

APROPOS ARIYA METTEYYA AND THE MAHĀSAMPINĀNIDĀNA

Information from the Theravāda tradition concerning the future Buddha Metteyya (Sanskrit:Maitreya) has been presented by Sayagyi U Chit Tin in a publication called *The Coming Buddha Ariya Metteyya*.¹ Very little has been said of Buddha Metteyya in the Pali Canon itself but many details are added in the Pali commentaries and later texts in the Theravāda tradition.² Besides giving information from the commentaries and details from texts on the decline in the present Buddha-sāsana, Chit Tin bases his description of the career of the future Buddha Metteyya largely on the Pali poem *Anāgatavaṃsa*, the Chronicle of the Future (Buddha).³ William Pruitt's translation of this poem into English is appended to Chit Tin's publication.⁴ A second appendix gives translations into English of *Aspirations to Meet Buddha Ariya Metteyya* found at the conclusion of Pali manuscripts in Sri Lanka, Sinhala manuscripts, the *Dvādasaparitta*, the commentary on the *Jātaka*, Sinhala manuscripts of Ācariya Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* and *Athasālinī*, an aspiration attributed to King Parakramabahu I of Sri Lanka, the aspiration of Thera Mahā-Maṅgala in his biography of Ācariya Buddhaghosa, the aspiration at the end of sharing merits in the *Dāna* ceremony in Sri Lanka and the aspiration used in connection with the recitation of *Parittas* in Sri Lanka.⁵ As acknowledged, these translations except that from the *Athasālinī* manuscripts, have been taken from Venerable Dr. Saddhatissa's study of the *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*,⁶ and altered in a few instances. Ven. Saddhatissa gives the relevant Pali or Sinhala text except that of the Sinhala text of the *Visuddhimagga*.

To this list of aspirations can be added the following information I noted at the conclusion of Sri Lankan manuscripts in the Minayev collection kept in the State Public

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- ¹. Sayagyi U Chit Tin *The Coming Buddha Ariya Metteyya*. Second Revised Edition. The Wheel Publication No. 381/383. Buddhist Publication Society. Kandy (1992). Originally published in 1988 as Dhammadāna Series 7 by the Sayagyi U Ba Khin Memorial Trust. U.K.
 - ². *ibid.* back cover.
 - ³. *ibid.*
 - ⁴. *ibid.* pages 49 - 61.
 - ⁵. *ibid.* pages 62 - 65.
 - ⁶. H. Saddhatissa. *The Birth-Stories of the Ten Bodhisattas and the Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*. Being a translation and edition of the *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā* PTS. London (1975) p. 36 - 42.

Library in St. Petersburg.⁷

1. A combination of two aspirations noted by Ven. Saddhātissa (pp. 36, 38) with a statement in Pali and an aspiration in Sinhala interspersed at the conclusion of a manuscript of the *Brahmajālasutta*.⁸

*imaṃ likhita-puññaena metteyyaṃ upasaṅkami
patiṭṭhahitvā sarāṇe supatiṭṭhāmi sāsane*

'By the merit of this writing, may I draw near to Metteyya
(and) having been established in the Refuges, may I be well established in the
sāsana'

(Saddhatissa p. 36)

Statement in Pali:

*akkharaṃ ekamekaṃ va buddharūpaṃ samaṃ siyā. Tasmā hi paṇḍito
poso likheyya piṭakattayaṃ likhāya pālinā dhammaṃ
navakotisahasakkaṃ kappam akkharaganāya cakkavatti bhavissati.*

"Each letter would be equal to an image of the Buddha. Therefore a wise person should copy the three-fold canon. Having copied the doctrine in Pali, he will become a universal monarch during nine thousand crores of aeons according to the number of letters.

Aspiration in Sinhala:

śraddhādī pañca dharmāyēn hā prajñāven yuktava upadimvā

'May I be born endowed with the five qualities such as faith and wisdom.'

Aspiration recorded and translated by Ven. Saddhatissa (p. 38) as follows:

⁷. Ratna Handurukande, The Minayev Collection of Manuscripts in the State Public Library in St. Petersburg (Leningrad). *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* Vol. XVI, University of Peradeniya 1990 (published in 1992) p. 195 - 214.

⁸. *ibid.* p. 200.

*Ito cuto 'ham vara-Jambudīpe
Himālaye hemamayamhi kūte
Kappāyuko devapaṭī va hutvā
Metteyyanāthassa suṇomi dhammaṃ*

'Having departed from here and being born on the golden peak of Himalaya in the noble Jambudipa as a leading deity of an aeon's life-span, I shall indeed hear the Dhamma of the Lord Metteyya.'

2. An aspiration in Sinhala at the conclusion of a Pali manuscript of the Mahabodhivamsa.⁹

*metun balen matu noyipada dujātiye ka
tānin tānana pilisindagena sētuve ka
upan upan tanakama nibanda sil rā ka
nivan dakim mam met munirajun dā ka*

By the power of these three (jewels of the Buddha, Dhamma and sangha) may I not be born in an evil birth in the future, may I be born in fortunate circumstances at all places, may I observe the precepts constantly wherever I am born and may I attain Nibbana after seeing Metteyya, the king of sages.

3. Aspiration in Pali at the conclusion of a manuscript of the Dhammacakkapavattanasutta¹⁰

*imaṃ likhitapuññaena metteyyaṃ upasaṅkamtivā bodhitaṃ dhammaṃ
nibbānapuragāminaṃ siddhir astu*

By the merit of writing this may I go near Metteyya and may the doctrine understood by me lead me to the city of Nibbana.

The following aspirations of the copyists of Sri Lankan manuscripts in the Minayev collection expressing their desire to become Buddhas, and to excel in wisdom, wealth and generosity are of interest, though there is no specific mention of Metteyya in the relevant formulae.

⁹. *ibid.* p. 201.

¹⁰. *ibid.* p. 210. Manuscript No. 916-87. The aspiration not printed there is given here from my notes on this manuscript.

1. Aspiration in Pali at the conclusion of a Pali manuscript of the *Balavatara*¹¹

*iminā puññakammena yāva buddho bhavāmaḥ mahosadhova ñāṇena
jotisetthīva bhoginā(sic.) vessantarova dānena hotu mayhaṃ
bhavābhava.*

With this act of merit, may I be like Mahosadha in wisdom, like the merchant Joti in wealth and like Vessantara in generosity in all births until I become a Buddha.

2. The same aspiration is found at the conclusion of a manuscript of the commentarial text, the *Satipaṭṭhānapada-atthavannaṇḍ*¹² with a few variants and a change in the order of words. *anena puññakammena yāva buddho bhavāmaḥ mahosadhova dānena jotisetthīva bhoginaṃ (sic.) mahosadhova ñāṇena hotu mayhaṃ bhavābhava.*

The copyist of this manuscript, Walpala Sobhita Terunnanse, incumbent of the Jayawardhana Kotte monastery (*Jayawardhana Koṭṭe vihārasthānayehi nityavāsi vū*), who completed his work (*liyā fīṇḍu kala*) on a Saturday afternoon (*śani dina divābhāgayedī*) in the year 2381 of the Buddhist era (*śrī buddhavaraṇyayen dedās tunsiya asūekaṭa paṇiṇi mema varaṇyeyhi*) aspires to be a supreme Buddha (*buduvemvā lovturā*).

3. An aspiration in Sinhala at the conclusion of a Sinhala commentary to the *Suryasataka*¹³

mama da lovtura buduvemva

May I too become a supreme Buddha.

4. Aspiration in Sinhala at the conclusion of a Pali manuscript of the *Mahāsatiṭṭhānasutta*¹⁴

nuvaṇṭtan kerehi agra vemvā

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 199.

¹² *ibid.* p. 204,205.

¹³ *ibid.* p. 213.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 202. Manuscript No. 976-78 printed there should be corrected to read as 916-18.

May I be foremost among the wise.

One text in the Theravada tradition that was not available to Chit Tin at the time he wrote on Ariya Metteyya was the *Mahāsampīḍānidāna*. He draws attention to a story in it concerning Ven. Mahakassapa which has information relevant to Metteyya given in Ven Saddhatissa's publication on the *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*. Saddhatissa, who refers to the *Mahāsampīḍānidāna* as a rare Pali work dealing with the Bodhisatta ideal and the life of the Buddha, probably written in the later part of the 12th century, gives the description of the passing away (*parinibbāna*) of Mahakassapa and the miraculous cremation of his dead body in the hand of the future Buddha Metteyya as found in this text.¹⁵ His source of information is an ola leaf manuscript of the *Mahāsampīḍānidāna* kept in the Colombo Museum in Sri Lanka, the relevant section of which was copied for him by another scholar.¹⁶ Saddhatissa refers to another incomplete manuscript of the *Mahāsampīḍānidāna* available in the British Museum from which he gives information about the number of Buddhas arising in each aeon.¹⁷

An incomplete palm-leaf manuscript of 170 folios called *Sampīḍitaṃ nāma mahānidāna* is found in the Minayev Collection of Manuscripts in the State Public Library in St. Petersburg.¹⁸ The section dealing with the passing away of Mahakassapa thera and the burial (*abhinīhāra*) by the Future Buddha Maitreya is found at the end of this manuscript. I give below in broad outline the content of the St. Petersburg manuscript of the *Mahāsampīḍānidāna* based on notes I made during a visit there in 1989-90.

The author begins the text by stating that he will relate the 'Great Narrative of the Beginnings of the Three Jewels called the *Sampīḍitaṃ*, the Compendium, as handed down by a succession of teachers.' (*ratanaṭṭayānaṃ sampīḍitaṃ nāma mahānidānaṃ vakkhāmi ācariyaparamparehīti*). Then he proceeds as follows. Beginning (*nidāna*) is three-fold according to ancient teachers viz. 'the beginnings of the remote past' (*dūrenidāna*), 'the beginnings of the not very remote past' (*avidūrenidāna*) and the 'beginnings in the present' (*santikenidāna*). The story of the remote past according to this text comprises accounts of previous lives of Gautama Buddha from the time of Buddha Dipamkara upto that of his birth as King Vessantara. The not so remote story is that from the time of Vessantara upto the time of attaining enlightenment. The present story is that of the Buddha's life thereafter until his passing away. Some teachers speak of a four-fold *nidāna* viz. the very remote (*atidūra*), the remote (*dūra*), the not so

¹⁵. Saddhatissa *op.cit.* pages 43-44.

¹⁶. *ibid.* p. 52, n. 48 and 49.

¹⁷. *ibid.* p. 94.

¹⁸. Handurukande *op.cit.* p. 203-204.

remote (*avidūra*), and the present (*santike*). The very remote story covers the period from the time of Buddha Brahmadeva upto the time of Buddha Dipamkara, during which period Gautama Buddha as a bodhisatta resolved to attain enlightenment. Brahmadeva Buddha is said to have lived in the great city of Karakanda, in the very distant past, in the *asamkheyakappa* called Nanda. Dīpaṃkara Buddha lived in the *kappa* called Varamdaka. The Buddhas Taṇhaṃkara, Medhaṃkara and Saraṇaṃkara were his predecessors in the same *kappa*. The aspirations of the bodhisatta during the dispensations of these Buddhas, his supreme virtues and the Perfections such as generosity which he practised upto the time of his birth as the ascetic Sumedha in the time of Buddha Dipamkara, when it was prophesied that he will become a Buddha, are discussed as part of the remote story. The manner in which the bodhisatta attended on twenty-four Buddhas beginning with Dīpaṃkara and received prophecies from each of them is also described in this section.

The subsequent section of the text which deals with the not so distant story includes the following events and episodes: the five great reflections made by the Bodhisatta living in the heaven of the Tusita gods, these reflections being about the time, continent, country, family and the mother in his last birth preceding enlightenment; the conception in the womb of Queen Mahamaya, the chief consort of King Suddhodana; the birth and the utterance of the lordly words 'I am the most excellent in the world' etc.; the birth of seven others at the same time as the bodhisatta; the prophecy that the prince, the son of Suddhodana, who had the characteristics of a great man was destined to be a universal monarch if he led a household life or a Buddha if he renounced the world; the ploughing festival; the incident of King Suddhodana erecting three mansions to suit each season for the use of his son; the prince's visits to the pleasure park during which he saw an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a recluse created by the Suddhāvāsa gods; the prince's reactions to seeing these omens culminating in his decision to renounce the world on the very day he saw the well-clad, well-robed recluse, so calm and peaceful in appearance; the announcement of this decision to the charioteer Channa with the request that he prepares the horse for the Great Departure; going past three kingdoms in a single night and arriving at the bank of a river, at the end of a journey, thirty *yojanas* long; the prince's departure at this point and the death of the horse Kanthaka through grief; the prince's arrival at a mango-grove in the town of Anupiya; spending a week there enjoying the bliss of renouncing worldly life; arriving in the city of Rājagaha; request of the king of Rājagaha that the prince, the bodhisatta, should visit his kingdom first on attaining enlightenment and the bodhisatta's assent; setting out wandering from there and arriving at the hermitages of Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Ramaputta where he spent sometime; the bodhisatta's decision to practise severe austerities; giving up these austerities after some time on realising that they did not lead to enlightenment; the decision to partake of a substantial amount of food for sustenance; arrival at the place called Isipatana after begging for alms in villages and market-towns; the offering of milk-rice in a bowl by the maiden Sujātā; partaking of it on the bank of the river Neranjara; arriving at the *bodhi-manda*, the terrace of enlightenment; confrontation of Mara, the Evil One; shattering him and his forces culminating in the attainment of Buddhahood, which event occasioned many a miracle.

Stating that the events discussed above should be known as the *avidūrenidāna*, the author of the *Sampindita-mahānidāna* proceeds to narrate episodes categorised under *santikenidāna*, which he again defines as the activities of the Buddha from the time of enlightenment upto the *parinibbāna*, the passing away. The main episodes so discussed are: the manner of the Buddha's spending the first few weeks after enlightenment; his wish to preach the doctrine and debating as to whom he should do so in the first instance; his going to the Deer Park at Isipatana and the arrival there of the *pañcavaggīya* monks, the monks belonging to the group of five; the preaching of the first sermon, the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta*; the conversion of the noble youth Yasa; the gradual formation and the increase of the community of monks; the Buddha's exhortation to the monks to go forth for the welfare of the many; the arrival of the Buddha at Uruvela, resulting in the conversion of the ascetic Uruvelakassapa and others; the arrival of the Buddha with a thousand monks in the city of Rājagaha and the acceptance of alms at the palace of King Bimbisāra; the conversion of Sāriputta and Moggallāna and their being appointed as the chief disciples; taking up residence in Veluvanarama; the story of the Elder Kāḷudāyī; the Buddha's arrival on the bank of the river Rohinī; being invited to take up residence in the Nigrodhārāma by King Suddhodana; meeting Yasodharā, the mother of Rāhula, being praised by her with the chanting of the set of stanzas called the *Narasīha-gāthā*: the narration of the *Candakinnarajātaka* in the course of a doctrinal discourse at the end of which Yasodharā attained *solāpattiphala*, the fruit of entering the stream; the incident of ordaining Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother, on the third day of the Buddha's arrival at Kapilavatthu; the episode of being told that the son Rāhula wished to inherit the father's wealth and the subsequent ordination of Rāhula; King Suddhodana's immense grief on losing both son and grandson; information about where the Buddha spent the rainy seasons, the first in Vārāṇasī, the second at Rājagaha and so on, and the last in the village of Veluvana; the events that took place shortly before the final passing away viz. the Buddha's going for alms to Vesālī, acceptance of alms at the house of Cunda, the son of a smith, informing the elder Ananda of the wish to go to Kusinara, arriving there and lying like a lion in the *sīhaseyya* posture between the twin *sal* trees, head towards the north; being questioned as to what line of action should be followed in relation to the body of the Buddha after his passing away; declaration to Ananda of four persons worthy of being honoured by the erection of *thūpa* mounds; the visit of Subhadda; the final admonition to the monks viz. "All conditioned things are subject to decay. Strive diligently" (*vayadhammā saṅkhārā appamādena sampādettha*); *parinibbāna*, the passing away and the concurrent miracles such as the trembling of the earth, many in number; and the erection of several *thūpas* after the demise of the Buddha.

Nibbānakathā, the story of the passing away, is followed by the story of the Council, *saṅgītikathā*. A large number of monks had assembled on the day of the distribution of relics. Considering that such gatherings would be rare, it was decided that a council should be held at the time. The *vinaya*, rules of discipline and the *suttas*, the discourses, were recited, the elders Upali, Ananda and Mahā-Kassapa being the disciples who played a prominent part at this assembly.

The *saṅgītikathā* is followed by the story of the passing away of the Venerable Mahakassapa. It is said that he continued to reside at Veluvanārāma after the recitation of the *dhamma* and the *vinaya* and the enshrinement of relics, where he passed away subsequently. This section of the *Mahāsampinānīdāna* has been translated into English by Ven. Saddhatissa in his introduction to *The Birth-Stories of the Ten Bodhisattas*.¹⁹

Anāgata-kathā, the Story of the Future, which forms the next section of the text, deals with the prediction made by the Buddha with reference to a certain monk, viz. that he will be Buddha Metteyya in this same *bhaddakappa*. *Anāgata-kathā* is followed by the *Kappapariśchedakathā*, which as its name indicates gives information about various periods of time called the *kappas*. The theme of the section that follows is not clear for the manuscript under consideration is incomplete.

The cursory survey given above of the content of the *Mahāsampinānīdānakathā* based on a Sri Lankan manuscript kept in St. Petersburg has been made to invite attention to this text with the hope that a critical edition of it will appear in the near future. Ven Dr. Yatagama Dhammapala, incumbent of the Sarasvati Pirivena at Balagalla, Divulapitiya in Sri Lanka, formerly a Senior Lecturer at the University of Peradeniya, mentioned to me once that he was preparing an edition of it. One can look forward to the completion and publication of his study.

RATNA HANDURUKANDE

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