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## 4

# THE SECRET OF THE BUDDHA'S SUCCESS

## The Buddha's First Discourse and the Founding of Buddhism

BRAHMĀ SAHAMPATI

### 1. SOMEONE TO SHOW RESPECT TO

Ancient Indian teachers, especially the brahminical gurus, were generally reluctant to teach others. Where these ancient teachers did give their teachings, they would usually hold something back by way of the “teacher’s fist” (*ācārya, muṣṭi/ācariya, muṭṭhi*) (D 2:100 = S 5:153) [10:7b]. As such, it is natural for the Buddha not to immediately declare his newly-realized truth, as it were. He is merely keeping to the religious convention of his times.

**The Gārava Sutta** (or Uruvelā Sutta II) gives important insight into the Buddha’s “hesitation” to teach, revealing a humble and sensitive side of the Buddha. This event occurred during the 5<sup>th</sup> week after the Enlightenment while the Buddha was sitting under the Goatherd Banyan Tree, when this thought arises in the newly enlightened Buddha: “One dwells in suffering if one is without reverence and deference. Now what ascetic or brahmin can I honour and respect and dwell in dependence on?”

With this thought, the Buddha reflects to whom he should turn as teacher to fulfill any unfulfilled **virtue**...any unfulfilled **concentration**...any unfulfilled **wisdom**...any unfulfilled **liberation**...any unfulfilled **knowledge and vision of liberation**...but he found no one more accomplished in these qualities than he himself, and as such found no one to honour and respect. “Let me then honour and respect and dwell in dependence on this very Dharma to which I have fully awakened.” (S 1:139 = A 2:20).

**The Aṅguttara version** of the sūtra closes with an interesting remark put into the Buddha’s mouth: “Moreover, monks, since the Sangha too has attained to greatness, I also have deep reverence for the Sangha.” Considering the fact that this event occurred only 5 weeks after the Enlightenment (before the Sangha was formed), it is likely that this last sentence was interpolated much later by redactors.

### 2. THE BUDDHA'S DECISION TO TEACH

#### (a) Reasons for the Buddha's hesitation

It is said that soon after his enlightenment, the Buddha hesitated to make known his newly-discovered Dharma, as it would be difficult for a world that is filled with lust and hate to understand. There are **two reasons for the Buddha's hesitation**—one intellectual, the other moral. The Dharma is deep and thus requires an extreme concentration of the mind before one can understand it. And since it insists upon the extinction of all desires, it therefore demands complete self-control. An average person, when he is a victim of unceasing desires and is untrained in mind, would find it extremely difficult to understand or follow the Dharma. The individualistic “intellectual” would find it beyond his capacity and the morally weak worldling would be thoroughly discouraged. These sentiments are recorded in a number of places in the Pāli Canon with these stanzas:

Enough with teaching the Dharma  
That even I found hard to reach;  
For it will never be perceived  
By those who live in lust and hate.

Those dyed in lust, wrapped in darkness,  
Will never discern this abstruse Dharma  
Which goes against the worldly current,  
Subtle, deep, and difficult to see.

Considering thus, my mind inclined to inaction rather than to teaching the Dharma.

(V 1:4 = M 1:169 = S 1:136; D 2:37 Vipāśyī Buddha; Mvst 3:315)

At this point, it is said that **Brahmā Sahampati**, a celestial being from the highest heavens, perceiving the Buddha's thought, is alarmed, crying, "The world is lost!" Fearing that the world might perish through not hearing the Doctrine, he entreats the Buddha to teach the Dharma as there are

...beings with little dust in their eyes who are falling away because they do not hear the Dharma.  
There will be those who will understand the Dharma

(V 1:5-7 = M 1:169 = S 1:138 f)

### (b) Waiting for Brahmā

Some modern scholars regard the story of Brahmā Sahampati's entreaty to the Buddha to teach the Dharma for the benefit of the world as "**a symbolic and psychological description of the Buddha's inner conflict**" (Endo, 1997:90, also 331:n127). The implication here, some scholars argue, is that Brahmā has to request the Buddha to teach because the Buddha is inclined towards not teaching the Dharma.

**The Majjhima Commentary on the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta stanzas** raises the question why, when the Bodhisattva had long ago made an aspiration to reach Buddhahood in order to liberate others, his mind was now bent towards inaction. The reason, the commentator says, is that only now, after reaching enlightenment, does he fully realize the strength of the defilements in people's minds and of the profundity of the Dharma. Moreover, he wants Brahmā to entreat him to teach so that beings who venerate Brahmā would recognize the precious value of the Dharma and desire to listen to it (MA 2:176 f).

Even without Brahmā's entreaty, the Buddha, in all his infinite wisdom, would have been able to convince his audience, and it is needless, therefore, for him to have hesitated. Moreover, in modern times, Brahmā's entreaty could be misinterpreted as **a divine intervention** by a higher being to bestow charisma or prophetship upon the Buddha.

Where the first problem is concerned, one must remember that no one is obliged to teach the Truth that one has discovered. Had the Buddha decided not to declare the Dharma, he would have lived and died just like any other enlightened saint. But, the fact that he decides to teach, and that he has the ability to do so, makes him "the Perfectly Self-Enlightened Buddha" (*samyak,sambuddha/sammā,sambuddha*). Whether or not Brahmā succeeds in his entreaty is of little consequence, or at best circumstantial.

As for the second problem, about the likelihood of misinterpreting Brahmā's entreaty as a **theophany** (divine manifestation in the world), it should be borne in mind that even the highest of the Brahmā deities have not attained Nirvana, whereas the Buddha has. The ancient Indians, especially the brahmins, looked up to Brahmā as the Creator. The fact that Brahmā himself comes down and humbly entreats the Buddha to teach the Dharma obviously means that the Buddha's message is a vital one worthy of listening to and following (DA 2:467).

### (c) The decision to teach

The most important reason for the Buddha to teach the Dharma is given in the words put into Brahmā's mouth in **the Āyācanā Sutta** (or Uruvelā Sutta I), recorded in the Vinaya, the Dīgha (Vipāśyī

Buddha), the Majjhima and the Saṃyutta (with BHS parallel in the Mahāvastu), attesting to its importance. The Saṃyutta Commentary says that this event occurred in the 8<sup>th</sup> week after the Enlightenment.

The Āyācanā Sutta opens with the Buddha sitting under the Goatherd Banyan Tree reflecting on the profundity of the newly-realized Dharma, his hesitation to teach it and Brahmā's entreaty. What Brahmā says following this serves as the rationale for the need for the Buddha to declare the newly-found Dharma to the world:

In the past there has appeared (until now) in Magadha  
An impure Dharma devised by those still tainted.  
Throw open this door to the Deathless!  
Let them hear the Dharma discovered by the Stainless One.

Just as one standing on a mountain peak  
Might see below the people all around,  
So, O wise one, Universal Eye,<sup>1</sup>  
Ascend the palace of the Dharma.  
Being yourself free from sorrow, behold the people  
Drowned in sorrow, oppressed by birth and decay.

Arise! O Hero! Victor in battle!  
O Caravan Leader, debt-free one, wander in the world!  
Teach the Dharma, O Blessed One!  
There will be those who will understand,

(V 1:4-7; M 1:167-69; S 1:136-39; D 2:36-40  
Vipaśyī Buddha; Mvst 3:314-19; cf. S 1:234)

*In the past there has appeared (till now) in Magadha / An impure Dharma devised by those still tainted.* In dialectical terms, this is the **thesis**, the real but unsatisfactory state of things stated by Brahmā on behalf of sentient beings as it were. In social terms, this statement clearly refers to the Brahminical system of philosophy and practices, that is, the *āstika* system [2:11a].

*Throw open this door to the Deathless! / Let them hear the Dharma discovered by the Stainless One.* This is the **antithesis** to Brahmā's earlier request. The first statement was a definition of the problem, and this second statement was a proposal for its solution.

### 3. ANTECEDENTIAL TERMINOLOGY

A successful teacher is a good communicator. To communicate his teachings, the Buddha (and the Buddhists) not only introduced new terms (such as *pratisaṃvid/paṭisambhidā*) but more so used numerous old terms (Buddha, arhant, dharma, karma, nirvana) giving them new senses. Both these categories need to be clearly defined.

In his article, "Theravāda Buddhism and Brahmanical Hinduism: Brahmanical Terms in a Buddhist Guise" (1991), K.R. Norman investigates into the terminology used by the Buddha to show how he coped with this problem. Norman deals with the Buddha's usage of brahminical terms in three categories (here listed with a few examples):

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<sup>1</sup> The Five Eyes. The **Buddha eye** (*buddha, cakkhu*) is a name for the knowledge of the degrees of maturity in the faculties of being (*indriya, paropariyatta, nāṇa*) and the knowledge of the dispositions and underlying tendencies of beings (*āsayānusaya, -nāṇa*). The knowledge of omniscience is called the **Universal Eye** (*samanta, cakkhu*). The knowledge of the three lower paths is called the **Dharma Eye** or "vision of Dharma" (*dhamma, cakkhu*). Together with the **Divine Eye** or clairvoyance (*dibba, -cakkhu*) and the **physical eye** (*maṃsa, cakkhu*), these make up the Five Eyes of the Buddha. [1:2]

### (a) Terms and structures taken over by the Buddha

**deva.** They are accepted as merely superhuman and not allowed any causal role in the universe.<sup>2</sup>

**Myths and fables.** In the Brahmajāla Sutta (D no. 1), the Buddha jokes about the way in which Brahmā thinks that he has created other beings, and he makes references to the creation myth in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. In his comments in the Aggañña Sutta (D no. 27) on the way in which brahmins are born, the Buddha satirizes the Puruṣa-sūkta of the Rgveda.<sup>3</sup>

### (b) Terms taken over by the Buddha but used with new senses

**aggi.** Keeping to the Vedic tradition of *āhitāgni*, the brahmin keeps three fires burning. The Buddha declares that there are three fires that should not be served but abandoned, namely, the fires of lust, hate and delusion (*rāga dosa moha*).

**amata.** In Brahmanism, *amṛta* is the world of immortality, heaven, eternity, or the nectar (ambrosia) which confers immortality, produced at the churning of the ocean. The Buddha however uses the word as an epithet of Nirvana, which is described as the *amatam padaṃ* (the path where there is no death). This is not, however, an immortal place, but the state where there is no death. Elsewhere Norman points out a common error in the usage of the terms *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna* [10:21c].

**brahman.**<sup>4</sup> The word *brahma* (uncompounded neuter) in the Upaniṣadic *brahman* is not found in Pali, but the word *brahma* is used in the compounds apparently in the sense of “excellent, perfect” (and I might add “supreme”, as in *brahma,daṇḍa* [10:20b]).

**brahma,cariya.** In its basic brahmanical sense this means “the practice of a *brāhmaṇa*”, i.e. to live a celibate life, learning the Vedas. The Buddha uses the term in the more general sense of “to live a holy, celibate life (or in the case of married couples, a chaste and moral) life”.

**brahma,vihāra.**<sup>5</sup> The term literally means “dwelling in or with *brahman* or Brahmā”, and it perhaps show a trace of its original meaning in the Tevijjā Sutta (D 3:235-253), but it should be noted that this means only being born in the same heaven as Mahā Brahmā, not union with the Upaniṣadic *brahman*.

**brāhmaṇa.** In Brahmanism, a *brahman* (*√br̥mh-*, “to be strong”) is a brahman by birth and is a kinsman of Brahmā. This idea is known to the Buddha<sup>6</sup>, but by adopting a different etymology (*√br̥mh-*, “to destroy”), he was able to justify the view that a brahman is one who has destroyed evil (ThaA 2:85,5-6 ad Tha 221; cf. Dh 383-423). I might add that another etymology (fr. *bahi*, outside), in the sense of “keep outside, ward off” (*bāheti*) is used for *brahman* in the Aggañña Sutta and elsewhere, that is, a brahman is “one who wards off evil” (D 3:94; S 1:141; Sn 510 = Nc 464a; Dh 267).

**jhāna.** The Sanskrit *dhyāna* is “religious thought, meditation”. For the Buddha, *jhāna* applies to a very specific type of meditation absorption, and is rarely applied in a wider sense.<sup>7</sup>

**khetta,jina (Sn 523 f.).** The commentary here is uncertain of its meaning, which on the face seems to mean “conqueror of the field(s)”.<sup>8</sup> Norman proposes that the second element of the compound is actually -*jña*, not -*jina*, pointing to its connection with *kṣetra-jña* (Manu 12:12).

**uposatha.** In Brahmanism, the *upavasatha* is a fast day, the day of preparation for the Soma sacrifice. In Buddhism, the fast day itself is the day of reciting the Prātimokṣa (for monks and nuns) and listening to recitations (for the laity), i.e. it is no longer part of a ritual for purity, but the occasion for a confession of moral and ethical transgression.

**veda.** This is used in Buddhism in its general sense of “knowledge”,<sup>9</sup> instead of as a title of brahmanical texts. The term *veda,gu*, which in its brahmanical sense means one who has gained competence in the

<sup>2</sup> On the 3 types of devas (Nc 307; KhA 123) see K.R. Norman, “Devas and Adhidevas in Buddhism”, JPTS 9 1981: 154.

<sup>3</sup> R. Gombrich, “Recovering the Buddha’s Message” in T. Skorupski (ed.), *The Buddhist Forum* 1, 1990:13 ff and 14 n25.

<sup>4</sup> For the occurrences of *brahman* in the Pali Canon, see K. Bhattacharya, “Brahman in the Pali Canon and in the Pali Commentaries”, *Amalā Prajñā: Aspects of Buddhist Studies*, Delhi 1989:91-102.

<sup>5</sup> E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), London, 1949:126.

<sup>6</sup> See Buddha’s remark regarding Aṅgaṇika Bharadvāja (ThaA 2:85,4-5 ad Tha 221).

<sup>7</sup> L.S. Cousins, “Buddhist *jhāna*: Its nature and attainment according to the Pali sources”. *Religion* 3,2 1973:116.

<sup>8</sup> See Norman 1991:197 n25 & Norman, “Notes on the *Sutta-nipāta*”, 106 (ad Sn 423 f.).

Vedas, is interpreted as one who has gained knowledge of release from cyclic existence (*samsāra*) (ThaA 2:85:17-19 ad Tha 221).

### (c) Terms referred to but rejected

There are ideas that the Buddha referred to but rejected, but in such a way that the reasons for the objection could only be understood by those who knew the brahmanical terminology:

**attā.** The Buddha's rejection of the existence of *ātman/attā*, i.e. his view that everything is *anattā*, is based upon the brahmanical belief that *ātman* is *nitya* and *sukha*. Hence, the Buddha could refute this by pointing out that the world is in fact *anicca* and *dukkha*.

### (d) Common religious terminology?

K.R. Norman concludes:

Besides the convenience of taking over terms which were already known to this audience, albeit in a different sense, the Buddha possibly had other reasons for acting in this way. In part it may have been due to his desire to show that Brahmanical Hinduism was wrong in its [basic] tenets: a Brahmanical *brāhmaṇa* was *suddhi*, etc. If a teacher takes over his rivals' terms and repeat them often enough in his own meaning, he gives the impression that he is using them in the correct sense, and the original owners are wrong in their usage.

It must be made clear that we cannot prove that the Buddha (or the Buddhists) was the first to make use of these Brahmanical terms in a new sense, since there is a possibility that such a use of some of these terms was also common to other contemporary religions. Some of the terminology of Buddhism is held in common with **Jainism**, e.g. Buddha, *pratyeka*, *Buddha*, *jina*, *nirvāṇa*, *tathāgata*, *bhāvanā*, *dhuta*, *yoga*, *kevalin*, *āsrava*, *karman*, *gati*, *mokṣa*, *śramaṇa*, *pravrajyā*, *pravrajita*, *tapas*, *ṛṣi*, *tā(din)*, *phāsu(ya)*, and also certain epithets of the Buddha and the Jina [1:4a]. It is possible therefore that the use of Brahmanical terms in a non-Brahmanical sense was taken from the general fund of vocabulary of *śramaṇical* [i.e. non-brahmanical] religions.

(K.R. Norman, 1991:199f.; emphasis mine)

## 4. THE LOTUS POND

### (a) Three kinds of beings

Then the Blessed One, having understood Brahmā's request, out of compassion for beings, surveys the world with the Buddha eye [3n2]. As he does so, the Blessed One see beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and difficult to teach, and a few who dwell seeing blame and fear in the otherworld.

Just as in **a pond of blue lotuses or red lotuses or white lotuses**, some lotuses might be born in the water, grow up in the water, and thrive while submerged in the water, without rising out of the water; some lotuses might be born in the water, grow up in the water, and stand up at an even level with the water; some lotuses might be born in the water and grow up in the water, but would rise up from the water and stand up in the water without being soiled by the water—

So, too, surveying the world with the Buddha Eye, the Blessed One sees beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and difficult to teach, and a few who dwelt seeing blame and fear in the otherworld.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, *veda, sampanno ti ñāṇa, saṃpanno* (ThaA 3:169,20 ad Tha 1170).

Having seen this, he answers Brahmā Sahampati in verse:

Open to them are the doors to the Deathless!  
Let those who have ears declare their faith! [forsake blind faith].<sup>10</sup>  
Foreseeing trouble, O Brahmā, I did not speak  
The refined, sublime Dharma among humans.

Then, Brahmā Sahampati, thinking, “The Blessed One has consented to teach the Dharma,” pays homage to the Blessed One and disappear right there.

(V 1:7; M 1:170; S 1:138; D 2:39 Vipassī Buddha;  
Mvst 3:318; cf. S:B 1:233 n372; also Sn 1146c)

### (b) The parable of the fields

In due course, the Buddha would use another analogy for the kinds of audience he would teach. In the **Desanā Sutta** (S 4.42), the Buddha gives **the parable of the fields**:

Now what do you think, headman? Suppose a farmer here has three fields, one excellent, one moderate, and one poor, hard, salty, of bad soil. Now what do you think, headman? When that farmer wants to sow his seeds, which field would he sow first: the excellent field, the moderate field, or the one that is poor...?

“The farmer, Lord, wishing to sow his seeds, would first sow the excellent field, and having done so he would sow the moderate one. Having done so, he might or might not sow the field that is poor.... Why so? Because in any case it might do for cattle-food.”

Well, headman, just like the excellent field are **my ordained disciples**, both men and women. I teach them Dharma that is good in its beginning, good in its middle and good in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the Holy Life, that is wholly perfect and pure. Why is that? Because, headman, these people abide with me for their island, with me for their cave and shelter, with me for stronghold, with me for their refuge.

Then, headman, just like that moderate field are **my lay disciples**, both men and women. I teach them Dharma that is lovely... I make known to them the Holy Life... Why is that? Because, headman, these people abide with me for their island... for their refuge.

Then, headman, just like that field that is poor, hard, salty, of bad soil, are **the wandering ascetics and brahmins** that hold other views than mine. To them also I teach Dharma that is good... I make known to them the Holy Life... Why so? Because **if it be that they understand but a single sentence of it, that would be their benefit and happiness for a long time to come.**

(S 4:315 f.)

### (c) Teaching the masses

The Buddha's purpose in arising in this world is **to teach the Dharma for the upliftment and liberation of beings** from spiritual ignorance and suffering. Through his boundless compassion, the Buddha declares the Dharma to the world. It is a general rule that nothing happens in the life of a Buddha which has not already happened in the lives of his predecessors or will not happen to his successors.

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<sup>10</sup> “declare their faith”, *pamuñcantu saddhamā*. This is a difficult sentence. Literally, it means “give up your faith”. The Dīgha Subcomy glosses as *saddhamā pavedentu*, “let them declare their faith”; Woodward: “renounce the creed ye hold” (Woodward 1973:7); Horner: “let them renounce their faith” (V:H 1:9); “abandon other faiths” (Nakamura 2000:462); Walshe: “put forth faith” (D:W 215); Bodhi: “release faith” (S:B 1:233); cf. Norman: “declare your faith” (Sn 1146). See also Sn:N n1146 and Nakamura 2000:461 f. n 53.

When contemplating on a lotus pond, the Buddha notices that some of the lotus buds are still immersed in the muddy waters while others have risen well above the waters. Still others are obscurely trying to reach the light, close to opening, just floating on the surface. Surveying the world with his Divine Eye, the Buddha sees that human beings fall into three categories: those who have sunk completely into error, those who already have reached the Truth or are ready for the Truth, and those who still float between error and truth.

**The first kind of lotus**—drowned in the dark and murky waters—represents those with much dust in their eyes, with dull faculties, with bad qualities, difficult to teach, not seeing blame and fear in the otherworld. For such beings, there is little hope, at least for the time being, of bringing them out of the darkness of their ignorance and delusion. They are like the poor field that would be cultivated only after the better ones have been cultivated.

Then there is **the second**, in-between, group (the lotuses bobbing up and down on the water level), hesitating between the true and the false, wavering between good and evil. They would either be saved or be lost, depending on whether or not they hear the Dharma. This is the moderate field waiting for cultivation by the wise farmer.

**The third group** (the lotuses standing high above the waters and open in the sunlight) is the best audience since they have good roots, that is, enjoying the fruit of their past good deeds. They are those with very little dust in their eyes, with keen faculties, with good qualities, easy to teach, seeing blame and fear in the otherworld. They are like the rich field, heavy with crop, merely waiting for harvest and celebration.

It is **for the sake of the rich fields, for the love of the medium fields and for the thought of the poor fields** that the Buddha resolves “to set the Wheel of Truth in motion”. In aspiring to declare the Dharma to all, the Buddha sees the world as a single mission field, not as an artificially stratified society, divided by race, religion and status.

The Buddha's decision to openly teach the Dharma is **a revolutionary action** in the history of Indian religion. In his book, *Gotama Buddha*, Nakamura remarks:

In India at that time it was rare for religious teachers to instruct the people at large. Philosophers in the *Upaniṣads* are depicted as teaching only a limited group of students: their own children or perhaps people with high qualifications.<sup>11</sup> It was Gotama who broke down such customary restrictions on teaching; to do so, however, required resolution and courage, which he may have gained by means of such psychological phenomena as quelling Māra and hearing Brahmā's encouragement.

(Nakamura, 2000:235; see also 228 f.)

The decision is made: **“In this blind world, I will beat the Drum of Deathlessness!”** the Buddha proclaims (V 1:8; M 1:171; J 1:81; DhA 4:71). To whom shall the Buddha teach first, who will understand the Dharma quickly? He thinks of his former teachers, Ārāḍa Kālāma and Udraka Rāmaputra. A deva informs him that both of them has passed away (a week before and a day before respectively). Then he thinks of the Five Ascetics who have attended to him during his period of self-mortification. Through his Divine Eye, he sees that they are residing in the Deer Park at Ṛṣipatana in Vārāṇasī.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Yājñavalkya (Bṛhad. Up. IV, 3, 33); Satyakāma (Chānd. Up. IV, 10); Raikva (Chānd. Up. IV, 2, 3); Prajāpati (Chānd. Up. VIII, 7 f.); Yama (Kāth. Up. I, 21 f.).



## 5. UPAKA

### (a) Meeting the Buddha

Satisfied with his stay at Uruvilvā, the Buddha sets out for **Vārāṇasī** to look for the Five Ascetics. Between Buddha, gayā and Gayā, the Buddha meets the naked ascetic, **Upaka** (also known as Kāla, probably a nickname for his dark complexion, Thi 309, or Upaganena, Divy 393) who, struck by the Buddha's radiant personality, says, "Serene are your senses, friend! Clear and bright is your complexion. Under whom have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?"

The Buddha replies:

All have I overcome, all do I know,  
From all am I detached, all have I renounced,  
Through the stopping of craving, I am freed,  
Having understood all by myself, whom shall I call teacher?

No teacher have I,  
An equal to me there is none.  
In all the world, with its gods, there is no rival to me.  
Indeed, an Arhant am I in this world.

An unsurpassed Teacher am I.  
Alone am I the All-Enlightened One,  
Quenched, whose fires are all extinguished.  
I'm going to Kāśī to set the Wheel of Truth in motion.  
In this blind world, I shall beat the Drum of Deathlessness!

"Then, friend, you admit that you are a Conqueror of the Endless (*ananta,jina*)?" Upaka asks.

The Conquerors like me are those whose impurities have been destroyed.  
All the evil things I have conquered.  
Therefore, Upaka, am I called Conqueror!

"It may be so, friend," Upaka wryly remarks and nodding his head [in lukewarm approval or ambivalence], turns into a path and leaves.

(V 1:8; M 1:171; J 1:81; DhA 4:71 f; cf. Miln 235; UA 54; Kvu 289; Mvst 3:326)

The importance of this meeting is that the Buddha for the first time proclaims from his own mouth and before another person his new and supreme dignity—the **first public statement of his enlightenment**—as well as his determination to liberate the world. This is what is important to the simple follower. Whether Upaka understands his privilege or not is of little consequence. In fact, the Dīgha Commentary says that the Buddha walks all the way (about 7 km) from Gayā to R̥ṣi,patana (Isi,patana), instead of teleporting himself, so that Upaka would meet him (DA 2:471).

### (b) Upaka's return

After meeting the Buddha, Upaka heads for **Vaṅga** or Vaṅkahara country. There he meets and falls in love with **Cāpā** (or Chāvā), a huntsman's daughter, who looks after him. Desperately in love with her but failing to win her, he goes on a hunger strike for seven days. In the end, he succeeds in persuading the huntsman to give Chāvā to him in marriage.

Upaka supports her by hawking the meat brought in by the huntsman and in due course the couple have a son, named **Subhadda**. Whenever he cries, Cāpā sings to him, “Upaka’s son, ascetic’s son, game-hawker’s boy, don’t cry!” thus mocking her husband. The exasperated Upaka then proudly speaks of his friend, the “Ananta,jina” (the Buddha) but Cāpā still does not stop teasing him. Consequently, despite her attempts to keep him back, he leaves her behind at Nala (his birthplace), a village near the Bodhi Tree, and goes to the Buddha at Śrāvastī (Sāvatthī) (ThiA 225).

The Buddha, seeing him from afar, instructs that anyone asking for “Ananta,jina” should be brought to him. Having listened to Upaka’s plight, the Buddha has him admitted into the Order. As a result of his meditation, Upaka becomes a Non-returner and is reborn in the Avihā Heaven of the Pure Abodes (Suddhāvāsa)<sup>12</sup>, where he immediately becomes an Arhant (MA 1:190). Later, Cāpā, too, goes forth and becomes an Arhant nun.

In reference to Upaka’s attainment of the fruit of Non-return (*anāgāmi,phala*), the Buddha makes this declaration recorded in the 5<sup>th</sup> verse of **the Muni Sutta**:

Overcoming all, knowing all, truly wise,  
Unattached to all things,  
Giving up all, completely released in the destruction of craving—  
Him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.

*Sabbābhibhuṃ sabba,viduṃ sumedham  
Sabbesu dhammesu anūpalittaṃ  
sabbañ,jahaṃ taṇha-k,khaye vimuttaṃ--  
yaṃ vā'pi dhīrā muniṃ vedayanti.*

(Sn 211)

## THE FIRST MONKS

### 6. VĀRĀṆASĪ

The second most important event in the Buddha’s life is **the First Discourse**. Understandably, such an event should occur in an auspicious place, which would be **Vārāṇasī** (modern Benares), or to be exact, **the Deer Park** (*mṛga,dāya,vana/miga,dāya,vana*). The Buddha chooses to go to the Deer Park for two good reasons: it is a popular gathering-ground for ascetics and religious, and his erstwhile companions, the Five Ascetics, are there. “For the Buddha to go to Vārāṇasī to expound his ideas was something like a modern scholar presenting a new theory at a national conference” (Nakamura 2000:242).

The fact that the Buddha specifically chooses to teach the Five Ascetics first and not to evangelize his message in an open assembly indicates that

Buddhism was **not originally an open religion** that appealed suddenly and directly to ordinary people but a teaching that developed gradually among specific ascetics.

(Nakamura 2000:242; my emphasis)

A more important reason, I think, is simply that before the Buddha can effectively spread his message around, **he needs to multiply his voice and body**. The Dharma can only grow when there are those who are liberated like the Buddha himself. As such, he has to select the best candidates for this vital role of attracting the right people for the task.

<sup>12</sup> MA 2:189-91; ThiA 220 ff; cf. S 1:35, 60.

## 7. THE DEER PARK

After practising self-mortification for six years, the Bodhisattva Siddhârtha fails to discover the Truth. After abandoning self-mortification [2:15], he decides to follow **the “middle way”** by first regaining his strength by taking some food. When this happens, the Five Ascetics, thinking that he has given up his struggle for enlightenment, leave him. They go to the Deer Park at R̥ṣipatana, near Vārāṇasī, where they lead a life common to other contemporary ascetics: going about their affairs peacefully, doing their chores in the open, cutting wood, cooking rice, washing or rubbing themselves with ashes, reciting or meditating, and sometimes practising such austerities as standing immobile in unnatural poses, lying on spikes, or sitting among the “five fires” (a fire at each cardinal point with the hot sun as the fifth).

After meeting Upaka, the Buddha continues his journey to Vārāṇasī by stages and finally reaches **R̥ṣipatana** (modern Sarnath), about 7 kilometres north of Vārāṇasī. It should be noted that it is some 200 km from Gayā to Vārāṇasī, and by road the distance is about 250-300 km, which will take some 10 days by foot (Nakamura, 2000:241). As is the custom, he rests in the outskirts of Vārāṇasī and waits until morning to enter the city. Having collected his almsfood, taken his wash and eaten his meal, he heads straight for the hermitage where the Five Ascetics were.

As the Buddha approaches **the Five Ascetics**, all their antagonism is aroused. Seeing him from afar they resolve not to show him any respect, as they think that the Buddha has given up his spiritual quest. But as the Buddha draws near, his magnetic personality automatically compels them to salute him. They rise from their seats and address him by name and the title *āvuso* (friend), a form of address applied generally to juniors. The Buddha advises them not to address him thus as he has attained enlightenment.

## 8. THE FIRST DISCOURSE

All the Buddhist texts agree on the events that follow. The Buddha thereupon discourses to the Five Monks on what he has discovered. He admonishes them to avoid **the two extremes** of sensual pleasures and of self-mortification, and to keep to **the “middle way”**, that is, the Noble Eightfold Path. He discourses on **the Four Noble Truths** and announces his Perfect Enlightenment (V 1:10 ff; S 5: 420 ff).

This discourse, the Buddha's first public formulation of his Enlightenment, is called **the Dhamma-cakka-pavattana Sutta** (The Turning of the Wheel of Truth) in the Commentaries (e.g. J :82; DA 1:2; AA 1:69).<sup>13</sup> It is delivered by the Buddha on the night of the full moon day of the month of Āṣāḍha/Āsāḷha (June-July), 588 BCE—Āsāḷha Pūja or Dharmacakra Day—to **the Five Monks** (*pañca, varṅika bhikṣū/ pañca, varṅgiya bhikkhū*), namely, Kauṇḍinya (Koṇḍañña), Bhadrīka (Bhaddiya), Vāṣpa (Vappa or sometimes, Daśa, bala Kaśyapa), Mahānāma Kulika and Aśvajit (Assaji) in the Deer Park near modern Sarnath in north central India. (V 1:10 ff; S 5:420 ff.; Mvst 3:330 f; Lalv 540(416) f).

The Buddha's first discourse serves **three purposes**: firstly, the Buddha clears up the unfortunate misunderstanding that came between himself and his former colleagues. The discourse refutes the constant criticism by rival sects of the alleged laxity of the Buddhist monastic rules. It also warns novices in advance of the dangers of extremes in practice, and to keep to the Middle Way. In short, it deals with:

- (1) The exhortation on the avoidance of the extremes of sensual indulgence and of self-mortification;
- (2) The proclamation of the Middle Way, i.e. the Noble Eightfold Path;
- (3) The statement of the Four Noble Truths;
- (4) The declaration of the Buddha's Supreme Enlightenment; and
- (5) The exultation of the devas.

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<sup>13</sup> See for example Rewata Dhamma, *The First Discourse of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1997.

These four Truths are succinctly stated in the extant early texts, but there are innumerable places in the early Buddhist scriptures where they are explained again and again, with greater detail and in different ways.

The Four Noble Truths are **the briefest synthesis of the entire teaching of the Buddha**, since all those manifold doctrines of the Pali Canon are, without any exception, included therein. If we study the Four Noble Truths with the help of the various references and explanations in the early Buddhist Scriptures, we get a fairly good and accurate account of the essential teachings of the Buddha according to the early texts.

## 9. ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

### (a) Basic teachings

Why does the Buddha in the **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana Sutta** present his teachings in that way? In the introduction to the Sutta, the Buddha declares that he rejects the 2 extremes of (a) self-mortification (*āṭma,kilamathānuyoga/atta,kilamathānuyoga*) and (b) self-indulgence (*kāma,sukh'allikānuyoga*). The purpose of this “opening gambit” is to address the two basic viewpoints common in the India of the Buddha's days, that is:

- (1) Self-mortification is founded on **eternalism** (*śāśvata,vāda/sassata,vāda*), connected with the Creator idea;
- (2) Self-indulgence is founded on **nihilism** (*uccheda,dr̥ṣṭi/uccheda,diṭṭhi*), connected with materialism.

Jainism and Brahmanism believe that God and soul are eternal (*śāśvata*). To them there are **two kinds of souls**: the individual soul, which is impure, and the universal soul, which is eternal. To get rid of the individual soul, they torture the body, which is an accumulation of karma, and a prison for the soul. Once they have “purified” the body, the individual soul reunites with the universal soul.

The term *uccheda* (ts) means “total destruction”. **Nihilism** is the belief that this is our only life, and that there is no afterlife; nor is there heaven or hell. So, a nihilist's main objective is to enjoy life here and now. In ancient India, the nihilist school is known as **Cārvāka**, who are said to “word their philosophy beautifully”: since there is no future life, they can say anything and do anything. They criticize other religions (like Buddhism) as being negative.

### (b) The Buddha's criticism of the extremes

**Self-mortification** is “painful, ignoble, useless” (*duḥkha anārya anartha/dukkha anariya anatta*). **Self-indulgence** is “lowly, common, worldly, ignoble, useless” (*hīna grāmya pṛthagjanika anārya anartha/hīna gamma pothujjanika anariya anatta*) (V 1:10; S 5:421). Self-mortification, however, is not condemned as “lowly, common, worldly” (*hīna grāmya pṛthagjanika*) because it may be painful but does not break the Precepts.

The Buddha uses 2 methods to reject the extremes:

Self-mortification is overcome by the method of **analysis**.  
Self-indulgence is overcome by the method of **synthesis**.

#### (1) The analysis method

A “person” is analyzed as being made up of the 6 senses (internal organs) and 6 external sense-objects. All these 12 senses are impermanent; as such, they are unsatisfactory. Analyzed in this way, they ultimately come to void, as such, they are not “self” or have no unchanging entity.

## The 5 Aggregates

Matter ( <i>rūpa</i> )	—	Body
Feelings ( <i>vedanā</i> )	}	Mind
Perception ( <i>saṃjñā/saññā</i> )		
Disposition ( <i>saṃskāra/saṅkhāra</i> )		
Consciousness ( <i>viññāna/viññāṇa</i> )		

Feelings are based on the senses.

Perception is based on feelings or “signs”. The sign is kept in mind.

This sign (*nimitta*), e.g. emptiness (*sūnyatā*), can be wholesome and used in meditation.

When there are signs, *reflection* arises.

This method of analysis is for countering both the theory of eternalism and the practice of self-mortification. However, analysis *in itself* is negative, as it leads to pluralism or nihilism. It is only a tool to be rejected once it has been effectively used.

### (2) The synthesis method

The method of synthesis is the process of **causality** (cause + effect): when the eye comes into contact with form, eye-consciousness arises, etc. This is more fully explained in discourses like **the Mahā, nidāna Sutta** (D no. 15) and **the Madhu, piṇḍika Sutta** (the Honeyball Discourse, M 18). In the latter, the Buddha first gives an instruction in brief, thus:

If, O monks, one neither delights in, nor asserts, nor clings to, that which makes one subject to “concepts characterized by the proliferating tendency” (*prapañca, saṃjñā, saṃkhyā/papañca, saññā, -saṅkhā*), then that itself is the end of the proclivities to attachment, views, pride, ignorance and attachment to becoming. That itself is the end of taking the stick, of taking the weapon, of quarrelling, contending, disputing, accusation, slander and lying speech. Here it is that all these evil unskilled states cease without residue.

(M 1:109)

Then, **Mahā Kātyāyana** (Mahā Kaccāna), on the monks’ invitation, gives a commentary on the abbreviated Buddha’s Word:

*Cakkhuñ c’āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca*

*uppajjati cakkhu, viññāṇaṃ*

*Tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso*

*Phassa, paccayā vedanā*

*Yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti*

*Yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi*

*Yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti*

*Yaṃ papañceti tatonidānaṃ purisaṃ*

*papañca, saññā, saṅkhā samudācaranti*

Friends, dependent on the eye and forms,

Eye-consciousness arises.

The meeting of the three is contact.

Depending on contact, there is feeling.

Whatever one feels, one perceives it.

Whatever one perceives, one thinks about it.

Whatever one thinks about, one mentally proliferates it.

Owing to what a person has mentally proliferated, perceptions and notions tinged by mental proliferation<sup>14</sup> beset one

<sup>14</sup> Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda: “concepts characterized by the prolific tendency” (*Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*. Kandy: BPS, 1971: 8 passim. See esp. ch. 1 which discusses this term.) Bhikkhu Bodhi: “Perhaps the key to the interpretation of this passage is Ven. Mahā Kaccāna’s explanation of the Bhadd’ekaratta verses in M no. 133. There too delight in the elements of cognition plays a prominent role in causing bondage, and the elaboration of the verses in terms of the three periods of time link up with the reference to the three times in this sutta [Madhupiṇḍika Sutta].” (M:Ñ 1204 n232).

*atītānāgata, paccupannesu  
cakkhu, viññeyyesu rūpesu*

with respect to past, future and present  
forms cognizable through the eye.

*Sotañ c'āvuso paṭicca sadde ca...*

Dependent on the ear and sounds....

*Ghanañ c'āvuso paṭicca gandhe ca...*

Dependent on the nose and smells....

*Jivhañ c'āvuso paṭicca rase ca...*

Dependent on the tongue and tastes....

*Kāyañ c'āvuso paṭicca phoṭṭhabbe ca...*

Dependent on the body and tangibles....

*Manañ c'āvuso paṭicca dhamme ca*

Dependent on the mind and mind-objects,  
mind-consciousness arises.

*uppijati mano, viññāṇaṃ*

*Tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso*

The meeting of the three is contact.

*Phassa, paccayā vedanā*

Depending on contact, there is feeling.

*Yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti*

Whatever one feels, one perceives it.

*Yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi*

Whatever one perceives, one thinks about it.

*Yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti*

Whatever one thinks about, one mentally  
proliferates it.

*Yaṃ papañceti tatonidānaṃ purisaṃ*

Owing to what a person has mentally proliferated,

*papañca, saññā, saṅkhā samudācaranti*

perceptions and notions tinged by mental

proliferation<sup>14</sup> beset one

*atītānāgata, paccupannesu*

with respect to past, future and present

*mano, viññeyyesu dhammesu*

forms cognizable through the mind.

(M 1:111 f.; cf. S 2:73)

Life is **causal**, a series of interacting causes and effects:

Death (cause) → rebirth (effect) → rebirth (cause) → life (effect) → life (cause) → death (effect)

While the first 5 books of the Abhidhamma all use the analysis method, only the 6<sup>th</sup> and last book, the **Paṭṭhāna**, uses the synthesis method in terms of the 24 causal formulae. This latter method counters nihilism.

The Buddha advises us to avoid both eternalism and nihilism. This does not mean that Buddhism is somewhere “in between”; rather that it rises above both of them.

## 10. ĀJÑATĀ KAUNḌINYA

At the end of the discourse, **Kaunḍiya** attains to the knowledge that everything which is subject to arising is also subject to cessation, and reaches the first stage of Sainthood. Tradition has it that the news that the Wheel of Truth has been turned by the Buddha is acclaimed in relay by the terrestrial devas, and carried from rank to higher rank of devas *pari passu* up to the world of Brahmā. Finally, the Buddha exclaims:

Kaunḍiya has indeed attained the knowledge (*ājñāsi/annāsi*); Kaunḍiya has indeed attained the knowledge!

Henceforth he is known as **Ājñāta Kaunḍinya** (Aññāta or Aññā Koṇḍañña), “Kaunḍiya who has attained the knowledge!”

Kaunḍiya then requests for the going-forth (*pravrajā/pabbajā*) and the ordination (*upasampadā*). The Buddha admits him with the words:

Come, O monk! Well-proclaimed is the Doctrine of the Blessed One; live the Holy Life for making a complete end of suffering (*ehi bhikkhu, svākkhāto bhagavato dhammo, cara brahmacariyaṃ sammā dukkhassa antakiriyāya*).

(V 1:12).

This is Kauṇḍinya's ordination and **the earliest form of ordination** conferred by the Buddha. After further instruction, Vāṣpa and Bhadrīka attains the first-stage Sainthood (Stream-winning) and are admitted as monks; and, in due course (on the same day, according to the Vinaya), Mahānāma Kulika and Aśvajit, too, become Stream-winners and are ordained. (V 1: 11 f; J 1:82; DA 1:2; AA 1:100; Lalv 540 (416) f; Mvst 3: 330 f).

## 11. DISCOURSE ON NON-SELFHOOD

Five days after the First Discourse, the Buddha gives the Discourse on the Not-self, **the Anatta, lakhaṇa Sutta** (V 1:13 f.; S 3:66; cf. M 3:19). It denies the existence of an unchanging soul or permanent entity in any of the Five Aggregates of Existence, namely, Form, Feeling, Perception, Disposition, and Conscious-ness.

The argument is that whatever part of the “individual” is taken, whether physical or mental, we cannot point to any one element in it as permanent, and when the individual is free from any passion or craving (which leads these elements to be reborn), he is liberated. On hearing this discourse, all the Five Monks attained the highest stage of Sainthood, that of Arhant.

And so there are 6 Arhants in the world: the 5 Monks and the Buddha. The Sangha has arisen and **the Dispensation** established. Buddhism has been founded.

## THE PROBLEM OF YAŚĀS

### 12. YAŚĀS

At that time, a young man named **Yaśas** (Yasa), son of a wealthy treasurer, is living in luxury in Vārāṇasī. Waking up suddenly one night, he finds his female attendants and musicians asleep in unseemly postures, and with the same cry of disgust that Prince Siddhartha has uttered on leaving the world, goes out from his house and the city to the Deer Park, exclaiming, “Alas! What distress! Alas! What danger!”

At dawn, he meets the Buddha who sees him in the distance and calls to him, “Come, Yaśas, here is neither distress nor danger!”

Yaśas eagerly listens to the Buddha who teaches him a graduated discourse, after which Yaśa attains to realization of the Dharma. When Yaśas' father comes in search of him, the Buddha makes Yaśa invisible and then discourses to the father. At the end of the discourse, he acknowledges himself as the Buddha's follower, thus becoming **the first layman to take the Three Refuges** (*te, vācika upāsaka*).

### 13. YAŚĀS' FAMILY

On hearing the Buddha's teaching to his father, Yaśas attains full enlightenment. Then the Buddha makes him visible again, and Yaśas' father asks him to return home. The Buddha then explains to Yaśas' father that one whose mind has become quite free from attachment to the world cannot return to it again.

Yaśas then asks for the going-forth and the ordination from the Buddha, who admits him with the words: “Come, O monk! Well-proclaimed is the Doctrine; live the Holy Life!” (*ehi bhikkhu, svākkhāto*

*bhagavato dhammo, cara brahmacariyaṃ*) (V 1:16 f). The last phrase “.....for making a complete end of suffering” is omitted because Yaśa has already attained Arhant hood. Yaśas thus becomes the seventh member of the Order.

After Yaśas' father becomes a Stream-winner, he invites the Buddha and Yaśas to his house for alms. Hearing the Buddha teach, Yaśa's mother and his former wife take the Threefold Refuge and become the **first lay women disciples** (V 1:19; cf A 1:26, J 1:68 If, SnA 154, D 2:135; AA 1:401 ff).

The Anguttara Commentary (by Buddhaghosa) says that Yaśa's mother is **Sujātā** (AA 1:403). This raises a problem—for Yaśas is converted on the day of the Buddha's first discourse, that is, the full-moon day of Āśāḍha (DhA 1:88). If we follow the Anguttara Commentary, Yaśa would then be only 3 months old! It is possible that she is only a namesake, a different Sujātā, since the name is not rare. [15]

Yaśas' sensational conversion starts a whole train of others. Yaśas' four intimate friends—**Vimala, Subāhu, Pūrṇajit and Gavāmpati**—follow his example, and soon fifty more of his companions follow suit (V 1:17 f). After listening to the Buddha's instruction, they all become Arhants of which there now total 60. Then the Buddha feels that all is ready for the sending of the first missionaries to announce the Dharma to the world at large.

#### 14. A CURIOUS STORY

While I was doing his monastic training in Thailand, I came across a curious story behind the birth of Yaśa. His father, the city treasurer, is distressed because he has no child. At his wife's instigation, the city treasurer turns to the spirit of a large Indian fig tree who is known to grant all requests made to him. The man promises to build the spirit a shrine in exchange for the fulfillment of his wish; but the desperate barren wife threatens to chop down the tree if she fails to get a child!

The poor tree spirit finds himself in a dilemma, for the request is beyond his power. Fearing what a vindictive and superstitious woman might do, he turns to Śakra, leader of the devas, who reassures him of his help. There happens to be among the Thirty-three devas, one who is reaching the time for rebirth. As long as he has to fall from the deva state, he might as well be reborn in the womb of the treasurer's wife.

After some hesitation, this comes about and the birth takes place in the treasurer's family, amidst great joy, and the child is brought up in the lap of luxury. His mind, purified from his previous life, does not allow him to be stained by this new sensual existence, the vanity of which he soon perceives. Many experiences similar to those of the Bodhisattva are attributed to him, and he, too, leaves home under the cover of darkness.

Śakra, remembering his promise made to Yaśas before the latter's rebirth, then leads him to the Buddha's retreat on the far side of the river Vānarā. The young man leaves his golden slippers on the near bank, fords the river and falls at the feet of the Buddha. The rest of the story is as found in the Vinaya, which, however, does not mention the name of Yaśas' mother (V 1:18 ff). It is also not mentioned that she made any food offering to the Bodhisattva. Furthermore, the story of Sujātā's offering as given in the Jātaka Commentary (by Buddhaghosa), too, does not mention Yaśa (J 1:68 ff).

#### 15. WHO OFFERED THE BODHISATTVA'S LAST MEAL?

Earlier [13], I mentioned that the Anguttara Commentary says that Yaśa's mother was **Sujātā** (AA 1:403), which is historically problematic. **The Mahāvastu**, an early Mahayana text, mentions that the Bodhisattva has a meal of soup made from beans, pulse and peas that gradually brings back his strength (Mvst 2:131, 205). Later on, Sujātā offers him some milk-rice under the banyan tree. The Mahāvastu also mentions that Sujātā has been the Bodhisattva's mother for a hundred lives (Mvst 2:205).



Most other Mahāyāna sources, however, say that the donors of the Bodhisattva's last meal know who he really is—namely, the ascetic Siddhārtha, “the Śākya prince of the Kapilavastu Śākyas” (Rockhill 30) —and feels honoured to make the offering. The Dulva and the Divyāvadāna throw new light on the Yaśas problem: it is not Sujātā, but the two sisters **Nandā and Nandabalā** who offer the “milk-soup” (Rockhill 30; Divy 392). The Lalita-vistara mentions nine girls offering food to the Bodhisattva during his self-mortification (Lalv 334-7(267 f)). The Chinese Abhiniṣkramaṇa Sūtra says they were Nandā and Balā, daughters of the brahmin “Senayana” (Ans:B 191) or the village lord “Sujata” (*sic*), i.e. Sujāta (Ans:B 193). [The feminine form of the name Sujāta has a long final vowel “a”: *Sujātā*.]

It is possible that the two sisters are not identical to Sujātā and Pūrṇā. Moreover, the name of the donor of the Bodhisattva's last meal is not mentioned in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta where the two foremost meals of the Buddha are listed (D 2:135 f) [10:15b]. It is also probable that a different Sujātā offered the last meal to the Bodhisattva. In that case, one might conclude that the Aṅguttara Commentary account of Sujātā and Yaśas (AA 1:403) is a later fabrication.

## 16. WHO WAS YAŚAS?

Though Yaśas is converted immediately after the Enlightenment of the Five Monks, and is one of the 60 missionaries, he does not figure prominently in the Canon. He is not even mentioned in the list of foremost disciples (*agra, śrāvaka/agga, sāvaka*) in the Eka Nipāta (Book of Ones) of the Aṅguttara Nikāya. In fact, he is hardly mentioned in the Pali Tripitaka except in the Vinaya story (V 1:15 ff) and the Thera-gāthā. In the latter, he is listed as elder (*thera*) no. 117 (Tha 117) with a very brief standard native gloss (Tha 1:243 f) where it is also hinted that he is identical with Sabba,dāyaka of the Apadāna (Ap 1:333 f).

The Commentaries usually refer to Yaśas as a “youth” (*dāraka*, e.g. AA 1:100, 147) or young man of family (*kula, putta*, e.g. DhA 1:88; BA 19; V 1:15 ff). He is obviously a very young man but perhaps not younger than 20 for that is the minimum age for ordination (V 4:130), though the rule was made later.

The seventh chapter of the Mahā Khandhaka of the Pali **Vinaya Piṭaka** called the “Recital on the Going-forth” (P. *pabbajjā kathā*) contains the details of Yaśas' luxurious life and his subsequent renunciation (V 1:15 ff). T.W. Rhys Davids and Herman Oldenberg are of the opinion that “a well-known scene of the Bodhisatta has evidently been represented after the model of this story.... Nowhere in the Pali Piṭakas is the story told about the Bodhisatta himself.” (V:RDO 1:102 n 2)

The account is indeed a stereotype passage, but it is found in the Pali Piṭakas in reference to the Bodhisattva (M 1:504; A 1:146; Mvst 2:115 f) and also in the Commentaries (e.g. J 1:58). Therefore, it is not true to say that Yaśas' luxurious life is a model superimposed onto the life of the Bodhisattva (*pace* Thomas 1949:90 n 1). The Buddha also uses this stock passage in describing the life of the past Buddha Vipasī (D 2:21).

One might now to ask whether the Vinaya account of Yaśa's life was modelled along that of the Buddha. This seems more probable for we find the stock passage again in relation to Aniruddha's early life (V 2:180).

Though Yaśas is only mentioned a couple of times in the Canon, it would be wrong to conclude that he never existed. On the contrary, one might ask why he is mentioned at all in the Canon especially with such scanty details about him. It is very likely that some Canonical accounts of him have been lost. For, complete as the Pali Canon may appear to be, it does not contain all the accounts of the Buddha's 45 years of public ministry.

## THE FIRST MISSIONARIES

### 17. THE GREAT COMMISSION

With the conversion of the Five Monks, and Yaśas and his 54 friends, there were sixty Perfect Saints (*arhat/arahanta*), excluding the Buddha. It is then that the Buddha commissions his **first sixty disciples** with these immortal words:

Free am I, O monks, from all bonds, whether divine or human. You, too, O monks, are free from all bonds, whether divine or human.

Go forth, O monks, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world; for the good, the gain and the welfare of gods and man.

Let not two go the same way. Teach, O monks, the Dharma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end. Declare the Holy Life, both in the spirit and in the letter, altogether complete, wholly pure.

There are beings with little dust in their eyes who, not hearing the Dharma, would fall away. There will be those who will understand the Dharma.

I, too, O monks, will go to Uruvilvā in Senānigama, to expound the Dharma.

(V 1:20 f.; S 1:105 f.; Mvst 3:415 f.)

Exhorting thus, the Buddha dispatches the first 60 monks in 60 different directions. This is the Buddha's first and famous commission to the first 60 monks to go forth and spread the Dharma. The **Samyutta Commentary** adds an interesting detail. Immediately after the Buddha has commissioned the monks, Māra appears to him. The Commentary remarks that Māra approaches the Buddha, thinking: "Like one directing a great war, the ascetic Gotama enjoins the sixty men to teach the Dharma. I am not pleased even if *one* should teach, let alone *sixty*. Let me stop him!" (SA 1:173)

Then Māra the Evil One approaches the Blessed One and addresses him in verse:

You are bound by all the snares,  
Both celestial and human;  
You are bound by the great bondage:  
You won't escape me, ascetic!

[Buddha:] I am freed from all snares,  
Both celestial and human;  
I am freed from the great bondage:  
You're defeated, End-maker!

Then Māra the Evil One, thinking: "The Lord knows me, the Well-farer knows me," pained, afflicted, vanished there and then.

(V 1:20; S 1:107)

We are told that the first sixty missionaries brought back so many converts for admission into the Order that the Buddha decides to allow the monks themselves to perform the ceremony. It consists of removing the candidate's hair, his putting on the saffron robes, and then reciting three times the Three Refuges (*tisaraṇa, gaman'upasampadā*). This is the second form of ordination introduced by the Buddha (V 1:21).

## 18. THE THIRTY GOOD FRIENDS

As the rainy season has arrived, the Buddha spends his first Rains Retreat (*varṣa/vassa*) at R̥ṣipatana near Vārāṇasī. When it is over, he leaves for **Uruvilvā**. On the way, he rests at the foot of a tree in a silk-cotton grove (P. *kappasika vana,saṇḍa*) where a group of thirty good friends (*bhadra,vargika sahāyakā/bhadda,vaggiya sahāyakā*), except one, are amusing themselves with their wives. As the one has no wife, he brings along a female social escort (P. *vesī*).

While they are all enjoying themselves, this female escort absconds with their valuables. As soon as they discover this, the young men go in search of the treacherous woman. Meeting the Buddha, they inquire whether he has seen a woman pass him.

The Buddha calmly replies: “**Which is better (*varam*, lit. “noble. best”), young men (*kumārā*)—seeking a woman, or seeking oneself (*attānaṃ gaveseyyātha*)?**” [Lit. “Young men, would it noble if you were to seek a woman or if you were to seek the self?”]

“Seeking oneself is better, O Lord!” reply the young men. The Buddha’s words settle their destiny. Giving up their sensual frolic, they listen attentively to his Dharma, and soon all attain the “Eye of Truth” (*dharma,caḥṣu/dhamma,cakkhu*), a term referring to any of the three lower Stages of Sainthood. Upon their request, they receive ordination into the Order. (V 1:23 f; DhA 2:33 f; J 1:82; AA 1:100, 147; ThIA 3)

## 19. THE KĀŚYAPA BROTHERS

At Uruvilvā there live a matted-hair ascetic, **Uruvilvā Kāśyapa** (Uruvelā Kassapa) with 500 disciples. Further down the river live his brothers, **Nadī Kāśyapa** (Kāśyapa of the River) with 300 disciples, and **Gayā Kāśyapa** (of the village of Gayā) with 200. The members are identifiable by their large mop of hair and their garments made of bark. They live with their respective flocks in huts built of branches at the edge of the jungle.

They are practically self-sustained and, withdrawn in the forest, they practise their sacrifices, study and meditate in their own way. They thus form a sort of brahminical colony or outpost in a country still poorly Aryanised. Their austerities, complicated rites, mythological and cosmogonic traditions, along with their literary and grammatical knowledge of the “perfect language” (Sanskrit), quickly bring them popular veneration.

The Buddha visits **Uruvilvā Kāśyapa** and stays the night where the sacred fire is kept, in spite of Kāśyapa’s warning that the spot is inhabited by a fierce *nāga* (serpent or dragon). The Buddha, through his psychic powers, overcomes, first this *nāga* and then another, both of whom belch fire and smoke. Kāśyapa being pleased with this exhibition of psychic power, undertake to provide the Buddha with his daily food.

Meanwhile the Buddha stays in a grove nearby waiting for the right time when Kāśyapa is ready for conversion. He spends the whole rainy season there, performing in all, 3500 miracles of various kinds, splitting firewood for the ascetics’ sacrifices, heating stoves for them to use after bathing in cold weather, etc. Still Kāśyapa persists in the thought, “The great ascetic has great magical powers, but he is not an Arhant like me.”

Finally, the Buddha decides to startle him by declaring that he (Kāśyapa) is not an Arhant and neither does the way he follows lead to Arhanthood. Thereupon, Kāśyapa admits defeat and reverently asks for ordination. The Buddha asks him to consult his pupils, and together they cut off their hair and throw it along with their sacrificial utensils into the river and are all ordained.

Alarmed by the sight of the ascetic debris floating down the river, Nadī Kāśyapa and Gayā Kāśyapa come to inquire what has happened, and on understanding the Buddha's Teaching, they, too, along with their pupils, join the Order. At Gayā Head, the Buddha teaches them the Fire Sermon (Āditta,pariyāya Sutta), and they all attain Arhanthood (V 1:33 f.).

## 20. BIMBISĀRA

According to the **Pabbajjā Sutta** [1:2c], the ascetic Siddhārtha, newly renounced, meets prince (*kumāra*) Bimbisāra in Rājagṛha (V 1:36) [Chapter 8]. Turning down the prince's offer of a comfortable and pleasurable life, Siddhārtha assents to the prince's request to visit him first once he has gained enlightenment. [2:13]

From Gayā Head (Gayā,śīrṣā/Gayā,sīsa) the Buddha goes to Rājagṛha with the Kāśyapa brothers and their pupils. In the presence of king Bimbisāra and the assembled populace, **Uruvilvā Kāśyapa** declares his allegiance to the Buddha (V 1:36). The Buddha then teaches the graduated discourse (on generosity, morality, heavenly existence, the disadvantages of sensual pleasures, and the benefits of renouncing sensual pleasures) followed by the Four Noble Truths. In the gathering of King Bimbisara's retinue, eleven persons out of twelve obtain the Eye of Dharma, the rest having their faith established in the Three Jewels.

The king then makes known his former wishes to the Buddha, saying, "Formerly, when I was still young prince (*kumāra*), having not ascended the throne, I made **five wishes** (P. *assāsakā*): firstly, that I may ascend the throne of the country of Magadha; secondly, that an Arhant, being self-enlightened, may come to my country during my reign; thirdly, that I may have the opportunity to approach the Arhant; fourthly; that the Arhant may deliver to me a discourse; and fifthly: that I may realize whatever there is to be realized in the Arhant's Doctrine." (V 1:36)

Then the king praises the Buddha's discourse and declares himself a lay-follower. After that, he invites the Buddha and the monks for a meal in the palace. The king serves the Buddha with his own hands, and at the end of the meal, he donates **the Bamboo Grove** (Veṇuvana/Veḷuvana) to the Buddha and the Sangha [8:2b]. Thus for the first time, the wandering finds itself as the owner of a residence (*vihāra*) where the monks can always be sure of finding shelter.

In the Bamboo Grove at Rājagṛha, the Buddha is to spend the following rainy season, and where during his long teaching career he frequently comes back and stays for lengthy periods. Soon he will have, as we shall see, similar resting places on the edge of most of the large cities of the Central Ganges plains of India.

## 21. REASONS FOR THE BUDDHA'S SUCCESS

By the time the Buddha passed away, he had a huge following known as the "fourfold assembly"--- monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen---that included a cross-section of Indian society then [10:9]. There were kings and royalty, priests and philosophers, merchants, workers, and lowly outcastes. In every major city of the day, there were Buddhist monasteries and orders. In fact, Buddhism became one of the most popular religions of the times, if not the most successful. We can give five reasons for the Buddha's success:

### (a) The Buddha converted the Brahminical gods.

Even before the Buddha began preaching, it is said that **Brahmā**, the highest of the brahminical gods humbly appeared before him, inviting him to teach the newly-found Dharma [2]. This grand opening is a divine blessing and cosmic authentication of sorts, giving the Buddha the licence, as it were, to declare his

Dharma for the whole world. The people had no excuse not to listen to the Buddha as he preached no new gods, but spoke in terms of the familiar old ones.

**(b) He used the local language and terminology.**

The Buddha was a great communicator who **spoke in the language and languages of the people** (see for example his remarks concerning the eight assemblies, D 2:109 f.) [10:9c]. He used at least two levels of communication: the worldly and the spiritual, so that he appealed to the simple and the sophisticated, and reached out to everyone. Most of **the religious terms** he used were already current in the established religions (especially Brahmanism and Jainism), so his audience could immediately relate to him as he elaborated on the new meanings that he wished to convey to them. [4:3]

**(c) He chose the right people as his first disciples.**

The original core of the Buddha's spiritual disciples were **enlightened masters** who were themselves religious practitioners (the Five Monks), wealthy learned brahmins (Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyāna, Mahā Kāśyapa), high-caste royalty (Ānanda, Aniruddha), and even a king (Mahā Kapphina). He started the Order of Nuns which was regarded as novel in those days since the position of Indian women was still lowly and uncertain. [9:4-5]

The Buddha's lay followers came from **a cross-section of society**. Among the mighty were kings like Bimbisāra [8:2], Ajātaśatru [8:6] and Prasenajit [8:12, 18], and their queens. The wealthy patrons included Anātha, piṇḍada and the lady Viśākhā. Drove of people (like the Kālāmas of Kesputta and the Mallas of Kuśinagarī) who listened to the Buddha or his disciples would take refuge in the Three Jewels and become material supporters of the Order.

**(d) The Buddha's personality.**

There were those like Mahā Kāśyapa [6:13] and Vālkali [1:1a] who converted and joined the Order by merely meeting the Buddha and marveling at his **charisma**. Even Upaṭiṣya converted at his first meeting with Aśvajit, one of the first five monks [5:11]. There is the remarkable case of **Ugra (Ugga), the householder of Vaiśālī**, who declared: "When I first saw the Blessed One, even from afar, my heart, Venerable Sir, at the mere sight of him became tranquil" (A 4:209) [cf. 10:13b]. If his 80 chief disciples (DhA 1:14, 19) were foremost in special qualities, the Buddha himself had all of them, including psychic powers. Above all, the Buddha and his disciples were great teachers and educators.

One of the most winning characteristics of the Buddha is his profound yet subtle sense of **humour**,<sup>15</sup> as evident in numerous discourses. In such discourses as the Brahmajāla Sutta, Tevijjā Sutta, Vāseṭṭha Sutta and the Aggañña Sutta, he shows his humorous genius in debunking the established brahminical claims. His teachings are full of subtle **wordplay** [3:2-6], that one can only marvel at upon appreciating them. And yet all this humour have the serious purpose of pointing to a higher liberating truth.

**(e) His message itself: the Dharma.**

The most important reason for the Buddha's success is simply because he is **self-enlightened**. He has understood the profound Dharma for himself. Having overcome his defilements, he taught others how to do the same. Having known the liberating truth regarding reality, he taught others to be free. Despite all this, he never claimed to be a divine prophet or cult leader, leaving each disciple to be "an island" taking only the Dharma as refuge, that is, to work for one's own salvation.

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<sup>15</sup> See for example my lecture on "The Buddha's Smile: A study of Buddhist humour", National University of Singapore Buddhist Society, Singapore, 2001.

Underlying all this spiritual exhortation is the living warmth of **spiritual friendship** [5:3] which the Buddha regarded as the whole of the spiritual life. Although he speaks highly of the solitary life of the forest wanderer, he also extols this universal friendliness when in the company of others. In short, the true teaching can only be transmitted in the spirit of true friendship, such as that the Buddha shared with Ānanda. [6:3, 17a]

#### **(f) Incidental conditions**

Historians and others might attribute **royal patronage and support of the wealthy** as a major reason for the Buddha's success. However, these are incidental occasions that brought **material success** to Buddhism. On a number of occasion, we actually find the Buddha showing his concern about such successes. For example in response to Śāriputra's request, the Buddha answered that he would only introduce the training-rules and the Prātimokṣa after the Order "has attained long standing...has attained great gains..." (V 3:9 f.) [5:27].

The history of Buddhism is unequivocal in witnessing that whenever and wherever the rulers patronize Buddhism, it becomes fossilized into a state dogma to serve the agenda of the powerful. In East Asia, we find monastic members becoming militant and materialistic through state patronage. Indeed, when Buddhism (or any religion) is associated with power (worldly or divine) it falls victim to the rise and fall of their patrons.<sup>16</sup>

The continuing spread and growth of Buddhism has less to do with state patronage than its own protean propensity for assimilating and adapting the systems of new regions and cultures wherever it takes root. While this may be a strength where the meditation culture is strong, it is its great weakness where this expedience has hidden agenda and worldly ambitions. The ultimate strength of Buddhism lies in the spiritual friendship of those "islands" who take the Dharma as their only refuge. [10:7b]



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<sup>16</sup> See for example my lectures on Buddhism in China, in Japan and in Korea, The Buddhist Library, Singapore, 2002.

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