

The instrument of gaining the second knowledge is the eye (*cakkhu*). This should refer to the natural eye of a person, sometimes also called the physical (*lit. flesh*) eye (*mamsa-cakkhu*) developed through mental culture into a divine eye (*dibba-cakkhu*). Actually the word *dibba-cakkhu* is used as an alternative term of expression for the same knowledge. The use of the physical eye in gaining this information is perhaps indicated in a simile used in several discourses (eg. *D.1.83*). A person using his well developed physical eye for this purpose is compared to a person, who sits on the upper floor of a house built at the junction of four roads observing people walking on the road below and entering or leaving a house. This shows that the field of operation of the eye here should be limited to contemporary events and does not extend to the past or the future.

Some information revealed by the Buddha regarding his own knowledge of the past and the future may be relevant to this discussion on the threefold knowledge. Here (*D.III. 134*) the Buddha says that wandering ascetics holding other religious views may say that the recluse Gotama reveals an infinite knowledge and insight (*atīrakaṃ nānadassanaṃ*) concerning the past but not so concerning the future. These wandering ascetics, like unskilled fools as they are, should think that a type of knowledge that should be used to reveal one kind of thing could be used to reveal another kind of thing. "Regarding the past, Cunda, Tathāgata has cognition reminiscent of existences (*satānusāri viññāṇam hoti*). He can remember as far back as he desires" (*so yāvatakaṃ ākañkhati tāvatakaṃ anussarati*). Undoubtedly this is a reference to the range of the Buddha's knowledge of his past births. "And concerning the future", says the Buddha, "there arises in him knowledge born of Enlightenment (*bodhijaṃ ñāṇaṃ uppajjati*) to this effect: This is the last birth: now is there no more coming to be". This, definitely, is a reference to the third of the triple knowledge, related to the destruction of the cankers, which finally brings him Awakening (*bodhi*). From this it becomes very clear that the range of operation and the purpose for which these three knowledges are used are limited. In other words they are not all purpose capabilities gained by a Buddha or an Arahant.

References

- 1 Winternitz, Maurice, *A History of Indian Literature*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, Vol.I. p.115.
- 2 Tr. Mrs. Rhys Davids, *Psalms of the Early Buddhists*, *P.T.S.*, 1980, II Psalms of the Brethren p. 29, n.1
- 3 . Gradual Sayings *P.T.S.*, vol.I p. 146.
- 4 *Ibid* .p. 147 ff.

TEVIJJA-VACCHAGOTTA SUTTA, the "discourse to Vacchagotta on the three [higher] knowledges", is the seventy-first discourse in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (*M. I*, 481). What makes this discourse particularly significant is that it records how the Buddha, in reply to a question posed by the wanderer Vacchagotta, explicitly denied to have ever claimed to be omniscient. This stands in contrast to later Buddhist traditions, which attribute omniscience to the Buddha. According to the *Tevijja-vacchagotta Sutta*, however, those who attribute such a claim to the Buddha misrepresent him with what is untrue and contrary to the fact, *abbhācikkhanti ... asatā abhūtena* (*M. I*, 482).

The commentary tries to reconcile the presentation in the *Tevijja-vacchagotta Sutta* with the view that the Buddha was omniscient by explaining that his refusal referred only to being endowed with omniscience in a continuous manner, in the sense that the Buddha would have omniscient knowledge only when he would turn his mind to the exercise of such knowledge (*MA. III*, 195). This explanation could perhaps have in mind a statement in the *Kaṇṇakathala Sutta*, according to which the Buddha pointed out that a certain type of omniscient knowledge is not possible (*M. II*, 127). Yet, the type of omniscient knowledge that is impossible according to the *Kaṇṇakathala Sutta* is to know all "at once", in the sense of knowing all and everything at the same time, not omniscience that is present continuously. Moreover, if in the *Tevijja-vacchagotta Sutta* the Buddha had only been intending to refute being endowed with continuous omniscient knowledge, one would expect him to reply to Vacchagotta by clarifying in what other way he was omniscient. Instead of such an explanation, however, according to the *Tevijja-vacchagotta Sutta* the Buddha pointed out that he only laid claim to the three higher

knowledges. This reply indicates that he substituted a claim to omniscience with a claim to the three higher knowledges, not with a claim to a discontinuous type of omniscience.

The impression that the *Tevijja-vacchagotta Sutta* indeed records an explicit disclaimer of the attribution of omniscience to the Buddha finds further support in other discourses (See also OMNISCIENCE). Omniscient abilities are conspicuously absent from listings of special attributes of the Buddha, such as the ten powers of a *Tathāgata* or his four intrepidities (*M. I*, 69), nor is such an ability mentioned among the altogether hundred epithets of the Buddha given in the *Upāli Sutta* (*M. I*, 386).

The *Kālakārāma Sutta* records the Buddha proclaiming that he knew what is seen, heard and experienced by men and gods in this world (*A. II*, 25). Though the commentary understands this to be a declaration of omniscience (*AA. III*, 38), a closer examination of the discourse shows that this statement does not refer to factual knowledge, but rather to penetrative insight into the nature of what is seen, heard and experienced, highlighting that the Buddha did not take any stance upon it.

A discourse in the *Itivuttaka* can be taken up in order to better appreciate this difference in perspective. According to this discourse, it is not possible to reach awakening without knowing all (*It. 3*). Taking this passage literally, one would have to conclude that omniscience is required for anyone to reach awakening. This, however, is obviously not the case in early Buddhism. From this it would follow that to take such passages as this *Itivuttaka* discourse or the *Kālakārāma Sutta* to refer to insight quite probably does more justice to their original intention.

Another discourse of relevance to the attribution of omniscience to the Buddha is the *Sandaka Sutta*, which records Ānanda criticizing a religious teacher's claim to omniscience. In this discourse, Ānanda described a teacher who makes such a claim but nevertheless receives no food when he goes begging, or else meets with other kinds of misfortune. When asked how this could happen, such a teacher will have to resort to evasive arguments, maintaining that he had to get no alms food, he had to meet with a misfortune (*M. I*, 519).

If the *Sandaka Sutta's* criteria for evaluating someone's claim to omniscience are applied to the Buddha, a similar kind of evasive argumentation would be required in order to justify why on one occasion the Buddha went begging and did not receive food (*S. I*, 114). Another dilemma would be the mass suicide of a group of newly ordained monks after a recommendation given by the Buddha in favour of developing detachment towards the body (*S. V*, 320). The only way to uphold the Buddha's omniscience in the face of such events would be to adopt the kind of argument criticized in the *Sandaka Sutta*, assuming that the Buddha just had to act in this way.

The presentation in the *Sandaka Sutta* also indicates that omniscience comprises foresight of future events, an indication confirmed in the *Paṭisambhidhāmagga* (*Ps. I*, 131). To know all about the future, however, is possible only if the future is predetermined. Though a few particular events can be foretold with certainty, much of the future is still undetermined at present and will take place according to a continuously changing and evolving set of causes and conditions. Hence to assume that the future can be foreseen in its entirety is an idea compatible only with a deterministic world-view, but not with the early Buddhist conception of dependent origination, *paṭicca samuppāda*. According to the *Pāsādika Sutta*, on one occasion the Buddha in fact explained that to expect him to predict the future is a sign of confusing a possible type of knowledge, such as knowledge about the past, with quite a different type of knowledge (*D. III*, 134).

In view of the information gathered from various other discourses, it seems safe to conclude that the *Tevijja-vacchagotta Sutta* does indeed record an explicit disclaimer of the notion that the Buddha was omniscient.

Anālayo

THATON: Thaton (Sudhammavati or Sudhammapura) was the capital of Rāmañña in Lower Burma and one of the early Theravāda centres in the region. (q.v. Burma and Rāmaññadesa). Since Rāmañña was the home of a group of people called "Talaing" or "Mon", it was also called Talaing country or Mon country. The term Talaing is derived from Teligana, a Pallava country of

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