2.31/1:28; DA 1:118.

<sup>202</sup> ThA 2:42.

<sup>203</sup> Vbh 424,23 f.

### 2.3.16 (16) The buddha-aspirant does not arise in the pure abodes

**2.3.16.1 The pure abodes** (*suddh'āvāsa*) are neither a physical nor structured realm, but an invisible dimension of form-world beings (like radio waves). The “form world” (*rūpa,loka*) comprises beings who are free from the 5 physical senses. They have form (*rūpa*) that is not sense-based like that of humans, but are of a refined kind like radiant colours. They are “divine, having form, mind-made, endowed with all the limbs and organs, without defect in any faculty.”<sup>204</sup>

Among the **form beings** (like the nonreturners of the pure abodes), the **decads** (*dasaka*) of *nose, tongue, body, sex and material groups arising from food* are not found in them. Hence, to these beings, at the time of rebirth-linking<sup>205</sup> there arise **4 material groups** (*kalāpa*) produced by karma: the 3 decads of eye, ear and heart-base,<sup>206</sup> and the life nonad. During the course of existence, material phenomena produced by consciousness and by heat (temperature) also occur.<sup>207</sup>

Since the beings of the form realms are free from the sense-faculties, including a physical body (like a human's), they are asexual; they lack the 2 decads of sex.<sup>208</sup> Even though they have physical forms of the nose, tongue and body, these organs lack any sensitivity. In other words, these organs are merely aesthetic.

In short, the **form-world beings**, including the nonreturners of the pure abodes, do not *smell, taste or feel or touch* (or need to). They do not need to sense things the way humans and sense-world beings do. The form-world beings have highly developed senses of **sight and hearing** on account of their dhyanic minds, which are able to process smell, taste or touch mentally (thus directly), while humans depend on their sense-faculties, further aided by their sensitivities and skills.

**2.3.16.2 The pure abodes** (*suddh'āvāsa*), the dimension of the **nonreturners** (supramundane 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana) located in the 4<sup>th</sup>-dhyana form world (*rūpa,loka*) comprises the following realms:<sup>209</sup>

		<u>life-span</u>
5	<i>akaniṭṭhā</i>	the supreme
6	<i>sudassī</i>	the clear-visioned
7	<i>sudassā</i>	the clear-beauty
8	<i>ātappā</i>	the serene
9	<i>avihā</i>	the durable
		16,000 aeons
		8,000 aeons
		4,000 aeons
		2,000 aeons
		1,000 aeons

**2.3.16.3 Beings in the form world**—wherein the pure abodes are located—are called **brahmas** (*brahmā*), on account of their **divine** or perfect form and nature, of whom Mahābrahmā is the most radiant and most beautiful of them. They feed on joy and are luminous. Those who attain nonreturning as humans but do not go on to attain arhathood are reborn as brahmas in the pure abodes. Therein the nonreturners practise until they gain arhathood without ever being reborn on earth again.

The **bodhisattva** does not arise in the pure abodes for obvious reasons: only **nonreturners** arise there, or rather the abodes are the dimensions of the nonreturners. For the very same reason, the

<sup>204</sup> *Dibbo rūpī mano, mayo sabbaṅga, paccaṅgī ahindriyo*: D 1,3.12/1:34 (SD 25); Vbh 384,9.

<sup>205</sup> See SD 60.1b (12.2.3.4).

<sup>206</sup> “Heart-base,” *hadaya, vatthu*, the Abhidhamma term for the mind's “location.” See SD 26.2 (3.1.3.6); SD 56.20 (2.2.2.4).

<sup>207</sup> “Nonad” and “decad” refer to molecular “clusters” (*kalāpa*) that comprise each of the faculties, according to Abhidhamma. See SD 26.2 (esp 3).

<sup>208</sup> I.e., male and female. On the sex decads, see SD 60.1b (12.3.2).

<sup>209</sup> The numbering sequence (5-9) refers to their ranking in the scheme of the 31-plane cosmology [SD 1.7 (App)].



Buddha declares that *there is no place that he has not been born into except the pure abodes*.<sup>210</sup> However, due to his awakened powers, the Buddha is able to fathom, even visit, any of these abodes if he wishes to.<sup>211</sup>

### 2.3.17 (17) The buddha-aspirant does not arise in a formless world

**2.3.17.1** The formless world is the highest of the 3 worlds—the sense-world, the form world and the formless world—that is, existential states, in early Buddhist cosmology. It comprises the following realms.<sup>212</sup>

- |  |                                   |            |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------|
| (1) the base of infinite space,                        | <i>ākāsānañc'āyatana</i>          | [SD 24.15] |
| (2) the base of infinite consciousness,                | <i>viññāṇañc'āyatana</i>          | [SD 24.16] |
| (3) the base of nothingness,                           | <i>ākīñcaññ'āyatana</i>           | [SD 24.17] |
| (4) the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. | <i>n'eva,saññā,nāsaññ'āyatana</i> | [SD 24.18] |

Because they have transcended all materiality by attaining the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana, the beings here retain only the subtlest form of the last 4 of the 5 aggregates, that is, *feeling, perception, formations and consciousness*; that is, they lack physical form (*rūpa*) of the sense-world. Since these are profoundly meditative states of the formless dhyana, they spend much of their time in meditation.

**2.3.17.2** The 4 stages of the formless realms are ultimately rooted in **the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana**. When all perceptions of material form belonging to the 4 dhyanas, and the objects of these perceptions (the form-dhyana counterpart signs), are transcended, the meditator attains **the base of infinite space** (*ākāsānañc'āyatana*), the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 4 formless attainments. This means that there is no more “perception of diversity” (*nanatta,saññā*). However, there is still some very subtle perception of mind-objects (*dhmma,saññā*) in this 1<sup>st</sup> formless attainment.<sup>213</sup>

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> formless attainment, the meditator perceives space as infinite (and has no sense of time either). Consciousness of both time and space (as external realities) as we know them disappears. The mind is directed *inward* to consciousness itself. This is that rare occasion when there is no more consciousness *of*; thus consciousness appears to be *infinite*; hence, it is called **the base of infinite consciousness** (*viññāṇañc'āyatana*).<sup>214</sup>

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> formless attainment, as the meditator sustains his focus on infinite consciousness, consciousness itself begins to disappear. This leaves behind only the infinity, that is, of “**nothingness**” (*ākīñcaññā*). In other words, in letting go of the perception of infinite consciousness, one proceeds to the next level. Otherwise, one could remain stuck in that particular state: what is meant to free us becomes a fetter, holding us back. Dhyana, in short, is about *supreme letting go*—until there is *nothing* more to let go of. This is true renunciation. Then we are ready for liberation.<sup>215</sup>

Finally, as our experience of “nothingness” (*ākīñcaññā*) steadily deepens, we begin to understand that underlying it is a perception that goes beyond nothingness. If our mind is refined enough to see this, then the perception of nothingness disappears and is best described as being neither-perception-nor-

<sup>210</sup> D 2:50, 52, 3:237; DA 3:1029.

<sup>211</sup> On the Buddha's visit to the pure abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*), see **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,3.34 f), SD 49.8a.

<sup>212</sup> For a summary on the formless realms, see SD 24.11 (5). On the “formless” (*arūpī*), see SD 53.23 (2.1.3). Related suttas are: (1) **Ākāsānañc'āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.5), SD 24.15; (2) **Viññāṇañc'āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.6), SD 24.16; (3) **Ākīñcaññ'āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.7), SD 24.17; (4) **N'eva,saññā,nāsaññ'āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.8), SD 24.18.

<sup>213</sup> See **Ākāsānañc'āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.5), SD 24.15.

<sup>214</sup> See **Viññāṇañc'āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.6), SD 24.16,

<sup>215</sup> See **(Pañcāla,caṇḍa) Sambādha S** (A 9.42/4:449-451), SD 33.2.

non-perception (*n'eva saññā nāsaññā*). The consciousness here is so refined that *it cannot be said whether there is perceiving or not*. In other words, our consciousness is at its subtlest level.

**2.3.17.3** Why is it that the bodhisattva does not arise in any of these formless states that are so remarkably subtle? That is the very reason! These remarkable mental experiences blissfully frees one from the suffering world, whose beings mostly do not experience form-dhyanas; they are caught in the world of sense-experiences with which they react with pleasure or displeasure deluded by the appeal and promises of these experiences, fettered to craving, blinded by ignorance.

**The bodhisattva** arises in the sense-world as the Buddha to free it from the prison of the senses and the captivity of the worldly mind. The Buddha teaches the true nature of the world—its impermanence, suffering and nonself—which is easier for the sense-world beings to experience and understand since these characterize their senses and minds.

### **2.3.18 (18) The buddha-aspirant does not migrate to another universe**<sup>216</sup>

**2.3.18.1** This last condition is a very remarkable one: it implies that the Buddha and the early Buddhists were aware of or envisioned **the multiverse**, a multiplicity of universes like ours that exist at the same time, separated remotely from one another by astronomical distances. Apparently, the Buddha was aware of such a reality through his profound powers of meditation and boundless wisdom.

**The (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** (A 3.80) preserves a remarkable statement by the Buddha on this definition of **loka, dhātu** (world system), thus:<sup>217</sup>

“Ānanda, a thousand times the world in which the sun and the moon turn and light up the quarters with their radiance<sup>218</sup>—this, Ānanda, is called a **1,000 small world system** (*sahassī cūḷānikā loka, dhātu*).<sup>219</sup>

In that 1,000 small world system,<sup>220</sup> there are:<sup>221</sup>

a thousand moons,	
a thousand suns,	
a thousand Sinerus, kings of the mountains,	(the world-hubs) <sup>222</sup>
a thousand Jambu, dīpas, <sup>223</sup>	(the Indian subcontinent)
a thousand Aparā, go.yānas,	(the Western Ox-wains)
a thousand Uttara, kurus,	(the Northern Kurus)
a thousand Pubba, videhas,	(the Western Videhas)
a thousand 4 great oceans,	
a thousand Cātu, māha.rajika heavens,	(the 4 great kings)
a thousand Tavatimsā heavens,	(the 33 devas)

<sup>216</sup> For a reflection, see R140 Parallel universes RB150 2016.

<sup>217</sup> A 3.80/1:226-228 (SD 54.1). [[Download](#)] 20 Feb 2025

<sup>218</sup> *Yāvatā ānanda candima, suriyā* (Ce Ee Ke Se; Be *candima, suriyā* throughout) *pariharanti disā bhanti virocanā, tāva sahassadhā loka*.

<sup>219</sup> See SD 54.1 (2.1.2.4). Comy: This is the range of a disciple (*ayaṃ sāvakaṣa visayo*, AA 2:341,1).

<sup>220</sup> The “1,000” here, then, is simply an adjective referring to a collection of neighbouring world-systems; hence, the phrase is tr in the singular. See SD 54.1 (2.1.2.2+2.1.2.4).

<sup>221</sup> All this, up to the Para, nimmita Vasa, vatti heaven, constitutes our “physical” universe, or, the “sense world” (*kāma, loka*). The brahma realms mentioned here constitute only the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 4 form worlds (*rūpa, loka*), which are all dhyanic in nature. For their locations in the early Buddhist cosmology, see SD 1.7 (App).

<sup>222</sup> This is the early Buddhist conception of the hub or centre of the revolving galaxy.

<sup>223</sup> *Jambu, dīpa* is the textual name for the ancient Indian subcontinent, the southernmost of the 4 great continents, surrounded by the 4 oceans. See SD 16.15 (3). For descriptions, see KhpA 123; SnA 2:443; DhsA 298.

a thousand Yāma heavens,	
a thousand Tusita heavens,	(the contented devas)
a thousand Nimmāna,ratī heavens,	(devas who delight in creation)
a thousand Para,nimmita Vasa,vattī heavens,	(those who lord over others' creations)
and a thousand brahma worlds.	(A 3.80,11/1:227 f) <sup>224</sup> + SD 54.1 (2.2.3)

**2.3.18.2** The galaxies comprise world systems (*loka,dhātu*) of different sizes, thus:

- (1) Our solar system and its quadrant as imagined by the early Buddhists, known simply as “**the universe**” (*loka,dhātu*, “world-system,” or *cakka,vāḷa*, “world sphere”),<sup>225</sup> that is, our “immediate” universe.
- (2) A “small **chiliocosm**,”<sup>226</sup> or a thousandfold world system (*sahassī cūḷanikā loka,dhātu*), which is 1,000x larger than our own universe [1]; this is defined in **the (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta** (A 3.80). [2.3.18.1].
- (3) A “**dichiliocosm**,” a kind of “mega” universe, larger than (2) by 10<sup>6</sup> or 1,000,000 (a million).
- (4) A “**trichiliocosm**,” a kind of “**tera**” universe, larger than (3) by 10<sup>12</sup> or 1,000,000,000,000 (a trillion); a **trichiliocosm**. As for the size of this tera-universe, the north Indian tradition—as found in Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharma,kośa*<sup>227</sup>—sees it as comprising *a billion* (1,000,000,000) world systems,<sup>228</sup> while the southern tradition—in Buddhaghosa’s commentaries<sup>229</sup>—it is *a trillion* (1,000,000,000,000).

**2.3.18.3** Why does a bodhisattva not move from our universe to another? This may be explained in terms of the concept of **buddha-field** (*buddha,khetta*), that is, as follows:<sup>230</sup>

- his field of **birth**—the “10,000 world system” (*dasa,sahassa cakka,vāḷa*); this is where he can be born;
- his field of **authority**—the “1,000,000,000,000 [trillion] world system” (*koṭi,sahassa cakkavāḷa*) = a “tera-universe” [2.3.18.2]; this is the reach of or accessibility to his teaching (dispensation, *sāsana*);
- his field of **range**—an infinite number of world systems; this is how far the Buddha’s mind can survey.

This means that, basically, the Buddha would not move away from his birth-universe, which he well knows and is well-known. The significance is that his teaching (*sāsana*) will remain long to benefit that universe (that is, us) even after his death, so that even then, awakening or attaining the path is possible. If the Buddha were to move away from our universe, then, he is likely to become some kind of “mythical memory,” “mystical myths” or “imaginative piety” such as the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of later Buddhism.

## 2.4 THE IDEAL BEING

**2.4.1** The freedom from these 18 impossible conditions *neither* authenticates *nor* confers on the bodhisattva any kind of status or power. He has earned the benefit of those conditions through aeons of cultivating what is wholesome. Some of these conditions (such as nos. 8, 15, 16), he has *chosen* or *determined* not to have to expedite his attaining buddhahood.

<sup>224</sup> Nc 235.2b; Dā T1.114b20c7. See SD 54.1 (2.1.2) for nn. Cf Punnadhammo, *The Buddhist Cosmos*, 2018:41 f.

<sup>225</sup> On these 2 terms, see SD 57.10 (2.1.1.2).

<sup>226</sup> See SD 57.10 [1.5.2.4]. The term “chiliocosm” first appeared in Abel Rémusat, Julius von Klaproth & C Landresse, *The Pilgrimage of Fa Hian*, Calcutta, 1848:131 (tr from French): <https://archive.org/details/pilgrimagefahia00rmgoog>.

<sup>227</sup> SD 59.10 [2.1.3.1].

<sup>228</sup> Abhk 3.73 f. On the “power of 10,” see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power\\_of\\_10](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_of_10).

<sup>229</sup> A 1:227 f; AA 2:340 f.

<sup>230</sup> See SD 57.10 [4.3.2.2].

**2.4.2** In a scriptural and literary way, the ancient Indian Buddhist story-tellers invoke these conditions to declare that the bodhisattva is **the “great man”** (*mahā, purisa*), a highly evolved individual, who will become a trans-existential human, one who is capable of crossing over samsara or cyclic existence by his own effort and self-awakening.

**2.4.3** Hence, he is also **the ideal being**, one that all beings should look up to, reminding them that they, too, are capable of rising above their current state or station, no matter how evil, how unholy, how subservient or how powerless, they may be now. They only need to seek the path of awakening and follow it, the path that leads to true spiritual freedom and awakening.

### **3 Disciplehood and discipleship**

#### **3.1 DISCIPLEHOOD**

**3.1.2** The aspirant to **disciplehood**—being a path disciple of the Buddha [1.3]—must have an earnest desire to act or practise (*kattu, kamyatā*) so as to attain the path [1.3]. **The Vibhaṅga** explains the term “desire to act” as “the will (or desire) for Dharma [seeing true reality]” (*dhamma-c, chanda*) and it also means “effort (*vāyāma* or *padhāna*)” or “energy (*vīriya*)”; one puts one’s “mind” (*citta*) into that Dharma.

In other words, the aspirant to disciplehood must practise right effort (*samma-p, padhāna*): *do no evil, end evil; initiate good, cultivate good*. The aspirant must cultivate the fourfold path of spiritual success: willfulness or purposefulness (*chanda*), effort (*vīriya*), the mind (*citta*) and dharma-investigation (*vīmaṃsā*);<sup>231</sup> these are the qualities that make the aspirant an accomplished meditator.

**3.1.3** Both kinds of aspirants for disciplehood—the foremost disciples and the great disciples [2.1.4.2]—are arhats, just like the Buddha [2.2.3.2(1)]. Apparently, disciples who are *neither* chief disciples (like Sāriputta and Moggallāna) *nor* great disciples (such as Koṇḍañña, Mahā Kassapa and Mahā Kaccāna) do not need to take such a long time (in terms of aspiration and the ensuing practice for awakening).

The reality is that non-aspirants actually take a very much longer time to reach the path, since they are still stuck in samsara, *shrouded in ignorance and fettered in craving*, like cattle being led to the slaughter. Realistically, then, aspirants take a relatively shorter time to attain awakening than those on the path of the ordinary practitioners!

The only “consolation” for the ordinary practitioner is that they are unaware of this astronomically long time that they spend in samsara because of either *not knowing the Dharma* or *not accepting it* as our life’s goal. For example, while scholars who are expert in Buddhism take it as merely an academic subject and remain, arguably, unawakened, the mindful practitioner, whether a scholar or not, is more likely to reach the path of awakening in this life itself.

#### **3.2 DISCIPLESHIP**

##### **3.2.1 Commitment to the 3 jewels**

**3.2.1.1** While disciplehood (*sāvakattā*) usually begins with an aspiration to be the future Buddha’s disciple in some capacity (such as a chief disciple, or one of the great disciples), **discipleship** (*dhamma,-*

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<sup>231</sup> Vbh 209-223. On the 4 right efforts, see SD 10.16 (6); on the fourfold path of spiritual success (*iddhi, pāda*), see **Cattāro Iddhi, pāda**, SD 10.3.

*cariya*), “living the Dharma,” involves *study, practice and realization*,<sup>232</sup> of the path of *moral conduct, mental cultivation and liberating wisdom*<sup>233</sup>—the former triad is the 3 stages of training, the latter the 3 trainings themselves (*sīla samādhi paññā*).

**Discipleship** is basically our commitment to the 3 jewels, taking the historical **Buddha** as “refuge” (*saraṇa*), meaning that we understand and accept the Buddha as our one and only true *teacher*. Secondly, we go for refuge in the **Buddha Dharma**, the teaching of the nature of the Buddha and the Dharma. Thirdly, we take the **noble sangha** as our path of practice leading to streamwinning in this life itself.

**3.2.1.2** It is vital to understand why we should aspire for **streamwinning**<sup>234</sup> in this life itself—because we now have the right conditions for such an aspiration. If we miss this opportunity, we may neither be human again nor find the favourable conditions for Dharma practice. If we should fall into any of the 4 subhuman states, it would take a very long time before we get this chance for discipleship again. Even if we are reborn as humans, our mind may not be able to attain the level of opening to the study, practice or realization of the path.

Aspiring for discipleship thus means to see the urgency of awakening, and to work for the path in this life itself—as taught in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1).<sup>235</sup> The point is that it is not the *belief* that all things are impermanent that changes us, but our actions and understanding in the spirit of impermanence does. Our beliefs do not make us better persons, our conduct does. Such conduct supports the mind that will awaken.

### **3.2.2 Significance of the long duration for aspirant transformation**

The time that one must take in one’s aspiration to awakening—as the buddha, a pacceka-buddha or a disciple—is really many aeons. An **aeon** (a world-cycle), as we have noted [2.1] is described as being “immeasurable” or “incalculable,” in the prescientific times of the Buddhist India. This immeasurability and incalculability are described (not “measured”) in metaphors [2.1.1].

We may well claim that the early Buddhists were basically making the point that **time is relative**. But this would be like trying to measure Buddhism up to modern science—it would be like comparing Cinderella (as a scullery maid) against Prince Charming (as royalty). It could be argued who is like Buddhism and who is like science! But then in trying to compare them, we are missing the whole idea of the aspiration to awakening: that early Buddhism and science share the same love, that of understanding nature.

Further, the point of speaking of such astronomical lengths of time is that we should make our spiritual aspiration right here and now. We have actually vacillated that long to gain the path. We should right now aspire to attain at least **streamwinning**. [3.2.1.2]

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<sup>232</sup> This triad of “study, practice, realization” (*pariyatti, paṭipatti, paṭivedha*) are known as **the 3 good dharmas** (*saddhamma* 3): SD 40a.1 (3.4.2); SD 40a.4 (6.2.1).

<sup>233</sup> On the 3 trainings, see **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88), SD 24.10c; *Sīla samādhi paññā*, SD 21.6; SD 1.11 (5).

<sup>234</sup> On streamwinning (*sotāpatti*), see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3; *Kūṭa, danta S* (D 5,29-30) SD 22.8 Kūṭadanta’s streamwinning. On the certainty of attaining streamwinning, see SD 3.3 (7).

<sup>235</sup> S 25.1/3:225 (SD 16.7).