

Meeting Buddhas Now, Part 1: Meditative Visions of the Buddha and Buddhafields

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Abstract:

The present study is the first of two articles dedicated to exploring the notion of meeting Buddhas of the present in a meditative vision. The focus in this first contribution is on various passages from *Āgama* literature relevant to meditative visions of Buddhas and Buddhafields, as a background to examining in the second contribution aspects of the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, the 般舟三昧經 (T 418). The passages to be explored below cover selected instances of recollection of the Buddha as well as the notion of meditative encounters with celestials or the Buddha Śākyamuni. Another trajectory to be taken up is the gradual development of the notion of multiple Buddhas and Buddhafields.

Keywords:

Akṣobhya; Buddhafields; Buddha image; meditative vision; **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*; recollection of the Buddha; Śākyamuni; T 313; T 418

Introduction

The present set of two articles on the idea of encountering Buddha(s) of the present in *samādhi* are part of a research project of relating early Mahāyāna *sūtras* to *Āgama* literature, a term which I use to cover not only the Chinese *Āgamas* but also their parallels, including Pāli discourses.¹ As part of the same project, in a monograph publication I studied the *Prajñāpāramitā* text whose translation is attributed to Lokakṣema and his team, the 道行般若經 (T 224).² In the present set of two articles, I apply the same mode of reading to the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, the 般舟三昧經 (T 418), the translation of which is also attributed to Lokakṣema.

The present article begins with the topic of recollection of the Buddha (I.1), some instances of which exhibit a relation to seeing him (I.2). These thereby shine a spotlight on an element of meditative vision that is also a concern of the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*. Next, I turn to various other descriptions of meditative visions and encounters. *Āgama* literature

¹ Pāli discourses and *Vinaya* refer to the whole body of discourses in the singular as *āgama*; see Anālayo 2016a: 9–12. The Pāli commentaries continue to employ the term *āgama* to refer to the four discourse collections, rather than using only *nikāya* for this purpose; see Gethin 2020: 6n2. As pointed out by Skilling 2024: 383, “[t]he Pāli counterpart of an *āgama* is called a *nikāya*, a corpus or body of texts, but Pāli tradition also recognized and used the synonym *āgama*. Thus, when we refer to the collections as a whole, regardless of their school affiliation, we can refer to them as *Āgamas* on the understanding that this includes the *Nikāyas*.” My usage is based on adopting this reasonable suggestion, rather than using a more cumbersome expression like *Āgama/Nikāya* literature.

² Anālayo 2025b.

reports that Śākyamuni himself, during the time of his pursuit of awakening, engaged in a sustained quest for a meditative vision of celestials (II.1). The element of meditative vision continues after his awakening in interactions with some of his disciples, where an instance of particular interest for appreciating the practice described in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* involves Mahāmaudgalyāyana receiving teachings from Śākyamuni in a meditative vision, the two being at different locations and neither employing supernormal means of locomotion to come to where the other is at present (II.2).

Whereas the first two sections of the present article are mainly relevant to the specific case of the type of practice described in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, the third section is of a more general relevance for early Mahāyāna thought and practice. The main topics of exploration are the multiplication of Buddhas (III.1) and the closely related emergence of multiple Buddhafields (III.2). A relevant instance from *Āgama* literature relates to another text similarly translated during the beginning period of Chinese translation activities, the 阿閼佛國經, T 313, which describes Akṣobhya and his Buddhafield.

I. Recollecting and Seeing the Buddha

In exploring a topic that has been studied in such depth by Paul Harrison, the most straightforward way of getting started is simply to quote him. The quote I have chosen for this purpose occurs in the context of a survey of various modalities of recollecting the Buddha. Harrison (1992: 220) explains that the “*samādhi* (‘meditation,’ ‘concentration’) of direct encounter with the buddhas of the present” is a “developed form of *buddhānusmṛti*; in fact, in some sources it is referred to as the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*,” differing from the approach to recollecting the Buddha usually described in *Āgama* literature in not being confined to Śākyamuni but encompassing many Buddhas. Harrison (1992: 220f) further explains that the “purpose of the *pratyutpanna-samādhi*, very briefly, is to enable practitioners to have audience with these buddhas and hear their teachings in this very life, and, secondarily, to achieve rebirth in their buddha-fields on their death.”

I.1 Recollection and Fear

One of the possible functions that recollection of the Buddha can fulfill comes to the fore in the following passage from the *Samyukta-āgama* (T 99):³

Suppose monastics dwelling in the wilderness, under a tree, or in an empty hut, at times become afraid, being scared so that their hair stands on end, [then] they should recollect the topic of the Tathāgata, the topic of the Dharma, and the topic of the Community.

As already noted by Harrison (1992: 218), here recollection of the Buddha (or alternatively of the Dharma or the Saṅgha) serves “as a specific remedy against fear when meditating in wild and solitary places,” a form of practice that “must have assumed quite

³ SĀ 981 at T II 255a26: 若比丘住於空閑, 樹下, 空舍, 有時恐怖, 心驚毛豎者, 當念如來事, 及法事, 僧事, with parallels in SN 11.3 at SN I 219,27, EĀ 24.1 at T II 615a17, in Sanskrit fragments in Waldschmidt 1932: 48 and 1959/1967: 379 (see also Sander 1987: 136), SHT XI 4496, Wille 2012: 90, Or.15003/171, Wille 2006: 118, Or.15004/79+80, Wille 2009: 92, Or.15009/352, Kudo 2015: 234, Or.15009/536, Nagashima 2015: 368, Or.15007/288, Wille 2015: 83f, and in a Tibetan parallel, Skilling 1994: 292; see also Skilling 1997: 441–467 and 2024: 167–188 and 317–330. Here and elsewhere, in my translations I adopt the plural for 比丘 in order to make my renderings appear more gender inclusive.

early on the nature of an apotropaic technique, providing its practitioners with general protection, or at least a sense of this.”

The same discourse illustrates the function of such recollection by describing a battle between the *devas* of the Thirty-three and the *asuras*. Śakra tells his followers that, in case they experience fear, they should look at or keep in mind the crest of his standard or else the standard of another leading *deva*. The Pāli commentary explains that on looking at the crest of Śakra’s standard, the *devas* are reassured that their king has come and remains with them like a firmly rooted pillar, wherefore they have nothing to fear.⁴ On this explanation, the idea would presumably be that an individual warrior engaged in combat will find encouragement on ascertaining that the king is present and not withdrawing, in flight, or even defeated. After all, should the battle already be lost, it would be better to retreat as well rather than continue fighting. Hence, some way of reassuring oneself that the battle must be going well overall, given that the king stays firmly in his place, could be a substantial source of courage.

The basic idea of recalling the Buddha in a challenging situation in which he is not present recurs in another discourse in the same *Samyukta-āgama* in an otherwise different setting. Instead of monastic(s) living alone in the wilderness, in the present case the main protagonist is a lay disciple driving through the midst of traffic in what according to tradition was the Buddha’s hometown, Kapilavastu.⁵

I often have encounters with mad elephants, mad people, and mad chariots. I become afraid for myself and concerned whether, with all these mad ones, I am going to live with them or die with them, and I forget to recollect the Buddha, recollect the Dharma, and recollect the Monastic Community.

The situation described in this way is probably less in need of explanation, as having to drive through heavy traffic in town, surrounded by mad people and cars, would be a common experience for many of us. Reformulated in terms of the previous imagery of having to fight a battle, in the present situation the warrior is so closely engaged with others that not only the king but even the crest of his standard is no longer visible.

The present case complements the previous one by being of a descriptive type, in the sense of taking the form of a report given by a lay disciple of challenges experienced when implementing a meditation practice, in the present case the practice of recollection. The earlier example was rather of a prescriptive type in the form of the Buddha giving instructions on recollection, which he then illustrates with the example of being in a battle. Notably, the lay disciple presents the report of his difficulties maintaining the recollection practice while in heavy traffic to the Buddha. In other words, the recurrent challenge of not being able to connect to the Buddha mentally while in a difficult situation has motivated the lay disciple to go to see the Buddha personally and seek advice.

I.2 From Recollecting to Seeing the Buddha

In the previous two examples, recollection of the Buddha came embedded in what in *Āgama*

⁴ Spk I 341,14: *taṃ passantānaṃ hi rājā no āgantvā parisapariyante nikhātathambho viya ñhito. kassa mayaṃ bhāyāma ti? bhayaṃ na hoti.*

⁵ SĀ 930 at T II 237b25: 狂象, 狂人, 狂乘常與是俱。我自恐與此諸狂俱生俱死, 忘於念佛, 念法, 念比丘僧, parallel to SN 55.21 at SN V 369,13, SĀ² 155 at T II 432b17, and EĀ 41.1 at T II 744a8 (the last only mentions his fear but not his inability to cultivate the recollections).

literature is its most common setting, namely in the company of recollection of the Dharma and the Community. The instance to be taken up next concerns only the Buddha. According to the narrative setting, King Prasenajit has arrived at a park and seen secluded places suitable for meditation. A version of this episode found in the *Madhyama-āgama* (T 26) reports that he addressed the person attending on him in the following manner:⁶

Now, beneath these trees it is quiet and without noise, secluded, without disturbance, without people, being suitable for sitting in meditation. In such places I have frequently gone to see the Buddha.

Being in this way reminded of the Buddha, the king then has the wish to see the Buddha. On learning from the person attending on him that the Buddha was dwelling at a place within travelling distance, Prasenajit decides to go there and indeed meets the Buddha in person.

Strictly speaking, this episode would not be an instance of recollection of the Buddha, instead of which it is of a more informal type, in the sense of the king just being reminded of the Buddha. It shares with the previous example the character of being descriptive, rather than prescriptive, and of leading up to an actual encounter with the Buddha. This narrative denouement in a way exemplifies that recollecting the Buddha, whether unsuccessfully or successfully, does not really compare to seeing him in person.⁷

In principle, the possibility of actually seeing the Buddha remains confined to those who lived at his time and who, like King Prasenajit, happened to be within travelling distance of whatever location the Buddha was staying at. Another approach to seeing the Buddha emerges with a discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama* (T 125):⁸

Suppose monastics sit down cross-legged, with straightened body and straightened intention, collecting mindfulness in front, and focus on recollection of the Buddha, without having any other notion. They contemplate an image of the Tathāgata without ever taking their eyes off it. Not having taken their eyes off it, they then recollect the qualities of the Tathāgata.

Elsewhere the *Ekottarika-āgama* reports the construction of a Buddha image.⁹ This exemplifies a general trend in this collection of incorporating later material of a type that is usually not found in *Āgama* literature. The idea of looking at an actual image of the Buddha may well stand in the background of the above passage as well.¹⁰ This passage shares with the

⁶ MĀ 213 at T I 795b24: 今此樹下寂無音聲，遠離，無惡，無有人民，隨順燕坐。此處我數往見佛，with parallels in MN 89 at MN II 118,24 and EĀ 38.10 at T II 724c7; see also T 1451 at T XXIV 237a18 and D 6 *tha* 82b1 or P 1035 *de* 79a6.

⁷ Nevertheless, an example that complements this indication would be when, despite being unable to be physically in the presence of the Buddha (Sn 1144), Piṅgiya can still assert that he feels never being apart from his teacher (Sn 1140), as he sees him with the mind as if with the eye, Sn 1142: *passāmi naṃ manasā cakkhunā va* (see Pj II 605,30: *cakkhunā viya manasā passāmi*).

⁸ EĀ 3.1 at T II 554a20: 若有比丘，正身，正意，結跏趺坐，繫念在前，無有他想，專精念佛。觀如來形，未曾離目；已不離目，便念如來功德。The phrase 繫念在前 may reflect an Indic original similar to Pāli *parimukha sati*, on which see also Anālayo 2019: 16f.

⁹ EĀ 36.5 at T II 706a11: 作如來形像; see in more detail Anālayo 2013: 9f.

¹⁰ Harrison 1978: 38 mentions the alternative possibility that the instruction in EĀ 3.1 refers to a mental image. The passage indeed only employs 形, whereas the description of the construction of a Buddha image has 形像. At the same time, given a penchant among some Chinese translators to vary their renderings rather than stick to the same translation, something fairly evident in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, this difference need not reflect a difference in the Indic original. Judging from the context in which 形 occurs in EĀ 3.1, a mental image seems to

episode I took up first—on recollecting the Buddha as a means to counter fear—the character of being of a prescriptive type, that is, the Buddha gives instructions for how such recollection should be undertaken. It differs from the other examples surveyed above in not having any known parallel elsewhere in *Āgama* literature. Although the absence of a parallel is not in itself decisive, in the present case such absence would concord with the general impression that the instruction to contemplate an image of the Buddha must reflect a more evolved type of recollection compared to what is generally found in *Āgama* literature.

II. Meditative Visions

The element of seeing the Buddha while in meditation, although in his living embodiment rather than in the form of an image, features also elsewhere in *Āgama* literature. Before exploring such instances, however, I take a short detour by turning to descriptions of Śākyamuni's pre-awakening experiences of meditative visions.

II.1 Śākyamuni's Pre-awakening Visions of Celestials

Śākyamuni's pre-awakening experiences of meditative visions feature in two consecutive discourses in the *Madhyama-āgama*, one of which has a parallel in the *Majjhima-nikāya* whereas the Pāli parallel to the other occurs in the *Anguttara-nikāya*. The first *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, paralleling the *Upakkilesa-sutta* in the *Majjhima-nikāya*,¹¹ relates a visit paid by Śākyamuni to Aniruddha and his companions, who report on their meditative experiences of light and visions of forms.¹² Being told that these disappear again, Śākyamuni explains that Aniruddha and his companions have not yet or else need to penetrate the sign related to such meditative experience.¹³ The “sign” (*nimitta*/相) here could have the sense of a “cause,” which is how the commentary understands it,¹⁴ but alternatively it could also be taken to refer to a sign in the sense of a mental image used for deepening concentration. Cousins (1973: 119) opts for the latter understanding, considering the present occurrence in the *Upakkilesa-sutta* as providing “striking evidence for the antiquity” of this notion. The two alternative meanings are not necessarily contradictory, as from a practical perspective the ability to stabilize the mental image, often experienced as an inner light, requires precisely the fostering of those causes that deepen concentration, and such fostering in turn will lead to

me a less probable explanation, as in such a case I would expect the instruction to be formulated in terms of keeping the image well in mind, rather than speaking of never taking one's eyes off it, 未曾離目, which is more suggestive of actually looking at an object with the physical eyes.

¹¹ Terminology corresponding to the phrasing in the next two notes, but apparently pertaining to Śākyamuni's own meditative experiences and thus to a subsequent section of the discourse, can be found in SHT VI 1384, Bechert and Wille 1989: 109; for further parallels to MN 128 as a whole see Anālayo 2011: 731.

¹² MĀ 72 at T I 536c16: 我等得光明便見色, MN 128 at MN III 157,25: *obhāsañ c'eva sañjānāma dassanañ ca rūpānaṃ*, and another version of this statement in a partial parallel, Up 5020 at D 4094 ju 276a2 or P 5595 *thu* 20a2: *gzugs mthong ba'i snang ba gcig yang dag par shes la*.

¹³ MĀ 72 at T I 536c17: 阿那律陀, 汝等不達此相, MN 128 at MN III 157,28: *taṃ kho pana vo, anuruddhā, nimittaṃ paṭivijjhitabbaṃ*, and Up 5020 at D 4094 ju 276a3 or P 5595 *thu* 20a4: *ma 'gags pa de'i phyir gzugs mthong ba'i snang ba de rtogs par 'gyur ba'i rgyu mtshan legs par yid la gyis shig*.

¹⁴ Ps IV 207,17 explains *nimittaṃ paṭivijjhitabbaṃ* to imply *taṃ vo kāraṇaṃ jānitabbaṃ*. The Tibetan translation reflects the same understanding with its choice of *rgyu mtshan*, whereas the employment of 相 in MĀ 72, as already pointed out by Kuan 2008: 66, rather reflects the alternative sense of a “sign” (see the previous footnote for both quotes).

increased stability of the mental image.¹⁵ At any rate, the stage of meditative practice described by Aniruddha must be intending a level of concentration prior to an actual attainment of absorption (*dhyāna*).

This impression finds confirmation in the detailed account given by Śākyamuni of his own pre-awakening experiences of inner light and visions of forms. These repeatedly disappeared, each time due to a particular mental defilement or imbalance that had arisen in his mind. Both versions of the discourse work through a long list of such obstructions, which notably do not include the first two of the five hindrances, sensual desire and anger. Presumably these rather gross defilements have already been successfully kept at bay at the stage when the light and the visions of forms are experienced. In fact, most of the obstructions in both lists could be summarized as involving in one way or another excessive or insufficient effort. On this reading, the listings point to a need to balance and fine-tune the mind. Śākyamuni reports that, once he had successfully overcome all these defilements and the light and visions of forms no longer disappeared, he cultivated three levels of concentration.¹⁶ These three differ from the standard listing of the four absorptions, as they involve a level corresponding to the first absorption, a second level situated between the first and the second absorptions, and a third level that covers the second to fourth absorptions.¹⁷

For the purpose of my present exploration, the main indication to be taken away from Śākyamuni's report of his pre-awakening meditation practice is that the experience of light and visions of forms start at a level of concentration that falls short of the first absorption. Such light and visions of forms recur repeatedly in the course of overcoming various defilements incompatible with absorption attainment. Once all of these has been successfully overcome, a level of concentration can be cultivated corresponding to the first absorption, followed by taking concentration deeper. The two versions also agree in reporting that Śākyamuni at times experienced light without visions of forms and at other times visions of forms without light, and that each of these experiences lasted for a whole day and night.¹⁸ This clearly shows that the meditative progression under discussion must have been a prolonged one.¹⁹

With this assessment in place, the time has come to turn to the other *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, the next one in this collection, which has a parallel in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. In both versions, Śākyamuni again reports his pre-awakening practice, and this again involves

¹⁵ For a description of the cultivation of the meditative *nimitta* see, e.g., Vism 125,30.

¹⁶ Whereas in MĀ 72 at T I 538c3 this occurs right after the report of overcoming the defilements, in MN 128 at MN III 162,¹³ the corresponding report is found toward the end of the discourse, where it is also preceded by a summary statement on the various defilements overcome.

¹⁷ See in more detail Anālayo 2022c: 15.

¹⁸ MĀ 72 at T I 539a2 and MN 128 at MN III 161,3.

¹⁹ The commentary Ps IV 209,⁷⁺²⁶ takes the visions of forms to refer to the exercise of the divine eye and allocates the cultivation of the three types of concentration to the night of Śākyamuni's awakening. This does not do justice to the information found in the Pāli discourse on which it comments. The visions of forms clearly set in at a level well before the first absorption, whereas the divine eye requires mastery of the fourth (recognized in Vism 412,²⁰ + 423,¹⁴). The cultivation of the three types of concentration also must have taken place earlier during the course of Śākyamuni's quest for awakening, as the description of either experiencing light or else visions of forms speaks of a whole day, a whole night, and a whole day and night for each of these, see MN 128 at MN III 161,5: *kevalam pi rattiṃ, kevalam pi divasaṃ, kevalam pi rattindivaṃ*. It follows that the meditative cultivation subsequent to overcoming the various defilements, resulting in absorption attainment, could hardly be fitted into the single night of Śākyamuni's awakening; see also below note 26.

meditative experiences of light and visions of forms. However, the otherwise similar description comes with the further indication that he has not yet met and conversed with “those *devas*.”²⁰ Since in both versions this is the first occurrence of the term *deva*/天, the reference to “those” (*tāhi*/彼) only makes sense if the previous mention of visions of forms implies a vision of the forms of such *devas*. This in turn provides a perspective on the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, suggesting that in this case, too, the visions of forms would have been concerned with *devas*.

The present set of parallel discourses then proceed from the vision of forms (= *devas*) and having a conversation with them to other ways of interacting with, or acquiring knowledge about, “those *devas*.” The presentation in the *Madhyama-āgama* version could be summarized as follows:

1. see forms (= *devas*)
2. converse with those *devas*
3. know their names
4. know their nutriment and experience of pleasure and pain
5. know their life span
6. know the karma that led to their rebirth as *devas*
7. know what type of *devas* they belong to
8. know whether he had formerly lived in their heaven

The Pāli version also works through a list of eight items, although with some differences in content and sequence.²¹ Alongside some variations, however, the culmination point in both lists is Śākyamuni’s knowledge of whether in the past he had himself taken birth in the respective celestial realm.²²

As an aside from my main topic, it could be noted that the presentation in both versions proceeds by repeating each time the abilities or knowledges already mentioned. This feature appears to be another modality of crescendo repetitions that could be added to those I explored in a recent contribution to the present journal, Anālayo (2024), in the form of combining a textual portion to be repeated invariably with changing textual items that follow a crescendo pattern. In the present case, the repetitions gradually increase rather than staying static, as they cover all those items already mentioned. The new item added with each instance then creates the crescendo effect, as each newly mentioned item appears at the end of a line of increasing knowledge about those *devas*.

²⁰ MĀ 73 at T I 539b27: 即得光明, 便見形色也, 然我未與彼天共同集會, 未相慰勞, 未有所論說, 未有所答對 and AN 8.64 at AN IV 302,14: *obhāsañ c’ eva sañjānāmi, rūpāni ca passāmi, no ca kho tāhi devatāhi saddhiṃ santiṭṭhāmi sallapāmi sākacchaṃ samāpajjāmi*. On this presentation as a possible precedent for *Pratyutpannasamādhī* see also Dhammajoti 2021: 24.

²¹ For example, the seventh in the *Madhyama-āgama* list is the fourth in its *Aṅguttara-nikāya* counterpart, AN 8.64 at AN IV 303,10: *tā ca devatā jānāmi: imā devatā amukamhā vā amukamhā vā devanikāyā ti*, which helps make sense of the otherwise somewhat obscure formulation in MĀ 73 at T I 540b16: 知彼天, 彼彼天中也.

²² AN 8.64 treats the experience of light and the vision of forms as two distinct items, whereas in MĀ 73 these appear together as the first item. The same overall count of eight results from AN 8.64 not covering knowledge of the names of those *devas*, which is the third item in MĀ 73. The third in AN 8.64, conversation, is the second in MĀ 73 (for the fourth in AN 8.64 see my previous note). The fifth in AN 8.64 is karma (the sixth in MĀ 73), the sixth nutriment and pleasure/pain (the fourth in MĀ 73), and the seventh life span (the fifth in MĀ 73). In other words, the only item where there is full agreement in content and order of listing is the last in both versions: Śākyamuni’s knowledge of whether he had previously lived in the respective heaven.

Alongside this thematic crescendo effect, however, there is also a crescendo effect in terms of textual size, since with each repetition all the previous items are reiterated: The list begins with seeing forms (= *devas*), which combines with the acknowledgment of not yet being able to converse with them. This then stimulates making a meditative effort to cultivate the missing dimension, hence next comes seeing and conversing, but then this successful achievement comes with the acknowledgement of not yet knowing their names, and so on. The net result is a gradual build-up of the presentation whereby what has already been achieved combines with a pointer to what needs to be accomplished next. The procedure adopted in this way could be illustrated as follows, based on the numbering from the previous list:

- 1, but not 2
- 1, 2, but not 3
- 1, 2, 3, but not 4
- 1, 2, 3, 4, but not 5
- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, but not 6
- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, but not 7
- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, but not 8
- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

In this way, the item mentioned first comes up eight times, the second item seven times, and so on. Keeping in mind the importance of visions of celestials in the ancient Indian setting, the type of crescendo repetition employed here makes sure to drive home that the Buddha had achieved complete mastery in such matters. Even a less than fully attentive listener in the audience will not fail to get this point.

The effect created by this mode of presentation then leads up to the final statement in both versions, according to which the Buddha did not claim to have reached full awakening until he had developed these eight types of knowledges; when he had developed these, however, he knew that he had indeed gone beyond the prospect of any future birth.²³ This type of statement is a recurrent pericope employed in *Āgama* literature to highlight particular insights that were considered to have been crucial dimensions of the Buddha's awakening.²⁴ In the present case, the last of the set of eight would presumably have reached the required completion during the night of the Buddha's awakening through his cultivation of recollection of past lives.²⁵ The same does not hold for other items mentioned previously in the two lists, whose cultivation appear to be rather related to an earlier time in the narrative of Śākyamuni's quest for awakening.²⁶

²³ MĀ 73 at T I 540c10: 若我正知得此八行者 ... 生已盡, 梵行已立, 所作已辦, 不更受有, 知如真, and AN 8.64 at AN IV 304,27: *yato ca kho me, bhikkhave, evaṃ aṭṭhaparivaṭṭaṃ adhidevañāṇadassanaṃ suvisuddhaṃ ahosi ... ñāṇaṃ ca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi: akuppā me cetovimutti, ayam antimā jāti, n' atthi dāni punabbhavo ti.*

²⁴ For a study of applications of this pericope in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* to insight topics like the five aggregates, the six sense spheres, etc., see Anālayo 2023: 1–9.

²⁵ On Śākyamuni's recollection of his past lives during the night of his awakening see MN 4 at MN I 22,11 and EĀ 31.1 at T II 666b24.

²⁶ Mp IV 143,1 relates the experience of light to the divine eye. This does not do justice to the presentation in MN 128, where such experience of light occurs in relation to a level of concentration well before mastery of all four absorptions, which is the required foundation for cultivation of the divine eye. It seems as if the last item in the list in AN 8.64, which does require reliance on the fourth absorption and is indeed best allocated to the night

In sum, what emerges from the two *Madhyama-āgama* discourses and their respective Pāli parallels surveyed above is that a strong meditative vision component in relation to celestials features as an integral dimension of Śākyamuni's progress to awakening. Such meditative vision goes beyond mere recollection of *devas*, regularly mentioned together with recollection of the Buddha in a standard list of six such recollections,²⁷ as it involves an actual encounter. During his quest for awakening, Śākyamuni developed this type of meditative vision so thoroughly that he acquired a rather comprehensive knowledge of various dimensions of those *devas*. Moreover, the basic modality of such meditative vision appears to be, at least to some extent, available before having reached the mastery of the four absorptions that is required for a cultivation of the divine eye. This option is particularly relevant to my exploration of the **Pratyutpannasamādhī-sūtra* in the second of the present set of articles.

II.2 Meditative Visions of Śākyamuni

The element of meditative vision that emerges in relation to Śākyamuni's pre-awakening pursuit of knowledge in regard to *devas* continues after his awakening, as *Āgama* literature shows him frequently in conversation with various celestials (or else visiting their respective realms). Another dimension of the basic trajectory of a form of vision-encounter beyond the abilities of ordinary sense perception manifests in his relationship with some of his human disciples. One such case involves Aniruddha; the relevant report occurs in the same section on Eights of the *Anguttara-nikāya* as the discourse on Śākyamuni's cultivation of eight knowledges in relation to *devas*. Moreover, a parallel to this discourse in the *Madhyama-āgama* immediately follows the discourse that reports Śākyamuni's pre-awakening cultivation of knowledge regarding *devas*.

According to the narrative setting, Aniruddha is alone on this occasion. While in meditative seclusion, he reflects on key characteristics of the Dharma, in that its teachings or the path (to liberation) call for fewness of wishes, contentment, seclusion, being energetic, having mindfulness, being concentrated, and having wisdom. Śākyamuni, who is living in a different location, becomes aware of Aniruddha's reflection through his telepathic powers. Śākyamuni leaves his location and comes to Aniruddha's presence just as quickly as a person may stretch or bend an arm—a standard pericope in *Āgama* literature to describe feats of supernormal travel, including to celestial destinies—in order to add one more characteristic to the set of seven that Aniruddha had been reflecting on. This turns out to be the absence of conceptual proliferation (*prapañca*). After giving a teaching to Aniruddha, Śākyamuni again disappears as quickly as a person may stretch or bend an arm to return to the location where he had been before, in order to deliver the same teaching to the resident monastics there.

Notably, this is thus an instance in *Āgama* literature where a teaching delivered by reliance on supernormal means afterwards is repeated in a more conventional manner to enable its reception among those who were not witness to the former. This thereby in a way provides a template for the idea of teachings give under extraordinary circumstances afterwards being circulated in more ordinary manners.

of awakening, has influenced the commentarial take on the whole description, here and in the case of MN 128; see also above note 19.

²⁷ See, e.g., SĀ 931 at T II 238a21 and AN 6.10 at AN III 287,21.

The discourse ends on a set of verses in which Aniruddha reminisces about the teaching he has received. In the *Madhyama-āgama* version, the verses refer to the Buddha's feat in reading Aniruddha's thought and then entering concentration in order to traverse space and reach Aniruddha.²⁸ The corresponding Pāli verses are more specific in this respect, as they indicate that Buddha had availed himself of the mind-made body for the purpose of visiting Aniruddha.²⁹ The same verse spoken by Aniruddha recurs in the *Theragāthā*, in which case a parallel to this verse in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* also refers to the mind-made body.³⁰ In this way, whereas in the earlier instance reported in the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallel he had given Aniruddha (and his companions) teachings on *samādhi* after paying a visit with his physical body, in the present instance Śākyamuni avails himself of the mind-made body to deliver teachings related to insight.³¹

Śākyamuni is not the only person to pay Aniruddha such a visit. Another two discourses, extant in Pāli and Chinese, report that on two distinct occasions Mahāmaudgalyāyana had, through his telepathic power, come to know what Aniruddha was thinking, which in both cases was on the topic of the four establishments of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna*). Mahāmaudgalyāyana leaves his location just as quickly as a person may stretch or bend an arm to come to the presence of Aniruddha.³² The purpose of both visits, presumably accomplished through the mind-made body, was to ask Aniruddha for further clarifications on the topic that the latter had been thinking about.

²⁸ MĀ 74 at T I 542a19: 遙知我思念, 無上世間師, 正身心入定, 乘虛忽來到; another parallel, T 46 at T I 836c27, only reports receiving a teaching from the Buddha but does not mention his means of arrival. Zhang 2020: 16 refers to the present episode and another one to be taken up below in relation to Mahāmaudgalyāyana as instances of the Buddha dispensing teachings through his “duplicate.”

²⁹ AN 8.30 at AN IV 235,20: *mama saṅkappam aññāya, satthā loke anuttaro, manomayena kāyena, iddhiyā upasaṅkami*.

³⁰ The parallels to Th 901 (which corresponds to the verse from AN 8.30 quoted in my previous note) are Hofinger 1954: 113,18: *ston pa 'jig rten bla med kyis, bdag gi kun rtogs mkhyen nas kyang, yid las byung ba'i sku yis ni, bdag drung rju 'phrul gyis byon nas* (here and elsewhere, I adjust to the Wylie system) and T 1448 at T XXIV 86c11: 世間無上師, 知我念所念, 佛身意神通, 而來於我所, where I suggest to emend 身意 to 意身.

³¹ On the mind-made body as an apparent means for acts of levitation and the performance of other super-normal feats and travels see in more detail Anālayo 2016b (also 2021 and 2022a: 237n376). The mind-made body appears to have been conceived as a replica of the physical body, in the sense of corresponding to it closely in shape (but being made instead of a fine-material substance similar to the constitution of celestials in the Brahmā realms); see, e.g., Sv I 222,7, which reports that the mind-made body will mirror if the individual's physical body has ears that are pierced or not. It would be due to such close resemblance that in the present narrative context Aniruddha is shown to be able to recognize immediately who has come for a visit. The different versions of the *Śrāmaṇyaphala-sūtra* present several similes to illustrate the extraction of such a mind-made body, such as pulling out a reed from its sheath, drawing a sword from its scabbard, extracting a snake from its slough, or seeing a thread that has been passed through a jewel; see DN 2 at DN I 77,12, DĀ 20 at T I 85c18, T 22 at T I 275a24, and Gnoli 1978: 245,29 (my summary only covers similes found in at least two versions). What these illustrations have in common is the idea of disclosing or taking out what is found within. This suggests that during feats undertaken with the mind-made body the physical body may remain behind, comparable to the sheath, scabbard, slough, and jewel in the above examples. It would then follow that references to the practitioner leaving or disappearing from a particular location are best read as intending the departure or disappearance of what in terms of the similes are the reed, sword, snake, and thread. In the present case of the Buddha visiting Aniruddha with his mind-made body, it would then follow that the Buddha's physical body should be imagined as having been left behind at his place of departure, similar in kind to the description given in the *Mahāvastu* of a yogi performing supernatural feats while the physical body remains seated in the hermitage; see Senart 1882: 284,4.

³² SN 52.1 at SN V 294,13 and SN 52.2 at SN V 296,31 (abbreviated), with their parallels in SĀ 535 at T II 139b1 and SĀ 536 at T II 139b26 (abbreviated) and Up 6029 at D 4094 *nyu* 13b2 or P 5595 *thu* 46b6.

Mahāmaudgalyāyana in turn features repeatedly as a recipient of teachings dispensed by Śākyamuni through arrival at his location by supernormal means. In one such instance, Mahāmaudgalyāyana is nodding off during his meditation. Śākyamuni realizes what is happening—according to the Pāli version he does so through his divine eye—and just as quickly as a person may stretch or bend an arm he arrives on the scene and gives Mahāmaudgalyāyana a rather detailed teaching on various approaches for overcoming the mental hindrance of torpor.³³ On another occasion, Mahāmaudgalyāyana wants to abide in the second absorption (qualified as “noble silence”) but slips back to the level of the first absorption. Śākyamuni pays a visit by supernormal means—the Chinese version specifies that this involved disappearing from the Bamboo Grove and reappearing on Mount Vulture Peak (both in the environs of Rājagṛha)—to encourage Mahāmaudgalyāyana in his attempts to stabilize his attainment of the second absorption.³⁴ Needless to say, this intervention was successful. The same holds for another such episode, with the main difference that here Mahāmaudgalyāyana has difficulties stabilizing his abiding in signless concentration.³⁵

Whereas all these instances of Mahāmaudgalyāyana receiving teachings from Śākyamuni involve the latter coming to visit the former by supernormal means, another modality of receiving teachings—one that is particularly relevant for my exploration of the **Pratyutpannasamādhī-sūtra*—emerges in a discourse extant in Chinese and Pāli. According to the introductory narration, Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana are staying together in a single dwelling in the Bamboo Grove, Rājagṛha, whereas Śākyamuni is in Śrāvastī. When Śāriputra commends Mahāmaudgalyāyana for what he takes to be the effect of the latter’s meditative abiding, Mahāmaudgalyāyana clarifies that he has not been meditating but rather having a Dharma discussion. A follow-up question by Śāriputra leads to the additional information that Mahāmaudgalyāyana has been in conversation with Śākyamuni. Śāriputra notes that the Buddha is living far away in Śrāvastī, and wonders whether Mahāmaudgalyāyana has travelled by supernormal means to meet the Buddha or the latter has come to pay a visit in this way to Mahāmaudgalyāyana. This leads to the following clarification by Mahāmaudgalyāyana:³⁶

I did not approach the Blessed One by relying on supernormal power, and the Blessed One did not come to me by relying on supernormal power. Yet, we heard [each other] between being in Śrāvastī and in Rājagṛha [respectively], because the Blessed One and I are both endowed with the attainments of the divine eye and the divine ear. I was able to ask the Blessed One ... and the Blessed One replied to me.

Mahāmaudgalyāyana then shares the teachings he has heard from the Buddha with Śāriputra. The way he has received these comes rather close to the modality of meeting a

³³. AN 7.78 at AN IV 85,13, MĀ 83 at T I 559c3, and T 47 at T I 837a12.

³⁴. SN 21.1 at SN II 273,24 and SĀ 501 at T II 132a23.

³⁵. SN 40.9 at SN IV 269,8 and SĀ 502 at T II 132b19. Parts of this discourse have been preserved in Or.15009/563, Nagashima 2015: 392. The *Moggallāna-saṃyutta* (SN 40) applies such a procedure to each of the four absorptions and the four immaterial attainments.

³⁶. SĀ 503 at T II 132c20: 我不以神通力詣世尊所, 世尊不以神通力來至我所, 然我於舍衛國王舍城中聞, 世尊及我俱得天眼, 天耳故; 我能問世尊 ... 世尊答我. The parallel SN 21.3 at SN II 276,1 proceeds similarly: *na khvāhaṃ, āvuso, bhagavantaṃ iddhiyā upasaṅkamiṃ, na pi maṃ bhagavā iddhiyā upasaṅkami. api ca me yāvatā bhagavā ettāvatā dibbacakkhu visujjhi dibbā ca sotadhātu; bhagavato pi yāvatāhaṃ ettāvatā dibbacakkhu visujjhi dibbā ca sotadhātū ti.*

Buddha and receiving teachings envisaged in the **Pratyutpannasamādhī-sūtra* and thereby provides a significant indication to be kept in mind. The main difference is the need to rely on the divine eye and ear. Yet, as the exploration of Śākyamuni's pre-awakening visions of celestials has shown, to some degree extraordinary modalities of vision beyond the ability of the physical eye appear to be already accessible with levels of concentration falling short of the meditative mastery required for cultivating the divine eye and ear.

III. Buddhas and Buddhafields

Having completed my survey of passages from *Āgama* literature that I consider to be relevant to the meditative activity described in the **Pratyutpannasamādhī-sūtra*, in what follows I turn to the complementary topic of the object that such practice takes, namely a multitude of Buddhas existing at present in different Buddhafields.

III.1 Multiple Buddhas

The wish to have more than one Buddha arise in the same place and time features explicitly in *Āgama* literature. The narrative setting is a meeting of the *devas* of the Heaven of the Thirty-three, whose ruler Śakra has just expressed lavish praise of the Buddha Śākyamuni. Here is the report from the *Dīrgha-āgama* (T 1) of the reaction of his celestial audience to this praise:³⁷

Then a *deva* of the Thirty-three made this statement: “Suppose it could be brought about that eight Buddhas emerge in the world—that will greatly increase the host of *devas* and decrease the host of *asuras*.” Then [another] *deva* of the Thirty-three said: “Never mind eight Buddhas, even if it could be brought about that seven Buddhas ... six Buddhas ... up to ... two Buddhas emerge in the world, that [will] also greatly increase the host of *devas* and decrease the host of *asuras*, how much the more so eight Buddhas?” Then Śakra, the King of *devas*, said to the *devas* of the Thirty-three: “I personally heard from the Buddha, personally received it from the Buddha, that the wish to bring about that two Buddhas emerge in the world at the same time is [wishing for] an impossibility.”

The parallels begin their countdown of Buddhas with the number four instead of eight. A minor but, for the present context, significant difference is that the Pāli version in the *Dīgha-nikāya* speaks of the impossibility of two Buddhas emerging at the same time “in a single world system,” *ekissā lokadhātuyā*, whereas the other versions just speak of the world in general.³⁸ Such a reference to a single world system leaves open the door to the possibility that more such world systems exist to which the same impossibility need not apply. The same type of indication recurs in other Pāli discourses and in some of their parallels to express this type of impossibility.³⁹

³⁷ DĀ 3 at T I 31a9: 時忉利天作是說言: 若使世間有八佛出者, 當大增益諸天眾, 減損阿須倫眾。時忉利天言: 且置八佛, 正使七佛, 六佛, 乃至二佛出世者, 亦大增益諸天眾, 減損阿須倫眾; 何況八佛? 時釋提桓因告忉利天言: 我親從佛聞, 親從佛受: 欲使一時二佛出世, 無有是處 (adopting a 宋, 元, and 明 variant that adds 親 after 我)。

³⁸ DN 19 at DN II 225,3; the other parallels are the *Mahāvastu*, Marciniak 2019: 250,9: *loke* (also in Senart 1897: 199,11), and T 8 at T I 208b4: 世間 (here Śākyamuni informs Śakra of this impossibility)。

³⁹ DN 28 at DN III 114,25, MN 115 at MN III 65,15, and AN 1.15 at AN I 27,38. Vetter 2001: 67n32 already pointed out that, out of the altogether four occurrences in Pāli discourses, it is particularly in DN 19 that this statement most naturally arises from its contexts, wherefore it has been given pride of place in my exploration.

In this way, among several *Āgama* discourse the specification of restricting this impossibility to a single world system occurs.⁴⁰ As noted by Vetter (2001: 67n32), “[w]hat seems implicit here ... is the acceptance of the existence of several *lokadhātus*.” Once this much is at least implicitly accepted, a multiplication of Buddhas existing at the same time becomes in principle possible.⁴¹ Despite an attempt by the *Kathāvatthu* to refute the idea that Buddhas exist in all directions,⁴² in view of the precedent provided in Pāli discourses, it is perhaps less surprising that the *Apadāna*—a relatively late text considered ‘canonical’ from an emic Theravāda perspective—affirms the existence of Buddhafields in the ten directions as well as of a plurality of Buddhas in the present.⁴³ Based on surveying relevant references among Pāli discourses, Vetter (2001: 68n32) offers the following overall assessment:

The notion of an inconceivable number of worlds thus certainly did not come to be a feature of the Mahāyānist movement because additional worlds had to be invented to geographically accommodate the new ideal of becoming a Buddha oneself; it was rather, as a fully developed and recognized doctrine already found in the Hīnayāna schools, appropriated from them because it (without serving as a sufficient cause for it) stimulated the new ideal.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I would like to put on record that my motivation in presenting the above evidence and quote is not to encourage visualizing developments in Buddhist thought from a mono-causal perspective (the same applies to other parts of my discussion here and in the second article). There must have been a range of causes and conditions contributing to the notion of the existence of a plurality of Buddhas in the present,⁴⁴ located in different Buddhafields, and evidence found in particular textual sources

Parallels to DN 28: DiSimone 2024: 342 (292r2): *loka*, DĀ 18 at T I 79a7: 世, T 18 at T I 255c2: 世, Up 1002 at D 4094 *ju* 5a3 or P 5595 *tu* 5b6: *’jig rten*. Parallels to MN 115: MĀ 181 at T I 724a1: 世中, D 297 *sha* 300a7 or P 963 *lu* 329a4: *’jig rten*, T 776 at T XVII 713b18: 世間, the *Dharmaskandha*, T 1537 at T XXVI 502b14: 一世界 and Up 1032 at D 4094 *ju* 32a2 or P 5595 *tu* 35a3: *’jig rten gcig tu*. Thus, in the last two cases an additional qualification of a type similar to the standard Pāli phrasing can be found. No parallel appears to be known for AN 1.15. According to a line of reasoning proposed in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Pradhan 1967: 185,17, having two Buddhas arise simultaneously would fulfil no purpose; Schmithausen 2000: 13 notes that this argument seems to presuppose a relatively limited world: “[d]as Argument scheint allerdings eine verhältnismäßig begrenzte Welt vorauszusetzen.”

^{40.} According to Demiéville 1937: 199, the Sautrāntikas and Mahāsāṃghikas also understood the stricture under discussion to apply to a single world system.

^{41.} In the words of Nattier 2003: 186, once this step has been taken, “there is no longer any barrier to the appearance of other buddhas in the present, as long as they are located in world-systems elsewhere in the universe.”

^{42.} Kv 21.6 at Kv 608,22; already noted by Zhang 2020: 30.

^{43.} Ap 1.64 at Ap 5,19: *disā dasavidhā loke ... buddhakhettā asaṅkhiyā* and Ap 1.20 at Ap 2,22: *ye ca etarahi atthi buddhā loke anuttarā*; see also Anālayo 2025b: 15.

^{44.} An example for an additional perspective would be the following suggestion by Nattier 2000: 90: “[A] factor that must surely have contributed to the formulation of ideas concerning other Buddha-worlds [is] a problem that we might describe (in contemporary parlance) as ‘bodhisattva job-market crowding.’ As more and more people within the Buddhist community opted for Buddhahood rather than Arhatship, the problem of where one might find ‘employment’ as a Buddha emerged in sharp relief. Given the axiomatic assumption that there could be only one Buddha in a given world at a time (for the very definition of a Buddha is one who discovers the path to enlightenment by himself and then teaches it to others in a world where no ‘Buddhism’ exists), one could not of course become a Buddha while still a member of an existing Buddhist community; the attainment of the final goal would have to wait until a later life when one is reborn into a world with no knowledge of the Buddha’s teachings. Those desiring to become Buddhas in our own world-system might, of course, simply get in line behind the bodhisattva Maitreya (recognized by virtually all Buddhists as the next Buddha-to-be), but

can only provide a spotlight on a limited number out of these conditions. The situation could perhaps be illustrated with the example of various tributaries coalescing to form a river. Reading early Mahāyāna *sūtras* from the viewpoint of *Āgama* literature is comparable to charting the course of one of these tributaries. This tributary is quite definitely not the whole river. Nevertheless, it offers a contribution to the river. I think the same holds for relevant developments in *Āgama* literature, in that these are not to be confused with the whole phenomenon under discussion but rather can be seen as offering a contribution to it.

With this much clarified, I would like to continue my exploration based on an observation by Harrison (1978: 39) regarding the shift from a single to countless Buddhas: “This multiplicity of Buddhas is of course achieved by a simple proliferation of Śākyamunis—that is, all Buddhas everywhere resemble the historical Buddha ... [o]nly the names and the minor details admit of an endless variety.”

A first stage in such multiplication, shared by the different reciter traditions of *Āgama* literature, would be the series of predecessors of Śākyamuni, the six Buddhas of the past.⁴⁵ The *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, in the words of T. W. Rhys Davids in Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids (1910: 1), presents “six forerunners of the historical Buddha, each constructed ... in imitation of ... the life of Gotama.” Based on such a multiplication along a temporal axis, a similar multiplication along a geographical axis becomes possible once the notion of different *lokadhātus* is in place.

As noted by Zhang (2020: 12f), a passage relevant to this idea can be found in a text translated by Lokakṣema, the 兜沙經 (T 280).⁴⁶ The relevant passage describes how Śākyamuni multiplied himself in such a way that there was a Buddha in each of a large number of minor countries.⁴⁷ A similar description features in the 諸菩薩求佛本業經 (T 282), which Nattier (2005) has shown to be part of the same translation, in the senses that some accident in transmission must have resulted in breaking up a single text—a proto-*Buddhāvataṃsaka* or smaller *Buddhāvataṃsaka*—into three parts, which are now found individually as T 280, T 282, and T 283. In other words, this second instance pertains to the same text. In this second instance, the multiplication of Buddhas takes place in order to fulfil the wishes of a large number of different Śākras that Śākyamuni be seated with them in their respective heavenly realms.⁴⁸

this would mean a wait of several billion years, as Maitreya’s own descent from the Tuṣita heaven was not expected to occur for some five and a half billion years. Alternatively—and much more appealingly—one might seek rebirth in another realm ... where Buddhahood could far more quickly be attained.”

⁴⁵ For an excellent survey of references to former Buddhas in textual and epigraphic records see Tournier 2019: 95–98.

⁴⁶ On this text see Harrison 1993: 157f and Nattier 2005.

⁴⁷ T 280 at T X 446b6: 佛分身悉遍至十億小國土, 一一小國土皆有一佛, 凡有十億佛. These minor countries then make up a Buddhāfield; see T 280 at T X 446b5: 凡有十億小國土, 合為一佛刹. The ability to multiply oneself as such is part of a general repertoire of supernormal abilities recognized in *Āgama* literature; see, e.g., DN 2 at DN I 78,25: *eko pi hutvā bahudhā hoti*, with counterparts in DĀ 27 at T I 109b8 (to be supplemented from DĀ 20 at T I 86a8): 變化一身為無數身, T 22 at T I 275b7: 以一身化無數身, and Gnoli 1978: 246,16: *eko bhūtvā bahudhā bhavati*.

⁴⁸ T 282 at T X 454a13: 佛便分身威神, 悉皆在百億忉利天上釋提桓因埤外門. 一一釋提桓因埤皆有一佛, 凡有百億佛 (adopting a CBETA emendation of 埤 to read 埤); the preceding part in T 282 describes the seat prepared in each of Heavens of the Thirty-three for the Buddha. Nattier 2007: 124 comments that “[w]hen larger numbers of Buddhas seem to appear—as, for example, when each of the Śākras in the Sahā world sees Śākyamuni Buddha appear directly before him (§7a)—the *sūtra* portrays these not as ‘real’ Buddhas but only as emanations. For the authors of the smaller *Buddhāvataṃsaka*, then, the universe is filled with Buddhas, yet this

The relationship to Śakra that emerges in this way can be related not only to the above episode of members of his host wishing for more than one Buddha arising in the same place and time, but also to another passage in *Āgama* literature, which describes a visit paid by a particular Brahmā to Śakra's heaven. Each of the *devas* in Śakra's heaven hope that this Brahmā will take a seat with them. Brahmā obliges by multiplying himself so that he can sit with each of them.⁴⁹ In this way, Brahmā performs a multiplication feat comparable to the description in the 諸菩薩求佛本業經 (T 282) of Śākyamuni multiplying himself.

My next topic is the multiplication of Buddhafields needed to accommodate multiple Buddhas—at least as long as these are not just emanations of Śākyamuni.

III.2 Multiple Buddhafields

Rowell (1934, 1935, and 1937) offers a detailed study of the notion of Buddhafields together with several indications regarding what she considers to be potential precedents among Pāli discourses. Rowell (1934: 210) argues that the notion “of *visaya* in early Buddhist literature may be very significant for the history of the Buddha-field notion.” This notion concerns the Buddha's “domain” (*viśaya*) in the sense of designating often, but not exclusively, the range of his knowledge.⁵⁰ A Pāli discourse and its parallels in Chinese and Tibetan highlight that the Buddha's domain is inconceivable.⁵¹

Rowell (1935: 423f) proposes other relevant precedents for Buddhafields in general in the following form:

[C]onverts to Buddhism, who were used to thinking of Brahmā as presiding over the highest heaven, when they were now taught that Buddha was superior to all gods could imagine this superiority only in the concrete terms which were familiar to them. They would quite

is still true in a somewhat restricted sense: only one Buddha resides in each of the ten directions, though other buddha-forms (that is, emanations) can also be made to appear. This vision of a universe with other Buddhas existing in the present thus coexists quite harmoniously, at least for the authors of this scripture, with the traditional idea that only one Buddha can appear in any given world at a time.”

⁴⁹. DN 18 at DN II 211,29, DĀ 4 at T I 36a17, and T 9 at T I 215b12 (here he also seems to transform their bodies).

⁵⁰. An example illustrating this sense would be an episode in DN 11 at DN I 215,21, with parallels in Sanskrit fragment 387v7, Zhou 2008: 5, and DĀ 24 at T I 102a24, according to which an inquisitive monk visited progressively more elevated heavenly realms in search of an answer to his inquiry as to where the four elements cease entirely, only to find out that he had to come back to earth and ask the Buddha. The commentary, Sv II 391,26, reports the reflection by Śakra that the monk's question pertains to the domain of the Buddha, and others are unable to answer it, *ayaṃ pañho buddhavisayo, na sakkā aññena vissajjetuṃ*. Another relevant indication occurs in the context of two debated points in Kv 21.3 and 22.1 at Kv 606,22 and 613,22, which refer to the—apparently considered self-evident—fact that an arhat does not know all that falls within the domain of a Buddha, *arahā sabbaṃ buddhavisayaṃ jānāti ti? na h'evaṃ vattabbe*.

⁵¹. AN 4.77 at AN II 80,16: *buddhānaṃ, bhikkhave, buddhavisayo acinteyyo*, with parallels in EĀ 29.6 at T II 657a21: 佛國境界不可思議 (followed by an explanation at T II 657b14 that takes up questions regarding the nature of the Buddha's body to illustrate what is beyond being fathomed) and Up 7027 at D 4094 *nyu* 66a7 or P 5595 *thu* 110a4: *sangs rgyas rnam kyī sangs rgyas kyī yul ni bsaṃ gyis mi khyab po* (see also Up 2082 at D 4094 *ju* 100a4 or P 5595 *tu* 114b1). Rowell 1934: 216 notes that the *Visuddhimagga* recognizes the domain of the Buddha as one out of three types of what here come under the name of being Buddhafields (*buddhakkhetta*), the other two being the field of world-spheres that quakes at his birth and the field of his authority in terms of the protective power exerted by *parittas* taught by him. The field of his domain is the largest out of these three, being without limits. Vism 414,19: *buddhakkhettaṃ nāma tividhaṃ hoti: jātikkhettaṃ, añākkhettaṃ, visaya-kkhettaṃ ca*, followed by explaining: *visayakkhettaṃ anantaṃ aparimāṇaṃ. yaṃ yāvatā vā pana ākañkheyyā ti vuttaṃ, yattha yaṃ yaṃ tathāgato ākañkhati, taṃ taṃ jānāti*, which shows that the unlimited nature of the Buddha's knowledge is a key aspect of this field.

naturally think of Buddha as ruling over a heaven higher than Brahmā's and more glorious than Brahmā's ... having aspired previously to be reborn in Brahmā's heaven, they would now aspire to be reborn in Buddha's heaven-world! Their picture of Buddha and his heaven would necessarily be modelled to a large extent upon the picture already in their heads of Brahmā and his heaven.

An example that may fit the above reasoning occurs in a Pāli discourse in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, the relevant part of which concerns aspirations for rebirth in different Brahmā worlds. Hearing of the long lifespan, beauty, and happiness of a particular Brahmā can result in stimulating the aspiration to be reborn in that realm. The Pāli discourse indicates that fixing the mind on this aim and cultivating it in this manner will conduce to the desired rebirth. The same pattern finds application to different Brahmās, which are distinguished according to the number of worlds they are able to pervade, the uttermost being a type of Brahmā who is able to pervade a hundred thousand worlds.⁵²

Rowell (1934: 219) also draws attention to another presentation, namely the report in a Pāli discourse of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* that the Buddha can pervade with radiance and make his voice heard throughout the Thrice-a-thousand (= 1000³) Great Thousandfold World System.⁵³ This is indeed superior even to the remarkable ability of the Brahmā just mentioned, who is able to pervade just a hundred thousand worlds.⁵⁴ In this way, even the staggering number of worlds repeatedly mentioned in Mahāyāna texts—the Trichiliomegachiliocosm—has a counterpart in a Pāli discourse.⁵⁵

This Pāli discourse appears to be reflecting the influence of an idea that originated in a different setting, related to emerging Mahāyāna thought. Bodhi (2012: 1662n515) comments on this passage that “[i]n flavor it seems more in keeping with the opening of such Mahāyāna sūtras as the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka and the Pañcavīsati-prajñāpāramitā than with the Pāli Nikāyas.”

This fairly evident instance of outside influence affords me another opportunity to clarify my approach, in the sense that my survey of relevant passages from *Āgama* literature is not meant to posit these as invariably earlier and the source of corresponding ideas and motifs in Mahāyāna sūtras. The present case points to the untenability of taking such a position in principle, as room needs to be left for the possibility that already existing Mahāyāna ideas may have influenced a Pāli discourse. This holds particularly when the relevant presentation in the latter does not naturally arise from its context and stands out in the thought world of early Buddhism for its rather unusual character, as in the present case. Nevertheless, the present Pāli discourse at the same time shows that references to the Trichiliomegachiliocosm are not necessarily a marker of Mahāyāna sense of identity as such, given that the same is also found in a Pāli discourse, testifying to its pan-Buddhist popularity.

⁵² MN 120 at MN III 102,13: *satasahasso, bhikkhave, brahmā satasahassilokadhātuṃ pharivā adhimuccitvā viharati*. I will come back to this discourse in the second of the present set of two articles, Anālayo 2025a: 117.

⁵³ AN 3.80 at AN I 228,14: *tathāgato tisahassīmahāsahassilokadhātuṃ obhāsenā phareyya ... tathāgato tisahassīmahāsahassilokadhātuṃ sarena viññāpeyya*. Bodhi 2012: 1662n514 explains that “a *tisahassī mahāsahassī lokadhātu* is ... a thousand times the size of a thousand-to-the-second-power middling world system, in other words, a thousandfold world system cubed.”

⁵⁴ Szukstul 2015: 157 relates such ability to emit radiance by the Buddha Śākyamuni to the same type of capacity possessed by Amitābha Buddha.

⁵⁵ Following Harrison 1990: 322 for rendering the *trisāhasramahāsāhasralokadhātu*.

Another relevant motif has been identified by Rowell (1935: 419) in a Pāli discourse in the *Dīgha-nikāya* depicting the living conditions under the rule of a wheel-turning king, as the relevant passage offers “a description of the Cakravartin’s destined realm ... very suggestive of later descriptions of the Buddha-field.” The portrayal of the realm of a wheel-turning king given in the Pāli discourse in question, the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta*,⁵⁶ differs from other such Pāli descriptions precisely in relation to qualities that resemble depictions of Buddhafields.⁵⁷ The additional textual portion as such is typical of the kind of elaboration usually provided in Pāli commentaries. Its appearance in the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta* can in turn safely be taken to reflect the incorporation of a commentarial gloss in the discourse itself, rather than requiring external influence comparable to the case of the reference to the Trichiliomegachiliocosm.

In addition, another relevant description of the realm of a wheel-turning king that also occurs in the *Dīgha-nikāya* features the future advent of the Buddha Maitreya, with parallels in discourses found in the *Dīrgha-āgama* (T 1) and the *Madhyama-āgama* (T 26).⁵⁸ Whereas the *Dīrgha-āgama* version also mentions Maitreya, in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse the future Buddha Maitreya does not appear at all.⁵⁹ Closer study supports the impression that the advent of the Buddha Maitreya would be a later addition to this discourse.⁶⁰ The same study also shows, however, that this addition arises naturally from within its narrative context, being quite different in this respect compared to the reference in a Pāli discourse to the Trichiliomegachiliocosm.

The episode resulting from this to all appearances natural evolution is significant for my present exploration, as the resultant presentation becomes a description of the living conditions at the time of the next Buddha. Being unique in this respect among *Āgama* literature, this calls for further examination to determine whether this description can be related to depictions of living conditions in other Buddhafields, once the latter idea had started to gain traction.⁶¹

The main concern of the presentation common to the three discourse parallels appears to be an inculcation of the importance of ethical conduct. The narrative depicts how a decline in ethical conduct leads to a gradual deterioration of the environment until a low point is reached in ethics and living conditions, with human beings of very short life span

⁵⁶ On this text from the viewpoint of the gradual development of the bodhisattva ideal see Anālayo 2017: 103–135.

⁵⁷ The relevant part in DN 30 at DN III 146,20 offers the following specifications of the realm of the wheel-turning king: *akhilam animittam akaṇṭakam iddham phīṭam khemaṃ sivaṃ nirabbudam*; see in more detail Anālayo 2025b: 346n307. Rowell 1935: 419n1 comments: “I have come across no passage in Pali more like the typical Sanskrit descriptions of the Buddha-kṣetra than this.”

⁵⁸ DN 26 at DN III 75,19, DĀ 6 at T I 41c29, and MĀ 70 at T I 524b29.

⁵⁹ Karashima 2013: 178 and 2018: 181 points out that the lateness of the idea of Maitreya as a future Buddha had already been proposed by him in an annotation to the second volume of the Japanese translation of the *Dīrgha-āgama* published in 1997. Due to my ignorance of Japanese, I was unaware of this proposal and therefore did not give him due credit in my own publications on the topic, which I am happy to rectify herewith.

⁶⁰ Anālayo 2010: 95–113 and 2014; see also Tournier 2017: 165.

⁶¹ The somewhat transitional role of Maitreya in this respect has already been noted by Nattier 2000: 74n8. In the context of distinguishing Śākyamuni and his predecessors from the countless Buddhas in the ten directions, she points out that “Maitreya might in fact be described as a borderline figure: though he will appear in our own world-system, which is generally described as characterized by undesirable qualities (in contrast to other more glorious Buddha-worlds), he will do so in a distant future age when our world has reached the peak of its potential.”

indiscriminately killing each other. Some instead go into hiding and decide to refrain from killing. This forms the beginning point for a gradual recovery of ethical conduct, which results in improved living conditions until reaching a peak point when, thanks to people's ever-increasing dedication to ethics, the environment flourishes and human beings have an exceedingly long lifespan. It is within this setting of almost paradisaical conditions, resulting from the observance of ethics, that a wheel-turning king rules and—in two of the three versions—the future Buddha Maitreya arises.

This presentation could in turn be related to the 阿閼佛國經 (T 313), the Discourse on Akṣobhya's Buddhafeld, whose attribution to Lokakṣema should according to Harrison (1993: 166) “be viewed with some suspicion,” probably being “either a translation by Lokakṣema which has been subsequently revised, or the work of one of his contemporaries or disciples. It is, however, certainly an old text.”⁶²

The Discourse on Akṣobhya's Buddhafeld explicitly refers to the motif of the wheel-turning king to illustrate qualities of Akṣobhya or of his realm.⁶³ Moreover, it refers twice to the Buddha Maitreya, in the form of Śākyamuni highlighting the much larger number of disciples of Akṣobhya compared to his own disciples and those of Maitreya, etc., taken together. This provides an intriguing relationship to the two *Āgama* discourses that do feature the advent of Maitreya, as both explicitly indicate that Maitreya will have more disciples than Śākyamuni. The significance of this parallelism warrants a translation of each of the three versions, which I provide beginning with the Pāli passage (DN 26),⁶⁴ followed by its *Dīrgha-āgama* counterpart (DĀ 6), and then by the first of two similar indications in the Discourse on Akṣobhya's Buddhafeld (T 313).

He [= Maitreya] will be surrounded by a community of several thousands of monastics, just as I am now surrounded by a community of several hundreds of monastics. (DN 26)

In view of the vastly superior living conditions at this future time, when people have a lifespan of eighty-four thousand years and are governed by a wheel-turning king, it is perhaps natural that the Pāli discourse indicates that Maitreya will also be in some way superior to Śākyamuni. Since as Buddhas both must be equal in matters of realization, such superiority naturally manifests in the number of monastic followers. The same becomes more pronounced with the *Dīrgha-āgama* version.⁶⁵

^{62.} See also Nattier 2008: 85f and Radich 2025 (forthcoming). According to the research undertaken by Nattier 2000: 101, “[i]t seems clear, therefore, that the ideas contained in the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* represent a further development of those found in the *Akṣobhavyūha*, and not vice versa.” Early references to Abhirati and Akṣobhya can also be found in a Gāndhārī manuscript from the Bajaur Collection; see the discussion in Strauch 2010: 45–59.

^{63.} References to the wheel-turning king occur in T 313 at T XI 754c5, 759b9, 763a26, and 763c18, where different aspects of this motif illustrate the nature of Akṣobhya's bodhisattva career, of bodhisattvas reborn in his Buddhafeld, and of his vows.

^{64.} DN 26 at DN III 76,19: *so anekasahassaṃ bhikkhusaṅghaṃ pariharissati, seyyathā pi 'ham etarahi anekasataṃ bhikkhusaṅghaṃ pariharāmi* (so refers to the earlier mentioned *metteyyo nāma bhagavā loke uppajjissati*). As noted in Anālayo 2010: 102n20, in the Ceylonese edition the difference becomes more pronounced, as instead of *anekasahassaṃ* it reads *anekasatasahassaṃ*, whereby Maitreya comes to be surrounded by a community of several hundreds of thousands.

^{65.} DĀ 6 at T I 42a7: 彼眾弟子有無數千萬, 如我今日弟子數百 (the 彼 refers to the earlier mention of 有佛出世, 名為彌勒如來).

He [= Maitreya] will have a community of innumerable thousands of myriads of disciples, just as I nowadays have several hundreds of disciples. (DĀ 6)

With this comparison a tendency emerges to increase the difference between Śākyamuni and Maitreya—even though in other respects the descriptions of the living conditions at this future time in the two versions are relatively similar—thereby enhancing his superiority when compared to Śākyamuni. The same trajectory continues but in relation to Akṣobhya in the following manner:⁶⁶

Should my disciples and all of the Buddha Maitreya's disciples, and moreover other disciples, all further combined together, be set beside the community of disciples in Akṣobhya's Buddhafield a hundred times, a thousand times, a ten thousand times, a hundred of million times, they are together not equal to it. (T 313)

This continues along the trend evident already when comparing the Pāli and the *Dīrgha-āgama* versions. The circumstance that in both versions Maitreya has more disciples than Śākyamuni quite naturally leads to the indication found here that, compared to both Śākyamuni and Maitreya together, Akṣobhya will have many more disciples. In fact, the only function of the Buddha Maitreya in the Discourse on Akṣobhya's Buddhafield is to serve together with Śākyamuni as a poor comparison in matters of quantity of disciples, thereby throwing into relief the glory of Akṣobhya.⁶⁷

It remains to be seen whether other similarities emerge between the *Āgama* discourses related to the living conditions at the time of the future Buddha Maitreya and the Discourse on Akṣobhya's Buddhafield, the contents of which can best be introduced with the help of the following summary offered by Harrison (1993: 167):

[It] deals in a relatively systematic fashion with the Buddha Akṣobhya and his Buddha-field Abhirati, which lies to the east of our world. On the Vulture Peak near Rājagṛha Śākyamuni relates to the disciple Śāriputra the former vows of Akṣobhya and his setting out upon the bodhisattva path; the circumstances of Akṣobhya's awakening as a Buddha; the characteristics of his Buddha-field, the "paradise" Abhirati; the attributes and powers of his *śrāvakas* and bodhisattvas; the circumstances of his Parinirvāṇa; the manner in which beings can ensure that they are reborn in Abhirati; and the advantages of such a rebirth.

Of interest for my present concerns is Akṣobhya's conduct as a bodhisattva. The relevant description begins with his wholehearted dedication to the path to Buddhahood and his

⁶⁶ T 313 at T XI 762b25: 我諸弟子, 及彌勒佛所有諸弟子, 及復餘弟子, 皆復共合會, 當令在阿閼佛刹諸弟子眾邊, 是亦百倍, 千倍, 萬倍, 億萬倍, 不與等. The second reference to Maitreya takes the same comparison a step further by way of expanding the Buddhas whose number of disciples do not compare with Akṣobhya's; see T 313 at T XI 762b29: 置我諸弟子, 復置彌勒佛諸弟子, 於毘陀劫中諸佛, 天中天所有諸弟子, 及餘得道弟子復共合會, 當令在阿閼佛刹諸弟子眾邊, 百倍, 千倍, 萬倍, 億萬倍, 巨億萬倍, 不與等.

⁶⁷ The relationship that emerges in this way between Maitreya and Akṣobhya provides an interesting background to a shift from a cult of Maitreya to a cult of Amitābha in China and Japan; see Ch'en 1964: 405 for the former and Kitagawa 1981: 121 for the latter. Nattier 1988: 28, who already provided these two references, offers the following comment on this shift: "Whatever the historical relations between the two traditions, the religious similarities between them are obvious. Both offer the believer a rebirth in a reasonably accessible paradise, from which the final step to *nirvāṇa* can be taken much more easily than is possible on earth."

determination to avoid a set of mental states counted in the text as being of five types.⁶⁸ These are in turn followed by another two sets of five such determinations. Despite some variations, it seems fair to propose that these two sets of five are modelled on the ten pathways of action (*karmapatha*).⁶⁹ In their unwholesome manifestation—which are of course to be avoided—the ten pathways of action comprise killing, stealing, sexual misconduct (for monastics *abrahmacarya*), false speech, harsh speech, slander, foolish talk, greed, anger, and wrong view.⁷⁰ After listing the altogether fifteen items to whose avoidance the bodhisattva Akṣobhya wholeheartedly dedicates himself, the *sūtra* continues with him being given the name Akṣobhya and the acclaim of celestials. Following this, the text presents further sets of determinations by Akṣobhya.

The two sets of five determinations by the bodhisattva Akṣobhya that appear to be inspired by the ten pathways of action can be related to the description of ethical decline and recovery in the three *Āgama* discourses under discussion, which clearly takes inspiration from these ten pathways of action. As noted in relation to the Pāli version by Collins (1998: 486), the discourse “constructs a story around a slightly elaborated version of the well-known ten Paths of Bad/Good Deeds (*a/kusala-kamma-pathā*).” Each of the three parallels in fact explicitly mentions the ten pathways of action.⁷¹

⁶⁸ T 313 at T XI 752a10, which gives the impression of probably being inspired by the standard list of five hindrances (except for 發弟子, 緣一覺意, which may rather belong to the aspiration for Buddhahood that precedes the present set); with 瞋恚 having become the first item—in the standard listing of the five hindrances this is rather the second—due to its importance in relation to the bodhisattva Akṣobhya receiving his name; see T 313 at T XI 752b3: 用無瞋恚故, 名之為阿閼. On this premise, this set of five could in turn be related to the indication in DN 26 at DN III 58,12, DĀ 6 at T I 39a28, and MĀ 70 at T I 524c14 that the Buddha accompanied his delivery of the tale with an injunction to the listening monastics that they should cultivate the four *smṛtyupasthānas* (in DN 26 and DĀ 6 this comes before the tale, in MĀ 70 after it). In *Āgama* literature, such cultivation of mindfulness features as the central practice for being able to recognize the presence of the five hindrances, which forms the indispensable basis for then being able to overcome them. For example, Gethin 1992: 58 notes that, according to a recurrent statement in the Pāli discourse collections, “the Buddhist path consists essentially in the abandoning of the five hindrances, the development of the establishments of mindfulness and subsequent development of the awakening factors.” On the impact of the five hindrances beyond matters related to meditation practice proper, and on the role of the four establishments of mindfulness in relation to these five, see also Anālayo 2022b. In other words, if the task of the bodhisattva Akṣobhya is indeed to stay free from the five hindrances, which seems probable, then this can reasonably be expected to require mindfulness practice. This would then provide a relationship, albeit an indirect one, to DN 26, DĀ 6, and MĀ 70. The proposed relationship is considerably more tenuous, however, than the one discussed in the next note between the ensuing two sets of five and the role of the ten pathways of action in DN 26, DĀ 6, and MĀ 70.

⁶⁹ T 313 at T XI 752a17, where the first four clearly match the first four *karmapathas* in content and sequence: 殺生者 (1st), 盜取他人財物 (2nd), 非梵行者 (3rd) and 妄言 (4th). In the case of the second set, T 313 at T XI 752a23, the fifth to seventh items in the list of *karmapathas* appear to be reflected in 罵詈 (1st), 惡口 (2nd, which according to Hirakawa 1997: 486 can render *piśuna*), and 綺語 (4th), and in the tenth case there is again a clear match in content and sequence in the form of 邪見 (5th, which on combining both sets becomes the 10th). For the corresponding listing in T 310.6 at T XI 102b10, Dantinne 1983: 84n48+52 notes the parallelism to the activities that according to detailed expositions of the eightfold path are comprised under its factors of right action and right speech. These detailed expositions correspond to the first seven of the ten *karmapathas*, the main difference being that in the eightfold path matters of speech come before those related to action, whereas in the present case and in the *karmapathas* matters of action come before those related to speech.

⁷⁰ Following the sequence of their positive counterparts in the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* 1685–1698, Sakaki 1916/1962: 134f.

⁷¹ DN 26 at DN III 71,25 reports that, once the nadir of decline is reached, the ten wholesome pathways of action completely disappear, *dasa kusalakammāpathā sabbena sabbam antaradhāyissanti*, and their unwholesome counterparts will prevail, to the extent that even the very notion of wholesomeness no longer

The topic of ethical conduct in general is central throughout, and in all three versions the unethical behavior of human beings affects the environment, as ghee and sugar will disappear, and there will no longer be any rice to eat.⁷² According to the *Dirgha-āgama* account, thorny bushes will grow, and there will be many mosquitoes, gadflies, flies, fleas, snakes, vipers, wasps, centipedes, and poisonous worms.⁷³ Although such details are not provided in the other two versions, the three parallels clearly envision ethical misconduct as having quite serious repercussions on the environment.⁷⁴

The same then holds conversely for the description of ethical and environmental recovery. Having taken the decision to abstain from the first unwholesome path of action (intentional killing of sentient beings), people realize that this ethical commitment has resulted in improving their living conditions. The description of such improvement primarily emphasizes a lengthening of their life span but eventually also results in an improvement of the environment. Recognizing that their wholesome conduct has such repercussions, they decide to increase their ethical commitments in the expectation that conditions will further improve. This increase then takes the form of refraining from the second unwholesome path of action (intentional theft), which indeed has the anticipated repercussions.⁷⁵

It follows that the three versions of this *Āgama* discourse present changes of the environment as being the result of wholehearted dedication by human beings to particular types of ethical conduct. At an unspecified point in time, ghee, sugar, and rice become available again, and once the peak condition of a human lifespan of eighty-four-thousand years has been reached—in two out of three versions of this discourse providing the appropriate setting for the manifestation of the Buddha Maitreya—diseases no longer occur, except for ordinary afflictions of the body such as becoming hungry or aging, etc.⁷⁶

exists. In a comparable manner, DĀ 6 at T I 41a18 indicates that even the name of the wholesome ten [pathways of action], 十善, is no longer heard, and their bad counterparts flourish, adding at T I 41a24 that people often engage in the ten bad/evil ones (= pathways of action), 眾生多修十惡. In a similar vein, MĀ 70 at T I 523a18 reports that those who follow the ten unwholesome pathways of action are highly esteemed, adding at T I 523a22 that even the word for wholesomeness completely disappears, let alone those who undertake the ten wholesome pathways of action, 都無有善名, 況復有行十善業道?

⁷² DN 26 at DN III 71,17, DĀ 6 at T I 41a13, and MĀ 70 at T I 523a13.

⁷³ DĀ 6 at T I 41a16.

⁷⁴ As pointed out by Schmithausen 1997: 24, “the breakdown of civilization and natural calamities (like drought) are considered to be caused by human immoral behaviour.” Another relevant passage, already noted by Schmithausen 1997: 69n163, is AN 4.70 at AN II 74,27, which has a parallel in EĀ 17.11 in the part of the discourse beginning at T II 586c20. The two versions agree in depicting how a lack of ethics penetrates from the higher ranks of government to the people, and this in turn—via affecting the sun, the moon, and the stars—results in storms and irregular rain, which disturbs the regular ripening of crops, as a result of which humans become short-lived. The general perspective that emerges in this way conveys the idea, as explained by de Silva 2000: 95, that “the world, including nature and mankind, stands or falls with the type of moral force at work. If immorality grips society, people and nature deteriorate; if morality reigns, the quality of human life and nature improves.”

⁷⁵ DN 26 at DN III 74,4: *mayam kho kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ samādānāhetu āyunā pi vaḍḍhāma, vaṇṇena pi vaḍḍhāma. yaṇ nūna mayam bhiyyosomattāya kusalam kareyyāma. yaṇ nūna mayam adinnādānā virameyyāma.* DĀ 6 at T I 41b13: 我等由少修善行, 不相殘害故, 壽命延長至二十歲。今者寧可更增少善, 當修何善? 已不殺生, 當不竊盜。MĀ 70 at T I 523b19: 若求學善者, 壽便轉增, 形色轉好。我等應共更增行善。云何當共更增行善? 我等已共離殺, 斷殺; 然故共行不與而取。我等寧可離不與取, 斷不與取; 我等應共行是善法。

⁷⁶ DN 26 at DN III 75,7 lists desire, *icchā*, hunger, *anasana*, and aging, *jarā*; DĀ 6 at T I 41c23 lists cold, 寒, heat, 熱, hunger, 飢, thirst, 渴, defecation, 大便, urination, 小便, desire, 欲, gluttony, 饕餮, and aging, 老; MĀ 70 at T I 524b28 lists cold, 寒, heat, 熱, defecation and urination, 大小便, desire, 欲, lack of food, 不食, and aging, 老。

Descriptions of Akṣobhya's Buddhafield also thematize the absence of diseases and afflictions,⁷⁷ and make it quite clear that in this Buddhafield there are simply no evildoers or evildoing.⁷⁸

Pointing out the above patterns is not meant to promote a monocausal perspective, as the description of Akṣobhya's realm must be the result of multiple influences. Kwan (1985: 70 and 78) notes that the Discourse on Akṣobhya's Buddhafield (阿閼佛國經) explicitly refers to Uttarakuru and to the Heaven of the Thirty-three to illustrate aspects of its conditions, such as the absence of kings or the spontaneous manifestation of food.⁷⁹ This makes it reasonable to assume that descriptions of Uttarakuru and of the Heaven of the Thirty-three would have influenced the depiction of living conditions in this Buddhafield. The important contribution made by the three *Āgama* discourses under discussion, however, appears to be that their presentation testifies to the idea of relating intentionally undertaken wholesome actions to agreeable environmental conditions. With that notion in place, it would not take that much for the idea to arise that Akṣobhya undertook certain intentional actions as a bodhisattva that resulted in his Buddhafield coming to be endowed with superb living conditions.

Conclusion

With this much I have completed my survey of relevant passages from *Āgama* literature as a background to exploring the **Pratyutpannasamādhī-sūtra* in the other of the present set of two articles. By way of summarizing what I believe has emerged thus far, in addition to the meditative cultivation of recollection of the Buddha, another significant tributary to the majestic river that will form the main topic of the remainder of my study appears to be actual meditative encounters with Śākyamuni. Of particular relevance seems to be the indication, evident in Śākyamuni's pre-awakening visions of celestials, that supernormal abilities in this respect need not invariably rely on the divine eye and its requirements of high levels of concentrative mastery. This indication, together with a particular instance in the form of teachings Mahāmaudgalyāyana receives from Śākyamuni, who is staying at a distant location, appears to present significant similarities to central features of the meditative practice described in the **Pratyutpannasamādhī-sūtra*.

A multiplication of Śākyamuni seems to have proceeded from the temporal axis, by way of listing Buddhas of the past, and eventually also one of the future, to a spatial axis. This appears to have been facilitated by a stricture on the impossibility of the co-existence of more than one Buddha at the same time, according to which this applies just to a single world system.

^{77.} The absence of any disease finds mention in the Gāndhārī manuscript from the Bajaur Collection, Strauch 2010: 51, part 5 recto 17: *teṣa maṇuṣaṇa sar[va]galaṇo paḍipraśadha bhaviṣati*. T 313 at T XI 755c13 offers the following relevant indication: 其佛刹無有三病. 何等為三? 一者風, 二者寒, 三者氣. The temperate climate also comes up in T 313 at T XI 756a27: 其佛刹亦不大寒, 亦不大熱.

^{78.} T 313 at T XI 757b25: 其刹無有行惡者 and T XI 757c10: 其刹無有惡者.

^{79.} T 313 at T XI 756a9: 譬如鬱單越 (or 鬱單曰 according to a 宋, 元, 明, and 宮 variant), 天下人民無有王治, 如是 ... 佛刹無有王 and T XI 755c22: 譬如, 舍利弗, 忉利天人隨所念, 食即自然在前. 如是, 其刹人民隨所念欲, 得何食即自然在前; see also T XI 756a12. In relation to one particular episode in the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*, Harrison 1998: 561f refers to “a longstanding tendency to cannibalise traditional Buddhist (and Indian) accounts of the heavens of this world-system for parts with which to build up a picture of Sukhāvatī.” Jenkins 2022: 389 notes: “Pure lands, like Sukhāvatī and Abhirati, are explicitly modeled on heaven realms, even their seven-jeweled airborne palaces, foods, and clothes.”

Several aspects relevant to the evolution of the notion of Buddhafields can be identified among Pāli texts, and the *Apadāna* testifies to the recognition of multiple Buddhas existing at present in different Buddhafields as a dimension of ‘canonical’ Theravāda. A tale related in some reciter traditions to the appearance of the future Buddha Maitreya provides clear indications that ethical conduct and its opposite were believed to have repercussions on the condition of the environment. With this much in place, it seems possible to envisage a gradual emergence of the idea that particular types of restraint observed by an exceptional bodhisattva, such as Akṣobhya, will ensure superb living conditions in his Buddhafield.

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Āṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Ap	<i>Apadāna</i>
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dirgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
Kv	<i>Kathāvatthu</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>
P	Peking edition
Pj I	<i>Paramatthajotikā</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ ²	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
SHT	Sanskriithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>
T	Taishō edition (Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association)
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Up	<i>Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

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