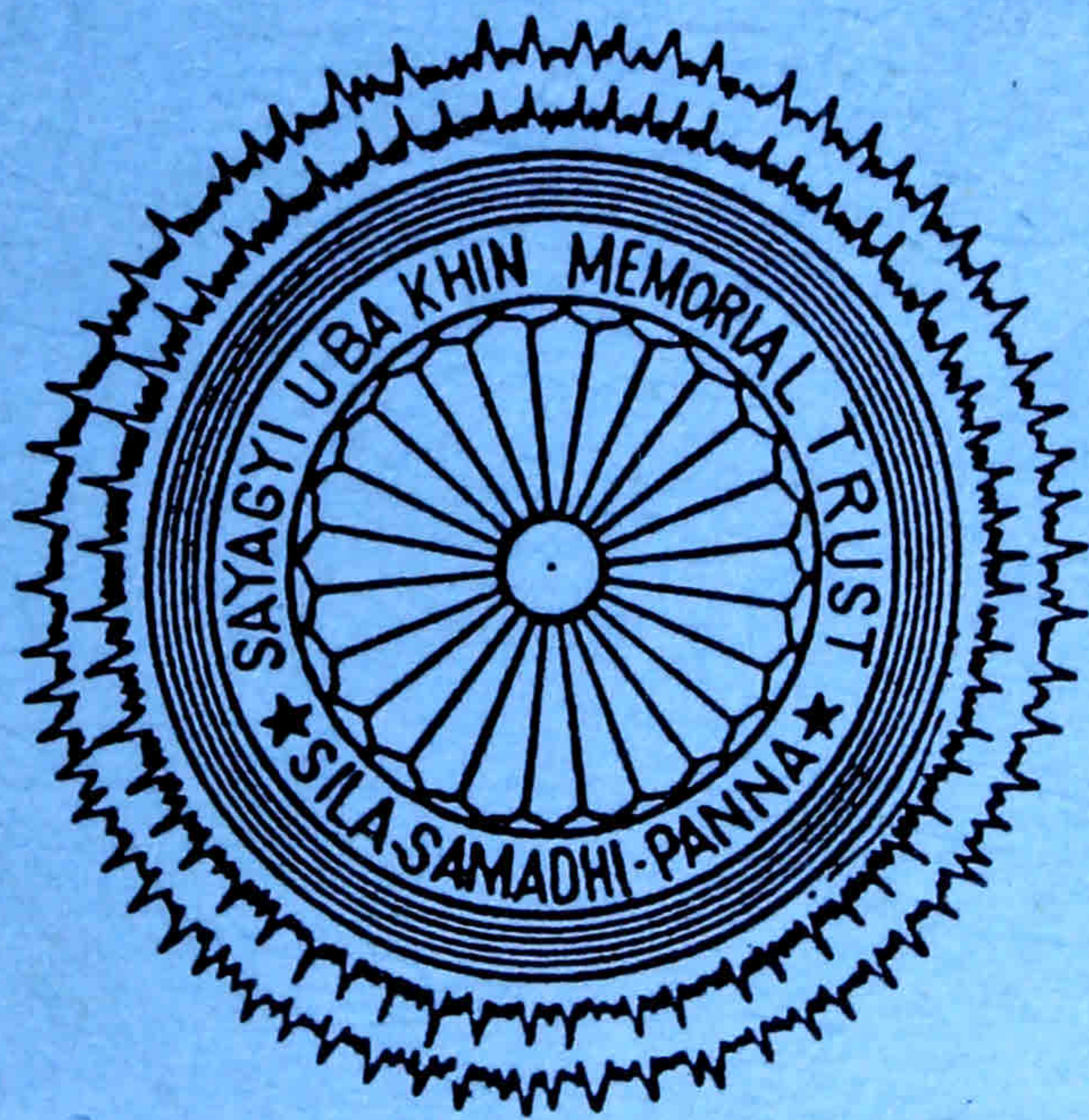


# THE GREAT OCCASION

A Research Paper  
by

Saya U Chit Tin, WKH



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Assisted by

William Pruitt, PhD

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Dedicated  
to  
our much revered teacher  
the late Sayagyi U Ba Khin  
(Thray Sithu)

This publication is one of several marking the tenth anniversary of Mother Sayama and Saya U Chit Tin's coming out of Burma to continue their work in the Tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin by teaching the Buddha-Dhamma in the West.

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## THE GREAT OCCASION

Susukhaṃ vata jīvāma verinesu averino.  
Verinesu manussesu viharāma averino.

Susukhaṃ vata jīvāma āturesu anāturo.  
Āturesu manussesu viharāma anāturā.

Susukhaṃ vata jīvāma ussukesu anussukā.  
Ussukesu manussesu viharāma anussukā.

Indeed, we are very happy! We who are free of hatred live among those who hate. We dwell free of hatred in the midst of men who hate.

Indeed, we are very happy! We who are free of disease live among the diseased. We dwell free of disease in the midst of diseased men.

Indeed, we are very happy! We who are free of greed live among the greedy. We dwell free of greed in the midst of greedy men.

### Dhammapada vv 197-199

Twenty-five years ago, in May 1953, the observance of the Mahāsamaya (The Great Occasion) was first held at the International Meditation Centre, Rangoon, in the Dhamma Yaungchi Ceti (The Light of the Dhamma Pagoda), which had recently been built. On such occasions, the disciples of Sayagyi U Ba Khin would assemble in the eight cells surrounding the raised circular room in the centre of the pagoda where Sayagyi sat. In 1953, the southern room was empty, as no Buddha statue had been installed there as yet. Sayagyi sat facing this room, looking towards the Shwedagon Pagoda. Mother Sayama was in the northern room behind Sayagyi, facing the same direction.

Sayagyi led us all in the recitation of the Mahāsayama Sutta, and then Sayagyi recited alone the six discourses given on the Great Occasion. Sayagyi was fond of telling the story connected with this occasion, a story that is to be found in the Pāli commentaries.

## The Events Leading Up to the Great Occasion

The story begins with a quarrel between the Koliyans and the Sākyans.<sup>1</sup> The Rohiṇī river flowed between the cities of Koliya and Kapilavatthu, and it had been dammed to provide water to irrigate the crops on both sides. One year, when the crops began to droop during the hot season in the month of Jeṭṭhamūla (corresponding to May or June), a quarrel arose over which country should have the use of the water because there was not enough for the crops on both sides of the river. Neither side wished to let the other side have the water. Tempers flared, and they began to insult each other, casting aspersions on their ancestors. Finally, each side prepared to go to battle in the evening.<sup>2</sup>

At that time, the Buddha was residing at Sāvatthi. When he surveyed the world at dawn on the day for the battle, he saw his relatives, the Sākyans, and asked himself, "If I go there, will the quarrel be settled?" Then he realized that he would be able to put an end to the quarrel by telling three Jātaka stories, and he would be able to show them the importance of being united by telling two more Jātaka stories. He would also teach the Discourse on Embraced Violence,<sup>3</sup> and at the end of that discourse, two hundred and fifty young men from each country would ordain as bhikkhus, and there would be the Great Gathering (or Great Occasion).

The Buddha spent the day as usual, going on his alms round in Sāvatthi. Then, in the evening, without saying a word to anyone, he took his bowl and robe and went forth from the Perfumed Chamber. He went through the air to where the two sides were drawn up for battle and sat cross-legged in the air over the river between them. He startled them by emitting dark rays from his hair,<sup>4</sup> and then revealed himself and emitted the six-coloured rays. Seeing the Buddha, his relatives thought, "Our noble kinsman, the Teacher, has come. He has surely seen the cause of our dispute. Now that the Blessed One has come, we cannot attack others with our weapons. Let the Koliyans kill and slaughter us." The Koliyans reacted in the same way.<sup>5</sup>

The Buddha descended and sat on a seat placed on the sand. The warriors paid their respects to the Buddha and sat down also. Then the Buddha asked them, "Why have you come here?"

"We did not come to amuse ourselves at the bathing spot," they answered, "or to amuse ourselves on the rocks or in the river; nor did we come for the view of the mountains. We came here to launch a battle."

"What is the quarrel about?" the Buddha asked.

"The water," they replied.

"What is water worth?" he asked.

"Very little, venerable sir," they said.

"What is the earth worth?" the Buddha asked.

"It is priceless," they answered.

"What are warriors (Khattiya) worth?" the Buddha asked.

"They too are priceless," came the answer.

"Why do you kill priceless warriors because of worthless water?" the Buddha asked.

According to the Dhammapada commentary,<sup>6</sup> the Buddha told them that they were acting in a very improper way. "You live in enmity, indulging in the five kinds of hatred. I live free from hatred. You live afflicted with the sickness of the evil passions. I live free from disease. You live in eager pursuit of the five kinds of sensual pleasure. I live free from the eager pursuit of anything." And then he pronounced the verses with which we began this talk.

Then the Buddha illustrated his point by telling the Phandana Jātaka.<sup>7</sup> This story illustrates the futility in seeking revenge through anger. In it, a black lion is angry with the Deva of a Phandana tree because he thinks a dead branch of the tree that fell on him was thrown down by the Deva. So he persuades a cartwright to cut down the tree to get wood for a wheel. But the Deva tells the cartwright that the wheel should be covered with skin from the black lion. So the tree is cut down and the lion is killed. This story shows how important it is to investigate before jumping to conclusions.

Next, the Buddha cautioned his listeners not to blindly follow others, and he told them the Daddabha Jātaka.<sup>8</sup> In this story, a hare hears a vilva fruit fall on a palm leaf just when it is thinking about what would become of it if the earth should be destroyed. The sound of the falling fruit persuaded the hare the earth was collapsing. He fled and told other animals about his fear. Eventually, a great multitude of animals were fleeing together. The Bodhisatta was a young lion at that time, and he inquired into what was happening. Investigating the hare's story, he discovered the truth and saved all those animals from rushing into the sea and drowning.

The Buddha then told the Laṭukika Jātaka<sup>9</sup> to illustrate how even the weak can sometimes bring down the powerful. In this story, a rogue elephant intentionally killed some young quails. Their mother got a crow to peck out the elephant's eyes. Then a blue fly laid eggs in the eye sockets. The mother quail had a frog croak at the top of a mountain so the elephant, who was tormented by thirst and by the maggots in his eyes, went up the mountain, thinking he would find water there.



Next, the frog croaked at the foot of the mountain, and the elephant, following the sound, fell over a precipice and was killed.<sup>10</sup>

These three Jātaka stories appeased the quarrel, just as the Buddha had foreseen. He went on to tell two other stories about the need to be united. The first was the Rukkhadhamma Jātaka,<sup>11</sup> in which the maxim "united we stand, divided we fall" is illustrated. The Buddha tells of a time when wise Devas lived in trees that survived a great storm because they were in thick forests where the trees, shrubs, bushes, and vines were interlaced. Foolish Devas chose solitary trees because they were near where men lived and that meant they would get the richest offerings and the greatest worship. Those trees were knocked down by the great storm, as they had nothing near them to support them.

The second story about the importance of unity was the Sammodāna Jātaka.<sup>12</sup> In this story, the Bodhisatta was a quail who taught the quails who were his followers to escape a fowler by concerting their efforts and flying off with his net. The fowler knew that the quails would eventually begin to quarrel, so he continued setting his net till one day the quails did begin to argue rather than fly away with the net, and he captured them.

After these stories, the Buddha gave the Discourse on Embraced Violence.<sup>13</sup> The Buddha begins the discourse by talking of how in the past he had observed people fighting each other and of how he could not find a place of his own where he could be free of fear. Then he saw the barb in his own heart. The Buddha then instructs his listeners in how to remove the dart. One must not give attention to the fetters in the world. One should undertake the training to reach Nibbāna. Many details in this discourse show the dangers of quarrelling.

The assembled warriors gained faith in the Buddha, and they were grateful to him for saving them from the bloodshed that would have resulted from the battle. They reflected that the Buddha would have become a Universal Monarch if he had not gone forth, and they decided he should be surrounded by warriors. So each side, the Koliyans and the Sākyans, had two hundred and fifty young men ordain as bhikkhus. The Buddha accepted them into the Saṅgha with the "Come, bhikkhu" ordination.<sup>14</sup> The Buddha took the bhikkhus and resided in the Mahāvana (the Great Forest), and they went on alms rounds, sometimes in Kapilavatthu, sometimes in Koliya.

These young men, however, had not been strongly motivated to leave the household life. They had ordained out of respect for the Buddha. Their former wives were not happy to have lost their husbands, either, and stirred up their discontent with their new lives by sending them various messages.



The Buddha realized the five hundred bhikkhus were dissatisfied, and he decided to teach them a Jātaka story that would help them. He asked the bhikkhus if they had ever seen the Himalayas. When they said they had not, he asked them if they would like to go there. They answered that they possessed no special powers, so how could they go to the mountains? The Buddha offered to take them with his special powers and they accepted.

The Buddha transported all five hundred bhikkhus to the Himalayas and pointed out the main mountains, rivers, and lakes; he showed them the various animals living there and the trees and flowers. Seeing these charming regions, the bhikkhus' longing for their former wives disappeared. The Buddha then descended with them on a plateau on the west side of the Himalayas. He invited them to inquire about any marvel they had seen, and at that moment, a cuckoo was seen riding on a stick held by two other cuckoos and surrounded by a flock of cuckoos. Naturally, the bhikkhus asked about this unusual sight, and the Buddha told the Kuṇāla Jātaka.<sup>15</sup>

This birth story is about a life when the Bodhisatta was a cuckoo who gave a discourse to a fellow cuckoo and to a large assembly about the danger in trusting women. The cuckoo tells seven birth stories, and in all of them, women are unfaithful to their husbands. At the end of the Jātaka story all the bhikkhus attained one of the first three stages of Awakening,<sup>16</sup> and they were able to return to the Mahāvana by their own psychic powers. Then the Buddha taught them a meditation subject. They developed insight and all of them became Arahats that same day. This was the full-moon day of Jeṭṭhamāsa,<sup>17</sup> which corresponds to May or June in the Western calendar and to the full-moon day of the month of Nayon in Burma. On the evening of that day, these five hundred Arahats went to see the Buddha.

### The Great Occasion

This was the day that a great gathering of Devas and Brahmās took place, the Great Occasion. A discourse in the Dīgha Nikāya<sup>18</sup> gives details about the gathering and the names of the principal Devas and Brahmās who were present. The commentaries say that the Buddha gave six discourses found in the Sutta-nipāta on this occasion.

The account in the Dīgha Nikāya says that while the Buddha was residing in the Mahāvana with a large Saṅgha of five hundred bhikkhus, Devas from the 10,000 world-systems<sup>19</sup> used to come to see the Buddha and the Saṅgha of bhikkhus. Four Brahmās of the Pure Abodes (Suddhāvāsa), where Non-returners are reborn, decided to go to see the Buddha and to



recite one stanza each in praise of him. According to the Sutta-nipāta commentary,<sup>20</sup> these Brahmās were already Ara-hats.

The Dīgha Nikāya commentary says that each of the four Brahmās stood on the edge of this world-system in each of the four cardinal points. Before approaching the Buddha and reciting the stanzas they had prepared, each of them attained a state of deep concentration based on different colours and emitted rays of that colour. They were also clothed in garments of the same colours. The Brahmā to the east emitted blue rays (Nīla-rasmi); the Brahmā to the south emitted golden rays (Suvanṇa);<sup>21</sup> the Brahmā to the west emitted red rays (Lohita); and the Brahmā to the north emitted white rays (Odāta).

The Brahmā from the east recited the following stanza:

This is a great gathering of groups of Devas assembled in the wood. We have come to this gathering (for the teaching) of the Dhamma to see the unconquered Saṅgha.

The Brahmā from the south recited this stanza:

There, the bhikkhus have composed and made their minds upright. These wise men control their faculties like a charioteer who has grasped the reins.

The commentary<sup>22</sup> explains that they are composed through developing concentration (Samādhi), and that their minds are upright because they have made them straight by removing from their minds all conditions of dishonesty, deceit, and crookedness.<sup>23</sup> They control their sense faculties like a charioteer who will throw away his goad when driving (a superior breed like) Sindh horses, grasping only the reins of the chariot's yoke and urging on the horses.

The Brahmā from the west spoke the following stanza:

They are unmoved, for they have removed the barren (mental tendencies); they have removed the obstacle; they have pulled out Inda's post.

They dwell pure, stainless, of clear vision, well tamed, (like) young elephants.

The commentary<sup>24</sup> explains that this means they have removed the barren (mental tendencies), the obstacles, and Inda's post of passion (Rāga), hatred (Dosa), and delusion (Moha). There is no turbulence due to desire (Taṇhā) in these bhikkhus who are unwavering (Aneja), having pulled out (the



deep-rooted) post of Inda.<sup>25</sup> Wherever they dwell they remain uncorrupted. They are like young elephants of unsurpassed beauty that have been tamed by an elephant trainer.

The Brahmā from the north gave the last stanza:

Whoever goes to the Buddha for refuge will not go to a world of loss. After giving up the human body, they will swell the Deva groups.

After the four Brahmās from the Pure Abodes said these stanzas, the Buddha spoke to the assembled bhikkhus. He told them that the Devas of the 10,000 world-systems often came to see them, and added that this had been true for Buddhas in the past and would be true for Buddhas in the future. Then he told the bhikkhus to listen attentively while he gave them the names of the groups of Devas. He told the Devas to come, and the bhikkhus made an effort to see them. This meant they had to develop divine sight.<sup>26</sup> Some were able to see a hundred non-human beings, some saw a thousand, some saw seventy thousand, and some saw an endless number of them.

The Buddha enumerated many different groups of earth Devas, Devas of the six Deva heavens, and Brahmās. Many names of important individual Devas are also given.

We can conclude that the number of Devas was past counting from the description given of those coming to see the Buddha.<sup>27</sup> Those who wished to hear him teach the Dhamma created for themselves bodies that were so subtle that from ten to eighty of them could occupy a space no bigger than the tip of a single hair. At the end of the Buddha's description of the gathering, Māra approached the assembly. The discourse describes it thus:

And Māra's army came, approaching all those (Devas) with Inda and Brahmā. Observe the stupidity of the Dark One! "Seize them, bind them, they are to be bound by passion! Surround them all. Not one of these should go free!" Thus did the Great General command the dark army there. Striking the ground with his hand, he made a fearful sound, like rain, a storm cloud, thunder and lightning. Then he turned back, angry, having lost control over himself.

And the Seeing One determined all this through his supernormal power. Then the Teacher spoke to those disciples devoted to his Teaching: "Māra's army has come, note it, bhikkhus." And they exerted themselves when they heard the Teaching of the Buddha. (Māra's army) retreated from those



(bhikkhus), who were free from passion and for whom not one hair moved.

(Then Māra said:) "All the victorious ones, those who have gone beyond fear, the glorious, these disciples, renowned among men, rejoice together with the world."

This confrontation between the Buddha and Māra was the subject of the second of two radio talks given by Sayagyi U Ba Khin. His first talk was given on June 29, 1950, the full-moon day of the month of Waso in Burma (Dhammacakka Day). The second talk was given the next year on Mahāsamaya Day and was entitled "Dhamma-dhātu Versus Pāpa-dhātu" ("The Forces of the Teachings of the Buddha Versus the Forces of Evil").

This talk was greatly appreciated in Burma, as can be seen from this extract from a discussion of it by a popular Burmese writer in one of the leading newspapers, "The New Light of Burma":

At dawn on the full-moon day of Nayon, there was a broadcast from the "Aung San Room" [named after General Aung San, who was assassinated with his cabinet ministers in 1947] in the Rangoon Secretariat. In celebration of Mahāsamaya Day, the members of the Buddhist Association of the Secretariat [including cabinet ministers] recited the Mahāsamaya Sutta. ... Today, there are many Buddhist activities taking place, and they show that the people understand that their religion [Buddhism] is their life blood and they are seriously taking it to heart now. ... U Ba Khin, President of the Accountant General's Office, gave a Dhamma talk on "Dhamma-Dhātu Versus Pāpa-dhātu" from the Burma Broadcasting Station (BBS). It was pleasing to listen to and it drew one's mind to the Dhamma. ... Although many religious talks were heard from both laymen and monks, none of them captured our attention as much as this one, nor were they as interesting. ...

Even though it was a religious talk, U Ba Khin's voice was very commanding and he gave a clear exposition with a natural flow of words without pausing. He could captivate even unintelligent minds. Therefore, we would like to request that he give more talks like this one in the future.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin, however, was not to give any further radio talks. In his talk, Sayagyi gave most of the details which we include in our description of the Great Occasion and of the six discourses preached by the Buddha at that time.

### **The Discourses Taught on the Great Occasion**

The commentaries<sup>28</sup> say that the Buddha surveyed the assembled Devas and saw that they could be divided into two groups: those who were capable (Bhabba) and those who were incapable (Abhabba) of understanding his Teachings. Among the capable Devas the Buddha saw six types: (1) those of passionate temperament (Rāga-carita), (2) those of angry temperament (Dosa-carita), (3) those of deluded temperament (Moha-carita), (4) those of speculative temperament (Vitakka-carita), (5) those of faithful temperament (Saddhā-carita), and (6) those of intelligent temperament (Buddhi-carita).<sup>29</sup> He saw that for each type of temperament he would teach a discourse that they would be able to understand.

The Buddha then looked to see if there was anyone who could initiate a discourse by asking a question.<sup>30</sup> He made an examination to see if any of the five hundred bhikkhus there, or if one of the eighty leading disciples could do so. But he saw they would not be able to. He saw that even if a Pacceka Buddha had been there, he would not have known what to ask. Nor did the Devas Sakka or Suyāma or any of the other Devas know. Then he thought to himself, "A Buddha like myself would be able. Is there another Buddha anywhere?" He examined throughout the endless worlds, but no other Buddha was to be seen. He thought to himself, "If I ask the question and answer it myself, the Devas will not be able to penetrate to the truth. Therefore, I will produce a created Buddha (Nimmita-Buddha)."

He developed the supernormal powers and made a created Buddha who carried a robe and bowl and who could look around, bend and stretch, just like himself. The created Buddha was like the moon rising from the east behind Yugandhara mountain in the Himalayas. The group of Devas said, "Another moon has arisen." Others said it was another sun, or a Deva palace, or a son of the Devas, or Mahā-Brahmā. Finally, some said it was another Buddha.

The ordinary Devas (Puthujjana-devatā) thought to themselves, "There is one Buddha in this Deva assembly, how big will it become with the second one?" But the Ariya Devas thought, "There cannot be two Buddhas in one world-system. Certainly the Blessed One has created a Buddha like himself."



The created Buddha approached where Buddha Gotama was sitting and, not paying respects [because it was unnecessary for it to do so], sat down on a created seat facing him. The Devas saw that the created Buddha was exactly the same as Buddha Gotama. Both had the thirty-two major marks. They both emitted the six-coloured rays. Then they would alternate, with first one, then the other, emitting the rays. The two Buddhas rose up to the height of the Akanitṭha world--the highest of the Deva worlds--then came back from there and descended to the limits of the edge supporting the world-system. All the interior of the world-system shone forth like a Cetiya building covered by a curved beam of gold. The Devas of the 10,000 world-systems were crowded in just this one world-system enveloped in the rays of the two Buddhas.

In his radio talk, Sayagyi U Ba Khin said, "The rays struck each other and were so great they rose together to the highest realms. From there, they came down, covering the whole universe. There was only Nibbāna-dhātu (or Dhamma-dhātu) then, and no trace of Pāpa-dhātu could be present in the whole world-system. It is at that time that the forces of the Dhamma overwhelm the forces of evil."

### **The Discourse on Proper Wandering**

The created Buddha asked Buddha Gotama the opening question of the Discourse on Proper Wandering.<sup>31</sup>

This discourse was given for the benefit of the Devas of passionate temperament. The created Buddha asks how a bhikkhu who has left lay life and thrust away sensual pleasure should correctly wander in the world.<sup>32</sup> As we have seen, the Buddha realized that only a Buddha could frame the question in such a way that the Devas would be able to grasp his Teaching. This first question is very straight forward, but it is significant that the wording of the question itself throws doubt on the desirability of being attached to sensual pleasures. It does this, however, in an indirect way. The question is not, "What is wrong with a Deva who is given over to the enjoyment of pleasure?" It simply asks how a human being who turns his back on the pleasures of lay life should conduct himself. From the question, it is clear that such a person does not even have a fixed home; he rather leads a life of wandering.

In his answer to this question, the Buddha could have put the emphasis on the physical and verbal deportment of a bhikkhu. If he had done so, only difficulties of the renunciation of worldly pleasures would have been made clear. Instead, the Buddha puts the emphasis on the mental state of such a bhikkhu--one who, as the question words it, has thrust away

sensual pleasures. In the answer it is clear that the Buddha is describing a bhikkhu who has truly gone beyond the snares of sensual pleasures by attaining Arahatsip and not a bhikkhu who forces himself to avoid them.

In terms of the worldly life, either as a human or a Deva, the bhikkhu who wanders properly will no longer trust in signs and omens. He will dispel his passion for sensual pleasures, put slander behind him, abandon anger and meanness, not react to praise or blame, abandon covetousness, harm no one else, and not follow factions. In terms of developing his mind and reaching the goal of Nibbāna, the bhikkhu who wanders properly will go beyond existence, understand the Dhamma, be completely released from the fetters, and be free of the latent tendencies.<sup>33</sup> In other words, a bhikkhu who wanders correctly will have attained Arahatsip.

Devas and Brahmās are very quick in their ability to understand, and this short discourse was sufficient for 100,000 crores of the assembled Devas to attain the fruition state of Arahatsip. Those who attained the three lower fruition states were innumerable (Asaṅkheyya).<sup>34</sup>

### **The Discourse on Quarrels and Disputes**

The Buddha then saw that some Devas were wondering, "Where do the eight phenomena beginning with quarrels come from?"<sup>35</sup> To these Devas, who were of angry temperament, he taught the Discourse on Quarrels and Disputes.<sup>36</sup> This discourse is a series of seven questions and answers between the created Buddha and Buddha Gotama. The questions grow out of the answers and all have to do with origins. The created Buddha begins this discourse by asking about the eight phenomena some of the Devas were wondering about. "Where do quarrels, disputes, lamentation, grief, avarice, pride, arrogance, and slander come from?" he asked. Buddha Gotama answered that they come from what is dear.

With the second question we see that something new is added with the questions. In this way, much more information is condensed in the seven questions. The second question is not just about the origin of things that are dear in the world but also about the origin of longings, hope, and the fulfilment of hope. The Buddha answers that they have their origin in desire (Lobhā).

The third question is about the origin and desire and other mental states such as decisions (about various beliefs),<sup>37</sup> anger, lying, and doubt. These come due to what is known as "pleasant" or "unpleasant" in the world. Seeing forms coming into existence and disappearing leads to making decisions about different beliefs. Whoever has doubts should train himself in the path of knowledge.



We can sum up the remaining questions and answers as follows: the pleasant and unpleasant arise through contact. Contact, which is associated with possessions, arises from name and form and from longing. Contacts disappear when there are no forms. Forms, which are associated with happiness and suffering, disappear when a person goes beyond ordinary and deranged perceptions. The wise man, who has no future rebirth, is above disputes and speculation about supreme purity.

At the end of this discourse, a thousand crore of the Devas attained Arahantship, and those who attained the lower stages of release could not be numbered.<sup>38</sup>

According to the commentary on the Verses of the Therīs,<sup>39</sup> it was after hearing this discourse that the wives of the five hundred warriors who had become bhikkhus went to the Buddha's step-mother, Mahā-Pajāpatī, and making her their leader, said, "We wish to be ordained by the Teacher." Mahā-Pajāpatī had been refused when she first asked for the creation of a Bhikkhunī-saṅgha, but this time, the Buddha allowed its creation on condition she accept eight important rules to be observed by all bhikkhunīs.

### **The Major Discourse on Dispositions**

The Major Discourse on Dispositions<sup>40</sup> is given in answer to two questions put by the created Buddha. It was given for the Devas of deluded temperament.<sup>41</sup> The Buddha saw that they were wondering, "Do those who abide by their own views receive blame or praise from the intelligent?" The question is slightly expanded by the created Buddha, and the theme of quarrels and disputes, which runs through all the events associated with the Great Occasion, is added. The question in the discourse is, "If some of these (people), abiding by their (own) views, dispute, (saying) 'Only this is true,' do all of them indeed incur blame, or do they gain praise also from that?"

The Buddha answers that praise gained in this way "is a little thing indeed." Seeing that disputes lead to blame and praise or to victory and defeat,<sup>42</sup> a person should recognize that security is a state where there is no disputing. He goes on to explain that a person should go beyond all opinions and putting all one's trust in virtuous conduct. One should not think that asceticism will lead to true happiness. Only those who go beyond desires and longings are without fear.

The second question is about whose doctrine is the best. People call their own doctrine superior and say that other people's doctrine is inferior. This leads to disputes. The Buddha explains that if all the doctrines that are said to be inferior **are** inferior, then all doctrines would be inferior.

Similarly, if praising one's own doctrine made it superior, all doctrines would be so.

The Buddha goes on to describe the Brahman--that is to say, the Arahant. The Brahman is beyond disputes. He is not dogmatic, for dogmatic people are hard to discipline. The Brahman leaves commonplace opinions to others. He does not follow any faction when disputes arise. He remains calm when others are not. He is completely freed.<sup>43</sup>

At the end of the discourse, a thousand crore of Devas attained Arahantship, and those who attained the lower stages of release could not be numbered.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Minor Discourse on Dispositions**

The Minor Discourse on Dispositions<sup>45</sup> was given for those of speculative temperament.<sup>46</sup> The Buddha realized that some Devas were wondering, "All these adherents of (various) views proclaim, 'We are respectable.' Are these individuals established in (right) view or are there others who accept (right) view?"

This discourse is similar to the Major Discourse on Dispositions, and once again, the question emphasizes the fact that when people argue about the relative values of their beliefs, arguments are the result. The created Buddha asks three questions in this discourse. The first is about those who say that if other people do not know their own doctrine, those people are fools. Buddha Gotama says that if calling someone a fool made that person a fool, everyone would be a fool. If following a view made a person perfect, everyone would be perfect.

The second question is about disputes over what is true or false. "Why do all ascetics not say the same thing?" The answer is that ascetics proclaim various doctrines because they are mistaken in their perception. There is only one truth, and an intelligent person (who knows this) will not enter into disputes. The third question expands on this, "Why do arguers who claim to be experts proclaim various truths? Are there many, various truths? Or do these arguers (merely) speculate?" In the longest part of the discourse, the Buddha describes how sectarians argue with each other, "inflamed with passion for their own view." But he concludes by saying, "The person who has left all decisions behind does not cause trouble in the world."

At the end of the discourse, a thousand crore of the Devas attained Arahantship, and those who attained the lower stages of release could not be numbered.<sup>47</sup>



### The Discourse on Speedy (Attainment)

The Discourse on Speedy (Attainment)<sup>48</sup> was given for the Devas of faithful temperament.<sup>49</sup> The Buddha realized that some Devas were wondering, "What is the way (leading) to the state of Arahatsip?,"<sup>50</sup> so he gave a discourse on the life of a bhikkhu. The created Buddha first asks a question about how a bhikkhu attains Nibbāna. Buddha Gotama answers that he puts a stop to the root of the thought "I am." He trains himself to expel any internal cravings and is always mindful. He is not stubborn about doctrines. He does not consider himself better than, inferior to, or equal to others. He is at peace within himself and does not seek peace from another. He is still, unmoved, and never haughty.

The created Buddha then requested more details about the path, morality (binding principles), and concentration. In response, Buddha Gotama gives many details of how a bhikkhu should comport himself, not only externally, but also within his mind.

In his description of the ideal bhikkhu, the Buddha refers to his speech, his bodily activities, his control over his senses, and his control over his mind.

The bhikkhu does not boast, quarrel, or tell lies. He abandons laughter and deception. His livelihood is pure as he does not buy or sell, he does not hoard food and clothes, and he does not practise the low arts of divination, astrology, etc. He abandons sport and sexual intercourse. He controls his senses as he is not covetous for what he sees, and he closes his ears to common talk. He controls his reactions by not lamenting when unpleasant contact occurs. He does not tremble from fear or when he incurs blame.

The bhikkhu controls his desires by not being greedy for favours, by not longing for future existence, and by not having ulterior motives. He also abandons the other mental hindrances, thrusting aside greed, avarice, anger, and slander.

The bhikkhu is diligent through not being negligent, by paying little attention to sleep, by being energetic, and abandoning sloth. He should be a meditator, living where there is little noise. He trains himself in the Doctrine, always mindful. He will know quenching (Nibbutim ñatvā) as peace.

At the conclusion of the discourse, a thousand crore of Devas attained Arahatsip, and those who attained the lower stages of release could not be numbered.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Discourse on (What Should be Done) Before the Dissolution (of the Body)**

The Discourse on (What Should Be Done) Before the Dissolution (of the Body)<sup>52</sup> was taught to the Devas of intelligent temperament.<sup>53</sup> The Buddha realized they were wondering, "What should be done before we die?"<sup>54</sup>

The discourse describing the ideal bhikkhu might not be taken as applying to all. In this discourse, the Buddha describes the supreme person, the sage who has become an Arahāt. This can be the goal of one and all. The created Buddha asks about the vision and virtuous conduct of one who is calmed. Buddha Gotama then gives a glowing description of the calmed person. Most of these attributes are found in the other discourses he gave on the Great Occasion, so we will only give a few of them here.

One who is calmed has eliminated craving even before dying. In his comportment he is restrained in speech, speaking in moderation, not arrogant, not given to slander. He is not agitated if others attack him with accusations. He is gentle and of ready wit. His attitude is one of detachment. He is not attached to the future and he does not grieve for what is past. He is detached with regards to sense-contacts, indifferent to sensual pleasures. He is not led into wrong views. He is always mindful, without greed and avarice.

At the end of the discourse, a thousand crore of the Devas attained Arahātship, and those who attained the lower stages of release could not be counted.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Story of a Devī Who Was Present at the Great Occasion**

The Dīgha Nikāya commentary concludes the discussion of the Great Occasion with the story of a Devī who was present at that time.<sup>56</sup> A Devī<sup>57</sup> once lived in a Nāga tree at the entrance to the Nāgalena<sup>58</sup> in the Koṭipabbata monastery.<sup>59</sup> A young bhikkhu in the inner cave recited the Mahāsamaya Sutta. The Devī heard him, and at the end of the discourse she gave her approval in a loud voice.

"Who is that?" the young bhikkhu asked.

"It is I, venerable sir, a Devī," she said.

"Why do you speak, giving approval?" he asked.

"Venerable sir, one day, the One of the Ten Powers, seated in the Mahāvana, recited this discourse I have heard today. Without omitting a single syllable of the Blessed One's speech, I was attentive to this Doctrine."

"Did you hear this speech by the One of the Ten Powers?" he asked.

"Yes, venerable sir," she said.



"That assembly of Devas was very large. Where did you stand?" he asked.

"Venerable sir," she said, "I lived with the devas who dwelt in the Mahāvana. It was not possible to see the land of Jambudīpa [India] due to the arrival of Devas of great power. Then I came to this country of Tambapaṇṇi [Sri Lanka], I stayed in the sea-port town of Jambukola, and I undertook to listen. Then powerful Devas arrived there, and going further back I entered the water in the Goṭakasamudda [sea near Sri Lanka] behind the region of Mahāgāma [the capital of] the province of Rohaṇa. Standing there, I listened."

"Devī," the bhikkhu asked, "did you see the Teacher standing so far away?"

"What are you saying, venerable sir?" the Devī said. "When the Teacher taught the Doctrine in the Mahāvana, I thought to myself, 'He is looking at me constantly.' And feeling modest and shy, I hid in the waves."

"It is said that on that day 100,000 crores of Devas attained Arahathship," the bhikkhu said. "Did you attain Arahathship then?"

"No, venerable sir," the Devī said. And she also answered no when he asked if she had become a Non-returner or a Once-returner.

"They say, I think, that the Devas who attained the three [higher] paths were those who were born in the past as Stream-winners," the bhikkhu said.

The Devī at that time had attained the fruition state of Stream-winner. As she was ashamed (of not having attained a higher path), she said, "Master, you ask what should not be asked."

Then the bhikkhu said to her, "But is it possible, Devī, for you to show your form?"

"It is not possible for me to show my entire body, venerable sir," she answered. "I will show only a finger, master." And she showed a finger through a keyhole facing the inner cave.

Then the Devī paid respects to the young bhikkhu and said, "You should be vigilant (Appamattā), venerable sir."

These closing words of the Devī to the young bhikkhu are good advice for us all. We must be vigilant as we strive to attain the Nibbanic peace within.

Truth will triumph!

### Abbreviations

**BL** = Buddhist Legends      **CDP** = A Critical Pāli Dictionary      **D** = Dīgha Nikāya      **Dhp-a** = The Dhammapada Commentary      **DPPN** = Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names      **Ja** = Jātaka      **JS** = Jātaka Stories      **Pj II** = Paramatthajotikā II (the commentary on the Sutta-nipāta)      **Sn** = Sutta-nipāta  
**Spk** = Sāratthappakāsinī (the commentary on the Saṃyutta Nikāya)      **Sv** = Sumaṅgalavilāsinī (the commentary on the Dīgha Nikāya)

1. This story is given in the introduction to Jātaka n° 536, Sv 672ff., Spk I 64ff., Dhp-a III 254 (BL III 70-72).
2. Ja V 413 (JS V 219) says a second version is that the dispute started over a turban worn by a female water carrier (cf. the introduction to Jātaka n° 33), but adds that the first version "being found in many commentaries and being plausible is to be accepted rather than the other."
3. Sn vv 935-954.
4. This detail is found only in the Jātaka versions (n°s 74 and 536).
5. This detail is omitted at Sv 674.
6. See BL III 70ff. The Jātaka stories are not mentioned there.
7. N° 475.
8. The story of the "thud" (Jātaka n° 322), called the story of "the splitting of the earth" (Paṭhavi-uddīyana-jātaka) at Pj II 674 and Sv 674. Jātaka n° 322, in the introduction, mentions another occasion on which this story was told.
9. N° 357. This story was also told on a different occasion.
10. The elephant was later to become Devadatta.
11. N° 74.
12. N° 33, called the story of the quail (Vaṭṭaka-jātaka) in the introduction to Jātaka n° 536 and in the commentaries.
13. "Attadaṇḍa-sutta," Sn vv 935-954.



14. This detail is found in Pj II 569.

15. N° 536, "The Cuckoo Birth Story."

16. Pj II 359. Sv 676, Spk I 71 only mention Stream-entry.

17. Pj II 359. "Jeṭṭhamāsa-uposatha-divase" (on the observance day of Jeṭṭhamāsa).

18. D II, 253-262.

19. The text has "ten world-systems," but the commentary (Sv II 678) says this should be understood as meaning "10,000 world-systems."

20. Pj II 359f.

21. Using a yellow (Pīta) kasiṇa as the object of concentration.

22. Sv 680.

23. All the Pāli words here are derived from various words with the meaning of bent or crooked.

24. Sv 681.

25. CDP explains "Inda-khīla" as being "most probably, originally, a pointed wooden post ... rammed deep into the ground and projecting about one cubit above it ... against which the wings of the gate are closed ..." It is used in similes as "a symbol of firmness ... but also of an obstacle, a hindrance."

26. Sv 685.

27. See Pj I 124 (Ill., p. 134). This is referred to at Pj II 359, which states that only Brahmās from the immaterial worlds (Arūpa-Brahmās) and the world of unconscious beings (Asañña-satta) did not come.

28. Sv 682, Pj II 361. In Sv the details about the six discourses are given before the commentary on the poem describing the Devas. Pj has the discourses as given after the Buddha describes the Deva gathering.

29. These are discussed in Path of Pur., Ch. III, ¶¶74-102, 121.

30. Details here are from Sv 682ff.

31. Sammāparibbājaniya-sutta (Sn vv 359-375). In DPPN this is given as the last of the six discourses, but the commentaries (Sv 682 and Pj II 548) say it was given first. We discuss these six discourses in the order that is mentioned at Sv 682. This order follows the order given for the six types of temperaments. Pj II, of course, discusses the discourses in the order given in the Sutta-nipāta.

32. The discussions of these discourses does not attempt to go into all the details. They are based primarily on the translation by Mr K.R. Norman (The Group of Discourses).

33. This is only a partial list of this part of the description.

34. Pj II 367.

35. Pj II 551.

36. Kalahavivāda-sutta (Sn vv 862-877), cf. Sv 682.

37. This detail is in Pj II 552.

38. Pj II 554, referring to Pj II 550.

39. Thī-a 3, 141.

40. Mahāvyūha-sutta (Sn vv 895-914).

41. Sv 682.

42. This detail is from Pj II 557.

43. This description is slightly condensed.

44. Pj II 554, referring to Pj II 550.

45. Cūlavyūha-sutta (Sn vv 878-894).

46. Sv 682.

47. Pj II 557, referring to Pj II 550.

48. Tuvaṭṭaka-sutta (Sn vv 915-934).

49. Sv 682.



50. Pj II 562.

51. Pj II 565, referring to Pj II 550.

52. Purabheda-sutta (Sn vv 848-861).

53. Sv 682.

54. Pj II 548. This could be translated: "before the dissolution of the body" (cf. Sn v 849).

55. Pj II 550.

56. Sv 695f.

57. She is called "deva-dhītā" (a daughter of the devas) in the commentary.

58. "Nāga cave."

59. Also spelled Koṭapabbata (cf. DPPN under this name). The name means "mountain top." This monastery was in Sri Lanka in the province of Rohaṇa.



