

Relatives and Disciples of the Buddha
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[02]

GREAT MALE DISCIPLES - Part A

Upatissa (Sariputta) and Kolita (Moggallana)

At the time of the Buddha, in a village called Upatissa, there lived a well-known Brahmin family. The father, Vanganta, and mother, who was named Rupasari, had a beautiful baby boy whom they named Upatissa, after the village in which they lived. On the very same day, in the village known as Kolita, a Brahmin woman named Moggali gave birth to a son whom they named Kolita, after the village in which they lived. The two families were well-known to each other and the two boys, Upatissa and Kolita, were best friends.

Both families were wealthy and well respected. As was the custom at the time, each of the young men had a retinue of 500 companions. Upatissa travelled in luxury by palanquin while Kolita travelled by carriage. Both youths led a life of pleasure and luxury.

One day Upatissa and Kolita, together with their companions, decided to attend a festival known as the Hilltop Festival, which included dance, music and drama. At first they enjoyed the festivities and joined in the merrymaking. However, on the third day, reflecting on the fleeting nature of sense pleasures, Upatissa and Kolita decided to give up their wealth and luxuries and take to the holy life of ascetics. At about the same time that Upatissa and Kolita gave up sense pleasures, Prince Siddhattha married Princess Yasodhara.

On hearing of their renunciation some of their companions joined them. Upatissa and Kolita decided to study under the well-known Ascetic Sanjaya. Before long they had learned everything that Sanjaya could teach. Realizing that they had not found the truth they were seeking, Upatissa and Kolita decided to seek other teachers and learn their doctrine in search of the Truth. The friends parted after deciding that they would come back and teach the other, if either of them realized the enlightenment they were seeking.

Upatissa was still searching for a teacher when he saw a monk seeking alms for his noonday meal. The serenity and bearing of the monk impressed Upatissa. Thinking that he should not disturb the monk until after his meal, Upatissa followed him back to the forest grove where he dwelled. He then asked the monk under whom he had studied and if he could teach the doctrine of his master. The monk who impressed Upatissa was none other than Assaji, one of the first five disciples of the Buddha. Assaji informed Upatissa that he was himself a new disciple of the fully enlightened Buddha. He said that he would teach the Master's doctrine, but that being new to the doctrine he would have to be brief.

Upatissa requested that he teach whatever he knew. Assaji then said:

*"Of those things that arise from a cause
The Tathagata (Buddha) has told the cause
And also what their cessation is.
This is the Doctrine of the Buddha."*

On hearing the first two lines of these four lines the spiritually advanced Upatissa attained the first stage of sainthood, Sottapanna. After inquiring as to where the Buddha dwelt he then went back to inform Kolita that he had found the Master who would show them the path to deliverance.

The moment that Kolita saw his friend he knew that Upatissa had found the path to deliverance. There was a radiance in his friend that had not been there before. Upatissa confirmed that a Fully Enlightened Being had been born on earth for the benefit of men and Devas. He then explained about His meeting with Assaji and repeated the four lines he had heard. On hearing the four lines Kolita too attained Sotapanna.

Kolita was now anxious to meet the Master. However, Upatissa suggested that they should first go back and inform Sanjaya that a Fully Enlightened Being had appeared so that he too

could benefit by the Doctrine. The two friends went back and informed Sanjaya.

Sanjaya, however, did not want to go back to being a student. He had a large retinue and was a respected teacher. Blinded by vanity and ignorance he disregarded the pleas of his former students. Sanjaya realized the wisdom of the Buddha and he acknowledged the supremacy of the Buddha. He asked, "Are there more wise men or fools on this earth?" When Upatissa replied that there were more fools than the wise Sanjaya said, "Then let the wise go to the Buddha. Let the fools come to me."

Upatissa and Kolita left Sanjaya and set off towards Rajagaha, where the Buddha was residing in the bamboo grove. About half of Sanjaya's pupils decided that they would join Upatissa and Kolita and follow the Doctrine of the Buddha. The text says that Sanjaya was so upset at seeing his retinue dwindle that he was stricken with illness and vomited hot blood.

Upatissa and Kolita approached the Buddha and requested permission to be ordained. The Buddha ordained the two and preached the Dhamma. On hearing the Dhamma all of their retinue attained Arahantship and joined the order. It took Kolita a week with further instruction from the Buddha and Upatissa two weeks of concentrated effort to realize the Truth. After ordination Upatissa was known as Sariputta and Kolita as Moggallana.

The Buddha then appointed Sariputta as His first chief disciple and Moggallana as His second chief disciple. The roles of the chief disciples are very important. They helped the Buddha with His growing congregation and had three main functions to perform as follows:

- To help the Buddha in the consolidation and teaching of the Dhamma for the benefit of men and Divine beings.
- To be a role model for the Sangha (monks and nuns).
- To supervise the training and administration of the Sangha.

When Sariputta and Moggallana were appointed as the chief disciples there arose a dispute among the Sangha. Even though the Noble Order was young, the Buddha had many Arahants in His retinue of monks. The five monks who were His first pupils – Kondanna, Bhadhiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji, Yasa and his fifty-four friends, the three Kassapa brothers, and many others who were senior to Sariputta and Moggallana. Why had the

Buddha not selected one of them? The Buddha then explained that He had not selected His chief disciples. All that He had done was to appoint the persons who had many aeons ago aspired to these positions and worked tirelessly, performing meritorious deeds, to fulfil their aspiration. The fruits of their labour were being fulfilled under His order.

And so we go back 100,000 world cycles and one incalculable period in time to the era of the Buddha Anomadassi, the 18th Buddha prior to the Gotama Buddha. Sariputta at that time was known as Sarada, and Moggallana as Sirivaddhana. Sarada, unsatisfied with his luxurious life of wealth and pleasures, had adopted the life of an ascetic. Inspired by the radiance of the Anomadassi Buddha, he had prepared a canopy of fragrant flowers which he held above the Buddha to form a fragrant arbour. The Anomadassi Buddha, accompanied by His chief disciples, Nisabha and Anoma, attained a higher meditative stage, which He retained for a week. Sarada was so inspired by the Anomadassi Buddha that he remained thus, holding the fragrant canopy, so as not to disturb the Buddha. The Buddha Anomadassi, seeing the merit of Sarada and desiring to inspire Sarada to further heights, instructed Nisabha to dispense the Dhamma to Sarada and the devotees who were present. So inspiring were the Dhamma and the deportment of the chief disciple that Sarada paid homage to the Buddha Anomadassi and aspired to be the first chief disciple of a future Buddha. The Buddha Anomadassi looked into the future and seeing that his aspiration would be fulfilled, prophesied that 100,000 world cycles and one infinite period into the future, Sarada would be the first chief disciple, by the name of Sariputta, of the Gotama Buddha.

Sarada then urged his friend to perform meritorious deeds and to aspire to be the second chief disciple of the Gotama Buddha. Inspired by his friend, Sirivaddhana built an alms hall, provided meals and robes to the Anomadassi Buddha and His retinue of 100,000 monks and aspired to be the second chief disciple of the Gotama Buddha. The Anomadassi Buddha, seeing that Sirivaddhana's aspiration would be fulfilled, prophesied that he would be the second chief disciple, named Moggallana, of the Gotama Buddha.

The knowledge, wisdom and abilities of the Buddha were incomparable. There was no one in the Sangha who could take His place or substitute for the Teacher. However, the combined qualities of the two chief disciples complemented those of the Buddha. Sariputta, who was foremost in wisdom, was steady and focussed his energies on leading as many persons as possible to the first stage of sainthood, Sotapanna (also known as stream enterer). This was because once they had entered this stage they would move forward and reach the other stages within seven more births. There was no longer the danger of their falling back or obtaining

birth in an unhappy realm. Sariputta felt that he should place as many persons as possible in the Path. Moggallana, the more aggressive of the two, was foremost in psychic powers. Feeling that even one more rebirth was one too many, Moggallana concentrated his efforts on taking the devotees from Sotapanna to Arahantship. The two friends continued to work together as one, each drawing on the strengths of the other, for the betterment of men and gods.

The Buddha had the deepest respect and regard for His chief disciples and used them as an example for His monks. He encouraged His monks to associate with and emulate the chief disciples by saying:

*"Associate, O monks, Sariputta and Moggallana
and keep company with them.
They are wise bhikkhus
and helpers of their fellow monks..."*

6. Sariputta

Sariputta was the first (right) chief disciple of the Buddha and foremost in wisdom. His special task was the detailed analysis and systematisation of the doctrine. Because of his deep insight of the ultimate Truth he was responsible for drawing out the subtle implications of the Dhamma and for explaining the meaning of complex teachings.

In addition to his wisdom, Sariputta was well-known for his patience, compassion, humility and helpfulness to others. Not only did he help the community and the monks in the Dhamma, but he also provided material help and comfort. When the monks left for their alms round early in the morning Sariputta did not join them. Instead, he stayed in the monastery and made sure that everything was in order. If one of the novice monks had forgotten to sweep out a room or if any item was disarranged Sariputta put it in place and swept the premises. He wanted to ensure that the monastery should at all times be in order so that visiting devotees would not have a negative impression of the Order.

Sariputta's Caring

He then visited the sick hall and provided comfort and medicine for the monks who were sick. Tending a sick monk named Tissa that everyone had rejected, the Buddha had said, "Those

that tend the sick tend me (follow my teachings)." Sariputta, reminding the monks of this, encouraged the novice monks to help with the caring and comforting of the sick. If any of them required medicine that was not available on site, he arranged for it to be obtained. It was only after such duties were taken care of that Sariputta went on his alms round.

There are many documented instances of Sariputta's ministering to the sick. His instruction and comfort to Anathapindika are noteworthy. Sariputta helped Anathapindika on two occasions. The first was when he was sick and in excruciating pain. Sariputta had reminded Anathapindika that he was a Sotapanna and as such on the path to enlightenment. He could not fall away from the Dhamma or obtain rebirth in one of the unhappy plains. These words relaxed Anathapindika's mind and gave him great happiness. The excruciating pain disappeared. So grateful was Anathapindika to Sariputta that he offered him the rich meal that had been prepared by his servants to tempt him to eat.

The second instance was at Anathapindika's deathbed. Anathapindika, who had a lot of confidence in Sariputta and respect for him had requested his presence 'out of compassion for him'. Sariputta, accompanied by Ananda, had come and given an inspiring sermon on non-attachment. Anathapindika was moved to tears by the profound discourse, the likes of which he had never heard before. Shortly after, Anathapindika died and was reborn in the Tusita heaven as a Deva. That night he came in splendour to Jetavana to praise the glory of the chief disciple. Saluting the Buddha, he said:

*"Sariputta truly is endowed with wisdom
With virtue and with inner peace,
Even a monk that has gone beyond
At best can only equal him."*

The next morning the Buddha told His monks of His visitor and what he had said, without identifying the Deva. Ananda immediately identified Anathapindika correctly by saying that the Deva must be Anathapindika, reborn as a Deva, as he had great respect for and confidence in Sariputta.

Sariputta's Humility

Sariputta's humility is also documented in the text. When travelling with the Buddha he did not feel that as the first chief disciple his place should be next to the Buddha. Instead, he

trailed behind, helping the sick and infirm monks who usually lagged behind. In fact, because of his immense compassion and caring, on one such instance Sariputta was the last to arrive. As all the good accommodation had been taken, Sariputta slept in a tent made of robes. When this was brought to the Buddha's attention He said that accommodation should be arranged based on seniority in the order and dispensed the Tittira Jataka, where in a previous birth the Buddha and His chief disciples had similarly decided that the three of them would pay homage and obeisance to the most senior member.

On another occasion a seven-year-old novice monk brought to Sariputta's attention the fact that his inner robe dragged below his outer robe. Moving aside, Sariputta adjusted his robe, then saluted the young monk and asked, "Now is it correct, teacher?" The Milindapanha documents Sariputta's account of this incident as follows:

*"If one who has gone forth this day, at age seven
Should teach me, I accept it with lowered head;
At sight of him I show my zeal and respect:
May I always set him in the teacher's place."*

Sariputta's respect for his teacher Assaji who first taught him the Dhamma is an example that all should follow. Each night before sleeping Sariputta would pay obeisance to the Buddha. Then he would look around, prostrate himself and worship a direction. Observing this, the monks informed the Buddha that Sariputta had taken to worshipping the different directions (north, south, east and west). The Buddha corrected their assumption by saying that each night Sariputta looked with his divine eye to see in which direction his first teacher, Assaji, was residing. Then, after paying obeisance to him, he slept placing his head in that direction, careful to ensure that his feet were not in the direction in which Assaji was residing.

The honouring of one's teachers is an integral part of the Buddha's teaching. The Nava Sutta instructs that one should honour one's teacher, especially those who teach the nectar of the Dhamma. The Sutta starts as follows:

*"As the Devas pay devout homage to Indra¹,
So should one revere the person
Through whom one has learnt the Dhamma."*

Sariputta's Patience

Sariputta's patience and forbearance are also legendary. A group of men were praising the noble qualities of the elder when a young Brahmin challenged them saying that the reason Sariputta had never shown anger was because he had never been provoked. To prove that Sariputta, like others, would resort to anger, he walked up behind the elder and dealt him a resounding blow. Sariputta said 'What was that?' and then, without even turning around to find out who had hit him, continued walking. The Brahmin was overcome with guilt and shame at his conduct. Falling on his knees he begged pardon and told Sariputta how he had hit him to provoke anger. Sariputta then forgave the Brahmin. The Brahmin, not satisfied with a verbal pardon, asked Sariputta to come to his home for the noonday meal to show that he bore no malice towards him. Sariputta accepted the invitation.

After the meal, as Sariputta was leaving, he saw that a mob of angry supporters had gathered with sticks and stones to punish the Brahmin. They had witnessed the Brahmin's treatment of the elder whom they loved and respected. Sariputta asked them what the commotion was about. When informed he asked, 'Whom did the Brahmin strike, you or me?' On being told that it was the Elder whom the Brahmin had struck he dispersed the angry crowd by saying, "I have pardoned him. What cause is there for anger when I whom he struck feel none."

Sariputta's caring, compassion and humility won him many friends. He was the chief disciple of the Buddha, second in wisdom to the Buddha. But he was humble, caring and compassionate. He also did not in any way use his position for special treatment. In addition to his close friendship with Moggallana, his childhood friend, he had a close relationship with Ananda, the Buddha's personal attendant.

Sariputta, who felt that as Chief disciple he should be attending to the needs of the Buddha, was deeply grateful for the respect, care and attention that Ananda lavished on the Buddha. In turn, Ananda was deeply respectful of the chief disciple of the Buddha who helped to administer and train the Buddha's large following. When Ananda gave ordination to novice monks he took them to Sariputta for higher ordination. Similarly when Sariputta gave ordination to novice monks he took them to Ananda for higher ordination. In this way the two great elders shared a large congregation of monks.

Ananda also, with the Buddha's permission, often kept choice robes that he received for Sariputta. In the same manner, Sariputta passed on to Ananda choice offerings that had been made to him. Once Ananda received a very expensive robe from a wealthy Brahmin and, with the Buddha's permission, kept it for ten days for Sariputta's return. The other monks

commented on this deep friendship, saying, "We can understand Ananda, who has not as yet attained Arahantship, feeling such deep affection for Sariputta, but how is it that Sariputta, who is free of taints, should reciprocate?" The answer, of course, was that Sariputta's attachment was not a worldly attachment but a love and respect for Ananda's virtues. It is also because Arahants have not eradicated samsaric virtues (vasana gune). It is only the Buddha who has eradicated vasana gune.

Sariputta must have been a stimulating companion for he was sought after by many. What attracted people to him was his deep caring for others, his enormous patience and his exemplary behaviour. When Sariputta entered the meditative stage on the void, even the Devas came to pay homage to him. The following is Maha Kassapa's praise of the elder:

*"These many Devas, powerful and glorious,
Ten thousand (Devas), from Brahma's company,
Stand with joined hands worshipping him,
Sariputta, wise marshal of the Dhamma,
The great meditator in concentration.
"Homage to you, O thoroughbred man,
Homage to you, O supreme man..."*
-- (Theragatha 1082-1084)

Despite the fact that he had a large following and was well-respected, Sariputta had difficulties convincing his mother, Rupasari, of the Truth, as she had been taught from birth the doctrine of the Brahmins. Sariputta had three brothers, Cunda, Upasena and Revata, and three sisters, Cala, Upacala and Sisupacala. All six took ordination under the Buddha and attained Arahantship. Cunda was in later years Sariputta's attendant. Despite the fact that Rupasari had such distinguished children in the Order, she herself was a non-believer, deeply set in Brahmin rites and rituals. In fact, she had not wanted her youngest son, Revata, to be ordained, and had planned a marriage for him at a very young age to prevent him from entering the order. However, on his wedding day, when Revata viewed the very old grandmother of his bride-to-be, he became disillusioned and, realizing the impermanence of all things, ran away from the wedding to the monastery to be ordained. His three sisters married, but gave up the household life and became nuns. Their children too entered the order.

None of her children or grandchildren, however, could influence Rupasari. When Sariputta visited the city of his birth with a large gathering of monks, he came to his mother's house for alms. His mother, whilst offering them food, insulted him in front of all the monks by berating him. She said, "O you, eater of others' leavings. When you fail to get food you go from house to house among strangers, licking the leavings from the back of their ladles. And so it was for this that you gave up eighty crores of wealth. You have ruined me. Now go on and eat." She then went on to berate the monks for having her younger son as an attendant by saying, "So you are the men who have made my younger son your page boy". Sariputta, however, did not say a word. He took his food in silence and returned to the monastery.

Rahula, who had been among the retinue of monks, related this incident to the Buddha. Thereupon the Buddha praised Sariputta in front of the assembly of monks by saying:

*"He that is free from anger,
Who performs his duties faithfully,
He that guards the precepts and is free from lust,
He that has subdued himself,
He that wears his last body -
He it is I call a Brahmin (Arahanth).
-- (Dhammapada 400)*

We can all learn from Sariputta's great patience, forbearance and humility. The Buddha has instructed us on the respect we should have for our mothers. Sariputta's exemplary behaviour is one that we should all follow.

Sariputta's Enlightenment

Sariputta attained supreme knowledge whilst listening to a discourse that the Buddha was addressing to Dighanakha, Sariputta's nephew. The Buddha was teaching the comprehension of feeling and began by explaining the nature of the body. He then asked Dighanakha to contemplate the body so that desire and concern for the body should be abandoned. He then went on to explain the impermanence of all feeling and the doctrine of dependent arising. Sariputta, who was fanning the Buddha, listened to the discourse and describes his attainment of Arahanthship as follows:

*"The Blessed One, The Buddha, The One with Vision,
Was teaching the Dhamma to another.
Whilst the Dhamma was being taught,
I lent an ear keen on the goal.
That listening of mine was not in vain,
For I am released free from cankers."
-- (Theragatha 995-996)*

The Buddha repeatedly praised and reinforced Sariputta's administration and handling of the monks. There is, however, one occasion on which the Buddha mildly admonished Sariputta. Sariputta had taught the Brahmin Dhananjani at his deathbed and ensured rebirth in a Brahma realm by teaching him about the four Brahma Vihara: Metta (loving-kindness), Karuna (compassion), Mudita (sympathetic joy) and Upekkha (equanimity). The Buddha questioned him as to why he had not taught Dhananjani further and helped him to destroy all cankers and attain Nibbana. Sariputta, unlike the Buddha, did not have the ability to know the spiritual capabilities of a person. As Dhananjani was a Brahmin he had ensured that his goal, which was birth in the Brahma realm, was met. The Buddha explained that as a result Dhananjani would need to obtain birth again in the human realm to achieve Arahantship. This shows that rebirth, even in a Brahma realm, is not desirable, as one who has not attained Sotapanna could in a subsequent birth perform an unwholesome deed that could lead to rebirth in an unhappy realm. The Buddha had seen that Dhananjani would have been capable of attaining Arahantship with some well-directed instruction.

Sariputta's Last Days

When Sariputta's life was nearing its end he decided that it was time to convince his mother of the Truth and place her on the Buddha's Path. Sariputta knew that he had to first open her mind so that she would be receptive to the Buddha's Teaching. He also knew that the only way that could be done was by shaking the confidence she had in Maha Brahma. Knowing that the Brahmas, including Maha Brahma, had great regard for him, he decided to go to his birthplace to pass away on the same bed in which he had been born. But first he had to take leave of the Buddha. With his retinue of monks he visited the Buddha and saluted Him respectfully. He then said:

*"Lord of the world, O Great Sage,
I soon shall be released from life,*

*Going and coming shall be no more.
This is the last time I worship you,
Short is the life that now remains in me
But seven days from now I shall lay
This body down, throwing the burden off.
Grant it, O Master! Give permission, Lord!
At last the time has come for my Nibbana
Now I have relinquished the will to live.*

The Buddha then asked Sariputta where he would attain final Nibbana. Sariputta replied that it would be in the Magadha country, in the village named Nalaka (Upatissa). The Buddha then asked Sariputta to dispense the Dhamma to his younger and elder brothers, as they would no longer have the opportunity to see a Bhikkhu like him.

The great elder then gave a discourse in which he displayed all his wondrous powers. Rising to the loftiest height of truth descending to mundane truth, rising again and again, he expounded the Dhamma directly and with similes.

He then worshipped the feet of the Buddha, embraced them and said: "So that I may worship at these feet I fulfilled the perfections throughout an incalculable period and one hundred thousand world cycles. My heart's wish has found fulfilment. From now on there will be no more contact and feeling. Soon I will enter the City of Nibbana the unaging, peaceful, blissful and secure, which has been attained by many hundreds of thousands of Buddhas. If any deed or words of mine did not please you, O Lord, may the Blessed One forgive me. It is now time for me to go."

The Buddha then forgave Sariputta by saying, "There is nothing either by deed or words that I have to reproach you, Sariputta, for you are learned, of great wisdom, of broad and bright wisdom, of quick, keen and penetrative wisdom."

Immediately after the Buddha gave permission for Sariputta to attain Nibbana the great Earth shook and the skies tore open with a deluge of rain as if the very heavens were crying for the passing away of the great elder. The Buddha then rose and went to His perfumed chamber. Three times Sariputta circumambulated the chamber and paid reverence, and said: "It was one incalculable period and one hundred thousand world cycles ago that I prostrated myself at the feet of the Anomadassi Buddha and made the aspiration to see you. This aspiration has now

been fulfilled and I have seen you. At the first meeting it was my first sighting of you. This is my last. There will be none in the future." And with raised hands joined in salutation, he revered the Buddha and walked backwards until the Blessed One was out of sight.

The Blessed One then addressed the Bhikkhus who surrounded Him and asked them to accompany Sariputta on his last journey. At His words all four assemblies at Jetavana left the Master alone and accompanied the great elder. The citizens of Savatthi also joined in with incense and fragrant flowers. A multitude of weeping and lamenting devotees followed the elder. Sariputta then addressed the devotees and reminded them of the impermanence of all things. "Have I not, he said, taught you of the impermanence of all near and dear to us"? He then asked everyone to go back to Savatthi, as the Master was alone and should not be left unattended.

Accompanied by a retinue of five hundred monks whom he himself had ordained, Sariputta set off for his birthplace. It took them a week to travel to Nalaka and on the way he spent one night in each of the different cities, teaching the Dhamma with compassion to the devotees for the last time. Upon entering the city of his birth he sent a message through his nephew informing his mother that he and his retinue would be staying with her for a day, and asking her to prepare his birth chamber and residence for his 500 monks.

He then walked slowly to his childhood home. Rupasari was perplexed at her son's appearance. "I wonder," she thought, "if he has realized the error of his thinking in leaving all his wealth. Perhaps in his old age he has grown wiser and has come back to reclaim his wealth." She then went about preparing for her son and his retinue.

Sariputta approached his mother's house and entered the bedchamber where he had been born. But he was now in great pain and very sick with dysentery. He lay down to rest whilst his brother, the novice Cunda, attended to his needs.

The four leading Devas of the Catumaharajika Heaven, seeing that the Marshall of the Dhamma was about to pass away, descended in all Their radiance to pay obeisance to the Venerable elder. Shortly after, Sakka, the king of the Tavatimsa Heaven, illuminated the whole area and descended to earth, and kneeling before the elder, paid obeisance to the Venerable One. Finally, Maha Bahama, in His full radiance, descended to earth to pay His last respects and catch a last glimpse of the elder.

Rupasari approached her son and questioned him on his visitors. "Who were the four radiant beings", she asked, "who paid obeisance to you?" Sariputta replied, "The four great divine kings, upasika." "Are you then greater than them?" asked his mother. "They are like temple attendants", replied Sariputta. "Ever since our Master took rebirth they have been standing guard over Him, swords in hand."

His mother then questioned him on his next visitor who surpassed the four kings in radiance. "That", said Sariputta, "is Sakka, the king of the Devas." "Are you then greater than the king of the Devas, dear?" asked his mother. "He is like a novice who carries a Bhikkhu's belongings," replied Sariputta. "When our Master returns from the Tavatimasa Heaven, Sakka takes His bowl and extra robe and descends to earth with Him."

"And when Sakka had gone" asked his mother, "who was it who descended to your room, filling the room with his radiance?" "That," replied Sariputta, "is your Maha Brahma. The lord and master to whom you have been paying obeisance." "Are you then greater than my lord Maha Brahma?" asked his mother.

"Yes, Upasika," replied Sariputta, "on the day our master was born it is said that Maha Brahma received the Great Being in a golden net."

Upon hearing this the Brahmin woman thought, "How great must be the power and goodness of my son's Master," and she was suffused with happiness, joy and confidence in the Exalted One.

Sariputta, seeing that his mother was now ready to receive the teachings of the Buddha, explained to her the Dhamma based on the virtues of the Buddha. At the end of the discourse his mother attained the first stage of sainthood, Sotapanna. Enjoying the bliss of Sotapanna, she then asked him why during all these years he had not bestowed the ambrosia of the knowledge of the deathless on her. Sariputta realized that his end was imminent. Seeing that his mother was now on the Path to Emancipation, and that she would not fall away from the Path, Sariputta requested the presence of his retinue of monks.

When the monks had assembled he asked Cunda to help him to a sitting position. And addressing the monks, he said, "For forty-five years I have lived and travelled with you. If by deed or word I caused you pain, forgive me, brethren."

And the monks replied that he had never given any cause for displeasure or pain and in turn asked Sariputta for forgiveness for any wrong they may have done. Then the elder, pulling his robe around him, lay on his right side and entered into the nine successive attainments of meditation in forward and reverse order, then passed through the four absorptions, and just as the crest of the sun was rising, at early dawn passed away to final Nibbana.

Next morning when his mother found that he had passed away she lamented at the missed opportunity to perform meritorious deeds for her son. And thus lamenting and crying at her own former folly spent the morning, for even as a Sotapanna she still had not eradicated all attachments.

After a week of ceremonies and homage a funeral pyre was built of sandalwood with rich arches of gold to cremate the elder. News of the elder's death spread and people from all over came to pay homage and their last respects to the Marshal of the Dhamma. Throughout the night the devotees listened to discourses of the Dhamma until finally Venerable Anuruddha extinguished the glowing embers with scented water and, using a filter cloth, sifted the relics of the elder.

When Cunda, Sariputta's attendant, informed Ananda that Sariputta had passed away and handed him his master's robe and bowl, Ananda became weak and pale with grief over his friend. He addressed the Buddha and said, "Lord, the novice Cunda has told me that Sariputta has passed away. Then, Lord, my own body became weak as a creeper; everything around me became dim and things were no longer clear to me..."

The Buddha then questioned Ananda as to how this could be, as Sariputta had not taken any of Ananda's knowledge or virtue with him when he passed away. The Buddha then reminded Ananda of impermanence and of the fact that He had taught him that all near and dear to us would eventually pass away.

Sariputta's Contribution

Sariputta's enormous contribution as the Marshal of the Dhamma can be understood by his description of his attainment of the supreme knowledge and the Buddha's praise of the elder. Sariputta said:

*"It was half a month after my ordination, friends, that I realized in all their parts and details,
the analytical knowledge of meaning,
the analytical knowledge of the doctrine,
the analytical knowledge of language,
the analytical knowledge of perspicacity.*

These I expound in many ways, teach them and make them known, establish and reveal them, explain and clarify them. If anyone has any doubt or uncertainty, he may ask me and I shall explain the matter." (Anguttara Nikaya)

Sariputta, with this fourfold analytical knowledge, not only excelled in understanding the Dhamma, but also in teaching it so that others could understand. Because of his excellence in the Anupada Sutta, the Buddha declared him to be a true spiritual son and His chief assistant in "turning the Wheel of the Dhamma". The Buddha said:

"If one could ever say rightly of one that he has come to mastery and perfection in noble virtue, noble concentration, noble wisdom and noble liberation, it is of Sariputta that one could thus rightly declare.

If one could ever say rightly of one that he is the Blessed One's true son, born of His speech, born of the Dhamma, formed of the Dhamma, heir to the Dhamma (not heir to worldly benefit), it is of Sariputta that one could thus rightly declare.

After me, O monks, Sariputta rightly turns the Supreme Wheel of the Dhamma even as I have turned it."

There are many discourses and books attributed to Sariputta which form a comprehensive body of the Buddha's teaching. Sariputta understood in a unique way how to organize and present the rich and deep Dhamma in a lucid manner that was intellectually stimulating and inspirational. He was also responsible for the codification of the Abhidhamma that the Buddha taught in the Tavatimsa heaven to the Devas. Each day the Buddha would come back to earth to partake of His alms food and then would transmit this knowledge to Sariputta. Thus the giving of the method of the Higher Teachings was to the chief disciple who was endowed with the analytical knowledge, who then passed it on to the monks.

The Buddha's high regard for Sariputta is seen again and again. In one instance the Buddha compared Sariputta to a crown prince as follows:

"If he is endowed with five qualities, O monks, the eldest son of a world monarch righteously turns the wheel of sovereignty that has been turned by his father. And the wheel of sovereignty cannot be overturned by any hostile human being. What are the five qualities? The eldest son of a world monarch knows what is beneficial, knows the law, knows the right measure, knows the right time and knows the society (with which he has to deal).

Similarly, O monks, is Sariputta endowed with five qualities and rightly turns the Supreme Wheel of the Dhamma, even as I have turned it. And the Wheel of the Dhamma cannot be overturned by ascetics or priests, by deities or Brahma, nor by anyone else in the world. What are those five qualities? Sariputta, O monks, knows what is beneficial, knows the Dhamma, knows the right measures, knows the right time and knows the assembly (he is to address)."

Sariputta encouraged those in the Noble Order by his wisdom and gentle ways. He said:

*"Of restrained conduct, full of mindfulness,
Like a mindful one meditating with restrained intentions,
Vigilant, delighting in inward things,
With self well-concentrated,
Alone, content, him they call a Bhikkhu.
Whether eating moist or dried food,
He should be satisfied;
A Bhikkhu should wander with unfilled belly,
Eating in moderation, mindful.
Leaving four or five mouthfuls,
He should drink water;
This is sufficient for the abiding in comfort
Of a resolute Bhikkhu.
If he covers himself in the proper robe,
Which is for this purpose,
This is sufficient for the abiding in comfort
Of a resolute Bhikkhu.
Just as a rocky mountain is unmoving,*

*Well-founded, so a Bhikkhu,
Like a mountain does not tremble,
After the annihilation of delusion.
To a man who is without sin,
Always seeking purity,
A hair's tip measure of evil seems
As if the size of a cloud.
I do not long for death,
I do not long for life,
I shall lay down this body attentive
And mindful.
As a frontier city is guarded inside and out
So you should guard yourselves.
Let not the opportunity pass you by,
For those who have missed the opportunity
Grieve when consigned to hell.
Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation, Calm,
quiet, speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet,
speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet,
speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation,
Not conceited, he shakes off evil characteristics,
As the wind shakes off the leaves of a tree.
Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation, Calm,
quiet, speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet,
speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet,
speaking in moderation, Calm, quiet, speaking in moderation,
Not conceited, he plucks off evil characteristics
As the wind plucks off the leaves of a tree.
Calm, without grief, settled and undisturbed,
Of good virtue, He should put
An end to pain.
Desire for sensual pleasure,
Malevolence, sloth and torpor,
Conceit and uncertainty,
These are the five defilements of the mind for a Bhikkhu.*

*Meditating, persevering,
Having subtle insight into views,
Having delight in the annihilation of grasping,
Him they call a good man.
Even the great sea, the earth, a mountain and wind,
Are not applicable in simile,
To the Teacher's excellent release.
Keeping the wheel rolling,
Having great knowledge,
Concentrated, being like earth, water, fire,
The elder is not attached,
Is not opposed.
Having attained the perfection of wisdom,
Having great discernment and great thought,
Not dull (but) as though dull,
He always wanders, quenched.
The Teacher has been waited on by me,
The Buddha's Teaching has been done,
The heavy load has been put down,
That which leads to renewed existence has been rooted out.
-- (Theragatha 981-984, 1000 – 1002, 1005-1008, 1010, 1012-1016)*

Sariputta's great reputation long survived him. His great work still remains today, preserved and enshrined in some of the oldest books of Buddhism alongside the words of the Buddha.

7. Moggallana

Moggallana, who was the second (left) chief disciple of the Buddha, was instrumental in preserving, cultivating and enriching the Dhamma for future generations. He was also foremost in supernormal powers. Before long he came to be known as Maha Moggallana or "Moggallana the great", so as to distinguish him from other contemporaries with the same name.

There were many monks who were highly skilled in various supernormal powers. But they each mastered only one or two of the powers. Anuruddha and the nun Sakula possessed supernormal vision or the divine eye. The monk Sobhita and the nun Bhadda Kapilani could recollect many past births. Cula Panthaka was skilled in astral travel, while the monk Sagala mastered the element of fire and Pilindi Vaccha excelled in communications with divine beings. Maha Moggallana, however, mastered all of these supernormal powers in a comprehensive manner and as such surpassed in excellence these other monks and nuns. His powers were also stronger than those possessed by the nun Uppalavanna, who was foremost among the nuns in supernormal powers.

In general we limit our knowledge to that which we can experience with the five senses. Since we are limited by the capabilities of our sense organs, we tend to perceive our limited experiences as absolute. Therefore, with confidence we look into an empty room and say that there is nothing in the room though in fact the room is teeming with life forms so small that they cannot be seen with the naked eye. Similarly, there are many sounds that we cannot hear and smells we cannot detect. In fact, it is proven that the hearing and olfactory senses of a dog are far superior to those of a human being. Despite this fact, we restrict our experience and view the truth that is perceived as absolute due to the limitations of our sense organs. The universe as experienced by the wise is much larger, as they can tap into other sources of energy with their developed mind.

Through development of the four ways of power (iddhipada), Maha Moggallana was capable of a much wider experience in space and time. His knowledge transcended the limitations and boundaries of the normal mind. By developing his mind over an infinite period of time, Moggallana achieved supernormal powers that may seem like make-believe to modern man. Some of his powers and feats have been carefully documented and preserved to help future generations understand the full potential of the mind. There were six types of supernormal powers that Maha Moggallana had developed. They have been outlined briefly with some examples as documented in the texts.

(1). Penetration of others' minds and thought reading.

Moggallana, like the Buddha, had the ability to penetrate and read the minds of others and often helped the Buddha by using this trait. One night the Buddha sat in silence in front of an assembly of monks, observing each of the monks gathered in turn, without uttering a word.

When morning dawned the Buddha addressed the assembly and said that this assembly was impure, as there was among them a monk who was corrupt.

Moggallana surveyed the minds of each of the monks gathered and saw that one of the monks was corrupt. Approaching him he asked the monk to leave. The monk refused. Three times Moggallana requested that the monk leave the assembly. Each time the monk refused. Moggallana then led him out of the assembly and closed the door. Moggallana then asked the Buddha to recite the rules of monastic discipline (Patimokkha) as the assembly was now pure. The Buddha, observing that the assembly was pure, addressed the monks with a sermon on the Monastic Discipline.

The text also refers to an incident where Moggallana had penetrated the minds of 500 of his disciples and determined that they were all Arahants. The monk Vangisa, who was well-known for his poetic language, had immediately realized what had happened and praised Moggallana's ability to the Buddha as follows:

*"While the sage is seated on the mountain slope,
Gone beyond to the far shore of suffering,
His disciples sit in attendance on him,
Triple knowledge men who have left death behind.
Moggallana, great in spiritual powers,
Encompassed their minds with his own
And searching (he came to see) their minds.
Fully released, without attachment."*

(2). Ability to hear sounds that cannot be heard by persons - Divine Ear

One evening when Sariputta came to visit Moggallana, he observed such a serene and calm expression on his friend's face that he questioned Moggallana if he had dwelt in one of the peaceful abodes of mind. Moggallana informed Sariputta that this was not the case, that he had been engaged in a deep talk with the Exalted One. Sariputta then remarked that the Buddha was living in Savatthi while they themselves were many miles away in Rajagaha. He then asked if Moggallana had gone to the Buddha or if the Buddha had come to him. Moggallana said that neither had happened. They had, by using the divine eye and ear, engaged in a Dhamma talk on the mental faculty of energy. Sariputta, observing the supernatural powers of his friend, then proclaimed that so powerful were Moggallana's

supernatural powers that if he so wished, like the Buddha, he might be able to live through an entire aeon.

Moggallana also had the ability to hear the voices of divine beings and spirits. For example, a spirit had warned him of the impending danger to the Buddha by Devadatta, who was plotting to kill him. Moggallana also often visited the heavens and lower worlds and asked the beings that dwelt there about the actions that they had performed to obtain such birth. He then conveyed this information to his disciples to encourage them to perform wholesome deeds and refrain from unwholesome deeds.

(3). Ability to see things that cannot usually be seen by persons - Divine Eye

Moggallana often used his divine eye to perceive the whereabouts of the Buddha. He also used it to observe other beings. Once when Sariputta was seated deep in meditation Moggallana observed a demon pound his head. He then questioned his friend on how he was feeling. Sariputta replied that he had a slight headache resulting from the blow. Moggallana then praised his friend on his powers of concentration while Sariputta praised his friend on his ability to view the demon which he had not seen.

One such recorded incident occurred when Moggallana and the monk Lakkhana were descending Vulture's Peak. Moggallana, who had observed a peta (unhappy spirit) had smiled. Lakkhana, realizing that Moggallana had viewed something that he had not, questioned him. Moggallana agreed to give his answer when they were in the presence of the Buddha.

As they approached the Buddha, Lakkhana again questioned Moggallana as to why he had smiled. Moggallana replied that he had seen a spirit shaped like a huge snake engulfed in flames, screaming whilst being chased and pecked at by vultures. Moggallana had felt compassion for the suffering being and then relief in the knowledge that he himself would never in the future have such a birth, as this was his last birth. This relief had caused him to smile. Moggallana did not think that anyone would believe what he saw unless it was confirmed by the Buddha. He then went on to explain the kammic cause for such a birth. He said that in a former birth this spirit had been a farmer. He had a field, which he was ploughing close to where a Pacceka (silent) Buddha was residing. The townsfolk often crossed his field to visit the Pacceka Buddha. This upset the farmer and he tried all kinds of

methods to dissuade the people from crossing his field. The multitude of devotees, however, ignored his instructions and continued to walk over his field.

The farmer had then watched for an opportunity to observe the Pacceka Buddha leaving his residence, whereupon he had destroyed his belongings and burnt his shelter. The devotees were furious when they found out that the farmer had destroyed the Pacceka Buddha's shelter and belongings. They vented their anger on him by battering him to death. The farmer was reborn in the Avichi hell and after many thousands of years was reborn in Vulture's Peak as the snake ghost (peta) engulfed in flames.

The Buddha confirmed Moggallana's sighting and story by saying that He Himself had viewed the same spirit on the day He attained enlightenment.

Like the Buddha, Moggallana could also view the law of kamma in operation. He could see persons with unwholesome deeds being reborn in peta and asura realms and those with meritorious deeds being reborn in heavenly realms. The Petavatthu documents 51 incidents and the Vimanavatthu 85 incidents that Moggallana had observed and used to help teach his disciples the effects of one's wholesome and unwholesome intentional actions. In fact, with this ability, Moggallana drew many disciples of other teachers into the Noble Path. This resulted in many jealousies among other teachers who lost disciples.

(4). Ability to travel through space - Astral Travel

During the seventh rainy season the Buddha recited the Abhidhamma, the higher teachings, to the Devas in the Tavatimsa Heaven, for three months. Using astral travel, Moggallana visited the Buddha from time to time to inform Him of the progress of the Noble Order.

On another occasion when Moggallana was seeking the Buddha, he saw that the Buddha had visited a Brahma realm to shake the arrogance of a Brahma. A certain Brahma was under the false view that as Brahma he was above the Buddha and the Noble Order. The Buddha, seeing this and realizing the potential of this Brahma, appeared on his throne. Moggallana, seeing and realizing the Buddha's intention, joined Him and thus subdued the pride and arrogance of the Brahma. The subdued Brahma was ready to accept the supremacy of the Buddha and His Teachings.

Moggallana also used his ability of astral travel to help Sariputta when he was sick. The doctor had recommended a medicine made of lotus stalks, which were only available in the Himalayan mountains. Moggallana immediately travelled to the mountains and obtained the medicine required to cure his friend.

It was also Moggallana who brought the Ananda Bhodi to Savatthi from Buddha Gaya. Ananda asked the Buddha what could be done to help the many disappointed devotees who travelled to Savatthi to see the Buddha, only to find that He was away attending to another in distress. The Buddha asked for a sapling from the great Bodhi tree under which He had attained enlightenment to be planted in Savatthi. He then proclaimed that the Bodhi Tree would be a symbol of the Buddha that devotees could venerate in His absence. Moggallana, using his supernormal powers, travelled to Buddha Gaya and brought the sapling.

(5). Mastery of matter- Supernormal Locomotion

The text indicates many instances where, at the request of the Buddha, Moggallana used his supernormal powers to shake people out of their inaction and non diligence in the Dhamma. On one occasion the monks residing in the mansion of Migara's mother were negligent and slothful. The Buddha instructed Moggallana to instil confidence in them by performing a miracle. Moggallana shook the mansion by pushing it with his big toe. The monks, seeing the supernormal feat and recognizing the powers of Moggallana, went back to diligent practice and attained higher levels of spiritual development.

In another instance Moggallana observed that the King of the Heavens, Sakka, was being negligent and embroiled in sense pleasures. Travelling to Sakka's heavenly abode, Moggallana used his big toe to shake Sakka's mansion and thus reminded him of his mortality and the impermanence of all phenomenon. Sakka then went back to a more righteous way of life.

Once the Buddha and His retinue were going through great hardship as the rains were delayed and famine had set in. Moggallana offered to turn the earth so that the rich soil underneath would be brought up and crops harvested. The Buddha declined Moggallana's offer saying that many innocent creatures would be killed if such an act was performed as there were many small creatures that lived in the soil. Moggallana then offered to build a road by using his supernormal powers, between the city in which they were residing and another which was lush with vegetation. The Buddha again declined, saying that they would instead weather out

this famine, which would soon be over. These are the only documented instances where the Buddha declined a request made by Moggallana. In general, the Buddha, who had great confidence and respect for Moggallana, supported his decisions and requests.

(6). Transformation of form

The most famous and spectacular of Moggallana's powers was his ability to transform himself into other beings. The power struggle and ultimate defeat of the King Cobra NandopAnanda are well-known. The Visuddhimagga describes this battle as follows. On one occasion the Buddha, with a retinue of 500 Arahants, visited the Tavatimsa Heaven. In so doing they passed above and disturbed the divine royal snake, NandopAnanda. In anger he surrounded Mount Sineru with his massive coils and spread his huge hood so that the world below was enveloped in darkness. Several of the monks offered to subdue the enraged snake but the Buddha, realizing the powers of the divine serpent, chose Moggallana for the task. Moggallana then transformed himself into a huge snake and engaged NandopAnanda in a terrible battle. Drawing upon one power after another, appearing in various shapes, he overcame his opponent. In the last phase of the battle he assumed the form of Supanna, a celestial eagle, arch-enemy of the snake. At this point NandopAnanda retreated in defeat and Moggallana, resuming his form as a monk, brought the subdued NandopAnanda to the Buddha for an apology.

In the Jataka there are many references to Moggallana's past births. In many birth stories the Bodhisatta, Moggallana and Sariputta had been together as brothers, friends, ministers or disciples. There are also recorded instances of other past associations. The Jataka also brings to light the strong bond between Moggallana and Sariputta. For in many instances they were associated and close friends. In general, however, Sariputta was of a higher station than Moggallana though this is more apparent when they were both in animal births. In all, more than 30 instances of their past associations are recorded in the Jataka.

Moggallana's Enlightenment

Moggallana has left a legacy of his experiences in sixty-three verses, which are recorded in the Theragatha. The following emphasize his inwardly-directed efforts, his powers of meditation, his happiness at his friends' emancipation, His experience of the truth of no soul and of the supernatural, and his final deliverance.

*"Living in the forest, subsisting on alms food,
Delighting in the scraps that came into our bowl,
Let us tear apart the army of Death
Firmly concentrated within ourselves.
Living in the forest, subsisting of alms food,
Delighting in the scraps that came into our bowl,
Let us shatter the army of Death
As an elephant does a hut of reeds.
Then there was terror, then there was excitement,
When Sariputta, possessed of many qualities,
Had been quenched.
Truly the constituent elements are impermanent,
Subject to arising and passing away.
Having arisen, they cease,
Their quiescence is happiness.
Those who see the five elements of existence as other
And not as self,
Have pierced a subtle thing as a tip of hair
With an arrow.
Flashes of lightning fall upon the cleft
Of the mountains Vebhara and Pandava
But gone within the cleft he meditates,
The son of the peerless, Stable One.
Tranquil, still the sage resorts
To remote places for his lodgings,
A true heir of the supreme Buddha
He is venerated even by Brahma.
In but a moment I can create
Ten times a million bodies,
I am skilled in transformation,
I am the master of psychic powers.
A master of concentration and knowledge,
Moggallana, gone to perfection
A sage in the dispensation of the Detached One,
With concentrated faculties has cut off his bonds*

*As an elephant bursts a rotten creeper,
The Teacher has been served by me,
The Buddha's Teaching has been done,
The heavy burden has been dropped,
The conduit to becoming has been uprooted.
The goal has been attained by me,
For the sake of which I have gone forth,
From the home life into the homeless,
The destruction of all fetters."
-- (Theragatha 1146, 1147, 1158, 1160, 1167, 1168, 1182-1186)*

Moggallana's Last Days

Even though Moggallana had supernormal powers and was an Arahant he did not, unlike his friend Sariputta, have a peaceful death. Moggallana's ability to see into other realms and explain the operation of the law of kamma, together with his extraordinary teaching skills, made him very popular. Many disciples of other teachers were placed in the Buddha's Noble Path by Moggallana.

Ascetics of other sects, seeing their numbers dwindle, decided to kill Moggallana. Unwilling to perform the evil deed themselves for fear of exposure, they hired assassins to kill Moggallana. Moggallana was meditating in his hut in Black Rock on Mount Isigili on the outskirts of Rajagaha when they made the first attempt. Moggallana used his supernormal powers to escape unseen. The second time too the assassins found an empty hut. On the third attempt Moggallana's supernormal powers momentarily deserted him. The assassins battered and crushed his bones and left him for dead.

Moggallana, however, was the second chief disciple of the Buddha. He was not going to pass away without first paying homage to the Buddha and obtaining permission for his Parinibbana. Gathering his battered body with supreme effort, using astral travel, Moggallana went to where the Buddha was residing and asked permission to die. Then, as was the custom for the chief disciple, he dispensed the Dhamma to those in attendance, performed many miracles to give confidence to the multitude gathered, and passed away to Parinibbana. Moggallana passed away two weeks after his friend Sariputta, in the month of Kattika (October/November).

The monks and disciples were outraged at the untimely death of their beloved teacher. The king ordered an investigation into the murder and caught the assassins, who informed him that they had been hired by Niganthanatha ascetics. The king then had the ascetics tortured and killed, in keeping with the laws at that time for murderers.

The devotees also asked the Buddha why Maha Moggallana had come to such a painful death. The Buddha explained the law of kamma that even an Arahant could not avoid, and spoke of a grave crime that Moggallana had performed in a previous birth.

At the instigation of his wife, Moggallana had murdered both his parents, who were blind, by pounding them to death. His aged parents, who thought that they were being attacked by a band of robbers, implored their son, whom they loved, to save himself. Little did they know that it was their own son, who, in the guise of robbers, had committed this evil act. Moggallana suffered in hell for many thousands of years and had to die a violent death even as an Arahant, for killing one's parents is a grave (garuka) crime, the effects of which are not easily extinguished.

Moggallana's ability to teach and his supernormal powers assisted him in his role of training the Sangha and the multitude. It was also Moggallana who, together with his friend Sariputta, brought the errant monks back to the Buddha when Devadatta caused a schism in the Sangha. He also assisted in the consolidation of the Dhamma and the administration of the Sangha.

8. Ananda

Ananda was one of Prince Siddhattha's cousins. His father was Amitodana, a younger brother of King Suddhodana. As his birth brought a lot of happiness to his family he was named Ananda. He was born on the same day as Prince Siddhattha.

Ananda was ordained as a monk in the second year of the Buddha's ministry, when he was thirty-seven years old. Shortly after, hearing a sermon by the Ven. Punna Mantaniputta, he attained the first stage of sainthood, Sotapanna. When the Buddha was fifty-five years old, Ananda became His personal attendant.

The Buddha addressed the assembled monks and informed them that He had many attendants who had assisted him periodically but none of them had been able to fulfil their duties perfectly. "It is time" he said, "to have a reliable, trustworthy attendant." He then asked if any of the assembled monks would like to be His personal attendant. All the noble ones gathered immediately responded to His request by offering their services. Ananda, however, who dearly wished to be His attendant, modestly held back, thinking, "The Buddha would surely appoint me if I were the most suitable person." The Buddha, with His divine eye, observed that many eons ago Ananda had aspired to be a personal attendant of a Buddha, the fulfilment of which was to occur during His reign. Refusing the offers of the other monks, He turned to Ananda and offered the post to him.

Ananda agreed to accept the post if the Buddha would agree to eight conditions. Four of them related to the non-acceptance of gifts and favours from the Buddha. Ananda wanted to ensure that there would be no doubts cast that he had accepted this position in order to obtain material gain. The other four related to the performance of his duties while being mindful of his own advancement in the Noble Path. The Buddha agreed to Ananda's requests.

The fact that Ananda felt comfortable in asking the Buddha, whom he loved and respected and to whom he was loyal, for a conditional acceptance, illustrates the relationship between the Buddha and His monks and the manner in which the Buddha ran His ministry. The Buddha was the undisputed leader. But there was no fear under His reign. Monks felt free to voice their opinion and to question the Buddha at will.

In truth, the term personal attendant does not convey all the duties and responsibilities carried out by Ananda. In addition to taking care of all the Buddha's personal needs Ananda was an executive assistant to the Buddha and helped in the management of His large retinue of monks, nuns and devotees. He also had the unique advantage of hearing most of the Buddha's discourses and because of his unusually retentive memory, was declared the Guardian of the Dhamma.

To attain the position of personal attendant of a Buddha, one needs to aspire to the position and perform many meritorious deeds over a period of 100,000 world cycles. Ananda made this aspiration 100,000 world cycles ago, at the time of the Buddha Padumuttara. At that time he was born as Sumana, the younger half-brother of the Bodhisatta Gotama (known at that time by the name Jatila). He provided the requisites during the three months of the rainy season to the Padumuttara Buddha and His retinue of 100,000 monks. He then aspired to be

the personal attendant of a future Buddha. The Buddha Padumuttara looked into the future and saw that this aspiration would be fulfilled. He informed Ananda that in 100,000 world cycles he would be the personal attendant of the Buddha Gotama. From this time onwards Ananda continued to perform meritorious deeds to fulfil his aspiration.

In addition to being the Guardian of the Dhamma, Ananda was well-known for two other important events that he initiated. They were the planting of the Ananda Bodhi and the founding of the order of the nuns.

Many persons came to Jetavana to pay homage to the Buddha and to learn His teachings. Sometimes when they came, the Buddha was away helping a person in distress. As many had travelled long distances to see Him and were disappointed, Ananda asked the Buddha what could be done to help these disappointed devotees.

The Buddha then asked Ananda to bring a sapling from the Bodhi Tree in Buddha Gaya and plant it in Jetavana. He then said: "In my absence, let my devotees pay homage to the great Bodhi Tree that gave me protection during enlightenment. Let the Bodhi Tree be a symbol of my presence. Those who honour the Bodhi Tree would in essence be honouring and paying homage to me."

Ever since that time, Buddhists from all over the world have venerated the Bodhi Tree as they would the Buddha, with scented water, flowers and incense. Many uninformed persons have misunderstood this symbolic action by saying that Buddhists worship trees. The Buddha statue, the Bodhi Tree, the relics of the Buddha, are but symbols of the Buddha that people use to focus the mind on the compassionate and serene qualities of the Buddha. The veneration of the Buddha provides the tranquillity and peace of mind that many people cannot readily acquire to meditate, study, and listen to His teachings.

It was at Ananda's request, on behalf of Maha Pajapati, that the Buddha instituted the order of the nuns. The Buddha had initially refused Maha Pajapati Gotami's request to be ordained. It was after Ananda's question as to whether women were incapable of reaching spiritual heights and the Buddha's reply that women were as capable as men of reaching spiritual heights, that the Buddha had agreed to the formation of the order of the nuns. As such, women had a special regard and respect for Ananda. This, together with his pleasing nature, made Ananda very popular. It is said that there were none who spoke ill of Ananda or were envious of him despite his honoured position and proximity to the Buddha.

The documented past life stories of Ananda reflect that he was seldom a god (unlike his stepbrother Anuruddha) and seldom an animal (unlike his cousin Devadatta). Ananda was often a human and in many births was the brother of the Bodhisatta.

Even though Ananda was very learned and knowledgeable, he only reached the first stage of sainthood, Sotapanna, during the lifetime of the Buddha. His deep attachment to the Buddha prevented him from attaining Arahantship. As a result, he was not aware of the exact moment when the Buddha passed away. Thinking that the Buddha had attained Parinibbana, he informed his stepbrother Anuruddha. Anuruddha, who was an Arahant, observing with his divine eye that this was not the case, clarified to Ananda that the Blessed One had not yet passed away. He had reached a meditative stage known as Cessation of Perception and Feeling.

Shortly after the Buddha's Parinibbana, on the day of the First Council of the Dhamma, (Sangayana) Ananda attained Arahantship. Ananda was designated by the Buddha as the leader in five categories. They were:

- Erudition
- Retentive memory
- Good behaviour
- Steadfastness
- Ministering of care

Thirty of Ananda's verses have been preserved in the Theragatha. The following illustrate his encouragement to associate with good friends and those well-versed in the Dhamma.

*"A clever man should not make friends
With a malicious man, or an angry man, or an envious man,
One delighting in (others') misfortune;
Contact with a bad man is evil.
A clever man should make friends
With a man of faith, a pleasant man,
With wisdom and great learning;
Contact with a good man is fortunate.
See the painted puppet
A heap of sores, a compounded body, diseased,*

*With many bad intentions,
For which there is no permanent stability.
Desiring understanding of the doctrine,
One should associate with that disciple of the Buddha,
Who has great learning, is expert in the doctrine,
Possesses wisdom, is of such a kind.
-- (Theragatha 1018-1020, 1030)*

Ananda declared the following verses to inspire others to follow his example as the Guardian of the Dhamma. He also encouraged others to carefully examine and understand the teachings prior to their practice.

*"82,000 teachings from the Buddha
I have received,
2,000 more from his disciples;
Now 84,000 are familiar to me.
Who nothing has heard and nothing understood (those void of Dhamma)
He ages only oxen-like
His stomach (body) only, grows and grows
But his insight deepens not.
Thou follow him who has heard much
Then what is heard shall not decline.
This is the tap-root of the holy life;
Hence a Dhamma Guardian you should be!
Knowing what comes first and what last
Knowing well the meaning too,
Skilful in grammar (analytical knowledge) and in other terms
The well-grasped meaning he examines.
Keen in his patient application
He strives to weigh the meaning well.
At the right time he makes the effort
And inwardly collects his mind."
-- (Theragatha 1024,1025,1027-1029)*

Ananda passed away at the age of one hundred and twenty. The Dhammapada states that as people on both sides of the River Rohini wanted his relics, Ananda preached the Dhamma to

the people while seated in the air in the middle of the river and wished that his body would split in two with one part falling on one bank of the river and the other part on the other bank of the river. He then entered the ecstatic meditation on fire. Flames instantly issued from his body and, as willed, one portion of his relics fell on one side of the river while the other portion fell on the other side. The people then enshrined his relics in stupas so that they could honour him.

Ananda's greatest contribution to the Dhamma occurred three months after the Parinibbana of the Lord Buddha. The Buddha had declared Ananda as the guardian of the Dhamma because of his retentive memory. At the First Sangha Council, Ananda, under the direction of Maha Kassapa, led the five hundred Arahants in the recitation of the Teachings and helped in the codification of the Dhamma. This method of preservation of the Dhamma was used again in later years. The second Sangha Council was led by one of Ananda's pupils.

9. Maha Kassapa

In the district of Magadha, in a village known as Mahatittha, there lived a wealthy Brahmin couple named Kapila and Sumanadevi. They had a son whom they named Pippali Kassapa.

As was the custom at that time, when he came of age his parents looked for a suitable girl for him to marry. Pippali, however, was not interested in marriage and informed his parents that he would look after them until they passed away and then take to the life of an ascetic. His parents were not happy with this decision and insisted that he should select a suitable girl. To appease his parents, Kassapa had his goldsmith make a beautiful statue of a girl out of solid gold and said that he would marry if they could find a girl who resembled the statue.

Kapila then summoned eight Brahmins, and after giving them a large sum of money and the statue, asked them to roam the country in search of a bride who resembled the golden statue, for his son.

The Brahmins were in a village named Sagala when they saw an exquisitely beautiful girl named Bhadda Kapilani who resembled the statue. They spoke to her parents and found that they were agreeable to the marriage. They then went back and reported to Kapila and Sumanadevi that a suitable bride had been found.

When Kassapa heard about his oncoming marriage to Bhadda, he decided to write to her. Explaining that he was interested in becoming an ascetic he asked her to refuse this proposal and look for a suitable match elsewhere. Unknown to him, Bhadda too had no desire to marry and had chosen instead the life of an ascetic. She too had sent a similar letter to Kassapa requesting that he look elsewhere for a bride. The letters, however, were intercepted by both sets of parents who were aware of their children's feelings, and loving letters agreeing to the marriage were substituted.

A large wedding was arranged, and with great ceremony Bhadda was given in marriage to Kassapa. Neither one of them, however, was interested in married life. The influence of their past meritorious actions and lives as ascetics was so strong that they both decided to live a celibate life. They lived in harmony as good friends, looking after Kassapa's old parents until they passed away as was the custom, and inherited the family wealth and estates.

Maha Kassapa's Renunciation

One day when Kassapa was supervising the ploughing of the field in preparation for the growing season, he was shaken by a common sight that had gone unnoticed by him in the past. The ploughing had resulted in many worms and little creatures being unearthed and a host of birds, attracted by the worms, were circling his field and feasting.

Observing the destruction of many innocent creatures, Kassapa questioned his workers as to who was responsible for their suffering and death. His workers then informed him that he was responsible, as they were ploughing the field on his account. This statement had a profound effect on Kassapa. He decided that he would hand over the family wealth to Bhadda and take the life of an ascetic in search of deliverance.

Unknown to him, at about the same time Bhadda had made a similar decision. Her servants had put out some sesame seeds to dry in the sun. Little creatures had flocked around the sesame seeds and raucous birds had gathered to feast on the tiny creatures. Bhadda had seen the suffering of the little creatures and asked her servants who was responsible for their suffering and death. She too had been told that she was responsible, as it was on her instruction and for her consumption that the sesame seeds had been spread out in the sun.

Reflecting on the suffering, Bhadda decided to hand over all the family wealth to Kassapa and take to the life of an ascetic. So it was that in the evening both Kassapa and Bhadda discussed

their decision to find that they were both of one mind. Talking it over they both decided to take to the holy life and seek deliverance from suffering. Shaving each others' heads they donned the simple robes of ascetics and left their home.

When their servants and the villagers heard about their renunciation they cried and lamented and tried to dissuade the couple. Kassapa and Bhadda, however, had made up their minds. Distributing their wealth among the servants, they continued on their way. And thus they wandered, Kassapa in front with Bhadda following a few yards behind, in search of a teacher.

After some time, Kassapa reflected that it was not appropriate that his very beautiful former wife should follow him. People, he reflected, would assume that he was associated with Bhadda and would start rumours and make accusations. As they were both pure and innocent of any wrongdoing, the wrongful thoughts of the people would then cause them much suffering. Discussing his thoughts with Bhadda, he requested that she not follow him any longer. Bhadda, who agreed with his decision, separated from him at the next junction. Whilst Kassapa took the road to his right, she took the road to her left.

The text indicates that the earth trembled at this renunciation due to the purity and merit of the ascetics. The Buddha, observing the trembling of the earth, saw with his super-normal vision that one of his future great disciples was on his way to meet Him. He decided to meet Kassapa and walked down the road towards Mahatittha.

On the road between Nalanda and Rajagaha the Buddha sat down under a fig tree to await His future disciple. The moment Kassapa laid eyes on the Buddha he knew that he had found his Master. The Buddha stood in all His radiance, surrounded by an aura. Falling at the Buddha's feet and saluting Him respectfully, Kassapa asked permission to enter the Noble Order.

The Buddha then dispensed a discourse in which He instructed Kassapa on three accounts. He instructed Kassapa in order that he may:

Train himself so as to have a keen sense of shame for doing unwholesome deeds towards seniors, novices and those of middle status in the Noble Order.

Listen, examine, reflect and absorb the teachings that are conducive to wholesome deeds.

Be mindful of the body and its thoughts and actions.

After this discourse the Master and His new disciple walked back to Rajagaha.

On the way the Buddha wanted to rest under the root of a tree. Kassapa then took his outer robe, folded it four-fold and asked the Buddha to sit on it, as His doing so would bring great benefit to him for a long time. The Buddha accepted Kassapa's robe and commented on its softness. Hearing this, Kassapa immediately offered his robe to the Buddha by saying, "May the Blessed One, out of compassion for me, accept this robe." The Buddha then asked Kassapa if he would wear the worn-out, coarse rag-robe that He was wearing. Full of joy, Kassapa accepted the Buddha's rag-robe and agreed to wear it. Kassapa was the only monk with whom the Buddha had exchanged robes. Though the significance of this exchange was not described in the text, it may have reminded Kassapa of an ancient aspiration to be foremost among the monks in austere practices, because he took upon himself the thirteen austere practices.

Maha Kassapa's Aspiration

One hundred thousand world cycles ago, at the time of the Padumuttara Buddha, Kassapa was born as a wealthy landowner named Vedeha, and at that time too, Bhadda had been his wife. The Padumuttara Buddha was residing at the Khema Deer Park near the city of Hamsavati. Vedeha observed the Padumuttara Buddha appointing a monk by the name of Mahanisabha as the disciple foremost in austere ascetic practices and His third most pre-eminent disciple. Inspired by the Padumuttara Buddha, Vedeha invited the Buddha and His retinue to his home for their meals on the following day.

When the Buddha and His monks were eating Vedeha noticed that the monk Mahanisabha was walking the streets on the alms round. Vedeha invited the elder to partake of his alms at his home. When Mahanisabha refused, he took the elder's bowl and filled it with fragrant food and handed it back to him. He then questioned the Buddha as to why Mahanisabha had not accepted his invitation to come to his home for meals. The Padumuttara Buddha then explained that many world cycles ago Mahanisabha had aspired to be foremost in austere practices, and that in keeping with his aspiration he only accepted food obtained by going on the alms round.

Vedeha was suffused with happiness and inspired by Mahanisaabha. He decided that he too would like to be declared as a monk foremost in austere practices and the disciple of a future Buddha. Offering the Buddha Padumuttara and His retinue of monks meals and the requirements for seven days, he prostrated himself in front of the Padumuttara Buddha and aspired to be the monk foremost in austere practices as the disciple of a future Buddha. Seeing that Vedeha would fulfil this aspiration, the Buddha Padumuttara declared that at the time of the Gotama Buddha, Vedeha would be known as Maha Kassapa, and would be declared the third most pre-eminent monk and foremost in austere practices.

The relationship between the Gotama Buddha and Kassapa started many lifetimes ago. The Jataka stories document nineteen births in which Kassapa was related to the Bodhisatta, sometimes as his father, sometimes as his brother, and often as his teacher or friend. As such the immediate bond that formed when Kassapa saw the Buddha had deep roots. Kassapa also renewed his aspiration in the presence of succeeding Buddhas and performed many meritorious deeds over countless years. As foretold, Kassapa fulfilled his aspiration at the time of the Gotama Buddha. The Buddha appointed Kassapa foremost among the monks who persevered in austere practices.

The Buddha repeatedly praised Kassapa's commitment to austere practices and his detached behaviour. He said:

"When Kassapa goes among families his mind is not attached, not caught up, not fettered. He thinks, "Let those who want gain acquire gain! Let those who want merit do merit!" He is pleased and glad at the gains of others, just as he is pleased and glad at his own gains. Such a monk is fit to go among families."

"When he preaches the Doctrine, he will not do so for the sake of personal recognition and praise but for letting them know the teaching of the exalted one so that those who hear it may accept it and practise accordingly. He will preach it because of the excellence of the Teaching and out of compassion and sympathy." -- (Samyutta Nikaya)

Maha Kassapa's Practice of Austerities

Two interesting encounters with the Devas further illustrate Kassapa's commitment to austere practices. The first is his reaction to the female Deva Laja's ministering. Laja could remember

that she owed her present splendour to an offering she had made to the great elder. Laja, who had been a poor woman, had offered parched rice to the elder with great devotion. On her way back home she had been bitten by a poisonous snake and had died. As a result of her offering she had been reborn in the Tavatimsa Heaven in great splendour.

The grateful Laja decided to sweep the elder's cell and fill his vessels with water. On the third day he saw the Deva in all her radiance cleaning his cell. Kassapa questioned her as to what she was doing and on being told, asked her not to minister to his needs in the future as he was bent on austere practices. The dejected Laja left in great sadness. The Buddha, seeing the dejected Laja, came before her in compassion and explained to her the meritorious effects of her ministering. He then consoled her by informing her of the aspiration the elder had made.

The second instance was when Kassapa was residing in the Pippali Cave. He had attained a meditative stage and remained thus for seven days. The elder had then set out to obtain alms for Rajagaha. Inspired by the great elder, the Devas had descended to Earth with heavenly food. Kassapa, however, had refused the nectar of the Devas saying that he preferred to give this opportunity to the poor so that they could acquire merit. The disappointed Devas returned to the heavens and told Sakka, the King of the Heavens, about Kassapa's refusal.

When Sakka heard about Kassapa's refusal there arose in him a great desire to wait upon the great elder. Disguising himself as a poor weaver he offered Kassapa rice. When the elder accepted the food there arose a heavenly fragrance and Kassapa was instantly aware that he had been tricked by the Deva. He then admonished Sakka for taking the opportunity to acquire merit away from the poor. Sakka then asked Kassapa if he had failed to acquire merit from this deed due to his trickery. After informing Sakka that he had acquired merit despite his trick, Kassapa continued on his alms round.

The Buddha also informed Kassapa of the virtues of ascetic life and of the benefit of practising austerities in gaining emancipation. This not only encouraged Kassapa to continue in his austere practices but also encouraged him to pass them on to others by being a role model. The Buddha said:

" Formerly, Kassapa, there were elders of the Order who were forest dwellers, living on alms food, wearing rag-robles, using only the threefold set of robes, having few wants and being contented living secluded and aloof from society, energetic, and they praised and encouraged such a way of life. When such elders

or younger Bhikkhus visited the monastery, they were gladly welcomed and honoured as being dedicated to the practice of the Dhamma. Then those who welcomed and honoured those noble monks would also strive to emulate them in their way of life and this would be of great benefit to them for a long time."

"But nowadays, Kassapa, those who are honoured when visiting a monastery are not monks of austere and earnest life, but those who are well-known and popular and are amply provided with the requisites of a monk. These are made welcome and honoured, and their hosts try to emulate them, which will bring them harm for a long time. Hence one will be right in saying that such monks are harmed and overpowered by what does harm to a monk's life." --(Samyutta Nikaya)

Kassapa, who had made the aspiration to be the monk foremost in austerities at the time of the Padumuttara Buddha, took these words to heart. In fact, on one occasion he admonished Ananda who had taken 200 novice monks to the homes of disciples before they were advanced in the Dhamma. Attracted to worldly pleasures, the novices had given up the order and gone back to the family life. Kassapa admonished Ananda for not taking care of his pupils. The wealthy often invited the Buddha and His retinue for meals. Kassapa, by going on the alms round and refusing such invitations, ensured that the opportunity of this meritorious act of giving alms was available to the poor. He stopped at every house on the path and accepted every gift with equal grace.

Kassapa's austere life and detachment are explained by him in his verses:

*"Down from my mountain lodge I came one day
And made my round for alms about the street
A leper there I saw eating his meal
And courteously I halted at his side.
He with his hand all leprous and diseased
Put in my bowl a morsel. As he threw,
A finger broke off and fell into my food.
At a wall nearby I ate my share
Not at that time or after felt disgust.
For only he who takes as they come
The scraps of food, cow's urine for medicine,
Lodging beneath a tree, the patchwork robe,*

Truly is a man contented everywhere."
-- (Theragatha 1054-1057)

On another occasion the Buddha requested Kassapa to teach errant monks. The Buddha said, "Exhort the monks, Kassapa. Either I, Kassapa, should exhort the monks, or you. Either I or you should give them a discourse on the Dhamma". These words imply the confidence the Buddha had in Kassapa, as not every Arahant had the ability to teach in a manner that would be understood.

The text did not specify why the Buddha chose Kassapa over his chief disciples Sariputta and Moggallana for this instruction. They too were excellent teachers. It could be that this instruction was given after their passing away or just before, as the Buddha was aware that Kassapa would outlive Him, unlike his chief disciples who would pass away before He did. It could also have been because the Buddha saw in His monks a movement away from austere practices to a life of comfort and materialism. Kassapa, who led an austere life, would have been the perfect role model for the errant monks.

Kassapa often questioned the Buddha, as did the other monks. On one occasion, Kassapa asked the Buddha why, early in His dispensation, there were fewer rules for the monks and more Arahants, while later there were more rules for the monks and fewer Arahants. The Buddha replied as follows:

"So it happens, Kassapa, when beings deteriorate and the true Dhamma vanishes: then there are more rules and fewer Arahants. There will be, however, no vanishing of the Dhamma until a sham Dhamma arises in the world. But when a sham Dhamma arises in the world, there will be more rules and fewer Arahants."

"But, Kassapa, it is not a cataclysm of the four elements - earth, water, fire and air that make the Dhamma disappear. Nor is the reason for its disappearance similar to the overloading of a ship that causes it to sink. It is rather the presence of five detrimental attitudes that causes the obscuration and disappearance of the Dhamma.

"These are the five: It is the lack of respect and regard for the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, the training, and for meditative concentration on the part

of monks, nuns, and male and female devotees. But so long as there is respect and regard for these five things the Dhamma will remain free of obscuriation and will not disappear."

It is important to note that it is not only the Sangha that have been entrusted with the preservation of the Dhamma. Even the lay devotees can and should contribute to its preservation. In fact, each and every one of us should do our part to ensure the preservation of the Dhamma in whatever way we can to ensure the availability of the Dhamma for future generations.

Kassapa did not question the Buddha as to when a sham Dhamma would appear in the world or as to what exactly He meant by a sham Dhamma. Even though there are many traditions of Buddhism in the world they all contain the Four Noble Truths and the Doctrine of Dependent Origination which is the core of the Buddha's teaching.

Even though the Buddha often commended Kassapa for his austere practices and detached manner, He felt deep compassion for the ageing elder. On two occasions the Buddha reminded Kassapa that now that he was old, his coarse, worn-out rag-robe may be uncomfortable against his skin and that he should now wear soft robes. He also requested him to accept invitations from householders for alms, and to live in monasteries without resorting to the alms round and dwelling in the forest. Kassapa, however, refused, saying that he had been a forest dweller and had worn rag-robes for a long time, and recommended this behaviour to others. He also said that he had few wants and that he was contented and happy with what he had, and that he had also recommended this behaviour to others. As such, he preferred to remain in the austere practices which he had on many occasions recommended to others.

The Buddha then questioned him as to why he led such an austere life and he replied that it was for his own well-being and with compassion for later generations. He said that they could then emulate his exemplary behaviour and be inspired by him. For not only did he preach austerity to others but he also exemplified it in his behaviour. The Buddha then praised him for his words and gave permission for him to remain as a forest dweller, wearing rag-robes and going the alms round, as doing so would be of benefit to men and gods.

It almost seems as if the Buddha, realizing that there would be a decline in monastic values after His Parinibbana, was grooming Kassapa for the important role he would play in the

preservation of the Dhamma. The Buddha had specifically declared that there would be no successor after His passing, but that the Dhamma would be their Teacher. Even so the Buddha would have foreseen that Kassapa's austere practices would make him a reputable, outstanding leader who would be respected and honoured by the monks. On many occasions the Buddha praised and encouraged Kassapa's austere practices. Kassapa in turn used every opportunity to encourage his pupils away from materialism and towards the beauty of an austere life.

Kassapa describes the beauties of forest dwelling and the insight and peace it brings which lead to the penetration of the Dhamma as follows:

*"These regions are delightful to my heart
When the kareri creeper spreads its flower wreaths,
When sound the trumpet call of elephants
These rocky heights delight my heart.
These rocks with hue of dark-blue clouds
Where streams are flowing, cool and crystal-clear,
With glow-worms covered shining bright
These rocky heights delight my heart.
Like towering peaks of dark-blue clouds
Like splendid edifices are these rocks,
Where the birds' sweet voices fill the air
These rocky heights delight my heart.
With glades refreshed by (cooling) rain
Resounding with the calls of crested birds,
The cliffs resorted by the seers
These rocky heights delight my heart.
Like dark blue blooms of flax they are
Like autumn sky with dark blue clouds,
With flocks of many kinds of birds
These rocky heights delight my heart.
No crowds of lay folks have these rocks
But visited by herds of deer,
With flocks of many kinds of birds
These rocky heights delight my heart.
Wide gorges where clear water flows,*

*Haunted by monkeys and by deer,
With mossy carpets covered, moist
These rocky heights delight my heart.
No music with five instruments can
Gladden me so much as when,
With mind collected well
Right insight into Dhamma dawns."
Theragatha 1062-1065, 1068-1071*

Maha Kassapa's Great Contribution

Kassapa's greatest contribution to the preservation of the Dhamma occurred after the Parinibbana of the Lord Buddha. Of the Buddha's great disciples, only Ananda and Anuruddha were present in Kusinara when the Buddha passed away, as Sariputta and Moggalana had both passed away prior to the Buddha. Kassapa, with his retinue of monks, was travelling towards Kusinara from Pava when they met an ascetic who had with him a Mandarava (coral tree) flower. As this plant grows in the heavens Kassapa knew that something unusual had occurred. He asked the ascetic if he knew anything about the Buddha and the ascetic confirmed that the Buddha had passed away a week prior. He said that the gods and the Malla kings were paying their respects to the Buddha with incense and flowers. This Mandarava plant he said he had taken from the cremation site.

When the monks heard of the Buddha's passing away all who had not attained Arahantsip started to lament and cry. But there was one monk named Subhadda who addressed the other monks and said, "Enough, friends. Do not grieve, do not lament. We are well rid of the Great Ascetic. We have been in trouble by His telling us this is good, this is not good. Now we can do what we like and we do not have to do what we do not like."

The text does not indicate Kassapa's response to these cruel words. Kassapa may have remained silent so as not to cause discord among the monks. Instead, he consoled the grieving by reminding them of the truth of impermanence that the Buddha had taught. Kassapa, however, noted this incident for he cited it when he gathered the Arahants for the First Sangha Council.

Kassapa then made a mental aspiration that the funeral pyre would not light until he and his retinue of monks reached Kusinara. In keeping with his aspiration, the sandalwood pyre

would not light. When Kassapa and his monks arrived the wood shifted to expose the sacred foot of the Buddha. With bowed head Kassapa and his retinue paid homage to the Buddha, after which the sandalwood pyre caught fire.

After the cremation and distribution of the Buddha's relics Kassapa concentrated his efforts on the preservation of the Dhamma. Remembering Subbadda's challenge and the possibility of moral laxity and the decline of the Dhamma, he proposed holding a Sangha Council where the Dhamma and the rules for the Sangha, the Vinaya, would be reviewed. When he shared his views with the other members of the Noble Order, they agreed.

For the First Sangha Council, Kassapa selected 500 members from the Sangha, all Arahants except for Ananda. Ananda, who was known as the guardian of the Dhamma, was selected because of his retentive memory and detailed knowledge of the 84,000 suttas dispensed by the Buddha and His great disciples. Upali, the former barber of the Sakyan Prince, who was an Arahant, led the Vinaya as he had been declared by the Buddha as the monk foremost in the knowledge of the monastic rules (Vinaya). All other monks were required to leave Rajagaha for the seven-month duration of the recitation. All the teachings of the Buddha and the monastic discipline were recited. The Dhamma was codified and organized into the five collections (Nikayas) and the three Pitakas: Sutta Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. The first Sangha Council was held in the capital of Rajagaha, in the country of Magadha, under the patronage of King Ajatasattu, three months after the passing away of the Buddha.

Ananda, with the encouragement of Anuruddha, meditated and reached Arahantship at dawn on the day of the First Sangha Council. He then travelled through the air using astral travel to indicate his deliverance and took his place among the other members of the Council.

After the First Council the high regard that the monks had for Kassapa grew further. He was seen as the head of the order even though the Buddha had specifically declared that there would be no successor and that when He was gone, the Dhamma would be the teacher. Before his death, Kassapa handed the Buddha's bowl to Ananda as a symbol of the continuation of the faithful preservation of the Dhamma. Kassapa, who had generally been recognized as being the most worthy in succession, chose Ananda as being the most worthy after him.

Kassapa records his deliverance, gratitude and praise of the Master as follows:

*"In the whole field of the Buddha's following,
Except for the Mighty Master himself,
I stand the foremost in ascetic ways;
No one practises them as far as I.
The Master has been served by me,
And all the Buddha's teaching has been done;
Low have I laid the heavy load I bore,
Cause for rebirth is found in me no more.
Gotama the Immeasurable does not cling
To robe, to food or place of lodging,
Like spotless lotus blossoms He is free from taints
Bent on renunciation He transcends the three worlds.
The four foundations of mindfulness are His neck
The great Seer has faith and confidence for hands;
Above His brow is perfect wisdom; nobly wise,
He ever wanders with all desire quenched."
-- (Theragatha 1087-1090)*

Kassapa was known as Maha Kassapa (great) to distinguish him from others who had the same Brahmin name. It is said that Maha Kassapa was the only monk to share seven of the thirty two marks of noble birth that the Buddha had. In keeping with his aspiration the Buddha declared that Maha Kassapa was foremost among the monks in austere practices. He was also the third most pre-eminent monk among the Buddha's retinue.

The First Sangha Council was extremely successful in the preservation of "The Word of the Buddha". This method, the introduction of which resulted in Maha Kassapa being called "the Father of the Dhamma" was used in subsequent years as and when required. It also led to the use of the term "Theravada" or recitation of the elders (Arahanths) being used for the Word of the Buddha. Since then there have been six more Sangha Councils under the Theravada Tradition and one Sangha Council under the Mahayana Tradition. The Second Sangha Council was held 100 years after the Parinibbana of the Buddha, in the Valukarama at Vesali, under the patronage of King Kālasoka. One of Ananda's pupils, the Arahanth Sabbakāmi, who was 120 years old, presided over the Second Sangha Council, and 700 members of the Sangha, all of whom were Arahanths, took part. The Second Sangha Council took eight months to complete.

The Third Sangha Council was held 235 years after the Parinibbana of the Buddha in the 17th year of King Asoka's reign, under his patronage in the Asokarama in Pataliputta. The Arahant Moggaliputta Tissa presided over the Third Sangha Council and 1,000 members of the Sangha, all of whom were Arahants, took part. The Third Sangha Council took nine months to complete.

About four hundred and fifty years after the Buddha's Parinibbana, around 90 BC, the Fourth Sangha Council which was in the Theravada Tradition was held, and the Word of the Buddha was documented for the first time in Matale at the Aluvihara in Sri Lanka, under the patronage of King Vatta Gamini Abhaya (Walagambahu). Five hundred members of the Sangha, all of whom were Arahants, took part in the Fourth Sangha Council. The Great Commentator, Buddhaghosa, who wrote the *Path of Purification (Visuddhi Magga)*, states that the number of books written on Ola (palm) leaves was so great that when piled one on top of another they reached the height of six elephants.

The next Sangha Council, the First Sangha Council in the Mahayana Tradition was held in Kashmir about five hundred years after the Parinibbana of the Lord Buddha, under the patronage of King Kanishka (78 BC - 101 AC). The Ven. Vasumitta presided.

The Fifth Sangha Council in the Theravada Tradition was held in Mandalay in Myanmar (Burma), two thousand four hundred and fifteen years after the passing away of the Lord Buddha, in November 1871 under the patronage of King Mindon. The scriptures written on palm leaves would eventually deteriorate. To ensure the preservation of the scriptures the Buddha Dhamma was inscribed on marble slabs.

Two thousand four hundred Bhikkus led by Venerable Jagarabhivamsa of the Dakkhinarama Monastery assisted by the Venerable Narindabhidhaja and the Venerable Sumangalasami began by reciting the scriptures in the traditional manner. The joint Dhamma recitation lasted five months. Then with the help of skilled crafts men it was inscribed in seven hundred and twenty-nine marble slabs. It took seven years six months and fourteen days to complete the work. The marble slabs were placed in Pitaka Pagodas in the grounds of King Mindon's Kuthodaw Pagoda at the foot of the Mandalay Hill. It is now known as the world's largest book.

The Sixth Sangha Council, known as the Kaba Aye, which was of the Theravada Tradition, was held in Yangon (Rangoon) in 1954. It was sponsored by the Burmese Government led by

the Honorable Prime Minister U Nu. He authorised the construction of the Maha Passana Gaha, 'the great cave', an artificial cave similar to the cave in which the First Sangha Council was recited. The Sixth Sangha Council was unique in that the Bhikkus taking part in it came from eight different countries. Two thousand five hundred learned Theravada monks from Mynmar, Cambodia, India, Laos, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam graced the momentous occasion. The late Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw was appointed to question the Dhamma as required and the Venerable Bhadanta Vivittasarabhivamsa answered the questions eloquently. By this time the scriptures had been translated to the native language of all the participating countries except for India. The traditional recitation took two years. The commentaries and different scripts were also examined and reconciled where necessary. This version of the Tripitaka which was sanctioned by the entire Theravada Buddhist World is now accepted as the pristine teachings of the Buddha Gotama

The retentive powers of the minds of Arahants developed through years and years of meditation, the Buddha's style of teaching which was repetitive, and His instruction to memorize the Teaching so as to hand it down to others, resulted in a comprehensive text for future generations. The fact that only Arahants were admitted to the early Sangayanas ensured that it was only those who had experienced the Truth, those who have seen the supreme bliss of Nibbana, who participated in this very important preservation. The freedom the Buddha gave to investigate, question and debate also helped, as the teachings were analysed whenever there was a conflict of opinion and corrected to ensure that it was the word of the Buddha which was preserved. Thus the Arahant Maha Kassapa, the third most pre-eminent monk of the Buddha, often referred to as the "Father of the Dhamma", ensured the preservation of the Dhamma for future generations.

(see [Part B](#))

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