

# The Bodhisatta in Theravada



composed by Nico Moonen, 2548/2005.

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# The Bodhisatta in Theravada

## **Preface**

The Buddha taught that for a layman it is not a noble monk who should be the example, but a good layman.<sup>1</sup> The best layman who can serve as our example is the Bodhisatta. In Mahāyāna supernatural powers and some degrees of holiness are attributed to him. But according to the Theravāda tradition the Bodhisatta belongs still to the worldlings and not yet to the Ariyasangha, the community of the Buddhist saints of the first, second, third or fourth level.

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<sup>1</sup> See: A. II, 131-134.

The Pāli word Bodhisatta and the Sanskrit word Bodhisattva differ only by a single letter, yet there is an essential difference between the two concepts. Several studies have been published that show direct or indirect concern with the doctrine of the Bodhisatta in Theravāda. A systematic survey of these has not yet been published, as far as I know. As I have been interested in this topic for many years, I thought it would be useful to make a compilation of my research. I was encouraged to do so by Venerable Rassagala Seewali from Opanayaka, Sri Lanka, whom I met when he was studying in Thailand. He, too, is very much interested in this topic. A first attempt was made at the beginning of 2000. However, it turned out that the information available was too limited. Fortunately, Dr. K.H. Eckert, a good acquaintance of mine, donated more than 1100 of his books about Buddhism to me – May that donation be for his welfare and happiness for a long time. I had now at my disposal a large library of invaluable material and for that reason I was able to make a fresh attempt at presenting an examination of the teachings relating to the Bodhisatta.

In the Suttas of the Pāli Canon only a little information can be found about the Bodhisatta where the word is used there to indicate the Buddha Gotama before he attained Enlightenment. In the Cakkavatti-Sihanāda sutta (Digha Nikaya 26) the name of the next Buddha is mentioned. And in the Buddhavamsa and the Cariyapitaka there is information about other future Buddhas. Another source for this topic is the Dasabodhisattuppattikathā (about the births of the ten Bodhisattas). The value of these works will be discussed later.

Much has been written about the Bodhisattas by Venerable Narada Thera and also by Venerable Ledi Sayadaw. It is a pity that they did not give the sources from which they derived their information. This has made assessing the value of their observations quite difficult.

Venerable Dr. Sangharatana Thero, chief incumbent of Pitaramba Temple, Bentota, Sri Lanka, advised me – after reading of the first draft – to dwell a little more on the

Mahāyāna. That good advice was accepted thankfully. It was of great profit for the study of the concept of the Bodhisatta / Bodhisattva.

The English typescript was sent to the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka. There it is read carefully by Mr. Dennis Candy and Prof. Handunukanda. They made many suggestions to improve this study, which suggestions are accepted thankfully.

This study deals mainly with the Bodhisatta in Theravāda Buddhism. Many works have already been published about the Bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna. Therefore only a little is written here about them. First I try to explain how there arose a difference in thinking about these matters and what those main differences were between Theravāda on the one hand and Mahāyāna on the other hand. Then I describe in brief the concept of the Bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna. Next follows a discussion of the concept of the Bodhisatta in Theravāda. Then there is a chapter referring to the Jātakas and another to the Pāramīs

as well. A separate chapter is devoted to the future Buddhas. Finally there is a short survey and a comparison of the concepts in Theravāda and Mahāyāna.

To get a good understanding of the teaching of the Buddha, we must try to identify all alien and irrelevant elements that have accumulated in the course of time. This too is necessary for the doctrine of the Bodhisatta. I hope that I have succeeded in doing this to some degree.

N. Moonen

Kerkrade, November 2548/2005.

## 1. Development of early Buddhism

During the time of the Buddha Gotama and several centuries later nothing was written down about the Dhamma. It was not usual at that time. Writing was used for trade and administration, but not for teaching. Teachers and their followers would put their doctrines into verses, which could more easily be learnt by heart and passed from one person to another and from one generation to another.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the Buddha himself has not left written texts of his teaching. Three months after his final passing away (parinibbāna) a Council of 500 Arahants, fully enlightened ones, was held at Rājagaha. The President of that Council was Venerable Mahā Kassapa. The aim of that Council was to recite and to review the Teaching (Sutta Pitaka) and the Discipline for the monks (Vinaya Pitaka) and to remove false teachings.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Warder, A.K.: *Indian Buddhism*, (2nd revised ed.), Delhi 1980, p. 204-207.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, Edward J.: *The History of Buddhist Thought*, London 1933, p. 27-28. – The Abhidhamma was not

According to tradition Venerable Ānanda is said to have stated at the end of the Council that the Buddha told him that the minor rules could be abandoned. But he had failed to ask which were the minor rules. The matter was discussed, but there was no unity of view among the monks. Venerable Mahā Kassapa therefore decided that the Vinaya rules should not be changed and that all of them should continue to be observed.

Venerable Gnanarama has shown that this tradition must have originated in later times. In the time of the Buddha it would have known which were the minor rules. They would have been known to Venerable Ānanda too. And there would have been no need to ask questions about them. Further, the rules for monks were known among the lay people as well. Changing them after the passing away of

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mentioned, which is why some argue that it did not exist at that time.

the Buddha would have led to disputing amongst people.<sup>4</sup>

Not everyone agreed with the decisions taken at the first Council. Venerable Purāna, a wandering monk with a large retinue, claimed to remember the teaching and discipline as he had heard them from the Blessed One. And besides him there may have been other monks who didn't agree with the proceedings of the first Council. And at distant places there perhaps would have been other monks who didn't hear the suttas recited at the council but who remembered a number of suttas just as they were taught to them. Those suttas may have been added later, if they conformed to the Dhamma, and parts of those scriptures might have survived via translations into Chinese, Tibetan or Sanskrit.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gnanarama, Ven. Pategama: *The Mission Accomplished*, Singapore 1997, p. 108-128.

<sup>5</sup> Bodhesako, Samanera: *Beginnings. The Pali Suttas*, Kandy 1984, The Wheel No. 313/315, p. 33-34; Warder 1980, p. 204-207.

About 100 years after the death of the Buddha Buddhism in India seems to have consisted of several regional organisations each having their own characteristics. This was the inevitable result of difficulties in communication. There was little or no contact between the groups, due to the great distances between the regions. Therefore it is not surprising that there existed differences in the teaching.<sup>6</sup>

During those 100 years several rules were changed by some monasteries. Ten rules for monks were adapted to suit the new times by the Vajjiputtas. These monks lived in Vesali. That city was a commercial centre with a monetary economy. The Vajjiputtas had to accept alms in monetary form. For the inhabitants of Vesali it was quite natural at that time to give money instead of food.<sup>7</sup> But there arose

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<sup>6</sup> Ikeda, Daisaku: *Buddhism, the First Millennium*, Transl. by Burton Watson, Tokyo, 1977, p. 31-33.

<sup>7</sup> At present, too, the rules for monks are adjusted to modern times. Money is accepted without making problems about it, so long as certain procedures are followed.

difficulties. A monk named Yasa, belonging to the group of the Elders, travelled through Vesali. He saw that the monks there accepted monetary gifts from the laymen and he protested against it.<sup>8</sup> He got support in the West, in Kosambi and Mathura and also in Avanti. Monks from all over India were invited to send delegates to Vesali. Monks from Vesali sought help as well. Altogether seven hundred monks assembled and they represented Buddhism of that time. This second Council was presided over by the Venerables Yasa, Revata and Sabbakāmi. It is claimed that they all were older than 120 years and would have seen the Buddha himself.<sup>9</sup> The discussion went on endlessly. The orthodox monks said that nothing should be changed, while others were of the opinion that several rules could be

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<sup>8</sup> Ikeda 1977, p. 33-36. The name of that monk was Yasa; he was the son of Kākandaka (Geiger, Wilhelm (tr.): *The Mahāvamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, (repr.), London 1980, p. 20). According to Thomas 1933, p. 30, this Yasa was 164 years old. He is claimed to be the Yasa who was converted by the Buddha in the Deer Park at Isipatana.

<sup>9</sup> Warder 1980, p. 209-212; Thomas 1933, p. 32. – This seems to be exaggerated and is probably a later addition.

modified. The orthodox monks claimed to act according to the true tradition of the Elders.<sup>10</sup> Therefore they have become known as Sthaviravādins. They rejected the proposals of the Vajjiputtas. Therefore Venerable Revata, who was an Arahant and who was respected by both sides, was designated to convene a committee consisting of four monks from the side of Vesali and four monks of the opposite side (the Western). The Western monks persuaded those of Vesali that the rules should remain unchanged. The Vinaya was then recited again.<sup>11</sup>

The Council at Vesali lasted eight months and after it ended a new meeting was held by the Vajjiputtas and their followers. That meeting was named 'The Great Recitation'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Elder monks = *Theras* in Pāli; *Sthaviras* in Sanskrit.

<sup>11</sup> Warder 1980, p. 209-212; Ikeda 1977, p. 31-33; Thomas 1933, p. 29-33; Ling, Trevor: *A Dictionary of Buddhism. Indian and South-East Asian*, Calcutta/New Delhi 1981 (see: *Theravada*); Lamotte, Étienne: *Histoire du Bouddhisme indien. Des origines à l'ère Shaka*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1976, p. 138-140; Geiger 1980, p. 19-25.

<sup>12</sup> It is said that 10,000 monks assembled together. Such terms were used to indicate a very large number.

The Tipitaka was changed in accordance with their own interpretations and new texts were added. From this there arose a separate school, the Mahāsaṅghikas.<sup>13</sup>

Some say that this meeting was at the end of the second Council. According to others this is unlikely, if not impossible, and it was held some time after that Council and some time before the period of Asoka.<sup>14</sup>

Theravāda was strongly represented in the western part of North India. The Mahāsaṅghika-school was chiefly established in the eastern part. But a clear division cannot be made. Monks of different schools lived together in harmony in the same monasteries. And wandering monks were not asked to which school they belonged.<sup>15</sup>

The Mahāsaṅghikas developed new doctrines

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<sup>13</sup> Ikeda 1977, p. 31-33; Thomas 1933, p. 29-33; Ling 1981 (see: *Theravada*).

<sup>14</sup> Warder 1980, p. 212-218.

<sup>15</sup> Warder 1980, p. 212-218; Ikeda 1977, p. 33-36.

concerning Buddha-nature, Arahantship and Bodhisattvahood. They emphasised that the Buddha was a transcendental being, far exalted above other humans or perhaps not a human being at all. They tried to give him divine qualities. The Buddha Gotama who appeared here on earth, was according to them a spiritual image (*nirmanakāya*) of the Buddha's body in the Tusita heaven. They thought that the Buddha Gotama was a created Buddha. Thus they started with the transformation of the Buddha and his Teaching. This led gradually to Mahāyāna. The humanism of the original Teaching became the supernatural of most Mahāyāna texts.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas 1933, p. 166-169; Sangharatana Thero, Ven. Talawe: *A Critical Study of Provincial Gods in Sri Lanka*, Delhi 1996, p. 63-64; Warder 1980, p. 212-218. See also: *Points of Controversy or Subjects of Discourse*. Being a translation of the Kathā-Vatthu from the Abhidhamma-Pitaka, transl. by Shwe Zan Aung & Rhys Davids, (repr.), Oxford 1993, II, 10 and XVIII, 1-4 (= p. 134-136, 323-326).

Further, according to the Mahāsaṅghikas, an Arahant was not completely holy, but he or she could fall back into a lower sphere. They claimed that the Arahant may be influenced by deities, may have erotic dreams, that an Arahant may have doubt about the Teaching, and that he or she may be still further instructed in the Dhamma. In short, they made limitations to Arahantship. According to Theravāda an Arahant cannot be influenced by deities anymore. Attaining Arahantship is definitive, he or she cannot fall back. The Arahant understands the Teaching completely and there is no need for him to learn more about it.<sup>17</sup>

The Theravādins rejected the new doctrines.<sup>18</sup> A compromise was not found and so there came two main streams in Buddhism at that time: Theravāda and Mahāsaṅghika.

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<sup>17</sup> Warder 1980, p. 212-218.

<sup>18</sup> See: *Points of Controversy* I, 2 and II, 1-4 (= p. 64-70 and 111-119).

In the first two centuries of Buddhism there arose a latent jealousy from the side of the worldly monks and the laymen with regard to the Arahants. The status of Arahant was therefore lowered by the worldly monks drawing up theses to justify this.<sup>19</sup>

The split between the Theravādins and the Mahāsanghikas arose not only through the difference in conception about the rules, but also, it is argued, because the first group emphasised the monastic life too much and had become an isolated group. The Theravādins thought it their fundamental duty to maintain the originality of the Vinaya as explained by the Buddha himself. The Mahāsanghikas preached to all, to the people in general, as was done by the Buddha and his holy disciples. They emphasised work among and for the laity, even if this meant abandoning the chances to reach Enlightenment themselves.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Lamotte 1976, p. 317-319.

<sup>20</sup> Ikeda 1977, p. 36-40; Gnanarama 1997, p. 45-46.

About 200 years after the Parinibbāna of the Buddha there was a split within Theravāda. The monk Vātsīputra produced a new version of the Abhidhamma. He claimed to have received it (probably via several teachers) from Sariputta and Rahula. He formulated in it a special teaching about the person (pudgala). The followers of Vātsīputra were named Vātsīputriyas. Their teaching was also named

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If Theravāda indeed emphasised the Vinaya, and put the Sutta Pitaka at the second place and if it did not preach to the people, then something was wrong. The objection of the Mahāsaṅghikas is then understandable. The rules for monks and nuns (Vinaya Pitaka) are rules of conduct. The Teaching (Sutta Pitaka) is most important. The Sangha was at the time of the Buddha an organisation with a mission. Right from the start the Arahants were sent out to preach the Dhamma. And monks and nuns were not allowed to refuse preaching the Dhamma, if they were invited to do so. (Gombrich, Richard F.: *Theravāda Buddhism. A social history from ancient Benares to modern Colombo*, London 1988, p. 114-115). It is the duty of monks to show lay people the way to heaven. According to Gombrich it is not their duty to show the way to nibbāna. At that time the whole teaching was thought too difficult and not possible for laymen. (Gombrich 1988, p. 73-74).

Puggalavāda. They accepted the person in a certain sense as reality. They rejected the concept of an eternal soul, a permanent kernel. But they also rejected the doctrine that a living being is nothing else than the five groups with the sense-organs.<sup>21</sup>

About that time the Mahāsaṅghika-school split in two further schools: Ekavyavahārika and Gokulika (Kukkulika).<sup>22</sup>

An important reason why so many different schools arose is because the monks lived scattered over the whole of India. Further, Buddhism was not a “Church Community” with a central clerical authority. But every monastery or group of monasteries is a separate community. There is no supreme leader. Only the teaching of the Buddha serves as the highest authority. This also means that the teaching of the Buddha could be understood differently by monks of the

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<sup>21</sup> Warder 1980, p. 239-242; Schumann, Hans Wolfgang: *Buddhismus. Stifter, Schulen und Systeme*, Olten 1976, p. 108-109. See also: *Points of Controversy I*, 1 (= p. 8-63).

<sup>22</sup> Warder 1980, p. 239-242.

second, third or higher degree. In that way there arose different interpretations. In one monastery one aspect might have been more emphasised than in another.<sup>23</sup>

In the third century B.C.E. Emperor Asoka accepted Buddhism. In the following years the Order of Monks got many privileges and undesirable elements entered the Order. About 237 B.C.E. Theravāda was threatened by a schism, namely by the Sarvāstivāda, the “all-exist” school. The Sarvāstivādins claimed that not only the present, but also past and future mental states (dharmas) are real. They claimed that the present does not merely last one single moment, after which it dies. But according to them all past moments remain existing; the dharmas do not arise and perish, but change from passive to active state or the reverse. They also claimed that Nibbāna is an eternal state

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<sup>23</sup> Zürcher, E.: *Buddhism : its origin and spread in words, maps and pictures*, Amsterdam 1962, p. 31-32; Warder 1980, p. 36; Wach, Joachim: *Mahāyāna, besonders im Hinblick auf das Saddharma-Pundarīka-Sūtra*, München-Neubiberg 1925, p. 29-30; Lamotte 1976, p. 573-574.

that one enters. In Sarvastivāda there are three dharmas that are not bound to conditions: space and two kinds of liberation (nirodha). Theravāda rejected these views. Future dharmas cannot exist yet; past dharmas exist only in so far as their result is not exhausted. And Nibbāna is a mental state that sets in after the destruction of greed, hatred and ignorance. All schools that followed this last theory were called the Vibhajjavādins, the Analysts, those who make distinction (between past, present and future mental states).<sup>24</sup>

In 232 B.C.E., a third Council was convened at Pataliputta (Patna) by Emperor Asoka at the request of Venerable Moggalliputta Tissa who also presided over the

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<sup>24</sup> Warder 1980, p. 273-274; Rahula, W.: 'Theravada - Mahayana,' in: *Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, Kuala Lumpur 1983, p. 338-343; Schumann 1976, p. 109-113; Schumann, Hans Wolfgang: *Mahāyāna-Buddhismus. Die zweite Drehung des Dharma-Rades*, München 1990, p. 20. See also: *Points of Controversy* I, 6 (= p. 84-98); Schumann, Hans Wolfgang: *Buddhismus, Philosophie zur Erlösung : Die grossen Denksysteme des Hīnayāna und Mahāyāna*, Bern (etc.) 1963, p. 51-53.

Council.<sup>25</sup> During the Council the complete Canon was recited by 1000 leading monks to safeguard the Sangha against discord. At the end of this Council the Venerable Moggalliputta Tissa composed a book, the Kathavatthu, in which he set out to disprove the wrong opinions and theories of a number of sects. The teaching that was approved and accepted by this Council, was known as Theravāda. It was at this time that the Abhidhamma Pitaka was probably inserted.<sup>26</sup>

Emperor Asoka championed the Vibhajyavādins. Therefore the Sarvāstivādins went to the Northwest, first to Mathura and later to Kashmir, which remained their centre for more than 1000 years.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> According to Thomas 1933, p. 35-36, this was not a real Council but a meeting, a congress of eight monks, to revise the teaching.

<sup>26</sup> Bischoff, Roger: *Buddhism in Myanmar. A Short History*. Kandy 1995. The Wheel No. 399/401, passim.

<sup>27</sup> Rahula 1983, p. 338-343; Lamotte 1976, p. 297-300; Geiger 1980, p. 46-50.

At about the same time there was a split in the Mahāsaṅghika, with the rise of the Lokottaravādins. The name means: “transcendental” school and it relates to the nature of the Buddha. They argued that the Buddha was a transcendental being, someone who surpasses the world. A normal human would not have been able to recognise the universal laws that are laid down in the Teaching. The Buddha surely would have been a superman. These theories led to the transcendental visions of Mahāyāna about the nature of the Buddha. The Mahāvastu is from this school. This book was the favourite text of the followers of Mahāyāna and it was kept in Nepal in their libraries. The text that has come to us is the result of being handed down over several centuries.<sup>28</sup> Here it is written that the body of the Buddha is transcendental and not of this world.<sup>29</sup>

Some time after this split (end of the 3rd century B.C.E.) there came two other splits in the Gokulika-school,

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<sup>28</sup> Warder 1980, p. 276-277; Schumann 1976, p. 131-134.

<sup>29</sup> Jones, J.J. (tr.): *The Mahāvastu. Vol. I.*, (repr.). London, 1987, p.132.

namely the Bahushrutīya and the Prajñāptivāda. The first of these taught among other things that the Buddha had a transcendental teaching. Of the second school nothing is left.<sup>30</sup>

About 100 B.C.E. Vattagāmanī Abhaya came to the throne in Sri Lanka. During his reign there was a civilian rebellion. At the same time there was a Tamil-invasion. King Vattagāmanī was defeated and he fled to India where he lived in exile for fourteen years. During that time there was a famine and many laymen and monks died. The monasteries became deserted. Many persons left the country and went to India. The oral tradition of the Teaching was in danger. For example, as a result of the passing away or the departure of monks there was at that time only one monk who knew the entire Maha-Niddesa by heart. Therefore virtuous and scholarly monks learned that text, lest it would be lost. Under those circumstances it was decided to write down the Teaching. That happened about 90 B.C.E. Then the fifth Council of Arahants was held. The

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<sup>30</sup> Warder 1980, p. 277-278.

aim of this Council was the revision of the Commentaries to the Tipitaka. At the end of the Council for the first time in the history of Buddhism the Pāli Canon was written down and the Commentaries as well. This happened at Aluvihāra in the Matale District in Sri Lanka.<sup>31</sup>



Aluvihara, Matale, Sri Lanka

At the end of the first Century B.C.E. king Vattagāmani-Abhaya presented the Abhayagiri monastery at Anuradhapura to a monk who had helped him during his

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<sup>31</sup> Rahula, Ven. Walpola Sri: 'Validity and Vitality of the Theravada Tradition,' in: *Voice of Buddhism*, Dec. 1990, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 3-7; Gombrich 1988, p. 152; Perera, H.R.: *Buddhism in Ceylon. Its Past and its Present*, Kandy 1966, The Wheel No. 100 abc p. 21-24.

exile. That monk was named Mahātissa. Because of repeated mistakes and faults he was removed from the Sangha by the monks of the Great Monastery (Mahā Vihāra). Then a group of his followers went to the Abhayagiri monastery at Anuradhapura, severed their connection with the Great Monastery and formed a separate nikāya. Later this group became divided once more. So there were at that time two groups in Sri Lanka that had separated from the Theravāda-school.<sup>32</sup>

At the end of the first Century of the Christian Era there was in India a further meeting during the reign of King Kanishka, this time to fix the Teaching in Sanskrit and to remove the inaccuracies and different explanations of the sects that had arisen over the years. There were so many monks that a selection had to be made. Five hundred monks under the leadership of Vasumitra composed three

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<sup>32</sup> Geiger 1980, p. 236-237; Gombrich 1988, p. 158; De Silva, Lynn: *Buddhism. Beliefs and practices in Sri Lanka*, (2nd rev. enlarged ed.), Colombo 1980, p. 42-43; Perera 1966, p. 23-27.

Commentaries. Those commentaries still exist, but they probably are not composed during that Council.<sup>33</sup> The Council was held at Jalandhara in Kashmir. Theravāda whose Canon had already been written down in Sri Lanka did not accept the validity of the Council held under the patronage of King Kanishka. The result was the division of the Teaching of the Buddha into a Southern and a Northern School.<sup>34</sup>

The name of the Northern school became Mahāyāna (the Great Vehicle). The schools, from which it had been separated, were called Hinayāna (Small Vehicle) by the Mahāyānists. It was claimed by the Mahāyānists that the path of Hinayāna to liberation was limited, but Mahāyāna was universal. The two terms Mahāyāna and Hinayāna appear between the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E.

The new school used Sanskrit as its language and developed in the Northwest and in South India. In these

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas 1933, p. 174-176.

<sup>34</sup> Zürcher 1962, p. 45-46.

regions Buddhism was exposed to non-Indian influences. There was a strong influence from the western world. Alexander the Great had invaded India in the 4th century B.C.E. This had an immense effect on life in India. Garrisons stayed behind and Greek rulers succeeded each other during the following 200 years and controlled parts of India. Thus the Greek-Bactrian king Menander (Milinda) ruled in Northwest India in the second century B.C.E. and he had a long discussion with Venerable Nagasena about the Teaching of the Buddha which has become an important part of Theravāda teaching.<sup>35</sup> The Greeks went from Bactria to Punjab and probably to Magadha as well. After the fall of those Greek kingdoms came the Scythes and the Pahlavas who were influenced themselves by the Hellenistic culture. They remained in control of parts of India for several centuries. Thus Buddhism came in touch with the Hellenistic

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<sup>35</sup> See: Horner, I.B. (tr.): *Milinda's Questions*. Vol. I & II, Oxford 1990 & 1991, (1st ed. 1963 & 1964); and/or: Nyanaponika (Hrsg. & Übers.): *Milindapañha. Die Fragen des Königs Milinda. Zwiegespräche zwischen einem Griechenkönig und einem buddhistischen Mönch*, Interlaken 1985.

world.<sup>36</sup>

Mahāyāna emphasised the virtue of compassion. It has been suggested that Christian influences could have contributed to the development of Mahāyāna.<sup>37</sup> There arose interest in the future Buddha Metteyya (Maitreya). But if Metteyya was only one of a series of many, then others had to be active elsewhere, and the world had to be full of Bodhisattvas who are all striving for the welfare of others.<sup>38</sup> In place of the liberation by one's own effort came the liberation by another through the mercy of the Buddha or of Bodhisattvas. The function of the Bodhisattva was that of a liberator, a saviour.<sup>39</sup> The Bhakti-movement of Hinduism that started about 400 B.C.E., probably influenced the

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<sup>36</sup> Ikeda 1977, p. 68-72; Finegan, Jack: *The Archeology of World Religions*, (4th printing), Princeton 1971, p. 147 and 276. See also: Lamotte 1976, p. 469-546.

<sup>37</sup> Wach 1925, p. 43; Ling 1980 (*see: Buddhism*).

<sup>38</sup> Bary, Wm. Theodore de (Gen. Ed.): *Sources of Indian Tradition*, New York 1958, Vol. I, p. 153.

<sup>39</sup> Ling 1981 (*see: Buddhism*); Wach 1925, p. 43; Schumann 1976, p. 132.

Mahāyāna-school. Bhakti (faith and devotion) was a good way for the common people who could not follow the way of wisdom.<sup>40</sup>

Two important schools developed in Mahāyāna, namely the Mādhyamika and the Yogācāra School. The Mādhyamika was founded by Nāgārjuna at the end of the first or beginning of the second century C.E. He expounded the philosophy behind the teachings of anattā, not-self, and of dependent origination. The key concept in his teachings was sūnyatā, emptiness. Nāgārjuna formulated that all things are temporary, spurious, empty of own-being or self.<sup>41</sup> If emptiness did not exist, a realisation of Nirvāna would not be possible. According to him, emptiness does not change and is therefore equal to Nirvāna. Samsāra and Nirvāna are identical, are two forms of the same reality. The ultimate emptiness is here, is everywhere and all-embracing. In fact there is no difference between

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<sup>40</sup> De Silva 1980, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> See: *Lalitavistara* 13.175-13.177, in: Bary, de 1958 Vol. I, p. 172-174.

emptiness and the perceptible world. All here is only an illusion, a product of the mind. And the one who considers those representations of the mind as reality, experiences frustrations. The one who sees them as illusions, and who considers oneself as not-self, as empty of own-being, that person is liberated. All beings could participate in the emptiness that is Nirvāna. They all had a Buddha-nature. They only had to develop that Buddha-nature.<sup>42</sup>

The Yogācāra School was founded by the brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu in the fourth century C.E. They were born in Peshawar in Gandhāra. Some say that Maitreya or Maitreyanātha (3rd-4th century) was also one of the founders. He was the teacher of Asanga. The practice of

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<sup>42</sup> Bary, de 1958 Vol. I p. 155-156; Donath, Dorothy C.: *Buddhism for the West - Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna*, New York 1971, p. 60-63; Thomas 1933, p. 237; Prebish, Charles S.: *Historical Dictionary of Buddhism*, Metuche & London 1993 (see: *Nāgārjuna*); Schayer, Stanislav: *Vorarbeiten zur Geschichte der mahāyānistischen Erlösungslehren*, München-Neubiberg 1921, p. 40-44; Schumann 1963, p. 86-95. See also: *Ratnamegha Sūtra*, partly publ. in: Bary, de 1958 Vol. I, p. 177.

yoga was thought important as a means for religious advance. This school taught that there are no visible objects; the perceptible world is a manifestation of the mind. Another name for this school was therefore Vijñānavāda, the teaching of consciousness. Consciousness is real, the objects of consciousness are not real. And the subject too, the individual, is shaped out of mind. There merely is mind, without a self. In the Yogācāra, mind is a definition of the absolute. It taught a "central consciousness" that is the essence of the world and out of which originates all that is. It contains the experiences of the individual life and the germs for every spiritual phenomenon. The central consciousness played a part as permanent "self" although they denied the existence of a self.<sup>43</sup> This school taught three levels of the mind: (1)

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<sup>43</sup> Bary, de 1958 Vol. I, p. 155-156; Thomas 1933, p. 237; Prebish 1993 (see: *Yogācāra*); Humphreys, Christmas: *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism*, (2nd ed.), London 1976 (see: *Yogacara School; Alaya-vijñāna*); Ehrhard, Franz-Karl & Fischer-Schreiber, Ingrid (Herausg.): *Das Lexikon des Buddhismus*, München 1992. (see: *Yogachara*;

consciousness of thinking (objective world); (2) thinking; (3) central consciousness (the absolute out of which all is originated). In Theravāda there must be an object to cause object-consciousness. According to the Vijñānavāda consciousness creates the sense-object.<sup>44</sup>

This school, too, taught emptiness. It also developed the doctrine of the “three bodies of the Buddha”. As we have seen already, it was preceded by the doctrine of the Mahāsāṅghikas concerning *nirmānakāya*, the spiritual image of the Buddha. The three bodies (*Trikāya*) are:

1. *Dharma-kāya*. The true, invisible body; the body of the Law; the body of essence, of truth and reality. There are innumerable Buddhas on earth; however there is only one *dharma-kāya*. The beings on lower levels of insight see a multiple of Buddhas. But the enlightened beings experience in *dharma-kāya* the essential unity, not only of

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*Alaya-vijñāna*); Ling 1981 (see: *Yogācāras*); Schumann 1963, p. 95-96; Schumann 1976, p. 184-190.

<sup>44</sup> Schumann 1990, p. 75.

the Buddhas with each other, but also of the Buddhas with the beings in the world. The body of essence was identified with Nirvāna. Certain schools honour the dharma-kāya as the Primordial Buddha (ādibuddha) who pervades the whole universe. It is then in fact the World's Soul, the Brahman of the Upanishads, in a new form.

2. Sambhoga-kāya. The heavenly body of bliss and delight; the transcendental body that is only spiritually perceptible to Bodhisattvas. It is the spiritual manifestation of dharmakāya. In this body the Buddhas enjoy their glory and wisdom. The transcendental Buddhas co-operate in the liberation of beings. For they are the teachers of the Bodhisattvas. There are spiritual Bodhisattvas in the sambhoga-kāya who have not (yet) lived on earth.<sup>45</sup> In the sambhoga-kāya they are aware of each other – in states of higher consciousness. This body of bliss remains eternal in the heavens as a kind of supreme god. In its turn it is the result of dharma-kāya and the spiritual creator of

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<sup>45</sup> This would mean that it was possible to become a Bodhisattva without having lived on earth.

nirmāna-kāya.

3. Nirmāna-kāya. The magic body, the visible body of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. It is only the nirmāna-kāya that lives on earth. Its task is to preach the Teaching. It is a spiritual product of a heavenly Buddha, of sambhoga-kāya. Because Buddhas disappear forever as individual after their death, it is useless to pray to them. But praying to them may bring about a wholesome mood.<sup>46</sup>

According to Mahāyāna at the same time that the Buddha Gotama taught the Dhamma in India, his supernatural original in heaven preached another, deeper and secret teaching. That secret teaching was first preserved by the nāgas (snakes, dragons). And only a few centuries later it was brought to earth by Nāgārjuna and other teachers. The Dhamma taught by the Buddha was for

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<sup>46</sup> Donath 1971, p. 54-57; Schayer 1921, p. 33; Bary, de 1958 Vol. I, p. 154; Finegan 1971, p. 280; Schumann 1963, p. 60-65 and p. 96-107; Schumann 1976, p. 136-142. See also: *Mahāyānasūtralankāra*, partly publ. in: Bary, de 1958 Vol. I, p. 172.

simple people. The supreme teaching of the Buddha was brought from heaven to earth only when there were teachers who were able to interpret that teaching and who could make it public. However, as Warder justly remarked, that would mean the Buddha would not have been able during his lifetime to teach what others 600 years later were able to do.<sup>47</sup>

The Buddha taught that there are three types of perfect beings: (1) Buddhas; (2) Paccekabuddhas; and (3) Arahants. According to the early schools a serious disciple should strive after Arahantship.<sup>48</sup> But the Mahāyāna scriptures condemned the sthāvākas, persons who commit themselves to attaining the state of Arahant. They also condemned the pratyekabuddhas, persons who only attain their own Enlightenment.<sup>49</sup> The followers of Theravāda and of other early Buddhist schools focussed all their attention on the study of the Abhidhamma. Their aim was to achieve

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<sup>47</sup> Warder 1980, p. 6; Schayer 1921, p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> Bary, de 1958 Vol. I, p. 153.

<sup>49</sup> Ikeda 1977, p. 36-40.

the state of Arahant. They sought their own spiritual good and salvation and they undertook nothing to help others by preaching or by serving as models. The followers of Mahāyāna thought that one should not only work for one's own spiritual welfare, but that the Dhamma should be spread among the masses, as far as possible. Their aim was attaining the state of Bodhisattva, someone who as an enlightened being promises to help others to gain liberation.

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It is suggested that Hinayāna was centred around the monastic community, while Mahāyāna arose among the lay followers of that time. But probably there were monks who were not satisfied with the attitude of Hinayāna and who added their powers to the lay leaders.<sup>51</sup>

Mahāyāna teaches that all life is mutually dependent. The absolute is present in every being and is indivisible. Therefore all beings are identical with the absolute. There is no self; however there is a common unity. Karma therefore

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<sup>50</sup> Ikeda 1977, p. 80-85.

<sup>51</sup> Ikeda 1977, p. 83-85.

is not individual but familial, national and universal as well.

<sup>52</sup> In Mahāyāna the universal aspect of karma is emphasised. The spiritual system is like a great ocean. Individual karma is therefore connected with the whole. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are able to liberate human beings by their compassion, namely by means of guidance and inspiration that we receive if we open our heart and our mind for the spiritual presences around and within us. This is a transference of merit and it happens inward and outward through the power of compassion.<sup>53</sup>

Further, according to Mahāyāna, all life is a manifestation of the Buddha principle, or Mind. We all possess the absolute, the liberation in us. However we are not aware of it. Our life is a stream, a process of becoming.

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<sup>52</sup> Donath 1971, p. 66-69; Schumann 1990, p. 38. – According to Theravāda there is neither a small independent consciousness nor a big absolute Mind. Further there is neither universal karma nor group-karma. Every individual performs his or her own volitional action (*karma*) and creates his/her own karma-results.

<sup>53</sup> Donath 1971, p. 66-69.

Energy is identical with consciousness, and consciousness (mind) is all that is. Nirvāna and samsāra are identical. Nirvāna is found within samsāra, and not outside.<sup>54</sup>

In Mahāyāna many divine beings were also added. Thousands of Buddhas, innumerable Bodhisattvas and numerous deities, adopted from Hinduism, were admitted into the Mahāyāna-world of the gods.<sup>55</sup>

## **2. The Bodhisattva in Mahayana**

According to original Buddhism the Buddha was a teacher. Liberation took place through one's own power, one's own energy. In Mahāyāna liberation is possible through the mercy of the Buddha or of Bodhisattvas. Further, highest insight in Mahāyāna is not the insight of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, but an enclosing and penetrating knowing, an all-knowing. Even the Buddha

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<sup>54</sup> Donath 1971, p. 66-69; Schumann 1990, p. 40.

<sup>55</sup> Finegan 1971, p. 279-281.

was not able to attain to that insight in one single night. Innumerable existences were needed. The true Buddhist follows the Buddha and therefore he must aim at that all-knowing and start the career of a Bodhisattva.<sup>56</sup> The monk exerts himself to reach Arahantship. But it is argued that the layman through his generosity, patience and energy is much nearer to the Buddha than the monk.<sup>57</sup>

The concept of Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna replaced the Arahant ideal as the goal of Buddhist life. Some say that the Bodhisattva ideal was a revival of the original genius of Buddhism. In original Buddhism Arahantship was open to all, monks and laymen. Later this ideal was restricted to those who stayed in a monastery. The monks of the

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<sup>56</sup> Wach, Joachim: *Mahāyāna, besonders im Hinblick auf das Saddharma-Pundarīka-Sūtra : Eine Untersuchung über die religionsgeschichtliche Bedeutung eines heiligen Textes der Buddhisten*, München-Neubiberg 1925, p. 34-48;

Dhammavuddho, Bhikkhu Hye: *Main differences between Mahayana and Theravada Teachings*, Penang [s.a.], p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Lamotte, Étienne: *Histoire du Bouddhisme indien. Des origines à l'ère Shaka*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1976, p. 86.

Hinayana schools would strive after Arahantship only for themselves and would not spread the teaching among the people. In Mahāyāna the Bodhisattva is a being who aims at Buddhahood through systematic development of the perfections (pāramitā). He aims at helping all other beings on the way to liberation. He lives only for the sake of others. The Arahant on the contrary was considered to be selfish because he would aim at Enlightenment only for himself. The Arahant is considered to be inferior to the Bodhisattva, for Arahantship is attained by the disciple, the one who hears the Teaching and follows the Eightfold Path.<sup>58</sup> The followers of Mahāyāna did not care for Arahantship but called attention to reaching Buddhahood.

The quality of compassion is emphasised equally with wisdom in the Mahāyāna. Compassion and wisdom are found equally in the Bodhisattva. Through compassion he selflessly postpones his entrance into the bliss of Nirvana so

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<sup>58</sup> See: *Pañcavimsatisāhasrīkā Prajñāpāramitā*, partly published in: Bary, Wm. Theodore de (Gen. Ed.): *Sources of Indian Tradition*, New York 1958, Vol. I, p. 159.

as to help suffering creatures. Through wisdom he attempts to win insight into the emptiness of all that is. A Bodhisattva, although intent on ultimate purity, remains in touch with ordinary people by having the same passions they have. His passions, however, do not affect or pollute his mind. A Bodhisattva's compassion is great, it makes no distinctions. He has a selfless desire to make others happy. He is determined to exist in unhappy spheres during many millions of world-periods for the sake of saving all living beings. For it is better that only he suffers than that all beings come into that unhappy sphere. Voluntarily Bodhisattvas take the suffering of others, of the whole world upon themselves. But they have to check their compassion through wisdom. They may not sacrifice their life for an unworthy object. Wisdom is needed for choosing the correct means that are needed for giving help.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Conze, Edward (select. & tr.): *Buddhist Scriptures*, (repr.) Middlesex 1977, (1st ed. 1959), p. 30-31; Conze, Edward: *A Short History of Buddhism*, (repr.), London 1986, p. 46-48; Lamotte 1976, p. 90; Ling, Trevor: *A Dictionary of Buddhism. Indian and South-East Asian*, Calcutta/New Delhi 1981 (see: Bodhisatta); Katz, Nathan: *Buddhist Images of*

The Bodhisattva would rather commit an unwholesome deed and as a result of that suffer many thousands of world-periods (even in hell), than neglect the good in one single being. The Bodhisattva Jyotis, for example, broke his vow of chastity and had sexual intercourse with a woman who otherwise would have died.<sup>60</sup>

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*Human Perfection. The Arahant of the Sutta Pitaka Compared with the Bodhisattva and the Mahāsiddha*, Delhi 1989, (1st ed. 1982), passim; Ikeda, Daisaku: *Buddhism, the First Millennium*, Transl. by Burton Watson, Tokyo (etc.) 1977, p. 86-92; *Astasāhasrika Prajñāpāramita XVI*, and *Vajradhvaja Sutra*, partly publ. in: Winternitz 1930, p. 31-35; Schumann, Hans Wolfgang: *Buddhismus, Philosophie zur Erlösung : Die grossen Denksysteme des Hīnayāna und Mahāyāna*, Bern 1963, p. 65-73 and p. 110-111; Schumann, Hans Wolfgang: *Buddhismus. Stifter, Schulen und Systeme*, Olten 1976, p. 143-145. See also: *Sikṣāsamuccaya*, and *Tathāgataguhyā Sūtra*, partly publ. in: Bary, de 1958 Vol. I, p. 159-162 and p. 169. Taking the suffering of others upon oneself is very much like the Christian teaching. According to Theravāda one cannot take the suffering of others upon oneself.

<sup>60</sup> *Upayakarsalya-Sutra*, in: Winternitz 1930, p. 40, nr. 21. – Mahāyāna has been criticised for arguing that the end

The vow of the Bodhisattva is as follows:

“There are innumerable living beings; I promise to save them all. Our evil passions are inexhaustible; I promise to kill them all. The holy doctrines cannot be measured; I promise to study them all. It is difficult to attain to the Path of the Buddha; Enlightenment is highest. I promise to attain Enlightenment.”<sup>61</sup>

The unity of compassion and wisdom is achieved

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justifies the means or an action is justified only by its result. Therefore that would appear to exclude the possibility of some actions being inherently unwholesome. And if a Bodhisattva because of a wrong action is reborn in an unhappy sphere, he won't be of use for anybody during that time; he won't be able to help anybody. And that surely will not be the intention of such a deed, namely helping one single person only and, due to that, suffering for many thousands of years and during that time not being able to help anyone else.

<sup>61</sup> Yamaguchi, Susumu: 'Development of Mahayana Buddhist Beliefs,' transl. by Shoko Watanabe, in: *The Path of the Buddha*, Delhi 1986, p. 171-175. See also: *Vadradhvaja-Sūtra*, partly publ. in: Winternitz 1930, p. 34.

through the six perfections (pāramitā). A person becomes a Bodhisattva when he first resolves to win full enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. The Bodhisattva is separated from Buddhahood only by a single small obstacle, i.e. his belief in a personal self, his assumption that he is a separate individual.<sup>62</sup>

The 6 pāramitās are:<sup>63</sup>

dāna (generosity);

sīla (morality);

khanti (forbearance, patience);

virīya (energy);

dhyāna (contemplation);

prajñā (wisdom).

The question as to when one can justifiably be called a Bodhisattva was answered by Nāgārjuna (1st cent. C.E.) as follows: "This change from an ordinary being to a

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<sup>62</sup> Yamaguchi 1986, p. 171-175.

<sup>63</sup> Sangharatana Thero, Ven. Talawe: *A Critical Study of Provincial Gods in Sri Lanka*, Delhi 1996, p. 61-68.

Bodhisattva takes place when his mind has reached the state when it can no longer turn back on enlightenment. Also, he has by then gained five advantages: he is no more reborn in the states of woe, but always among gods and men; he is never again born in poor or low-class families; he is always a male and never a female; he is always well-built, and free from physical defects; he can remember his past lives, and no more forgets them again.”<sup>64</sup>

The Lankāvatāra Sūtra states: “The Bodhisattvas are those serious disciples who are enlightened because of their exertions to get self-realisation of Noble Wisdom, and who have taken upon themselves the task to enlighten other beings.”<sup>65</sup>

Asanga wrote in his Bodhisattvabhūmi that one of the characteristics held in common by both Buddhas and

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<sup>64</sup> Conze 1977 (1959), p.30-31; Ling 1981 (see: *Bodhisatta*). – If a Bodhisattva is always reborn among gods and human beings, how then can one explain that he sometimes is said to be reborn in unhappy spheres?

<sup>65</sup> Goddard, Dwight (ed.): *A Buddhist Bible*, Boston 1970, (1st. ed. 1938), p. 337.

Bodhisattvas is that they have inconceivable and innumerable means of power.<sup>66</sup>

There are two classes of Bodhisattvas: terrestrial ones and heavenly or transcendental ones. The terrestrial ones are human beings, recognisable as Bodhisattvas only due to their all-embracing compassion and their determination to exert themselves for the sake of others. It is open to anyone to become a Bodhisattva.

The transcendental or heavenly Bodhisattvas have, through realisation of the perfections (*pāramitā*), developed themselves from terrestrial Bodhisattvas to Buddhahood, but they have postponed their ultimate extinction until all living beings are liberated. They are in the position of “Nirvāna without a standstill”. In that way they are able to go on acting for the sake of all beings. They can only be perceived spiritually. However, if they themselves wish, they

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<sup>66</sup> Katz 1989, p. 265.

can appear in different shapes, according to need.<sup>67</sup>

For a Bodhisattva there are two stages of thinking. In his immeasurable compassion he exerts himself for the salvation of beings that he considers helpless and real. At the same time, however, he lives as a wise man with the insight that there doesn't exist a self (*ātman*) and that empiric beings are merely short-lived appearances. He has deep insight into *sūnyatā* (emptiness). In reality there is no suffering nor are there beings that have to be saved. All beings are led to perfect extinction, yet there is no being perfectly extinguished.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Schumann 1963, p. 65-70. See also: *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, in: Winternitz 1930, p. 37; Schumann 1976, p. 145-150.

<sup>68</sup> Schumann 1963, p. 65-70; *Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā XVIII*, in: Winternitz 1930, p. 67-69. – The teaching is like a raft, a vessel to reach the other shore. Once arrived, we should not cling to it anymore. However it could be said that the Bodhisattva clings here to the teaching and he could not have attained to full wisdom.

The Mahāyāna teaching about Bodhisattvas is based upon the doctrine on the transfer of merit. Bodhisattvas promise to liberate all living beings. This is not impossible, for karma is considered to be cosmic. All existence functions as “mind-waves” in the Cosmic Spirit. All that exists is, in ultimate reality, a manifestation of universal consciousness. The thoughts and deeds of one single being have the power to influence all other living beings.<sup>69</sup>

According to Mahāyāna, the path to Bodhisattvahood is open to all. Therefore there are many Bodhisattvas. Those who were regarded as having reached the penultimate stage of existence in the Tusita heaven were thought of as heavenly beings, upon whom ordinary mortals could call for help. This is possible in two ways. The Noble Eightfold Path is considered to be too difficult for most human beings. Only extremely talented persons are able to

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<sup>69</sup> Donath, Dorothy C.: *Buddhism for the West - Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna : A Comprehensive review of Buddhist history, philosophy, and teachings from the time of the Buddha to the present day*, New York 1971, p. 53-54 and p. 69-71.

follow that path. Others need help from outside. They have to trust upon the compassion (karunā) of the Bodhisattvas or upon the mercy of transcendental Buddhas. Their compassion is boundless and therefore encompasses also beings with few and weak talents. To get the help of Bodhisattvas it will be enough to utter a humble prayer. It is the way of faith, confidence. The devotees put their confidence in the compassionate Bodhisattva that he will not let them down. Through the mercy of a Bodhisattva one can reach liberation. The Bodhisattvas and the heavenly Buddhas are able to take upon themselves the unwholesome karma-result of others and to give them a good karma-result. In that way they break the natural law of moral result. In Mahāyāna the supernatural gets the chance to intervene in the natural. The faith of the devotees leads them with certainty to rebirth in a Buddha-paradise where they develop wisdom. From there they enter Nirvāna.

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<sup>70</sup> Sangharatana 1996, p. 102-107; Ling 1981 (see: *Buddhism; Councils; Sarvāstivada*); Schumann 1963, p.

Through striving after Bodhisattvahood and the welfare for others, the goal, Nirvāna, has been somewhat relegated to the background in Mahāyāna. But it has not lost any of its importance. After all beings are liberated, a Bodhisattva will enter into complete Nirvāna. In Mahāyāna Nirvāna is equal to samsāra. Only in the eyes of the ignorant is there a difference between the two.<sup>71</sup>

In Mahāyāna there are two kinds of Nirvāna:

1. The incomplete Nirvāna: this is the Nirvāna during lifetime. The devotee has then acquired the wisdom that all is an illusion. Bodhisattvas, too, live in the incomplete Nirvāna.
2. The complete Nirvāna: herein the body of the liberated one is abolished as well. The liberated one is free from personalities.<sup>72</sup>

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110-111; Schumann 1976, p. 152-153, p. 160-163 and p. 167-171.

<sup>71</sup> See: *Sikṣā-samuccaya* and *Lankāvatātāra Sūtra*, partly publ. in: Bary, de 1958 Vol. I, p. 177-178.

<sup>72</sup> Schumann 1963, p. 83-85. – According to Theravāda this would not be possible. Consciousness cannot exist without a

Because all beings are essentially empty, there is in fact no being that has to be liberated and no being that has to liberate. A Bodhisattva should remember this. He is free from the idea of "self" or "being" or "person". In an absolute sense there are no beings nor Perfect Ones nor Nirvāna. They are only appearances. They need no liberation because they are empty.<sup>73</sup>

The term Bodhisattva was not confined to celestial beings. Great teachers, e.g. Nāgārjuna and Asanga, were referred to as Bodhisattvas. It was also a convention of Buddhists in South East Asia to regard their kings as Bodhisattvas, since they were beings whose great efforts

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body, so how then can there be a liberated consciousness in Nirvāna without body? And further: consciousness arises through causes. It is not independent. The consciousness in Nirvāna is liberated from the idea of "I" and "mine". It does not appropriate anything anymore. And therefore it is completely liberated, completely free.

<sup>73</sup> Schumann 1963, p. 91.

were directed towards securing the welfare of the many.<sup>74</sup>

It is claimed that several kings from Sri Lanka lived the life of a Bodhisattva, that they aimed at Buddhahood.<sup>75</sup> It is also claimed that Anāgārika Dharmapala was a Bodhisattva.

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Bodhisatta,  
Polonnaruwa,  
Sri Lanka

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<sup>74</sup> Sangharatana 1996, p. 102-107; Ling 1981 (see: Buddhism; Councils; Sarvāstivada).

<sup>75</sup> Gombrich, Richard F.: *Theravāda Buddhism. A social history from ancient Benares to modern Colombo*, London (etc.) 1988, p. 161.

<sup>76</sup> Gombrich 1988, p. 188.

### **3. The Bodhisatta in Theravada**

The Bodhisatta who became the Buddha went through many hardships during immeasurable long periods of time, out of compassion (karunā) for the world, to become a Teacher of the Noble Truths. He suffered a lot for us, but not instead of us! He was a teacher, not a saviour. From the beginning of his career as Buddha-to-be during the time of the Buddha Dīpankara he exerted himself all the time to become a teacher of gods and men, to show us the way to the highest happiness, Nibbāna. During his long career he is called Bodhisatta.

#### **3.1. The term *Bodhisatta***

The Pāli term Bodhisatta is composed of *Bodhi* which term means 'wisdom' or 'enlightenment', and *satta* which means 'devoted to' or 'intent on'. A Bodhisatta means one

who is devoted to wisdom, who is intent on enlightenment.<sup>77</sup>

Somebody is called a Bodhisatta if he is sure to become a Buddha. In the Pāli Canon and commentaries, the designation Bodhisatta is given only to Prince Siddhattha before his Enlightenment and in his former existences. The Buddha himself uses this term when speaking of his life prior to Enlightenment.<sup>78</sup>

### **3.2. Types of Bodhisattas**

In the commentaries to Khuddaka Nikāya three types of Bodhisatta are mentioned. They are (1) Sāvaka Bodhisatta; (2) Pacceka Bodhisatta and (3) Mahā Bodhisatta.

The Sāvaka Bodhisatta will attain Enlightenment with the help of a teacher by following the teaching of a Buddha.

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<sup>77</sup> Nārada Maha Thera: *The Buddha and His Teachings*, (4th enlarged ed.), Kandy 2524/1980, p. 570 571.

<sup>78</sup> Nyānatiloka: *Buddhist Dictionary : Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, edited by Nyānaponika, (4th revised ed.), Kandy 1980 (see: Bodhisatta).

He will be an Arahant, a perfect saint. Laymen, too, can become an Arahant! There is little information available about the period of time that must be spent to become Arahant. But in the Satipatthana Sutta it is said that, if one practises insight-meditation for seven years, or even for a period of seven days, one may expect sainthood.<sup>79</sup>

The Pacceka Bodhisatta is one who will attain Enlightenment with his own effort, without any external help. But he will not be able to teach the Dhamma to others. To become a Paccekabuddha three factors must be present together: (1) an encounter with a living Buddha; (2) complete reverence; and (3) the will to become a Paccekabuddha.<sup>80</sup> According to the commentaries he will attain Enlightenment after fulfilling the ten normal and the ten higher perfections during two aeons and 100,000

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<sup>79</sup> Soma Thera (tr.): *The Way of Mindfulness : The Satipatthāna Sutta and Commentary*, Kandy 2518/1975, p. 32.

<sup>80</sup> Ledi Sayādaw, Ven.: *A Manual of the Excellent Man, Uttamapurisa Dīpanī*, transl. from the Burmese by U Tin Oo; edited by Bhikkhu Pesala, Kandy 2000, p. 18.

world-periods (kappas).<sup>81</sup>

The Mahā Bodhisatta is the one who will attain Sammā-sambodhi, the supreme Enlightenment with his own effort, without the help of anybody else. He will be a Buddha, a Fully Enlightened One, and he will teach the Dhamma to gods and humans. This career is not recommended as an ideal higher than or alternative to Arahantship.<sup>82</sup>

All these types of Bodhisatta strive to attain Enlightenment. Everybody, without exception, can attain the highest Enlightenment. The difference between a Buddha, a Paccekabuddha and an Arahant is that the first two have insight into the truth by their own effort and an Arahant

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<sup>81</sup> Idem, p. 15. – For more about the Paccekabuddha, see: Kloppenborg, Ria: *The Paccekabuddha. A Buddhist Ascetic. A study of the concept of the Paccekabuddha in Pali canonical and commentarial literature*, Kandy 1983, The Wheel No. 305/307.

<sup>82</sup> See note 80.

after having been taught.<sup>83</sup>

### **3.3. The Maha Bodhisatta**

A Mahā Bodhisatta (or in short: Bodhisatta) is someone who is destined for Buddhahood. He is sure to become a Buddha, a Fully Enlightened One, by his own efforts without being instructed by others.

Before the aspirant can begin his career, he has to make a mental resolve for Bodhisattahood and eventual Buddhahood. This mental resolve is made once only and does not need to be repeated. Secondly, he must make an aspiration in the presence of a succession of Buddhas in order to make known his intention of gaining Supreme Awakening. Thirdly, he has to perform some act of merit towards each Buddha as a pledge or guarantee of the deep seriousness of his purpose. Then each of these Buddhas must make a declaration to him that his aspiration will

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<sup>83</sup> See note 80.

succeed. Buddhas can recognize a Buddha-to-be and can prognosticate about him.<sup>84</sup>

The combination of eight circumstances is essential for the success of the aspiration to Buddhahood. That aspiration succeeds only when the aspirant is in a human status and of the male sex. It does not succeed for women or for eunuchs, the sexless or hermaphrodites.<sup>85</sup> And only for a man who is endowed with a cause for attaining Arahantship does the aspiration succeed, but not for anyother.

If the aspiration is made in the presence of a living Buddha it succeeds. The aspiration does not succeed if made only near a stupa of a Buddha who has attained final Nibbāna, or only before an image at the root of a Bodhi-tree, or only in the presence of Pacceka-Buddhas or of disciples of Buddhas.

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<sup>84</sup> Horner, I.B. (tr.): *Chronicle of Buddhas (Buddhavamsa) and Basket of Conduct (Cariyāpitaka)*. London 1975, p. xiv-xv.

<sup>85</sup> However, a woman is able to attain the highest sphere of sainthood (*arahatta*). See: M. 111, 65 and A. 1, 28.

For one aspiring in the presence of a Buddha, the aspiration succeeds only for one who has gone forth among ascetics who promulgate the efficacy of kamma, or among monks, not for a householder. Only aspirants who have gone forth arrive at Self-Awakening, not those leading a household life. Therefore, in the beginning, at the time of making the aspiration, it is necessary to be one who has gone forth. Also, the aspiration succeeds only when he has obtained the eight attainments<sup>86</sup> and the five types of super-knowledge.<sup>87</sup> There is no success for one who has abandoned these attainments of the special qualities. The

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<sup>86</sup> The eight attainments (*samāpatti*) refer to the eight absorptions of the fine-material and immaterial spheres. They comprise the four jhānas, the realm of the infinity of space, realm of the infinity of consciousness, realm of nothingness and the realm of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness. These high degrees of concentration are generally developed by the practice of tranquility meditation (*bhāvanā*). (See: Nyānatiloka 1980, p. 193, 83-85).

<sup>87</sup> The six supernormal knowings (*abhiññā*) or the six higher powers consist of one supermundane and five mundane powers. They are attainable through realisation of Arahantship, perfect holiness.

one aspiring to Buddhahood must also perform an act of merit: i.e. the sacrificing of oneself for Buddhas, even of ones own life. The aspiration succeeds only for one who has performed such an act of merit, not for others. In addition the aspirant to Buddhahood must have great will-power, great exertion and endeavour and must strive to attain these requirements leading to Buddhahood, that means resolutely practising the Perfections.<sup>88</sup>

In short, the career of the Bodhisatta begins with his making a formal resolution (abhinīhāra) to become a Buddha for the welfare of gods and men. Its ultimate realisation depends on fulfilling eight conditions: that the aspirant to Buddhahood (1) is a human being; (2) is a male; (3) is able to become an Arahant during the existence in which the resolution was made; (4) declares his

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<sup>88</sup> Horner, I.B. (tr.): *The Clarifier of the Sweet meaning (Madhurattavilāsini). Commentary on the Chronicle of Buddhas (Buddhavamsa) by Buddhadatta Thera*, London 1978, p. 132-134; Bodhi, Bhikkhu (tr.): 'The Treatise on the Pāramīs,' in: *The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views : The Brahmajāla Sutta and its Commentaries*, Kandy 1978, p. 262-264.

resolution to a living Buddha who must predict to him that he in the future will be a Fully Enlightened One; (5) has abandoned the household life and has gone to ascetics who teach the doctrine on kamma, or lives with monks; (6) is able to attain to the states of meditation and has won the five supernormal knowledges; (7) is prepared to perform the required act of merit; (8) has great will-power and exerts himself to attain the perfections.<sup>89</sup>

The Bodhisatta does not perform hard tasks, nor does he go to an evil doom, nor does he work penance under alien teachers, of his own accord and free will.

The Bodhisatta had teachers in worldly matters. But for piercing omniscient knowledge in the Dhamma, he had no instructor superior to himself.<sup>90</sup>

According to traditional belief, the Bodhisatta, before reaching his last birth as a Buddha on this earth, lives in the

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<sup>89</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 15 (II.59); Horner 1978, p.132-134.

<sup>90</sup> Horner, I.B. (tr.): *Milinda's Questions*, Vol. II, Oxford 1991, p. 37-39 (VI.1).

Tusita heaven, the Heaven of the Contented Ones. In that heaven the Bodhisatta investigates the following:<sup>91</sup>

The time of his birth.

The continent and the region where he will be born.  
(This is always India, in the Middle Country,  
Majjhimadesa).

The family into which he will be born (always either  
in a noble warrior family or a brahman family);

The mother (she is one to has fulfilled the perfections  
and kept the sīlas since she was born);

The life-span of his mother after conceiving him (ten  
lunar-months<sup>92</sup> and one week).

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<sup>91</sup> Horner, I.B. (tr.): *Milinda's Questions*, Vol. I, Oxford 1990, p. 277-279 (IV.4).

<sup>92</sup> lunar-month = month according the lunar calendar = ca 29.5 days. (Grotefend, H. (entw.): *Taschenbuch der Zeitrechnung des deutschen Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*, 10. erw. Aufl., Hannover 1960, p. 1-2).

The month of his birth;

The time of the renunciation of worldly life.

The parents of Bodhisattas are determined, assured, fixed, arranged beforehand (in the past, i.e. before the Bodhisatta enters his last birth). The enlightenment tree is determined, the chief disciples are determined, the son is determined, the attendant is determined.<sup>93</sup>

The Bodhisatta stays in the Tusita heaven during the whole period that was allocated for him until the devas see that he will soon reach the end of his heavenly life span. The deities of the 10,000 worlds gather together and, clasping their hands, say to the Bodhisatta: "It is time for you, great hero, to arise in the womb of a mother. Helping men with the devas to cross over, may you awaken unto the

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<sup>93</sup> Horner 1990, p. 277-279 (IV.4).

undying state. Save the worlds with their devas and humans; find the territory of the Deathless."<sup>94</sup>

### **3.4. Final Conception and Birth of the Bodhisatta**

According to the Mahāpadāna Sutta the following rules apply at the conception and birth of the Bodhisatta in his last life when he finally attains Buddhahood:<sup>95</sup>

Mindful, clearly aware the Bodhisatta descends from the Tusita heaven into his mother's womb.

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<sup>94</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 7/8.; Burlingame, Eugene Watson (tr.): 'Life of the Buddha,' in: *Buddhist Legends*, London 1979, Book 1, Story 8a (Vol. 28, p. 193-198); Jayawickrama, N.A. (ed. and tr.): *The Chronicle of the Thūpa and the Thūpavamsa*, London 1971, p. 24.

<sup>95</sup> See: D.14, *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, in: Walshe, Maurice (tr.): *The Long Discourses of the Buddha. A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, Kandy 1996, p. 199-221; and in: Dahlke, Paul (Übers.): *Buddha. Auswahl aus dem Palikanon*, Wiesbaden [s.a.], p. 68-126. See also: M.123 (Erstaunliche, außerordentliche Eigenschaften), in: Neumann, Karl Eugen (Übers.): *Die Reden Gotamo Buddhos. Aus der mittleren Sammlung Majjhimanikāyo des Pāli-Kanons*, (4. Aufl.), Zürich 1956, p. 917-923.

When the Bodhisatta descends from the Tusita heaven into his mother's womb, there appears in this world with its gods, Brahmas, Maras, and humans, a splendid light, surpassing the glory of the most powerful devas. And whatever dark spaces there are, such that they are not even reached by the mighty rays of sun and moon, these are illumined by this immeasurable splendid light. And those beings that have been reborn there, recognize each other by this light and know: "Other beings, too, have been born here!" And this tenthousandfold world-system trembles and quakes and is convulsed. And this immeasurable light shines forth.

When a Bodhisatta has entered his mother's womb, four devas<sup>96</sup> come to protect him from the four quarters,<sup>97</sup> saying: "Let no man, no human being, nothing whatever harm this Bodhisatta or this Bodhisatta's mother!"

When a Bodhisatta has entered his mother's womb, his mother becomes by nature virtuous, refraining from taking life, from taking what is not given, from sexual

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<sup>96</sup> The Four Great Kings.

<sup>97</sup> North, South, East and West.

misconduct, from lying speech, or from strong drink and sloth-producing drugs.<sup>98</sup>

When a Bodhisatta has entered his mother's womb, she has no sexual thoughts connected with a man, and she cannot be overcome by any man with lustful thoughts.

When a Bodhisatta has entered his mother's womb, she enjoys the fivefold pleasures of the senses<sup>99</sup> and takes delight, being endowed and possessed of them.

When a Bodhisatta has entered his mother's womb, she has no sickness of any kind, she is at ease and without fatigue of body, and she can see the Bodhisatta inside her womb, complete with all his members and faculties.

Whereas other women carry the child in their womb for nine or ten lunar-months before giving birth, it is not so

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<sup>98</sup> This great virtuousness shows that the five rules of good conduct (*pañca sīla*) existed already before the time of the Buddha Gotama. These five rules are part of the Ancient Path trodden by the Buddhas of yore. (Horner 1990, p. xxxix).

<sup>99</sup> The five sensual pleasures: the pleasures of the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body; in other words: all that she saw, heard, smelled, tasted and touched, she enjoyed, she took delight in it.

with the Bodhisatta's mother, who carries him for exactly ten lunar-months before giving birth.

Whereas other women give birth sitting or lying down, it is not so with the Bodhisatta's mother, who gives birth standing up.

When the Bodhisatta issues from his mother's womb, devas welcome him first, and then humans.

When the Bodhisatta issues from his mother's womb, he does not touch the earth. Four devas<sup>100</sup> receive him and place him before his mother, saying: "Rejoice, Your Majesty, a mighty son has been born to you!"

When the Bodhisatta issues from his mother's womb, he issues forth stainless, not defiled by water, mucus, blood or any impurity, pure and spotless.

When the Bodhisatta issues forth from his mother's womb, two streams of water appear from the sky, one cold, the other warm, with which they ritually wash the Bodhisatta and his mother.

As soon as he is born, the Bodhisatta takes a firm stance on both feet facing north, then takes seven strides

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<sup>100</sup> The Four Great Kings.

and, under a white sunshade,<sup>101</sup> he scans the four quarters and then declares with a bull-like voice: "I am chief in the world, supreme in the world, eldest in the world. This is my last birth, there will be no more re-becoming."<sup>102</sup>

### **3.5. Three types of Mahā Bodhisattas**

The (Mahā) Bodhisattas can be divided into three groups, namely: Bodhisattas with wisdom (*paññādhika*), Bodhisattas with energy (*vīriyādhika*), and Bodhisattas with devotion, faith (*saddhādhika*).<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The white sunshade is a sign of mastery.

<sup>102</sup> These things are symbolic, according to the Commentary. Standing on the earth denotes the four 'roads to power' (*iddhipadāna*). Facing north denotes the multitude to be won over. The seven steps are the seven factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhangā*). The sunshade denotes liberation. Looking round denotes unobstructed knowledge. The bull's voice denotes the turning of the wheel, and the declaration of his last birth the 'lion's roar' of Arahantship to be. (Walshe 1996, p. 560-561).

<sup>103</sup> Narada 1980, p. 572-574; Ledi Sayadaw, Mahāthera: *Uttamapurisa dīpanī . Manuel of the Superior Man*, Transl.

Bodhisattas with wisdom as their foundation attain Buddhahood within a short period, namely 4 asankheyyas and 100,000 kappas.<sup>104</sup> In them wisdom is predominant, faith is weakest. They concentrate more on the development of wisdom, insight, and on the practice of meditation than on devotion and the observance of external forms of homage. The Buddha Gotama belonged to this group.

Energetic Bodhisattas have to perform the pāramīs during 8 asankheyyas and 100,000 kappas to attain Buddhahood. In them energy is predominant, faith is

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by U Tin U, typescript, ca 1899, p. 20-21; Ledi (2000), p. 15-16.

<sup>104</sup> *Kappa* or world-period is an inconceivably long period of time, an aeon. Aeons cannot be scientifically measured, but they can be categorized as follows: 1) *sāra-kappa* in which one Buddha arises; 2) *manda-kappa* in which two Buddhas arise; 3) *vara-kappa* in which three Buddhas arise; 4) *sāramanda-kappa* in which four Buddhas arise; 5) *bhadda-kappa* in which five Buddhas arise. And there is the void aeon (*suñña-kappa*) in which no Buddha arises. (See: Horner 1975a, p. xxvii-xxviii and Saddhatissa 1975, p. 93-95, note 8).

middling, and wisdom is weakest. They always seek opportunities to be of service to others. Nothing gives them greater delight than active service. They are not happy unless they are active. They live not only for themselves but for others as well.<sup>105</sup>

Bodhisattas with devotion, *saddhā*, have to perform the paramis during 16 *asankheyyas* and 100,000 *kappas*. In them energy is weak and wisdom is middling and faith is predominant. They take keen interest in devotion and homage. The statue of a Buddha is for them a great inspiration. Here one has to bear in mind that it is not the statue of the Buddha that is worshipped and adored. The statue is merely a means to fix the mind on the Buddha, to remember him well. And by thinking of him more and more, he is more respected and estimated.

There are different opinions about the duration of the periods in which these three types of Bodhisattas have to perform the *pāramīs*.

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<sup>105</sup> Narada 1980, p. 573-574.

### **3.6. When did the Bodhisatta enter the Path of Holiness?**

According to Theravāda tradition the Bodhisatta did not attain any of the stages of holiness during his long career. As an ordinary human being he strives to attain Enlightenment during his long career and also during his last life.

The story about Jotipāla<sup>106</sup> shows clearly that the Bodhisatta – our Buddha Gotama in a former existence – in the time of the Buddha Kassapa was still an ordinary human being. Jotipāla was a Brahmin youth who, against his will, was brought to listen to the Buddha Kassapa. The words spoken by the Buddha had such a great influence on Jotipāla that he entered the Order and became a bhikkhu.

If Jotipāla during his time as a bhikkhu had entered the path of holiness, he must have been a holy disciple of the Buddha Kassapa. And then he would have learned the teaching from another, would not have seen it by himself, through his own effort. Further, if the Bodhisatta became

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<sup>106</sup> *Ghatikara Sutta*, M.IX,81, in: Neumann 1956, p. 601-608; Horner 1975a, p. 90 (XXV.10-15).

Kassapa's disciple, entering on the first Path and Fruit, it follows that there were only three stages of fruition for him to know thoroughly when under the Bodhi tree. But it is believed that all four were realized at that time. For him there is no teacher regarding the four noble truths; supreme enlightenment is his alone. (Vin.I,91; M.I.171). Insight, understanding, wisdom and light arose in him for the first time concerning the four noble truths. (S.V.422). Therefore, the Bodhisatta cannot have entered on the path of Assurance, the Ariyan Path, during the time of the Buddha Kassapa.<sup>107</sup>

### **3.7. Powers and characteristics of a Bodhisatta**

According to Venerable Ledi Sayadaw<sup>108</sup> the Bodhisatta, making the noble aspiration and receiving the confirmation of future Buddhahood, is also endowed with the five powers (bala), the four specific characteristics, the two qualifications of compassion (karunā) and skill in

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<sup>107</sup> *Points of Controversy*, p. 167-170 (IV.8).

<sup>108</sup> Ledi 2000, p. 25.

strategy (upāyakosalla), the four stages of maturity (bhūmi), the six inclinations (ajjhāsaya), and other qualities.

And according to him, a (Mahā) Bodhisatta has also four unique characteristics.<sup>109</sup> They are:

1. *Indriya*: the five moral qualities (a) dauntlessness in faith (saddhā), (b) dauntlessness in diligence (vīriya), (c) an all-round alertness in mindfulness (sati), (d) steadiness in concentration (samādhi), (e) a never-failing wisdom (paññā).

2. *Patipatti*: the 'practice'. The Bodhisatta is always out to help others for their immediate benefits, i.e. benefits occurring in this present life. He places the welfare of others above that of his own. He never expects any return, either for the efforts he is making, or those made already, towards others' welfare. Nor will he care to mention them either in the beneficiary's presence or elsewhere. Even if the beneficiary 'bites the hand that feeds', the Bodhisatta never turns back from the good act, but carries through to the end of his mission. This holds true even where his life is in

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<sup>109</sup> Ledi 1899, p. 29-33; Ledi 2000, p. 22-25.

immediate danger. This is the Bodhisatta's sense of weal-wishing for the present, his practice of present benefits for others. With regard to merits that are accruing in the future out of his present noble deeds in giving or in cultivating virtue, etc., the Bodhisatta sets his sights higher than the solitary attainment of Nibbāna; he aims only at Supreme Self-Enlightenment (sabbaññutañāna) whereby he will be able to show the way to Nibbāna to others. This is the Bodhisatta's practice for the hereafter.

3. *Kosalla*: proficiency. This is manifested in soundness of reasoning and presence of mind that never fail him in all circumstances.

4. *Ajjhāsaya*: inclination. The texts treat this subject quite comprehensively with reference to the Pāramīs. Here it is described briefly, using 'giving' as an example. The Bodhisatta is very happy in making gifts. Whenever he has something to offer as a gift and his would-be recipient does not present himself, he feels impatient. Whenever he gives, he gives it with a light heart, and takes proper care in doing so. No amount of gifts that he has made would satisfy his zeal for giving. Whenever anybody asks of him anything, he

does not judge him by class or creed, but always complies gladly. In doing so, he never thinks of his needs: he gives to satisfy the other person's needs only.

In respect of the other perfections, this example should be applied with due alterations.

The above account of the powers and unique characteristics of the Bodhisatta is summarised from Venerable Ledi Sayadaw account based on commentaries, including commentaries on the Jātakas. I did not have those commentaries at my disposal and was not able to check them. As we will see, the Jātakas are educational stories and not reliable historic accounts of past lives of the Buddha. What is the value of these and other commentaries?

The five powers manifest only following the first stage of holiness. And there is only full maturity after attaining perfect sainthood (Arahantship). As far as it is known to me, the Pāli Canon does not mention any unique characteristics of the Bodhisatta. The Bodhisatta has to fully develop the perfections in himself. This means that he has to practise them well – at least in the beginning. Further, he

cannot acquire unshakeable faith during his long career, for only someone who at least attained the first stage of holiness has unshakeable faith. And the Bodhisatta does not attain holiness during his career. Never failing wisdom is a quality of a perfect saint (Arahant). This, too, is not applicable to the Bodhisatta as described in the Pāli Canon. In my opinion doctrines from Mahāyāna have already been applied here to the Bodhisatta. The above mentioned powers and characteristics are not derived from the historical Theravāda teachings.

### ***3.8. Differences and correspondences among Bodhisattas***

According to Venerable Nāgasena<sup>110</sup> Bodhisattas differ in four ways: 1. the family they are born into when they become Buddhas; 2. the length of the period required to bring the perfections to fulfilment so as to become Buddhas; 3. the length of their life-span; 4. their height.

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<sup>110</sup> Horner 1991, p. 109-117 (VIII.2).

They also have features in common. All show forth ten special qualities and all leave wife and children.

### **3.9. Was the Bodhisatta, born in a Buddha Cycle, always a bhikkhu?**

According to Ven. Narada "a Bodhisatta would, in the period of a Buddhaless Cycle, adopt the life of an ascetic and lead the holy celibate life in solitude. If born in a Buddha Cycle, he would lead the life of a bhikkhu in strict accordance with the rules that pertain thereto."<sup>111</sup>

But does this conform to the available evidence and will the Bodhisatta as a bhikkhu be able to perform all the pāramīs? The Buddhavamsa describes 24 former lives of the Buddha during his career as Bodhisatta.<sup>112</sup> Let us consider those former lives.

1. As the ascetic Sumedha, a master in the meditations and perfect in the superknowledges and in the

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<sup>111</sup> Narada 1980, p. 594.

<sup>112</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 9-93.

states of psychic power, the Bodhisatta lay down in a swamp, thinking: "Let the Buddha Dīpankara with his disciples tread on me. Do not let him tread in the mire." After the prediction that he would be a Buddha in the future, he entered the forest on mount Dhammaka.<sup>113</sup> That means he lived as an ascetic.

2. As a warrior-noble named Vijitāvin the Bodhisatta refreshed with superb food a large group of stainless great seers together with the Buddha Kondañña. After the prediction he abandoned his kingdom and went forth in the presence of the Buddha. He learned the Suttanta and Vinaya and reached perfection in the super-knowledges.<sup>114</sup> In my conviction the Bodhisatta became a bhikkhu, for he learned both the Dhamma and the Vinaya. He obtained theoretical knowledge of the Dhamma, but did not enter the path of holiness. He cannot have reached perfection in the super-mundane power, but only in the five mundane

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<sup>113</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 14, 17, 25 (II A. 52-53, 80-81, 188); Horner 1978, p. 130, 170.

<sup>114</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 31 (III.22-24) and p. 34 (IV.16-17).

powers. If he were perfect in the super-mundane power, he would have been an Arahant and there would have been no rebirth anymore for him.

3. As a brahman named Suruci the Bodhisatta went to the Buddha Mangala for refuge. He honoured the Blessed One and his Order with perfumes and garlands and he refreshed them with a delicious meal. After the prediction he gave his worldly wealth to the Buddha and went forth in his presence. He learnt the Suttanta and Vinaya thoroughly and developed the meditation on the four Brahma-viharas.

<sup>115</sup> Here he became a bhikkhu.

4. As a nāga-king Atula by name the Bodhisatta went for refuge to the Buddha Sumana and gave him his upper robe.<sup>116</sup> After that he received the prediction. He lived his lifespan as a nāga-king.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 33, 34 (IV.10-11, 15-16); Horner 1978, p. 218.

<sup>116</sup> Does this mean that the nāga-king stripped off his old hide? If so, can it be considered as a great deed?

<sup>117</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 37 (V.16-17).

5. As a brahman named Atideva the Bodhisatta went for refuge to the Buddha Revata and gave him his upper robe. After that he received the prediction. He continued living as a brahman.<sup>118</sup>

6. As a brahman named Sujāta the Bodhisatta refreshed the Buddha Sobhita and the disciples with food and drink. After that he received the prediction. He continued living as a brahman.<sup>119</sup> Nothing is mentioned about taking refuge to the Buddha or about 'going forth'.

7. As a yakkha (a type of non-human being) the Bodhisatta refreshed the Buddha Anomadassin with food and drink. After that he received the prediction. He lived his lifespan as a yakkha.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 39 (VI.10-11).

<sup>119</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 42 (VII.12).

<sup>120</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 44 (VIII.12-13).

8. As a lion the Bodhisatta paid reverence at the feet of the Buddha Paduma, circumambulated him, roared loudly three times, and attended on the Conqueror for a week. After that he received the prediction.<sup>121</sup> According to the commentary this means that during one week he did not go away to look for prey for himself, thus sacrificing his life.<sup>122</sup> This seems to be exaggerated as there is no reason to think that a lion could not survive for one week without food.

9. As an ascetic the Bodhisatta lived on a flank of the Himavanta.<sup>123</sup> At that time he was refreshed with food and drink by the Buddha Nārada and honoured him with sandal-wood. After that he received the prediction. He continued living as an ascetic.<sup>124</sup>

10. As a district governor named Jatila the Bodhisatta gave cloth with food to the Buddha Padumuttara

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<sup>121</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 47 (IX.10-11).

<sup>122</sup> Horner 1978, p. 260.

<sup>123</sup> Himavanta = highest mountain of the Himālaya.

<sup>124</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 50 (X.13-14); Horner 1978, p. 270.

and his Order. After that he received the prediction. He remained living as a district governor.<sup>125</sup>

11. As a brahman youth named Uttara the Bodhisatta gave a whole crore (10 million) of riches stored in his house, to the Buddha Sumedha, approached him for refuge and became a bhikkhu. After that he received the prediction.<sup>126</sup>

12. As universal monarch of the four continents (Jambudīpa, Pubbavideha, Aparagoyāna and Uttarakuru) the Bodhisatta went to the Buddha Sujāta and paid reverence to him. Bestowing on the Buddha his great kingdom, he went forth and became a bhikkhu. After the prediction he learnt thoroughly the Suttanta and Vinaya, and he developed the meditation on the four Brahma-viharās.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 53 (XI.11-12).

<sup>126</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 55-56 (XII.11-12).

<sup>127</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 58-59 (XIII.11-14, 18); Horner 1978, p. 296.

13. As a brahman youth named Kassapa, expert in mantras, the Bodhisatta heard the Dhamma. He acquired belief in the teaching and at great expense constructed a park for the monks and gave it to the Buddha Piyadassin. He took refuge in the Triple Gem and observed the five precepts. After that he received the prediction. He continued living the life of a brahman.<sup>128</sup>

14. As an ascetic named Susīma the Bodhisatta honoured the Buddha Atthadasin with beautiful flowers. After that he received the prediction. The rest of his life he continued living as an ascetic.<sup>129</sup>

15. As the god Sakka the Bodhisatta honoured the Buddha Dhammadassin with deva-like perfumes, garlands and instrumental music. After that he received the prediction. He lived his life-span as the god Sakka.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 61 (XIV.9-11).

<sup>129</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 63-64 (XV.9-10).

<sup>130</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 66 (XVI.9); Horner 1978, p. 318.

16. As an ascetic named Mangala, endowed with supernormal powers, the Bodhisatta brought fruits from the rose-apple tree and gave them to the Buddha Siddhattha. After that he received the prediction. He lived the rest of his life as an ascetic.<sup>131</sup>

17. As a king named Sujāta the Bodhisatta abandoned great possessions and went forth as an ascetic. He brought beautiful flowers in both hands to the Buddha Tissa and held them over his head, thus paying homage to the Buddha. After that he received the prediction. He continued living as an ascetic.<sup>132</sup>

18. As a king named Vijitāvin he abandoned a great kingdom and became a bhikkhu in the presence of the Buddha Phussa. After the prediction he learnt the Suttanta

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<sup>131</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 68 (XVIII.8-9); Horner 1978, p. 323.

<sup>132</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 70 (XVIII.9-12); Horner 1978, p. 329.

and Vinaya, and developed the meditation on the Brahma-vihāras.<sup>133</sup>

19. As a nāga-king named Atula the Bodhisatta went to the Buddha Vipassin, playing on melodious musical instruments. He had a pavilion built for him, invited him there and gave the Buddha a golden chair with pearls and jewels, embellished with every adornment. After that he received the prediction. He lived his life-span as a nāga-king.<sup>134</sup>

20. As a king named Arindama the Bodhisatta refreshed with food and drink the Buddha Sikhin and his Order. After giving many glorious robes, he gave the Buddha a caparisoned riding-elephant. After that he received the prediction. He continued living as a king.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 73 (XIX.8, 12-13).

<sup>134</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 75 (XX.10-12); Horner 1978, p. 343.

<sup>135</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 78 (XXI.9-11).

21. As a warrior-noble called Sudassana the Bodhisatta gave the Buddha Vessabhū a gift of great value and honoured the Buddha and the Order with food, drink and clothing. He entered the Order and after that he received the prediction.<sup>136</sup>

22. As a warrior-noble named Khema the Bodhisatta gave a considerable gift to the Buddha Kakusandha and the Order. He gave bowls and robe-materials, ointment for the eyes, and wild liquorice, both medicines. Then he became a bhikkhu in the presence of the Buddha and after that he received the prediction.<sup>137</sup>

23. As a warrior-noble named Pabbata the Bodhisatta went to see the Buddha Konāgamana and heard the Dhamma. He invited the Buddha and his Order to accept a great gift of silk, woollen cloth and golden sandals. After that he received the prediction. He renounced a great

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<sup>136</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 81 (XXII.11-15); Horner 1978, p. 356.

<sup>137</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 84 (XXIII.8-9, 13); Horner 1978, p. 364.

kingdom and in the Buddha's presence he became a bhikkhu.<sup>138</sup>

24. As the brahman youth Jotipāla, master of the three Vedas, the Bodhisatta approached the Buddha Kassapa, heard his Dhamma and became a bhikkhu in his presence. He learnt the Ninefold Dispensation and engaged in austerities. After that he received the prediction.<sup>139</sup>

In these 24 former lives of the Buddha Gotama during his career as Bodhisatta we see that he became a bhikkhu only nine times. And we also see that the deed performed to honour each Buddha was not always a very heroic one. But it was always a deed of renunciation. (See numbers 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 24).

The question arises, are all these stories reliable? Are they true or fiction? Are they accounts of past lives of the Buddha Gotama that really happened? What are we to

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<sup>138</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 87 (XXIV.9-11, 15).

<sup>139</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 90 (XXV.10-15, 32).

make of the stories in which a nāga-king, lion or yakkha plays a part? Are those stories intended to be symbolic only? Are they better considered as educational stories?

The Buddhavamsa is a rather late text inserted in the Pāli Canon. Parts of it can be found in other works. Is the Buddhavamsa the source for those other works or is the reverse the case?<sup>140</sup> According to the Commentary on the Buddhavamsa the stories were proclaimed by the Buddha Gotama himself and they were handed down orally until the Third Council and later.<sup>141</sup> From this we may conclude that this work was inserted in the Pāli Canon after the Third Council. The oldest texts of the Pāli Canon mention only six predecessors of the Buddha Gotama. The stories about the Buddhas before the present Buddha Gotama were needed to show that a Buddha is not a unique being. They also show that the self-enlightenment of the Buddhas is attained only after aeons of long efforts to fulfil the perfections. Those perfections are not found in the older nikāyas and the Buddhavamsa is full of Buddha-veneration and

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<sup>140</sup> Horner 1975 ab, p. x.

<sup>141</sup> Horner 1978, p. 3-6.

Buddha-deification. This could be an indication of the influence of Mahāyāna.<sup>142</sup>

The division between nāgas (snakes), yakkhas and devas seems in these and other texts to be like that between human being and animal. Conversations by men with those other beings are often mentioned.<sup>143</sup> Should not these stories be compared with the fables of the Indian world and shouldn't they all be regarded in the same way as the Jātakas? In that case they are educational stories, without any historical factual truth. On the basis of these stories it is therefore impossible to conclude whether the Buddha Gotama in his former lives was always bhikkhu or not. And the deeds he performed to honour Buddhas are given as examples of respect and piety and are not to be taken as factual.

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<sup>142</sup> Winternitz, M.: *Geschichte der Indischen Litteratur. Zweiter Band. Erste Hälfte. Die buddhistische Litteratur*, Leipzig 1913, p. 129-131; Horner 1975a, p. xiii; Rhys Davids, T.W.: *Buddhist India*, (repr.) Delhi 1987, p. 176-177.

<sup>143</sup> Horner 1975a, p. xlvii.



At Buduruwagala, Monaragala District, Sri Lanka, is a big Buddha Statue carved in the rock.

At the left , in white, is a statue of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara; at the right is the Bodhisatta Metteyya, with Brahma Sahampati and Vajrapanil (= Sakka) at both sides.

(Courtesy of Ven. Dr. T. Sangharatana Thero).

### **3.10. Austerities**

Austerities are not for all Bodhisattas. They were only practised by the Bodhisatta Gotama. By bodily mortifications he strove during six years to find the way to Awakening. This is in sharp contrast to the period of striving that sufficed for other Bodhisattas. Sometimes a few weeks or some months at most sufficed for the other Bodhisattas, his predecessors, to attain omniscience.<sup>144</sup>

### **3.11. The 32 Marks**

In his last life, the Bodhisatta was endowed with the 32 auspicious marks (*lakkhana*) of a *Mahāpurisa*. The literal meaning of the word *Mahāpurisa* is "Great Man". It generally means a great, noble or excellent man. The knowledge of the 32 marks of a *Mahāpurisa* belongs to Brahmanical wisdom, and is enumerated in the mantras of the Veda. The concept of the Great Man is found already long before the

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<sup>144</sup> Horner 1990, p. xxxv.

time of the Buddha. These 32 marks are pre-Buddhistic; their history is not easily traceable.<sup>145</sup>

For one endowed with the 32 Marks, endowed as a superman, there are only two ways open, two careers, namely that of a universal monarch (a wheel turner), or that of a Bodhisatta. If he lives the life of a householder, he becomes Lord of the Wheel, a righteous Lord of the Right, Ruler of the four quarters, conqueror, guardian of the people's good, owner of the seven treasures: the wheel treasure, the elephant, the horse, the jewel, the woman, the steward, the heir apparent. More than a thousand sons are his, heroes, vigorous of frame, crushers of the host of the enemy. He, when he has conquered this earth to its ocean bounds, is established not by the scourge, not by the sword, but by righteousness. But if he goes forth from his home to homelessness, he becomes an Arahant Buddha Supreme, rolling back the veil from the world.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Wimalaratana, Bellanwillia: *Concept of Great Man (Mahāpurisa) in Buddhist Literature and Iconography*, Singapore [s.a.], p. 1, 7, 20-25.

<sup>146</sup> *Points of Controversy*, p.166-167 (IV.7); see also: D.3 and D.30, in: Walshe 1996, p. 112 and p. 441.

These words do not mean that the Bodhisatta in his last existence can choose between these two ways, these two careers. He has no choice anymore. For he made the resolve to become a Buddha already long ago. He got the prediction from a living Buddha and he trained himself during many aeons. For him there is only one way open.<sup>147</sup>

The 32 marks are:<sup>148</sup>

He has feet with level tread.

On the soles of his feet are wheels with a thousand spokes, complete with felloe and hub.

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<sup>147</sup> See also: Piyadassi Thera: *The Buddha. A Short Study of His Life and Teaching*, (3rd enlarged ed.) Kandy 1970, The Wheel No. 5ab, p. 3.

<sup>148</sup> See: D.30:1.2 , in: Walshe 1996, p. 441-442; and in: Neumann, Karl Eugen (Übers.): *Die Reden Gotamo Buddhos. Aus der längeren Sammlung Dīghanikāyo des Pāli-Kanons*, (3. Aufl.) Zürich 1957, p. 516-539. See also: M.X.91, *Brahmāyu*, in: Neumann 1956, p. 692-693. – For comparative translations in several Mahāyāna-works, see: Burnouf, M.E. (tr.): *Le lotus de la bonne loi*, Paris 1973, p. 553-583.

He has projecting heels.

He has long fingers and toes.

He has soft and tender hands and feet.

His hands and feet are net-like (or webbed).

He has high-raised ankles.

His legs are like an antelope's.

Standing and without bending, he can touch and rub his knees with either hand.

His male organs are enclosed in a sheath.

His complexion is bright, the colour of gold.

His skin is delicate and so smooth that no dust can adhere to his body.

His body-hairs are separate, one to each pore.

His body-hairs grow upward, each one bluish-black like collyrium, curling in rings to the right.

His body is divinely straight (like that of Brahmā).

He has the seven convex surfaces. (The backs of the four limbs, the shoulders and the trunk are well-rounded).

The front part of his body is like a lion's.

There is no hollow between his shoulders.

He is proportioned like a banyan-tree: the height of his body is the same as the span of his outstretched arms, and conversely.

His bust is evenly rounded.

He has a perfect sense of taste.

He has jaws like a lion's.

He has forty teeth.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Normally one has 32 teeth. Even in very ancient skeletons archaeologists have not found more than 32 teeth. – According to Neumann 1956, p. 1115 note 248 the meaning of it is that the number of his teeth is between 30 and 40.

His teeth are even.

There are no spaces between his teeth.

His canine teeth are very bright.

His tongue is very long.

He has a Brahmā-like voice, like that of the *karavīka*-bird.

His eyes are deep blue.

He has eyelashes like a cow's.

The hair between his eyes is white and soft like cottondown.

His head is like a royal turban.

Several of these marks could be said to point to deformities. In ancient times the priests probably explained away the deformities of children of well-to-do families by interpreting the deformities as marks of a great man.

Having soles with wheels with a thousand spokes, or soles with quite a lot of wrinkles, is not normal. Having webbed

fingers and toes is not normal. Long arms reaching down to the knees are not normal. Some say that having hair between the eyes points to incest. And if one has a head like a royal turban, one has an abnormal head. Another translation is that he has a bulge on the crown. That is not normal either.

And mark no. 19 is so very normal that it doesn't belong in this list of special marks. It also contradicts mark no. 9. Someone, who can touch his knees with his hands, has arms that are extremely long. The span of those stretched arms is more than the height of that person. Mark no. 19 possible means that the Mahāpurisa does not belong to the category of dwarfs.

Some of these 32 marks cannot easily be seen; they are not special physical marks. The Buddha had a body like that of others. If the Buddha's complexion was bright, the colour of gold, or if his arms were so long that he could touch his knees without bending, then he could have been distinguished easily among the group of monks. But there is another way of distinguishing the Great Man. He is

distinguished by his internal qualities. According to Ven. Wimalaratana the earliest notion of *Mahāpurisa* in the Pāli Canon can be traced to Sn. 1040-1042.<sup>150</sup> There the Venerable Tissametteyya asked:

*"Who is contented here in the world?*

*For whom are there no commotions?*

*Who, knowing both ends, does not cling to the middle?*

*Whom do you call a great man?*

*Who has gone beyond the seamstress here?"*

And the Buddha replied:

*"The bhikkhu who lives the holy life amidst sensual pleasures, with craving gone, always mindful, quenched after consideration, for him there are no commotions.*

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<sup>150</sup> Wimalaratana, p. 13-14.

*That thinker, knowing both ends, does not cling to the middle. Him I call a great man. He has gone beyond the seamstress here.*<sup>151</sup>

The Great Man is also mentioned in the Dhammapada. In stanza 352 we find: "He who is without craving and grasping, who is skilled in etymology and terms, who knows the grouping of letters and their sequence, who is versed in the four kinds of analytical knowledge, - it is he who is called the bearer of the final body, one of profound wisdom, a great man (*mahāpuriso*)."

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<sup>151</sup> Translation of these stanzas in: Norman, K.R. (tr.): *The group of Discourses (Sutta-Nipāta), Vol. I*, with alternative translations by I.B. Horner and Walpola Rahula, London 1984, V.3; and in: Nyānaponika (Übers.): *Sutta-Nipāta : Früh-buddhistische Lehr-Dichtungen aus dem Pali-Kanon. Mit Auszügen aus den alten Kommentaren*, (2. revid. Aufl.) Konstanz 1977, V.3.

<sup>152</sup> Wimalaratana, p. 15; translation of these stanzas in: Nārada Thera (tr.): *The Dhammapada: Pali Text and translation with stories in brief and notes*, (3rd ed.) Colombo 2522-1978 (1st ed. 1963) stanza 352.

In the Lakkhana Sutta the Buddha explained the karmic reasons for the gaining of those marks of a Great Man. And he also explained their real meaning.<sup>153</sup> Some of these reasons are also mentioned in the Cūla-Kammavibhanga Sutta.<sup>154</sup> There, long life, health, beauty, influence, wealth, high birth and wisdom are mentioned as results of good actions. Special physical marks like net-like formations between the fingers, long arms, a head like a royal turban or a bulge on the crown, are not mentioned. Those bodily marks must therefore be regarded as later additions inserted to appeal to people's beliefs in the past. In Buddhist iconography, however, they still play an important part. The deeper meaning of those marks is explained by the Buddha in the Lakkhana Sutta. It says that the Buddha is quoted as saying that a Great Man who becomes a Buddha has the following qualities:

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<sup>153</sup> D.30, in Walshe 1996, p. 441-460.

<sup>154</sup> M.135, 'Cūla-Kammavibhanga Sutta', in: Ñānamoli Thera (tr.): *The Buddha's Words on Karma. Four Discourses of the Buddha from the Middle Length Collection*, edited by Khantipālo Bhikkhu, Kandy 1977, The Wheel No. 248/249, p. 13-21. Also in: Neumann 1956, p. 991-996.

In former existences, being born as human being, he undertook mighty deeds to good purpose. He was unwavering in good conduct of body, speech and thought. He was generous, following the 5 and 8 rules of discipline. He honoured parents, ascetics and Brahmins and the head of the clan. He lived for the happiness of the many, as a dispeller of fright and terror. He was a provider of lawful protection and shelter, and supplied all necessities. He rejected the taking of life and abstained from it. He layed aside stick and sword and lived kind and compassionate. He had friendship and sympathy for all living beings. He was a giver of fine food, delicious and tasty, hard and soft, and of drinks. He made himself beloved through the four bases of sympathy: generosity, pleasing speech, beneficial conduct and impartiality. He became a speaker to the people about their welfare, about Dhamma, explaining this to people and being a bearer of welfare and happiness to beings, a dispenser of Dhamma. He became a skilled exponent of a craft, a science, a way of conduct or action. Arts and sciences, ways and deeds, he learned with ease. He learned fast the skills that harm no living beings. He asked: "What is

good, what is bad, what is blameworthy and what is not? What will be to my lasting sorrow and harm, and what to my lasting happiness?" He lived without anger, perfectly unruffled; he was not abusive nor agitated, not wrathful or aggressive, displaying neither anger nor hatred nor resentment. But he was in the habit of giving away fine, soft rugs, cloaks, fine linen, cotton, silk and woollen stuffs. Established in good will, he gave gifts of clothing, soft and fine. He reunited those long-lost with relatives, friends and companions who had missed them. He reunited children with parents, brothers with sisters. Long-lost friends and relatives, companions too, he brought together, thus uniting them in joy. He considered the welfare of people and knew the nature of each. He knew what each one deserved. He desired the welfare of the many, their advantage, comfort, freedom from bondage, thinking how they might increase in faith, morality, learning, renunciation, in Dhamma, in wisdom, in wealth and possessions, in bipeds and quadrupeds, in wives and children, in servants, workers and helpers, in relatives, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. He was one who avoided harming beings by hand, by

stones, stick or sword. Harming none, causing death to none, harmless he lived. He was accustomed not to look askance at people, not obliquely or furtively, but directly, openly and straight-forwardly, and with a kindly glance. He became the foremost in skilled behaviour, a leader in right action of body, speech and thought, in generosity, virtuous conduct, observance of fasts, in honouring father and mother, ascetics and Brahmins and the head of the clan, and in various other proper activities. He was intent on living righteously. He rejected false speech, put away lies and became a truth-speaker, reliable, not deceiving the world. He was true to his promise, sincere in speech, he shunned all lies. He rejected slander, abstained from it. He did not repeat there what he had heard here. Thus he was a reconciler of those at variance and an encourager of those at one, rejoicing in peace. He rejected harsh speech, abstained from it, spoke what was blameless, pleasing to the ear, agreeable, reaching to the heart, pleasing and attractive to the multitude. He rejected idle chatter, spoke at the right time, saying only what was correct and to the point, of Dhamma and discipline, and what was bound up

with profit. He rejected wrong livelihood, lived by right livelihood, refraining from cheating with false weights and measures, from bribery and corruption, deception and insincerity, from wounding, killing, imprisoning, highway robbery, and taking goods by force. He gave up wrongful living and took a pure and righteous course. Harmful things he cast aside, working only for folk's good.

These activities he used to do frequently. He developed and enlarged them. Virtue's fruit cannot be lost! And because of this good conduct in body, speech and thought, the Bodhisatta in his last existence will acquire the marks of a Great Man, namely:

He will become the chief, foremost, highest, supreme among beings. No man greater will be found. He will quickly acquire whatever things benefit a Buddha. He will have great wisdom. Among all beings there will be none equal to him or superior to him in wisdom. He will receive clothes of the finest quality. He will suffer little distress or sickness; his digestion will be good. He will be equable and tolerant of exertion. He will be long-lived; nobody will be

able to take his life. He will receive fine food and drinks. He will have a large retinue. He will be surrounded by monks and nuns, male and female lay followers, devas and humans. All his followers will be well disposed to him. He will receive their loyalty. He will be obeyed by them. He will be a master of doctrine, and all the folk will flock to hear the teaching that he will proclaim. He will have a persuasive voice. All his followers will take his words to heart. His followers will be pure. For he drives out from their hearts evil and corrupting states. His followers will not be divided among themselves. All will be delighted by his words and follow him in Dhamma's great and lesser ways. He will gain unsurpassed wealth, namely faith, morality, moral shame, moral dread, learning, renunciation and wisdom. He cannot lose anything: faith, morality, learning, renunciation or wisdom. He will succeed in all things. As a Buddha he cannot be impeded by any enemy or adversary from within or without, from greed, hatred or delusion, nor by any ascetic or Brahmin, any *deva*, *māra* or *Brahmā*, or any

being in the world. Peerless, never more will he be reborn.

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### **3.12. The Pāramīs**

The Buddhavamsa mentions 10 bodhi-pācana dhammā i.e. qualities that lead to the ripening of Perfect Enlightenment.<sup>156</sup> These qualities are the ten perfections (pāramīs) or ten transcendental virtues. Every Bodhisatta practises these pāramīs in order to gain Supreme Enlightenment. The pāramīs are:

1. generosity (*dāna*);
2. morality (*sīla*);
3. renunciation (*nekkhamma*);
4. wisdom (*paññā*);
5. energy (*virīya*);
6. patience, forbearance (*khanti*);
7. truthfulness (*sacca*);
8. determination (*adhitthāna*);

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<sup>155</sup> see D.30, in: Walshe 1996, p. 441-460.

<sup>156</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 20-23.

9. loving-kindness (mettā);
10. equanimity (upekkhā).

According to the Cariyā pitaka Commentary, pāramīs are those virtues which are cultivated with compassion, guided by reason, uninfluenced by selfish motives, and unsullied by misbelief and all feelings of self-conceit.<sup>157</sup>

Buddhahood is no sudden attainment. There are no shortcuts to this spiritual peak. It is to be reached only by prolonged, persistent and painful endeavour spread through countless lives in a enormously long period of time. It results from the fulfilment of the ten perfections (pāramīs). To become a Buddha these pāramīs have to be perfected three times, some have argued.<sup>158</sup> In that way there are through analysis thirty pāramīs: ten basic perfections (hīna pāramī), ten higher (upapāramī) or middle perfections (majjhimapāramī), and ten ultimate (paramattha pāramī) or superior perfections (pañña pāramī). The last is the case

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<sup>157</sup> Nārada 1980, p. 576.

<sup>158</sup> Buddhārakkhita, Acharya: *Nature of Buddha's Enlightenment*. Bangalore 1986, p. 14-15.

when the mind is set on the deed alone, not on its consequences.<sup>159</sup>

The difference between the three types of pāramīs may be illustrated thus: dāna pāramī means the ability to joyously give away all one's worldly possessions, (wealth, kingdom); dāna upapārami means giving parts of one's own body, such as eyes, limb, flesh, blood, etc.; and dāna-paramattha pārami means the sacrifice of one's own life. The Bodhisatta's acts, in fulfilment of the higher pāramīs, are great heroic deeds of absolute self-sacrifice, compassion and wisdom.<sup>160</sup>

My view is that this illustration is based on Mahāyāna. To be for the benefit of others, one has to have a healthy body. In the Lakkhana Sutta acts like giving parts of the body are not mentioned. In the Pāli Canon self-mutilation is not recommended as a way to holiness nor is it considered as a meritorious action.<sup>161</sup> It is much better to

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<sup>159</sup> Ledi 1899, p. 9-10; Ledi 2000, p. 8-9. See also: Buddharakkhita 1986, p. 15.

<sup>160</sup> Buddharakkhita 1986, p. 15-16.

<sup>161</sup> About the giving of one's life or limbs, see chapter 6.

devote one's whole life to the Dhamma. The teaching of the Buddha is the middle way and not a way of extremes. This applies also to a Bodhisatta.

One who can fulfil only the basic perfections is said to attain the state of Sāvakabodhi, the Enlightenment of a Noble Disciple.<sup>162</sup> I showed earlier that this statement need not be true. Holiness is attained as a disciple of a living Buddha or when his teaching still exists. It is not known what duration of time is needed to reach Arahantship, the state of Sāvakabodhi. Some attain the high goal within a few weeks; some need many years or a whole life. And not everybody has then practised the pāramīs to perfection.<sup>163</sup>

By fulfilling the ten basic perfections for a period of 100,000 kappas one can attain the Enlightenment of a Great Disciple (mahāsāvaka). And by fulfilling the ten basic perfections for a period of one asankheyya and 100,000

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<sup>162</sup> Buddharakkhita 1986, p. 15-16.

<sup>163</sup> It is dangerous to claim that only after fulfilling the basic perfections one can become an Arahant. Many a man might think: "We cannot attain the high goal." And then he or she puts one's trust in the power of others instead of in own power.

kappas one can attain the Enlightenment of a Chief Disciple (aggasāvaka).

One who can fulfil the basic and the higher perfections, attains Paccekabodhi, the Enlightenment of a Paccekabuddha. And one who can fulfil both basic, higher and ultimate perfections attains Sabbaññu-bodhi, Supreme Self-Enlightenment with one's own effort.<sup>164</sup>

Illustrations of the perfections are given in the Cariyāpitaka. Some say that this book is a small collection of jātakas and considered to be post-Asokan. It arranges stories to illustrate how the Bodhisatta gradually matured and mastered the perfections.<sup>165</sup> Those stories must not be taken literally. There are inconsistencies in them and I will not enter into further details about them.

The statement about perfecting the pāramīs three times is not found in the Pāli Canon and probably originates from the Mahāyāna. Ven. Wimalaratana has pointed out that the ethical norms in the Lakkhana Sutta can be compared with the ten pāramīs in the Theravāda tradition. By

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<sup>164</sup> Ledi (1899) p.17-18 ; Ledi (2000) p. 14-15.

<sup>165</sup> Horner 1975b, p. iv, vi, vii.

providing an ethical foundation for the 32 marks of the great man, the scope is made in the Lakkhana Sutta for the conceptual importance of the pāramīs. In this sutta the emphasis is put on the altruistic aspect of the Bodhisatta. We have seen that obtaining these 32 marks is the result of the accumulation of merit in the course of his former lives. The process undergone to gain those marks is nearly the same as the career of the Bodhisatta practising the perfections. For the Great Man who possesses the 32 marks, and the Buddha who is the final product of the Bodhisatta career, is one and the same.<sup>166</sup>

All the pāramīs, without exception, have as their characteristic the benefiting of others. They have as their function the rendering of help to others. They have as their manifestation the wish for the welfare of others, or Buddhahood. And they have as their proximate cause great compassion, or compassion and skilful means.<sup>167</sup> These virtues are explained in chapter 5.

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<sup>166</sup> Wimalaratana p. 7, 13, 25 and 180-182.

<sup>167</sup> Bodhi 1978, p. 259.

### **3.13. Spheres of existence of Bodhisattas**

According to Venerable Nārada the Bodhisatta is reborn in various spheres of existence during his career.<sup>168</sup> Now he is a mighty god, now he is a man or an animal, until he finally is reborn in the Tusita heaven. There he waits for the correct time to be reborn, for the last time, as a human being, in order to become a perfect Buddha. Those rebirths in various spheres of existence are the results of the law of kamma-vipāka, action and its moral results.<sup>169</sup> However, if the Bodhisatta is reborn in a heavenly sphere where the life span usually lasts innumerable aeons, then he is able by his own willpower to shorten his lifespan, it is said. In that case he is reborn in another suitable place where he can serve the world and can practise the pāramīs.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Nārada 1980, p. 608.

<sup>169</sup> This law regulates the future birth. Only Buddhas and Arahants are not reborn again. They don't "produce" kamma anymore.

<sup>170</sup> Nārada 1980, p. 608-609.

However, the Commentary on the Buddhavamsa mentions eighteen states in which Bodhisattas are never reborn.<sup>171</sup>

1. They do not arise in the Avîci-hell.

2. They are not departed beings consumed by constant craving and tormented by hunger and thirst.

3. They are not tiny creatures arising in a bad existence.

4-7. When born among men, they are not born blind. They have no deficiency in hearing. They are not dumb or paralysed.

8-10. They are not born as women nor as hermaphrodites or eunuchs.

11-14. They are released from offences which bring immediate results. That means they are unable to commit anyone of the heinous deeds, namely: killing an Arahant; physically injuring a Buddha with intention; creating schism in the Sangha; killing father or mother.

15. The suitable places for them to visit are pure in every respect.

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<sup>171</sup> See: Horner 1978, p. 388.

16. Beholding the efficacy of kamma they do not follow false views.

17. Even though dwelling in the heavens they will not arise in a non-conscious state.

18. They will not be reborn among the devas of the Pure Abodes; only non-returners are born there.

What can be said about the nature of the truth embodied in these statements? Does the Bodhisatta really have special powers through which he is able to shorten his life span? And can he also be reborn as an animal? Why will he never be reborn as a woman? The Jātakas on which probably many of these statements are based, cannot be adduced as proof . They are best interpreted as educational stories intended to exemplify particular moral qualities.

Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa Thera wrote that the Bodhisatta cannot go to an evil doom.<sup>172</sup> This means that he will neither be reborn in the worlds of hell nor as an unhappy spirit, demon or animal. When making the aspiration to Buddhahood, the Bodhisatta must be of male

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<sup>172</sup> *Points of Controversy*, p. 366 (XXIII.3).

sex to be successful. And in his last existence he is a man as well. About the sex in his earlier career nothing is mentioned. There is no statement in the Pāli Canon to the effect that Bodhisattas must be male throughout their careers. The ancient brahmin attitude towards women was that women are subordinate to men and nuns subordinate to monks. Many monks in the early Sangha came from brahmin family backgrounds and, no doubt, would have tended to maintain the traditional attitude towards women. The Theravādins appeared to have maintained a negative attitude towards women. The gap between men and women that was reduced by the Buddha when he gave equality of social and religious status to women, was then widened again.<sup>173</sup> But whether the Bodhisatta is able to shorten his life span in a heaven, is not referred to in the Pāli Canon.

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<sup>173</sup> Gnanarama, Ven. Pategama: *The Mission Accomplished : A historical analysis of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta of the Digha Nikaya of the Pali Canon*. Singapore 1997, p. 77-79.

### **3.14. The four resolutions**

Further, four resolutions must be fulfilled by the Bodhisatta. They are: truth, liberality, peace and wisdom. They are fulfilled by the ten perfections. Thus he attains to the two states of calmness (samatha) and insight (vipassanā). Through the fulfilment of calmness the Bodhisatta attains all the jhānas (meditative absorptions). With the attainment of insight, he is endowed with all supernormal knowledge. Thus he attains Buddhahood.<sup>174</sup>

### **3.15. Summary**

The (Mahā) Bodhisatta is the one who is destined to Buddhahood. Before he starts his career, he takes the decision to become a Buddha in the future. He takes this decision in the presence of a living Buddha who predicts

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<sup>174</sup> Upatissa, Arahant: *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimaggā)*. Transl. into Chinese by Tipitaka Sanghapāla of Funan; transl. from the Chinese by Rev. N.R.M.Ehara, Soma Thera & Kheminda Thera. (repr.). Kandy 1995, p. 190.

that his aspiration will succeed. That aspiration must also be repeated later in the presence of all subsequent Buddhas who will confirm his aspiration. The Bodhisatta must also perform a meritorious deed towards every Buddha.

The aspiration succeeds only if certain circumstances are fulfilled. When the aspiration is made for the first time, he should be a man who is able to attain perfect holiness. Further, he should by then have abandoned the home life.

During his long career he must practice ten virtues or perfections. He must develop and perfect them. Owing to these and other virtuous activities he acquires the marks of a Great Man. These marks mainly relate to his character and virtue. The stories from the Buddhavamsa about 24 former lives of the Buddha Gotama have educational value and need not be taken literally. They illustrate the extraordinary degree of virtue and unselfishness required to become a Buddha.

Before his last existence on this earth the Bodhisatta remains in the Tusita heaven. From there he descends into a womb where he stays exactly ten lunar months. His birth is stainless.

There are three kinds of Mahā Bodhisattas:

Bodhisattas with wisdom, with energy or with devotion as basis.

The Bodhisatta has not attained holiness. Therefore the four unique marks ascribed to him, cannot apply to a Bodhisatta. They are applicable to an Arahant (saint).

The Bodhisatta in Theravāda is not yet a perfect man. And as an imperfect man he has shortcomings and he can make mistakes, of course. Be he exerts himself from the beginning of his career to perform good unselfish actions. As a result he acquires during his career certain good qualities: health and long life, influence, beauty and wisdom. And in his last existence, the life in which he becomes a Buddha, he also acquires the special marks of a Buddha.



Bodhisatta, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka

## 4. The Jātakas

Stories of the so-called previous lives of the Buddha Gotama are called Jātakas. There are 547 of those stories, also called birth-stories. These stories are used for teaching the great lessons of morality.<sup>175</sup> The Jātaka stories are divided into 22 books (Nipāta), corresponding to the number of stanzas in them. In the first book are found the Jātakas with one stanza; in the second book those with two stanzas, etc.<sup>176</sup>

According to Venerable Dr. Phra Maha Tuan Pim-Aksorn the Jātakas were told by the Buddha himself during his sermons at several places and were then re-narrated in detail by the Venerable Ānanda and approved

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<sup>175</sup> Speyer, J.S. (tr.): *The Jātakamālā or Garland of Birth-Stories of Āryasūra*, (repr.) Delhi 1982, p. xi.

<sup>176</sup> Dutoit, Julius (übers.): *Jātakam. Das Buch der Erzählungen aus früheren Existenzen Buddhas*, Leipzig 1908, Bd. I, p. III.

by the 499 other Arahants of the first Council.<sup>177</sup> According to another source the stories were told by the Buddha to his disciples at Śrāvasti, and re-narrated by the scholar Ārya Śūra.<sup>178</sup> But are the Jātakas really stories of previous lives of the Buddha; were they told by the Buddha himself?

Kern states that the Jātakas are events with a moral meaning. Essentially they do not differ from the Indian fables and tales in the Pañcatantra.<sup>179</sup> Originally they were probably simple instructive stories. According to Kern the translation "birth-story" for Jātaka is wrong. The term jātakam was derived from jātam (something that is born, that happened) with the addition of the suffix ka meaning smaller or diminutive. This gives the meaning: a small

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<sup>177</sup> Pim-Aksorn, Phramaha Tuan: *Buddhist Concept of Karunā and World Peace*, Varanasi 1988, p. 117.

<sup>178</sup> Donath, Dorothy C.: *Buddhism for the West – Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna*, New York 1971, p. 43.

<sup>179</sup> See: *Pantschatantra. Fünf Bücher altindischer Staatsweisheit und Lebenskunst in Fabeln und Sprüchen*, Hrsg. u. übers. von Ludwig Alsdorf, Bergen II 1952; or: *Pantschatantra. Die fünf Bücher der Weisheit*, Aus dem Sanskrit übertragen von Theodor Benfey (1859), bearbeitet von Karin Fitzenreiter, Berlin 1978.

incident that happened, or a scene, a story, a fragment, a fable.<sup>180</sup> Speyer agrees with this meaning.<sup>181</sup>

The research undertaken by Winternitz led to the same conclusion.<sup>182</sup> In the Jātaka-stories old and new elements are mixed together. A Jātaka is a story in which the Bodhisatta in one of his former lives plays a part as hero or spectator. Every Jātaka-story starts therefore with the words "In such-and-such a time the Bodhisatta was reborn in the womb of such and such being" and then follows the story. In that way every popular story or legend could be changed into a Jātaka. All that was required was that a suitable human, animal or divine being that appeared in the story could be identified as the Bodhisatta. In that way, also, stories that originally had nothing to do with the Dhamma, could become "Buddhist". The monks of yore knew that the people of India liked to listen to stories.

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<sup>180</sup> Kern, H.: *Geschiedenis van het Buddhisme in Indië*, Haarlem 1882, Vol. 1, p. 256-257.

<sup>181</sup> Speyer 1982 (1895), p. xxii.

<sup>182</sup> Winternitz, M.: *Geschichte der Indischen Litteratur. Zweiter Band. Erste Hälfte . Die buddhistische Litteratur*, Leipzig 1913, p. 89-134.

Therefore they used all possible stories, fables, legends etc. to preach the Dhamma in a popular way.<sup>183</sup>

In ancient times it was not always considered necessary to transform the tales into the Jātaka form so that several stories can be found in the Pāli Canon without the key person being identified as the Bodhisatta. According to Winternitz it was only later that these stories were further transformed into the familiar Jātaka form. He also says that monks told those stories in their sermons or used the stories themselves as sermons.<sup>184</sup>

The original book of the Jātakas contained only the verses. It was compiled in North-India before the time of Emperor Asoka. In Indian stories a mixture of prose and verses was popular and the stories that were transformed into Jātakas, originally contained both. But only the verses were included in the Pāli Canon, without the prose stories. Yet, the stories that belong to those verses must have also

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<sup>183</sup> Winternitz 1913, p. 89-90. See also: Rhys Davids, T.W.: *Buddhist India*, (reprint) Delhi 1987, p.165.

<sup>184</sup> Winternitz 1913, p. 91.

been handed down. For without the prose stories the verses are incomprehensible.<sup>185</sup> The oldest Jātakas are prose parables, fables, legends, ballads, anecdotes, without a frame and without verses. Most of them were pre-Buddhist but have been cleverly transformed to connect them with the life of the Buddha. In all these stories the Bodhisatta plays a more or less important part.<sup>186</sup> In the earliest forms of the Jātakas the Buddha in his former life is never identified with an animal; he is only identified with famous sages or teachers. The canonical versions are believed to be a later development of the earlier Jātakas.<sup>187</sup>

The Jātakas were originally transmitted orally; but after the Pāli Canon was agreed, the prose was recorded in the form of a commentary. The final version was that of the commentary only and not of the original full version. That commentary was written down between the second and the

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<sup>185</sup> Winternitz 1913, p. 91-92; Rhys Davids 1987, p. 194-195.

<sup>186</sup> Glasenapp, Helmuth von: *Die Literaturen Indiens von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Wildpark-Potsdam 1929, p. 134-137; Rhys Davids 1987, p. 196.

<sup>187</sup> Rhys Davids 1987, p. 196.

fifth century C.E. It was based on the tradition of the Great Monastery (Mahā Vihara) at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka. According to some the commentator was Buddhaghosa. But that is not possible. The commentary contains both the stanzas and the stories in prose. Further it has a framework with an introduction and a connecting explanation. The commentary is a translation of the Sinhalese commentary into Pāli. In that way the tradition handed down from the third century B.C. is maintained.<sup>188</sup>

In that commentary each of the stories of the Jātakas is divided into five parts:

The story of the present (*paccuppanna-vatthu*). In this part we find the occasion on which the Buddha narrated the story.

The story of the past (*atīta-vatthu*). Here is narrated in prose the story of one of the past lives of the Bodhisatta.

The verses or stanzas (*gāthā*).

The brief exposition (*veyyākaraṇa*), which is a grammatical explanation.

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<sup>188</sup> Rhys Davids 1987, passim.

The connection (*samodhāna*). In this section the Buddha generally identifies the principal characters, referred to in part one, with those whose past actions have been described in part two.<sup>189</sup>

The Jātaka-book does not contain all Jātaka-stories that were in circulation during the initial period of Buddhism nor were those fables, legends and parables in the original collection specifically Buddhist. They originated as popular Indian stories and legends from which the early Buddhists probably made a selection and then adapted them. The ethics in them is simple.<sup>190</sup> Further it is unlikely that all the Jātakas are by author. At most they could have been arranged by one person. Several parts are added to or re-narrated from earlier versions. From the language it may

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<sup>189</sup> Saddhatissa, H.: *The Birth-stories of the Ten Bodhisattas and the Dasabodhisattuppattikathā, being a Translation and Edition of the Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*, London 1975, p. 5-6; and: Winternitz 1913, p. 92-93.

<sup>190</sup> Rhys Davids 1987, p. 196-197.

be concluded that several Jātakas originated in the second century B.C.E.<sup>191</sup>

From the foregoing it is evident that the prose parts of the Jātakas are not as old as the verses. And through the translation and retranslation several modifications could have been made as well. Some Jātakas, containing for both verses and prose, could belong to the third century B.C.E. in the Buddhist tradition. This is supported by Jātaka-pictures on reliefs on the stūpas of Bharhut and Sāñchi, dating from the third or second century B.C.E. Several aphorisms and legends might belong to pre-Buddhist times but for the most part the verses date at most from the third century B.C.E. and one part of the prose dates back to the third or second century B.C.E. It is thought that only one part dates from the Current Era (C.E.).<sup>192</sup> Some of the stories were already very old when they were originally incorporated into the Buddhist tradition not later than beginning of the third century B.C.E. About 60-70% of them have no verses.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Winternitz 1913, p. 97.

<sup>192</sup> Winternitz 1913, p. 94-95.

<sup>193</sup> Rhys Davids 1987, p. 189-208.

In the final version of the Jātakas we find:<sup>194</sup>

Fables; lessons about worldly wisdom. Only a few of them are specifically Buddhist.

Legends and myths, among which many animal legends. Most of these have no connection to Buddhism. In a few cases they have a Buddhist tendency.

Short anecdotes that have nothing Buddhistic about them.

Sagas and short stories with a lot of adventures and sometimes with a number of tales interspersed. The only reason they can be considered Buddhist is that the hero in the stories is the Bodhisatta.

Moralistic stories.

Aphorism which contain the Brahmin ideal.

Pious legends that are only partly of Buddhist origin. Most of them belong to the Indian ascetic literature.

Winternitz concluded that more than half of all the Jātakas, except the commentary, are not of Buddhist origin. His explanation is that the Buddhist monks came from all

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<sup>194</sup> Winternitz 1913, p. 99-100.

ranks in society. Many of them (e.g. labourers and merchants) would have been familiar with the popular stories of their time. Other monks would have been acquainted with the ancient ballads and epic poems of the warriors. Yet, others would have often heard the legends and myths of the pious Brahmins. When they became monks these people would probably have found it useful to incorporate much of this into their new religious tradition.<sup>195</sup>

Some scholars argue that the Jātakas give us a picture of the narrative literature and the cultural relations at the time of the Buddha or of former times. But according to Winternitz this counts only in a very limited way.<sup>196</sup> Dr. R. Fick researched the social circumstances in North East India where the Buddha and Buddhism originated. According to him the social circumstances in the Jātakas refer to those at the time of the Buddha.<sup>197</sup> G. Bühler argued (1895) that very few traces of Buddhism can be found in the

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<sup>195</sup> idem.

<sup>196</sup> Winternitz 1913, p. 96.

<sup>197</sup> Quoted in: Rhys Davids 1987, p. 202.

Jātaka-stories. And they do not describe the situation of India in the third or fourth century B.C.E., but that of an older period.<sup>198</sup>

According to Rhys Davids the political and social circumstances described in the Jātaka-book relate for the most part the situation that existed in North India before the time of the Buddha.<sup>199</sup>

Dr. Benoychandra Sen has also made an analysis of the Jātakas. His work was originally completed in 1926 as a dissertation. In 1974 it was published as a book. He wrote that this collection of stories is a warehouse of information about life and society in ancient India with special reference to the organisation of castes, the rituals, festivals, customs and usages of different communities and groups of people, the economy, etc.<sup>200</sup> The sources of the stock of legends have a pre-Buddhist character. Elements of great antiquity are traceable in some of the Jātakas.<sup>201</sup> Most stories, at

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<sup>198</sup> Rhys Davids 1987, p. 202.

<sup>199</sup> Rhys Davids 1987, p. 207

<sup>200</sup> Sen, Benoychandra: *Studies in the Buddhist Jātakas (tradition and polity)*, Calcutta 1974, p. I.

<sup>201</sup> idem, p. II.

least those about kings and prices, have a background in historical fact.<sup>202</sup> The geographical context of the Jātakas not only embraced a large part of India, but also places outside India. The storytellers of the Jātakas were familiar with many other places outside India including Myanmar (Burma), Sri Lanka and Babylon. Those stories must date from times when active sea-borne trade and commerce was going on between India and a large part of the external world.<sup>203</sup>

It is possible that the Jātaka-stories were originally myths, legends, parables and homilies; only the verses are the words of the Buddha.<sup>204</sup> If correct, this clearly shows

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<sup>202</sup> idem, p. III.

<sup>203</sup> idem, p.54-60.

<sup>204</sup> See: Ling, Trevor: *A Dictionary of Buddhism. Indian and South-East Asian*, Calcutta/New Delhi 1981 (see: Jātaka); and: Nārada Thera (tr.): *The Dhammapada : Pali Text and translation with stories in brief and notes*, (3rd ed.) Colombo 2522-1978, p. viii. See also: Dutoit 1908, Bd. I, p. IV; and: Kern 1882, dl. 1, p. 257; and: Dutoit, Julius (übers.): *Das Leben des Buddha. Eine Zusammenstellung alter Berichte aus den kanonischen Schriften der südlichen Buddhisten*, Leipzig 1906, p. XVIII-XIX.

that the Buddha often made use of similes, metaphors, allegories, satires and analogies.<sup>205</sup> For those who heard them, the Jātakas were for probably not much more than what parables are to us. They should not be treated as if they are meant to be accurate ancient history.<sup>206</sup> It would be more appropriate to look upon these birth-stories as homilies used for educational purposes and for inculcating the moral lessons of Buddhism.<sup>207</sup> I think the Buddha and/or his monks used ancient and well-known stories to explain something important. And later monks continued with this practice.

Venerable Seewali has shown that there are Jātakas where the Bodhisatta's conduct was not exemplary and that there are ethical problems also.<sup>208</sup> The myths and parables

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<sup>205</sup> See: Gombrich, Richard F.: *How Buddhism Began : The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*, London 1996, p. 65-67.

<sup>206</sup> Speyer 1982, p. xiii.

<sup>207</sup> Speyer 1982, p. xiii.

<sup>208</sup> Seewali Thero, Ven. Rassagala: *A Critical Study of Ethical Problems of Bodhisatta's Karunā in Jātaka Stories*, Bangkok 2542/1999.

that formed the basis of the Jātaka-stories are not intended to show the line of progress in the career of the Bodhisatta.

In conclusion it can be said that not one single Jātaka-story is a historical description of a former life of the Buddha. The Jātakas are ancient stories with educational objectives. Through the verses they are made "Buddhist". Probably only a few of them were told by the Buddha himself or his disciples. Monks of later times have added more stories. Only the verses – like the verses of the Dhammapada – are included in the Pāli Canon. The prose stories accompanying them are kept as commentaries. Those stories must not be over-valued, but nevertheless the verses can be understood much better in the context of the background provided by those stories. The stories are illustrative background, only the verses are important in terms of the Dhamma. And we must not forget that a large number of them date from the third century B.C.E. i.e. after the time of the Buddha. They cannot all have been told by the Buddha. And we also have to remember here the prediction of the Buddha that there will come a time when the bhikkhus will not listen to the Dhamma anymore, but

only to discourses made in poetical style.<sup>209</sup> The Jātaka stories might be reckoned among that category. It might have been better if the Jātakas from the beginning were classified not as birth stories but as teaching moral lessons, as allegories conveying in a vivid and memorable way the depth of the Bodhisatta's commitment to helping others no matter how difficult the circumstances. The translation of the samodhāna could then possibly have been: "... and in the same way as those persons in the past acted, likewise is it now with these persons ..."

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<sup>209</sup> S. II, 267, cited by Phra Khantipalo, in: *The Splendour of Enlightenment*, Bangkok 1987, Vol.II, p. 392-393.



Bodhisatta, Museum at Nalanda, India

## 5. Review of the Pāramīs

When and how the aspirant started his career as Buddha-to-be or Mahā Bodhisatta is told in the Buddhavamsa, in the account of Sumedha.<sup>210</sup> According to that story the Buddha Dīpankara confirmed the aspirant's future success. After this prediction the aspirant reflected on the qualities that had to be perfected to fulfil his goal. These qualities are the ten perfections or pāramīs.<sup>211</sup> The Commentary states that the Buddhavamsa was spoken by the Buddha himself. This is not correct. The Buddhavamsa was included in the Pāli Canon after the Third Council. Like the Jātakas, it is best regarded as having been compiled for educational purposes to illustrate important aspects of the teaching rather than as containing historically true

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<sup>210</sup> 'Account of Sumedha', in: Horner, I.B. (tr.): *Chronicle of Buddhas (Buddhavamsa)*. London 1975 [a], p. 9-25.

<sup>211</sup> The ten Pāramīs are mentioned in: Horner 1975a, p. 20-23; see also: Bodhi, Bhikkhu (tr.): *The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views : The Brahmajāla Sutta and its Commentaries*. Kandy 1978, p. 46.

incidents.<sup>212</sup> Seven of the ten Pāramīs are mentioned in the Cariyāpitaka.<sup>213</sup> It is a collection of 35 Jātakas, in verses. The goal of it is to show that the Bodhisatta possessed the Perfections or Pāramīs.<sup>214</sup> The ten pāramis are described in detail by Ācariya Dhammapāla in "The Treatise on the Pāramis", as counterpart of the Mahāyāna works about the Bodhisattvas. It is found in the Cariyāpitaka Atthakathā. An

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<sup>212</sup> See: Kashyap, Bhikkhu J. (Gen. Ed.): *The Apadāna (II) - Buddhavamsa - Cariyāpitaka* (Khuddhakanikāya, Vol. VII). [s.l.] 1959, p. v; Winternitz, Maurice: *A history of Indian Literature. Vol. II : Buddhist Literature and Jaina Literature*. A new authoritative English translation by V. Srinivasa Sarma. (revised ed.). Delhi 1983, p. 155-156; Thomas, Edward J.: *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History*. (repr.) New Delhi 1992, p. 275; Grönbold, Günter: 'Die Mythologie des indischen Buddhismus,' in: *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, Bd. 5. Stuttgart 1984, p. 384; Bareau, André: "Der indische Buddhismus," in: *Die Religionen Indiens, III*, Stuttgart 1964, p.26-27; Norman, K.R.: *Pāli Literature, including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of all the Hīnayāna Schools of Buddhism*. Wiesbaden 1983, p. 92-94.

<sup>213</sup> Horner, I.B. (tr.): *Basket of Conduct (Cariyāpitaka)*. London 1975 [b].

<sup>214</sup> See: Winternitz (II) 1983, p. 156-157; Thomas 1992, p. 275; Kashyap 1959, p. v.

abridged version is in the Subcommentary to the Brahmajāla Sutta. "The Treatise on the Pāramīs" is an account of the Theravāda conception of the practice of the Pāramīs. That work has been translated into English by Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi and is thus made accessible for others.<sup>215</sup> There is some influence from Mahāyāna, but regarding the Teaching (Dhamma) the work remains within the borders of Theravāda.<sup>216</sup> Other works such as the Vimuttimaggā written by Upatissa Thera<sup>217</sup> and the Visuddhimaggā composed by Buddhaghosa Thera<sup>218</sup> also

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<sup>215</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu (tr.): 'A Treatise on the Pāramīs,' in: *The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views*, Kandy 1978[a], p. 254-330.

<sup>216</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu (tr.): *The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views : The Brahmajāla Sutta and its Commentaries*. Kandy 1978, p. 46-49.

<sup>217</sup> Upatissa, Arahant: *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimaggā)*. Transl. into Chinese by Tipitaka Sanghapāla of Funan; transl. from the Chinese by Rev. N.R.M. Ehara, Soma Thera & Kheminda Thera. (repr.) Kandy 1995, p. 188-190.

<sup>218</sup> Buddhaghosa, Bhadantācariya: *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimaggā)*. Transl. by Bhikkhu Ñanamoli. Singapore [1956], p. 13-14, 216, 352-353; Nyanatiloka (übers.): *Visuddhi-Maggā oder Der Weg zur Reinheit. Die grösste und*

deal with the Pāramīs. I consulted two other works with information relating the Pāramīs, namely *A Manual of the Excellent Man, Uttamapurisa Dīpanī* written by Venerable Ledi Sayadaw<sup>219</sup> and the Chapter 'Pārami – Perfections,' in *The Buddha and His Teachings* written by Venerable Nārada Maha Thera.<sup>220</sup> Both Venerable Ledi Sayadaw and Venerable Nārada Maha Thera have consulted several commentaries. As those commentaries were not at my disposal, I have to rely on what is mentioned by the two Venerable monks. I have used the above-mentioned works together with the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta*<sup>221</sup> to try to show what the Pāramīs are.

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*älteste systematische Darstellung des Buddhismus*, (3. Aufl.) Konstanz 1975, p. 371.

<sup>219</sup> Ledi Sayādaw, Ven.: *A Manual of the Excellent Man, Uttamapurisa Dīpanī*. Transl. from the Burmese by U Tin Oo; edited by Bhikkhu Pesala. Kandy 2000.

<sup>220</sup> Nārada Maha Thera: 'Pārami – Perfections,' in: *The Buddha and His Teachings*. Kandy 1980, p. 576-611.

<sup>221</sup> D.30 : 'Lakkhaṇa Sutta : The Marks of a Great Man', in: Walshe, Maurice (tr.): *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, Kandy 1996, p. 441-460.

## **(1) Generosity (*dāna*)**

The perfection of giving is the volition of relinquishing oneself and one's belongings, accompanied by compassion and skilful means.<sup>222</sup> It has the characteristic of generosity, relinquishing; its function is to destroy attachment to things or to dispel greed for things by giving them away.<sup>223</sup>

The Bodhisatta develops loving-kindness (*mettā*) for all beings and gives them fearlessness.<sup>224</sup> He gives preference to beings' welfare; he dislikes their suffering. He desires their success for a long time; and he is impartial towards all beings. Therefore he gives gifts without discriminating.<sup>225</sup>

In former existences, being born as a human being, the Bodhisatta undertook mighty deeds to good purpose; unwavering in generosity.<sup>226</sup> He made himself beloved

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<sup>222</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 259.

<sup>223</sup> Ledi 2000, p. 2; Bodhi 1978a, p. 260.

<sup>224</sup> Upatissa 1995, p.188.

<sup>225</sup> Buddhaghosa 1956, p. 352-353.

<sup>226</sup> D.30:1.4, in: Walshe 1996, p. 442.

through generosity, giving and helpful acts.<sup>227</sup> He was a giver of fine food, delicious and tasty, hard and soft, and of drinks.<sup>228</sup> He became the foremost in generosity.<sup>229</sup> Established in good will, he was in the habit of giving away gifts of clothing, soft and fine.<sup>230</sup>

He reunited those who were separated with relatives, friends and companions who had missed them. He reunited mother with child and child with mother, father with child and child with father, brother with brother, brother with sister and sister with brother, making them happy.<sup>231</sup>

He desired the welfare of the many, their advantage, comfort, freedom from bondage, thinking how they might increase their faith, morality, learning, renunciation, their understanding of the Dhamma, their wisdom, wealth and possessions, their livestock, their wives and children, servants, workers and helpers, their relatives, friends,

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<sup>227</sup> D.30:1.16/18, in: Walshe 1996, p.446-447.

<sup>228</sup> D.30:1.13/15, in: Walshe 1996, p.446.

<sup>229</sup> D.30:2.13/15, in: Walshe 1996, p. 455.

<sup>230</sup> D.30:1.28/30, in: Walshe 1996, p. 450.

<sup>231</sup> D.30:1.31/33, in: Walshe 1996, p. 451.

colleagues and acquaintances.<sup>232</sup> He lived for the happiness of the many, as a dispeller of fright and terror. He was a provider of lawful protection and shelter, and supplied all necessities.<sup>233</sup>

He abstained from slander. He did not repeat in one place what he had heard elsewhere to the detriment of others. Thus he was a reconciler of those at variance and an encourager of those at one, rejoicing in peace, one who spoke up for peace.<sup>234</sup>

In short, the Bodhisatta gave both material things and encouraged the development of mental qualities such as fearlessness, concord, harmony, comfort, and security.

The perfection of giving is to be practised by benefiting beings in many ways - by relinquishing one's happiness, belongings, body and life to others, by dispelling their fear, and by instructing them in the Dhamma. Herein, giving is threefold by way of the object to be given: the

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<sup>232</sup> D.30:2.4, in: Walshe 1996, p. 452.

<sup>233</sup> D.30:1.7/8, en 2.13, in: Walshe 1996, p.444-445.

<sup>234</sup> D.30:2.19/21, in: Walshe 1996, p.456-457.

giving of material things, the giving of fearlessness, or the giving of protection to beings when they have become frightened, and the giving of the Dhamma.<sup>235</sup>

According to the Buddhavamsa and the commentary on it the Bodhisatta fulfils the basic perfection of giving by the sacrifice of his possessions; he fulfils the higher perfection by the sacrifice of any of his limbs; and he fulfils the ultimate perfection by the sacrifice of his life.<sup>236</sup>

Giving must be done wisely. If, for instance, a drunkard would ask for some money, and if the Bodhisatta were convinced that his gift would be misused, then he would refuse it without hesitation.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 289, 291.

<sup>236</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 20 (II A:120); Horner, I.B. (tr.): *The Clarifier of the Sweet Meaning (Madhurattavilāsinī). Commentary on the Chronicle of Buddhas (Buddhavamsa) by Buddhadatta Thera*. London 1978, p. 89 and 152.

<sup>237</sup> See: Nārada Maha Thera: *The Buddha and His Teachings*. (4th enlarged ed.) Kandy 2524/1980, p. 578.

In Milindapañha (VIII.1) the question is raised as to whether all Bodhisattas give away their wife and children. Venerable Nāgasena replied that all Bodhisattas do give them away, and not only the Bodhisatta King Vessantara. He said that the Bodhisatta had done what was difficult to do. He gave his children to be the slaves of a Brahman. He gave his wife to be the wife of another. She was a consenting party in this case, but the children lamented. He bound his children. When his son had freed himself by his own efforts and had come back overcome by fear, once again he bound him and gave him back to the Brahman. The children lamented but he did not comfort them. He showed no pity when his children were being led away.

According to Venerable Nāgasena the devas, titans, garulas, serpents and yakkhas lauded him. He also said that there are ten special qualities of the accomplished, clever and wise Bodhisattas. These ten qualities are: greedlessness, being without desire for worldly things, relinquishing, getting rid of, not reverting to secular life, the fineness, the greatness, the incomprehensibility, the rarity, the peerlessness of Buddhahood.

But this gift caused anguish in others. According to Venerable Nāgasena a gift causing anguish in others might result in happiness, might be conducive to rebirth in heaven. Vessantara gave away his wife and children according to the practices of that society at that time. For them it was a custom that a father, who had a debt or had been deprived of his livelihood, might deposit his son in pledge or sell him. King Vessantara was distressed and in anguish at not obtaining omniscient knowledge. Therefore he deposited his wife and children in pledge and sold them for the sake of acquiring the treasure of the Dhamma. He thought: "I myself, practising this, will attain Perfect Enlightenment." Vessantara gave wife and children for the sake of omniscient knowledge. And he knew that no one was able to keep his children in slavery, and that their grandfather would redeem the children.<sup>238</sup>

However, Venerable Nāgasena's interpretation can be disputed. It could be said that the gift in this case was

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<sup>238</sup> Horner, I.B. (tr.): *Milinda's Questions*. Vol. II. Oxford 1991, p. 95-109.

the cause of sorrow and lamentation. Perhaps the gift was not wise, was excessive, and was not practising the middle way. The Bodhisatta is called a dispeller of fright and terror; a provider of protection; having sympathy for all living beings; one who reunited children with parents. It could be said that the gift of Vessantara did not show loving-kindness or compassion towards all living beings, including his wife and children. And the reasoning behind Vessantara's decision is not recorded in the original text, so we do not know how or why he came to this decision about his wife and children. It could be said that Vessantara did not have special qualities since he was still a worldling. The Bodhisatta Vessantara did not yet have the ten special qualities, since he was still not perfected. The perfected qualities mentioned by Venerable Nāgasena are qualities of a Buddha, not of a Bodhisatta! I think Venerable Nāgasena was taking the Jātakas too literally. Perhaps he saw them as real, historical stories and not as illustrations. It is correct that all Bodhisattas renounce wife and children when they go into the homeless life. But that is not the same as giving them away. And if Vessantara knew previously that nobody

could harm his wife and children, if he previously knew that his father would redeem the children, then his giving was incomplete, was only for a short time. And the perfection of giving would not have been fulfilled.

## **(2) *Morality, virtue (sila)***

The perfection of virtue is good conduct of body and speech, accompanied by compassion and skilful means.<sup>239</sup> Its function is blameless conduct, or its function is to destroy unwholesome or unruly bodily or verbal actions; it is manifested as purity of actions; its proximate causes are moral shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*).<sup>240</sup>

In former existences, being born as a human being, the Bodhisatta observed the eight precepts at fast days, honoured his parents, ascetics and Brahmins and the head

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<sup>239</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 259/260.

<sup>240</sup> Ledi 2000, p. 2-3; Bodhi 1978a, p. 260.

of the clan.<sup>241</sup> He lived for the happiness of the many, as a dispeller of fright and terror. He was a provider of lawful protection and shelter, and supplied all necessities.<sup>242</sup> He rejected the taking of life and abstained from it. He was one who avoided harming beings by hand, by stones, stick or sword.<sup>243</sup>

He made himself beloved through pleasing speech and beneficial behaviour.<sup>244</sup> He became an adviser to the people both in worldly and in spiritual matters.<sup>245</sup>

He became the foremost in skilful behaviour in deed, word and thoughts.<sup>246</sup> He rejected harsh speech. He spoke what was blameless, pleasing to the ear, agreeable,

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<sup>241</sup> D.30:1.4/6, in: Walshe 1996, p. 442-443. – This is also the way leading to wealth and high birth. (M.135).

<sup>242</sup> D.30:1.7/8, en 2.13, in: Walshe 1996, p. 444-445.

<sup>243</sup> D.30:1.10/12, and D.30:2.7/9, in: Walshe 1996, p. 445-446 and p. 453-454; Buddhaghosa 1956, p. 353. – Not harming others leads to health and not killing leads to long life. (M.135).

<sup>244</sup> D.30:1.16/18, in: Walshe 1996, p. 446-447.

<sup>245</sup> D.30:1.19/21, in: Walshe 1996, p. 447-448.

<sup>246</sup> D.30:2.13/15, in: Walshe 1996, p. 455.

reaching to the heart, pleasing and attractive to the multitude.<sup>247</sup>

He rejected wrong livelihood, lived by right livelihood, refraining from cheating with false weights and measures, from bribery and corruption, deception and insincerity, from wounding, killing, imprisoning, highway robbery, and taking goods by force. He gave up wrongful living and took a pure and righteous course. He cast aside harmful things, working only for the good of people.<sup>248</sup>

The Bodhisatta must first purify his own virtue. Herein, virtue is purified in four modes: (1) by the purification of one's inclinations; (2) by the undertaking of precepts; (3) by non-transgression; and (4) by making amends for transgressions.<sup>249</sup>

According to the Commentary on the Buddhavamsa the perfection of virtue exists among others in fulfilling the

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<sup>247</sup> D.30:2.22/24, in: Walshe 1996, p. 457.

<sup>248</sup> D.30:2.28/30, in: Walshe 1996, p. 458-459.

<sup>249</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 296.

rules for monks.<sup>250</sup> The life of a monk is not mentioned in the Lakkhana Sutta. Laymen too can lead virtuous lives.

### **(3) Renunciation (*nekkhamma*)**

The perfection of renunciation is renouncing sense pleasures. The Bodhisatta practices non-greed. He sees the dangers of a home life, for his ability to practice the Pāramīs is limited and restricted by wife and children and by crafts and occupations. He recognises the unsatisfactoriness in sense pleasures; his mind is inclined towards solitude and peace. He avoids sensuality with the dread of misconduct or a sense of spiritual urgency. He adopts the ascetic life and through calmness (*samatha*) he gains all meditative absorptions (*jhānas*).<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 20 (II A: 125), note 4; Horner 1978, p. 153/154.

<sup>251</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 260-261, 303-304; Ledi 2000, p. 3, 10; Horner 1975a, p. 20 (II A: 129-130); Horner 1978, p. 153-154; Nārada 1980, p. 592-593; Upatissa 1995, p. 188-190.

The Bodhisatta practises renunciation for the purpose of perfecting his virtue.<sup>252</sup> This perfection is not mentioned explicitly in the Lakkhana Sutta. But in fact it is included in other perfections, such as generosity, virtue and patience.

#### **(4) Wisdom (*paññā*)**

The perfection of wisdom is the comprehension of the general and particular characteristics of dhammas, accompanied by compassion and skilful means.<sup>253</sup> It has the characteristic of *sabhāva*: seeing things in their true nature; its function is *visayo*: to illuminate the objective field or to shed light on all objects of sense; it is manifested as *asammoha* (non-confusion); its proximate cause is *samādhi* (concentration), or its proximate cause is the four noble truths.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Buddhaghosa 1956, p. 353.

<sup>253</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 260.

<sup>254</sup> Ledi (1899) p. 3; Ledi 2000, p. 3; Bodhi 1978a, p. 261.

The Bodhisatta wishing to accomplish the perfection of wisdom, should avoid the causes of delusion. These causes are: discontent, languor, drowsiness, lethargy, delight in company, attachment to sleep, irresoluteness, lack of enthusiasm for knowledge, over-estimation of oneself, non-interrogation, not maintaining one's body properly, lack of mental concentration, association with dull-witted people, not ministering to those possessed of wisdom, self-contempt, discrimination, adherence to perverted views, athleticism, lack of a sense of spiritual urgency, and the five hindrances; or, in brief, any states of confusion which should be avoided by applying effort to learning as well as to the jhānas.<sup>255</sup>

The Bodhisatta considers both merit and non-merit. He rejects the bad and takes the good.<sup>256</sup> For the purpose of non-confusion about what is good and bad for beings, he cleanses his understanding (paññā).<sup>257</sup> Through wisdom the

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<sup>255</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 305.

<sup>256</sup> Upatissa 1995, p. 189.

<sup>257</sup> Buddhaghosa 1956, p. 353.

Bodhisatta practises skilful means in providing for the welfare of beings.<sup>258</sup>

In former existences, being born as a human being, he became a teacher to the people about their welfare, about Dhamma, explaining it to them and being a bearer of welfare and happiness to beings, a dispenser of Dhamma.<sup>259</sup>

He became a skilled exponent of a craft, a science, a way of conduct or action. He learnt fast the skills that harm no living beings.<sup>260</sup>

He approached ascetics or Brahmins and asked: "What is good, what is bad." He asked what is blameworthy and what is not. He asked what will lead to lasting sorrow and harm, and what to lasting happiness.<sup>261</sup>

He considered the welfare of people and knew the nature of each, knew each one himself, and knew how each one differed: "This one deserves such-and-such, that one

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<sup>258</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 311.

<sup>259</sup> D.30:1.19/21, in: Walshe 1996, p. 447-448.

<sup>260</sup> D.30:1.22/24, in: Walshe 1996, p. 448-449.

<sup>261</sup> D.30:1.25/27, in: Walshe 1996, p. 449-450.

deserves so-and-so,” so he distinguished them. He knew what each one deserved.<sup>262</sup>

He desired the welfare of the many, their advantage, comfort, freedom from bondage, thinking how they might increase in faith, morality, learning, renunciation, Dhamma, wisdom, wealth and possessions, in their ownership of livestock, wives and children, servants, workers and helpers, relatives, friends, colleagues and acquaintances.<sup>263</sup>

Through the perfection of wisdom the Bodhisatta sees things objectively, in their true nature. He avoids wrong opinions. He sees the world in the light of transiency (anicca), sorrowfulness (dukkha) and soullessness (anattā). A Bodhisatta meditates on these three characteristics but not to such an extent as to attain the first stage of holiness. The immediate cause of wisdom is concentration, or the Four Noble Truths. To fulfil the perfection of wisdom the Bodhisatta should avoid the causes of delusions, such as

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<sup>262</sup> D.30:2.1/3, in: Walshe 1996, p. 451-452.

<sup>263</sup> D.30:2.4/6, in: Walshe 1996, p. 452-453.

drowsiness, lethargy, attachment to sleep, over-estimation of oneself, self-contempt, discrimination and adherence to perverted views.<sup>264</sup>

Wisdom is not only learning the Buddha's Dhamma and teaching it to others, but also teaching sciences and arts, ways of trade and agriculture and other such blameless vocations.<sup>265</sup>

### **(5) Energy (*viriya*)**

For the welfare, benefit and happiness of all beings the Bodhisatta exerts himself at all times, without abandoning energy.<sup>266</sup>

In former existences, being born as a human being, he became a skilled exponent of a craft, a science, a way of conduct or action. He learned fast the skills that harm no living beings. He learned with little toil.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 260-261, 305; Ledi 2000, p. 3; Nārada 1980, p. 596.

<sup>265</sup> Ledi 2000, p. 10.

<sup>266</sup> Upatissa 1995, p. 189; Buddhaghosa 1956, p. 353.

<sup>267</sup> D.30:1.22/24, in: Walshe 1996, p. 448-449.

He became the foremost in skilled behaviour, a leader in right action of body, speech and thought, in generosity, virtuous conduct, observance of fasts, in honouring father and mother, ascetics and Brahmins and the head of the clan, and in various other proper activities.<sup>268</sup>

The perfection of energy is bodily and mental work for the welfare of others, accompanied by compassion and skilful means.<sup>269</sup> It has the characteristic of striving, of diligence. It is manifested as persistence.<sup>270</sup>

Energy or perseverance is closely allied with wisdom. Here energy does not mean physical strength, but mental vigour or strength of character, which is far superior. It is defined as the persistent effort to work for the welfare of others both in thought and deed. Ceaselessly and untiringly he works for others, expecting no remuneration in return. He is ever ready to serve others to the best of his ability.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> D.30. 2.13/15, in: Walshe 1996, p. 455.

<sup>269</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 260.

<sup>270</sup> Ledi 2000 p. 3; Bodhi 1978a, p. 261; Horner 1975a, p. 21 (II A:139-140); Horner 1978, p. 156.

<sup>271</sup> Nārada 1980, p. 597-599.

## **(6) Patience (*khanti*)**

The Bodhisatta practises patience and forbearance and does not grow angry when others blame or hate him.<sup>272</sup> He is patient with the many kinds of faults of beings.<sup>273</sup>

In former existences, being born as a human being, he displayed no anger nor hatred nor resentment. He was not abusive or agitated or aggressive, even after many abusive or unpleasant words had been uttered by others to him.<sup>274</sup>

The perfection of patience and forbearance consists in enduring the unpleasantness and evil caused by others, and in enduring unpleasant circumstances and experiences, such as heat and cold. It is also enduring the shortcomings of others. Its function is not to be moved by likes or dislikes. Even if his hands and feet are cut, the Bodhisatta

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<sup>272</sup> Upatissa 1995, p. 189.

<sup>273</sup> Buddhaghosa 1956, p. 353.

<sup>274</sup> D.30:1.28/30, in: Walshe 1996, p. 450.

will not be angry.<sup>275</sup> The immediate cause of this is seeing things as they really are.<sup>276</sup>

Just as the earth has neither affection nor repugnance for what is thrown on it, whether this be pure or impure, but is patient, endures it and bears with it, so he, too, is patient of all forms of respect and disrespect.<sup>277</sup>

### **(7) Truthfulness (*sacca*)**

The Bodhisatta speaks always the truth, dwells in the truth and keeps the truth. He does not break his promise, but keeps it faithfully unto life's end.<sup>278</sup>

In former existences, being born as a human being, he was accustomed to look at people not askance, obliquely, or furtively, but directly, openly and

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<sup>275</sup> See the Simile of the Saw (M.21).

<sup>276</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 260-261, 311; Ledi 2000, p. 3, 10-11; Nārada 1980, p. 599-601.

<sup>277</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 21 (II A:140); Horner 1978, p. 156/157.

<sup>278</sup> Upatissa 1995, p. 189; Buddhaghosa 1956, p. 353.

straight-forwardly, and with a kindly glance.<sup>279</sup> He rejected false speech, put away lies and became a truth-speaker, reliable, not deceiving the world. He was true to his promise, sincere in speech, he shunned all lies.<sup>280</sup>

He rejected idle chatter or foolishness. He spoke at the right time, what was correct and to the point. His words were bound up with profit. He rejected false speech, put away lies. His words were reliable and consistent.<sup>281</sup>

The perfection of truthfulness is non-deceptiveness in speech, accompanied by compassion and skilful means. Its function is to ascertain and discover the truth as one sees or knows. It is manifested as sweet and agreeable speech out of sympathetic tenderness towards all.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> D.30:2.10/12, in: Walshe 1996, p. 454.

<sup>280</sup> D.30:2.16/18, in: Walshe 1996, p.455-456.

<sup>281</sup> D.30:2.25/27, in: Walshe 1996, p. 455; Upatissa 1995, p. 188-190.

<sup>282</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 260-261; Ledi 2000, p. 4.

## **(8) Determination (*adhitthāna*)**

Through the perfection of determination the Bodhisatta is unshakeably resolute upon beings' welfare and happiness and in rendering help to others. Without resolute and firm determination the other perfections cannot be fulfilled. Through determination he overcomes every opposition and all obstacles on his way. He is unshakeable once he has taken a decision. None can tempt him to do anything contrary to his principles.<sup>283</sup>

The Bodhisatta does not break his promise, but keeps it faithfully unto life's end.<sup>284</sup>

In *Milindapañha* V.5 it is mentioned that the Bodhisatta caused the slaughter of some animals.<sup>285</sup> He did wrong things and in fact he did something contrary to the

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<sup>283</sup> Buddhaghosa 1956, p. 353; Bodhi 1978a, p. 260-261, 311; Ledi 2000, p. 4; Horner 1975a, p. 22 (II A:154); Horner 1978, p. 159-160; Nārada 1980, p. 603-604.

<sup>284</sup> Upatissa 1995, p. 189.

<sup>285</sup> Horner 1991, p. 13-17.

principles of a Bodhisatta. According to Venerable Nāgasena the Bodhisatta in this case could not be punished, since he had lost his mind when he became beside himself at the sight of Candavatī, the king's daughter. He was thoroughly confused and agitated at that time. Nāgasena said that evil done by a madman is not of great blame, nor is it so in respect of its ripening in a future state.

The arguments of Venerable Nāgasena can be disputed. The Bodhisatta was healthy before seeing Candavatī. Someone who is mindful and wise should be able to resist temptation; surely, he should be able to control his mind even after seeing a beautiful girl.

### ***(9) Loving-kindness (mettā)***

The perfection of loving-kindness (mettā) is the wish to provide for the welfare and happiness of others. Resentment, rancour and hatred are removed through loving-kindness. For the sake of benefiting others, the Bodhisatta identifies himself with all beings. Through

loving-kindness (*mettā*) he places others before himself. He considers the welfare of others and is always helpful. He is of equal mind towards friends and enemies, towards all beings. He abandons personal deliverance for the sake of the welfare of others.<sup>286</sup>

In former existences, being born as a human being, he had friendship and sympathy for all living beings.<sup>287</sup> He lived for the happiness of the many, as a dispeller of fright and terror. He was a provider of lawful protection and shelter, and supplied all necessities.<sup>288</sup> He reunited those long-lost with relatives, friends and companions who had missed them. He reunited children with parents, brothers with sisters. Long-lost friends and relatives, companions too, he brought together, thus uniting them in joy.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Upatissa 1995, p. 189; Buddhaghosa 1956, p. 353; Bodhi 1978a, p. 260-261, 311; Ledi 2000, p. 4; Nārada 1980, p. 604; D.30:1.10, in: Walshe 1996, p. 445; Horner 1975a, p. 22-23 (II A:159-160); Horner 1978, p. 160-161.

<sup>287</sup> D.30:1.10, in: Walshe 1996, p. 445.

<sup>288</sup> D.30:1.7, in: Walshe 1996, p. 444.

<sup>289</sup> D.30:1.31, in: Walshe 1996, p. 450/451.

A Bodhisatta should have such a heart of sympathy for all beings that he does not feel any resentment towards anyone.<sup>290</sup>

Mettā should be differentiated from personal affection (pema) or ordinary carnal love. From affection comes fear and grief, but not from mettā. Mettā should be extended towards oneself equally with others. Mettā embraces the whole world, including oneself.<sup>291</sup>

### **(10) Equanimity (*upekkhā*)**

The Bodhisatta regards friends, indifferent ones and enemies equally, without hatred and without attachment. He is impartial. He expects no reward in return.<sup>292</sup>

Equanimity dispels attraction and repulsion. Through equanimity the Bodhisatta remains imperturbable in all

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<sup>290</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 297.

<sup>291</sup> Nārada 1980, p. 604-605.

<sup>292</sup> Upatissa 1995, p. 189; Nyānatiloka 1975, p. 371 (IX, 325); Buddhaghosa 1956, p. 352-353 (IX, 124); D.30:1.16/18, in: Walshe 1996, p.446-447.

circumstances, whether others render help or inflict harm.<sup>293</sup>

He reflects that all beings inherit the results of their own past volitional actions.<sup>294</sup> Praise and blame, loss and gain, pain and happiness, amidst all such vicissitudes of life a Bodhisatta tries to stand unmoved like a firm rock, exercising perfect equanimity.<sup>295</sup>

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Just as the pāramīs become thirtyfold through analysis, so they become sixfold through their specific nature: as giving, virtue, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom. The perfection of renunciation is included in the perfections of virtue and meditation. The perfection of truthfulness is partly included in the perfection of virtue and partly in the perfection of wisdom. The perfection of loving-kindness is included in the perfection of meditation.

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<sup>293</sup> Equanimity is not equal to indifference.

<sup>294</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 260-261, 311; Ledi 2000, p. 4, 11; Horner 1975a, p. 23 (II A:164-165); Horner 1978, p. 161-162; Nārada 1980, p. 606-607.

<sup>295</sup> Nārada 1980, p. 606-607.

The perfection of equanimity is included in the perfections of meditation and wisdom. And the perfection of determination is included in all perfections.<sup>296</sup>

It should be noted that in the established Theravāda tradition the pāramīs are not regarded as a discipline peculiar to candidates for Buddhahood alone, but as practices, which must be fulfilled by all aspirants to enlightenment and deliverance, whether as Mahā Bodhisattas, Paccekabuddhas, or disciples. What distinguishes Mahā Bodhisattas from Paccekabuddhas and disciples is the degree to which the pāramīs must be cultivated and the length of time they must be pursued. But the qualities themselves are universal requisites for deliverance, which all must fulfil to at least a minimal degree to gain the fruits of liberation.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Bodhi 1978a, p. 314.

<sup>297</sup> Bodhi 1978, p. 49.

In the Lakkhana Sutta we see that the Bodhisatta did not perform extravagant heroic deeds. His deeds were like those of others; it is only that they were aimed at the benefit and advantage of others. They were also always somewhat more meritorious than the deeds of others. Nevertheless, the Bodhisatta did not attract attention, exactly because his behaviour was not extravagant. He might have won a prominent position but that is not the same as the giving of one's limbs or of one's life.

The real meaning of offering one's life or giving one's limbs is to use one's talents and one's abilities for the sake of others, to be of use to others.



Bodhisatta Metteyya,

Maha Bodhi Temple, Buddha-Gaya, India

## **Survey of Buddhas**

100,000 aeons before the present aeon there was a sāramanda-kappa. Therein arose the Buddhas Tanhankara, Medhankara, Saranankara and Dīpankara.

After that kappa followed a suñña-kappa empty of Buddhas. Then there was a sāra-kappa wherein the Buddha Kondañña arose.

The Buddhas Mangala, Sumana, Revata and Sobhita arose thereafter in a sāramanda-kappa.

It was followed by a suñña-kappa, empty of Buddhas. After the suñña-kappa followed a vara-kappa; therein arose the Buddhas Anomadassin, Paduma and Nārada.

Then again there was a suñña-kappa empty of Buddhas. Hereafter there was a sāra-kappa wherein the Buddha Padumuttara arose.

30,000 aeons before the present aeon there was a manda-kappa; therein arose the Buddhas Sumedha and Sujāta.

18,000 aeons before the present aeon there was a vara-kappa. Therein arose the Buddhas Piyadassin, Atthadassin and Dhammadassin.

94 aeons before the present aeon there was a sāra-kappa, wherein the Buddha Siddhattha arose.

92 aeons before the present aeon there was a manda-kappa. Therein arose the Buddhas Tissa and Phussa.

91 aeons before the present aeon there was a sāra-kappa wherein the Buddha Vipassin arose.

31 aeons before the present aeon there was a manda-kappa. Therein arose the Buddhas Sikhin and Vessabhū.

The present aeon is a bhadda-kappa. Herein arose already the Buddhas Kakusandha, Konāgamana, Kassapa and Gotama. And the Buddha Metteyya will be the next one in this happy aeon.

## 6. Future Buddhas

There have been limitless and countless noble persons in the world who have fulfilled the perfections and attained Buddhahood. In the future, too, there will be limitless and countless Buddhas. It is not possible to compute the number of future Buddhas.<sup>298</sup> The names of more than 20 Buddhas who lived before the present Buddha Gotama are known (see Survey of Buddhas). But it is only the Buddha Dīpankara who is said to have made a prediction to Sumedha that he would become the Buddha Gotama.<sup>299</sup> It is stated in the Pāli Canon that the other Buddhas confirmed that prediction.<sup>300</sup> Presumably they

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<sup>298</sup> Saddhatissa, H. (tr.): *The Birth-Stories of the Ten Bodhisattas and the Dasabodhisattupattikathā, being a Translation and Edition of the Dasabodhisattupattikathā*. London 1975, p. 54.

<sup>299</sup> Horner, I.B.: *Chronicle of Buddhas (Buddhavamsa)*. London 1975 [a], p. 15.

<sup>300</sup> See: Horner 1975a, p. 30 (III.11), 33 (IV.12), 37 (V.18), 39 (VI.12), 42 (VII.13), 45 (VIII.14), 47 (IX.13), 50 (X.15), 53 (XI.12), 56 (XII.13), 59 (XIII.15), 61 (XIV.12),

would also have to confirm the predictions made to other future Buddhas. But this is not recorded in the Pāli Canon.

Relating future Buddhas there is information in the Dasabodhisattuppattikathā. It is a small book with the birth-stories of the ten Bodhisattas who will be future Buddhas. The book was undoubtedly composed at a time when devotees were craving for cult figures like Bodhisattas. Its compilation might have been in South India in the latter part of the 14th century C.E.<sup>301</sup>

### **1. The future Buddha Metteyya**

There are several stories relating to the future Buddha, Metteyya. However they have to be treated with great caution as most of them originated outside the original teaching of the Buddha Gotama as recorded in the Pāli Canon.

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64 (XV.11), 66 (XVI.10), 68 (XVII.10), 71 (XVIII.13), 73 (XIX.9), 75 (XX.13), 78 (XXI.12), 81 (XXII.15), 84 (XXIII.10), 87 (XXIV 12), 91 (XXV 16).

<sup>301</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 19.

After the disappearance of the teaching of the Buddha Gotama, there will arise another Buddha, Metteyya by name.<sup>302</sup> No definite number of years is given for the period between the Buddha Gotama and the Buddha Metteyya.

According to the Anāgatavamsa the Buddha Metteyya will arise ten million years later.<sup>303</sup> The Anāgatavamsa is a poem of 142 verses, a history of the ten future Buddhas. It is written by Kassapa of Cola.<sup>304</sup> It can be dated to the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> D.26 : 24, in: Walshe, Maurice (tr.): *The Long Discourses of the Buddha. A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Kandy 1996, p. 403.

<sup>303</sup> U Chit Tin, Sayagyi; assisted by William Pruitt: *The Coming Buddha Ariya Metteyya*. Kandy 1992 (2nd rev. ed.), The Wheel No. 381/383, p. 29; Pruitt, William (tr.): 'Anāgatavamsa. The Chronicle of the future Buddha,' in: *The Coming Buddha Ariya Metteyya*, Kandy 1992, The Wheel No. 381/383, p. 49 § 5.

<sup>304</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 29.

<sup>305</sup> Norman, K.R.: *Pāli Literature, including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of all the Hīnayāna Schools of Buddhism*. Wiesbaden 1983, p. 161.

Rudolf Steiner, a theosophist, claimed that the Bodhisatta who will be the future Buddha Metteyya was reborn as Jeshu ben Pandira, one hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ. He wrote that exactly 5000 years after the enlightenment of the Buddha Gotama the Bodhisatta would be reborn as the Buddha Metteyya.<sup>306</sup>

According to Ikeda the Bodhisattva Maitreya will appear in the world 5,670,000,000 years after the passing away of the Buddha Gotama.<sup>307</sup> Ikeda did not mention any source for this number.

It is nowhere mentioned in the Pāli Canon that the Buddha Gotama predicted to anybody that he would become the next Buddha or a Buddha in the future. It is mentioned only in the Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta that once there will arise the Buddha Metteyya. It is stated there that in the very distant future the continent of Jambudīpa [= India] will

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<sup>306</sup> Steiner, Rudolf: *Buddha und Christus. Die Sphäre der Bodhisattvas*. Vortrag gehalten im Mailänder Zweig, 21. September 1911.

<sup>307</sup> Ikeda, Daisaku: *Buddhism, the First Millennium*, transl. by Burton Watson, Tokyo, 1977, p. 146.

be powerful and prosperous. At that time Vārānasi will be a royal city called Ketumatī. There will arise a king called Sankha, a wheel-turning monarch. And in that time there will arise in the world a fully-enlightened Buddha, named Metteyya. He will be endowed with wisdom and conduct, a Knower of the worlds, an incomparable Trainer of men to be tamed, a Teacher of gods and humans, enlightened and blessed. He will teach the Dhamma in the spirit and in the letter, and proclaim the holy life in its fullness and purity. He will be attended by a company of thousands of monks.<sup>308</sup>

To become a Mahā Bodhisatta the ten perfections must be developed during at least 100,000 aeons. It is stated that the Buddha Metteyya will be reborn in this auspicious aeon (bhadda kappa).<sup>309</sup> That means the prediction about the Bodhisatta Metteyya must have been made more than 100,000 aeons ago. It is said that he aspired to become a Buddha 16 incalculables (16 asankheyyas) and 100,000 aeons before the present. Now,

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<sup>308</sup> D.26 : 22-25, in: Walshe 1996, p. 403-404.

<sup>309</sup> Horner 1975a, p. 97 (XXVII, 19).

one aeon is traditionally understood to consist of four incalculables; so, if we take this literally, he must have received his first prediction up to 100,004 aeons before the present aeon and he must have received it before the time of the Buddha Dīpankara.

The Rasavāhinī is a collection of edifying tales from Sri Lanka. The author of it is Vedeha and the work can be dated in the 13th or 14th century.<sup>310</sup> It states that it was at the feet of the Buddha Muhutta that the Bodhisatta Metteyya first received a prediction that he would attain Buddhahood. Since then he had fulfilled the perfections (pāramī) for 16 lakhs<sup>311</sup> of incalculable aeons. During this time he had worshipped many Buddhas and received predictions from them as well.<sup>312</sup>

In the Anāgatavamsa it is stated that in this auspicious world cycle, in the future, there will be an Awakened One named Metteyya. At that time there will be a

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<sup>310</sup> Norman 1983, p.155.

<sup>311</sup> One lakh = 100,000.

<sup>312</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p.35-36.

king named Sankha, a Wheel-Turning Monarch of Kusavātī. His royal city will be named Ketumatī. The women will marry at the age of five hundred. One named Ajita will be born, Metteyya, of great power, incomparable. He will be born in a brahman family, with great wealth and possessions. At that time, Metteyya's mother will be named Brahmavātī, his father Subrahma will be the head priest of king Sankha. Four palaces will have come into being for Ajita. Candamukhī will be his wife. Brahmavaddhana will be his son. He will live in a household for eight thousand years. On one occasion he will go to a park for pleasure to amuse himself. Seeing the danger in sensual pleasures and being wise in accordance with the nature of Bodhisattas, he will see the four signs: an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a happy wanderer. Having sympathy for all beings, he will go forth seeking the unsurpassed state of peace. He will undertake the practice of exertion for seven days and he will go forth, leaping up into the air with his palace. On the day that the Wise One goes forth in renunciation, on that very day he will approach the dais of the tree of awakening. In the place of the unconquered leaders of men, on that

supreme seat of awakening, he will be awakened. He will go to the garden Nāgavana and there he will set in motion the incomparable Wheel of the Doctrine. The Nāga tree will be the awakening tree for that Blessed One. The Buddha's lifetime will be 80,000 years. Then, in the midst of the venerable order of disciples who will have done what should be done, that Conqueror will blaze out like a mass of fire, and be extinguished. His Teaching will remain for 180,000 years.<sup>313</sup> After that there will be a terrible disappearance of the true Doctrine in the world.<sup>314</sup>

As we have mentioned above, the Anāgatavamsa is a post-canonical work dated to the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century. It is my opinion that it is a mixture of some Buddhist details and a fairy tale: wish-fulfilling trees (verses 22-26), self-generated rice (verse 27), leaping up with the palace (verse 54).

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<sup>313</sup> This is 2,25 lifetimes only. But since the women marry at the age of 500, the Dhamma in that time might last about 360 generations. And then it is for the weal and happiness of many.

<sup>314</sup> See: Pruitt 1992, p. 54-60 § 5-134.

In the Dasabodhisattuppattikathā it is said that the elder Ajita will be the Buddha named Metteyya in this auspicious aeon.<sup>315</sup> Horner states that in an old Burmese list of Buddhas is written that “The future Buddha Mitryā, having become the junior ordained monk called Acita, in the presence of Kotama Buddha received the prophesy.”<sup>316</sup> Horner cited also a text of the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien in which the last one has recorded that the prophecy about Metteyya (Maitreya) was made in the Deer Park at Isipatana, near the Dhamekh Stupa.<sup>317</sup>

But this is not recorded in the Pāli Canon. Among the five ascetics who were together with the Buddha Gotama, we find the ascetic named Assaji. And this Assaji attained Arahantship! So, he cannot be reborn again, neither in the Tusita Heaven nor as a coming Buddha.

A Venerable Ajita is mentioned in Sutta Nipāta 1032-1039. But no further details are given about his

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<sup>315</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 54-55.

<sup>316</sup> cited in: Horner 1975a, p. xvii, note 2.

<sup>317</sup> cited in: Horner 1975a, p. xvii, note 2.

future.<sup>318</sup> And Malalasekera mentions several other persons with the name Ajita.<sup>319</sup> One was a monk at the Second Council; he cannot be the Bodhisatta. Another was a paribbājaka who visited the Buddha; no further details are known about his future. A third one was the General of the Licchavīs and a follower of the Buddha. After his death he was reborn in the Tāvātimsa heaven. And still another one was a thera who became an Arahant. He cannot be reborn again.

If the Buddha Gotama foretold to a certain Ajita that he would be the coming Buddha Metteyya, then this prediction must have been a confirmation of a prediction made by another Buddha, living many aeons ago.

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<sup>318</sup> Norman, K.R. (tr.): *The Group of Discourses (Sutta-Nipāta)*, Vol. I, London 1984, p. 164; Nyānaponika (Übers.): *Sutta-Nipāta : Früh-buddhistische Lehr-Dichtungen aus dem Pali-Kanon*, (2. revid. Aufl.) Konstanz 1977, p. 210-211.

<sup>319</sup> Malalasekera, G.P.: *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, London 1974, Vol. I, p. 35-37.

According to the commentary on the Anāgatavamsa, Ajita was the son of King Ajātasattu and Queen Kāñcanadevī. When the prince reached the age of 16, the king asked him to take on the Buddha's heritage. The prince agreed and the king took him to the Veluvana Monastery. Prince Ajita was ordained as a novice; later he was ordained as a bhikkhu. The Buddha took him when he went from Rājagaha to Kapilavatthu to reside in the Nigrodhārāma Monastery. While residing there, Maha-Pajāpatī-Gotamī presented two special robes to the Buddha (see M.142). The Buddha refused to accept the robes three times. Then he said that it would be better to present one robe to the Sangha. Venerable Ajita accepted one robe. There was some talk about how an unknown bhikkhu could accept the robe when none of the leading disciples had accepted it. In order to dispel any doubts, the Buddha is recorded as saying: "This bhikkhu is a Bodhisatta who will be the coming Buddha Metteyya."<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> U Chit Tin 1992, p. 18-19.

This story cannot be true. Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī presented the robe to the Buddha at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> rains retreat. At that time Ajātasattu was not a king but a prince. Ajātasattu killed his father in the 37<sup>th</sup> year after the Enlightenment of the Buddha Gotama. And it was after this event that the prince became a king; and it was after this event too that he became a follower of the Buddha. It seems unlikely that before this event he would not have asked his son to become a bhikkhu. And his son was named Udaya, not Ajita. And Vajirā, Pasenadi's daughter, was his wife.<sup>321</sup>

In a text of the *Srī Saddharmāvavāda-Sangrahaya*, a Sinhalese work, cited by Ven. H. Saddhatissa it is written that the Bodhisatta Metteyya in this Buddha-period was conceived in the womb of the wife of the rich householder Sirivaddhana, in the city of Sankassa (near Sāvatti). Given the name Ajita, he grew up amidst great affluence. He studied all the arts and sciences of the age and after the death of his parents he received the great inheritance left

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<sup>321</sup> Malalasekera 1974, Vol. I, p. 31-35.

by them. Having heard the questions and answers between the Buddha Gotama and Sariputta, concerning the virtues, which bring about Buddhahood, he renounced his home and worldly life and became a bhikkhu. He learnt the whole Buddhist Canon and taught it to many hundreds of monks. Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī offered him two lengths of cloth. He offered them to the Buddha Gotama, who predicted: This monk will in the future, in this great auspicious aeon, become a Buddha, by name Metteyya.” This story indicates that the prophecy concerning Metteyya was uttered at the Nigrodha Monastery in Kapilavatthu.<sup>322</sup>

The Chinese traveller Hiueng Tsiang (629 C.E.) refers to the Gridhakūta Hill in Rājagaha, on which, it is said, the same assurance was received on another occasion.

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Which story is true? Is it true that the future Buddha Metteyya was a bhikkhu named Ajita during the time of the Buddha Gotama? And if yes, in which place was the

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<sup>322</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 31-32.

<sup>323</sup> idem, p. 32.

prophecy made: in Isipatana, Rājagaha or Kapilavatthu? According to Ven. H. Saddhatissa it would appear that the prediction was made by the Buddha Gotama on more than one occasion.<sup>324</sup> But the story about Ajita who was given the prediction near the Dhamekh Stupa in Isipatana cannot be true. The other stories seem to be fictitious, stories inserted after the Canon was compiled and mixed with some details of the Dhamma. What is certain is only that the future Buddha will have the name of Metteyya.

We find one more invented story in the Dasabodhisattuppattikathā. It is written in the language used in magical tales, uncommon to the real Buddhist Dhamma. In brief, it is as follows:

The elder Ajita will be the Buddha named Metteyya in this auspicious aeon. He will have a lifespan of 82,000 years. In the past the Bodhisatta Metteyya was born in the Kuru country, in the city of Indapatta. He was the emperor named Sankha. From the four gates of his capital city sprang up wish-bestowing trees. Then the Buddha Sirimata

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<sup>324</sup> idem, p. 32.

arose in the world. Going from village to village, he arrived within the precincts of the kingdom of the emperor Sankha. The emperor heard of the arrival of the Buddha Sirimata, who at that time resided in Pubbārāma with a great bhikkhu-sangha. The emperor Sankha renounced his kingdom and relatives. He proceeded on foot to Pubbārāma. During the first day of his journey on foot, the soles of his feet split open. On the second day they began to bleed; on the third day he was unable to walk any further. Then he went on his knees using the palms of his hands as support. On the fourth day his knees and palms bled. So he began creeping on his chest. Then the Buddha Sirimata surveyed the world and saw his mighty effort. And he thought: "This Sankha is certainly a Buddha-sprout" (= Bodhisatta). In the guise of a youth and in a chariot he went to meet him. The Buddha Sirimata asked the emperor Sankha to get into his chariot. The emperor consented and they went to Pubbārāma. On the way the emperor got food and drink. In the monastery the Buddha discarded the youthful form and sat down on the Buddha-seat. The emperor entered the Pubbārāma, venerated the Teacher and sat down on one

side. And he asked: "Please give me a discourse that would bring me peace." Then the Buddha Sirimata taught a discourse connected with nibbāna. The emperor asked the Buddha not to preach more, because he thought that he had no suitable offering to make for it. Then the emperor Sankha said to the Exalted One Sirimata: "Venerable Sir, you preach the Dhamma culminating in nibbāna. I too would pay homage to your doctrine with my head. By this giving of the head I will attain nibbāna." And he cut off his head with his nails. The offering of the head and the sacrifice of his life was called the highest perfection. Having passed away, he was reborn in the Tusita heaven as the deity Sankha. Thus, by the offering of his head, he will become the Exalted One Metteyya.<sup>325</sup>

This story seems to be fictitious. We find for example: wish-bestowing trees; cutting off the head with the nails – the nails must have been very long and sharp and strong! And what is more, normally the Buddha Gotama started with a discourse about giving (generosity), about

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<sup>325</sup> idem, p. 54-61.

morality and about a better world (the heavens), and after that he explained the Four Noble Truths (including Nibbāna). According to Ven. H. Saddhatissa the Dasabodhisattuppattikathā may well be the result of the influences of certain popular Hindu and Mahāyānist practices. There is a great admixture of non-Buddhist practices in the book, such as elements of self-destruction and bloody sacrifice. He wrote that possibly it was compiled at a place where non-Buddhist religions had influenced the thoughts of nescient Buddhists.<sup>326</sup>

The Buddha Metteyya will be the last Buddha to arise in this world cycle. According to Ven. U Chit Tin it will be possible to be reborn in the time of the Buddha Metteyya through the fruit of good actions. The following actions are the basis of meritorious action (puñña): if one encounters the Teachings of the Buddha Gotama, if one gives gifts (dāna), observes morality (sīla), and cultivates development

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<sup>326</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 19.

of the mind (bhāvanā). Through these actions a person can be assured of rebirth in the higher planes of existence.<sup>327</sup>

The Anāgatavamsa states that one has to act rightly, firmly, energetically in order to see the Buddha Metteyya here. Whoever does good things here and dwells vigilant, whoever esteems the great Buddha, pays honour to him, that person together with the Devas will see the auspicious assembly at that time. One should practise the holy life, give suitable gifts, keep the observance days, practise loving-kindness carefully and perform meritorious actions always. Having acted skilfully here, one will make an end of misery.<sup>328</sup>

The Dasabodhisattuppattikathā states that the Dispensation of the Exalted One Metteyya will last for a long period, and that after the lapse of a long period, this great earth will be burnt by the fire, which brings about the destruction of an aeon. After the close of this auspicious aeon, there will be one asankheyya (incalculable period)

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<sup>327</sup> U Chit Tin 1992, p. 44-45.

<sup>328</sup> Pruitt 1992, p. 60-61 § 138-142.

empty of Buddhas.<sup>329</sup> There will be no Buddha, Dhamma or Sangha for gods and men.<sup>330</sup>

Other Buddhas will follow the Buddha Metteyya. Besides the present Bodhisatta the names of nine succeeding Bodhisattas are given in the Dasabodhi-sattupattikathā or Account of the Arising of Ten Bodhisattas.<sup>331</sup> Only Metteyya will arise in this present aeon. The stories and the names of the others are fictitious. But there must be other Bodhisattas, of course, who received a declaration, a prophecy, from a living Buddha.

The stories of the nine other Bodhisattas follow here in brief.

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<sup>329</sup> According to Theravāda tradition there will be one *suñña-kappa* (= 4 times an *asankheyya*) after this auspicious aeon.

<sup>330</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 62 (II.19).

<sup>331</sup> Horner 1975a, p. xxix.



The 10 future Buddhas, painted on the ceiling in the Main Temple of the Siam Nikaya, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

(courtesy of Mrs. Khanti Salgado)

## **2. The Buddha Rāma**

The dispensation of the Buddha Metteyya will last a long time. And after a long period this earth will be burnt by fire. After the end of this auspicious aeon there will be one asankheyya empty of Buddhas. Then there will come a manda aeon in which two Buddhas will appear, namely Rāma and Dhammarāja.

In the time of the Buddha Kassapa there lived a young man named Nārada. When he saw the Buddha Kassapa he thought it worthwhile to give his life for the Buddha. And he burnt himself, like a torch.<sup>332</sup> Then the Buddha Kassapa foretold that Nārada would be the Buddha Rāma. After his death he was reborn in the Tusita heaven. From there he will be reborn in a family that has performed

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<sup>332</sup> This is not the correct way according to mainstream Theravāda. This is discussed further after these nine stories.

the perfections during 100,000 aeons. And then he will be the Buddha Rāma.<sup>333</sup>

### **3. *The Buddha Dhammarājā***

In the time of the Buddha Konāgamana lived a young man named Suddha. He guarded lotuses in a lake. He sold two flowers every day. Once the Buddha Konāgamana foretold him that he would be the future Buddha Dhammarājā.<sup>334</sup> Then the young man offered two flowers to the Exalted One. He protected him against the heat of the sun with two pieces of cloth. After his death he was reborn in one of the deva-realms. From there he was reborn as King Pasenadi from Kosala. After the fulfilling of

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<sup>333</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 62-63.

<sup>334</sup> At that time Suddha had not made an aspiration to become a future Buddha. And in the story nowhere is it mentioned that he aspired to become a Buddha.

the perfections he will be reborn as the Buddha

Dhammarājā.<sup>335</sup>

#### **4. *The Buddha Dhammassāmi***

After the destruction of the manda aeon by fire, there will come a sāra aeon. Herein one Buddha will arise, namely Dhammassāmi.

In the time of the Buddha Kassapa there lived a great general named the minister Bodhi. King Kikī, the ruler, had forbidden the giving of alms to the Buddha. Yet the minister Bodhi liked to give food to the Buddha, even if death might be the result. Before visiting the Buddha he was captured by the king's guards who bound him and brought him to the king. He was sentenced to death and was taken to the cemetery. By his supernormal power the Buddha Kassapa appeared before the guards and the minister and said: "Give alms as far as you are able to do,

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<sup>335</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 64-66.

and be happy.” But the minister had nothing to give since everything had been taken away. Now, by the power of the Buddha food appeared before the minister who took his portion of the rice and robes and offered them to the Buddha. Then he made an aspiration to be a future Buddha by the merits of that gift, and the Buddha foretold that the aspiration would succeed. Hereafter the executioners cut off the head of the minister Bodhi. He was reborn in the Tusita heaven and, as a result of the giving of his life for the Buddha, and after having lived as Abhibhū king of the gods, will be the future Buddha Dhammassāmi.

After the sāra aeon a lakkhana aeon will follow empty of Buddhas. It will be followed by a manda aeon in which two Buddhas arise, namely Nārada and Ramsimuni.

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## **5. The Buddha Nārada**

Rāhu-asurinda (chief of the Asuras), known as Dīghasona, will become the Buddha Nārada. Before the time

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<sup>336</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 67-70.

of the Buddha Kassapa he was a king named Sirigutta. One day eight brahmins approached him and begged for the kingdom. He was extremely happy and offered the city to them. Together with his wife and his two children he left the city and entered the jungle. He climbed the mountain Dhammika and built a hermitage where they lived a pure life.

At that place lived the demon Yanta. One day he was unable to allay his hunger. Disguised in the form of a brahmin he went to King Sirigutta and begged for the children, saying: "If you give me your children, you will be a Buddha in the future." King Sirigutta was delighted with these words and he gave his children to the demon and he made an aspiration to be a Buddha.

Then the demon took the children, cut them up and ate them. Even though he saw this still Sirigutta's heart did not tremble.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 71-73. – This story is somewhat like that of Vessantara. About the giving of one's own children, see the story of Vessantara.

## **6. The Buddha Ramsimuni**

In the same aeon the brahmin Cankī will be the Buddha Ramsimuni.

In the time of the Exalted One Kakusandha the Bodhisatta Cankī was a youth named Magha. Several times he encountered with great disasters, lost his wealth and was crushed with suffering. He borrowed a blanket and a lakh of gold.

Then a chief disciple of Kakusandha went to the city. The youth Magha saw him, saluted him and, having heard that the chief disciple had come to meet him, he was delighted. He offered the blanket and the lakh of gold to the chief disciple and he made the aspiration: "May this be a factor for the All-knowing Knowledge." The Elder said: "May your intention be successful." Then he rose up in the sky and disappeared.

On another occasion the Elder said that Cankī was a Buddha-sprout, one who has fulfilled all the perfections.

After that manda aeon there will be another manda aeon during which two Buddhas: Devadeva and Narasīha will arise.<sup>338</sup>

## **7. The Buddha Devadeva**

The brahmin Subha will appear as the Buddha Devadeva.

In the time of the Buddha Konāgamana the brahmin Subha was the Elephant-king, Chaddanta. One day a disciple of the Buddha Konāgamana finally passed away. The Elephant-king saw the dead body and, wishing for All-knowing Knowledge, he thought of cremating the body.<sup>339</sup> He cut off his two tusks with a saw and made a funeral pile with one and a casket with the other. The god Vissakamma helpt him to complete the work. Taking the remains from the funeral pile, he deposited them in the casket, making devotional homage to the relics.

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<sup>338</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 74-75.

<sup>339</sup> Are animals able to have such thoughts and wishes?

The relics rose up into the sky and were received by the gods. Then the Elephant-king Chaddanta made the aspiration to be a Buddha. At the end of his life he was reborn in the Tusita heaven.<sup>340</sup>

### **8. The Buddha Narasīha**

On the disappearance of the dispensation of the Buddha Devadeva, in that same aeon the brahmin Todeyya will become a Buddha named Narasīha.

When the dispensation of the Buddha Kassapa had ended and that of our Buddha Gotama had not begun, between those times the brahmin Todeyya was born as the youth Nanda. One day he worshipped a Paccekabuddha, offered a blanket and a lakh of gold and he made an aspiration that in future he, too,<sup>341</sup> would become a Buddha: “May I attain All-knowing Knowledge.”

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<sup>340</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 78-79.

<sup>341</sup> Why is the word ‘too’ used here? He offered his gift to a Paccekabuddha, not to a Perfect Buddha.

The Paccekabuddha said: "May your wish be successful," and left the village.

Nanda was reborn in Tāvatisa heaven. Having died there, and practising the perfections in different lives, he was reborn as the brahmin Todeyya. As the result of his generosity he will be the Buddha Narasīha.<sup>342</sup>

At the end of that aeon there will be an aeon empty of Buddhas. At the end of that empty aeon there will be a manda aeon adorned by two Buddhas: Tissa and Sumangala.<sup>343</sup>

## **9. The Buddha Tissa**

During the time of the Buddha Konāgamana the great king Dhammarājā reigned in the city of Campā. He had five sons. The Bodhisatta, formerly the elephant Dhanapāla, was reborn there as the eldest son

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<sup>342</sup> The gift was made to a Paccekabuddha, not to a Perfect Buddha. And there is no prophecy.

<sup>343</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 80-81.

Dhammasena. All the sons studied at Takkasilā.<sup>344</sup> After their studies they went in different directions. The four younger sons died, and Dhammasena was anointed as the new king. One day he went with his wife and his two children to a river to enjoy themselves. Then a demon, wishing to eat the children, took the guise of a brahmin and begged for the children. The Bodhisatta was delighted and, thinking him to be a true brahmin, gave him his children. Then he made an aspiration to become a Buddha in the future. The demon ate the children and went back to the forest.

Returning to the city the king reached the city-gate and saw a miserable old man. He asked: "What is the problem?" The old man replied that he had no wife and no son. Then the king wanted to give his queen. But the old man said that he could not take care of her as she was used to a rich royal lifestyle. Then the king gave his whole kingdom to the old man, again making the aspiration: "May I become a Buddha in the future by this gift."

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<sup>344</sup> Takkasila = Taxila.

The king became an ascetic and travelled through the sky to the Himālayas, to the sages with whom he lived after his study in Takkasila. At that period the Exalted One Konāgamana appeared in the world. Once a disciple of that Buddha went to the sages and spoke about the Buddha. The ascetic Dhammasena, leaving the Himālayas, came to the Buddha Konāgamana. Seeing the Tathāgata he was filled with joy and he begged for a Dhamma-talk. Then the Exalted One taught the Dhamma in detail, leading to Nibbāna. And the Bodhisatta Dhammasena thought: "The teachings of the Tathāgata are to be venerated exceedingly. Only the offering of the head is suitable."

Thinking so, he bowed down and cut his neck with his nails.<sup>345</sup> Immediately the head separated from the body and fell off. He was reborn in the Tusita heaven. In the future he will be the Buddha Tissa.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> The Buddha would not have approved this behaviour. And there is no prophecy by the Buddha!

<sup>346</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 82-87.

## **10. The Buddha Sumangala**

In the same manda aeon the elephant-king Pārileyya will be the Buddha Sumangala. In the past that elephant Pārileyya was the wheel-turning Emperor Panāda and ruled the whole of Jambudīpa. Afterwards, the Exalted One Kakusandha appeared in the world.

A householder saw the Exalted One and, not knowing that he was a Buddha, asked the Exalted One: "O young man, what is your name?" The Buddha Kakusandha said: "I am called Satthā (teacher)."- "Why are you called Satthā?" - "I am the teacher of the thirty-one planes." Thereafter the Buddha spoke about other qualities of a Buddha.

The householder went to the Emperor Mahāpanāda and explained him the virtues of the Buddha. The Emperor asked the chaplain: "Are these virtues of the Buddha correct?" The chaplain said: "O king, no one else has such virtues, certainly these are correct."

The Emperor then decided he would like to pay homage to the Buddha but before doing so he established the householder in supremacy over himself. Then he went

alone on foot in the direction of the Exalted One. At the foot of a tree he sat down, bowed and made an asseveration of truth: "If my confidence regarding the triple gem is unshakeable, may an ascetic's requisites suitable for a bhikkhu appear."

The Exalted One Kakusandha, surveying the world, saw the intention of the Emperor and out of compassion he resolved: "May the eight requisites go through the sky and appear before him." The Emperor, taking the requisites, said: "With these eight requisites I shall be freed from the suffering of samsāra. May I attain noble Nibbāna."<sup>347</sup> He became an ascetic, developed the meditation about the 32 parts of the body,<sup>348</sup> and through the power of that concentration he travelled through the sky to the presence of the Exalted One.

Then the Emperor Mahāpanāda, seated in midst of the bhikkhu-sangha, saw the Exalted One and offered him roots and fruits. At the end of the meal he begged the

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<sup>347</sup> Who taught him about Nibbāna? Did he know what this word means?

<sup>348</sup> Who taught him this meditation?

teacher: "Teach me one dhamma." And the Buddha Kakusandha preached a Dhamma-discourse connected with Nibbāna.

Then the Emperor Mahāpanāda, having heard the Dhamma to this extent, said: "Exalted One, please stop teaching Dhamma. It is better that I sacrifice my life for the Dhamma. By my gift of life, may I become a Buddha in the future." And he cut his neck with his nails. Immediately the head broke away from the neck.<sup>349</sup> Having died there, he was reborn in the Tusita heaven.

Through the fruit of the gift of offering his life the Bodhisatta Pārileyya will, in the future, become the Buddha Sumangala.<sup>350</sup>

### ***Review of the stories***

If the foregoing stories are true, then the predictions, made by the living Buddhas, must have been

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<sup>349</sup> The original story says: "Immediately the neck broke away from the head."

<sup>350</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 88-92.

confirmations of predictions made aeons earlier. And there are several inconsistencies. They will be discussed here briefly.

In story 2 the young man Nārada burnt himself. The Buddha would not have approved this. This is not the correct way. Killing oneself as a sacrifice for the Buddha or his Dhamma will be discussed later.

The young man Suddha (story 3) was visited by the Buddha Konāgamana who foretold that he would be a Buddha in the future. Yet, in that story nowhere is it mentioned that Suddha made an aspiration for Buddhahood.

The minister Bodhi (story 4) presented a gift to the Buddha Kassapa, which gift was created earlier by the supernatural power of that Exalted One. Is there any merit in a gift provided by the supernatural power of a Buddha? And can this gift be called a perfection? What special deed was done by the minister to get the offerings? It is also mentioned that he offered rice and robes. But who presented the robes to him? According to the story, he got

only the rice from the Buddha Kassapa. This story also doesn't make clear why he is suitable to be a Bodhisatta. And if he made the aspiration for the first time in the time of the Buddha Kassapa, it is not possible that he, after such a short period, will be reborn as a Buddha. At least 100,000 aeons are needed to fulfil the perfections.

In story 5 we are told that Dīghasona, chief of the asuras, will be a future Buddha. But only human beings, and of them only men, can become Perfect Enlightened Ones. It is not possible that an asura will become a Buddha. And there is a prediction made by the demon Yanta to the king Sirigutta; but that prediction has no value at all.

In story 6 the aspiration is made in the presence of a Chief Disciple and not in the presence of a living Buddha. That aspiration cannot possibly succeed because according to the Theravāda tradition it will have success only if made in the presence of a living Buddha!

The elephant-king Chaddanta (story 7) wished for Buddhahood. Are animals able to have such high aspirations? And the rest of this story is unbelievable as well.

In story 8 the youth Nanda offered gifts to a Paccekabuddha who lived in the period between the Buddha Kassapa and the Buddha Gotama. How did Nanda know about a Buddha, when he was living in a time in which no Buddhas appear?! And Nanda made an aspiration for Buddhahood. But that aspiration will not succeed because it was not made in the presence of a living Buddha.

King Dhammarājā (story 9) gave his children to a demon disguised as a brahmin. As argued earlier the giving of the children may perhaps be useful for the father, but not for the children. And the king also wanted to give his wife to an old man showing he had no respect for the feelings of his wife and children. The aspiration of the king was not made in the presence of a living Buddha so it cannot have Buddhahood as a result.

In story 10 it is stated that the elephant-king Pārileyya will be the future Buddha Sumangala. But in the Theravāda teachings only human beings can become Perfect Enlightened Ones and it would not be possible for an elephant to become a Buddha. Compare also story 5.

In story 10 we find also that the emperor Mahāpanāda became an ascetic and developed the meditation about the 32 parts of the body. Was this kind of meditation already known before the time of the Buddha, or is it a specific Buddhist meditation? If the last is correct, then who taught him that meditation? Further he had confidence in the Triple Gem and asked for the requisites suitable for a bhikkhu. How did he know about the Dhamma and the Sangha? So far he had only heard about the Buddha.

In the foregoing stories 2, 9, 10, and in the story about Ajita we find the giving of the life for the Buddha. In all those stories that giving was useless. The Buddha was not saved by the gift of offering the life. And he was not

honoured by it either. Surely it is much better to spend one's whole life, day by day, practising the Dhamma and being a good example for others, even in difficult circumstances.

Self-immolation or burning oneself is not sanctioned in Pāli literature as a means to sanctification or as a kind of heroism or meritorious deed. The appearance of stories like this probably shows the influence of popular Mahāyāna and other folk-lore of the times. The Buddha denounced extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification as ignoble and unworthy practices. Offering amputated parts of the body to the Dhamma is not in keeping with the original teaching of the Buddha. The Dhamma is not merely to be worshipped but practised and for this one requires the body as healthy and complete as possible.<sup>351</sup>

The Buddha taught in the Mahā-Parinibbana Sutta the following about worshipping to the highest degree:

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<sup>351</sup> Saddhatissa 1975, p. 103, note 42, and p. 102, note 35.

“In full bloom are the twin Sāla trees ... And celestial flowers and heavenly sandalwood powder from the sky rain down upon the body of the Tathāgata ... and heavenly instruments make music in the air, out of reverence for the Tathāgata. Yet, not thus is the Tathāgata respected, venerated, esteemed, worshipped and honoured in the highest degree. But whatsoever bhikkhu or bhikkhuni, lay man or lay woman abides by the Teaching, lives uprightly in the Teaching, walks in the way of the Teaching, it is by him or her that the Tathāgata is respected, venerated, esteemed, worshipped and honoured in the highest degree.”

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And in the Kūtadanta Sutta (D.5) the following are mentioned as right sacrifices, in due order:

\* Perpetual gifts kept up in a family where they are given specially to virtuous recluses.

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<sup>352</sup> D.16: chapter V, 5-6, in: Vajira, Sister (tr.): *Last Days of the Buddha. The Mahā-Parinibbāna Sutta. Being the 16th text of the Dīgha-Nikāya*, Kandy 1964, The Wheel No. 67/69, p. 58-59.

\* The putting up of a dwelling place (vihāra) on behalf of the Order.

\* Taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and (Ariya)Sangha.

\* Taking up the five precepts with a trusting heart.

\* The conversion of a hearer; his renunciation of the world and ordination as a monk.

\* Observance of the monk's Precepts.

\* Fearlessness and confidence due to virtue.

\* Sense-control.

\* Mindfulness and full awareness.

\* Contentedness.

\* Conquest of the five Hindrances.

\* Entering the Jhānas.

\* Insight-knowledge.

\* Attaining of Nibbāna.

There is no performance of a sacrifice higher than these! <sup>353</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Rhys Davids, T.W. (tr.): *Kūṭadanta Sutta (The Wrong Sacrifice and the Right)*, Kandy 1968, The Wheel No. 120.

In this list there is no mention of giving the head or other parts of the body to the Buddha or to the Dhamma or to the Sangha. The killing of oneself is an extreme action and does not belong to the original teaching of the Buddha.

The conclusion is that the stories about the ten future Buddhas are later compositions. It is difficult to see how these stories could even be used for educational purposes. These stories could be said to be in conflict with the true teachings of the Buddha who taught the middle path avoiding the two extremes.



Bodhisatta Metteyya, Temple of the Army, Panagoda, Homagama, Sri Lanka

(courtesy of Ven. R. Seewali)

## **7. Conclusion**

In the Theravāda tradition there are three types of Bodhisattas, namely the Sāvaka Bodhisatta, the Pacceka Bodhisatta and the Mahā Bodhisatta. Each of these types will attain Enlightenment. The difference is that the Sāvaka Bodhisatta is an Arahant, he attains Enlightenment as a disciple of a Buddha. The Pacceka Bodhisatta attains Enlightenment through his own efforts but he is not able to teach the Dhamma to others. To become a Buddha takes a vast length of time and an enormous amount of effort. During that time the aspirant is called a Mahā Bodhisatta or in short, a Bodhisatta. He attains Enlightenment with his own effort and, in addition, he is able to teach the Dhamma to gods and men.

Before he decides to become the human being who will become a Buddha, the Mahā Bodhisatta could have already attained Nibbāna; that is to say he could have

attained Enlightenment. He could have made an end of his suffering. But instead of that he gives it up and remains living as a common human, without special physical qualities. During immeasurably long periods of time he practises the ten perfections to become a teacher of gods and men.<sup>354</sup> The career of a Mahā Bodhisatta starts with his firm resolution to become a Buddha, together with the prediction of a living Buddha that his aspiration will succeed.

In Mahāyāna the ideal of Arahantship, the career of the Sāvaka Bodhisatta, was replaced by the ideal of the Bodhisattva, the Saint who out of compassion lives only for others. He aims at Buddhahood in order to liberate all other living beings. The Arahant is considered inferior to the Bodhisattva; for the Arahant is only a disciple-follower, the Bodhisattva tries to attain Buddhahood. The Bodhisattva has heard the Dhamma as well. Both Arahants and Bodhisattvas strive after the same goal: deliverance from suffering. It is also argued that the Arahant is selfish because he only aims

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<sup>354</sup> He becomes a teacher of gods and men, not of animals, asuras, demons, unhappy spirits, beings in hell.

at his own liberation. This conception of the Arahant is not correct. The Arahant has attained Perfect Enlightenment by following the teaching of the Buddha as a disciple. The ideal of Arahantship is not selfish at all. For Arahantship is gained only by eradicating all forms of selfishness. In Majjhima Nikāya 27 (Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta) a description can be found of one who aims at Arahantship. A summary of it follows here.

He gives up the killing of living beings. He has laid aside the cudgel and the knife and is modest and merciful, compassionate to all that lives. He gives up taking what is not given, and lives aloof, refraining from lust. He gives up lying, speaks the truth and deceives not the world. He gives up traducing speech. What he has heard here, he does not repeat elsewhere. He becomes one who unites the divided, encourages those who are friends, enjoys concord, and speaks words that make for concord. He gives up harsh talk. His words are pleasing to the ear, going to the heart, agreeable to many. He gives up frivolous chatter. He speaks what is true and meaningful, he is a speaker at the right

time. He becomes one who refrains from injuring seeds and plants. He becomes one who refrains from accepting gold and silver, from accepting women and girls, bondsmen and bondswomen. He becomes one who refrains from accepting sheep and goats, poultry and pigs, cattle, fields and lands. He becomes one who refrains from the crooked acts of bribery, trickery and deception. He becomes one who refrains from cutting, killing, putting in bonds, robbing, plundering, and violence.<sup>355</sup>

The Arahant has given up and refrains from all that is mentioned here. And there is nothing selfish in it. Further, the Arahant has overcome every form of pride and egoism. He has practised the four great virtues of loving kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), sympathy (muditā), and

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<sup>355</sup> See: M.27 in: Soma Thera (tr.): *The Lesser Discourse of the Buddha on the Elephant-footprint Simile*, Kandy 1960, Bodhi Leaves No. B.5, p. 20-26; see also: Neumann, Karl Eugen (Übers.): *Die Reden Gotamo Buddhos. Aus der mittleren Sammlung Majjhimanikāyo des Pālo-Kanons*, Wien 1956, (Die Elefantenspur), p. 202-204; Horner, I.B. (Transl.): *The Collection of the Middle length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya)*, Vol. I. : The first fifty discourses (Mūlapaṇṇāsa). Oxford 2000, p. 224-226.

equanimity (upekkhā). He or she is actively involved in helping others; it is the natural expression of having attained to Arahantship.<sup>356</sup>

The Arahant of Theravāda is sometimes compared with the Bodhisattva of Mahāyāna. Such comparison is misleading. In Mahāyāna it is said that the Bodhisattva has attained Nirvāṇa but that he refrains from definitive extinction to help others. He becomes a saviour, who takes the burden of others upon him. According to Theravāda this is not possible. The Arahant, the one who has attained Nibbāna already in this life, will not be reborn again. The Bodhisattva of Mahāyāna will be reborn again and again. According to the teaching of Theravāda this means that he did not even attain the first stage of holiness, the entering of the stream to Nibbāna. Nor is it possible in Theravāda for the burden of one person to be carried by somebody else.

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<sup>356</sup> Katz, Nathan: *Buddhist Images of Human Perfection. The Arahant of the Sutta Pitaka Compared with the Bodhisattva and the Mahāsiddha*. Delhi 1989, p. 165-166, 190, 194-202 and 265.

Unwholesome kamma results cannot be removed by others, nor can good kamma results be transferred to others. The kammic results (vipāka) of good or bad deeds can be experienced only by that person themselves in this life or in future lives. Everybody must strive for his or her own liberation. It is not possible to gain salvation from suffering by the mercy of a Bodhisattva. Herein the doctrines of Theravāda and Mahāyāna differ from each other. It is true that in Theravāda petas (unhappy spirits) might be liberated from their unhappy existence by the transference of merit. The donator of the gifts will keep the fruits of the giving. But by the transference there will be created a divine counterpart of that gift. In that way the peta will be liberated from suffering.<sup>357</sup> This however is quite different from being redeemed from all suffering by a Bodhisattva. The Eightfold Path is available to everybody, not just by the

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<sup>357</sup> See A.X.177 in: Nyanatiloka (Übers.): *Die Lehrreden des Buddha aus der Angereichten Sammlung Anguttara-Nikāya*. 3. revid. Neuauflage, Köln 1969, Bd. 5, p. 119-121; or in: Winternitz, M.: *Der ältere Buddhismus nach Texten des Tipitaka*, 2. erw. Aufl., Tübingen 1929, p. 96-97.

extremely talented. Everybody must strive after Nibbāna themselves; everybody must exert their own willpower. If one permits all things to happen passively, without more ado, what will happen? Will it be possible to attain salvation in that way? – No! One must exert oneself. The saying “There are only empty phenomena” can be misinterpreted. It may lead many to inactivity, sloth and fatalism or to wrong conclusions. There is also the ability to choose our actions. If everything happened for no reason or deterministically, then nobody would be responsible for his or her own deeds.<sup>358</sup>

According to Mahāyāna everyone is already a Buddha by nature.<sup>359</sup> That means that everybody is a Bodhisattva, a being destined for perfect Enlightenment. But

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<sup>358</sup> And if one continues to be attached to the teaching of not-self, to emptiness, then one cannot attain salvation. The Dhamma is a means to reach the other shore. One should not carry the vessel after reaching that shore. The teaching of the Buddha is like a map, which is not needed anymore as soon as the goal is reached.

<sup>359</sup> King, Sallie B.: *Buddha Nature*. Albany 1991, p. 1-2, 42; Conze, Edward: *A Short History of Buddhism*. (repr.) London 1986, p. 62.

how can this be? It is true that everybody has the possibility to attain Enlightenment. But not everybody will reach that high goal. The Buddha taught that some persons will attain the goal, and others will not. It depends on the path one follows. If one takes the wrong way, he or she will never attain the goal. For, the Buddha is only a Teacher, not a Saviour. He shows us the way. But that way we must follow ourselves. Nobody else can go in our place. On one occasion this was clearly explained by the Buddha. A brahman asked him this question: "Do all disciples attain Nibbāna, or do some not attain it?" The Blessed One replied: "Some of my disciples, on being exhorted and instructed by me, attain the unchanging goal, Nibbāna; some do not attain it. – What is the reason? – A man might come and ask the way to Rājagaha. And you show him the way, show him how he has to walk. But that man, although he has been exhorted and instructed, might take the wrong road and go westward. Then a second man might come along wanting to go to Rājagaha. You instruct him in the same way. Exhorted and instructed thus, he might get to Rājagaha safely. What is the cause, what is the reason that, since Rājagaha does

exist, since the way leading to Rājagaha exists, the one man may take the wrong road and go westward, while the other man may get to Rājagaha safely?" The brahman said: "In this matter I only show the way." ... "Even so, brahman, Nibbāna does exist, the way leading to Nibbāna exists and I exist as an adviser. But some of my disciples, on being exhorted and instructed thus by me, attain Nibbāna, and some do not. The Tathāgata only shows the way!"<sup>360</sup>

In Mahāyana the Bodhisattva is a saint with supernormal powers. But in Theravāda the Bodhisatta has not attained any stage of holiness during his long career. Yet it is often claimed that he has some of those qualities. However, it could be said that it is more difficult for a person without supernormal powers to practice the Dhamma amidst the difficulties of life than for one who has them.

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<sup>360</sup> See: Horner, I.B. (tr.): 'Discourse to Ganaka-Moggalāna (Majjhima Nikāya No. 107)', in: *Taming the Mind. Discourses of the Buddha*. Kandy 1973, The Wheel No. 51, p. 2-10.

Practise, development and, finally, perfection of the ten virtues lead to the attainment of perfect Enlightenment. These virtues are called the pāramīs, perfections. The Bodhisatta has to practice all of them to the highest degree of perfection. Sometimes he is aware that he is striving after Buddhahood, sometimes he is not.

During his last existence the Bodhisatta lives as a human male. In several stories it is claimed that in other existences he had lived as an animal. It seems reasonable to question how a Bodhisatta may be reborn in a lower world of existence. He performs only good activities, or at least he should. So rebirth as a human being or in one of the heavens should be the result. Does any animal have the necessary qualities to be able to practise any of the pāramīs? Is an animal able to have compassion for other animals or for human beings? Will it be possible to try to follow the perfections if one lives in the animal world? It appears to be doubtful.

All things are impermanent and subject to change. This characteristic of existence is the "creator" of time and therefore time is endless. In this endless circle of time there have been, according to Theravāda tradition, innumerable persons in the past who fulfilled the perfections and attained Buddhahood. And in the future too there will be innumerable Buddhas. A living Buddha predicts that all of those striving to fulfil the perfections will become a Perfectly Enlightened One, sammā sambuddha. So, at the moment there live many Bodhisattas somewhere in the worlds of existence.

According to Theravāda only one person receives from a living Buddha the prediction that he is a Bodhisatta, a future Buddha. Others may get a confirmation of a prediction that was made by a previous Buddha. According to Mahāyāna the path to Buddhahood may be followed by many simultaneously.

From much of the above examination of various texts it is clear that a number of erroneous beliefs and fanciful stories have emerged about Bodhisattas over the

centuries. Therefore one must be careful and what is not credible must be separated from what is credible and in conformity with the teachings in the Pāli Canon. Therefore only very few things are reliable concerning the Bodhisatta in Theravāda.

Laypeople are, perhaps, best advised to take as their example a good lay follower rather than a monk (bhikkhu) or nun (bhikkhunī). For the way of laypeople is quite different from that of members of the Sangha.<sup>361</sup> The best layman we know is the Bodhisatta. And even if one does not follow the way to Buddhahood but the path to Arahantship, yet the Bodhisatta can be an example for all of us. The pāramīs can be followed as guide by everybody for they need not be fulfilled to the highest degree. The layman might take the Bodhisatta as an example by thinking:

May I be generous and helpful.

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<sup>361</sup> See: A. II, 131-134, in: Nyanatiloka (Übers.): *Die Lehrreden des Buddha aus der Angereichten Sammlung Anguttara-Nikāya*. 3. revid. Neuauflage, Köln 1969, Bd. 1, p. 87.

May I be pure, virtuous and well disciplined.

May I not be selfish and greedy, but unselfish and non-greedy.

May I be wise and may I be able to give the benefit of my knowledge and wisdom to others.

May I be diligent, energetic and persevering.

May I be patient and tolerant; may I be able to endure the wrongs of others.

May I be honest and truthful.

May I be steadfast, resolute and determined.

May I be kind and compassionate.

May I be humble, calm, imperturbable and peaceful.

In this way the path of the Bodhisatta can be followed by any layman or lay woman. And in this respect Mahāyāna and Theravāda do not differ very much from each other.



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## **Abbreviations**

A = Anguttara Nikāya

BHU = Banaras Hindu University

BMS = Buddhist Missionary Society

BPS = Buddhist Publication Society

D = Dīgha Nikāya

M = Majjhima Nikāya

PTS = Pali Text Society

S = Samyutta Nikāya

[s.a.] = sine anno (without year)