An Exposition of
The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta

by
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Foreword

The translation is based on that by T.W. Rhys Davids, published on the Internet Sacred Text Archive: Buddhist Suttas. This translation dates from 1881, so the language is inevitably very dated. I have replaced archaic terms, and done my best to make it easy to read.

My own comments on the translation use a different font and indented paragraph settings to distinguish them from the translation of the actual text. I have also added footnote references and hyperlinks for further study. Footnote references to the Pāḷi texts refer to the Roman script edition of the Pali Text Society — in the translations these page numbers are given near the spine or in the body of the text like this: [72], which is where the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta begins (D.ii.72). The many footnotes made by Rhys Davids, which are of a scholarly nature, have been omitted.

A modern translation of the Dīghanikāya by Maurice Walsh is available from Wisdom Books, which I have not used for reasons of copyright. Another translation by Sister Vajira and Francis Story, published by the Buddhist Publication Society, can be found on the Access to Insight web site.

I have adopted the paragraph numbering used by the Pāḷi text edition of the CSCD Tipiṭaka so that those who know some Pāḷi can easily find the relevant passage referred to in the translation or my comments. The headings are my translations of the section headings found in the CSCD edition, with the Pāḷi section headings below as subheadings in italics. To study the Pāḷi texts, I recommend downloading the CST4 program. The Pāḷi text is divided into six portions for recitation (bhāṇavāra), which Rhys Davids has used as natural breaks for six chapters. It is over twice the length of other long discourses in the Dīghanikāya.

In several places I have added the Pāḷi term in parenthesis. An index serves as a glossary of Pāḷi terms used in the translation.

The entire Pāḷi text is included for the benefit of those who know Pāḷi, or who want to learn it. Reading famous discourses side-by-side with a translation is the most enjoyable way to learn and familiarise oneself with sentence structure. It is no substitute for studying Pāḷi grammar, but it is a good way to start learning for those who find linguistic studies too daunting. At least, you will build up your vocabulary of common Pāḷi words and those stock phrases that are used frequently in the Tipiṭaka.

For the convenience of those who want to skip the Pāḷi, I have included a link on the paragraph numbers of the Pāḷi passages to the corresponding translation. Links from the paragraph numbers of the translation, link to the next numbered paragraph of the translation.
An Exposition of the 
Mahāparinibbāna Sutta

The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta is not a single discourse like most others in the Suttanta Piṭaka, but an historical account of the last year or so of the Buddha's life. It is similar in style to the Vinaya Mahāvagga, which describes the period following the Buddha's Enlightenment, his first teaching of the Dhamma, the going forth of the first disciples, and the spreading of the Dhamma.

This discourse contains the Buddha's final instructions, thus it is very important for the preservation of the Buddha's dispensation. Every Buddhist should know about the important teachings contained in this Sutta.

The Sutta begins when the Blessed One was dwelling on Vulture's Peak near Rājagaha. At that time, King Ajātasattu wanted to wage war against the Vajjī, but he was not sure that he could defeat them. He therefore sent his minister, Vassakāra Brahmin, to the Buddha to find out, instructing him to listen attentively to what was said.

The Book of the Great Decease 
Mahāparinibbāna Suttaṃ


131. Thus have I heard. The Blessed One was once dwelling in Rājagaha, on the hill called the Vulture's Peak. Now at that time Ajātasattu, the son of the queen-consort of Videha origin, the king of Māgadha, was desirous of attacking the Vajjī; and he said to himself, “I will root out these Vajjī, mighty and powerful though they be, I will destroy these Vajjī, I will bring these Vajjī to utter ruin!”

132. Atha kho rājā māgadho Ajātasattu vedhiputto vassakāraṃ brāhmaṇaṃ magadhahamahāmattāṃ āmantesi — “Ehi tvam, brāhmaṇa, yena Bhagavā tenupasaṅkama; upasaṅkamitvā mama vacanena Bhagavato pāde sirasā vandāhi, appābadhaṃ appaṭṭhāṃ lahuṭṭhānaṃ balaṃ phāsuvihaṇaṃ pučcha — ‘Rājā, bhante, māgadho Ajātasattu vedhiputto Bhagavato pāde sirasā vandati, appābadhaṃ

132. So he spoke to the Brahmin Vassakāra, the prime-minister of Māgadha, saying: “Come now, Brahmin, do you go to the Blessed One, and bow down in adoration at his feet on my behalf, and enquire in my name whether he is free from illness and suffering, and in the enjoyment of ease and comfort, and vigorous health. Then tell him that Ajātasattu, son of the Vedehi queen,⁴ the king of Māgadha, in his eagerness to attack the Vajjī, has resolved, ‘I will root out these Vajjī, mighty and powerful though they be, I will destroy these Vajjī, I will bring these Vajjī to utter ruin!’ Bear carefully in mind whatever the Blessed One may predict, and repeat it to me, for the Buddhas speak nothing untrue!”

Why was King Ajātasattu so annoyed with the Vajjī that he wanted to wage war and wipe them out? In the Commentary to this Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Buddhaghosa gives the following account.²

There was a port (paṭṭanagāmaṃ) on the Ganges, extending over one league, half of which territory belonged to Ajātasattu,³ and the other half to the Licchavi.⁴ Nearby was a mountain, from which goods of great value (mahagghabhaṇḍaṃ) descended down the river. While Ajātasattu was making preparations to claim his share, the Licchavi would go before him and remove it all. This happened on several occasions, and Ajātasattu vowed vengeance.

So nothing unusual there — the war was waged over valuable property.

Vassakāra the Brahmin
(Vassakārabrāhmaṇo)

133. “Evam, bho”ti kho vassakāro brāhmaṇo magadhamahāmatto rañño māgadhassa Ajātasattussa vedehiputtassa paṭissutvā bhaddāni bhaddāni yānāni

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¹ The wise queen, wife of King Bimbisāra. Ajātasattu had committed the heinous crime of killing his own father to gain the throne, urged on by Devadatta.
² DA.ii.516f.
³ Ajātasattu’s kingdom of Māgadha, and the territory of the Vajjī (or Licchavi) were on opposite banks of the Ganges.
⁴ Their capital was Vesāli, and they formed a part of the Vajjī confederacy, being often referred to as the Vajjī (q.v.)

133. Then the Brahmin Vassakāra, heeded the words of the king, saying, “Be it as you say,” and ordering a number of magnificent carriages to be made ready, he mounted one of them, left Rājagaha with his entourage, and went to the Vulture’s Peak, riding as far as the ground was passable for carriages, and then alighting and proceeding on foot to the place where the Blessed One was. On arriving there he exchanged with the Blessed One the greetings and compliments of friendship and civility, sat down respectfully by his side [and then delivered to him the message even as the king had commanded].

Factors for the Non-decline of Rulers
(Rāja Aparihāniyadhammā)


Rhys Davids uses the words in square brackets to avoid repeating passages that are repeated verbatim in the Pāḷi text. Repetitions and stock phrases are not a problem for teachings memorised by heart and handed down orally — they aid memorisation.


134. Now at that time the Venerable Ānanda was standing behind the Blessed One, and fanning him, and the Blessed One said to him: “Have you heard, Ānanda, that the Vajjī hold full and frequent public assemblies?”

“Venerable sir, I have heard that is so,” he replied.

“So long, Ānanda,” replied the Blessed One, “as the Vajjī hold full and frequent public assemblies; so long may they be expected not to decline, but to prosper.”

[Questioning the Venerable Ānanda in the same way, and receiving a similar reply, the Blessed One declared as follows the other conditions that would ensure the welfare of the Vajjī confederacy.]

“So long, Ānanda, as the Vajjī meet together in concord, and rise in concord, and carry out their undertakings in concord — so long as they enact nothing not already established, abrogate nothing that has been already enacted, and act in accordance with the ancient institutions of the Vajjī as established in former days — so long as they honour and esteem and revere and support the Vajjī elders, and hold it a point of duty to hearken to their words — so long as no women or girls belonging to their clans are detained among them by force or abduction — so long as they honour and esteem and revere and support the Vajjī shrines in town or country, and allow not the proper offerings and rites, as formerly given and performed, to fall into desuetude — so long as the rightful protection, defence, and support shall be fully provided for the Arahants among them, so that Arahants from a distance may enter the realm, and the Arahants therein may live at ease — so long may the Vajjī be expected not to decline, but to prosper.’


Then the Blessed One addressed Vassakāra the Brahmin, saying: “Brahmin, when I was once staying at Vesāli at the Sārandada shrine (cetiya), I taught the Vajjī these conditions of welfare;¹ and so long as those conditions shall continue to exist among the Vajjī, so long as the Vajjī shall be well instructed in those conditions, so long may we expect them not to decline, but to prosper.”

“We may expect then,” answered the Brahmin, “the welfare and not the decline of the Vajjī when they are possessed of any one of these conditions of welfare, how much more so when they are possessed of all the seven. So, Gotama, the Vajjī cannot be overcome by the king of Māgadha; that is, not in battle, without diplomacy or breaking up their alliance. Now, Gotama, we must go; we are busy, and have much to do.”

“Whatsoever you think most fitting, O Brahmin,” was the reply. The Brahmin Vassakāra, delighted and pleased with the words of the Blessed One, rose from his seat, and went his way.

The Buddha’s reply describes the seven things for the prosperity and non-decline of rulers. As long as these seven things were found in the Vajjī they would be liable to prosper, not to decline. The Vajjī kingdom lay to the north-east of the Ganges, at the eastern extreme of the Middle Country of India (Majjhimadesa). It seems to have been a democratic republic rather than a kingdom like most of the other regions of India at that time. The Buddha’s advice is a conservative one — respect the elders, women, and monks, don’t change regulations that are well-established, and meet together frequently to discuss matters that require attention.

The same seven things will protect present-day governments too, and should be followed by societies and organisations that want to prosper and overcome their enemies and detractors. Modern parliaments are rather discordant and adversarial. In extreme cases, one sees fights breaking out in parliaments over controversial debates. That kind of behaviour does not augur well for the prosperity of any nation. It is vital to learn how to debate and come to a consensus, without sowing discord and distrust.

Factors for the Non-decline of Monks
(Bhikkhu Aparihāniyadhammā)

136. Atha kho Bhagavā acirapakkante vassakāre brāhmaṇe magadhamahāmatte āyasmantam Ānandaṃ āmantesi — “Gaccha tvaṃ, Ānanda, yāvatikā bhikkhū

¹ A.iv.16. The Sārandada Sutta.
Rājagahaṃ upanissāya viharanti, te sabbe upaṭṭhānasālāyaṃ sannipātehi”ti. “Evaṃ, bhante”ti kho āyasmā Ānando Bhagavato paṭissutovā yāvatikā bhikkhū Rājagahaṃ upanissāya viharanti, te sabbe upaṭṭhānasālāyaṃ sannipātevā yena Bhagavā tenupasaṅkami; upasaṅkamitvā Bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ aṭṭhāsi. Ekamantaṃ thito kho āyasmā Ānando Bhagavantaṃ etadavoca — “Sannipatito, bhante, bhikkhusaṅgho, yassadāni, bhante, Bhagavā kālaṃ maññati”ti.


“Yāvakīvānca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū abhinīhanā sannipātā sannipātabahululā bhavissanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvānca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū samagga sannipatissanti, samagga vuṭṭhahissanti, samagga saṅghakaraṇiyāni karissanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvānca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū apaṇṇattam na paññapessanti, paññattaṃ na samucchindissanti, yathāpaṇṇattasu sikkhāpadesu sāmādāya vattissanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvānca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū ye te bhikkhū therā rattaṇā cirappabbajitā saṅghapitaro saṅghaparināyakā, te sakkarissanti garaṇī karissanti mānessanti pūjessanti, tesaṅca sotbaṃ maṇḍissanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvānca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū uppānāya taṇhāya ponobbhavikāya na vasaṃ gacchissanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvānca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū āraṅṇakesu sapekkhā bhavissanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvānca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū paccattaṃ satiṃ uppaṭṭhapessanti — ‘Kinti anāgatā ca pesalā sabrahmacari āgaccheyyuṃ, āgatā ca pesalā sabrahmacari phāsu vihareyyu’nti. Vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvānca, bhikkhave, ime satta aparighānyā dhammā bhikkhūsūṇaṭhassanti, imesu ca sattasu aparighānyesu dharmesu bhikkhū sandississanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.
Now soon after he had gone the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying: “Go now, Ānanda, and assemble in the Service Hall such of the monks as live in the neighbourhood of Rājagaha.”

He did so, and returned to the Blessed One, and informed him, saying: “The company of the monks, Venerable sir, is assembled, let the Blessed One do as he deems fit.”

The Blessed One arose, and went to the Service Hall; and when he was seated, he addressed the monks, saying: “I will teach you, monks, seven conditions of the welfare of a community. Listen and pay careful attention, and I will speak.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” said the monks in assent to the Blessed One; and he spoke as follows: “So long, monks, as the monks meet together in full and frequent assemblies — so long as they meet together in concord, and rise in concord, and carry out the duties of the Order in concord — so long as the monks establish nothing that has not been already prescribed, and abrogate nothing that has been already established, and act in accordance with the rules of the Order as now laid down — so long as the monks honour and esteem and revere and support the elders of experience and long-standing, the fathers and leaders of the Saṅgha and hold it a point of duty to heed their words — so long as the monks do not fall under the influence of that craving which, springing up within them, would give rise to renewed existence — so long as the monks delight in a life of solitude — so long as the monks train their minds so that well-behaved companions in the holy life (pesalā sabrahmacāari) shall come to them, and those who have come shall dwell at ease. As long as the monks establish these seven things in themselves, they can be expected to prosper, not to decline.

The advice for the monks given by the Buddha is similar to that given to the Vajjī. It is conservative, showing respect to the elders and the traditions, not establishing new regulations, nor revoking the established ones. It also advises to live a life of contentment and solitude, not craving material things, fame, or influence, which only foment discord and dissatisfaction. Nowadays, this advice is seldom heeded. Many monks advocate changing the Vinaya rules to suit modern times. Some crave wealth, fame, and influence. A few even go so far as to get involved in politics. This behaviour is remote from the ideals of a recluse or alms mendicant, who depends on charity.

It is my opinion that accepting and using money is one of the primary causes, if not the main cause, for the decline in the modern Saṅgha. Those forest monks who practice meditation, and strive to develop morality, concentration, and wisdom, have no dealings
with money. If lay Buddhists want to have well-behaved monks to learn from, they should provide their material needs, and never offer cash to bhikkhus, which is very damaging to the Buddha’s dispensation, and is, in fact, a demeritorious deed.


“Yāvakīvaṃca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū na kammārāmā bhavissanti na kammaratā na kammārāmatamanuyuttā, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṃca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū na bhassārāmā bhavissanti na bhassaratā na bhassārāmatamanuyuttā, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṃca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū na niddārāmā bhavissanti na niddāratā na niddārāmatamanuyuttā, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṃca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū na saṅgaṇikārāmā bhavissanti na saṅgaṇikaratā na saṅgaṇikārāmatamanuyuttā, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṃca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū na pāpicchā bhavissanti na pāpikānaṃ icchānaṃ vasaṃ gatā, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṃca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū na pāpamittā bhavissanti na pāpasahāyā na pāpasampavaṅkā, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṃca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū na oramattakena visesādhigamena antarāvosānaṃ āpajjissanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṃca, bhikkhave, ime satta aparihāniyā dhammā bhikkhūsu ṭhassanti, imesu ca sattasu aparihāniyesu dhammesu bhikkhū sandississanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

137. “I will teach you, monks, another seven factors of non-decline. Please listen attentively.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” said the monks in assent to the Blessed One; and he spoke as follows: “So long as the monks do not delight in, take pleasure in, nor get absorbed in activity (kamma) — so long as the monks do not delight...
in, take pleasure in, nor get absorbed in idle talk — so long as the monks do not delight in, take pleasure in, nor get absorbed in sleeping — so long as the monks do not delight in, take pleasure in, nor get absorbed in socialising — so long as the monks do not entertain and fall under the influence of evil desires — so long as the monks do not become the friends, companions, or intimates of evil friends — so long as the monks do not come to a stop on their way [to nibbāna] because they have attained to any lesser thing — so long may the monks be expected not to decline, but to prosper. So long as these conditions shall continue to exist among the monks, so long as they are instructed in these conditions, so long may the monks be expected not to decline, but to prosper.”

The Commentary on the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta explains activity as searching out (cīvaravicāraṇaṃ) or making robes (cīvarakaraṇaṃ), reclining boards (upatthambhanāṃ), needle-cases (sūcigharaṃ), bowl covers (pattatthavikaṃ), straps (asambuddhakaṃ), belts (kāyabandhanāṃ), bellows? (dhamakaraṇaṃ), lecterns (ādhārakaṃ), footstools (pādakathalikaṃ), or broom-handles (sammajjanī-ādīnaṃ). It goes on to say that rehearsing the texts, attending to shrines, etc., is not called “delighting in activity.”

Thus, there are certain duties that a bhikkhu should perform such as keeping his robes and dwelling place clean and in good repair, attending on senior bhikkhus, caring for sick monks, and many other duties that are not called “delighting in activity.” Here, it is appropriate to tell the story of Sammajjana Thera from the Dhammapada Commentary.

A monk was constantly sweeping the rooms of the monastery. He criticised the Elder Revata who was always meditating. The elder advised him to sweep the monastery before almsround, and to spend the day in meditation, sweeping again in the evening if he wished. He followed this advice and in due course attained Arhatship. When rubbish started to accumulate, the other monks asked him why he didn’t sweep any more. The elder replied that he was no longer heedless, therefore he didn’t spend all his time sweeping. The monks wondered if he had attained Arhatship and told the Buddha what he had said. Concerning his change of attitude, the Buddha uttered this verse (Dhp v 172)

“Whoever was heedless before and afterwards is not;
such a one illuminates this world like the moon freed from clouds.”

There are two main duties for bhikkhus: the duty of learning (ganthadhura) and the duty of insight (vipassanādhura). The duty of learning includes the study of Pâli, learning some Suttas by heart, reciting protection discourses, explaining and teaching the Dhamma, writing books, giving lectures, answering questions on the Dhamma,
and so forth. In modern times, this may require the use of computers and the Internet, but it is plain that this duty can soon degenerate into “delighting in activity” and get diverted from its intended purpose of explaining and teaching the Dhamma.

The other duty is to practise insight meditation, and that also includes the development of tranquillity meditation (samatha), which may serve as a basis for insight.

In brief, monks should not be lazy — there are many duties that they should fulfil. As their basic needs are provided by pious lay supporters, and they have no relatives to support, they have plenty of time to study, teach, and meditate.


138. “I will teach you, monks, another seven factors of non-decline. Please listen attentively.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” said the monks in assent to the Blessed One; and he spoke as follows: “So long as the monks practise with confidence (saddhā) … with shame of wrong doing (hirī) … with fear of wrong doing (ottappa) … with learning (bahussutā) … with vigorous effort (āraddha-viriyā) … with established mindfulness (upatthitassati) … with wisdom (paññavanto), they can be expected to prosper, not to decline. As long as the monks establish these seven things in themselves, they can be expected to prosper, not to decline.


“Yāvakīvañca, bhikkhave, bhikkhu satisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāvessanti … Dhammaviccayasambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāvessanti … Vīriyasambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāvessanti … Pitisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāvessanti … Passaddhisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāvessanti … Samādhīsambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāvessanti … Upekkhasambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāvessanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.
“Yāvakīvañca, bhikkhave, ime sattā aparihiṇīyā dhammā bhikkhūsu thassanti, imesa ca sattasu aparihiṇīyesu dhhammesu bhikkhū sandississanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā no parihāni.

139. “I will teach you, monks, another seven factors of non-decline. Please listen attentively.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” said the monks in assent to the Blessed One; and he spoke as follows: “So long as the monks develop the enlightenment factor of mindfulness (sati-sambojjhaṅga) … the enlightenment factor of investigation (dhammavicaya-sambojjhaṅga) … the enlightenment factor of energy (vīriya-sambojjhaṅga) … the enlightenment factor of joy (pīti-sambojjhaṅga) … the enlightenment factor of serenity (passaddhi-sambojjhaṅga) … the enlightenment factor of concentration (samādhi-sambojjhaṅga) … the enlightenment factor of equanimity (upekkhā-sambojjhaṅga), they can be expected to prosper, not to decline. As long as the monks establish these seven things in themselves, they can be expected to prosper, not to decline.


“Yāvakīvañca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū aniccasaññaṃ bhāvessanti … Anattasaññaṃ bhāvessanti … Asubhasaññaṃ bhāvessanti … Ādīnavasaññaṃ bhāvessanti … Pahānasaññaṃ bhāvessanti … Virāgasaññaṃ bhāvessanti … Nīrodhasaññaṃ bhāvessanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvañca, bhikkhave, ime sattā aparihiṇīyā dhammā bhikkhūsu thassanti, imesa ca sattasu aparihiṇīyesu dhhammesu bhikkhū sandississanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

140. “I will teach you, monks, another seven factors of non-decline. Please listen attentively.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” said the monks in assent to the Blessed One; and he spoke as follows: “So long as the monks cultivate the perception of impermanence … the perception of not-self … the perception of repulsiveness … the perception of danger … the perception of abandonment … the perception of dispassion … the perception of cessation they can be expected to prosper, not to decline. As long as the monks establish these seven things in themselves, they can be expected to prosper, not to decline.

“Yāvakīvaṇca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū mettaṁ kāyakammaṁ paccupaṭṭhāpessanti sabrahmacārīsu āvi ceva raho ca, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṁ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṇca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū mettaṁ vacīkammaṁ paccupaṭṭhāpessanti … Mettaṁ manokammaṁ paccupaṭṭhāpessanti sabrahmacārīsu āvi ceva raho ca, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṁ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṇca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū, ye te lābhā dhammakā ḍhammaladdhā antamaso pattapariyāpnamattampi tathārūpehi lābhehi appaṭivibhattabhogi bhavissanti silavantehi sabrahmacārīhi sādhāraṇabhogī, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṁ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṇca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū yāni kāni silāni akhaṇḍāni acchiddāni asabalāni akammāsāni bhujissāni viñṇāpasatthāni aparāmaṭṭhāni samādhisaṃvattanikāni tathārūpesu sīlesu sīlasāmaññaggatā viharissanti sabrahmacārīhi āvi ceva raho ca, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṁ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṇca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū yāyaṁ diṭṭhi ariyā niyyānikā, niyyāti takkarassa sammā dukkhakkhayāya, tathārūpāya diṭṭhiyā diṭṭhisāmaññaggatā viharissanti sabrahmacārīhi āvi ceva raho ca, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṁ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.

“Yāvakīvaṇca, bhikkhave, ime cha aparīhāniyā dhammā bhikkhuṣu ṭhassanti, imesu ca chasu aparīhāniyesu dhammesu bhikkhū sandississanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṁ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni” ti.

141. “I will teach you, monks, another six factors of non-decline. Please listen attentively.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” said the monks in assent to the Blessed One; and he spoke as follows: “So long as the monks show loving-kindness both in public and in private towards their fellow monks by body … by speech … by thought … as long as they share their lawfully acquired gifts even including the contents of their almsbowls. As long as they maintain perfectly without any stain or blemish the rules of conduct, which are conducive to concentration and liberation. As long as they maintain the noble view that leads to the utter destruction of suffering, they can be expected to prosper, not to decline.
142. Then whilst the Blessed One stayed there at Rājagaha on the Vulture’s Peak he gave that comprehensive religious talk with the monks on the nature of morality, concentration, and wisdom. “Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by morality. Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by concentration. The mind protected by wisdom is freed from the corruptions, that is to say, from the corruption of sensuality (kāmāsava), from the corruption of becoming (bhavāsava), and from the corruption of ignorance (avijjāsava).”

143. Having stayed at Rājagaha as long as he wished, the Blessed One said to Venerable Ānanda: “Come Ānanda, let us go to Ambalaṭṭhikā.¹ So they went there with a large number of monks. At Ambalaṭṭhikā the Blessed One stayed at the royal park and there gave that comprehensive religious talk to the monks on the nature of morality, concentration, and wisdom. “Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by morality. Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by concentration. The mind protected by wisdom is freed from the corruptions, that is to say, from the corruption of sensuality, from the corruption of becoming, and from the corruption of ignorance.”

144. Most famous as the location where the Buddha taught the Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda Sutta to his young son Rāhula about the importance of truthfulness.

144. Having stayed at Ambalaṭṭhikā as long as he wished, the Blessed One said to Venerable Ānanda: “Come Ānanda, let us go to Nālanda.”
“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent.
At Nālandā they stayed in Pāvārika’s mango grove.¹

Venerable Sāriputta’s Lion’s Roar
(Sāriputtasīhanādo)


“Kiṃ te, Sāriputta, ye te ahesuṃ atītamaddhānaṃ arahanto sammāsambuddhā, sabbe te Bhagavanto cetasā ceto paricca viditā — ‘Evamsilā te Bhagavanto ahesuṃ itipi, evamdhammā evampaññā evaṃvihārī evaṃvimuttā te Bhagavanto ahesuṃ itipi”nti? “No hetan, bhante.”

“Kiṃ pana te, Sāriputta, ye te bhavissanti anāgatamaddhānaṃ arahanto sammāsambuddhā, sabbe te Bhagavanto cetasā ceto paricca viditā — ‘Evamsilā te Bhagavanto bhavissanti itipi, evamdhammā evampaññā evaṃvihārī evaṃvimuttā te Bhagavanto bhavissanti itipi”nti? “No hetan, bhante.”

“Kiṃ pana te, Sāriputta, ahaṃ etarahi arahaṃ sammāsambuddho cetasā ceto paricca vidito — “Evamsilo Bhagavā itipi, evamdhammo evampañño evaṃvihārī evaṃvimutto Bhagavā itipi”nti? “No hetan, bhante.”

“Ettha ca hi te, Sāriputta, atītānāgatapaccuppannesu arahantesu sammāsambuddhesu cetopariyaṅaṇaṃ natthi. Atha kiṅcarahi te ayaṃ, Sāriputta, uḷārā āsabhī vācā bhāsitā, ekaṃso gahito, sīhanādo nadito — ‘Evampasanno ahaṃ, bhante, Bhagavati; na cāhu na ca bhavissati na cetarahi vijjati aṅgio samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā Bhagavatā bhiyyobhiyññatato yadidaṃ sambodiya”nti?

¹ The location where the Buddha taught the Kevaṭṭa Sutta and the Upāli Sutta.
145. The Venerable Sāriputta came to where the Blessed One was, and having paid homage, took his seat respectfully at one side, saying: “Venerable sir! I have such faith in the Blessed One, that I think there never has been, nor will there be, nor is there now any other, whether a recluse or a Brahmin, who is greater and wiser than the Blessed One, that is to say, as regards the higher wisdom.”

“Grand and bold are your words, Sāriputta: you have spoken with a bull’s voice and roared a lion’s roar! Do you then comprehend with your mind the minds of all the Blessed Ones who in ages past have been Arahant Buddhas, are you aware what their conduct was, what was their teaching, what was their wisdom, what their mode of life, and what liberation they attained?”

“Indeed not, Venerable sir!”

“Do you then comprehend with your mind the minds of all the Blessed Ones who in the future will be Arahant Buddhas, are you aware what their conduct will be, what will be their teaching, their wisdom, their mode of life, and what liberation they will attain?”

“Indeed not, Venerable sir!”

“Do you then comprehend with your mind the mind of the Arahant Buddha now alive, are you aware what the Blessed One’s conduct is, what is his teaching, his wisdom, his mode of life, and what liberation he has attained?”

“Indeed not, Venerable sir!”

“Then, Sāriputta, you do not know the minds of the Arahant Buddhas of the past, the present, nor of the future. Why, then, are your words so grand and bold? Why do you speak with a bull’s voice and roar the lion’s roar?”

upakkilese paññāya dubbalikaraṇe catūsu satipaṭṭhānesu supatiṭṭhitacittā satta bojjhaṅge yathābhūtaṃ bhāvetvā anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhiṃ abhisambujjhissanti.

Bhagavāpi, bhante, etarahi arahaṃ sammāsambuddho pañca nīvaraṇe pahāya cetaso upakkilese paññāya dubbalikaraṇe catūsu satipaṭṭhānesu supatiṭṭhitacitto satta bojjhaṅge yathābhūtaṃ bhāvetvā anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhiṃ abhisambuddho”’ti.

146. “Venerable sir! I do not have the knowledge of the minds of the Arahant Buddhas that existed in the past, will exist in the future, and exist now. I only know the lineage of the faith. Just, Venerable sir, as a king might have a border city, with strong foundations, walls, and with only one gate; and the king might have a watchman there, clever, expert, and wise, to stop all strangers and admit only friends. On inspecting the walls all around the city, he might inspect all the joints in the walls to know that there were no gaps where any creature bigger than a cat could get out. He would know that all living things larger than a cat that entered or left the city would have to do so by that gate. Thus only is it, Venerable sir, that I know the lineage of the faith. I know that the Arahant Buddhas of the past, abandoning the five hindrances; knowing all those mental faults that weaken wisdom; establishing their minds firmly in the four foundations of mindfulness; thoroughly developing the seven factors of enlightenment, attained incomparable Enlightenment. I know that the Arahant Buddhas of the times to come will do the same, and I know that the Blessed One, the Arahant Buddha of today has done so now.”

Venerable Sāriputta was the wisest of the Buddha’s disciples. The Dhammapada verse 97 refers to him as an excellent man who is not credulous. When thirty forest monks came to pay their respects, the Buddha asked the Venerable Sāriputta whether he believed that cultivating and maturing the five spiritual faculties — confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom — could penetrate and culminate in the deathless. Venerable Sāriputta replied that he did not believe it. Since he had realised the Paths and Fruits he did not take it on faith in the Buddha. The monks talked among themselves that the elder had no faith in the Buddha. Then the Buddha explained that the Venerable Sāriputta was blameless as he had realised it through his personal experience, so he did not need to have faith in the word of another. In this extraordinary verse, the Buddha used shock tactics to awaken the thirty forest-dwelling monks to the truth.

“Assaddho akataññū ca, sandhicchedo ca yo naro.
Hatāvakāso vantāso, sa ve uttamaporiso.”
“The man who is not credulous,¹ who knows the uncreate,² who has cut off rebirth,³ who has destroyed all results,⁴ and expelled all desires,⁵ he is truly an excellent man.”⁶ (Dhp v 97)

He rightly inferred the great powers of the Buddha from his profound knowledge of the Dhamma taught by the Buddha, having practised that Dhamma and personally experienced the bliss of nibbāna by attaining Arahatship. The account in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta is just the first part of the “Discourse on Serene Faith” in which Venerable Sāriputta expounds the powers of the Tathāgata in some detail. It shows the method used by an intelligent person who should examine any religious teaching thoroughly. It also shows that some things should be accepted though they are beyond our personal direct knowledge. We should change our behaviour, speech, thought, and view accordingly, having inferred the right conclusion.

A hardened sceptic may say, “How can we believe that Sāriputta had gained Arahatship?” or “How can we know that the discourses have not just been made up by someone?” As long as they do not practise the Dhamma properly, they will never be able to gain confidence in it, because it is beyond logical reasoning and speculation.

Studying the original discourses will help, but there is no substitute for personal realisation. At least one should practise insight meditation to the level of “Purification by Overcoming Doubt.” Then one will know how to infer, “This is surely the teaching of the Blessed One” because one has acquired the taste of Dhamma. Those Buddhists who have never practised meditation properly, entertain doubts about the Dhamma and so visit astrologers or non-Buddhist teachers looking for something easier than observing moral purity, gaining concentration, and developing wisdom.

To follow the Middle Path is not easy — one must avoid sensual indulgence, which most people are very attached to, and one must avoid wrong views too. There is no

¹Taken at face value, this verse is very shocking, but the key words all have double-meanings. Assaddho literally means “without confidence” i.e. a non-believer, but here it means one who is not credulous.
²Akataññū means “ungrateful,” literally one who does not know what has been done for his benefit, but here it means one who knows (aññū) that which is not created (akata).
³Sandhicchedo means one who breaks the connection between houses, a burglar, but here it means an Arahat who won’t be reborn again because he has broken the connection between existences.
⁴Hatāvakāso means one who has ruined his life, but here it refers to the Arahat who has destroyed all future results.
⁵Vantāso or vantāsiko is a kind of hungry ghost (peta) that feeds on vomit, but here means one who has ‘vomited’ or expelled all desire.
⁶Uttamapuriso means the best of men, but could also mean “one who thinks that he is superior to others” i.e. a conceited person.
substitute for the correct and strenuous practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, which means insight meditation aimed at the realisation of nibbāna in this very life. Those who put off the practice of meditation for their old age, until the next life, or think that they do not need to practise meditation, have fallen into wrong views.

Charity and good works alone cannot lead to nibbāna. Morality is unstable and imperfect unless it is protected by concentration and wisdom. Even modern materialists and non-Buddhists practise charity and observe morality, a Buddhist must meditate too. Right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration, right thought, and right view are essential, otherwise, one will not be able to practise right speech, right action, and right livelihood. One will not even know what they are!


147. While staying at Nālanda in the Pāvārika mango grove the Blessed One gave that comprehensive religious talk to the monks on the nature of morality, concentration, and wisdom. “Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by morality. Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by concentration. The mind protected by wisdom is freed from the corruptions, that is to say, from the corruption of sensuality, from the corruption of becoming, and from the corruption of ignorance.”

The Venerable Sāriputta did not follow the Buddha and the monks on his journey, but returned to the place of his birth where he would pass away after converting his mother, who had been opposed to the Buddha’s teaching since all seven of her sons had become monks. See the account of the Parinibbāna of Sāriputta in the Dictionary of Pali Proper Names.


148. Now when the Blessed One had stayed as long as was convenient at Nālandā, he addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying: “Come, Ānanda, let us go on to Pāṭaligāma.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent. Then the Blessed One proceeded, with a great company of monks, to Pāṭaligāma. Now the disciples at Pāṭaligāma heard of his arrival there, and they went to where he was, took their seats respectfully beside him, and invited him to their village rest house, and the Blessed One signified, by silence, his consent. Then the Pāṭaligāma disciples seeing that he had accepted the invitation, rose from their seats, and went away to the rest house, bowing to the Blessed One and keeping him on their right as they passed him. On arriving there they made the rest house fit in every way for occupation, placed seats in it, set up a water-pot, and fixed an oil lamp. Then they returned to the Blessed One, and bowing, stood beside him, saying: “All things are ready, Venerable sir! It is time for you to do whatever you see fit.” Then the Blessed One robed himself, took his robe and bowl, went with the monks to the rest house, washed his feet, entered the hall, and took his seat against the centre pillar, with his face towards the east. The monks also, after washing their feet, entered the hall, and took their seats around the Blessed One, against the
The Dangers of Immorality

western wall, and facing the east. The disciples of Pāṭaligāma too, after washing their feet, entered the hall, and took their seats opposite the Blessed One, against the eastern wall, facing towards the west.

It makes sense to have the teaching monk sitting in the centre of the hall, where he can be heard by everyone without the aid of loudspeakers.


“Puna caparam, gahapatayo, dussilassa silavipannassa pāpako kittisaddo abbhuggacchati. Ayaṃ dutiyo ādinavo dussilassa silavipattiya.

“Puna caparaṇ, gahapatayo, dussilo silavipanno yañña deva parisaṃ upasaṅkamatī — yadi khattiyaparisaṃ yadi brāhmaṇaparisaṃ yadi gahapatiparisaṃ yadi samaṇaparisaṃ — avisārado upasaṅkamati maṅkubhūto. Ayaṃ tatiyo ādinavo dussilassa silavipattiya.

“Puna caparaṇ, gahapatayo, dussilo silavipanno sammūḷho kālaṅkaroti. Ayaṃ catutho ādinavo dussilassa silavipattiya.

“Puna caparaṇ, gahapatayo, dussilo silavipanno kāyassa bhedā paraṃ maraṇā apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ nirayaṃ upapajjati. Ayaṃ pañcamo ādinavo dussilassa silavipattiya. Ime kho, gahapatayo, pañca ādinava dussilassa silavipattiya.

149. Then the Blessed One addressed the Pāṭaligāma disciples, saying: “Fivefold, householders, are the dangers for the immoral through his loss of morality.

1) In the first place due to the loss of morality the immoral suffer great dissipation of wealth through heedlessness. This is the first danger for the immoral through the loss of morality.”

Morality is of two kinds: restraint from evil deeds, and the fulfilment of skilful deeds. Restraint from evil deeds means the observance of the five precepts, i.e. abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, wrong speech, and taking intoxicants. Morality of good conduct is of many kinds. For householders it entails gainful employment in some form of right livelihood to provide for one’s own needs, to support one’s family, paying due taxes, and doing some charitable deeds for one’s spiritual welfare.

While actually engaged in an evil deed, such as stealing, the evil-doer is expending a great deal of time and effort to succeed in stealing the property while avoiding detection.
For example, smugglers may spend weeks digging a tunnel to smuggle contraband, only to find that their efforts have been wasted if the tunnel is discovered. Even if they evade capture, they may have to hide out for weeks or travel long distances to escape, suffering loss of their own property in the process, and being unable to do any legal employment during that period. If they are captured for a crime, charged and imprisoned, they suffer even greater loss due to not being able to work for some years.

2) “Secondly the evil-doer’s bad reputation gets noised abroad. This is the second danger for the immoral through the loss of morality.”

On release from prison, it is extremely hard for the prisoner to find work because of his or her criminal record. If someone is dismissed from a job due to dishonesty they may not be able to provide a good job reference.

3) “Thirdly, whatever society he enters — whether of priests, nobles, householders, or recluses, he enters shyly and confused. This is the third danger for the immoral through the loss of morality.”

No ordinary person is perfect in morality, but one who has defective morality will have made many enemies and will always be looking over his or her shoulder to see who is present who might reveal past misdeeds. A Stream-winner is entirely free from moral defects, and is open-hearted regarding whatever misdeeds he or she may have done in the past. Having nothing to hide and no wish to lie to conceal any faults, he or she is self-confident and fearless.

4) “Fourthly, he is full of anxiety when he dies. This is the fourth danger for the immoral through the loss of morality.”

A Stream-winner is assured of a happy destiny after death, so has no fear when the time for death approaches. An ordinary person who has done few misdeeds and many wholesome deeds will also be able to die peacefully.

5) “Fifthly, on the dissolution of the body, after death, the evil-doer is reborn in some unhappy state of suffering. This is the fifth danger for the immoral through the loss of morality. Householders, is the fivefold loss of the evil-doer!”

Later in this discourse, in the section on the Mirror of the Dhamma, the Buddha gives the criteria by means of which one can know if one a Stream-winner. There are other sources such as the Alaggadūpama Sutta, where two further types of individuals are assured of a fortunate rebirth: the Dhamma-follower and the Faith-follower. They are known as Lesser Stream-winners (Cūlasotāpanna).
The Benefits of Morality
(Sīlavanta Ānisaṃsā)


“Puna caparaṁ, gahapatayo, silavato silasampannassa kalyāṇo kittisaddo abbhuggacchati. Ayaṁ dutiyo ānisaṃso silavato silasampadāya.

“Puna caparaṇ, gahapatayo, silavā silasampanno yaññaśevā parisaṃ upasamkamati — yadi khattiyaparisaṃ yadi brāhmaṇaparisaṃ yadi gahapatiparisaṃ yadi samanaparisaṃ visārado upasaṃkamati amaṅkubhūto. Ayaṁ tatiyo ānisaṃso silavato silasampadāya.

“Puna caparaṇ, gahapatayo, silavā silasampanno asammūlho kālaṅkaroti. Ayaṁ catuttho ānisaṃso silavato silasampadāya.

“Puna caparaṇ, gahapatayo, silavā silasampanno kāyassa bhedā paraṁ maraṇaṁ sugatim sagoṁ lokaṁ upapajjati. Ayaṁ paṅcama ānisaṃso silavato silasampadāya. Ime kho, gahapatayo, paṅca ānisaṃsā silavato silasampadāya”ti.

151. Atha kho Bhagavā pāṭaligāmike upāsake bahudeva rattīṇ dhammiyā kathāya sandassetvā samādapetvā samuttejetvā sampahaṃsetvā uyyojesi —

151. When the Blessed One had thus taught the disciples of Pāṭaligāma, instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened them far into the night with religious discourse, he dismissed them, saying, “The night is far spent, householders. It is time for you to do what you think fit.” “Yes, Venerable sir,” answered the disciples of Pāṭaligāma, and they rose from their seats, and bowing to the Blessed One, keeping him on their right side as they passed him, they departed. Not long after the disciples of Pāṭaligāma had departed, the Blessed One remained in the empty hall.

Morality is the beginning of the holy life: lay people should always observe the five precepts, and should undertake the eight precepts on observance days. Novices should observe ten precepts and 75 training rules. Bhikkhus should observe the fourfold morality:

1) Fundamental restraint by the 227 Pātimokkha precepts for bhikkhus.
2) Sense-faculty restraint, which means not looking around here and there, not listening to gossip, eating mindfully, sitting, standing, walking, and lying down with composure, and keeping the mind free from sensuality, malevolence, and envy.
3) Right livelihood means avoiding astrology, bribery, flattering, deception, and asking for requisites without being invited.
4) Reflection on the use of requisites provided by the faithful. A monk should not use anything without reflecting on gratitude and suitability.

The Construction of Pāṭaliputta
Pāṭaliputta Nagaramāpanaṃ


152. At that time Sunidha and Vassakāra, the chief ministers of Māgadhā, were building a fortress at Pāṭaligāma to repel the Vajji, and there were many deities who inhabited the area. Now, wherever a place is occupied by powerful deities, they bend the minds of the most powerful kings and ministers to build dwelling-places there, and deities of middling and inferior power bend in a similar way the minds of middling or inferior kings and ministers. The Blessed One, with his divine eye, surpassing the vision of ordinary men, saw those deities occupying Pāṭaligāma. He rose early in the morning, saying to Ānanda: “Who is it then, Ānanda, who is building a fortress at Pāṭaligāma?”

“Sunidha and Vassakāra, Venerable sir, the chief ministers of Māgadhā, are building a fortress there to keep back the Vajji.”

“They act, Ānanda, as if they had consulted with the gods of Tāvatiṃsa. [Telling him what he had seen, and of the influence the deities, he added]: “Among the famous residences of the Noble Ones, and as far as trade extends, this will become the chief city of Pāṭaliputta, a centre for trade. However, three dangers will affect Pāṭaliputta: fire, flood, and internal dissension.”

King Ajātasattu’s minister, Vassakāra, created dissension among the Vajji after listening to the Buddha’s prediction about the likely outcome of King Ajātasattu’s proposed attack on them. So the Māgadhans would get the result of their unwholesome kamma later when they would also be defeated by internal dissension. Although each individual is responsible for their own actions, and not those of others, if a group of people act together, they may also experience the fruit of that action together. There are several stories to illustrate this in the Dhammapada commentary: Nobody can Escape the Effects of Kamma.
153. Now Sunidha and Vassakāra, the chief ministers of Māgadha, proceeded to where the Blessed One was staying, and when they had arrived they exchanged greetings and compliments of friendship and civility with the Blessed One, and stood respectfully on one side. So standing, Sunidha and Vassakāra, the chief ministers of Māgadha, said to the Blessed One, “May the good Gotama do us the honour of taking his meal, together with the Saṅgha, at our house today.” The Blessed One signified his consent by silence. Then when Sunidha and Vassakāra, the chief ministers of Māgadha, perceived that he had given his consent, they returned to where they dwelt, and on arriving there, they prepared sweet dishes of boiled rice, and cakes.
Then they informed the Blessed One, saying, “The meal-time has come, friend Gotama,¹ and all is ready.”

The Blessed One robed himself early, took his bowl with him, and repaired with the brethren to the dwelling-place of Sunidha and Vassakāra, and sat down on the seat prepared for him. With their own hands they set the sweet rice and the cakes before the brethren with the Buddha at their head, and waited on them till they had had enough. When the Blessed One had finished his meal, the ministers brought a low seat, and sat down respectfully at his side. When they were seated the Blessed One gave thanks in these verses:—

“Wherever the wise man takes up his abode,
Let him support there good and upright men of self-control.

Let him give gifts to all such deities as may be there.
Revered, they will revere him: honoured, they honour him again;
Are gracious to him as a mother to her own, her only son.
The man who has the grace of the gods, good fortune beholds.”

When he had thanked Sunidha and Vassakāra, the ministers of Māgadha, in these verses he rose from his seat and departed.

¹The ministers were polite, but not reverential, as they addressed the Buddha as “Bho Gotama,” not as “Bhante,” Venerable sir. Buddhaghosa tells this story: Vassakāra once saw Mahākaccāna descending from Vultures’ Peak and remarked that he was just like a monkey. The Buddha, hearing of this, said that, unless Vassakāra begged the Elder’s forgiveness, he would be reborn as a monkey in Veḷuvana. Vassakāra, feeling sure that the Buddha’s prophecy would come true, had various fruit and other trees planted in Veḷuvana, to be of use to him as a monkey. After death he was actually reborn as a monkey and answered to the name of Vassakāra.
“Ye taranti aṅṇavaṃ saraṃ, setum katvāna visajja pallaṇī. 
kulāñhi jano bandhati, tiṇṭa medhāvino janā”ti.

Paṭhama Bhāṇavāro.

154. They followed him as he went, saying, “The gate that the recluse 
Gotama goes out by today will be called Gotama’s gate, and the ferry at 
which he crosses the river will be called Gotama’s ferry.” So the gate that he 
got out by was called Gotama’s gate.

However, when the Blessed One went on to the river, the Ganges was 
brimful and overflowing. Wishing to cross to the opposite bank, some began 
to seek for boats, some for rafts of wood, while some made rafts of reeds. Then 
the Blessed One instantaneously vanished from this side of the river and stood 
on the far bank with the Saṅgha, as a strong man would stretch forth his arm 
or draw it back again when he had stretched it forth. The Blessed One saw the 
people looking for boats and rafts, and as he saw them he spoke this verse:—

“They who wish to cross the flood, 
Construct a bridge across the stream, 
Whilst the vain world ties its rafts of reeds 
These, the wise, these are saved indeed!”

End of the First Portion for Recitation

The Account of the Four Noble Truths
(Ariyasaccakathā)

155. Atha kho Bhagavā āyasmantam Ānandaṃ āmantesi — “Āyām Ānanda, 
yena kōṭigāmo tenupasaṅkamissāmā”ti. “Evaṃ, bhante”ti kho āyasmā Ānando 
Bhagavato paccassosi. Atha kho Bhagavā mahatā bhikkhusaṅghena saddhiṃ yena 
kōṭigāmo tadavasari. Tatha suṇaṃ Bhagavā kōṭigāme viharati. Tatha kho Bhagavā 
bhikkhū āmantesi —

“Catunnaṃ, bhikkhave, ariyasaccānaṃ ananubodhā appaṭivedhā evamidaṃ 
dīghamaddhānaṃ sandhāvitaṃ saṃsāritaṃ mamañceva tumhākañca. Katamesaṃ 
catunnaṃ? Dukkhassa, bhikkhave, ariyasaccassa ananubodhā appaṭivedhā 
evamidaṃ dīghamaddhānaṃ sandhāvitaṃ saṃsāritaṃ mamañceva tumhākañca. 
Dukkhasamudayassa, bhikkhave, ariyasaccassa ananubodhā appaṭivedhā evamidaṃ 
dīghamaddhānaṃ sandhāvitaṃ saṃsāritaṃ mamañceva tumhākañca. 
Dukkhanirodhassa, bhikkhave, ariyasaccassa ananubodhā appaṭivedhā evamidaṃ 
dīghamaddhānaṃ sandhāvitaṃ saṃsāritaṃ mamañceva tumhākañca. 
Dukkhanirodhagāminiyā paṭipadāya, bhikkhave, ariyasaccassa ananubodhā
The Account of the Four Noble Truths

apātivedhā evaṃ dīghamaddhānaṃ sandhāvitaṃ samsaritaṃ mamoñceva tumhākañca. Taṭidaṇ, bhikkhave, dukkham ariyasaccam anubuddham paṭividdham, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccam anubuddham paṭividdham, dukkhanirodham ariyasaccam anubuddham paṭividdham, dukkhanirodhagāmini paṭipada ariyasaccam anubuddham paṭividdham, ucchinnā bhavatanhā, kīṇā bhavanetti, natthidāni punabbhavo"ti. Idamavoca Bhagavā. Idam vatavāna sugato athāparaṃ etadavoca satthā —


The Blessed One proceeded with a great company of the brethren to Kotigēma; and there he stayed in the village itself.

There the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying “It is through not understanding and penetrating the Four Noble Truths, monks, that we have had to wander so long in this cycle or existence, both you and I!”

“What are the four? The noble truth of suffering; the noble truth of the origin of suffering; the noble truth of the cessation of suffering; and the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. When these noble truths are known and penetrated, the craving for existence is rooted out, that which leads to renewed existence is destroyed, and then there is no more birth!” Thus spoke the Blessed One (Bhagavā), and when the Fortunate One (Sugato) had spoken, again the teacher (sattha) said:—

“By not seeing the four Noble Truths as they really are,
Long is the path that is traversed through many a birth;
When these are grasped, the cause of birth is then removed,
The root of sorrow rooted out, and there is no more birth.”
At Koṭigāma too the Blessed One gave that comprehensive religious talk to the monks on the nature of morality, concentration, and wisdom. “Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by morality. Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by concentration. The mind protected by wisdom is freed from the corruptions, that is to say, from the corruption of sensuality, from the corruption of becoming, and from the corruption of ignorance.”

**Those Destined for Enlightenment**
*(Anāvattidhammasambodhipārayaṇā)*

156. When the Blessed One had remained as long as was convenient at Koṭigāma, he addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “Come, Ānanda, let us go on to the villages of Nātikā.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” replied Venerable Ānanda, in assent.

The Blessed proceeded to the villages of Nātikā with a great company of monks, and at Nātikā, the Blessed One stayed at the Brick Hall.

The Venerable Ānanda went to the Blessed One, paid homage, and took his seat beside him. When he was seated, he addressed the Blessed One, saying, “The brother named Sāḷha has died at Nātikā, Venerable sir. Where has he been reborn, and what is his destiny? The sister named Nandā has died, Venerable sir, at Nātikā. Where is she reborn, and what is her destiny?”
In the same terms he enquired concerning the lay disciple Sudatta, and the female lay disciple Sujātā, the lay disciples Kukkuṭo, and Kālimba, and Nikaṭa, and Kaṭissaha, and Tuṭṭha, and Santuṭṭha, and Bhadda, and Subhadda.


157. “The brother named Sāḷha, Ānanda, by the destruction of the corruptions, has in this very life realised and attained Arahantship — to liberation by mind and liberation by wisdom. The sister named Nandā, Ānanda, has, by the complete destruction of the five lower fetters that bind people to this world, become an inheritor of the highest heavens, there to pass entirely away, never to return. The lay disciple Sudatta, Ānanda, by the complete destruction of the three fetters, and by the reduction of lust, hatred, and delusion has become a Once-returner, who on his first return to this world will make an end of suffering. The female lay disciple Sujātā, Ānanda, by the complete destruction of the three fetters, has become a Stream-winner, no longer liable to be reborn in a state of suffering, and is assured of final liberation. The lay disciple Kukkuṭo, Ānanda, by the complete destruction of the five lower fetters that bind people to these lower worlds of lust, has become an inheritor of the highest heavens, there to pass entirely away, never
to return. So also is the case with Kālimba, Nikaṭa, Katissaha, Tuṭṭha, Santuṭṭha, Bhadda, and Subhadda, and with more than fifty lay disciples of Nātikā. More than ninety lay disciples of Nātikā, who have died, Ānanda, have by the complete destruction of the three fetters, and by the reduction of lust, hatred, and delusion, become Once-returners, who on their first return to this world will make an end of suffering. More than five hundred lay disciples of Nātikā who have died, Ānanda, have, by the complete destruction of the three fetters become Stream-winners, are no longer liable to be reborn in a state of suffering, and are assured of final liberation.

The Exposition on the Mirror of the Dhamma
(Dhammādāsadhammapariyāyā)


158. “There is nothing strange in this, Ānanda, that a human being should die, but that as each one does so you should come to the Tathāgata, and enquire about them in this way, that is wearisome to the Tathāgata. Therefore Ānanda I will teach you a way to investigate the truth called “The Mirror of Truth,” by which a noble disciple may predict, “Hell is destroyed for me, and rebirth as an animal, or a ghost, or in any place of suffering. I am a Stream-winner, no longer liable to be reborn in a state of suffering, assured of final liberation.”

159. “Katamo ca so, Ānanda, dhammādāso dhammapariyāyo, yena samannāgato ariyasāvako ākaṅkhhamāno attānaṃ byākareyya — ‘Khīṇanirayomhi khīṇatiracchānayoni khīṇapettivisayo khīṇapāyaduggativinipāto, sotāpannohamsmi avinipātadhammo nīyato sambhāparāyaṇo’ti?

“IdhĀnanda, ariyasāvako buddhe aveccappasādena samannāgato hoti — ‘Iti pi so Bhagavā arahaṃ sammāsambuddho vijjācarānasampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammasarathi satthā devamanussānatho buddho Bhagavā’ti.

“Dhamme aveccappasādena samannāgato hoti — ‘Svākkhāto Bhagavatā dhammo sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehipassiko opaneyyiko paccattamā veditabbo viññūhi’ti.
“Saṅghena aveccappasādena samannāgato hoti — ‘Suppaṭipanno Bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, ājuppapiṭipanno Bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, nāyappapiṭipanno Bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, sāmicippapiṭipanno Bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho yadhām cattāri purisayugāni attha purisapuggalā, esa Bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho āhuneyyo pāhuneyyo dakkhiṇeyyo añjalikaraṇīyo anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassā’ti.

“Ariyakantehi sīlehi samannāgato hoti akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi bhujissehi viññūpasatthehi aparāmatthehi samādhisaṃvattanikehi.

“Ayaṃ kho so, Ānanda, dhammādāso dhammapariyāyo, yena samannāgato ariyasāvako ākaṅkhamāno attanāva attānaṃ byākareyya — ‘Khīṇanirayomhi khīṇatiracchānayoni khīṇapettivisayo khīṇāpāyaduggativinipāto, sotāpanno-hamasmi avinipātadhammo niyato sambodhiparāyaṇo’’’ti.

Taṇapi sudāṃ Bhagavā nātike viharanto giñjakāvasathe etadeva bahulaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ dhammiṃ kathaṃ karoti —


159. “What then, Ānanda, is this mirror of truth? It is the awareness that a noble disciple possesses firm confidence in the Buddha, believing the Blessed One to be an Arahant, Fully-enlightened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the worlds, the incomparable charioteer of trainable persons, teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed. That he or she possesses firm confidence in the Dhamma, believing the truth to have been well proclaimed by the Blessed One, visible in this world, timeless, inviting investigation, leading onwards, and to be realised by the wise. The disciple is possessed of firm confidence in the Saṅgha, believing that the disciples of the Blessed One have practised correctly, honestly, and wisely, that they have attained the four Paths and Fruits, are worthy of honour, hospitality, gifts, and reverence; they are the most fertile field of merit for the world. The noble disciple also possesses virtues beloved by the good, with their morality unbroken, intact, spotless, and unblemished, virtues that make men truly free, that are praised by the wise, untarnished by the desire for future life or by the belief in the efficacy of outward acts, and are conducive to high and holy thought.”

“This, Ānanda, is the way of investigation, the mirror of truth, by which a noble disciple may predict, “Hell is destroyed for me; and rebirth as an
animal, or a ghost, or in any place of suffering. I am a Stream-winner; no longer liable to be reborn in a state of suffering, and assured of final liberation.”

There, too, at the Brick Hall at Nātikā the Blessed One gave that comprehensive religious talk to the monks on the nature of morality, concentration, and wisdom. “Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by morality. Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by concentration. The mind protected by wisdom is freed from the corruptions, that is to say, from the corruption of sensuality, from the corruption of becoming, and from the corruption of ignorance.”

160. When the Blessed One had remained as long as he wished at Nātikā, he addressed Ānanda, saying: “Come, Ānanda, let us go on to Vesāli.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” replied Venerable Ānanda, in assent.

Then the Blessed One proceeded with a great company of monks to Vesāli, and there at Vesāli the Blessed One stayed at Ambapālī’s grove.

There the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying, “Monks, a monk should be mindful and clearly comprehending, this is my instruction to you.” How does a brother become mindful? Herein, monks, a monk dwells mindful of the body in the body; ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having
overcome covetousness and sorrow concerning the world. A monk dwells mindful of feeling in feelings; ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having overcome covetousness and sorrow concerning the world. A monk dwells mindful of thoughts in thoughts; ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having overcome covetousness and sorrow concerning the world. A monk dwells mindful of mental objects in mental objects; ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having overcome covetousness and sorrow concerning the world.

“How, monks, is a monk clearly comprehending? He acts, monks, in full presence of mind whatever he may do, in going out and coming back, in looking ahead and looking around, in bending or stretching his limbs, in wearing his robes or carrying his bowl, in eating and drinking, in chewing or tasting, in urinating or defecating, in walking, standing, or sitting, in sleeping or waking, in talking and in remaining silent. Thus monks, a monk is mindful and clearly comprehending. This is my instruction to you.”

The Buddha gave this advice because of the impending visit of Ambapālī, a beautiful courtesan. Though she was old, she was still extremely beautiful and graceful. If the monks were practising mindfulness diligently, they would not even look at her.

Ambapālī the Courtesan
(Ambapālīgaṇikā)


161. The courtesan Ambapālī heard that the Blessed One had arrived at Vesālī, and was staying at her mango grove. Ordering a number of magnificent vehicles to be made ready, she mounted one of them, and proceeded with her entourage towards her own park. She went in the carriage as far as the ground was passable for carriages, then alighted, and proceeded on foot to where the Blessed One was sitting, and took a seat respectfully on one side. When she was seated, the Blessed One instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened her with religious discourse.

Then she — being instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened with his words — addressed the Blessed One, saying, “May the Blessed One honour
me by taking his meal, together with the Saṅgha, at my house tomorrow.” The Blessed One signified his consent by silence.

When Ambapālī the courtesan saw that the Blessed One had consented, she rose from her seat, paid homage, and keeping him on her right side as she left, she departed.

The Licchāvi of Vesāli heard that the Blessed One had arrived at Vesāli, and was staying at Ambapālī’s grove. Ordering a number of magnificent carriages to be made ready, they each mounted one of them and proceeded with their entourage to Vesāli. Some of them were dark, dark in colour, and wearing dark clothes and ornaments: some of them were fair, fair in colour, and wearing light clothes and ornaments: some of them were red, ruddy in colour, and wearing red clothes and ornaments: some of them were white, pale in colour, and wearing white clothes and ornaments.

Ambapālī drove up against the young Licchāvi, axle to axle, wheel to wheel, and yoke to yoke, and the Licchāvi said to Ambapālī the courtesan, “Ambapālī, why do drive up against us thus?”

She replied, “My lords, I have just invited the Blessed One and the Saṅgha for tomorrow’s meal.”

They said, “Ambapālī! Give up this meal to us for a hundred thousand.”

“My lords, were you to offer all Vesāli with its subject territory, I would not give up so honourable a feast!”

Then the Licchāvi snapped their fingers (aṅguliṃ phoṭesuṃ), exclaiming, “We have been beaten by this mango girl!”

Then the Licchāvi went on to Ambapālī’s grove. When the Blessed One saw the Licchāvi approaching in the distance, he addressed the brethren, saying: “Monks, let those who have never seen the Tāvatiṃsa gods, gaze upon this company of the Licchāvi, behold this company of the Licchāvi, compare this company of the Licchāvi even as a company of Tāvatiṃsa gods.”

When they had ridden as far as the ground was passable for carriages, the Licchāvi alighted there, and then went on on foot to where the Blessed One was sitting, and took their seats respectfully by his side. When they were thus seated the Blessed One instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened them with religious discourse.

Instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened with his words, they addressed the Blessed One, saying, “May the Blessed One do us the honour of taking his meal, together with the Saṅgha, at our house tomorrow?”

“I have consented, Licchāvi, to take tomorrow’s meal with Ambapālī the courtesan,” was the reply.
Then the Licchāvī snapped their fingers, exclaiming, "We have been beaten by this mango girl!" Expressing their thanks and approval of the words of the Blessed One, they rose from their seats and paid homage to the Blessed One, and keeping him on their right side as they left, they departed.

It is impossible that a Buddha could break a promise that he has given. Once a monk has accepted an invitation for alms, he should not accept another invitation from someone else. At one time, the Buddha Kassapa was invited for the Rains by Ghaṭikāra, a potter. He later refused an invitation from the King of Kāsi, saying that he had already been invited. See the Ghaṭikāra Sutta, Majjhimanikāya, Sutta 81.

To allow the monks more flexibility with meal arrangements it is better to invite in general terms, "I would like to offer alms to a certain number of monks," or "I would like to invite the Saṅgha for alms." In this way, the monk in charge of meal arrangements can satisfy everyone more easily. If one offers alms to the Saṅgha one makes more merit than offering to an Arahant, even if the only representative of the Saṅgha available is a badly-behaved novice. This is surprising, but correct. If supporters like to invite only a particular monk they are guilty of partiality. By inviting the Saṅgha they make immeasurable merit, however many monks attend the almsgiving, since an invitation to the Saṅgha is an open invitation. If visiting monks happen to arrive, they are automatically invited too, and the resident monks have to share the available almsfood with them.

The almsfood is formally offered to the Saṅgha by reciting the words, "Imaṃ bhikkham, bhikkhu-saṅghaḥ dema," which means, "We offer this almsfood to the Saṅgha." Then each dish of curry should be physically offered to the nearest monk, who should receive it by touching the dish with his hand or by holding a cloth, tray, or table-mat on which the dish should be placed by the donor. If the food is not formally offered in this way, it is not allowable for bhikkhus to eat it. The Vinaya rules prescribe that the donor must be within arms-reach of the bhikkhu. Food can also be dropped into a bhikkhu's almsbowl (e.g. with a spoon).

In the Thai Forest tradition, once the food has been formally offered, it should not be touched again, but according to the Burmese tradition, as long as the monks have not relinquished the food, they can still use it.

There is another reason for offering the entire meal to the Saṅgha. If a lay person offers food to a monk and he refuses, since he has had enough rice, he should not later accept other food such as fruit or cakes. When many donors want to offer food some may not get a chance to have their dish accepted by any monk since they already have sufficient. Bhikkhuṣ can take back excess food to share with others, but this is not always convenient.
in modern times, and some may think they are being greedy. After the Saṅgha have finished their meal and relinquished the food, the remainder can be eaten by others.

162. At the end of the night Ambapālī the courtesan made delicious hard and soft food ready in her mansion, and announced the time to the Blessed One, saying, “The time has come Venerable sir, and the meal is ready!”

The Blessed One robed himself early in the morning, took his bowl, and went with the monks to Ambapālī’s dwelling: and when he had arrived he seated himself on the seat prepared for him. Ambapālī the courtesan set the delicious hard and soft food before the Saṅgha, with the Buddha at their head, and waited upon them until they refused any more.

When the Blessed One had finished his meal, the courtesan taking a low seat, sat down at one side, and addressed the Blessed One, saying, “Venerable sir, I donate this park to the Saṅgha of which the Buddha is the leader (Imāhaṃ, bhante, ārāmaṃ buddhappamukkhassa bhikkhusaṅghassa dammi).” The Blessed One accepted the park, and after instructing, rousing, enthusing, and gladdening her with religious discourse, he rose from his seat and departed.

Ambapālī later became a bhikkhuṇī and attained Arahantship. Though a courtesan due to force of circumstances, she was certainly not a common prostitute. In a previous life she had been a virtuous bhikkhuṇī, but on seeing some phlegm spat out on the pagoda precincts by an Arahant bhikkhuṇī, she contemptuously exclaimed, “What
An Exposition of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta

kind of whore would spit in a place like this?” When she was reborn in the time of the Buddha, she was abandoned by her mother, perhaps also a prostitute, in the mango grove of King Bimbisāra. The good king brought up the orphaned baby girl in the royal household. When she came of age, all the young nobles vied with one another for her hand in marriage. The elders feared that blood would be shed, so they decided that Ambapālī should be established as a courtesan. Then anyone who could afford the price could sleep with her. Thus, due to her excellent morality she was extremely beautiful, but due to her contemptuous remark about an Arahant she suffered the humiliation of being a courtesan. So self-righteousness indignation can be very dangerous. It is better to cultivate tolerance and compassion for the faults of others. Unless one has attained the path of Stream-winning, morality is unstable and imperfect.

While staying at Vesāli the Blessed One gave that comprehensive religious talk to the monks on the nature of morality, concentration, and wisdom. “Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by morality. Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by concentration. The mind protected by wisdom is freed from the corruptions, that is to say, from the corruption of sensuality, from the corruption of becoming, and from the corruption of ignorance.”

Observing the Rains Retreat at Beḷuva

(Veḷuvagāmavassupagamanam)


163. When the Blessed One had remained as long as he wished at Ambapālī’s grove, he addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying: “Come, Ānanda, let us go on to Beḷuva (Veḷuva).”

The variant reading of Beḷuva found in the Sri Lankan edition of the Pāḷi texts is more likely correct than the CSCD text version of Veḷuvana. The Bamboo (veḷu) grove
Observing the Rains Retreat at Beḷuva

at Rājagaha donated by King Bimbisāra is very famous, and there are several other places with the same name, but Beḷuva was near Vesāli, on the opposite side of the Ganges to Rājagaha. The translation by Maurice Walshe also refers to Beḷuva here.

“Yes, Venerable sir,” replied Venerable Ānanda, in assent.

Then the Blessed One proceeded with a great company of monks to Beḷuva, and there the Blessed One stayed in the village itself.

The Blessed One addressed the monks, saying: “Monks, take up residence for the rainy season near Vesāli, each according to the place where his friends, intimates, and companions may live. I will enter upon the rainy season here at Beḷuva.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the monks replied in assent, and they entered upon the rainy season around about Vesāli, each where his friends or intimates or close companions lived, whilst the Blessed One stayed just there at Beḷuva.

164. When the Blessed One had thus entered upon the rainy season, a dire sickness fell upon him, and sharp pains oppressed him, even to the point of death. However, the Blessed One, mindful and clearly comprehending, bore them without complaint. Then this thought occurred to the Blessed One, “It would not be right for me to pass away without addressing the disciples, without taking leave of the Saṅgha. Let me now, by a strong effort of will, suppress this sickness, and keep hold on life until the allotted time has come.”
Then the Blessed One, by a strong effort of will, suppressed that sickness, and kept hold on life until the time should come, and the sickness abated.

Soon after the Blessed One had recovered, when he had quite got rid of the sickness, he went out from the dwelling place, and sat down behind it on a seat spread out there. The venerable Ānanda went to where the Blessed One was seated, paid homage, took a seat respectfully on one side, and addressed the Blessed One, saying, “I saw how the Blessed One was in health, and how he had to suffer. Though at the sight of the Blessed One’s sickness my body became as weak as a creeper, the horizon became dim to me, and my faculties were no longer clear, yet notwithstanding I took some comfort from the thought that the Blessed One would not pass away before he had left instructions regarding the Saṅgha.”


Dutiya Bhāṇavāro
“What, then, Ānanda, does the Saṅgha expect of me? I have taught the truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrine. In respect of the truth, Ānanda, the Tathāgata has no such thing as the closed fist of a teacher who keeps some things back. Surely, Ānanda, should there be anyone who harbours the thought, “It is I who will lead the Saṅgha,” or, “The Saṅgha is dependent upon me,” it is he who should lay down instructions in any matter concerning the Saṅgha. The Tathāgata, Ānanda, does not think that he should lead the Saṅgha, or that the Saṅgha is dependent upon him. Why then should he leave instructions in any matter concerning the Saṅgha? I, Ānanda, have grown old, advanced in years, and my journey is drawing to its close, I have reached my sum of days, I am over eighty years of age. Just like a worn-out cart, Ānanda, can only with much additional care be made to move along, so, the body of the Tathāgata can only be kept going with much additional care. It is only, Ānanda, when the Tathāgata, ceasing to attend to any outward sign, or to experience any sensation, becomes plunged in that deep meditation that is not concerned with any material object, that the body of the Tathāgata is at ease. Therefore, Ānanda, be lamps to yourselves (attadīpo). Be a refuge to yourselves (attasaraṇo). Take no external refuge. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp (dhammadīpo). Hold fast to the truth as a refuge (dhammasaraṇo). Look for refuge in no one besides yourselves. How, Ānanda, is a monk a lamp to himself, a refuge to himself, taking no external refuge, holding fast to the truth as a lamp, holding fast to the truth as a refuge, looking for refuge in no one besides himself? Herein, Ānanda, a monk should be mindful and clearly comprehending, this is my instruction to you.” How does a monk become mindful? Herein, monks, a monk dwells mindful of the body in the body; ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having overcome covetousness and sorrow concerning the world. A monk dwells mindful of feeling in feelings; ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having overcome covetousness and sorrow concerning the world. A monk dwells mindful of thoughts in thoughts; ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having overcome covetousness and sorrow concerning the world. A monk dwells mindful of mental objects in mental objects; ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having overcome covetousness and sorrow concerning the world. Whosoever, Ānanda, either now or after I am dead, shall be a lamp to themselves, and a refuge to themselves, shall betake themselves to no external refuge, but holding fast to the truth as their lamp, and holding fast as their refuge to the truth, shall look not for refuge to anyone besides themselves — it is they,
Ānanda, among my disciples, who will reach the highest goal, whoever is eager to train themselves.”

There is an apparent paradox in this teaching. On the one hand, good friendship is described as the whole of the holy life, and on going-forth one should take dependence on a teacher, faithfully following their guidance until one has sufficient knowledge and experience to become independent. Anyone who is not yet a Stream-winner is still liable to fall into wrong-views and miss the right path if he or she does not heed the advice of teachers and wise friends who are more experienced in the practice. On the other hand, no one can become independent without personal realisation of the truth. What is meant by being a refuge to oneself is that even a Buddha or an Arahant can only show the way. However skilled the teacher may be, each individual must walk the full distance on the path by himself or herself. No one can carry another to nibbāna on their shoulders. Finding the right method to control the mind is like learning to swim, ride a bicycle, or fly an aeroplane. A teacher can instruct and encourage the pupil, but the pupil has to master the skill through practice.

End of the Second Portion for Recitation

The Account of Giving a Hint
(Nimittobhāsakathā)


166. Now the Blessed One robed himself early in the morning, and taking his bowl and the robe, went into Vesāli for alms, and when he returned he sat down on the seat prepared for him, and after he had finished eating the almsfood he addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying: “Take up the mat, Ānanda; I will go to spend the day at the Cāpāla Cetiya.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent, and taking up the mat he followed behind the Blessed One. So the Blessed One proceeded to the Cāpāla Cetiya, and when he had come there he sat down on the mat spread out for him, and the Venerable Ānanda took his seat respectfully beside him.

Ānanda, whosoever has developed, made much off, made them his vehicle and support, and ascended to the summit of the four bases of success (iddhipāda), and has mastered them, if he wished could remain in the same birth for a lifespan, or for that portion of the lifespan that had yet to run.

1 The word used, “kappa,” can mean a world-cycle, but here it probably means the maximum
The Tathāgata has [done this], and he could, should he so wish, live on for a full lifespan, or for that portion of the lifespan that has yet to run."

However, even though a suggestion so evident and a hint so clear was given by the Blessed One, the Venerable Ānanda was incapable of comprehending, and did not request the Blessed One, saying, “Determine, Venerable sir, to remain for the full lifespan! Live on to the end of the lifespan, Blessed One, for the good and the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good and the gain and the weal of gods and men,” so far was his heart possessed by the Evil One.

A second and a third time did the Blessed One say the same thing, and a second and a third time was Ānanda’s heart thus hardened. Then the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda saying: “Leave me for a while Ānanda and do whatever you see fit.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent, and rising from his seat he saluted the Blessed One, and passing him on the right, sat down at the foot of a certain tree not far off.

The Account of Māra’s Request
(Mārayācanakathā)

bhante, bhikkhū Bhagavato sāvakā viyattā vīnītā visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā
dhammānudhammappatiṇīpānā sāmicippatimappānā anudhammadacarīno, sakam
cariyakam uggahetvā ācikkhanti desenti paññapenti pātthapenti vivaranti vibhajanti
uttānikaronti, uppanama parappavaḍam sahaddhammam suniggahitam niggahetvā
sappāṭiḥariyam dhammaṃ desenti. Parinibbātudāni, bhante, Bhagavā, parinibbātu
sugato, parinibbānākālodāni, bhante, Bhagavato.

"Bhāsitā kho panesā, bhante, Bhagavatā vācā — 'Na tāvāham, pāpima,
parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me bhikkhuniyo na săvikā bhavissanti viyattā vīnītā
visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānudhammappatiṇīpānā sāmicippatimappānā
anudhammadacarīno, sakam ācariyakam uggahetvā ācikkhissanti
desessanti paññapessanti pātthapessanti vivarissanti vibhajissanti uttānikarissanti,
uppanama parappavaḍam sahaddhammam suniggahitam niggahetvā sappāṭiḥariyam
dhammaṃ desessanti’ti. Etarahi kho pana, bhante, bhikkhuniyo Bhagavato
săvikā viyattā vīnītā visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānudhmappatiṇīpānā sāmicippatimappānā
anudhammadacarīno, sakam ācariyakam uggahetvā ācikkhissanti desessanti
desenti paññapenti pātthapenti vivaranti vibhajanti uttānikaronti,
uppanama parappavaḍam sahaddhammam suniggahitam niggahetvā sappāṭiḥariyam
dhammaṃ desessantī’ti. Etarahi kho pana, bhante, bhikkhuniyo Bhagavato
săvikā viyattā vīnītā visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānudhmappatiṇīpānā sāmicippatimappānā
anudhammadacarīno, sakam ācariyakam uggahetvā ācikkhissanti desessanti
desenti paññapenti pātthapenti vivaranti vibhajanti uttānikaronti,
uppanama parappavaḍam sahaddhammam suniggahitam niggahetvā sappāṭiḥariyam
dhammaṃ desenti. Parinibbātudāni, bhante, Bhagavā, parinibbātu
sugato, parinibbānākālodāni, bhante, Bhagavato.

"Bhāsitā kho panesā, bhante, Bhagavatā vācā — 'Na tāvāham, pāpima,
parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me bhikkhuniyo na săvikā bhavissanti viyattā vīnītā
visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānudhammappatiṇīpānā sāmicippatimappānā
anudhammadacarīno, sakam ācariyakam uggahetvā ācikkhissanti desessanti
desenti paññapenti pātthapenti vivaranti vibhajanti uttānikaronti,
uppanama parappavaḍam sahaddhammam suniggahitam niggahetvā sappāṭiḥariyam
dhammaṃ desenti. Parinibbātudāni, bhante, Bhagavā, parinibbātu
sugato, parinibbānākālodāni, bhante, Bhagavato.

"Bhāsitā kho panesā, bhante, Bhagavatā vācā — 'Na tāvāham, pāpima,
parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me bhikkhuniyo na săvikā bhavissanti viyattā vīnītā
visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānudhammappatiṇīpānā sāmicippatimappānā
anudhammadacarīno, sakam ācariyakam uggahetvā ācikkhissanti desessanti
desenti paññapenti pātthapenti vivaranti vibhajanti uttānikaronti,
uppanama parappavaḍam sahaddhammam suniggahitam niggahetvā sappāṭiḥariyam
dhammaṃ desenti. Parinibbātudāni, bhante, Bhagavā, parinibbātu
sugato, parinibbānākālodāni, bhante, Bhagavato.


168. Not long after the Venerable Ānanda had gone, Māra, the Evil One, approached the Blessed One, and stood beside him. Standing there, he addressed the Blessed One in these words: “Pass away now, Venerable sir, from existence; let the Blessed One now die. Now is the time for the Blessed One to pass away — even according to the words that the Blessed One spoke when he said: ‘I shall not die, Evil One, until the monks and nuns of the Saṅgha, and until the male and female lay-disciples have become true disciples, wise and well-trained, ready and learned, versed in the scriptures, fulfilling all the greater and lesser duties, correct in life, living according to the precepts — until they, having thus themselves learned the doctrine, shall be able to tell others of it, teach it, make it known, establish it, open it, minutely explain it and make it clear — until they, when others start vain doctrine, shall be able by the truth to vanquish and refute it, and so to spread the wonder-working truth abroad!’ Now, Venerable sir, the monks and nuns of the Saṅgha, and the male and female lay-disciples have become all this, are able to do all this. Pass away now therefore, Venerable sir, from existence; let the Blessed One now die! The time has come for the Blessed One to pass away — even according to the words that he said, ‘I will not die, Evil One, until this pure religion of mine has become successful, prosperous, wide-
spread, and popular to its full extent — until it will have been well proclaimed to men.’ Now, Venerable sir, this pure religion of yours has become all this. Pass away now therefore, Venerable sir, from existence; let the Blessed One now die! The time has come for the Blessed One to pass away!’

When he had thus spoken, the Blessed One addressed Māra, the Evil One, saying: “Evil One! Be happy, the final extinction of the Tathāgata will take place before long. Three months from this time the Tathāgata will pass away!”

**Renouncing the Remaining Lifespan**

(Āyusaṅkhāraossajjanaṃ)

169. Atha kho Bhagavā cāpāle cetiye sato sampajāno āyusaṅkhāraṃ ossaji. Ossaṭṭhe ca Bhagavatā āyusaṅkhāre mahābhūmicālo ahosi bhiṃsanako salomahanmso, devadundubhiyo ca phaliṃsu. Atha kho Bhagavā etamatthaṃ viditvā tāyaṃ velāyaṃ imaṃ udānaṃ udānesi —

“Tulamatulañca sambhavam, bhavasaṅkhāramavassaji muni. ajjhattarato samāhito, abhindi kavacamivattasambhava”nti.

169. Thus the Blessed One while at the Cāpāla Cetiya deliberately and consciously rejected the rest of his allotted sum of life, and a mighty earthquake arose, awful and terrible, and thunder burst forth. When the Blessed One saw this, he broke out at that time into this hymn of exultation:

“His sum of life the sage renounced,
The cause of life immeasurable or small;
With inward joy and calm, he broke,
Like a coat of mail, his life’s own cause!”

**The Causes of Great Earthquakes**

(Mahābhūmicālahetu)

170. Atha kho āyasmato Ānandassa etadahosi — “Acchariyaṃ vata bho, abbhutaṃ vata bho, mahā vatāyaṃ bhūmicālo; sumahā vatāyaṃ bhūmicālo bhiṃsanako salomahanmso; devadundubhiyo ca phaliṃsu. Ko nu kho hetu ko paccayo mahato bhūmicālassa pātubhāvāyā”ti?

Atha kho āyasma Ānando yena Bhagavā tenupasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā Bhagavantaṃ abhiśaṭṭhā ekamantaṃ nisidi, ekamantaṃ nisinno kho āyasma Ānando Bhagavantaṃ etadavoca — “Acchariyaṃ, bhante, abbhutaṃ, bhante, mahā vatāyaṃ, bhante, bhūmicālo; sumahā vatāyaṃ, bhante, bhūmicālo bhiṃsanako
An Exposition of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta

salomahaṃso; devadundubhiyo ca phalimsu. Ko nu kho, bhante, hetu ko paccayo mahato bhūmicālassa pātubhāvāyā”ti?

170. Now the following thought occurred to the Venerable Ānanda:
“Wonderful indeed and marvellous is it that this mighty earthquake should arise, awful and terrible, and that the thunders of heaven should burst forth! What may be the proximate, what the remote cause of the appearance of this earthquake?”

Then the Venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One, paid homage to the Blessed One, seated himself respectfully at one side, saying: “Wonderful indeed and marvellous is it that this mighty earthquake should arise, awful and terrible, and that the thunders of heaven should burst forth! What may be the proximate, what the remote cause of the appearance of this earthquake?”


“Puna caparam, Ānanda, samaṇo vā hoti brāhmaṇo vā iddhimā cetovasippatto, devo vā mahiddhiko mahānubhāvo, tassa parittā pathaviṣaṅīṇā bhāvo ṭi, appamāṇā āposaṅīṇā. So imaṃ pathaviṃ kampeti saṅkampeti sampakampeti sampavedheti. Āyaṃ dutiya hetu dutiya paccayo mahato bhūmicālassa pātubhāvāyā.

“Puna caparam, Ānanda, yadā bodhisatto tusitakāyā cavittvā sato sampajāno mātukucchiṃ okkamati, tadāyaṃ pathavi kampati saṅkampati sampakampati sampavedhati. Āyaṃ tatiyo hetu tatiyo paccayo mahato bhūmicālassa pātubhāvāyā.

“Puna caparam, Ānanda, yadā bodhisatto tusitakāyā cavittvā sato sampajāno mātukucchismā nikkhamati, tadāyaṃ pathavi kampati saṅkampati sampakampati sampavedhati. Āyaṃ catuttho hetu catuttho paccayo mahato bhūmicālassa pātubhāvāyā.

“Puna caparam, Ānanda, yadā Tathāgato anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhiṃ abhisambujjhati, tadāyaṃ pathavi kampati saṅkampati sampakampati sampavedhati. Āyaṃ pañcamo hetu pañcamo paccayo mahato bhūmicālassa pātubhāvāyā.

“Puna caparam, Ānanda, yadā Tathāgato anuttaraṃ dhammacakkavāttham pavatteti, tadāyaṃ pathavi kampati saṅkampati sampakampati sampavedhati. Āyaṃ chaṭṭho hetu chaṭṭho paccayo mahato bhūmicālassa pātubhāvāyā.
“Puna caparam, Ānanda, yadā Tathāgato sato sampajāno āyusaṅkhāram ossajjati, tadāyaṃ pathavī kampati saṅkampati sampakampati sampavedhati. Ayaṃ sattamo hetu sattamo paccayo mahato bhūmicālassa pātubhāvāya.

“Puna caparam, Ānanda, yadā Tathāgato anupādisesāya nibbānadhātuyā parinibbāyati, tadāyaṃ pathavī kampati saṅkampati sampakampati sampavedhati. Ayaṃ aṭṭhamo hetu aṭṭhamo paccayo mahato bhūmicālassa pātubhāvāya. Ime kho, Ānanda, aṭṭha hetū, aṭṭha paccayā mahato bhūmicālassa pātubhāvāya′ti.

171. “There are eight root causes, eight conditions, Ānanda, for the appearance of a mighty earthquake. What eight? This great earth, Ānanda, is established on water, the water on wind, and the wind rests upon space. At such a time, Ānanda, as the mighty winds blow, the waters are shaken by the mighty winds as they blow, and by the moving water the earth is shaken. These are the first causes, proximate and remote, of the appearance of a mighty earthquake.

The four elements of earth, water, fire, and air should not be regarded literally. Here, water means fluidity, and even molten rock has the element of fluidity. The element of wind means pressure or motion, and earth refers to solidity. When the pressure of gases increases inside the earth’s mantle, the magma flows being pushed by the high pressures. Wherever there are faults in the solid rock, the pressure forces the rock surfaces apart and earthquakes can occur. The increase of water pressure in saturated ground can also cause liquefaction, and previously solid earth becomes like quicksand. This regular type of earthquake is due to the law of climate (utu niyāma).

“Again, Ānanda, a recluse or priest of great mental power, who has mastered the mind, or a deity of great might and power, such a one by intense meditation on the finite idea of earth or the infinite idea of water can make this earth move and tremble and shake violently. This is the second cause and condition for the appearance of a mighty earthquake.

“Again, Ānanda, when a Bodhisatta mindfully and clearly comprehending leaves his temporary abode, the heaven of delight, and descends into his mother’s womb, then this earth quakes and trembles and shakes violently. This is the third cause and condition for the appearance of a mighty earthquake.

“Again, Ānanda, when a Bodhisatta mindfully and clearly comprehending leaves his mother’s womb, then the earth quakes and trembles and shakes violently. This is the fourth cause for the appearance of a mighty earthquake.
“Again, Ānanda, when a Tathāgata attains supreme and perfect enlightenment, then this earth quakes and trembles and shakes violently. This is the fifth cause and condition for the appearance of a mighty earthquake.

“Again, Ānanda, when a Tathāgata sets in motion the wheel of the Dhamma, then this earth quakes and trembles and is shaken violently. This is the sixth cause and condition for the appearance of a mighty earthquake.

“Again, Ānanda, when a Tathāgata mindfully and clearly comprehending rejects the remainder of his lifespan, then this earth quakes and trembles and shakes violently. This is the seventh cause and condition for the appearance of a mighty earthquake.

“Again, Ānanda, when a Tathāgata passes entirely away with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever is left behind, then this earth quakes and trembles and shakes violently. This is the eighth cause and condition for the appearance of a mighty earthquake.

The Eight Kinds of Assembly

(Aṭṭha Parisā)

Antarahitaṅca maṇī na jānanti — ‘Ko nu kho ayaṁ antarahito devo vā manusso vā’ti? Imā kho, Ānanda, aṭṭha parisā.

172. “Ānanda, there are eight kinds of assemblies. What eight? Assemblies of nobles, priests, householders, recluses, deities of the Four Great Kings, deities of the Thirty-three, Māras, and Brahmās.

“I recall, Ānanda, how when I used to enter an assembly of many hundreds of nobles, before I had seated myself there or talked to them or started a conversation with them, I used to become the same colour as them, and with a voice like theirs, I used to instruct, rouse, enthuse, and gladden them with religious discourse. However, they did not know me when I spoke, and would say, “Who is this who speaks? Is he a man or a god?” Then having instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened them with religious discourse, I would vanish, but they did not know me when I vanished; and would say, “Who was this who has thus vanished? Was he a man or a god?”

In the same words the Blessed One spoke of how he used to enter each of the eight kinds of assemblies, and how he had not been known to them either in speaking or in vanishing.

“These, Ānanda, are the eight assemblies.”

The Eight Stages of Mastery

(Aṭṭha Abhibhāyatanāni)


“Ajjhattām arūpasaññī eko bahiddhā rūpāni passati nilāni nilavaṇṇāni nilanidassanāni nilanibhāsāni. Seyyathāpi nāma umāpupphaṁ nilāṁ nilavaṇṇāṁ nilanidassanaṁ nilanibhāsaṁ. Seyyathā vā pana taṁ vaṭṭhaṁ bārāṇaseyyakaṁ


173. “These, Ānanda, are the eight stages of mastery [over the delusion arising from the apparent permanence of external things]. What are the eight?
"When a man having subjectively the idea of form sees externally forms which are finite, and pleasant or unpleasant to the sight, and having mastered them, is conscious that he knows and sees — this is the first stage of mastery.
"When a man having subjectively the idea of form sees externally forms which are boundless, and pleasant or unpleasant to the sight, and having mastered them is conscious that he knows and sees — this is the second stage of mastery.
"When a man without the subjective idea of form sees externally forms which are finite, and pleasant or unpleasant to the sight, and having mastered them, is conscious that he knows and sees — this is the third stage of mastery.

"When a man without the subjective idea of form sees externally forms which are boundless, and pleasant or unpleasant to the sight, and having mastered them, is conscious that he knows and sees — this is the fourth stage of mastery.

"When a man without the subjective idea of form sees externally forms that are blue in colour, blue in appearance, and reflecting blue — just, for instance, as the Umā flower is blue in colour, blue in appearance, and reflecting blue; or, again, as that fine muslin of Benares which, on whichever side you look at it, is blue in colour, blue in appearance, and reflecting blue, — when a man without the subjective idea of form sees externally forms which, just in that way, are blue, blue in colour, blue in appearance, and reflecting blue, and having mastered them, is conscious that he knows and sees — that is the fifth stage of mastery."

[The sixth, seventh, and eighth stages of mastery are explained in words identical with those used to explain the fifth; save that yellow, red, and white are respectively substituted for blue; and the Kaṇikāra flower, the Bandhujiyaka flower, and the Morning Star (Osadhitārakā) are respectively substituted for the Umā flower, as the first of the two objects given as examples.]

**The Eight Liberations**

*(Aṭṭha Vimokkhā)*

174. “These are the eight liberations Ānanda [from the hindrance to thought arising from the sensations and ideas due to external forms]. What are the eight?

“A man possessed with the idea of form sees forms — this is the first liberation.

“Without the subjective idea of form, he sees forms externally-this is the second liberation.

“With the thought ‘It is well,’ he becomes intent (upon what he sees) — this is the third liberation.

“By passing quite beyond all idea of form, by putting an end to all idea of resistance, by paying no attention to the idea of distinction, he, thinking ‘It is all infinite space,’ reaches and remains in the state of mind in which the idea of the infinity of space is the only idea that is present — this is the fourth liberation.

“By passing quite beyond all idea of space being the infinite basis, he, thinking ‘It is all infinite consciousness,’ reaches and remains in the state of mind to which the infinity of reason is alone present — this is the fifth liberation.

“By passing quite beyond the infinity of consciousness, he, thinking ‘nothing at all exists,’ reaches and remains in the state of mind to which nothing at all is specially present — this is the sixth liberation.

“By passing quite beyond nothingness he reaches and remains in the state of mind to which neither perception nor non-perception are specially present — this is the seventh liberation.

“By passing quite beyond the state of neither perception nor non-perception he reaches and remains in the state of mind in which both feeling and perception have ceased — this is the eighth liberation.

“These, Ānanda, are the eight liberations.”

175. “Ekamidāhaṃ, Ānanda, samayaṃ Uruvelāyaṃ viharāmi najjā neraijarāya tire ajapālanigrodhe paṭhamābhīsambuddho. Ātha kho, Ānanda, māro pāpimā yenāhaṃ tenupaṣanikami; upaṣanikamitvā ekamantam aṭṭhāsi. Ekamantam ṭhito kho, Ānanda, māro pāpimā maṇṭi etadavoca — Parinibbātudāni, bhante, Bhagavā; parinibbātu sugato, parinibbānākālādāni, bhante, Bhagavato’ti. Evaṃ vutte ahaṃ, Ānanda, māraṇṭi pāpimantaṇṭi etadavocaṃ —

“Na tāvāhaṇṭi, pāpima, parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me bhikkhū na sāvāka bhavissanti viyattā vīṇīṭa visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānudhammappatiṇṇā sāmīcappatiṇṇā anudhammacārino, sakaṇṭi ācariyakaṇṭi uggahetvā ācikkhissanti
desessanti paññapessanti paṭṭhapessanti vivarissanti vibhajissanti uttānīkarissanti, uppannaṃ parappavādaṃ sahadhammena suniggahitaṃ niggahetvā sappāṭihāriyaṃ dhammaṃ desessanti.

“Na tāvāhaṃ, pāpima, parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me bhikkhuniyo na sāvikā bhavissanti viyattā viinitā visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānu-dhammappatippānā sāmicippatippānā anudhammadacārino, sakaṃ ācariyakaṃ uggahetoā ācikkhissanti desessanti paññapessanti paṭṭhapessanti vibhajissanti uttānīkarissanti, uppannaṃ parappavādaṃ sahadhammena suniggahitaṃ niggahetvā sappāṭihāriyaṃ dhammaṃ desessanti.

“Na tāvāhaṃ, pāpima, parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me upāsakā na sāvakā bhavissanti viyattā viinitā visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānu-dhammappatippānā sāmicippatippānā anudhammadacārino, sakaṃ ācariyakaṃ uggahetoā ācikkhissanti desessanti paññapessanti paṭṭhapessanti vibhajissanti uttānīkarissanti, uppannaṃ parappavādaṃ sahadhammena suniggahitaṃ niggahetvā sappāṭihāriyaṃ dhammaṃ desessanti.

“Na tāvāhaṃ, pāpima, parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me upāsikā na sāvikā bhavissanti viyattā viinitā visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānu-dhammappatippānā sāmicippatippānā anudhammadacārino, sakaṃ ācariyakaṃ uggahetoā ācikkhissanti desessanti paññapessanti paṭṭhapessanti vibhajissanti uttānīkarissanti, uppannaṃ parappavādaṃ sahadhammena suniggahitaṃ niggahetvā sappāṭihāriyaṃ dhammaṃ desessanti.

“Na tāvāhaṃ, pāpima, parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me idaṃ brahmacariyaṃ na iddhañceva bhavissati phitaṇcā viṭṭhāriyaṃ bāhujaññaṃ puthubhūtaṃ yāva devamanussehi suppakāsa’ti’nti.

175. “On one occasion, Ānanda, I was resting under the Goat-herd’s Banyan (Ajapālanigrodha) tree on the bank of the river Nerañjarā immediately after having attained Enlightenment. Then, Ānanda, Māra the Evil One came to where I was, and standing beside me he addressed me in the words: ‘Pass away from existence now, Venerable sir! Let the Blessed One now die! Now is the time for the Blessed One to pass away!’

“When he had thus spoken, Ānanda, I addressed Māra, the Evil One, saying: ‘I shall not die, Evil One, until the monks and nuns, and also the male and female lay-disciples have become true disciples, wise and well-trained, ready and learned, versed in the scriptures, fulfilling all the greater and the lesser duties, correct in life, living according to the precepts — until they, having thus themselves learned the doctrine, shall be able to tell others
of it, teach it, make it known, establish it, open it, minutely explain it and make it clear — until they, when others start false teachings, are able to vanquish and refute it by the truth, and so spread the wonder-working truth abroad! “I shall not die until this pure religion of mine shall have become successful, prosperous, wide-spread, and popular in all its full extent — until, in a word, it shall have been well proclaimed among men!”

176. “Idāneva kho, Ānanda, ajja cāpāle cetiye māro pāpimā yenāham tenupasaṅkami; upasaṅkamito ēkaṃmantaṃ aṭṭhāsi. Ēkaṃmantaṃ ṭhito kho, Ānanda, māro pāpimā maṃ etadavoca — ‘Parinibbātudāni, bhante, Bhagavā, parinibbātu sugato, parinibbānakālodāni, bhante, Bhagavato. Bhāsitā kho panesā, bhante, Bhagavatā vācā — ‘Na tāvāhaṃ, pāpima, parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me bhikkhū na sāvakā bhavissantī … Yāva me bhikkhuniyo na sāvikā bhavissantī … Yāva me upāsakā na sāvakā bhavissantī … Yāva me upāsikā na sāvikā bhavissantī … Yāva me idam brahmacariyāṃ na iddhañceva bhavissati phitaṅca viṁśārkaṃ bāhujaññāṇaṃ puthubbhūtaṃ, yāva devamanussehi suppakāsita”nti. Etaraṃ kho pana, bhante, Bhagavato brahmacariyāṃ iddhañceva phitaṅca viṁśārkaṃ bāhujaññāṇaṃ puthubbhūtaṃ, yāva devamanussehi suppakāsitaṃ. Parinibbātudāni, bhante, Bhagavā, parinibbātu sugato, parinibbānakālodāni, bhante, Bhagavato’ti.

176.”Again today, Ānanda, at the Cāpāla shrine, Mara, the Evil One, came to where I was, and standing beside me addressed me [in the same words].


177. “When he had thus spoken, Ānanda, I answered him saying: ‘Be happy, the final demise of the Tathāgata will occur before long. Three months from now the Tathāgata will die!’ Thus, Ānanda, the Tathāgata has now today at the Cāpāla shrine consciously and deliberately rejected the rest of his allotted term of life.”

The Account of Venerable Ānanda’s Request (Ānandayācanakathā)


178. When he had spoken thus the Venerable Ānanda addressed the Blessed One, saying: “Resolve, Venerable sir, to remain for the remaining lifespan! Live on throughout the lifespan, Blessed One, for the good and the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and men!”

“Enough, Ānanda, do not beseech the Tathāgata,” he replied, “The time for making such a request is past.”

A second and a third time, the Venerable Ānanda besought the Blessed One [in the same words, and received from the Blessed One the same reply].

"Do you have faith, Ānanda, in the wisdom of the Tathāgata?"

"Yes, Venerable sir!"

"Why, then, Ānanda, do you trouble the Tathāgata even up to the third time?"

"From his own mouth have I heard from the Blessed One, from his own mouth have I received this saying, ‘Whosoever has developed, made much off, made them his vehicle and support, and ascended to the summit of the four bases of success, and has mastered them, if he wished could remain in
the same birth for a lifespan, or for that portion of the lifespan that had yet
to run. The Tathāgata has [done this], and he could, should he so wish, live
on for a full lifespan, or for that portion of the lifespan that has yet to run.”
“Do you have faith, Ānanda?”
“Yes, Venerable sir!”

“Then, Ānanda, the fault is yours, yours is the offence, in that when a
suggestion so evident and a hint so clear were given by the Tathāgata, you
were incapable of comprehending, and did not then beseech the Tathāgata,
saying: “Resolve, Venerable sir, to remain for the remaining lifespan! Live
on throughout the lifespan, Blessed One, for the good and the happiness of
the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and
happiness of gods and men!”

If you had done so, the Tathāgata might have rejected the appeal even to
the second time, but the third time he would have granted it. Therefore,
Ānanda, the fault is yours, the offence is yours!”

179. “Ekamidāham, Ānanda, samayaṃ Rājagahe viharāmi gijjhakūṭe pabbate.
Taṇīpi kho tāhaṃ, Ānanda, āmantesiṃ — Ramaṇīyaṃ, Ānanda, Rājagahāṃ,
ramaṇīyo, Ānanda, gijjhakūṭo pabbato. Yassa kassaci, Ānanda, cattāro iddhipādā
bhāvītā bahuликatā yānikatā vatthukatā anuṭṭhitā paricitā susamāraddhā, so
ākaṅkhamāno kappāṃ vā tiṭṭheyya kappāvasesaṃ vā. Tathāgatassa kho, Ānanda,
cattāro iddhipādā bhāvītā bahuликatā yānikatā vatthukatā anuṭṭhitā paricitā
susamāraddhā, so ākaṅkhamāno, Ānanda, Tathāgato kappāṃ vā tiṭṭheyya
kappāvasesaṃ vā’ti. Evampi kho tvaṃ, Ānanda, Tathāgatena olārike nimitte
kayiramāne olārike obhāse kayiramāne nāsakkhi paṭivijjhitum, na Tathāgataṃ
yāci — Tiṭṭhatu, bhante, Bhagavā kappam, tiṭṭhathu sugato kappam bahujanahitāya
bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussāna’nti.
Sace tvaṃ, Ānanda, Tathāgataṃ yāceyyāsi, dve te vācā Tathāgato paṭikkhipeyya,
atha tatiyakaṃ adhivāseyya. Tasmātiḥ Ānanda, tuyeveṭeṇā dukkātaṃ, tuyeveṭeṇā
aparaddhāṃ.

179. “On one occasion, Ānanda, I was dwelling at Rājagaha, on the hill
called the Vulture’s Peak. There, Ānanda, I spoke to you, saying: “How
pleasant a spot, Ānanda, is Rājagaha; how pleasant is this Vulture’s Peak.
Whosoever has developed, made much off, made them his vehicle and
support, and ascended to the summit of the four bases of success, and has
mastered them, if he wished could remain in the same birth for a lifespan,
or for that portion of the lifespan that had yet to run. The Tathāgata has [done
this], and he could, should he so wish, live on for a full lifespan, or for that
portion of the lifespan that has yet to run.’ However, even when a suggestion so evident and a hint so clear were given by the Tathāgata, you were incapable of comprehending, and did not beseech the Tathāgata, saying, “Resolve, Venerable sir, to remain for the remaining lifespan! Live on throughout the lifespan, Blessed One, for the good and the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and men!”

If you had done so, the Tathāgata might have rejected the appeal even to the second time, but the third time he would have granted it. Therefore, Ānanda, the fault is yours, the offence is yours!”


180. “On one occasion, Ānanda, I was dwelling at that same Rājagaha in the Banyan Grove — on one occasion at that same Rājagaha at the Robbers’ Cliff (Corapapāta) — on one occasion at that same Rājagaha in the Sattapanṇī cave on the slope of Mount Vebhāra — on one occasion at that same Rājagaha at the Black Rock (Kālasilā) on the slope of Mount Isigili — on one occasion at that same Rājagaha in the Sītavana Grove in the mountain cave Sappasonḍika — on one occasion at that same Rājagaha in the Tapoda
Monastery — on one occasion at that same Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove in the Squirrels’ Feeding Ground (Kalandakanipāva) — on one occasion at that same Rājagaha in Jivaka’s Mango Grove — on one occasion at that same Rājagaha in the Deer Forest at Maddakucchi.

There too, Ānanda, I spoke to you saying: “How pleasant a spot, Ānanda, is Rājagaha; how pleasant the Vulture’s Peak; how pleasant the Banyan tree of Gotama; how pleasant the Robbers’ Cliff; how pleasant the Sattapanṇi cave on the slope of Mount Vebhāra; how pleasant the Black Rock on the slope of Mount Isigili; how pleasant the mountain cave Sappasonḍika in the Sitavana Grove; how pleasant the Tapoda Monastery; how pleasant the Squirrels’ Feeding Ground in the Bamboo Grove; how pleasant Jivaka’s Mango Grove; how pleasant the Deer Forest at Maddakucchi!

“Whosoever has developed, made much off, made them his vehicle and support, and ascended to the summit of the four bases of success, and has mastered them, if he wished could remain in the same birth for a lifespan, or for that portion of the lifespan that had yet to run. The Tathāgata has [done this], and he could, should he so wish, live on for a full lifespan, or for that portion of the lifespan that has yet to run.”

However, even when a suggestion so evident and a hint so clear were given by the Tathāgata, you were incapable of comprehending, and did not beseech the Tathāgata, saying, “Resolve, Venerable sir, to remain for the remaining lifespan! Live on throughout the lifespan, Blessed One, for the good and the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and men!”

181. “On one occasion, Ānanda, I was residing here at Vesāli at the Udena shrine. Here too, Ānanda, I spoke to you saying: ‘How pleasant, Ānanda, is Vesāli; how pleasant the Udena shrine. Whosoever has developed, made much off, made them his vehicle and support, and ascended to the summit of the four bases of success, and has mastered them, if he wished could remain in the same birth for a lifespan, or for that portion of the lifespan that had yet to run. The Tathāgata has [done this], and he could, should he so wish, live on for a full lifespan, or for that portion of the lifespan that has yet to run.’

However, even when a suggestion so evident and a hint so clear were given by the Tathāgata, you were incapable of comprehending, and did not beseech the Tathāgata, saying, “Resolve, Venerable sir, to remain for the remaining lifespan! Live on throughout the lifespan, Blessed One, for the good and the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and men!”


182. “Today, Ānanda, at the Cāpāla shrine, I spoke to you, saying: ‘How pleasant, Ānanda, is Vesāli; how pleasant the Udena shrine; how pleasant the Gotamaka shrine; how pleasant the Sattamba shrine; how pleasant the Bahuputta shrine; how pleasant the Sārandada shrine.
“Whosoever has developed, made much off, made them his vehicle and support, and ascended to the summit of the four bases of success, and has mastered them, if he wished could remain in the same birth for a lifespan, or for that portion of the lifespan that had yet to run. The Tathāgata has [done this], and he could, should he so wish, live on for a full lifespan, or for that portion of the lifespan that has yet to run.”

However, even when a suggestion so evident and a hint so clear were given by the Tathāgata, you were incapable of comprehending, and did not beseech the Tathāgata, saying, “Resolve, Venerable sir, to remain for the remaining lifespan! Live on throughout the lifespan, Blessed One, for the good and the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and men!”


183. “However, Ānanda, have I not formerly declared to you that it is in the very nature of all things, near and dear to us, that we must divide ourselves from them, leave them, sever ourselves from them? How then, Ānanda, can this be possible — whereas anything whatever born, brought into being, and organised, contains within itself the inherent necessity of dissolution — how then can it be possible that such a being should not be dissolved? No such condition can exist! This mortal being, Ānanda, has been relinquished, cast
away, renounced, rejected, and abandoned by the Tathāgata. The remaining sum of life has been surrendered by him. Verily, the word has gone forth from the Tathāgata, saying, 'The final demise of the Tathāgata will take place before long. Three months from now the Tathāgata will die!' That the Tathāgata for the sake of living could repent that saying — this can no wise be!"

"Come, Ānanda, let us go to the Kūṭāgāra Hall at Mahāvana."

"Yes, Venerable sir," the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent.

Then the Blessed One proceeded with Ānanda to the Kūṭāgāra Hall at Mahāvana, and when he had arrived he addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying: "Go, Ānanda, and assemble in the Service Hall the monks residing in the neighbourhood of Vesāli."

"Yes, Venerable sir," the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent. When he had assembled in the Service Hall the monks residing in the neighbourhood of Vesāli, he went to the Blessed One, paid homage, and stood at one side. Standing there, he addressed the Blessed One, saying, ‘Venerable sir! The monks have assembled. Let the Blessed One do as he deems fit.’

184. Then the Blessed One proceeded to the Service Hall, and sat down there on the mat spread out for him. When he was seated the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying, “Therefore, monks — you to whom the truths I have perceived have been made known by me — having thoroughly mastered them, practised them, meditated on them, spread them abroad so that the pure religion may endure and be perpetuated, so that it may continue
An Exposition of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta

for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and men!

“What then, monks, are the truths that, when I had perceived them, I made known to you, which, when you have mastered it behoves you to practise, meditate on, and spread abroad, in order that pure religion may last long and be perpetuated, in order that it may endure for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and men?”

They are these: the four foundations of mindfulness (cattāro satipaṭṭhānā), the four right exertions (cattāro sammappadhānā), the four bases of success (cattāro iddhipādā), the five spiritual faculties (pañcindriyāni), the five spiritual powers (pañca balāni), the seven factors of enlightenment (satta bojjhaṅgā), and the noble eightfold path (ariyo atthaṅgiko maggo). These, monks, are the truths that, when I had perceived them, I made known to you, which, when you have mastered them it behoves you to practise, contemplate, and spread abroad, so that the pure religion may endure and be perpetuated, so that it may continue for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, benefit, and the happiness of gods and men!”

Together, these thirty-seven spiritual faculties are known as the Requisites of Enlightenment (Bodhipakkhiyadhammā). They are described in the late Venerable Ledi Sayādaw’s Bodhipakkhiya Dipani. The term is used in numerous places in the Pāḷi texts, but as far as I could tell with a quick search, only in this place are all thirty-seven taught together.

185. The Blessed One further exhorted the monks, saying, “Behold, monks, I exhort you, saying, all compounded things must decay (vayadhammā...
This statement about the time of the Buddha's demise is interesting, occurring as it does at the end of the Rains Retreat in October. Three months from October would be in January. Traditionally, most Buddhists of the Theravāda school celebrate the thrice-sacred day on the Full-moon of May, which is said to commemorate the Birth, Enlightenment, and Final decease of the Blessed One. See paragraph 165 where the Buddha states that he is more than eighty years of age, so if the tradition were true he would have died at eight-one years of age, if it occurred on the following May.

To my way of thinking, there is something more natural about his death occurring during the coldest and darkest months of winter, when vitality is at its lowest ebb. In both cases, when speaking to the Venerable Ānanda, and later, when speaking to the monks, the Buddha says: “Three months from now.” These two statements must, therefore, have been made on the same day, or perhaps on consecutive days otherwise Māra would have appeared again three months after the first statement to ask why the Buddha had not yet passed away. From that it follows that the assembling of the monks and the Buddha's statement to them must have occurred on the full-moon day of October, and that the Parinibbāna would occur on the full-moon day of the following January — neither sooner, nor later than that.

“My age is now full ripe, my life draws to its close.
I leave you, I depart, relying on myself alone!
Be heedful and mindful, monks, and virtuous!
Be steadfast in resolve! Guard your minds well!
Who wearies not, but holds fast to the Dhamma and discipline,
Shall cross this sea of life, shall make an end of grief.’

End of the Third Portion for Recitation

The Elephant’s Gaze
(Nāgāpalokitaṃ)

186. Atha kho Bhagavā pubbaññhasamayaṃ nivāsetvā pattacīvaramādāya Vesāliṃ piṇḍāya pāvisi. Vesāliyaṃ piṇḍāya caritvā pacchābhhattam piṇḍapātappatikkanto nāgāpalokitaṃ Vesāliṃ apaloketvā āyasmantam Ānandaṃ āmantesi — “Idaṃ pacchimakaṃ, Ānanda, Tathāgatassa Vesāliyā dassanaṃ sanikhāra). Strive with diligence (appamādena sampādetha). The final demise of the Tathāgata will take place before long. Three months from now the Tathāgata will die!”
bhavissati. Āyām Ānanda, yena bhanḍagāmo tenupaśaṅkamissāmā”ti. “Evam, bhante”ti kho āyasmā Ānando Bhagavato paccassosi.


“Sīlaṃ samādhi paññā ca, vinutti ca anuttarā. anubuddhā ime dhammā, Gotamena yasassinā.

“Iti buddho abhiññāya, dhammamakkhiṃ bhikkhunā. dukhassantakaro satthā, cakkhumā parinibbuto”ti.

Tatrāpi sudāṃ Bhagavā bhanḍagāme viharanto etadeva bahulaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ dhammiṃ kathāṃ karoti — “Iti sīlaṃ, iti samādhi, iti paññā. Silaparībhāvito samādhi mahāphalā hoti mahānīsamā. Samādhiparībhāvita paññā mahāphalā hoti mahānīsamā. Paññāparībhāvitaṃ cittaṃ sammadeva āsavehi vimuccati, seyyathidaṃ — kāmāsavā, bhavāsavā, avijjāsavā”ti.

186. Now the Blessed One early in the morning robed himself, and taking his bowl, entered Vesāli for alms: and when he had passed through Vesāli, and had eaten his meal and was returning from his alms-seeking he gazed at Vesāli with an elephant look¹ and addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “This will be the last time, Ānanda, that the Tathāgata will behold Vesāli. Come, Ānanda, let us go on to Bhaṇḍagāma.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent.

¹ Turning the whole body around to look.
The Blessed One proceeded with a great company of monks to Bhaṇḍagāma; and there the Blessed One stayed in the village itself. There the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying: “It is through not understanding and comprehending four truths, monks, that we have had to wander so long in this weary cycle of existence — both you and I.

“What are these four? The noble morality, the noble concentration, the noble wisdom, and the noble liberation. However, when noble morality is realised and known, when noble concentration is realised and known, when noble wisdom is realised and known, when noble liberation is realised and known — then the craving for existence is rooted out, that which leads to renewed existence is destroyed, and there is no more birth.”

Thus spoke the Blessed One; and when the Fortunate One had spoken, again the teacher said:

“Morality, concentration, wisdom, and incomparable liberation — These are the truths realised by Gotama, the far-renowned.

Knowing them, the knower proclaimed the truth to the monks. The master with the divine-eye, the quencher of grief, must die!”

There too, while staying at Bhaṇḍagāma, the Blessed One gave that comprehensive religious talk to the monks on the nature of morality, concentration, and wisdom. “Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by morality. Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by concentration. The mind protected by wisdom is freed from the corruptions, that is to say, from the corruption of sensuality, from the corruption of becoming, and from the corruption of ignorance.”

**The Four Great References**

_(Catumahāpadesakathā)_

When the Blessed One had remained at Bhaṇḍagāma as long as he wished, he addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying: “Come, Ānanda, let us go on to Hatthigāma, to Ambagāma, to Gambugāma, and to Bhoganagara.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent.

Then the Blessed One proceeded with a great company of monks to Bhoganagara. There at Bhoganagara the Blessed One stayed at the Ānanda shrine. There the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying: “I will teach you, monks, the four great references. Listen, and pay heed, I will speak.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the monks replied in assent, and the Blessed One spoke as follows:


“Idha pana, bhikkhave, bhikkhu evaṃ vadeyya — ‘Amukasmiṃ nāma āvāse saṅgho viharati sathero sapāmokkho. Tassa me saṅghassa sammukhā sutaṃ sammukhā paṭiggahitaṃ, ayaṃ dhammo ayaṃ vinayo idaṃ satthusāsana’nti. Tassa, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno
bhāsitaṁ neva abhinanditabbaṁ ... Na ca vinaye sandissanti, niṭṭhamettha gantabbaṁ — ‘Addhā, idaṁ na ceva tassa Bhagavato vacanaṁ; tesaṅca therānaṁ duggahita’nti. Itihetaṁ, bhikkhave, chaḍḍeyyātha. Tāni ce sutte osāriyamānāni ... Vinaye ca sandissanti, niṭṭhamettha gantabbaṁ — ‘Addhā, idaṁ tassa Bhagavato vacanaṁ; tesaṅca therānaṁ suggahita’nti. Idam, bhikkhave, tatiyamahāpadesaṁ dhāreyyātha.


188. “In the first place, monks, a monk may say thus: ‘From the mouth of the Blessed One himself have I heard, from his own mouth have I learned it. This is the Dhamma, this the discipline, this the doctrine of the teacher." The words spoken, monks, by that monk should neither be received with praise nor treated with scorn. Without praise and without scorn every word and syllable should be carefully understood, and compared with the discourses and the rules of discipline. If when so compared they do not harmonise with the discourses, and do not fit in with the rules of discipline, then you may conclude, ‘Verily, this is not the word of the Blessed One, and has been wrongly grasped by that monk.’ Therefore, monks, you should reject it. However, if they harmonise with the discourses and fit in with the rules of discipline, then you may conclude, ‘Verily, this is the word of the Blessed One, and has been well grasped by that monk.’ This, monks, you should remember as the first great reference.
“Again, monks, a monk may say thus: ‘In such and such a dwelling-place there is a company of monks with elders and leaders of the Saṅgha. From the mouth of that company have I heard, from their own mouths have I learned it. This is the Dhamma, this the discipline, this the doctrine of the teacher.’ The words spoken, monks, by that monk should neither be received with praise nor treated with scorn. Without praise and without scorn every word and syllable should be carefully understood, and compared with the discourses and the rules of discipline. If when so compared they do not harmonise with the discourses, and do not fit in with the rules of discipline, then you may conclude, ‘Verily, this is not the word of the Blessed One, and has been wrongly grasped by that monk.’ Therefore, monks, you should reject it. However, if they harmonise with the discourses and fit in with the rules of discipline, then you may conclude, ‘Verily, this is the word of the Blessed One, and has been well grasped by that monk.’ This, monks, you should remember as the second great reference.

“Again, monks, a monk may say thus: ‘In such and such a dwelling-place there are dwelling many elders of the Saṅgha deeply read, holding the faith as handed down by tradition, versed in the truths, versed in the regulations of the Saṅgha versed in the summaries of the doctrines and the law. From the mouth of those elders have I heard, from their own mouths have I learned it. This is the Dhamma, this the discipline, this the doctrine of the teacher.’ The words spoken, monks, by that monk should neither be received with praise nor treated with scorn. Without praise and without scorn every word and syllable should be carefully understood, and compared with the discourses and the rules of discipline. If when so compared they do not harmonise with the discourses, and do not fit in with the rules of discipline, then you may conclude, ‘Verily, this is not the word of the Blessed One, and has been wrongly grasped by that monk.’ Therefore, monks, you should reject it. However, if they harmonise with the discourses and fit in with the rules of discipline, then you may conclude, ‘Verily, this is the word of the Blessed One, and has been well grasped by that monk.’ This, monks, you should remember as the third great reference.

“Again, monks, a monk may say: ‘In such and such a dwelling-place there lives a monk, deeply read, holding the faith as handed down by tradition, versed in the truths, versed in the regulations of the Saṅgha versed in the summaries of the doctrines and the law. From the mouth of that elder have I heard, from his own mouth have I learned it. This is the Dhamma, this the discipline, this the doctrine of the teacher.’ The words spoken, monks, by
that monk should neither be received with praise nor treated with scorn. Without praise and without scorn every word and syllable should be carefully understood, and compared with the discourses and the rules of discipline. If when so compared they do not harmonise with the discourses, and do not fit in with the rules of discipline, then you may conclude, ‘Verily, this is not the word of the Blessed One, and has been wrongly grasped by that monk.’ Therefore, monks, you should reject it. However, if they harmonise with the discourses and fit in with the rules of discipline, then you may conclude, ‘Verily, this is the word of the Blessed One, and has been well grasped by that monk.’ This, monks, you should remember as the fourth great reference.

“These, monks, are the four great references.”

These four great references amply demonstrate the importance of not accepting any teaching due to the status of the person teaching it. A thorough examination should be made to see if it is consistent with other teachings in the Dhamma and Vinaya. This is why monks especially should study the texts as well as practising meditation. The Dhamma is profound and difficult to penetrate. We don’t necessarily need to be scholars, but we do need to have that inquiring mind that never accepts things at face value, and we must be willing to abandon our views if they are shown to be erroneous.

Placing too much faith in contemporary teachers, and repeating their teachings without having done any significant study for oneself is a dangerous road to travel. Study, practice, and realisation must be done by oneself. Without personal realisation of the truth, one is still at the mercy of one’s views, which may be right or wrong.

There, too, at Bhoganagara the Blessed One gave that comprehensive religious talk to the monks on the nature of morality, concentration, and wisdom. “Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by morality. Great is the fruit, great the benefit of concentration when protected by concentration. The mind protected by wisdom is freed from the corruptions, that is to say, from the corruption of sensuality, from the corruption of becoming, and from the corruption of ignorance.”

The Story of Cunda Kammāraputta
(Kammāraputtacundavatthu)

An Exposition of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta


189. When the Blessed One had remained as long as he wished at Bhoganagara, he addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “Come, Ānanda, let us go on to Pāvā.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent, and the Blessed One proceeded with a great company of monks to Pāvā.

There at Pāvā the Blessed One stayed at the Mango Grove of Cunda, who was a worker in metals. Cunda heard that the Blessed One had come to Pāvā, and was staying there in his mango grove. Then Cunda went to where the
Blessed One was seated, and after paying homage to him, took a seat respectfully on one side. When he was thus seated, the Blessed One instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened him with religious discourse.

Being instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened by religious discourse, he addressed the Blessed One, saying: “May the Blessed One do me the honour of taking his meal, together with the monks, at my house tomorrow.” The Blessed One signified his consent by silence. Seeing that the Blessed One had consented, Cunda rose from his seat, paid homage to the Blessed One, and keeping him on his right side, he departed.

At the end of the night, Cunda made ready in his dwelling-place delicious hard and soft food, and a quantity of dried boar’s flesh. Then he announced the time to the Blessed One, saying, “The time has come Venerable sir, and the meal is ready.” The Blessed One robed himself early in the morning, and taking his bowl, went with the monks to the dwelling-place of Cunda. When he arrived he sat on the seat prepared for him. Then he addressed Cunda, saying, “The dried boar’s flesh that you have made ready, serve that to me, Cunda; and serve the other delicious hard and soft food to the monks.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” replied Cunda in assent. The dried boar’s flesh he had prepared he served to the Blessed One; and he served the other delicious hard and soft food to the monks.

Then the Blessed One addressed Cunda, saying: “Whatever dried boar’s flesh is left over, bury that in a pit (sobbhe). I see no one other than the Tathāgata — neither a Māra, Brahma, deva, recluse, or priest — among gods and men who can digest that food.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” said Cunda in assent. Whatever dried boar’s flesh remained over, that he buried in a pit.

Then he went to where the Blessed One was; and when he had come there, took his seat respectfully on one side. When he was seated, the Blessed One instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened Cunda with religious discourse. The Blessed One then rose from his seat and departed.

1 There is some debate about the translation: “Dried boar’s flesh (sūkaramaddavaṃ).” Some say it is truffles. The PTS says it is soft tender pork, while Maurice Walshe translates it as Pig’s delight, and provides a long footnote about the word.
“Cundassa bhattaṃ bhuñjitvā, kammārassāti me sutaṃ. ābādhaṃ samphusī dhiro, pabāḷhaṃ māraṇantikaṃ. Bhuttassa ca sükaramaddavena, byādhippabāḷho udapādi satthuno. Virecamāno Bhagavā avoca, Gacchāmahāṃ Kusināraṃ Nagaranti.”

190. When the Blessed One had eaten the food prepared by Cunda, severe dysentery afflicted him, with sharp pains, even unto death. However, the Blessed One, mindful and clearly comprehending, bore it without complaint. Then the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “Come, Ānanda, let us go on to Kusinārā.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent.

“When he had eaten Cunda the smith’s food — thus have I heard, He bore with fortitude sharp pains even unto death! From the dried flesh of the boar, as soon as he had eaten it, There fell upon the teacher sickness dire, Then after nature was relieved the Blessed One announced saying: “I am now going to Kusinārā.”

The Bringing of Drinking Water
(Pāniyāharaṇaṃ)

sakṣatasaṭāni atikkantāni, taṃ cakkacchinnaṃ udakaṃ parittaṃ luḷitaṃ āvilaṃ sandati. Ayaṃ, bhante, kakudhā nādi avidūre acchodakā satodakā sitodakā setodakā suppatitthā ramaṇīyā. Ētha Bhagavā pāṇīyaṅca pivissati, gattāni ca sitikarissati”ti.


191. The Blessed One went aside from the path to the foot of a certain tree; and when he had come there he addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “Please fold the double-robe\(^1\) (saṅghāṭi) in four, Ānanda, and spread it out for me. I am weary, Ānanda, and must rest awhile!”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent, and spread out the double-robe folded in four.

The Blessed One sat on the seat prepared for him, and when seated, addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying: “Please fetch some water, Ānanda. I am thirsty, and wish to drink.”

When he had spoken thus, the Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One, “Just now, Venerable sir, about five hundred carts have crossed. The water stirred up by the wheels is shallow and flows muddy and turbid. This river Kakudhā, Venerable sir, which is not far off, is clear and pleasant, cool and transparent, easy to get down to, and delightful. There the Blessed One may both drink the water, and cool his limbs.”

A second time the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “Please fetch some water, Ānanda. I am thirsty, and wish to drink.”

A second time the Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One, “Just now, Venerable sir, about five hundred carts have crossed. The water stirred up

\(^1\) A monk’s set of three robes comprises an under robe wrapped around the waist, a full length upper robe wrapped around the shoulders, and a double-robe — also usually full sized — which may be used as a cloak, a blanket, or a padded seat as in this case.
by the wheels is shallow and flows muddy and turbid. This river Kakudhā, Venerable sir, which is not far off, is clear and pleasant, cool and transparent, easy to get down to, and delightful. There the Blessed One may both drink the water, and cool his limbs.”

A third time the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “Please fetch some water, Ānanda. I am thirsty, and wish to drink.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent; and taking a bowl he went down to the stream. The stream which, stirred up by the wheels, was shallow, and flowing muddy and turbid, when the Venerable Ānanda came near to it, flowed clear and bright and free from all turbidity.

Then Ānanda thought, “How wonderful, how marvellous is the great might and power of the Tathāgata! For this stream which, stirred up by the wheels, was just now shallow and flowing muddy and turbid, as I come near to it, is now flowing clear and bright and free from all turbidity.”

Taking water in the bowl he returned to the Blessed One; and when he had come to where the Blessed One was he said to him, “How wonderful, how marvellous is the great might and power of the Tathāgata! For this stream which, stirred up by the wheels, was shallow and flowing muddy and turbid, as I came near to it, flowed clear and bright and free from all turbidity. Let the Blessed One drink the water! Let the Fortunate One drink the water!” Then the Blessed One drank the water.

This incident, like so many others, shows that even a close personal attendant of a senior monk is expected to think for himself, and not to slavishly obey his teacher’s every instruction. If a monk ever tells you to do something that you regard as improper or asks for some requisites that are unsuitable for a recluse, such as luxurious goods or cigarettes, don’t be afraid to say that you cannot afford them, or ask him whether such goods are allowable if you know or suspect that they are unsuitable requisites for one who claims to be a renunciate.

The Story of Pukkusa Mallaputta
(Pukkusamallaputtavatthu)

Now at that time a man named Pukkusa, a young Mallian, a disciple of Āḷāra Kālāma, was passing along the high road from Kusinārā to Pāvā. Pukkusa, the young Mallian, saw the Blessed One seated at the foot of a tree. On seeing him, he went up to the Blessed One, greeted him, and sat respectfully on one side. When he was seated, Pukkusa the young Mallian, said to the Blessed One, “How wonderful it is, Venerable sir, and how marvellous, that those who have gone forth should pass their time in a state of mind so calm! At one time, Venerable sir, Āḷāra Kālāma was walking along the high road; and leaving the road he sat himself down under a certain tree to rest during the heat of the day. Then, Venerable sir, five hundred carts passed by one after the other, each close to Āḷāra Kālāma. A certain man, who was following close behind that caravan, went up to Āḷāra Kālāma, and said to Āḷāra Kālāma:—

“Venerable sir, did you see those five hundred carts go by?”
“No, indeed, sir, I did not.”
“Venerable sir, did you hear them?”
“No, indeed, sir, I did not.”
“Venerable sir, were you then asleep?”
“No, sir, I was not asleep.”
“Venerable sir, were you then conscious?”
“Yes sir, I was conscious.”

“So, Venerable sir, though you were both conscious and awake, but neither saw nor heard the five hundred carts passing by, one after the other, and
An Exposition of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta

each close to you. Why, Venerable sir, even your robe was sprinkled over with the dust raised by them!”

“It is as you say, sir.”

“Then that man thought: ‘How wonderful it is, how marvellous, that those who have gone forth should pass their time in a state of mind so calm! So much so that though being conscious and awake, neither sees nor hears five hundred carts passing by, one after the other, and each close to him,’ and after expressing his deep faith in Āḷāra Kālāma, he departed.”


“Atha kho, pukkusa, purisassa etadahosi — ‘Acchariyam vata bho, abbhutaṃ vata bho, santena vata bho pabbajitā vihārena viharanti. Yatra hi nāma saññī
samāno jāgaro deve vassante deve gāñgalāyante vijjullatāsu niccharantisu asaniyā phalantiyā neva dakkhati, na pana saddaṁ sossatī‘ti. Mayi uḷāraṁ pasādaṁ pavedetvā mañ abhivādetvā padakkhinaṁ katvā pakkāmi”ti.


193. “What do you think, Pukkusa, which is the more difficult thing to do or more rare — that a man being conscious and awake should neither see nor hear five hundred carts passing by, one after the other, close to him — or that a man, being conscious and awake, should neither see, nor hear the sound when torrential rain beats and splashes, lightning flashes, and thunder crashes?”

“What in comparison, Venerable sir, can these five hundred carts do, or six, seven, eight, nine hundred, or even thousands of carts. That certainly is more difficult to do and more rare, that a man being conscious and awake should neither see nor hear the sound when torrential rain beats and splashes, lightning flashes, and thunder crashes.”

“On one occasion, Pukkusa, I was dwelling at Ātumā, at the threshing-house. At that time torrential rain began to beat and splash, and lightning flashed, and thunder crashed; and two brothers who were farmers and four oxen were killed. Then, Pukkusa, a crowd of people from Ātumā went to the place where the two brothers and the four oxen, lay dead.

“At that time, Pukkusa, I had gone out from the threshing-house, and was walking up and down in the open. A certain man, Pukkusa, from that crowd of people approached me, paid homage to me, and stood respectfully on one side. As he stood there, Pukkusa, I said to the man: “Why, friend, has this crowd of people assembled?”

“Just now, Venerable sir, the torrential rain began to beat and splash, the lightning flashed, thunder crashed; and two brothers who were farmers were killed and four oxen. Therefore, this crowd has gathered. Where, Venerable sir, were you?”

“I, friend, have been here all the while.”

“Venerable sir, did you see it?”
“I, friend, I saw nothing.”

“Venerable sir, did you hear it?”

“I, sir, heard nothing.”

“Were you then, Venerable sir, asleep?”

“I, friend, was not asleep.”

“Were you then conscious, Venerable sir?”

“I was, friend.”

“So, Venerable sir, being conscious and awake, neither saw, nor heard the torrential rain beating and splashing, lightning flashing, and thunder crashing.”

“That is so, friend.”

“Then, Pukkusa, this thought occurred to him, ‘How wonderful it is, and marvellous, that those gone forth should pass their time in a state of mind so calm that though conscious and awake they neither see nor hear torrential rain beating and splashing, and lightning flashing, and thunder crashing.’ After expressing his deep faith in me, and paying homage, he departed.”

When this had been said, Pukkusa addressed the Blessed One thus, “Venerable sir, as to the faith that I had in Āḷāra Kālāma, that winnows away as in a mighty wind, and washes away as in a swiftly flowing stream. Most excellent, Venerable sir, are your words, most excellent! Just as if a man were to set upright that which has been overturned, or reveal that which is hidden, or point out the right path to one who has gone astray, or bring a lamp into the darkness so that those who have eyes can see — Yes, Venerable sir, has the truth been made known in many ways, by the Blessed One. I go to the Blessed One as my refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha. May the Blessed One accept me as a disciple from this day forth, as long as I may live!”

Āḷāra Kālāma was one of the two teachers who taught tranquility meditation to the Bodhisatta prior to his Enlightenment (the other being Udaka Rāmaputta). He was a genuine recluse who was an adept in deep states of absorption (jhāna). The Bodhisatta mastered these absorptions, but they did not lead to the cessation of suffering, so he abandoned them to seek another path. After attaining Buddhahood he was able to abide in a state called Nirodha Samāpatti for periods of up to seven days and nights, enjoying the perfect bliss of nibbāna. Āḷāra Kālāma, who was still an ordinary person (puthujjana), had no experience of this state. Nothing can disturb this concentration.

194. Atha kho pukkuso Mallaputto aññataraṃ purisaṃ āmantesi — “Īṅgha me tvāti, bhaṇe, singūvaṇṇam yugamaṭṭham dhāraṇīyaṃ āharā”ti. “Evaṃ, bhante”ti kho so puriso pukkusassa Mallaputtassa paṭissutvā taṃ singūvaṇṇam yugamaṭṭham dhāraṇīyaṃ āhari. Atha kho pukkuso Mallaputto taṃ singūvaṇṇam yugamaṭṭham
194. Then Pukkusa addressed a certain man, saying: “Fetch me a pair of robes of gold-coloured (siṅgīvaṇṇaṃ) cloth, ready to wear.”

“Even so, sir,” said that man in assent; and he brought a pair of robes of golden cloth, ready to wear. Pukkusa presented the pair of robes of golden cloth, ready to wear, to the Blessed One, saying, “Venerable Sir, this pair of robes of gold-coloured cloth is ready to wear. May the Blessed One accept them out of compassion!”

“In that case, Pukkusa, robe me in one, and Ānanda in the other.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” said Pukkusa, in assent; and he robed the Blessed One in one, and Venerable Ānanda in the other.

Then the Blessed One instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened Pukkusa with religious discourse, and Pukkusa, when he had been instructed, roused, enthused, and gladdened by the Blessed One with religious discourse, rose from his seat, paid homage to the Blessed One; and keeping him on his right, he departed.

The Pāḷi word “acchādehi” means to dress or clothe. It seems improbable that Pukkusa would actually put the robes on the Blessed One and the Venerable Ānanda, so I assume that this is idiomatic. It seems from the following paragraph too, that it was the Venerable Ānanda who actually dressed the Blessed One in the golden robe.

dvīsu kālesu ativyā Tathāgatassa kāyo parisuddho hoti chavivaṇṇo pariyoḍāto.
“Ajja kho, pan’Ānanda, rattiya pacchime yāme kusinārāyaṃ upavattane mallānaṃ salavane antarena yamakasālanaṃ Tathāgatassa parinibbānaṃ bhavissati.
ĀyāmĀnanda, yena kakudhā nadi tenupasāṅkaṃ issāmā”ti. “Evaṃ, bhante”ti kho āyasāṃ Ānando Bhagavato paccassosi.

“Singīvaṇṇaṃ yuṃgaṭṭhāṃ, pukkuso abhihārayi.
Tena acchādito satthā, hemavaṇṇo asobhathāti.”

195. Not long after Pukkusa had departed, Ānanda arranged that pair of robes of gold-coloured cloth, ready to wear on the Blessed One’s body, and when it was on the Blessed One’s body it appeared to have lost its splendour!
The Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One, “How wonderful, Venerable sir, and how marvellous, that the skin of the Blessed One should be so clear, so exceeding bright! When I arranged this pair of robes of gold-coloured cloth, ready to wear on the Blessed One’s body it has lost its splendour!”

“It is so, Ānanda. There are two occasions, Ānanda, on which the skin of a Tathāgata becomes exceeding clear and bright. What are the two? On the night, Ānanda, on which a Tathāgata attains to the supreme and perfect Enlightenment, and on the night when he passes away in that utter passing away which leaves nothing whatever to remain; on these two occasions the skin of the Tathāgata becomes exceeding clear and bright.”

Today, Ānanda, in the third watch of the night, in the Sal Grove of the Mallians at Kusinārā, between the twin Sal trees, the final passing away of the Tathāgata will take place. Come, Ānanda! Let us go to the river Kakudhā.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent.

“The pair of robes of golden cloth,
Ready to wear, Pukkusa had brought,
Clad with them, the Master then
Shone forth in colour like gold!”

196. Atha kho Bhagavā mahatā bhikkhusaṅghena saddhiṃ yena kakudhā nadi tenupasāṅkami ; upasāṅkaṃ itvā kakudhāṃ nadiṃ ajjhogāhetvā nhatvā ca pīvitvā ca paccuttaritvā yena ambavanaṃ tenupasāṅkami. Upasāṅkaṃ itvā āyasmantaṃ cundakaṃ āmantesi — “Īṅgha me tvāṃ, cundaka, catuggaṇaṃ saṅghāṭiṃ paññapehi, kilantosmi, cundaka, nipajjissāmi”ti.

“Evaṃ, bhante”ti kho āyasāṃ cundako Bhagavato paṭissutvā catuggaṇaṃ saṅghāṭiṃ paññapesi. Atha kho Bhagavā dakkhiṃena passena sīhaseyyaṃ kappesi
pāde pādaṃ accādhāya sato sampajāno utṭhānasaññaṃ manasikaritvā. Āyasma pana cundako tattheva Bhagavato purato nisīdi.

“Gantvāna buddho nadikaṃ kakudham,
Acchodakaṃ sātudakaṃ vippasannaṃ.

Ogāhi satthā akilantarūpo,
Tathāgato appaṭīmo ca loke.

Nhatvā ca pivitvā cudatāri satthā,
Purakkhato bhikkhuṇaṃassa majjhe.

Vattā pavattā Bhagavā idha dhamme,
Upāgami ambavannatī mahesi.

Āmantayi cundakaṃ nāma bhikkhuṃ,
Catugguṇaṃ santhara me nipajjaṃ.

So codito bhāvitattena cundo,
Catugguṇaṃ santhari khippameva.

Nipajji satthā akilantarūpo,
Cundopi tattha pamukhe nisiditi.”

196. Then the Blessed One with a great company of monks went on to the river Kakudhā; and on arriving there, he went down into the river, bathed, and drank. Then, on coming up out on the other side he went on to the Mango Grove. When he came there he addressed the Venerable Cundaka, saying, “Fold the double-robe in four and spread it out. I am weary, Cundaka, and would rest.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Cundaka replied in assent, and folding the double-robe in four, he spread it out. The Blessed One laid himself down on his right side, with one foot resting on the other; mindful and clearly comprehending, with the perception of rising again after a while. The Venerable Cundaka sat in front of the Blessed One.

“The Buddha came to Kakudhā’s river,
Whose clear and pleasant waters limpid flow,
He plunged beneath the stream wearied and worn,
The Buddha without equal in the world!

When he had bathed and drunk, the teacher then
Crossed o’er, the monks thronging round his steps;
The Blessed Master, teaching the while the truth,
The Mighty Sage came to the Mango Grove.
There he spoke to the monk Cundaka,
‘Spread me the fourfold robe out as a couch.’
Cheered by the Holy One, he quickly spread
The fourfold robe in order on the ground.

The Master laid himself down, wearied and worn;
There, before him, Cunda took his seat."

197. Then the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “It may happen, Ānanda, that someone should stir up remorse in Cunda the smith, saying, ‘This is a loss for you, Cunda, and a calamity in that when the Tathāgata had eaten his last meal, from you, he died.’ Any such remorse, Ānanda, in Cunda the smith, should be checked by saying, ‘This is a gain
for you, Cunda, and blessing for you, in that when the Tathāgata had eaten his last meal, from you, then he died. From the mouth of the Blessed One, Cunda, have I heard it said, “These two offerings of food are of equal fruit, of equal result, and of much greater fruit and much greater benefit than any other. What are the two? The offering of food which, when a Tathāgata has eaten, he attains to supreme and perfect Enlightenment; and the offering of food which, when a Tathāgata has eaten, he passes away by that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains behind — these two offerings of food are of equal fruit and of equal result, and of much greater fruit and much greater benefit than any others. There has been laid up by Cunda the smith a karma leading to long life, leading to good birth, resulting in good fortune, resulting in good fame, resulting in the inheritance of heaven, and of sovereign power.” In this way, Ānanda, should be checked any remorse in Cunda the smith.” Then the Blessed One perceiving how the matter stood, uttered this verse:

“To him who gives shall virtue be increased;
In him who curbs himself, no anger can arise;
The righteous man casts off all sinfulness,
By the rooting out of lust and bitterness, and
All delusion, does attain nibbāna!”

End of the Fourth Portion for Recitation

The Twin Sal Trees
(Yamakasālā)

Then the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “Come, Ānanda, let us go on to the Sal Grove of the Mallas at Kusinārā, on the other side of the river Hiraññavatī.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent.

The Blessed One proceeded with a great company of monks to the Sal Grove of the Mallas at Kusinārā, on the other side of the river Hiraññavatī, and on arriving there he addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “Spread for me, Ānanda, a bed facing north, between the twin Sal trees. I am weary, Ānanda, and will lie down.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent, and he spread a bed between the twin Sal trees, facing north. The Blessed One lay down on his right side, with one foot resting on the other; mindful and clearly comprehending.

At that time the twin Sal trees were all one mass of bloom with flowers out of season; and all over the body of the Tathāgata these dropped and sprinkled and scattered themselves, out of reverence for the successor of the Buddhas of old. Heavenly mandārava flowers and sandalwood powder came falling from the sky, sprinkling the body of the Tathāgata out of reverence for the successor of the Buddhas of old. Heavenly music was heard in the skies, and heavenly songs wafted down from the skies, out of reverence for the successor of the Buddhas of old!

The normal season for Sal trees to flower is in May to June, so it is significant that the text mentions here that they flowered out of season (akālapupphehi). This fits with the aforementioned time of the Parinibbāna being in January, not May.

Then the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “The twin Sal trees are all one mass of bloom with flowers out of season; all over the body of the Tathāgata these drop and sprinkle and scatter themselves, out of reverence for the successor of the Buddhas of old. Heavenly mandārava flowers, too, and heavenly sandalwood powder come falling from the sky, and all over the body of the Tathāgata they descend and sprinkle and scatter themselves, out of reverence for the successor of the Buddhas of old. Heavenly music sounds in the sky, out of reverence for the successor of the Buddhas of old. Heavenly songs come wafted from the skies, out of reverence for the successor of the Buddhas of old! It is not thus, Ānanda, that the Tathāgata is rightly respected, revered, honoured, venerated, or worshipped. However, a monk or nun, a male or female disciple, who fulfils the greater and lesser duties, who practises correctly, living in accordance with the Dhamma, rightly respects, reveres, honours, venerates, and worships the Tathāgata with the highest reverence. Therefore, Ānanda, be constant in fulfilling the greater and lesser duties, practising correctly, live in accordance with the Dhamma. Thus, Ānanda, should it be taught.”

This is an important point to be noted by all Buddhists. The Buddha says specifically, that not only monks and nuns, but also male and female lay disciples who practise correctly, living in accordance with the Dhamma, fulfilling their duties, rightly respect, honour, venerate, and revere the Tathāgata. Thus, it is not only those gone forth who should meditate, and strive to realise the Dhamma, but also householders. Mere devotional practices such as offering flowers, incense, and other gifts to shrines, or offering alms to monks and nuns, are not the highest homage. What the Buddha stresses here is the importance of paying homage by practice (paṭipatti pūjā).

Householders and monastics have different duties and different precepts to observe. Householders have a religious duty to support the Saṅgha by providing their material needs, and monastics have a duty to be easily supportable, reflecting wisely when using the requisites offered by those with faith in the teaching. They have a duty to cultivate insight (vipassanā-dhura), and to preserve and propagate the Buddha’s
teachings (*gantha-dhura*). Householders should observe the five precepts, or the eight precepts on Uposatha days whenever possible. Monks should observe the 227 Pātimokkha precepts, and novices should observe the ten precepts. Modern nuns usually observe the eight precepts, but there are 311 Bhikkhuni precepts to be observed for nuns with the higher ordination.

Practising in accordance with the Dhamma, for both householders and monastics, means to cultivate morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). The three types of spiritual training are not like the rungs of a ladder, with morality being the first step that must be fulfilled before one can ascend to the second step of concentration, and thence on to the third step of wisdom. Rather, they are like the three legs of a tripod. Morality provides support to concentration and wisdom; concentration provides support to morality and wisdom; and wisdom provides support to morality and concentration. Therefore, even a Buddhist fisherman or farmer who is, as yet, unable to properly fulfill the five precepts, should be encouraged to cultivate concentration and insight. Gradually, as wisdom develops, morality is purified, and with the non-re remorse that comes from not breaking the precepts, mental serenity and concentration develop.

It is the same for monastics too. Nowadays, there are many who are unable to fulfill even the ten precepts by abstaining from using money. Even Ajahn Chah accepted money when he was a young monk. Later, he studied the Vinaya and realised that it was not allowable for monks. He gave it up, and went to learn meditation from forest monks, gradually attaining wisdom and becoming a famous teacher.

The Buddha's teaching is realistic. Apart from a few rare exceptions from the time of the Buddha, nobody is already perfect when they join the Saṅgha, and most remain imperfect for their entire life. However, if the training is followed properly, morality, concentration, and wisdom will develop, and in this way a disciple rightly respects, honours, venerates, and reveres the Tathāgata by practising in accordance with the Dhamma to remove his or her imperfections.

Building pagodas, planting Bodhi trees, making offerings to shrines may be done if it makes the mind peaceful and focuses attention on the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha — there is no harm in performing these traditional religious practices. However, they are not the best homage to the Buddha. It is like preparing delicious food, but not eating it oneself. The purpose of food is to provide strength, and that can only be effective if one eats it. The truth of suffering must be understood, the cause of suffering (craving) must be abandoned, the cessation of suffering (*nibbāna*) must be realised, and the path to the cessation of suffering (the eightfold path) must be developed.
200. At that time the Venerable Upavāṇa was standing in front of the Blessed One, fanning him. The Blessed One told Upavāṇa to move, saying, ‘Stand aside, monk, do not stand in front of me.’

Then this thought occurred to the Venerable Ānanda, ‘The Venerable Upavāṇa has long been in close personal attendance, serving the Blessed One. At the last moment, the Blessed One orders him to move, saying, ‘Stand aside, monk, do not stand front of me.’ What is the cause, what is the reason, that the Blessed One speaks thus to him?’ So the Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One, ‘The Venerable Upavāṇa has long been in close personal attendance, serving the Blessed One. At the last moment, the Blessed One orders him to move, saying, ‘Stand aside, monk, do not stand front of me.’ What is the cause, what is the reason, that the Blessed One speaks thus to him?’

1Rhys Davids translates “Bhagavā āyasmanṭam upavāṇanāṃ apasāresi” as “was displeased with Upavāṇa.” Perhaps he reads it as “apasādeti,” to blame?
“In great numbers, Ānanda, the gods of the ten world-systems have assembled to see the Tathāgata. For twelve leagues, Ānanda, around the Sal Grove of the Mallas at Kusinārā, there is no spot even as big as a hair tip that is not pervaded by powerful deities. The deities, Ānanda, are complaining, and say, ‘We have come from afar to see the Tathāgata. Rarely do the Tathāgatas, the Worthy, Fully Enlightened Buddhas appear in the world. Today, in the last watch of the night, the final passing away of the Tathāgata will take place, but this eminent monk stands in front of the Tathāgata, concealing him, and in his last hour we are prevented from seeing the Tathāgata;’ thus, Ānanda, do the deities complain.”

201. “Kathaṃbhūtā pana, bhante, Bhagavā devatā devatā manasikarotī”ti?
“Sant’Ānanda, devatā ākāse pathavīsaññino kese pakiriya kandanti, bāhā paggayha kandanti, chinnapātaṃ papatanti, āvaṭṭanti, vivaṭṭanti — ‘Atikhippaṃ Bhagavā parinibbāyissati, atikhippaṃ sugato parinibbāyissati, atikhippaṃ cakkhum loke antaradhāyissati’ti.

“Sant’Ānanda, devatā pathaviyaṃ pathavīsaññino kese pakiriya kandanti, bāhā paggayha kandanti, chinnapātaṃ papatanti, āvaṭṭanti, vivaṭṭanti — ‘Atikhippaṃ Bhagavā parinibbāyissati, atikhippaṃ sugato parinibbāyissati, atikhippaṃ cakkhum loke antaradhāyissati’ti.

“Yā pana tā devatā vītarāgā, tā satā sampajānā adhivāsenti — ‘Aniccā saṅkhārā, taṃ kutettha labbhā’ti.

201. “To what kind of deities is the Blessed One referring?”
“There are, Ānanda, deities in the sky, but of worldly mind, who tear their hair, stretch forth their arms and weep, who fall prostrate on the ground, and roll to and fro in anguish at the thought, ‘Too soon will the Blessed One die! Too soon will the Fortunate One pass away! Too soon will the eye of the world disappear!’ There are also, Ānanda, deities on the earth, and of worldly mind who tear their hair, stretch forth their arms and weep, who fall prostrate on the ground, and roll to and fro in anguish at the thought, ‘Too soon will the Blessed One die! Too soon will the Happy One pass away! Too soon will the eye of the world disappear!’ However, those deities who are free from passion bear it calmly, clearly comprehending and mindful that all compounded things are impermanent, how could this be otherwise!”

Even the gods are mostly not free from sorrow, lamentation, grief, and despair because they are not free from sensual desire and craving. Some deities are wise, some are not. Some are Noble Ones, some are still ordinary persons.
The Four Places that Arouse Devotion

(Catusanvejaniyatthathanani)

202. “Formerly, Venerable sir, when they had spent the rainy season in different districts, the monks used to come to see the Tathāgata, and we used to receive those monks, and to wait upon the Blessed One. However, after the passing of the Blessed One, we will not be able to receive those monks, and to wait upon the Blessed One.”

“There are these four places, Ānanda, that the believing man should visit with feelings of religious emotion. Which four? The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, ‘Here the Tathāgata was born,’ is a spot to be visited with feelings of religious emotion. The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, ‘Here the Tathāgata, attained to the supreme and perfect Enlightenment’ is a spot to be visited with feelings of religious emotion. The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, ‘Here was the incomparable wheel of Dhamma set rolling by the Tathāgata,’ is a spot to be visited with feelings of religious emotion. The place, Ānanda, at which
the believing man can say, ‘Here the Tathāgata finally passed away in that utter passing away that leaves nothing whatever behind,’ is a spot to be visited with feelings of religious emotion.

“There will come, Ānanda, to such spots, devout monks and nuns of the Saṅgha, or male and female lay disciples, who will say, ‘Here was the Tathāgata born,’ or, ‘Here the Tathāgata attained to the supreme and perfect Enlightenment,’ or, ‘Here the wheel of Dhamma was set rolling by the Tathāgata,’ or, ‘Here the Tathāgata finally passed away in that utter passing away that leaves nothing whatever behind.’ They, Ānanda, who die with believing heart, while on such a pilgrimage, will be reborn after death, on the break-up of the body, in the fortunate heavenly realms.”

As in other religions, pilgrimage to places associated with the life of the founder of our religion is popular among devout followers. Many disciples travel to Lumbinī, Buddhagayā, Saranath, and Kusināgara, to visit the sacred spots where the Bodhisatta was born, where the Buddha gained Enlightenment, where he taught his first discourse, and where he passed away, attaining Parinibbāna. I also visited these four main sites as a young man, prior to my ordination. At that time, I knew very little about the history of Buddhism, so I did not visit other famous sites such as Nālandā and Rājagaha — I was more interested to visit Igatpuri where I attended a 10-day meditation retreat with S.N. Goenka. He is no longer living, but the meditation tradition that he established has expanded enormously worldwide.

To my way of thinking, it is more important to attend such retreats to practise the Buddha’s teaching than to go on pilgrimage to the holy sites. It is in keeping with the Buddha’s advice to Ānanda on how best to pay homage to the Blessed One. That’s not to discourage anyone from going on pilgrimage if they feel inspired to do so, but if you have the time and money to visit India, then do take 10-days at least to attend such a retreat — to visit the four holy sites needs four days at the most, and staying in those places is costly, while staying in a meditation centre is entirely free of charge. When you leave, you can make a donation for the benefit of others.

**The Account of Venerable Ānanda’s Questions**

(Ānandapucchākathā)

203. "How are we to conduct ourselves, Venerable sir, with regard to women?"

"Do not look at them, Ānanda."

"However, if we should see them, what should we do?"

"Do not speak to them, Ānanda."

"However, if we should speak to them, Venerable sir, what should we do?"

"Be mindful, Ānanda."

In footnote 430 of his translation, Maurice Walshe comments “This small passage seems arbitrarily inserted at this point,” and he gives a cross-reference to the Samyuttanikāya, 35.127 (S.iv.110), which is a conversation between the Venerable Pindola Bhāradvāja, an Arahant, and King Udena, who asked how young monks manage to live the holy life. The Venerable Pindola replies that they regard women as their mothers, sisters, or daughters. King Udena thinks that this might not be enough to control sexual desire, then the Venerable Pindola explains about the contemplation of the 32 body parts, then about sense-faculty restraint. The king is finally satisfied that this method would be effective.

The Venerable Pindola was the son of king Udena’s chaplain, and was greedy by nature. After following the Buddha’s advice, he became an Arahant. King Udena was a lustful and passionate man. On an earlier occasion, when he found the same monk talking to the women of his harem, in a fit of jealousy he had a nest of red ants poured over his body. After this later conversation, he took refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, and became a disciple of the Venerable Pindola.

I have no way of knowing if this question belongs here in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta or not, but Venerable Ānanda was someone who had to deal with women frequently, so it is a question he might well have asked at that time, knowing that the Buddha would no longer be around to protect him if his mind wandered to sensual thoughts. Staying with a teacher like the Buddha, who could read one’s every thought, would be a powerful aid to controlling one’s lustful thoughts. Dealing with women is a problem for celibate monks. Most monks who disrobe do so after forming emotional attachments to women Although monks do not wish to make it difficult for women to learn the Dhamma, and it is often women who are the most reliable supporters of monks, if there is too close and friendly an association between a monk and a woman, then intimacy and lust are always a danger. If the Buddha’s advice to Ānanda is heeded then monks would be able to remain contented in living the holy life.

204. “Katham mayam, bhante, Tathāgatassa sarire paṭipajjāmā”ti? “Abyāvaṭā tumhe, Ānanda, hotha Tathāgatassa sarīrapūjāya. Ingha tumhe, Ānanda, sāratthe
An Exposition of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta

204. “What should we do, Venerable sir, with the remains of the Tathāgata?”

“Do not hinder yourselves, Ānanda, by honouring the remains of the Tathāgata. I urge you, Ānanda, to apply yourselves to your own welfare! Be mindful, zealous, and intent on your own welfare! There are wise men, Ānanda, among nobles, priests, householders and, who are firm believers in the Tathāgata; and they will do due honour to the remains of the Tathāgata.”


205. “What should be done, Venerable sir, with the remains of the Tathāgata?”

“As men treat the remains of a wheel-turning monarch, so, Ānanda, should they treat the remains of a Tathāgata.”

“How, Venerable sir, do they treat the remains of a wheel-turning monarch?”

“They wrap the body of a wheel-turning monarch, Ānanda, in a new cloth. When that is done they wrap it in carded cotton wool. When that is done they wrap it in a new cloth, and so on till they have wrapped the body in five hundred successive layers of both kinds. Then they place the body in an oil vessel of iron, and cover that close up with another oil vessel of iron. They then build a funeral pile of all kinds of perfumes, and burn the body of the wheel-turning monarch. Then at the four cross-roads they erect a pagoda to the wheel-turning monarch. This, Ānanda, is the way in which they treat the remains of a wheel-turning monarch.
“As they treat the remains of a wheel-turning monarch, so, Ānanda, should they treat the remains of the Tathāgata. At the cross-roads a pagoda should be erected to the Tathāgata. Whosoever shall there place garlands or perfumes or paint, or make salutation there, or become in its presence calm in heart — that shall long be to them for a profit and a joy.”

The wheel-turning monarch (Cakkavatti) in Buddhist texts is a very rare individual. In traditional Theravāda Buddhism, the Emperor Asoka and other great kings are referred to as wheel-turning monarchs. However, all such kings gained power over large dominions by wars involving the slaughter of many innocent victims by invading armies. A true world-turning monarch as described in the Cakkavatti Sutta or Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta of the Dīghanikāya, becomes a ruler over many nations by power of virtue and wisdom. The wheel that he rolls over many nations is not that of a war-chariot, but the wheel of righteousness and truth. There is a world of difference between obedience based on fear, and obedience based on respect.

**The Four Individuals Worthy of a Pagoda**

*(Thūpārahapuggalo)*


206. “These four, Ānanda, are worthy of a pagoda. Which four? A Tathāgata, a worthy, Fully Enlightened Buddha, is worthy of a pagoda, a Solitary Buddha is worthy of a pagoda, a disciple of the Tathāgata is worthy of a pagoda. A wheel-turning monarch is worthy of a pagoda. Why, Ānanda, is a Tathāgata, a worthy, Fully Enlightened Buddha worthy of a pagoda? At the thought, Ānanda, ‘This is the pagoda of that Blessed One, of that a worthy, Fully Enlightened Buddha,’ the hearts of many will be made calm and happy; and since they calmed and satisfied their hearts they will be reborn after death, on the break-up of the body, in fortunate heavenly realms. This is the reason, Ānanda, that a Tathāgata, a worthy, Fully Enlightened Buddha is worthy of a pagoda. Why, Ānanda, is a Solitary Buddha worthy of a pagoda? At the thought, Ānanda, ‘This is the pagoda of that Blessed One, of that Solitary Buddha,’ the hearts of many will be made calm and happy; and since they calmed and satisfied their hearts they will be reborn after death, on the break-up of the body, in the fortunate heavenly realms. This is the reason, Ānanda, that a Solitary Buddha is worthy of a pagoda. Why, Ānanda, is a disciple of the Blessed One, the Tathāgata, worthy of a pagoda? At the thought, Ānanda, ‘This is the pagoda of a disciple of the Tathāgata,’ the hearts of many will be made calm and happy; and since they calmed and satisfied their hearts they will be reborn after death, on the break-up of the body, in the fortunate heavenly realms. This is the reason, Ānanda, that a disciple of the Tathāgata, is worthy of a pagoda. Why, Ānanda, is a wheel-turning monarch worthy of a pagoda? At the thought, Ānanda, ‘This is the pagoda of that righteous king who ruled righteously,’ the hearts of many will be made calm and happy; and since they calmed and satisfied their hearts they will be reborn after death, on the break-up of the body, in the fortunate heavenly realms. This is the reason, Ānanda, that a wheel-turning monarch is worthy of a pagoda. These four, Ānanda, are worthy of a pagoda.”

There are examples in the texts of pagodas being constructed over the remains of Arahants. Perhaps they were simple earth mounds, rather than the elaborate structures that we see today. In modern times too, devout Buddhists build pagodas in honour of their revered teachers like Ajahn Chah, who were thought to be Arahants.
207. Then the Venerable Ānanda went into the dwelling place (vihāraṃ), and stood leaning against the door-post, weeping at the thought, “Alas! I am just a learner, one who still has much to do. The teacher is about to pass away — he who was so compassionate to me!”

The Blessed One called the monks, saying: “Where, monks, is Ānanda?”

“The Venerable Ānanda, Venerable sir, has gone into the dwelling place, and stands leaning against the door-post, weeping at the thought, “Alas! I am just a learner, one who still has much to do. The teacher is about to pass away — he who was so compassionate to me!”

The Blessed One called a certain monk, saying,”Go to Ānanda, saying, “Venerable Ānanda, the teacher asks for you.”

The Venerable Ānanda was, at this stage just a Stream-winner, and so not free from attachment. Later, he attained to Arahantship, just before the First Buddhist Council.
“Yes, Venerable sir,” the monk replied in assent. He approached Venerable Ānanda; and having approached said, “Venerable Ānanda, the teacher asks for you.”

“Yes, friend,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent to that monk. He went up to where the Blessed One was, and when he had come there, he paid homage to the Blessed One, and took his seat respectfully on one side.

Then the Blessed One said to the Venerable Ānanda, as he sat there by his side, “Enough, Ānanda! Do not distress yourself; do not weep! Have I not already, on former occasions, told you that it is in the very nature of all things most near and dear to us that we must divide ourselves from them, leave them, sever ourselves from them? How, then, Ānanda, can this be possible that anything born, brought into being, and organised, which contains within itself the inherent necessity of dissolution, can it be possible that such a being should not be dissolved? No such condition can exist! For a long time, Ānanda, you have been very close to me with acts, speech, and thoughts of unwavering kindness and well-wishing beyond measure. You have made merit, Ānanda! Strive diligently, and you will quickly be free from the corruptions!”

208. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying: “Whosoever, monks, have been worthy, fully Enlightened Buddhas in the distant past, they had attendants just as devoted as Ānanda has been to me. Whosoever, monks, will be worthy, fully Enlightened Buddhas in the distant future, they will have attendants just as devoted as Ānanda has been to me. Ānanda is wise, monks, he is discerning. He knows the right time to come and visit the Tathāgata, and he knows the right time for monks, nuns, devout male and female lay disciples, kings, ministers, other teachers or their disciples, to come and visit the Tathāgata.

209. “Cattārome, bhikkhave, acchariyā abhutā dhammā Ānande. Katame cattāro? Sace, bhikkhave, bhikkhuparisā Ānandaṃ dassoṭṭhāya upasaṅkamati,
Venerable Ānanda’s Special Qualities

101. "Monks, there are these four wonderful and marvellous qualities in Ānanda. What four? If, monks, a number of monks come to visit Ānanda, they are filled with joy on beholding him; and if Ānanda should teach the Dhamma to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while they are ill at ease, monks, when Ānanda is silent. If, monks, a number of nuns, or devout male or female lay disciples come to visit Ānanda, they are filled with joy on beholding him; and if Ānanda should teach the Dhamma to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while the company is ill at ease, monks, when Ānanda is silent.


209. “Monks, there are these four wonderful and marvellous qualities in Ānanda. What four? If, monks, a number of monks come to visit Ānanda, they are filled with joy on beholding him; and if Ānanda should teach the Dhamma to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while they are ill at ease, monks, when Ānanda is silent. If, monks, a number of nuns, or devout male or female lay disciples come to visit Ānanda, they are filled with joy on beholding him; and if Ānanda should teach the Dhamma to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while the company is ill at ease, monks, when Ānanda is silent.
“Monks, there are these four wonderful and marvellous qualities in a wheel-turning monarch. What are the four? If, monks, a number of nobles, priests, householder, or recluses come to visit a wheel-turning monarch, they are filled with joy on beholding him; and if the wheel-turning monarch speaks, they are filled with joy at what is said; while they are ill at ease, monks, when the wheel-turning monarch is silent. Just so, monks, are the four wonderful and marvellous qualities in Ānanda. If, monks, a number of monks come to visit Ānanda, they are filled with joy on beholding him; and if Ānanda should teach the Dhamma to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while they are ill at ease, monks, when Ānanda is silent. If, monks, a number of nuns, or devout male or female lay disciples come to visit Ānanda, they are filled with joy on beholding him; and if Ānanda should teach the Dhamma to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while the company is ill at ease, monks, when Ānanda is silent. These, monks, are the four wonderful and marvellous qualities possessed by Ānanda.”

The Teaching of the Mahāsudassana Sutta
(Mahāsudassanasuttadesanā)


“Bhūtapubbaṃ, Ānanda, rājā mahāsudassano nāma ahosi cakkavatti dhammiko dhammarājā cāturanto vijītāni janappadaddhaṃvariyaṃpatto sattaratanasamāmaṇāgato. Rañño, Ānanda, mahāsudassanassa ayaṃ kusinārā kusāvati nāma rājadhāni ahosi, puratthidhā ca pacchimena ca dvādasayojanaṃ ayāmena; uttareṇa ca dakkhiṇena ca sattayojanaṃ vitthārena. Kusāvati, Ānanda, rājadhāni iddhā ceva ahosi phītā ca bahujanā ca ākiṃṇamanussā ca subhikkhā ca. Seyyathāpi, Ānanda, devānaṃ ālakamandā nāma rājadhāni iddhā ceva hoti phītā ca bahujanā ca ākiṃṇayakkhā ca subhikkhā ca; evaneva kho, Ānanda, kusāvati rājadhāni iddhā ceva ahosi phītā ca bahujanā ca ākiṃṇamanussā ca subhikkhā ca. Kusāvati, Ānanda, rājadhāni dasahi saddehi avivattā ahosi divā ceva rattiṇca, seyyathidaṃ — hatthisaddena assasaddena
When he had thus spoken, the Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One, “Let not the Blessed One die in this small town (khuddakanagarake), in this barren town (ujjaṅgalanagarake), in this suburb (sākhānagarake). Venerable sir, there are other great cities, such as Campā, Rājagaha, Sāvatthi, Sāketa, Kosambī, and Benares. Let the Blessed One die in one of them. There live many wealthy nobles, priests, and householders who are believers in the Tathāgata, who will pay due honour to the remains of the Tathāgata.”

“Say not so, Ānanda! Do not say, Ānanda, that this is just a small and barren suburb. Long ago, Ānanda, there was a king by name of Mahāsudassana, a wheel-turning monarch, a righteous man who ruled righteously, lord of the four quarters of the earth, conqueror, the protector of his people, possessor of the seven royal treasures. This Kusinārā, Ānanda, was the capital city of King Mahāsudassana named Kusāvatī. On the east and west it was twelve leagues in length, and on the north and south it was seven leagues in breadth.

“That royal city of Kusāvatī, Ānanda, was mighty and prosperous, crowded with people, and well provided with food. Just, Ānanda, as the royal city of the gods named Āḷakamandā is mighty and prosperous, crowded with gods, and well provided with food, so, Ānanda, was the royal city Kusāvatī mighty and prosperous, crowded with people, and well provided with food.

“Both by day and by night, Ānanda, the royal city Kusāvatī reverberated with ten sounds; that is to say, the sounds of elephants, horses, chariots; drums, tabor and lute; singing, the cymbal and gong; and with the cry, “Eat, drink, and be merry!”

“Go, Ānanda, enter Kusinārā, and inform the Mallas of Kusinārā, saying, “Today, Vāseṭṭhas, in the last watch of the night, the final passing away of the Tathāgata will take place. Come Vāseṭṭhas, give no reason to reproach yourselves later, ‘In our own village the death of the Tathāgata took place, but we did not take the opportunity to visit the Tathāgata in his final hours.’”
“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent; and he robed himself, and taking his bowl, entered Kusinārā attended by a second monk.

This brief account in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta is expanded to a full discourse — the Mahāsudassana Sutta — which follows the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta in the Dīghanikāya. It describes the seven treasures possessed by a Wheel-turning monarch (Cakkavatti), and describes the wealth, virtue, and longevity of King Sudassana in some detail. It concludes by identifying the King as a previous existence of the Buddha when he was a Bodhisatta, and the Buddha concludes by emphasising the impermanence of all conditioned things with the verse that is always recited at Buddhist funerals:

“Aniccā vata saṅkhārā, uppādavayadhammino.
uppaṭijjtvā nirujjhanti, tesam vūpasamo sukhoti.

“Impermanent, alas, are all conditioned things
Subject to decay, having arisen they cease,
Their cessation is blissful.”

The Homage of the Mallas
(Mallānaṃ Vandanā)

Ānando kosinārake malle kulaparivattaso kulaparivattasso thapetvā Bhagavantaṃ vandāpesi — ‘Itthannāmo, bhante, mallo saputto sabhariyo sapariso sāmacco Bhagavato pāde sirasā vandati’”ti. Atha kho āyasmā Ānando etena upāyena paṭhameneva yāmena kosinārake malle Bhagavantaṃ vandāpesi.

211. At that time the Mallas of Kusinārā were assembled in the council hall on some public business. The Venerable Ānanda went to the council hall of the Mallas of Kusinārā; and when he had arrived he informed them, saying, “Today, Vāseṭṭhās, in the last watch of the night, the final passing away of the Tathāgata will take place. Come Vāseṭṭhas, give no reason to reproach yourselves later, ‘In our own village the death of the Tathāgata took place, but we did not take the opportunity to visit the Tathāgata in his final hours.’”

When they had heard the words of the Venerable Ānanda, the Mallas with their young men, maidens, and wives were grieved, and sad, and afflicted at heart. Some of them wept, tearing their hair, and stretched forth their arms and wept, fell prostrate on the ground, and rolled to and fro in anguish at the thought, “Too soon will the Blessed One die! Too soon will the Fortunate One pass away! Too soon will the eye of the world disappear!”

Then the Mallas, with their young men and maidens and their wives, being grieved and sad and afflicted at heart, went to the Sal Grove of the Mallas, to where the Venerable Ānanda was staying.

The Venerable Ānanda thought: “If I allow the Mallas of Kusinārā, one by one, to pay their respects to the Blessed One, the whole of the Mallas of Kusinārā will not have been presented to the Blessed One until this night brightens up into the dawn. Let me, now, cause the Mallas of Kusinārā to stand in groups, each family in a group, and so present them to the Blessed One, saying, ‘Venerable sir, a Malla of such and such a name, with his children, his wives, his retinue, and his friends, humbly bows down at the feet of the Blessed One.’” The Venerable Ānanda therefore caused the Mallas of Kusinārā to stand in groups, each family in a group, and so presented them to the Blessed One, saying, “Venerable sir! a Malla of such and such a name, with his children, his wives, his retinue, and his friends, humbly bows down at the feet of the Blessed One.” In this way the Venerable Ānanda presented all of the Mallas of Kusinārā to the Blessed One in the first watch of the night.

212. At that time a wanderer named Subhadda was dwelling at Kusinārā. The wanderer Subhadda heard the news, “Today, in the third watch of the night, the final passing away of the recluse Gotama will take place.” Then the wanderer Subhadda thought, “I have heard from fellow wanderers of mine, well advanced in years, teachers of teachers, who said, “Very rarely
do Tathāgatas appear in the world, worthy, fully Enlightened Buddhas.” Yet today, in the last watch of the night, the final passing away of the recluse Gotama will take place. Uncertainty has arisen in my mind; and I have this faith in the recluse Gotama, that he is able to teach me the Dhamma so that I may be able to get rid of this uncertainty.” So the wanderer Subhadda went to the Sal Grove of the Mallas at Kusinārā, to where Venerable Ānanda was staying. When he arrived he said to the Venerable Ānanda, “I have heard from fellow wanderers of mine, well advanced in years, teachers of teachers, who said, ‘Very rarely do Tathāgatas appear in the world, worthy, fully Enlightened Buddhas.’ Yet today, in the last watch of the night, the final passing away of the recluse Gotama will take place. Uncertainty has arisen in my mind; and I have this faith in the recluse Gotama, that he is able to teach me the Dhamma so that I may be able to get rid of this uncertainty. May I, Ānanda, be allowed to see the recluse Gotama!”

When he had thus spoken the Venerable Ānanda said to the wanderer Subhadda, “Enough, friend Subhadda. Do not trouble the Tathāgata. The Blessed One is weary.”

The wanderer Subhadda [made the same request in the same words, a second and third time and received the same reply.]
213. The Blessed One overheard this conversation of the Venerable Ānanda with the wanderer Subhadda. Then the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “Enough, Ānanda! Do not keep Subhadda away. Subhadda, Ānanda, may be permitted to see the Tathāgata. Whatever Subhadda may ask of me, he will ask from a desire for knowledge, and not to annoy me. Whatever I may say in answer to his questions, that he will quickly understand.”

Then the Venerable Ānanda said to Subhadda, the wanderer, “Enter, friend Subhadda; for the Blessed One gives you leave.”

Then Subhadda, the wanderer, went to where the Blessed One was, and greeted him courteously, and after exchanging polite and friendly speech, took a seat on one side. Seated thus, Subhadda the wanderer, said to the Blessed One, “These recluses and priests, Gotama, who are heads of groups of disciples and students, teachers of students, well known, renowned, founders of schools, esteemed by the multitude, namely: Purāṇa Kassapa, Makkhali of the cattle-pen, Ajita of the hair-garment, Kaccāyana of the Pakudha tree, Sañcaya Belatthiputta, and Nigaṇṭha Nāṭhaputta, have they all, according to their own assertion, thoroughly understood things? Or have they not? Or are there some of them who have understood, and some who have not?”

“Enough, Subhadda! Let this matter rest whether they, according to their own assertion, have thoroughly understood things, or whether they have not, or whether some of them have understood and some have not! I teach you the Dhamma, Subhadda, listen and pay careful attention, I will speak.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Subhadda replied in assent.

The Blessed One said this:


“Ekūnatiṃso vayasā subhadda,
Yañi pabbajitāṁ kimkusalānu esī.
Vassāni paññāsa samādhikāni,
Yato ahaṁ pabbajito subhadda.
The Story of the Wanderer Subhadda

214. “In whatsoever doctrine and discipline, Subhadda, the Noble Eightfold Path is not found, there a true recluse of the first, second, third, or fourth grade is not found. In whatsoever doctrine and discipline, Subhadda, the Noble Eightfold Path is found, there is found the true recluse of the first, second, third, and fourth grade. In this doctrine and discipline, Subhadda, is found the Noble Eightfold Path; in it alone is found the true recluse of the first, second, third, and fourth grade. Empty are the systems of other teachers — they are devoid of true recluses. In this one, Subhadda, as long as the monks live the perfect life, the world will not be bereft of Arahants.”

“Twenty-nine was I when I renounced
The world, Subhadda, seeking after good.

For fifty years and one year more, Subhadda,
Since I went out, one gone forth have I been

Through the wide realms of virtue and of truth,
Outside of these no true recluse can be!”

“Neither the first true recluse, nor the second, nor the third, nor of the fourth grade. Empty are the systems of other teachers — they are devoid of true recluses. In this one, Subhadda, if the monks live the perfect life, the world will not be bereft of Arahants.”

An Exposition of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta

When he had spoken thus, Subhadda, the wanderer, said to the Blessed One, “Most excellent, Venerable sir, are your words, most excellent! Just as a man might set upright what has fallen down, or reveal that which is hidden, or point out the right path to one who has gone astray, or bring a lamp into the darkness, so that those who have eyes can see forms — Yes, Venerable sir, has the Truth been made known to me, in many a figure, by the Blessed One. I go to the Blessed One as my refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha. May the Blessed One accept me as a disciple, as a true disciple, from this day forth, as long as life endures! May I obtain the going-forth in the presence of the Blessed One? May I receive the higher ordination?”

“Whoever, Subhadda, has formerly been a follower of another doctrine, then wishes to obtain the going-forth and higher ordination in this doctrine and discipline, if he remains on probation for four months; and at the end of four months, the monks, if they agree, may grant him the going-forth or the higher ordination. However, I recognise a difference in individuals.”

“If, Venerable sir, whoever has formerly been a follower of another doctrine, then wishes to obtain the going-forth and higher ordination in this doctrine and discipline, if such a person remains on probation for the space of four months; and at the end of the four months, the monks, if they agree, may grant him the going-forth and the higher ordination — I then, will remain...
on probation for four years; and at the end of the four years let the monks, if they agree grant me the going-forth and the higher ordination!"

Then the Blessed One called the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “As it is, Ānanda, grant Subhadda the going-forth!”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent.

Then Subhadda, the wanderer, said to the Venerable Ānanda, “Great is your gain, friend Ānanda, great is your good fortune, friend Ānanda, that you have been sprinkled with the sprinkling of discipleship in this monkhood at the hands of the teacher himself!”

So Subhadda, the wanderer, obtained the going-forth in the presence of the Blessed One, and the higher ordination. From immediately after his ordination the Venerable Subhadda remained alone and aloof, earnest, zealous, and resolved. Before long he attained the highest goal of the holy life for the sake of which men go forth, realising for himself, and abiding in it. He knew that birth was at an end, that the holy life had been fulfilled, that what should be done had been done, and that would be no more rebirth. Thus the Venerable Subhadda became another of the Arahants; and he was the last direct disciple of the Blessed One.

This key passage makes it clear that there is no liberation from suffering outside of the Buddha’s teaching. This will not surprise anyone who knows the teachings well. Other religions do not even aspire to put an end to the cycle of death and rebirth. Their aim is only to go to heaven. Buddhism, which regards all existence, even in celestial realms, as fundamentally unsatisfactory, is seen as pessimistic by followers of other religions. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta says that following the noble eightfold path is the only way to attain the four stages of Sainthood and put an end to suffering. This passage is the corollary of that, without practising the noble eightfold path no one can attain any stage of Sainthood.

To an average lay person who does not practise meditation, and who delights in sensual pleasures, any person who lives a celibate life, abstaining from sexual relationships, having few possessions, devoted to caring for the sick or doing some other selfless service for the community, may seem like a saint. However, according to the Buddha’s teaching, one is not a true saint until the pernicious self-view or belief in an eternal soul is eradicated by insight. This cannot be achieved by any method, other than cultivating mindfulness to the highest degree, and gaining genuine insight into the three characteristics of impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anatta). No attainment of moral purity, deep concentration, or mystic powers can eradicate the deep-seated wrong view of egoism.

End of the Fifth Portion for Recitation
216. Then the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ānanda, saying, “It may be, Ānanda, that in some of you the thought may arise, ‘The word of the teacher has ended, we no longer have a teacher!’ However, Ānanda, you should regard it like this. The Dhamma and discipline that I have set forth and laid down for you will be your teacher after I am gone.”

“Ānanda, after I am gone do not address one another as you do now as friend (āvuso). A junior monk may be addressed by an elder by his name, or family name, or as āvuso, but an elder should be addressed by a junior monk as “Venerable sir (bhante) or reverend (āyasmā).”

“After I am gone, Ānanda, let the Saṅgha if it should so wish, abolish the lesser and minor precepts (khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni).”

At the first Buddhist Council, soon after the Buddha’s demise, the five hundred Arahants were also not unanimous about this matter, and they blamed the Venerable Ānanda for not asking about it. Some Arahants said, “Apart from the four offences of defeat, the remainder are lesser and minor.” Others said, “Apart from the four offences of defeat and the thirteen offences requiring formal meeting, the rest are lesser and minor.” Others said, “… and the two indeterminate offences, the rest are lesser and minor.” Others said, “… and the thirty offences requiring expiation with forfeiture, the rest are lesser and minor offences.” Others said, “… and the ninety-two offences requiring expiation, the rest are lesser and minor.” Others said, “… and four offences requiring confession, the rest are lesser and minor.”
Since there were different opinions, Venerable Mahākassapa addressed the monks saying: "People will say, 'While the Buddha was alive the monks followed the training rules, but after his passing away they do not.' So we should continue to train ourselves in all of the precepts." Thus the five hundred Arahants agreed not to abolish any training rules. Not one of the later Councils abolished any training rules either.

That was the decision made by the five hundred Arahants, and all later Buddhist Councils, so the monks of the present day must also train themselves in all of the training precepts. There is no legitimate reason to ignore a single one of them. Nevertheless, one should distinguish between serious, medium, and minor offences.

In the Milinda Pañha the Arahant Nāgasena says that the Buddha gave permission to abolish the lesser and minor rules to test his disciples, as a king on his death-bed might test his sons by saying, "You can let the border regions go after my death if you wish." Then the sons would surely make efforts to subdue the border regions, and even conquer more territory. Venerable Nāgasena concludes, "The offences of wrong-doing are the lesser precepts, and offences of wrong speech are the minor precepts." I will now show why this is a wise decision.

As already pointed out, groundlessly accusing a monk of defeat leads to rebirth in hell, unless one admits the offence and apologises. For a monk, this offence requires a formal meeting of the Saṅgha.

Causing a schism in the Saṅgha is heavy kamma that inevitably leads to rebirth in hell. Striving to create a schism, when admonished by the Saṅgha to desist, is an offence requiring a formal meeting of the Saṅgha. Clearly, offences that lead to hell or that require a formal meeting of the Saṅgha are not minor offences.

A novice must observe ten precepts, which includes not accepting money. If a bhikkhu accepts money, it must be forfeited to the Saṅgha. The Saṅgha must then give it to a lay person or appoint a bhikkhu to dispose of it. The money must be thrown away outside the monastery, taking no notice of where it falls. So offences requiring confession with forfeiture are not minor, since they deal with a bhikkhu's correct means of livelihood, and some donations of the faithful may go to waste.

If a bhikkhu kills an animal, tells a deliberate lie, abuses, slanders, hits, or threatens a bhikkhu, drinks intoxicants, or eats after midday, these are offences requiring expiation. These offences are contrary to the five or eight precepts observed by lay disciples, temple attendants and nuns, so they are also not minor offences.

If a bhikkhu who is staying in a remote area, which is considered dangerous due to wild beasts or robbers, accepts almsfood in his own place, thus endangering lay
supporters who bring it, it is an offence requiring confession. Since his action endangers the life or property of lay people, this offence cannot be regarded as minor either.

If a bhikkhu laughs loudly in town, if he talks with food in his mouth, if he teaches Dhamma while standing to one who is sitting, if he urinates while standing — these are offences of wrong-doing. If he makes a sarcastic remark or tells a joke, it is an offence of wrong speech. These offences should be avoided too, but they can rightly be called lesser and minor offences. Having committed any of them, a bhikkhu should confess his offence, and undertake to restrain himself in the future. He should not overlook them, nor dismiss them as trivial.

The seventy-second offence requiring expiation states: "While the Pātimokkha is being recited, if any bhikkhu should say, ‘Why are these lesser and minor training rules recited? They only lead to worry, bother, and fret’ then in disparaging the training rules there is an offence requiring expiation.” Thus, the sanctity of the lesser and minor training rules is protected by a specific offence requiring expiation.

The seventy-third offence requiring expiation expects every bhikkhu to be familiar with all of the training rules included in the Pātimokkha (in Pāḷi), within four to six weeks of his ordination. Claiming ignorance of the rule as a defence requires expiation, and he is also to be censured by the Saṅgha for his ignorance.

“After I am gone, Ānanda, let the punishment of Brahma (brahmadaṇḍa) be imposed on monk Channa.”

“What, Venerable sir, is the punishment of Brahma?”

“Let Channa say whatever he likes, Ānanda, the monks should neither speak to him, nor exhort him, nor admonish him.”

At the beginning of this discourse in paragraph 136, the Buddha states so long as the monks establish nothing that has not been already prescribed, and abrogate nothing that has been already established, and act in accordance with the rules of the Order as now laid down then they will prosper and not decline. In paragraph 138 he says that practising with shame of wrong doing (hirī) and fear of wrong doing (ottappa) are two more factors for non-decline for a monk. The Venerable Channa was lacking in these two qualities, and would not heed the advice of his fellow monks, making himself difficult to speak to. In the Kesi Sutta, the Buddha tells the horse-trainer that if his fellows in the holy-life think that a monk is not worth speaking to, it leads to his destruction. This punishment of Brahma is therefore a kind of ostracism imposed on Channa, who later reformed himself, and thus the penalty was later revoked.
217. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying, “It may be, monks, that there doubts or concerns in the mind of some monk about the Buddha, Dhamma, the Saṅgha, the Path, or the practice. Ask freely, monks. Do not reproach yourselves later with the thought, “Our teacher was face to face with us, and we could not bring ourselves to ask the Blessed One when we were face to face with him.” When he had thus spoken the monks were silent. A second and the third time the Blessed One addressed the monks [in the same way] and a third time the monks were silent. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying: “It may be, monks, that you ask no questions out of respect for the teacher, then let a companion ask on your behalf.” When he had spoken thus the monks were silent. Then the Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One, “How wonderful it is, Venerable sir, how marvellous, I believe that in this community of monks there is not one who has any doubt or concerns about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, the Path, or the practice!”

“It is out of faith that you have spoken thus, Ānanda, but, Ānanda, the Tathāgata knows for certain that in this whole community of monks there is not one who has any doubt or concerns about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, the Path, or the practice! Even the most backward, Ānanda, of all
these five hundred monks is a Stream-winner, and no longer liable to be
reborn in a state of suffering, and is assured of final liberation.”

218. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying, “Now, monks,
I exhort you, “Decay is inherent in all formations! Strive with diligence!”

These were the last words of the Tathāgata!

The Account of the Final Decease
(Parinibbutakathā)

219. Then the Blessed One entered the first absorption. Emerging from
the first absorption he entered the second. Emerging from the second he
entered the third. Emerging from the third he entered the fourth. Emerging
from the fourth absorption he entered the infinity of space. Emerging from
the infinity of space he entered the infinity of consciousness. Emerging from
the infinity of consciousness he entered the state of nothingness. Emerging
from the state of nothingness he entered the state of neither perception nor
non-perception. Emerging from the state neither perception nor non-
perception he entered the cessation of perception and feeling.

Then the Venerable Ānanda said to the Venerable Anuruddha, “Venerable
Anuruddha, has the Blessed One passed away?”

“No! Ānanda, the Blessed One has not passed away. He has entered the
cessation of perception and feeling.”

Then the Blessed One emerging from the cessation of perception and
feeling, entered the state of neither perception nor non-perception. Emerging
the state of neither perception nor non-perception he entered the state of
nothingness. Emerging from the state of nothingness he entered into the
infinity of consciousness. Emerging from infinity of consciousness he entered
into the infinity of space. Emerging from the infinity of space he entered into
the fourth absorption. Emerging from the fourth absorption he entered into
the third. Emerging from the third he entered the second. Emerging from
the second he entered into the first absorption. Emerging from the first
absorption he entered into the second. Emerging from of the second he
entered the third. Emerging from the third he entered the fourth absorption.
Emerging from fourth absorption he attained final cessation (parinibbāna).

220. Parinibbute Bhagavati saha parinibbānā mahābhūmicālo ahosi bhiṃsanako
salomahamso. Devadundubhiyo ca phaliṃsu. Parinibbute Bhagavati saha
parinibbānā brahmāsahampati imaṃ gāthaṃ abhāsi —

“Sabbeva nikkhipissanti, bhūtā loke samussayaṃ.
Yattha etādiso satthā, loke appaṭipuggalo.
Tathāgato balappatto, sambuddho parinibbuto”ti.

220. When the Blessed One attained final cessation there arose, at the
moment of his final cessation, a mighty earthquake, terrible and awe-inspiring
and thunder sounded. When the Blessed One attained cessation, Brahmā
Sahampati, at the moment of his final cessation, uttered this stanza:

“They all, all beings that have life, shall lay
Aside their complex form — that aggregation
Of mental and material qualities,
That gives them, or in heaven or on earth,
Their fleeting individuality!
Even as the teacher — being such a one,
Unequalled among all the men that are,
Successor of the prophets of old time,
Mighty by wisdom, and in insight clear has died!”

221. Parinibbute Bhagavati saha parinibbānā sakko devānamindo imaṃ gāthāṃ abhāsi:

“Aniccā vata saṅkhārā, uppādavayadhammino.
Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho”ti.

221. When the Blessed One attained final cessation, Sakka, the king of the gods, at the moment of his final cessation, uttered this stanza:

“They’re transient all, each being’s parts and powers,
Growth is their nature, and decay.
They are produced, they are dissolved again:
Then is best, when they have sunk to rest!”

222. Parinibbute Bhagavati saha parinibbānā āyasmā Anuruddho imaṃ gāthāyo abhāsi:

“Nāhu assāsapassāso, ṭhitacittassa tādino.
anejo santimārabbha, yaṃ kālamakarī muni.
“Asallīnena cītena, vedanaṃ ajjhavāsayi.
Pajjotasseva nibbānaṃ, vimokkho cetaso ahū”ti.

222. When the Blessed One attained final cessation, the Venerable Anuruddha, at the moment of his final cessation, uttered these stanzas:

“When he who from all craving want was free,
Who to nibbāna’s tranquil state had reached,
When the great sage finished his span of life,
No gasping struggle vexed that steadfast heart!
All resolute, and with unshaken mind,
He calmly triumphed over the pain of death.
Even as a bright flame dies away, so was
His last deliverance from the bonds of life!”

223. Parinibbute Bhagavati saha parinibbānā āyasmā Ānando imaṃ gāthāṃ abhāsi:

“Tadāsi yaṃ bhiṃsanakaṃ, tadāsi lomahāṁsanaṃ.
Sabbākāravarūpete, sambuddhe parinibbute”ti.
When the Blessed One died, the Venerable Ānanda, at the moment of his passing away from existence, uttered this stanza:

"Then was there terror!  
Then stood the hair on end!  
When he endowed with every grace —  
The supreme Buddha attained final cessation!"


When the Blessed One attained final cessation, of those monks who were not yet free from the passions, some stretched out their arms and wept, and some fell headlong on the ground, rolling to and fro in anguish at the thought, “Too soon has the Blessed One died! Too soon has the Fortunate One passed away from existence! Too soon has the eye of the world disappeared!” However, those monks who were free from the passions remained mindful and clearly comprehending at the thought, “Impermanent are all formation! How is it possible that [they should not be dissolved]?”


225. Then the Venerable Anuruddha exhorted the monks, saying, “Enough, friends! Weep not, nor lament! Has the Blessed One not taught us that it is in the very nature of all things near and dear to us, that we must divide ourselves from them, leave them, sever ourselves from them? How, monks, can it be — since anything born, brought into being, and organised, contains within itself the inherent necessity of dissolution — that such a being should not be dissolved? No such condition can exist! The deities, monks, will reproach us.”

“Venerable sir, what kind of deities does the Venerable Anuruddha have in mind?”

“There are deities, friend Ānanda, in the sky, but of worldly mind, who tear their hair, stretch forth their arms, and weep, falling prostrate on the ground, and rolling to and fro in anguish at the thought, ‘Too soon has the Blessed One attained final cessation! Too soon has the Fortunate One passed away! Too soon has the eye of the world disappeared!’ There are also deities, Ānanda, on the earth, and of worldly mind, who tear their hair, stretch forth their arms and weep, falling prostrate on the ground, rolling to and fro in anguish at the thought, ‘Too soon has the Blessed one attained final cessation! Too soon has the Fortunate One passed away! Too soon has the eye of the world disappeared!’ However, the deities who are free from passion bear it, mindful and clearly comprehending at the thought, “Impermanent are all formation! How is it possible that [they should not be dissolved]?"

The Venerable Anuruddha and the Venerable Ānanda spent the rest of that night in religious discourse.
226. Then the Venerable Anuruddha said to the Venerable Ānanda, “Go, friend Ānanda, into Kusinārā and inform the Mallas of Kusinārā, saying, “The Blessed One, Vāsetṭhas, has attained final cessation. Do whatever you deem fit!” “Yes, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied in assent to the Venerable Anuruddha. Having robed himself early in the morning, he took his bowl, and went into Kusinārā with one of the monks as an attendant. At that time the Mallas of Kusinārā were assembled in the council hall concerning that very matter. Then the Venerable Ānanda went to the council hall of the Mallas of Kusinārā; and when he had arrived there, he informed them, saying, “The Blessed One, Vāsetṭhas, has attained final cessation. Do, whatever you deem fit!” When they had heard this saying of the Venerable Ānanda, the Mallas, with their young men and their maidens and their wives, were grieved, and sad, and afflicted at heart. Some of them wept, tearing their hair, some stretched forth their arms and wept, and some fell prostrate on the ground, and some rolled to and fro in anguish at the thought, “Too soon has the Blessed One attained final cessation! Too soon has the Fortunate One passed away! Too soon has the eye of the world disappeared!”

The Venerable Anuruddha was ordained on the same day as Venerable Ānanda, along with Bhaddiya, Bhagu, Kimbila, Devadatta, and Upāli. The Sākyan noble youths requested that Upāli be ordained first so that their pride would be humbled. Anuruddha was apparently the leader of the group, and was ordained before Ānanda, hence according to the Buddha’s instructions, Anuruddha addressed Ānanda as friend (Āvuso), and Ānanda addressed Anuruddha as Venerable Sir (Bhante), although their ordinations may have been only a few minutes apart.

Honouring the Buddha’s Body
(Buddhasarīrapūjā)

227. Atha kho kosinārakā mallā purise āṇāpesuṃ — “Tena hi, bhaṇe, kusinārāyaṃ gandhamālañca sabbañca tālāvacaraṃ sannipātethā”ti. Atha kho kosinārakā mallā gandhamālañca sabbañca tālāvacaraṃ pañca ca dussayugasatāni ādāya yena upavattanaṃ mallānaṃ sālavanaṃ, yena Bhagavato sarīraṃ tenupasaṅkamiṃsu; upasaṅkamito Bhagavato sarīraṃ naccehi gītehi vāditehi mālehi gandhehi sakkarontā garuṃ karontā mānentā pūjentā celavitānāni karontā maṇḍalamāle paṭiyādentā ekadīvāyanaṃ viṭṭināmesuṃ.

Atha kho kosinārakānaṃ mallānaṃ etadahosi — “Ativikālo kho aja Bhagavato sarīraṃ jhāpetuṃ, sve dāni mayaṃ Bhagavato sarīraṃ jhāpessāmā”ti. Atha kho kosinārakā mallā
Then the Mallas of Kusinārā gave orders to their attendants, saying, “Gather together perfumes and garlands, and all the musicians in Kusinārā!” The Mallas of Kusinārā took the perfumes and garlands, and all the musicians, and five hundred suits of apparel, and went to the Sal Grove of the Mallas, where the Blessed One’s body lay. There they passed the day in paying respect, honour, reverence, and homage to the remains of the Blessed One with dancing, songs, and music, with garlands and perfumes; making canopies of their garments, and preparing decorations.

Then the Mallas of Kusinārā thought: “It is much too late to burn the Blessed One’s body today. Let us perform the cremation tomorrow.” In paying respect, honour, reverence, and homage to the remains of the Blessed One with dancing, songs, and music, with garlands and perfumes; and in making canopies of their garments, and preparing decorations, they passed the second day too, and then the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth day too.

Then on the seventh day the Mallas of Kusinārā thought: “Let us carry the Blessed One’s body, out by the south gate to a spot outside the south side of the city — paying it respect, honour, reverence, and homage with dance, song, and music, with garlands and perfumes — and there, to the south of the city, let us perform the cremation ceremony!”

Then the Mallas of Kusinārā thought: “It is much too late to burn the Blessed One’s body today. Let us perform the cremation tomorrow.” In paying respect, honour, reverence, and homage to the remains of the Blessed One with dancing, songs, and music, with garlands and perfumes; and in making canopies of their garments, and preparing decorations, they passed the second day too, and then the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth day too.

Then the Mallas of Kusinārā thought: “Let us carry the Blessed One’s body, out by the south gate to a spot outside the south side of the city — paying it respect, honour, reverence, and homage with dance, song, and music, with garlands and perfumes — and there, to the south of the city, let us perform the cremation ceremony!”

Honouring the Buddha’s Body

228. Then eight Malla chieftains bathed their heads, and clad themselves in new garments with the intention of bearing the Blessed One’s body, but they could not lift it up! Then the Mallas of Kusinārā said to the Venerable Anuruddha, “What, Venerable sir, is the reason, what is the cause, that eight Malla chieftains who have bathed their heads, and clad themselves in new garments with the intention of bearing the Blessed One’s body, are unable to lift it up?”

“It is because you, Vāseṭṭhas, have one purpose, and the deities have another.”

“What, Venerable sir, is the purpose of the deities?”

“Your purpose, O Vāseṭṭhas, is this, ‘Let us carry the Blessed One’s body, out by the south gate to a spot outside the south side of the city — paying it respect, honour, reverence, and homage with dance, song, and music, with garlands and perfumes — and there, to the south of the city, let us perform the cremation ceremony,’ but the purpose of the deities, Vāseṭṭhas, is this, ‘Let us carry the Blessed One’s body by the north to the north of the city, and entering the city by the north gate, let us bring it to the midst of the city. Going out again by the eastern gate — paying it respect, honour, reverence, and homage with dance, song, and music, with garlands and perfumes — let us carry it to the Malla shrine called Makuṭabandhana, to the east of the city, and there let us perform the cremation ceremony.’”

“Even according to the purpose of the deities, so, Venerable sir, let it be!”

229. Tena kho pana samayena kusinārā yāva sandhisamalasaṃkaṭīrā jaṇṇumattena odhinā mandāravapupphehi santhatā hoti. Atha kho devatā ca kosinārakā ca mallā Bhagavato sarīraṃ dibbehi ca mānusakehi ca naccehi gitehi vāditehi mālehi gandhehi sakkarontā garam karontā mānentā pūjentā uttareṇa uttaram nagarassa haritvā uttareṇa dvārena nagaram pavesetvā majjhena majjham nagarassa haritvā puratthimena dvārena nikkhamitvā puratthimato nagarassa makuṭabandhanaṃ nāma mallānaṃ cetiyaṃ ettha Bhagavato sarīraṃ nikkhipiṃsu.

229. Immediately the whole of Kusinārā town, even the sewers and rubbish heaps became strewn knee-deep with celestial Mandārava flowers. Then the
deities and the Mallas of Kusinārā paid respect, honour, reverence, and homage to the Blessed One’s body with dance, song, and music, with garlands and perfumes. They carried the body by the north to the north of the city; and entering the city by the north gate they carried it into the midst of the city; and going out again by the eastern gate they carried it to the Malla shrine called Makūtabandhana; and there, to the east of the city, they laid down the Blessed One’s body.

230. Then the Mallas of Kusinārā said to the Venerable Ānanda, “What should be done, Venerable sir, with the remains of the Tathāgata?”

“As men treat the remains of a wheel-turning monarch, so, Vāseṭṭhas, should the remains of a Tathāgata be treated.”

“How, Venerable sir, do they treat the remains of a wheel-turning monarch?”

“They wrap the body of a wheel-turning monarch, Vāseṭṭhas, in a new cloth. When that is done they wrap it in cotton wool. When that is done they wrap it in five hundred successive layers of both kinds. Then they place the body in an oil
vessel of iron, and cover that close up with another oil vessel of iron. They then build a funeral pyre of all kinds of perfumes, and burn the body of the wheel-turning monarch. Then at the cross-roads they erect a pagoda to the wheel-turning monarch. This, Vāseṭṭhas, is how they treat the remains of a wheel-turning monarch.

“As they treat the remains of a wheel-turning monarch, so, Vāseṭṭhas, should the remains of the Tathāgata be treated. At the cross-roads a pagoda should be erected to the Tathāgata. Whosoever places garlands, perfumes, or coloured paste, or pays homage there, or becomes serene there — that will be a profit and a joy to them for a long time.”

Then the Mallas gave orders to their attendants, saying, “Gather all the carded cotton wool of the Mallas!”

Then the Mallas of Kusinārā wrapped the Blessed One’s body in a new cloth. When that was done, they wrapped it in cotton wool. When that was done, they wrapped it in a new cloth — and so on until they had wrapped the Blessed One’s body in five hundred layers of both kinds. Then they placed the body in an oil vessel of iron, and covered that close up with another oil vessel of iron. Then they built a funeral pile of all kinds of perfumes, and upon it they placed the Blessed One’s body.

**The Story of Venerable Mahākassapa**

*(Mahākassapattheravatthu)*


231. At that time the Venerable Mahākassapa was going along the high road from Pāvā to Kusinārā with a great company of monks, with about five hundred of the monks. The Venerable Mahākassapa left the high road, and
sat down at the foot of a certain tree. At that time a certain naked ascetic who had picked up a Mandārava flower in Kusinārā was coming along the high road to Pāvā. The Venerable Mahākassapa saw the naked ascetic coming in the distance; and when he had seen him he said to the naked ascetic, “Friend! Surely you know our teacher?”

“Yes, friend! I know him. Today the recluse Gotama has been dead for a week. That is how I obtained this Mandārava flower.”

Immediately those monks who were not yet free from the passions, stretched out their arms and wept, some fell prostrate on the ground, and some rolled to and fro in anguish at the thought, “Too soon has the Blessed One attained final cessation! Too soon has the Fortunate One passed away! Too soon has the eye of the world disappeared!” However, those monks who were free from passion bore their grief mindfully and clearly comprehending at the thought, “Impermanent are all formations! How is it possible that they should not be dissolved?”


232. At that time a monk named Subhadda, who had gone-forth in old age, was seated in that company. Subhadda, who had gone-forth in old age, addressed the monks, saying, “Enough, monks! Do not grieve, do not lament! We are well rid of the great recluse. We used to be annoyed by being told, ‘This is allowable (kappati) for you, this is not allowable for you.’ Now we will be able to do whatever we want, and will not have to do what we do not want to do!”

There was another monk named Subhadda, mentioned above who was the last bhikkhu to go forth while the Blessed One was living. He practised diligently and soon became an Arahant.

This Subhadda was very different. Subhadda had been a novice (sāmaṇera) at the time of the Buddha’s visit to Ātumā, and had two sons before he joined the Order. When
he heard that the Buddha was coming, he sent for his two sons and gave orders for various foods to be collected to feed the Buddha and the twelve hundred and fifty monks. The Buddha arrived in the evening and took up his residence in Ātumā. All night long Subhadda went about giving instructions regarding the preparation of the food. In the morning of the next day the Buddha went out for alms, and Subhadda approached him and invited him to partake of the food which he had prepared. However, the Buddha questioned him, and, discovering what he had done, refused to accept the meal, forbidding the monks to do so too. This angered Subhadda, and he awaited an opportunity of expressing his disapproval of the Buddha. This opportunity came when he heard of the Buddha’s death.

This incident shows how scrupulous the Buddha was about receiving only alms offered in the proper way. The first chapter of the Visuddhimagga on morality explains all manner of improper livelihood for a bhikkhu such as scheming, talking, hinting, belittling, and pursuing gain with gain. A bhikkhu is not a beggar, but an alms-gathering mendicant. When walking for alms, he does not draw attention to his presence, but stands silently at the gate to a house wherever he thinks someone may want to offer alms. If no one comes out to offer alms, then he moves on to the next house. Even when invited into a house to receive alms, he must eat only what is offered to him, and cannot just help himself to food that is put on the table. Food is considered to be properly offered if the donor is within alms-reach of the bhikkhu, and if the bhikkhu receives it onto a plate, receiving-cloth, tray, or into his almsbowl. If the donor just places the food somewhere in the bhikkhu’s vicinity, it is not properly offered and should not be used. Not knowing the donor’s intention, it might have been put there for another bhikkhu or for some other purpose, e.g. an offering to the departed or the donor might be waiting for someone else to come and make the formal offering to the Saṅgha.

So Subhadda’s behaviour was ugly for a bhikkhu. Although it is allowable for a monk to request almsfood from his own blood-relatives, or to urge them to offer alms to the Saṅgha, there is no need for the bhikkhu to involve himself in the details of what is to be offered, or how it is to be prepared — that is for the donor to manage as he or she wishes. The Buddha knew that Subhadda’s behaviour went far beyond what was suitable, so he refused the almsfood, and Subhadda took offence at this — later showing his disregard for the bhikkhu’s training.

However, the Venerable Mahākassapa addressed the monks, saying, ‘Enough, monks! Do not grieve, do not lament! Did the Blessed One not formerly declare that it is in the very nature of all things, near and dear to us, that we must divide ourselves from them, leave them, sever ourselves
from them? How then, monks, can this be possible that, since anything born, brought into being, and organised is inherently unstable how can such a being not be dissolved? That is not possible!"


233. Just at that time four Malla chieftains had bathed their heads and clad themselves in new garments with the intention of setting fire to the funeral pyre of the Blessed One. However, they were unable to set it alight! Then the Mallas of Kusinārā said to the Venerable Anuruddha, “What, Venerable sir, is the reason, what is the cause, that four Malla chieftains who have bathed their heads, and clad themselves in new garments, with the intention of setting fire to the funeral pyre of the Blessed One, are unable to do so?”

“It is because you, Vāseṭṭhas, have one purpose, and the deities have another.”

“What, Venerable sir, is the purpose of the deities?”

“The purpose of the deities, Vāseṭṭhas, is this, “The Venerable Mahākassapa is now coming along the high road from Pāvā to Kusinārā with a great company of monks, with five hundred monks. The funeral pyre of the Blessed One will not ignite until the Venerable Mahākassapa has been able to pay homage at the feet of the Blessed One.”

“Even Venerable sir, let it be according to the purpose of the deities!”

234. Atha kho āyasma Mahākassapo yena kusināraṃ makuṭabandhanaṃ nāma mallānaṃ cetiyaṃ, yena Bhagavato citako tenupaṇaṅkami; upapaṇaṅkimittvā ekāmsaṃ cīvaram katvā aṅjaliṃ paṇāmetvā tikkhattum citakaṃ padakkhiṇaṃ katvā Bhagavato pāde sirasā vandi. Tāniṇpi kho pañcabhikkhusatāni ekāmsaṃ cīvaram katvā aṅjaliṃ paṇāmetvā tikkhattum citakaṃ padakkhiṇaṃ katvā Bhagavato pāde sirasā vandiṃsu. Vandite ca pañāyasmatā Mahākassapena tehi ca pañcahi bhikkhusatehi sayameva Bhagavato citako pajjali.
Then the Venerable Mahākassapa went on to the Malla shrine of Kusinārā named Makūtabandhana where the funeral pyre of the Blessed One was. When he arrived, he arranged his robe on one shoulder, and paying respect with palms joined (añjali) he circumambulated the pyre three times, keeping it on his right, he paid homage at the feet of the Blessed One. Those five hundred monks arranged their robes on one shoulder, and paying respect with palms joined they circumambulated the pyre three times, keeping it on their right, and paid homage at the feet of the Blessed One. When the Venerable Mahākassapa and those five hundred monks had paid homage, the funeral pyre of the Blessed One ignited by itself.

This ancient tradition is maintained by Buddhists to this day when visiting a pagoda it is customary to remove one's shoes, and circumambulate it, keeping it on one's right.

As the Blessed One’s body burned, from the outer skin, the inner skin, the flesh, the nerves, and the fluid of the joints, neither soot nor ash was seen: and only the bones remained. Just as one sees no soot or ash when ghee or oil is burned, when the Blessed One’s body burned, the outer skin, the inner skin, the flesh, the nerves, and the fluid of the joints, neither soot nor ash was seen, and only the bones remained. Of the five hundred pieces of cloth the innermost and outermost were both consumed. When the Blessed One’s body had been burnt up, streams of water fell from the sky and extinguished the Blessed One’s funeral pyre; and streams of water burst forth from the earth, and extinguished the Blessed One’s funeral pyre. The
Mallas of Kusinārā also brought water scented with all kinds of perfumes, and extinguished the funeral pyre of the Blessed One.

Then the Mallas of Kusinārā surrounded the bones of the Blessed One in their council hall with a lattice work of spears and a rampart of bows, and for seven days they paid respect, honour, reverence, and homage with dance, song, and music, with garlands and perfumes.

**Partition of the Relics**

**(Sarīradhātuvibhājanam)**


Evaṃ vutte kosinārakā mallā te saṅghe gaṇe etadavocuṃ — “Bhagavā amhākaṃ gāmakkhette parinnibutto, na mayaṃ dassāma Bhagavato sarīrānaṃ bhāga”nti.

236. The king of Māgadha, Ajātasattu, the son of the queen of the Videha clan, heard, “The Blessed One has just attained final cessation at Kusinārā.” Then the king of Māgadha, Ajātasattu, the son of the queen of the Videha clan, sent a messenger to the Mallas, saying, “The Blessed One belonged to the warrior caste, I too am of the warrior caste. I am worthy to receive a portion of the Blessed One’s relics. Over the remains of the Blessed One I will erect a pagoda, and in their honour I will celebrate a festival!”

The Licchavī of Vesāli heard, “The Blessed One has just attained final cessation at Kusinārā.” The Licchavī of Vesāli sent a messenger to the Mallas, saying, ‘The Blessed One belonged to the warrior caste, and we too are of the warrior caste. We are worthy to receive a portion of the relics of the Blessed One. Over the remains of the Blessed One we will put up a pagoda, and in their honour we will celebrate a festival!’

The Sakyans of Kapilavatthu heard, “The Blessed One has just attained final cessation at Kusinārā.” The Sakyans of Kapilavatthu sent a messenger to the Mallas, saying, ‘The Blessed One was the chief of our clan. We are worthy to receive a portion of the relics of the Blessed One. Over the remains of the Blessed One we will put up a pagoda, and in their honour we will celebrate a festival!’

The Bulis of Allakappa heard, “The Blessed One has just attained final cessation at Kusinārā.” The Bulis of Allakappa sent a messenger to the Mallas, saying, ‘The Blessed One belonged to the warrior caste, and we too are of the warrior caste. We are worthy to receive a portion of the relics of the Blessed One. Over the remains of the Blessed One we will put up a pagoda, and in their honour we will celebrate a festival!’

The Koḷiyas of Rāmagāma heard, “The Blessed One has just attained final cessation at Kusinārā.” The Koḷiyas of Rāmagāma sent a messenger to the Mallas, saying, ‘The Blessed One belonged to the warrior caste, and we too are of the warrior caste. We are worthy to receive a portion of the relics of the Blessed One. Over the remains of the Blessed One we will put up a pagoda, and in their honour we will celebrate a festival!’
The Brahmin of Veṭṭhadīpa heard, “The Blessed One has just attained final cessation at Kusinārā.” The Brahmin of Veṭṭhadīpa sent a messenger to the Mallas, saying, ‘The Blessed One belonged to the warrior caste, and I am a Brahmin. I am worthy to receive a portion of the relics of the Blessed One. Over the remains of the Blessed One will I put up a pagoda, and in their honour will I celebrate a festival!’

The Mallas of Pāvā heard, “The Blessed One has just attained final cessation at Kusinārā.” Then the Mallas of Pāvā sent a messenger to the Mallas, saying, ‘The Blessed One belonged to the warrior caste, and we too are of the warrior caste. We are worthy to receive a portion of the relics of the Blessed One. Over the remains of the Blessed One we will put up a pagoda, and in their honour we will celebrate a festival!’

When they heard these things the Mallas of Kusinārā spoke to the assembled monks, saying, ‘The Blessed One died in our village domain. We will not give away any part of the remains of the Blessed One!’

237.  Evaṃ vutte doṇo brāhmaṇo te saṅghe gaṇe etadavoca —

Suṇantu bhonto mama ekavācaṇ,  
Amhāka. Buddho ahu khantivādo.  
Na hi sādhu yaṃ uttamapuggalassa,  
Sarīrabhāge siyā sampahāro.  
Sabbeva bhonto sahitā samaggā,  
Sammodamānā karomaṭṭhabhāge.  
Vitthārikā hontu disāsu thūpā,  
Bahū janā cakkhumato pasannā”ti.

237. When they had thus spoken, Doṇa the Brahmin addressed the assembled group, saying:

“Listen, good sirs, to a speech from me.  
Our Buddha was a teacher of patience.  
It is unseemly that strife should arise over dividing  
The remains of the best of beings!

Let us all, sirs, with one accord unite  
In friendly harmony to make eight portions.  
Wide spread let pagodas rise in every land  
So that mankind may have faith in the Enlightened One!”


238 “Then, Brahmin, divide the remains of the Blessed One into eight equal portions.”

“Even so good sirs,” said Doṇa in assent to the assembled group. Then having divided the remains of the Blessed One into eight equal portions, he said to them, “Give me, good sirs, this vessel, and I will erect a pagoda over it and establish a festival in its honour.” So they gave the vessel to Doṇa the Brahmin.

The Moriyas of Pipphalivana heard, “The Blessed One has just attained final cessation at Kusinārā.” Then the Moriyas of Pipphalivana sent a messenger to the Mallas, saying, “The Blessed One belonged to the warrior caste, and we too are of the warrior caste. We are worthy to receive a portion of the relics of the Blessed One. Over the remains of the Blessed One we will put up a pagoda, and in their honour we will celebrate a festival!”

When they heard the reply, “There is no portion of the remains of the Blessed One left over. The remains of the Blessed One are all distributed,” they took away the embers.

Honouring the Relics with a Pagoda
(Dhātuthūpapūjā)


239. Then the king of Māgadha, Ajātasattu, the son of the queen of the Videha clan, made a pagoda\(^1\) (thūpa) in Rājagaha over the remains of the Blessed One, and held a festival. The Licchavi of Vesāli made a pagoda in Vesāli over the remains of the Blessed One, and held a festival. The Bulis of Allakappa made a pagoda in Allakappa over the remains of the Blessed One, and held a festival. The Koliyas of Rāmagāma made a pagoda in Rāmagāma over the remains of the Blessed One, and held a festival. The Brahmin of Veṭṭhadīpa made a pagoda in Veṭṭhadīpa over the remains of the Blessed One, and held a festival. The Mallas of Pāvā made a pagoda in Pāvā over the remains of the Blessed One, and held a festival. The Mallas of Kusinārā made a pagoda in Kusinārā over the remains of the Blessed One, and held a festival. Doṇa the Brahmin made a pagoda over the vessel, and held a festival. The Moriyas of Pipphalivana made a pagoda over the embers, and held a festival. Thus were there eight pagodas for the remains, and one for the vessel, and one for the embers. This was how it was then.


\[Ekāhi dāṭhā tidivehi pūjitā, ekā pana gandhārapure mahīyati. Kālingaraṇi vijite punekaṃ, ekaṇi pana nāgarājā maheti.\]

\[Tasseva tejena ayaṇi vasundhara, Āyāgaseṭṭhehi mahī alaṅkatā.\]

\[Evāni imaṇi cakkhumato sarīraṃ, Susakkatam saṅkatasakkatehi.\]

\[Devindaṅgindanarindapūjito, Manussindaseṭṭhehi tatheva pūjito.\]

\(^1\) The word “pagoda” is used for many different kinds of structures. The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta uses the word “thūpa” (vedic: stūpa) for the structure built over the remains of a Buddha, a Solitary Buddha, an Arahant, or a Wheel-turning monarch (Cakkavatti). Elsewhere the sutta uses the word “cetiya” for a shrine built to honour the dead warriors of the Vajji, and for several shrines at which the Buddha rested during his long journey to Kusināra.
Honouring the Relics with a Pagoda

Taṃ vandatha pañjalikā labhitvā,  
Buddho have kappasatehi dullabhoti.

Cattālīsa samā dantā, kesā lomā ca sabbaso.  
Devā hariṃsu ekekaṃ, cakkavālaparamparāti.

Mahāparinibbānasuttaṃ Niṭṭhitaṃ Tatiyaṃ

240. Eight measures of relics there were of the seer,  
Of the best of the best of men. In India seven are worshipped,  
One measure in Rāmagāma by the kings of the nāgas.  
One tooth, too, is honoured in heaven, and one in Gandhāra’s city,  
One in the Kāliṅga realm, and one more by the Nāga race.

“Through their glory the bountiful earth is made bright with offerings painless —  
For with such are the Great Teacher’s relics best honoured by those who are honoured,  
By gods, nāgas, and kings, by the noblest of monarchs —  
Bow down with clasped hands!  
Rare is it to meet a Buddha through hundreds of ages!”

End of the Book of the Great Decease
The Ten Pagodas

The map shows the approximate locations of the ten pagodas built over the Buddha’s remains after his demise. See *India in the Time of the Buddha* for more details and a PDF file of the full map.
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