

# Śakra and the Destruction of Craving – A Case Study in the Role of Śakra in Early Buddhism

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## Introduction

In the previous issue of the *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, I had taken a brief look at Indra's role in early Buddhism in the context of a discussion mainly concerned with the arahant Bakkula.<sup>1</sup> With the present paper I further explore this role, based on a study of the *Samyukta-āgama* counterpart to the *Cūḷataṇhāsāṅkhaya-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*.

The discourse in question records a visit paid by Mahāmaudgalyāyana to Indra's heaven. During this visit, the complacent attitude of the ruler of the gods is stirred by a feat of supernatural power performed by the visiting monk.

A closer study of the discourse bring to light its underlying humour and shows how the ancient Indian god Indra has been 'included' in the thought-world of early Buddhism in order to deliver a doctrinally central teaching on the importance of the destruction of craving.<sup>2</sup> At the background of the role assumed in this way by Indra stands a transformation undergone by the ancient Indian warrior god, the slayer of Vṛtra,<sup>3</sup> who in early Buddhist texts has become a peaceful and devoted Buddhist disciple by the name of Śakra (Sakka).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anālayo (2010).

<sup>2</sup> As already mentioned in Anālayo (2010: 2), the role of Indra in early Buddhist texts can be understood as exemplifying a mode of thought that has been referred to as "inclusivism", on which cf. the articles collected in Oberhammer (1983); as well as e.g. Mertens (2004) and Ruegg (2008: 97–99).

<sup>3</sup> A summary of this myth can be found in Macdonell (1897/2000: 58–60).

<sup>4</sup> Godage (1945: 70–71) explains that while Indra "was a picture of the warlike Aryan who was bent on the conquest of new lands and the repelling

The *Cūḷatanhāsāṅkhaya-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*,<sup>5</sup> which records this tale, has parallels in the *Samyukta-āgama* and in the *Ekottarika-āgama*,<sup>6</sup> preserved in Chinese translation.

Regarding these two collections, the translation of the *Samyukta-āgama* collection was begun in 435 of the present era by Baoyun (寶雲), assisted by Puti (菩提) and Fayong (法勇), based on an original read out to them by the Indian Guṇabhadra.<sup>7</sup> According

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of his enemies”, descriptions of Śakra seem to follow “the model of the character of a Buddhist Upāsaka”; cf. also Masson (1942: 46) and Lamotte (1966: 116). Barua (1967: 184) notes how “the infuriated Vṛtra slayer of the Veda” is transformed into “a devout Buddhist disciple”. Arunasiri (2006: 629) points out that “in Buddhist literature we observe an attempt to adjust Vedic Indra’s character so that it would not clash with the main principles of Buddhism”. Bingenheimer (2008: 153) comments that “certainly the gentle and friendly Sakka bears little resemblance to the *soma*-quaffing, demon-beheading Indra of the *Vedas*”. The positive value accorded to Śakra in early Buddhist thought is also reflected in the circumstance that, as noted by Jones (1979: 174), in *jātaka* tales the Buddha “appears twenty-one times in the form of Sakka”. Regarding the function assumed by Śakra in the Jain tradition, von Glasenapp (1925/1999: 268) comments that “Śakra appears on all occasions which affect the world; he has above all a role in the history of the Tirthaṅkaras”. Śakra is not the only denizen of ancient Indian cosmology that lost his more fierce aspects on becoming part of the Buddhist thought-world. Other examples would be Yama, of whom Marasinghe (2002: 631) comments that “the Ṛg Vedic god of death and the king and ruler of the underworld ... has been reduced in Buddhism to a mere passive onlooker at the uninfluenced operation of the law of karma”; or the *nāgas*, of which Vogel (1926: 93) remarks that in Buddhist literature “the dreaded serpent-demons are generally presented as devout worshippers of the Buddha”.

<sup>5</sup> MN 37 at MN I 251–256.

<sup>6</sup> SĀ 505 at T II 133b-134a and EĀ 19.3 at T II 593c-594c. EĀ 19.3 has been translated by Huyen-Vi (1998: 65–70). The summary verse at T II 596c13 refers to EĀ 19.3 as “abandoning of craving”, 斷愛, suggesting that the discourse’s title would have been not too different from the title of MN 37.

<sup>7</sup> The introduction to the *Samyukta-āgama* at T II 1a5 mentions only Guṇabhadra as the translator; though a more detailed account of the translation procedure can be found in T 2145 at T LV 13a6. Forte (1984: 316) explains that every translation was “registered under the name of a single person, usually the actual guarantor of the text ... This need to make one person responsible often meant that the actual contribution of other members of the team tended to be unacknowledged”. Since Guṇabhadra had only recently arrived in China, it seems improbable that he could already have had the language skills enabling him to translate the text himself.

to modern scholarship, this collection is probably of (Mūla-) Sarvāstivāda provenance.<sup>8</sup>

The *Ekottarika-āgama* extant in the Taishō edition appears to be the text translated into Chinese during the period 384–385 by Zhu Fonian (竺佛念), based on what probably was a Prākṛit original of so far undetermined school affiliation transmitted by Dharmanandin.<sup>9</sup>

### Translation<sup>10</sup>

[The Destruction of Craving]<sup>11</sup>

1. Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at Rājagṛha.<sup>12</sup> At that time the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana was living on Mount Vulture Peak.

<sup>8</sup> Lü (1963: 242); Waldschmidt (1980: 136); Mayeda (1985: 99); Enomoto (1986: 23); Schmithausen (1987: 306); Choong (2000: 6 note 18); Hiraoka (2000); Harrison (2002: 1); Bucknell (2006: 685); and Glass (2010). According to de Jong (1981: 108), the original text used for translating the *Samyukta-āgama* would have been in Sanskrit.

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the somewhat complex issue of the translators and school affiliation of this collection cf. Anālayo (2009).

<sup>10</sup> The translated text covers T II 133b24 to T II 134a6.

<sup>11</sup> I follow Akanuma (1929/1990: 58), who suggests 愛盡 as a tentative title.

<sup>12</sup> According to MN 37 at MN I 251,13, the Buddha was staying in the Eastern Park by Śrāvastī, in the monastery given by Mṛgāra's Mother, whereas according to EĀ 19.3 at T II 593c13 he was staying in Jeta's Grove by Śrāvastī, in the monastery given by Anāthapiṇḍika. This disagreement between the three parallel versions exemplifies the lack of concern prevalent in ancient Indian texts for precise 'historical' information in relation to such issues as geographical locations. The same is reflected in an instruction given in the Mahāsāṅghika and (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas*, according to which a monk who has forgotten the location of a discourse should just allocate it to one of the main places where the Buddha was known to have stayed frequently, T 1425 at T XXII 497a6 and T 1451 at T XXIV 328c15 (cf. also T XXIV 575b29); cf. also the discussion in Schopen (1997/2004: 395–407) and a similar passage in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, T II 550b13, and in T 1507 at T XXV 33b19. The lack of concern for historical details evident in these instructions stands in contrast to a much greater care with which doctrinal teachings are transmitted in the discourses. Rhys Davids (1899: 207) explains that “the doctrine taught loomed so much larger than anything else” that the monks responsible for the texts were “necessarily more concerned with that, than with any historical accuracy in the details of the

- 5.<sup>13</sup> Then, while being alone and meditating in a quiet place,<sup>14</sup> the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana had the following thought:

“At a former time, in a cave in the Border Mountains,<sup>15</sup> Śakra, the ruler of gods, asked the Blessed One about the significance of liberation [through] the destruction of craving. On having heard the Blessed One’s explanation, he was delighted. He seemed to want to ask further questions on its significance. I shall now approach him and ask what delighted his mind.”<sup>16</sup>

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story”. In the same vein, de Jong (1974/1979: 142) notes that information on the location of a discourse is considerably less well established in the tradition than the text itself. Coward (1986: 305) comments that “the early Buddhists shared ... the Indian indifference to historical details. Historical events surrounding a text are judged to be unimportant in relation to the unchanging truth the text contains”. According to Pollock (1989: 610), behind the ancient Indian attitude towards historical details stands “a model of ‘truth’ that accorded history no epistemological value or social significance”. Gombrich (1990a: 22) explains that “from the religious point of view this is perfectly understandable: the narrative framework of the sayings is not relevant to salvation”. Thus when evaluating the lee-way given to supplementing a location in case this has been forgotten, as pointed out by Scharfe (2002: 25 note 93), “it is worth noting that no such ‘creativity’ was allowed where the contents of the lesson is concerned”.

- <sup>13</sup> To facilitate comparison, I adopt the paragraph numbering used in the English translation of the *Cūḷatanhāsankhaya-sutta* in Ñāṇamoli (1995/2005: 344–348). In the present instance, this results in irregular numbering, since §§2–4 of the Pāli version have no counterpart in SĀ 505.
- <sup>14</sup> The progression of the introductory narration in MN 37 and EĀ 19.3 differs, as these two versions report Śakra’s visit to the Buddha as an event actually happening (§§2–4 in Ñāṇamoli (1995/2005: 344)), while in SĀ 505 the same visit is only remembered by Mahāmaudgalyāyana. According to MN 37 at MN I 252,8 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 593c27, Mahāmaudgalyāyana was seated not far away from the Buddha at the time of that visit. Once Śakra had left, Mahāmaudgalyāyana had the reflection that according to SĀ 505 he had while dwelling on Mount Vulture Peak.
- <sup>15</sup> This appears to refer to the meeting between Śakra and the Buddha in Indraśaila Cave on Mount Vaidehaka, which in the Pāli canon is reported in DN 21 at DN II 263–289. A reference to a discussion between Śakra and the Buddha which has the ‘Border Mountains’ as its venue occurs also in SĀ 552 at T II 144c24, SĀ 553 at T II 145a12 and SĀ 988 at T II 257b3, where in the case of SĀ 552 the Pāli parallel SN 22.4 at SN III 13,5 explicitly mentions the *Sakkapañha* (i.e. DN 21); on the name of this location cf. also Waldschmidt (1932: 62 note 3).
- <sup>16</sup> In MN 37 at MN I 252,10 the motivation for Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s visit is to find out if Śakra had understood the instruction he had received from the

6. Having had this thought, just as a strong man might quickly bend or stretch out an arm, [133c] he disappeared from Mount Vulture Peak and arrived in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, where he appeared not far away from the Single Lotus Pond.<sup>17</sup>
7. At that time Śakra, the ruler of gods, was disporting himself in the pond, bathing together with five hundred female attendants, all of them heavenly maidens who were singing most beautifully.<sup>18</sup> Then, on seeing Mahāmaudgalyāyana from afar, Śakra, the ruler [of gods], told the heavenly maidens: “Stop singing, stop singing!”
- The heavenly maidens thereon immediately became quiet. Śakra, the ruler of gods, promptly approached the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana, paid respect with his head at [the latter’s] feet, and stood back to one side.
8. The venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana asked Śakra, the ruler [of gods]: “At an earlier time, on the Border Mountains, you asked the Blessed One about the significance of liberation [through] the destruction of craving, and on hearing [the Blessed One’s explanation] you were delighted. What was on your mind? Did

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Buddha. EĀ 19.3 at T II 593c29 reports that he wanted to find out if Śakra had asked this question as one who had attained the path.

<sup>17</sup> SĀ 505 at T II 133c1: 一分陀利, counterpart to the *ekapundarika* in MN 37 at MN I 252,18, where, however, this name refers to a park, *uyyāna*, not a pond. The term *ekapundarika* recurs in MN 88 at MN II 112,14 as the name of an elephant, rendered as 一奔陀利 in the parallel MĀ 214 at T I 797c14. EĀ 19.3 does not describe in what way or where Śakra was passing his time when Mahāmaudgalyāyana arrived.

<sup>18</sup> SĀ 505 at T II 133c3 reports that they were making most beautiful sounds, 音聲美妙, with the next line of the text then indicating that they had been singing, 歌. This helps clarify the expression *dibbehi pañcahi turīyasatehi* (B<sup>c</sup>: *turīyasatehi*) with which according to MN 37 at MN I 252,18 Śakra was endowed at the time of Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s arrival. Chalmers (1926: 181) translates this expression as “five hundred instruments discoursing heavenly music”, Horner (1967: 307) as “five hundred *deva*-like musical instruments”, and Ñāṇamoli (1995/2005: 345) as being endowed “a hundredfold with the five kinds of heavenly music”. The difficulties this cryptic expression in MN 37 posed to the translators are quite understandable, yet the solution to the conundrum becomes easy once SĀ 505 is taken into account: Śakra was surrounded by five-hundred nymphs that were entertaining him with music; cf. also Anālayo (2005: 11).

you rejoice on hearing the explanation, or did you rejoice because you wanted to ask further questions?”<sup>19</sup>

Śakra, the ruler of gods, replied to the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana: “We in the Heaven of the Thirty-three are quite attached to self-indulgence and pleasure. At times we remember an earlier matter, at other times we do not remember it.<sup>20</sup> The Blessed One is now in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrel’s Feeding Ground, at Rājagṛha. Venerable sir, as you would like to know the matter I asked about earlier on the Border Mountains, you could right now approach the Blessed One and ask him. As the Blessed One explains it, so you could remember it.”<sup>21</sup>

However, in this realm here I have a beautiful palace, which has been completed recently, not long ago.<sup>22</sup> You could [now first] enter it and take a look.”

9. Then the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana accepted [the invitation] by remaining silent. He right away went together with Śakra, the ruler of gods, into the palace.<sup>23</sup> On seeing from afar that Śakra, the ruler [of gods], was coming, all of the divine maidens [inside the palace] performed heavenly music

<sup>19</sup> This additional query is without a counterpart in MN 37 or in EĀ 19.3, according to which Mahāmaudgalyāyana only requests Śakra to repeat what he had earlier been taught by the Buddha.

<sup>20</sup> In MN 37 at MN I 252,34 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 594a9, Śakra excuses himself by pointing out that he has much to do, without admitting that he is self-indulgent.

<sup>21</sup> This witty suggestion is not found in the parallel versions, instead of which in MN 37 at MN I 253,2 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 594a11 Śakra narrates a former victory over the *asuras* and then leads the talk over to the palace he began to build on that occasion. On the symbolic significance of such battles between *devas* and *asuras* in early Buddhist thought cf. e.g. Witanachchi (2005).

<sup>22</sup> MN 37 at MN I 253,8 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 594a15 offer a more detailed description of the palace, indicating that it had seven hundred chambers, each chamber was inhabited by seven heavenly maidens, each of whom had seven attendants. A similar description can be found in the discourse that precedes the present discourse in the *Samyukta-āgama*, SĀ 504 at T II 133b16.

<sup>23</sup> According to MN 37 at MN I 253,14 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 594a17, the two were accompanied by Vaiśravaṇa, one of the four Heavenly Kings. His presence, as one of the protectors of the world (cf. e.g. Kirfel (1920: 195f); Malalasekera (1938/1998: 948–950); Haldar (1977: 80f) and Mudiyanse (1999)), bestows on the visit to the palace a nuance of official reception.

by singing or dancing. The rows of gems and ornaments with which the bodies of those heavenly maidens were lavishly adorned produced the most beautiful sounds, in accordance with the five [types] of music, in this way skilfully creating a melody without a sound being out of tune.<sup>24</sup>

When these crowds of heavenly maidens saw the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana, they all became ashamed and went back to hide in their rooms.<sup>25</sup>

10. Then Śakra, the ruler of gods, told the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana: “Look at this palace, with its level terrace, its walls and pillars, its roof beams and tiered gables, the windows, screens and curtains, all gloriously beautiful!” The venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana replied to Śakra, the ruler [of gods]: “Kosiya, such fine fruits manifest because you earlier developed wholesome states and [performed] meritorious deeds.”

In this way Śakra, the ruler [of gods], praised himself three times by asking the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s [opinion about the palace], who replied three times [as above].

11. Then the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana had the following reflection: “Now this Śakra, ruler [of gods], is highly self-indulgent and quite attached to this realm of heavenly existence, praising this palace. I shall now arouse some sense of urgency in his mind.”<sup>26</sup> He promptly entered [a state of] concentration and, through the use of supernormal power, shook the palace with one of his toes so that it trembled all over. Then the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana swiftly disappeared and was no more to be seen.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> This description is without a counterpart in the two parallels.

<sup>25</sup> Similar to the instance mentioned above in note 18, this small detail clarifies the situation described in the parallel accounts in MN 37 at MN I 253,18 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 594a25, where it is not self-evident why the heavenly maidens should be embarrassed, cf. in more detail Anālayo (2005: 11f).

<sup>26</sup> SĀ 505 at T II 133c27: 厭離, which according to Hirakawa (1997: 224) can render *saṃvega*, a meaning that fits the present context well and is also found in the corresponding section in MN 37 at MN I 253,35. According to EĀ 19.3 at T II 594a29, he wanted to “frighten” him, 恐怖. On *saṃvega* cf. also e.g. Coomaraswamy (1943).

<sup>27</sup> In MN 37 at MN I 254,6 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 594b4, Mahāmaudgalyāyana does not disappear right away after the supernormal feat. Instead, he gets

14. The host of divine maidens, on seeing the palace shake and tremble, [134a] had become very afraid and had gone running in all directions. [When the tremble was over], they asked Śakra, the ruler [of gods]: “Kauśika, is this your great teacher, possessed of such great might and power?” Then Śakra, the ruler of gods, told the heavenly maidens: “This is not my teacher, this is Mahāmaudgalyāyana, a disciple of the great teacher, he is a pure practitioner of the holy life who has great virtue and great power.”<sup>28</sup> The heavenly maidens said: “Well indeed, Kauśika, if you have as co-practitioners of the holy life a disciple of such great virtue and great power, how much more must be the virtue and power of the great teacher!”<sup>29</sup>

### Study

To appreciate the central message of the present tale requires a brief look at another discourse, the *Sakkapañha-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*, which, in agreement with parallels preserved in Chinese and Sanskrit, reports that Śakra attained stream-entry during his first meeting with the Buddha.<sup>30</sup> This not only provides a background for Śakra’s activities in Buddhist texts in general, but also appears to be closely related to the event depicted in the above translated discourse.

The close relationship between these two discourses is reflected in the circumstance that key Pāli terminology found in the

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Śakra, whose complacency has apparently been shattered so thoroughly that his memory has come back into operation, to repeat the instruction given to him earlier by the Buddha (§§12–13 in Nāṇamoli (1995/2005: 346f)).

<sup>28</sup> According to MN 37 at MN I 255,8, Śakra told the heavenly maidens that Mahāmaudgalyāyana was one of his companions in the holy life, *sabrahmacārī me eso* (EĀ 19.3 does not report any exchange between the heavenly maidens and Śakra after the miracle). This is slightly puzzling, as Śakra was not a *brahmacārī* himself, a problem also noted in Ps II 304,27, cf. also Haldar (1977: 89).

<sup>29</sup> MN 37 at MN I 255,12 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 594b25 continue by reporting that Mahāmaudgalyāyana approached the Buddha with the request to be told the instruction the Buddha had earlier given to Śakra. MN 37 at MN I 256,7 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 594cb11 conclude with Mahāmaudgalyāyana delighting in the Buddha’s words and thus have, in contrast to the abrupt ending of SĀ 505, the standard conclusion to a discourse.

<sup>30</sup> For references cf. Anālayo (2010: 3 note 7).

Buddha's last reply to a series of questions put by Śakra in the *Sakkapañha-sutta* recurs in Śakra's inquiry in the Pāli version of the present discourse, the *Cūlatanāhāsāṅkhaya-sutta*.<sup>31</sup> This indicates that the question posed by Śakra according to the report given in the *Cūlatanāhāsāṅkhaya-sutta* follows up an exchange he earlier had during his first meeting with the Buddha, reported in the *Sakkapañha-sutta*. The same continuity of Śakra's inquiry would also underlie Mahāmaudgalyāyana's reflection in the *Samyukta-āgama* version, according to which Śakra on that earlier occasion "seemed to want to ask further questions" about "the significance of liberation [through] the destruction of craving".

The settings of the two discourses, however, differ considerably. According to the *Sakkapañha-sutta*, on that earlier occasion Śakra did not even dare to approach the Buddha and requested the *gandharva* Pañcaśikha to intervene and announce Śakra's visit.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to his timid behaviour in the *Sakkapañha-sutta*, in the present discourse Śakra is depicted as acting quite self-confident and the way he poses his question conveys almost a nuance of nonchalance or casualness.

The impression of a somewhat casual attitude receives confirmation soon enough, when Śakra is found to be indulging in sensual enjoyment in the company of heavenly maidens who are entertaining him with song – a pastime not quite in keeping with the penetrative teaching on the destruction of craving he had just received.

His failure to live up to this teaching is further heightened by the circumstance that another discourse reports that Mahāmaudgalyāyana also received the same instruction on the destruction of craving. According to the Pāli commentary, he put

<sup>31</sup> Both DN 21 at DN II 283,9 and MN 37 at MN I 251,17 speak of being "liberated [through] the destruction of craving", *tañhāsāṅkhayavimutta*, and of reaching "the ultimate end, the ultimate security from bondage, the ultimate holy life, the ultimate goal", *accantaniṭṭha*, *accantayogakkhemī*, *accantabrahmacārin*, *accantapariyosāna*. The same terms recur also in a reference to the *Sakkapañha-sutta* in SN 22.4 at SN III 13,5. Another feature shared in common between DN 21 at DN II 285,6 and MN 37 at MN I 253,2 is that in both discourses Śakra narrates how on a former occasion the *devas* defeated the *asuras* in battle.

<sup>32</sup> DN 21 at DN II 265,1.

this instruction to good use, as it led him to full awakening.<sup>33</sup> From this perspective, Śakra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana can be seen to embody two noble disciples with diametrically opposed attitudes towards the same instruction given by the Buddha.

The surprise visit of Mahāmaudgalyāyana to the Heaven of the Thirty-three throws into relief this contrast in an entertaining way, where on being confronted with Mahāmaudgalyāyana's sudden appearance Śakra has to quickly stop the singing girls and adopt the behaviour of a faithful lay disciple that receives a perhaps not altogether convenient visit by a monk. The same contrast continues when the unexpected visitor asks a question about the Buddha's instructions on the destruction of craving, whereon Śakra quickly tries to change the topic.<sup>34</sup>

His reply in the *Samyukta-āgama* is particularly worthy of note, when he wittily suggests that Mahāmaudgalyāyana might best approach the Buddha directly with his inquiry, so that on having heard it from the Buddha, Mahāmaudgalyāyana could remember it accordingly. This suggestion employs a standard phrase from the early discourses according to which the monks, on having heard an instruction given by the Buddha, will remember it accordingly. Its occurrence in the present context has a rather comical effect, in line with a tendency towards humour evident in all versions.<sup>35</sup>

The entertaining tale comes to a climax when, after Śakra has taken advantage of the occasion in order to boast of his palace,

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<sup>33</sup> AN 7.58 at AN IV 88,12 and Mp IV 44,23. Similar to AN 7.58, the parallels MĀ 83 at T I 560b4 and T 47 at T I 837c5 report the instruction without explicitly mentioning Mahāmaudgalyāyana's attainment of full awakening.

<sup>34</sup> As Arunasiri (2006: 633) notes, the invitation for a tour of the palace is made "to divert the attention of the elder elsewhere", i.e. away from the question he had asked and thereby away from the topic of the destruction of craving.

<sup>35</sup> On humour in (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* texts cf. Clarke (2009); Schopen (2007) and Schopen (2009). The presence of humour in Theravāda canonical texts was already noted by Rhys Davids when introducing his translations of individual *Dīgha-nikāya* discourses; on humour in Pāli discourses cf. also e.g. Rahula (1981); Gombrich (1988: 82ff); Gombrich (1990b: 13); Norman (1991/1993); Gombrich (1992); Collins (1998: 476ff) and Gombrich (2009: 180–192). In fact, even a doctrinal item like the twelve-links of dependent arising (*pratītya samutpāda*) appears to involve some degree of punning on ancient Indian cosmogony, cf. Jurewicz (2000); Gombrich (2003: 11ff) and Jones (2009).

Mahāmaudgalyāyana decides to disturb his complacency. In view of the general Indian scorn for lower parts of the body, especially the feet, it may not be accidental that Mahāmaudgalyāyana shakes the divine palace with his toe. In this way the lowliest part of the body of an arhat causes the heavenly palace to tremble at its very foundation,<sup>36</sup> shattering the self-indulgent and forgetful attitude of the heavenly king.

The image conveyed by this episode is thus thoroughly pervaded by humour, where the heavenly palace, the symbol of a divine life-style that affords the acme of sensual enjoyment, is quite literally given a kick by an arhat who has gone beyond the attraction that such heavenly pleasures could offer. The present scene can be understood to pun on the type of happiness that according to ancient Indian thought becomes available through rebirth in a heavenly realm of the sense-sphere. As several discourses indicate, from the normative perspective of early Buddhist monasticism, aspirations to such a heavenly rebirth were regarded with considerable disdain.<sup>37</sup>

The Pāli and *Ekottarika-āgama* versions complete the picture by reporting that, after Mahāmaudgalyāyana's display of supernatural powers Śakra was able to recall the instruction given to him by the Buddha on the destruction of craving.<sup>38</sup> That is, the shock treatment administered to Śakra by rocking the foundations of his palace had its effect in overcoming forgetfulness – one of the obstructions on the path to awakening – and arousing recollection of the Buddha's teaching. In this way, the episode narrated in the

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<sup>36</sup> Ps II 304,4 explains that Mahāmaudgalyāyana achieved this by entering into [absorption based on] the water *krtsna*, whereon he made a determination that the ground on which the palace stood turns into water, after which he struck the corner of the palace with his great toe.

<sup>37</sup> AN 3.18 at AN I 115,2 indicates that Buddhist monks would feel ashamed if others were to think that they are practising with the aspiration to be reborn in a heavenly sphere. MN 16 at MN I 102,9 and AN 10.14 at AN V 18,25 consider such an aspiration to be a “mental bondage”, while their parallel EĀ 51.4 at T II 817b1 includes the same under the category of being a “mental corruption”. SN 35.200 at SN IV 180,22 and its parallels SĀ 1174 at T II 315a2 and EĀ 43.3 at T II 759a18 reckon an aspiration for a celestial rebirth to be a way of being “caught by non-humans”. AN 7.47 at AN IV 55,21 scornfully treats such an aspiration as an impurity of the holy life; for a comparative study of this discourse cf. Hahn (1977).

<sup>38</sup> MN 37 at MN I 254,11 and EĀ 19.3 at T II 594b8.

*Cūḷataṇhāsāṅkhaya-sutta* and its parallels serves to illustrate how awareness of the unstable foundation of sensual pleasures can bring a disciple back to his senses, making him realize the importance of the destruction of craving, which will result in a form of imperturbability that can no longer be shaken.<sup>39</sup>

The present discourse thus employs a delightful tale brimming with humour to deliver a teaching on a recurrent theme in the early discourses, namely the contrast between the destruction of craving and indulgence in sensual pleasures. A poetic version of the same theme can be found, for example, in a verse in the Pāli *Dhammapada* and its parallels, which runs:

“[Even] by a shower of coins  
Sensual desires will not be satiated.  
Sensual pleasures give little pleasure and are unsatisfactory  
The wise who have understood this  
Find no delight  
Even in heavenly pleasures.  
[Instead, a true] disciple of the Fully Awakened One  
Delights in the destruction of craving.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> According to AN 6.55 at AN III 378,7 (= Vin I 184,27), the mind of an arhat can no longer be shaken by any experience, comparable to a mountain that will not be shaken by wind from any of the four directions. This simile recurs in the parallels MĀ 123 at T I 612c20, SĀ 254 at T II 63a22, T 1428 at T XXII 844c25, Gnoli (1978: 146,6), fragment 142 SB 35 in Hoernle (1916: 169f) and fragment 412 folio 21 V6 in Waldschmidt (1968: 781).

<sup>40</sup> Dhṛ 186–187: *na kahāpaṇāvassena titti kāmesu vijjati, appassādā dukkhā* (S<sup>c</sup>: *dukkhā*) *kāmā iti viññāya paṇḍīto, api dibbesu kāmesu ratim so nādhigacchati, taṇhakkhayarato hoti sammāsambuddhasāvako*. This couplet has a range of closely similar parallels: *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell (1886: 224,12): *na kāṛṣāpaṇavarṣeṇa tṛptiḥ kāmeṣu vidyate, alpāsvādān bahudukkhān kāmān vijñāya paṇḍītaḥ, api divyeṣu kāmeṣu ratim naivādhigacchati, tṛṣṇākṣaye rato bhavati samyaksambuddhaśrāvakaḥ*. Patna *Dharmapada* 145–146, Roth (1980: 110): *na kahāpaṇāvāsena trettī kāmesu vijjati, appāssādā dukkhā kāmā iti vimñāya paṇḍīto, api dibbesu kāmesu ratim so nādhigacchati, taṇhakkhayarato hoti sammasambuddhasāvako* (Conc (1989: 140) reads *divvesu* and *sammasam*<sup>o</sup>). *Udāna(-varga)* 2.17, Bernhard (1965: 117): *na karṣāpaṇavarṣeṇa tṛptiḥ kāmair hi vidyate, alpāsvādāsukhāḥ kāmā iti vijñāya paṇḍītaḥ, api divyeṣu kāmeṣu sa ratim nādhigacchati, tṛṣṇākṣayarato bhavati buddhānām śrāvakaḥ sadā* (on this edition cf. Schmithausen (1970), on the title of the work cf. Bernhard (1969) and the discussion in Willemsen (1978: xxvf) and Dhammajoti (1995: 39)). The Tibetan counterpart in Beckh (1911: 10) reads similarly: *kar sha pa na'i* (Zongtse (1990: 48): *kār ṣā pa ṇa'i*) *char bab kyang 'dod pa rnams kyi*

In this way, the domesticated warrior god Indra assumes the role of a somewhat negligent Buddhist disciple in a picturesque narrative that unfolds in a celestial setting, whose underlying message turns out to be a central doctrinal teaching of early Buddhism.

The present instance thus illustrates how early Buddhist texts adopt members of the ancient Indian pantheon to their own purposes, ‘including’ them, with a considerable dose of humour, in their own thought-world, an inclusion that in the present case results in a tale that skilfully combines entertainment with education.

### Abbreviations:

AN	= <i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Dhp	= <i>Dhammapada</i>
DN	= <i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	= <i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
MĀ	= <i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	= <i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Mp	= <i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>
Ps	= <i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
SĀ	= <i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
S°	=Siamese edition
SN	= <i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
T	=Taishō (CBETA)
Vin	= <i>Vinaya</i>

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*ngoms mi 'gyur, 'dod pa mnog chung nyes mang par* (ibid.: *pa*) *m khas pa rnams kyis kong du chud, lha yi 'dod pa rnams la yang lhag par dga' bar mi 'gyur gyi, rdzogs sangs rgyas dang nyan thos rnams sred pa zad pas dgyes par 'gyur*. The Chinese counterpart in T 212 at T IV 631c13+20, differs in as much as here the rain consists of the seven [kinds of] jewels: 天雨七寶, 猶欲無厭, 樂少苦多, 覺之為賢, 雖有天欲, 惠捨不貪, 樂離恩愛, 三佛弟子, (the same set of verses recurs in the two Chinese *Dharmapadas* with only minimal variations T 210 at T IV 571c3 and T 211 at T IV 604a25).

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