



The Life of Sāriputta

Compiled and translated from the Pāli texts by

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Prologue

In many temples of Sri Lanka you will find on either side of the Buddha image, the statues of two monks. Their robes are draped over one shoulder and they stand in the attitude of reverence, with joined palms. Quite often there are a few flowers at their feet, laid there by some pious devotee.

If you ask who they are, you will be told that they are the Enlightened One's two chief disciples, the arahats Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna. They stand in the positions they occupied in life, Sāriputta on the Buddha's right, Mahā Moggallāna on his left. When the great stupa at Sāñchī was opened up in the middle of the last century, the relic chamber was found to contain two stone receptacles; the one to the north held the body relics of Mahā Moggallāna, while that on the south enclosed those of Sāriputta. Thus they had lain while the centuries rolled past and the history of two thousand years and more played out the drama of impermanence in human life. The Roman Empire rose and fell, the glories of ancient Greece became a distant memory; new religions wrote their names, often with blood and fire, on the changing face of the earth, only to mingle at last with legends of Thebes and Babylon, and gradually the tides of commerce shifted the great centres of civilisation from East to West, while generations that had never heard the Teaching of the Buddha arose and passed away. But all the time that the ashes of the saints lay undisturbed, forgotten in the land that gave them birth, their memory was held dear wherever the Buddha's message spread, and the record of their lives was passed down from one generation to another, first by word of mouth, then in the written pages of the Buddhist Tipiṭaka, the most voluminous and detailed scripture of any religion. Next to the Enlightened One himself, it is these two disciples of his who stand highest in the veneration of Buddhists in the Theravada lands. Their names are as inseparable from the annals of Buddhism as that of the Buddha himself. If it has come about that in the course of time many legends have been woven into the tradition of their lives, this is but the natural outcome of the devotion that has always been felt for them.

And that high esteem was fully justified. Few religious teachers have been so well served by their immediate disciples as was the Buddha. This you will see as you read these pages, for they tell the story of one of the two greatest of them, Sāriputta, who was second only to the Buddha in the depth and range of his understanding, and his ability to teach the Doctrine of Deliverance. In the Tipiṭaka there is no connected account of his life, but it can be pieced together from the various incidents, scattered throughout the canonical texts and commentaries, in which he figures. Some of them are more than incidents, for his life is so closely interwoven with the life and ministry of the Buddha that he plays an essential part in it, and on a number of occasions it is Sāriputta himself who takes the leading role—as skilled preceptor and exemplar, as kind and considerate friend, as guardian of the welfare of the bhikkhus under his charge, as faithful repository of his Master's doctrine, the function which earned him the title of *Dhammasenāpati*, Marshal of the Dhamma, and always as himself, a man unique in his patience and steadfastness, modest and upright in thought, word and deed, a man to whom one act of kindness was a thing to be remembered with gratitude so long as life endured. Even among the Arahats, saints freed from all defilements of passion and delusion, he shone like the full moon in a starry sky.

This then is the man, of profound intellect and sublime nature, a true disciple of the Great Teacher, whose story we have set down, to the best of our ability, in the pages that follow. If you, the reader, can gather from this imperfect record something of the qualities of man perfected, of man fully liberated and raised to the highest level of his being; of how such a man acts and speaks and comports himself towards his fellows; and if the reading of it gives you

strength and faith in the assurance of *what man may become*, then our work has been worthwhile, and is fully rewarded.

Part I

From Birth to the Attainment of Arahatsip

The story begins at two brahminical villages in India, called Upatissa and Kolita, which lay not far from the city Rājagaha. Before our Buddha had appeared in the world, a brahmin lady named Sāri, living in Upatissa village,¹ conceived; and also, on the same day at Kolita village, did another brahmin lady whose name was Moggallī. The two families were closely connected, having been friends with one another for seven generations. From the first day of their pregnancy the families gave due care to the mothers-to-be, and after ten months both women gave birth to boys, on the same day. On the name-giving day the child of the brahmin lady Sāri received the name Upatissa, as he was a son of the foremost family of that village; and for the same reason Moggallī's son was named Kolita.

When the boys grew up they were educated, and acquired mastery of all the sciences. Each of them had a following of five hundred brahmin youths, and when they went to the river or park for sport and recreation, Upatissa used to go with five hundred palanquins, and Kolita with five hundred carriages.

Now at Rājagaha there was an annual event called the Hilltop Festival. Seats were arranged for both youths and they sat together to witness the celebrations. When there was occasion for laughter, they laughed; when the spectacles were exciting, they became excited; and they paid their fees for the extra shows. In this manner they enjoyed the festival for a second day; but on the third day their understanding was awakened and they could no longer laugh or get excited, nor did they feel inclined to pay for extra shows as they had done on the first days. Each of them had the same thought, "What is there to look at here? Before these people have reached a hundred years they will all have come to death. What we ought to do is to seek for a teaching of deliverance."

It was with such thoughts in mind that they took their seats at the festival. Then Kolita said to Upatissa, "How is this, my dear Upatissa? You are not as happy and joyous as you were on the other days. You seem now to be in a discontented mood, what is on your mind?"

"My dear Kolita, to look at these things here is of no benefit at all. It is utterly worthless! I ought to seek a teaching of deliverance for myself. That, my Kolita, is what I was thinking, seated here. But you, Kolita, seem to be discontented, too."

And Kolita replied, "Just as you have said, I also feel." When he knew that his friend had the same inclinations, Upatissa said, "That was a good thought of ours. But for those who seek a teaching of deliverance there is only one thing to do: to leave home and become ascetics. But under whom shall we live the ascetic life?"

At that time, there lived at Rājagaha an ascetic of the sect of the Wanderers (*paribbājaka*) called Sañjaya, who had a great following of pupils. Deciding to get ordination under him, Upatissa and Kolita went there, each with his own following of five hundred Brahmin youths and all of them received ordination from Sañjaya. And from the time of their ordination under him, Sañjaya's reputation and support increased abundantly.

¹ According to the Cunda Sutta (SN 47:13) and its Commentary, the name of his birthplace was Nālaka, or Nālāgama, which may be an alternative name. It was probably quite close to the more famous Nālandā. Sāriputta's father was a brahmin named Vaganta. (Comy. to Dhammapada, verse 75).

Within a short time the two friends had learned Sañjaya's entire doctrine and they asked him, "Master, does your doctrine go so far only, or is there something beyond?"

Sañjaya replied, "So far only it goes. You know all."

Hearing this, they thought to themselves, "If that is the case, it is useless to continue the Holy Life under him. We have gone forth from home to seek a teaching of deliverance. Under him we cannot find it. India is vast, if we wander through villages, towns and cities we shall certainly find a master who can show us the teaching of deliverance." And after that, whenever they heard that there were wise ascetics or brahmins at this or that place, they went and discussed with them. But there was none who was able to answer their questions, while they were able to reply to those who questioned them.

Having thus travelled through the whole of India they turned back, and arriving at their old place, they agreed between them that he who should attain to the Deathless state first, should inform the other. It was a pact of brotherhood, born of the deep friendship between the two young men.

Some time after they had made that agreement, the Blessed One, the Buddha, came to Rājagaha. It was when he had delivered the Fire Sermon at Gāyā Peak that he remembered his promise, given before his Enlightenment to King Bimbisāra, that he would come to Rājagaha again when he had attained his goal. So in stages the Blessed One journeyed from Gāyā to Rājagaha, and having received from King Bimbisāra the Bamboo Grove Monastery (Veluvana), he resided there.

Among the sixty-one Arahats (Saints) whom the Master had sent forth to proclaim to the world the virtues of the Triple Gem, there was the Elder Assaji, who belonged to the group of five ascetics, the Buddha's erstwhile companions before his Enlightenment, and afterwards his first disciples. The Elder Assaji had returned to Rājagaha from his wanderings, when one morning, while he was going for alms in the city, he was seen by Upatissa, who was on his way to the Paribbājaka ascetics' monastery. Struck by Assaji's dignified and serene appearance, Upatissa thought, "Never before have I seen such a monk. He must be one of those who are Arahats, or on the way to Arahatship. Should I not approach him and ask, 'Under whom have you been ordained? Who is your teacher and whose teaching do you profess?'" But then he thought, "It is not the proper time now for putting questions to this monk, as he is going for alms through the streets. I had better follow behind him after the manner of supplicants." And he did so.

Then, when the Elder had gathered his alms food, and Upatissa saw him going to another place intending to sit down and take his meal, he prepared for him his own ascetic's seat that he carried with him, and offered it to the Elder. The Elder Assaji took his meal, after which Upatissa served him with water from his own water-container, and in that way performed towards Assaji the duties of a pupil to a teacher.

After they had exchanged the usual courteous greetings, Upatissa said, "Serene are your features, friend. Pure and bright is your complexion. Under whom, friend, have you gone forth as an ascetic? Who is your teacher and whose doctrine do you profess?"

Assaji replied, "There is, O friend, the Great Recluse, the scion of the Sākyas, who has gone forth from the Sakya clan. Under that Blessed One I have gone forth. That Blessed One is my teacher and it is his Dhamma that I profess."

"What does the venerable one's master teach, what does he proclaim?"

Questioned thus, the Elder Assaji thought to himself, "These wandering ascetics are opposed to the Buddha's dispensation. I shall show him how profound this dispensation is." So he said,

“I am but new to the training, friend. It is not long since I went forth from home, and I came but recently to this teaching and discipline. I cannot explain the Dhamma in detail to you.”

The wanderer replied, “I am called Upatissa, friend. Please tell me according to your ability, be it much or little. It will be my task to penetrate its meaning by way of a hundred or a thousand methods.” And he added:

“Be it little or much that you can tell,
The meaning only, please proclaim to me!
To know the meaning is my sole desire;
Of no avail to me are many words.”

In response, the Elder Assaji uttered this stanza:

“Of all those things that from a cause arise,
Tathāgata the cause thereof has told;
And also how they cease to be:
This is the doctrine of the Great Recluse.”²

Upon hearing the first two lines, Upatissa became established in the Path of stream-entry, and to the ending of the last two lines he already listened as a stream-winner. When he became a stream-winner, and before he had achieved the higher attainments, he thought, “Here will the means of deliverance be found!” and he said to the Elder, “Do not enlarge upon this exposition of the Dhamma, venerable sir. This will suffice. But where does our Master live?”

“In the Bamboo Grove Monastery, wanderer.”

“Then please go on ahead, venerable sir. I have a friend with whom I agreed that he who should reach the Deathless State first, should tell the other. I shall inform him, and together we shall follow on the road you went and shall come into the Master’s presence.” Upatissa then prostrated himself at the Elder’s feet, saluted him and, taking the Elder’s leave, went back to the park of the Wandering Ascetics.

Kolita saw him approaching and thought, “Today my friend’s appearance is quite changed. Surely, he must have found the Deathless State!” And when he asked him about it, Upatissa replied, “Yes, friend, the Deathless State has been found!” and he recited to him the stanza he had heard. At the end of the verse, Kolita was established in the Fruition of stream-entry and he asked, “Where, my dear, does the Master live?”

“I learned from our teacher, the Elder Assaji, that he lives at the Bamboo Grove Monastery.”

“Then let us go, Upatissa, and see the Master,” said Kolita.

But Sāriputta was one who always respected his teacher, and therefore he said to his friend, “First, my dear, we shall go to our teacher, the Wanderer Sañjaya, and tell him that we have found the Deathless. If he can grasp it, he will penetrate to the Truth. And even if he does not he may, out of confidence in us, come with us to see the Master; and hearing the Buddha’s teaching, he will attain to the penetration of the Path and Fruition.”

² “*Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā tesam hetum tathāgato āha, tesañca yo nirodho, evamvādi mahāsamaṇo ’ti.*” This gāthā was later to become one of the best-known and most widely-disseminated stanzas of Buddhism, standing for all time as a reminder of Sāriputta’s first contact with the Dhamma and also as a worthy memorial to Assaji, his great arahant teacher. Spoken at a time when the principle of causality was not accorded the prominence it enjoys today in philosophical thought, its impact on the minds of the early Buddhists must have been revolutionary.

So both of them went to Sañjaya and said, "Oh, our teacher! What are you doing? A Buddha has appeared in the world! Well proclaimed is his Teaching and in right conduct lives his community of monks. Let us go and see the Master of the Ten Powers!"

"What are you saying, my dear?" Sañjaya exclaimed. And refusing to go with them, he spoke to them of the gain and fame they would enjoy if they would share his—the teacher's place. But they said, "Oh, we should not mind always remaining in the state of pupils! But you, O teacher, you must know whether to go or not!"

Then Sañjaya thought, "If they know so much, they will not listen to what I say." And realizing that, he replied, "You may go, then, but I cannot."

"Why not, O teacher?"

"I am a teacher of many. If I were to revert to the state of a disciple, it would be as if a huge water tank were to change into a small pitcher. I cannot live the life of a pupil now."

"Do not think like that, O teacher!" they urged.

"Let it be, my dear. You may go, but I cannot."

"Oh teacher! When a Buddha has appeared in the world, people flock to him in large crowds and pay homage to him, carrying incense and flowers. We too shall go there. And then what will happen to you?"

To which Sañjaya replied, "What do you think, my pupils, are there more fools in this world, or more wise people?"

"Fools there are many, O teacher, and the wise are few."

"If that is so, my friends, then the wise ones will go to the wise recluse Gotama, and the fools will come to me, the fool. You may go now, but I shall not."

So the two friends left, saying, "You will come to understand your mistake, O teacher!" And after they had gone there was a split among Sañjaya's pupils, and his monastery became almost empty. Seeing his place empty, Sañjaya vomited hot blood. Five hundred of his disciples had left along with Upatissa and Kolita, out of whom two hundred and fifty returned to Sañjaya. With the remaining two hundred and fifty, and their own following, the two friends arrived at the Bamboo Grove Monastery.

There the Master, seated among the fourfold assembly,³ was preaching the Dhamma, and when the Blessed One saw the two coming he addressed the monks, "These two friends, Upatissa and Kolita, who are now coming, will be two excellent disciples to me, a blessed pair."

Having approached, the friends saluted the Blessed One reverentially and sat down at one side. When they were seated they spoke to the Blessed One, saying, "May we obtain, O Lord, the ordination of the Going Forth under the Blessed One, may we obtain the Higher Ordination!"

And the Blessed One said, "Come, O bhikkhus! Well proclaimed is the Dhamma. Now live the Life of Purity, to make an end of suffering!" This alone served as the ordination of these venerable ones.

Then the Master continued his sermon, taking the individual temperaments⁴ of the listeners into consideration; and with the exception of the two chief disciples all of them attained to

³ That is, monks, nuns, and male and female lay followers.

⁴ *Carita-vasena*. This refers to the types of character (*carita*) as explained in *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga, Ch. III)*.

Arahatship. But the two chief disciples had not yet completed the task of attaining to the three higher paths of sanctity. The reason for this was the greatness of the “knowledge pertaining to the perfection of a disciple” (*sāvaka-pārami-nāṇa*), which they had still to reach.

Upatissa received the name of Sāriputta on becoming a disciple of the Buddha, while Kolita became known as Mahā Moggallāna. Now the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna went to live at a village in Magadha called Kallavāla, on which he depended for alms food. On the seventh day after his ordination when he was doing the recluse’s work (of meditation), fatigue and torpor fell upon him. But spurred on by the Master,⁵ he dispelled his fatigue, and while listening to the Master expounding to him the meditation subject of the elements (*dhātu-kammaṭṭhāna*), he completed the task of winning to the three higher paths and reached the acme of a disciple’s perfections (*sāvaka-pāramī*).

But the Venerable Sāriputta continued to stay near the Master, at a cave called the Boar’s Shelter (*Sūkhakhata-leṇa*), depending on Rājagaha for his alms food. Half a month after his ordination the Blessed One gave a discourse on the comprehension of feelings⁶ to the Venerable Sāriputta’s nephew, the wandering ascetic Dīghanakha. The Venerable Sāriputta was standing behind the Master, fanning him. While following with his thoughts the progress of the discourse, as though sharing the food prepared for another, the Venerable Sāriputta on that occasion reached the acme of “knowledge pertaining to a disciple’s perfection and attained to Arahatship together with the fourfold analytical knowledge (*paṭisambhidā-nāṇa*).”⁷ And his nephew, at the end of the sermon, was established in the Fruition of stream-entry.⁸

Now it may be asked, “Did not the Venerable Sāriputta possess great wisdom; and if so, why did he attain to the disciple’s perfections later than the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna?” The answer is because of the greatness of the preparations necessary for it. When poor people want to go anywhere they take to the road at once; but in the case of kings, larger preparations are required, as for instance to get ready the elephants and chariots, and so on. Thus it was in this case.

On that same day, when the evening shadows had lengthened, the Master caused his disciples to assemble and bestowed upon the two elders the rank of chief disciples. At this, some monks were displeased and said among themselves, “The Master should have given the rank of chief disciples to those who were ordained first, that is, the group of five disciples. If not to them, then either to the group of two hundred and fifty bhikkhus headed by Yasa, or to the thirty of the auspicious group (*bhaddavaggiya*), or else to the three Kassapa brothers. But passing over all these Great Elders, he has given it to those whose ordination was the very last of all.”

The Master inquired about the subject of their talk. When he was told, he said, “I do not show preference, but give to each what he has aspired to. When, for instance, Kondañña in a previous life gave alms food nine times during a single harvest, he did not aspire to Chief Discipleship; his aspiration was to be the very first to penetrate to the highest state, Arahatship. And so it came about. But when Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna many aeons ago, at the time of the Buddha Anomadassi, were born as the brahmin youth Sarada and landowner Sirivaḍḍhaka, they made the aspiration for Chief Discipleship. This, O bhikkhus, was the aspiration for these, my sons, at that time. Hence I have given them just what they aspired to, and did not do it out of preference.”

⁵ This is a reference to the discourse in the AN 7:58 (A IV 85).

⁶ Dīghanakha Sutta, MN 74.

⁷ The fact of his attainment to analytical knowledge, which has here been added to the commentarial text, was mentioned by the Venerable Sāriputta himself in AN 4:172.

⁸ The Venerable Sāriputta refers to his way of attaining Arahatship in Th 995–96.

This account of the beginning of the Venerable Sāriputta's career is taken from the commentary to the Etad-agga chapter of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, with some passages from the parallel version in the Dhammapada commentary. From it some of the principal traits of the Venerable Sāriputta's character are already discernible. His capacity for deep and constant friendship showed itself while he was still a worldling, a youth nurtured in luxury and pleasure, and it persisted after he had abandoned the household life. On receiving his first insight into the Dhamma, and before proceeding any further, his first thought was for his friend Kolita and the vow they had sworn together. His penetrating intellect is revealed in the promptness with which he grasped the essence of the Buddha's teaching from a few simple words. And, most rare of all, he combined that intellectual power with a modesty and sweetness of nature that expressed itself in gratitude and reverence for anyone, even the misguided Sañjaya, who had taught him things of value. It was no wonder, therefore, that throughout his life he continued to show respect for the Venerable Assaji, from whom he had gained his introduction to the Buddha's Teaching. We are told in the commentary to the Nāvā Sutta (Sutta-Nipāta), and also in the commentary to v. 392 of the Dhammapada, that whenever the Venerable Sāriputta lived in the same monastery as the Elder Assaji, he always went to pay obeisance to him immediately after having done so to the Blessed One. This he did out of reverence, thinking, "This venerable one was my first teacher. It was through him that I came to know the Buddha's Dispensation." And when the Elder Assaji lived in another monastery, the Venerable Sāriputta used to face the direction in which the Elder Assaji was living, and to pay homage to him by touching the ground at five places (with the head, hands and feet), and saluting with joined palms.

But this led to misunderstanding, for when other monks saw it they said, "After becoming a Chief Disciple, Sāriputta still worships the heavenly quarters! Even today he cannot give up his brahmanical views!" Hearing these remarks, the Blessed One said, "It is not so, bhikkhus. Sāriputta does not worship the heavenly quarters. He salutes him through whom he came to know the Dhamma. It is him he salutes, worships and reveres as his teacher. Sāriputta is one who gives devout respect to his teacher." It was then that the Master preached to the monks assembled there the Nāvā Sutta,⁹ which starts with the words:

"As gods their homage pay to Indra,
So should a man give reverence to him
From whom he learned the Dhamma."

Another example of the Venerable Sāriputta's gratitude is given in the story of Rādha Thera. The commentary to v. 76 of the Dhammapada relates that there was, living at Sāvattihī, a poor brahmin who stayed in the monastery. There he performed little services such as weeding, sweeping, and the like and the monks supported him with food. They did not, however, want to ordain him. One day the Blessed One, in his mental survey of the world, saw that this brahmin was mature for Arahatsip. He inquired about him from the assembled monks, and asked whether any one of them remembered to have received some help from the poor brahmin. The Venerable Sāriputta said that he remembered that once, when he was going for alms in Rājagaha, this poor brahmin had given him a ladle full of alms food that he had begged for himself. The Master asked Sāriputta to ordain the man, and he was given the name Rādha. The Venerable Sāriputta then advised him time and again as to what things should be done, and always Rādha received his admonitions gladly, without resentment. And so, living according to the Elder's advice, he attained Arahatsip in a short time.

This time the bhikkhus remarked on Sāriputta's sense of gratitude and said that he who himself willingly accepts advice obtains pupils who do the same. Commenting on this, the

⁹ Sutta Nipāta, vv. 316ff. (Also called "Dhamma Sutta.")

Buddha said that not only then, but also formerly Sāriputta had showed gratitude and remembered any good deed done to him. And in that connection the Master told the *Alīnacitta Jātaka*, the story of a grateful elephant.¹⁰

¹⁰ Jātaka No. 156.

Part II

Maturity of Insight

Friendships

If Sāriputta was notable for his lasting sense of gratitude, he was no less so for his capacity for friendship. With Mahā Moggallāna, the friend and companion of his youth, he maintained a close intimacy, and many were the conversations they held on the Dhamma. One of these, which is of special interest as throwing light on the process of Venerable Sāriputta's attainment, is recorded in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, Catukka-Nipāta, No. 167. It relates that once the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna went to see the Elder and said to him:

“There are four ways of progress, brother Sāriputta: difficult progress, with sluggish direct-knowledge; difficult progress, with swift direct-knowledge; easy progress, with sluggish direct-knowledge; easy progress, with swift direct-knowledge.

“By which of these four ways of progress, brother, was your mind freed from the cankers without remnants of clinging?” To which the Venerable Sāriputta replied, “By that of those four ways of progress, brother, which is easy and has swift direct-knowledge.”

The explanation of this passage is that if the suppression of the defilements preparatory to absorption or insight takes place without great difficulty, progress is called “easy” (*sukha-paṭipadā*); in the reverse case it is “difficult” or “painful” (*dukkha-paṭipadā*). If, after the suppression of the defilements, the manifestation of the Path, the goal of insight, is quickly effected, the direct-knowledge (connected with the Path) is called “swift” (*khippābhiññā*); in the reverse case it is “sluggish” (*daṇḍābhiññā*). In this discourse the Venerable Sāriputta's statement refers to his attainment of arahatship. His attainment of the first three Paths, however, was, according to the commentary to the above text, connected with “easy progress and sluggish direct-knowledge.”

In such ways as this did the two friends exchange information about their experience and understanding of the Dhamma. They were also frequently associated in attending to affairs of the Saṅgha. One such occasion was when they combined in winning back certain monks who had been led astray by Devadatta. There is an interesting passage¹¹ in this connection which shows that the Venerable Sāriputta's generous praise of Devadatta's achievements before the latter brought about a schism in the Saṅgha was the cause of a slight embarrassment. It relates that when the Buddha asked Sāriputta to proclaim in Rājagaha that Devadatta's deeds and words should no longer be regarded as connected with the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, the Venerable Sāriputta said, “Formerly I spoke at Rājagaha in praise of Devadatta's magical powers. How can I now make that declaration about Devadatta?” The Buddha asked, “Did you not speak truthfully, Sāriputta, when you praised Devadatta's magical powers?” “Yes, Lord,” the elder replied. “So you will now speak truthfully also, Sāriputta, when you make this proclamation about Devadatta.” So, after receiving the formal approval of the Saṅgha, the Venerable Sāriputta, together with many monks, went to Rājagaha and made the declaration about Devadatta.

When Devadatta had formally split the Saṅgha by declaring that he would conduct Saṅgha-acts separately, he went to Vultures' Peak with five hundred young monks who through

¹¹ Cv VII 3.2/Vin II 189.

ignorance had become his followers. To win them back, the Buddha sent Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna to Vultures' Peak, and while Devadatta was resting, the two Chief Disciples preached to the monks who attained to stream-entry and went back to the Master.¹²

Another time when the Venerable Sāriputta and the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna worked together to restore order in the Saṅgha was when a group of monks led by Assaji (not the Elder Assaji referred to earlier) and Punnabbassu, living at Kīṭāgiri, were misbehaving. In spite of repeated admonitions, these monks would not mend their ways, so the two chief disciples were sent to pronounce the penalty of *pabbājaniya-kamma* (excommunication) on those who would not submit to the discipline.¹³

Venerable Sāriputta's devotion to his friend was fully reciprocated; we are told of two occasions when Sāriputta was ill, and Mahā Moggallāna attended to him and brought him medicine.

Yet there was nothing exclusive about the Venerable Sāriputta's friendships, for according to the commentary to the Mahāgosinga Sutta there was also a bond of mutual affection between him and the Elder Ānanda. On the part of Sāriputta it was because he thought, "He is attending on the Master—a duty which should have been performed by me"; and Ānanda's affection was due to the fact that Sāriputta had been declared by the Buddha as his foremost disciple. When Ānanda gave Novice Ordination to young pupils he used to take them to Sāriputta to obtain higher ordination under him. The Venerable Sāriputta did the same in regard to Ānanda, and in that way they had five hundred pupils in common.

Whenever the Venerable Ānanda received choice robes or other requisites he would offer them to Sāriputta, and in the same way, Sāriputta passed on to Ānanda any special offerings that were made to him. Once Ānanda received from a certain brahmin a very valuable robe, and with the Master's permission he kept it for ten days awaiting Sāriputta's return. The sub-commentary says that later teachers commented on this, "There may be those who say, 'We can well understand that Ānanda, who had not yet attained to Arahatship, felt such affection. But how is it in the case of Sāriputta, who was a canker-free arahant?' To this we answer, 'Sāriputta's affection was not one of worldly attachment, but a love for Ānanda's virtues (*guṇa-bhatti*).'"

The Buddha once asked the Venerable Ānanda, "Do you, too, approve of Sāriputta?" And Ānanda replied, "Who, O Lord, would not approve of Sāriputta, unless he were childish, corrupt, stupid or of perverted mind! Learned, O Lord, is the Venerable Sāriputta; of great wisdom, O Lord, is the Venerable Sāriputta; of broad, bright, quick, keen and penetrative wisdom is the Venerable Sāriputta; of few wants and contented, inclined to seclusion, not fond of company, energetic, eloquent, willing to listen, an exhorter who censures what is evil."¹⁴

In the Theragāthā (v. 1034f) we find the Venerable Ānanda describing his emotion at the time of Sāriputta's death. "When the Noble Friend (Sāriputta) had gone," he declares, "the world was plunged in darkness for me." But he adds that after the companion had left him behind, and also the Master had passed away, there was no other friend like mindfulness directed on the body. Ānanda's sorrow on learning of the Venerable Sāriputta's death is also described very movingly in the Cunda Sutta.¹⁵

Sāriputta was a true friend in the fullest sense of the word. He well understood how to bring out the best in others, and in doing so did not hesitate sometimes to speak straightforwardly

¹² Cv VII 4.3/Vin II 200.

¹³ Cv I 13–17/Vin II 200. *Saḍghādisesa* 13, Vin III 179ff.

¹⁴ SN 11:2/S I 112.

¹⁵ See p. 37

and critically, like the ideal friend described by the Buddha, who points out his friend's faults. It was in this way that he helped the venerable Anuruddha in his final break-through to Arahatship, as recorded in the Aṅguttara Nikāya (Tika-Nipāta No. 128):

Once the Venerable Anuruddha went to see the Venerable Sāriputta; when they had exchanged courteous greetings, he sat down and said to the Venerable Sāriputta, "Friend Sāriputta, with the divine eye that is purified, transcending human ken, I can see the thousandfold world-system. Firm is my energy, unremitting; my mindfulness is alert and unconfused; the body is tranquil and unperturbed; my mind is concentrated and one-pointed. And yet my mind is not freed from cankers, not freed from clinging."

"Friend Anuruddha," said the Venerable Sāriputta, "that you think thus of your divine eye, this is conceit in you. That you think thus of your firm energy, your alert mindfulness, your unperturbed body and your concentrated mind, this is restlessness in you. That you think of your mind not being freed from the cankers, this is worrying¹⁶ in you. It will be good, indeed, if the Venerable Anuruddha, abandoning these three states of mind and paying no attention to them, will direct the mind to the Deathless Element."

And the Venerable Anuruddha later on gave up these three states of mind, paid no attention to them, and directed his mind to the Deathless Element. And the Venerable Anuruddha, living then alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, with determined mind, before long reached in this very life, understanding and experiencing it by himself, that highest goal of the Holy Life, for the sake of which noble sons go forth entirely from home into homelessness. And he knew, "Exhausted is rebirth, lived is the holy life, the work is done, nothing further remains after this."

Thus the Venerable Anuruddha became one of the Arahats.

Sāriputta must have been stimulating company, and sought after by many. What attracted men of quite different temperament to him and his conversation can be well understood from the incident described in the Mahāgosinga Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya No. 32). One evening the Elders Mahā Moggallāna, Mahā Kassapa, Anuruddha, Revata and Ānanda went to Sāriputta to listen to the Dhamma. The Venerable Sāriputta welcomed them, saying, "Delightful is this Gosinga Forest of Sāla trees; there is moonlight tonight, all the Sāla trees are in full bloom, and it seems that heavenly perfume drifts around. What kind of monk, do you think, Ānanda, will lend more lustre to this Gosinga Sāla Forest?"

The same question was put to the others as well, and each answered according to his individual nature. Finally, Sāriputta gave his own answer, which was as follows:

"There is a monk who has control over his mind, who is not under the control of his mind.¹⁷ In whatever (mental) abiding or attainment he wishes to dwell in the forenoon, he can dwell in it at that time. In whatever (mental) abiding or attainment he wishes to dwell at noon, he can dwell in it at that time. In whatever (mental) abiding or attainment he wishes to dwell in the evening, he can dwell in it at that time. It is as though a king's or royal minister's cloth chest were full of many-coloured garments; so that whatever pair of garments he wishes to wear in the morning, or at noon, or in the evening, he can wear it at will at those times. Similarly it is with a monk who has control over his mind, who is not under the control of his mind; in whatever (mental) abiding or attainment he wishes to dwell in the morning, or at noon, or in the evening, he can do so at will at those times. Such a monk, friend Moggallāna, may lend lustre to this Gosinga Sāla Forest."

¹⁶ Conceit (*māna*) and restlessness (*uddhacca*) are two of the three fetters (*saṃyojana*) which are destroyed only at the stage of Arahatship. Worry (or scruples: *kukkucca*), however, is removed already at the stage of non-returner (*anāgāmi*).

¹⁷ Is not subject to the vagaries of the mind.

They then went to the Buddha, who approved of all their answers and added his own.

We see from this episode that Sāriputta, with all his powerful intellect and his status in the Saṅgha, was far from being a domineering type who tried to impose his views on others. He understood well how to stimulate self-expression in his companions in a natural and charming way, conveying to them the pensive mood evoked by the enchanting scenery. His own sensitive nature responded to it, and drew a similar response from his friends.

There are many such conversations recorded between Sāriputta and other monks, not only the Venerables Mahā Moggallāna, Ānanda and Anuruddha, but also Mahā Koṭṭhita, Upavāna, Samiddhi, Savittha, Bhūmija and many more. It seems that the Buddha himself liked to talk to Sāriputta, for he often did so, and many of his discourses were addressed to his “Marshal of the Law,” to use the title he gave him.

Once, Sāriputta repeated some words the Master had spoken to Ānanda on another occasion. “This is the whole of the life of purity (*brahmacariya*); namely, noble friendship, noble companionship, noble association.”¹⁸

There could be no better exemplification of that teaching than the life of the Chief Disciple himself.

The Helper

Among the bhikkhus, Sāriputta was outstanding as one who helped others. We find a reference to this in the Devadaha Sutta.¹⁹ Some visiting monks, about to return to their own places, took formal leave of the Buddha. He then advised them to see the Venerable Sāriputta and take leave of him also, telling them, “Sāriputta, O bhikkhus, is wise, and a helper of his fellow monks.” The commentary, in explanation of these words, says, “Sāriputta was a helper in two ways: by giving material help (*āmisānuggaha*) and the help of the Dhamma (*dhammānuggaha*).”

The Elder, it is said, did not go on alms round in the early morning hours as the other bhikkhus did. Instead, when they had all gone he walked around the entire monastery grounds, and wherever he saw an unswept place, he swept it; wherever refuse had not been removed, he threw it away; where furniture such as beds, chairs, etc., or earthenware had not been properly arranged, he put them in order. He did that lest other, non-Buddhist ascetics, visiting the monastery, might see some disorderliness and speak in contempt of the bhikkhus.

Then he used to go to the hall for the sick, and having spoken consoling words to the patients he would ask them about their needs. To procure their requirements he took with him young novices, and went in search of medicine either by way of the customary alms round or to some appropriate place. When the medicine was obtained he would give it to the novices, saying, “Caring for the sick has been praised by the Master! Go now, good people, and be heedful!” After sending them back to the monastery sick room, he would go on the alms-round or take his meal at a supporter’s house. This was his habit when staying for some time at a monastery.

But when going on a journey on foot with the Blessed One, he did not go with the very first of the monks, shod with sandals and umbrella in hand, as one who thinks, “I am the Chief Disciple.” But letting the young novices take his bowl and robes sending them ahead with the others, he himself would first attend to those who were old, very young, or unwell, making them apply oil to any sores they might have on their bodies. Then, either later on the same day or on the next day, he would leave together with them.

¹⁸ SN 45:2/S V 2

¹⁹ SN 22:2/S III 5.

Once, when for that reason the Elder Sāriputta had arrived particularly late at the place where the others were resting, he did not get proper quarters for the night, and seated himself under a tent made from robes. The Master saw this, and next day he caused the monks to assemble and told them the story of the elephant, the monkey, and the partridge who, after deciding which was the eldest of them, lived together showing respect for the seniormost.²⁰ He then laid down the rule that “lodgings should be allocated according to seniority.”²¹

In this way the Venerable Sāriputta was a helper by giving material help.

Sometimes he would give material help and the help of the Dhamma together, as when he visited Samitigutta, who suffered from leprosy, in the infirmary. The Theragāthā commentary tells us that he said to Samitigutta, “Friend, so long as the aggregates (*khandhā*) continue, all feeling is just suffering. Only when the aggregates are no more is there no more suffering.” Having thus given him the contemplation of feelings as subject of meditation, Sāriputta went away. Samitigutta, following the Elder’s instruction, developed insight and realised the six supernormal powers (*chalabhiññā*) as an arahant.²²

Again, when Anāthapiṇḍika was lying on his deathbed, Sāriputta visited him, accompanied by Ānanda. Sāriputta preached to the dying man on non-attachment, and Anāthapiṇḍika was greatly moved by the profound discourse.²³

Another sickbed sermon given by the Elder to Anāthapiṇḍika is preserved in the Sotāpatti-Saṃyutta (SN 55:26). In this discourse, Anāthapiṇḍika is reminded that those things which lead to rebirth in states of woe are no longer in him, but that he possesses the four basic qualities of stream-entry (*sotāpattiyaṅga*) and the eight path factors: in considering this, his pains would subside. As the result, his pains did subside.

Once the Elder Channa was lying ill and in great pain. The Venerable Sāriputta paid him a visit, in company with the Elder Mahā Cunda. Seeing the sick monk’s agonies, Sāriputta at once offered to go in search of medicines and suitable food for him. But Channa told them he had decided to take his life, and after they had left he did so. Afterwards the Buddha explained that the Elder Channa’s act was without demerit and blameless, since he had attained Arahatsip while dying. This story is found in the Channovāda Sutta (MN 144).

It is said that whenever Sāriputta gave advice, he showed infinite patience; he would admonish and instruct up to a hundred or a thousand times, until his pupil was established in the Fruition of stream-entry. Only then did he discharge him and give his advice to others. Very great was the number of those who, after receiving his instruction and following it faithfully, attained to Arahatsip. In the Saccavibhaṅga Sutta (MN 141) the Buddha says, “Sāriputta is like a mother who brings forth, while Moggallāna is like a nurse of that which has been brought forth. Sāriputta trains to the Fruit of stream-entry, and Moggallāna trains to the highest goal.”

Explaining this passage, the commentary says, “When Sāriputta accepted pupils for training, whether they were ordained by him or by others, he favoured them with his material and spiritual help, looked after them in sickness, gave them a subject of meditation and at last, when he knew that they had become stream-winners and had risen above the dangers of the lower worlds, he dismissed them in the confident knowledge that ‘Now they can, by their own manly strength, produce the higher stages of saintship.’ Having thus become free from concern about their future, he instructed new groups of pupils. But Mahā Moggallāna, when training pupils in the same way, did not give up concern for them until they had attained Arahatsip. This was

²⁰ Tittita Jātaka (No. 37).

²¹ Cv VI 6.4/Vin II 162.

²² Theragāthā v. 81 and commentary.

²³ MN 143.

because he felt, as was said by the Master, 'As even a little excrement is of evil smell, I do not praise even the shortest spell of existence, be it no longer than a snap of the fingers.'"

But although the Majjhima commentary says that Sāriputta used to lead his regular pupils only up to stream-entry, in individual cases he helped monks to attain the higher stages. The Udāna commentary, for example, says that "at that time bhikkhus in higher training (*sekhā*) often used to approach the Venerable Sāriputta for a subject of meditation that could help them to attain the three higher Paths." It was after taking instruction from Sāriputta that the Elder Lakuṅṭhika Bhaddiya ("The Dwarf")²⁴ attained Arahātship, having been a stream-winner at the time. There is also the case of the Venerable Anuruddha, referred to on p. 14.

It was in this manner that the Venerable Sāriputta gave the help of the Dhamma. He was a great leader of men and an outstanding spiritual adviser. To the latter task he brought not only a keen and perceptive understanding of the human mind, but also a warm, human interest in others which must have been a great encouragement to those under his spiritual guidance. We have already seen how ready he was to give generous praise where it was due; he was also keen at all times to meet noble monks, particularly those whom the Master had commended. One such was the Elder Puṇṇa Mantāniputta; when Sāriputta learned that he had come on a visit he went to meet him. Without telling him who he was, he listened to Puṇṇa's great discourse, the Stage Coach simile (MN 24), and when it was ended gave it high praise.

Administering to the physical as well as the spiritual needs of the monks under his charge, restraining them with kindly admonitions and encouraging them with the praise their efforts deserved, guiding them on the path showing in all he did that vital sympathetic interest which draws forth the best from a pupil, Sāriputta combined the qualities of a perfect teacher with those of a perfect friend. He was ready to help in every way, in small things as in great. Filled with the virtue of the Holy Life himself, he was quick to see virtue in others, expert in developing it in those in whom it was latent, and among the first to extol it where it was in full flower. His was no cold, aloof perfection, but the richest intermingling of spiritual exaltation with the qualities that are finest and most endearing in a human being.

Attainment

Two stanzas in the Theragāthā (995–96) relate, in words ascribed to the Venerable Sāriputta himself, the way in which he attained Arahātship. There he tells us:

"It was to another that the Blessed One was teaching the Dhamma; to the Dhamma-preaching I listened intently for my own good. And not in vain, for freed from all defilements, I gained release."

In the next two verses (996–97) the Elder declares that he felt no inclination to develop the five supernormal powers (*abhiññā*). However, the Iddhividha-Kathā of the Paṭisambhidāmagga credits him with possessing the intensive degree of meditative concentration called "the power of intervention by concentration" (*samādhi-vipphāra-iddhi*), which is capable of intervening in certain normal physiological processes or other natural events. This is illustrated by the anecdote in the *Visuddhimagga*, Ch. XII, which records that once when the Venerable Sāriputta was living with the Elder Mahā Moggallāna at Kapotakandarā, he was sitting meditating in the open with his hair freshly shaved when he was given a malicious blow on the head by a mischievous spirit. The blow was a very severe one, but at the time it was given "the Elder was absorbed in meditative attainment; consequently he suffered no harm." The source of this story is the Udāna (4.4) which continues the account as follows:

²⁴ Ud 7.1.

The Venerable Mahā Moggallāna saw the incident and approached the Venerable Sāriputta to ask how he fared. He asked him, “Brother, are you comfortable? Are you doing well? Does nothing trouble you?”

“I am comfortable, brother Moggallāna,” said the Venerable Sāriputta. “I am doing well, brother Moggallāna. Only my head troubles me a little.”

Whereupon the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna said, “O wonderful is it, brother Sāriputta! O marvellous is it, brother Sāriputta! How great is the psychic power, and how great is the might of the Venerable Sāriputta! For just now, brother Sāriputta, a certain demon gave you a blow on the head. And a mighty blow it was! With such a blow one might fell an elephant seven or seven and a half cubits high, or one might split a mountain peak. But the Venerable Sāriputta says only this, ‘I am comfortable, brother Moggallāna. I am doing well, brother Moggallāna. Only my head troubles me a little.’”

Then the Venerable Sāriputta replied, “O wonderful is it, brother Moggallāna! O marvellous is it, brother Moggallāna! How great is the psychic power and how great is the might of the Venerable Moggallāna, that he should see any demon at all! As for me, I have not seen so much as a mud-sprite!”

The Anupada Sutta (MN 111) contains a description of Sāriputta’s attainments given by the Buddha himself. In it the Blessed One declares that the Venerable Sāriputta had mastered the nine meditative attainments, that is the four fine-material and four immaterial jhānas and the cessation of perception and feeling. And in the Sāriputta Saṃyutta²⁵ the Venerable Elder mentions the fact himself, in speaking to Ānanda, adding that in all the stages he was free of any self-reference, “I had no such thoughts as ‘I am entering the jhana; I have entered it; I am rising from it.’” And on another occasion he describes to Ānanda how he attained to such developed concentration of mind that with regard to the earth element he was without earth perception of it. And so also, with regard to the other three elements and the four immaterial absorptions; he was without perception of them. Yet it seems that he was not entirely without perception of another kind, his only perception being that “Nibbāna is ceasing of coming-to-be” (*bhava-nirodha*).²⁶

This detached attitude to the jhānic attainments may have been due to the meditative “abiding in voidness” (*suññatā-vihāra*) which the Venerable Sāriputta cultivated. We read in the Piṇḍapāta-pārisuddhi Sutta (MN 151) that the Buddha once remarked on the Venerable Sāriputta’s radiant features and asked him by which state of mind this radiance had been caused.²⁷ The Venerable Sāriputta replied that he frequently practiced the abiding in voidness, upon which the Buddha said that this was the abode of great men, and proceeded to describe it in detail. The Udāna records that on three occasions the Master saw the Venerable Sāriputta seated in meditation outside the monastery and uttered verses (*udāna*) in praise of a firm and calm mind.

We may perhaps imagine the Venerable Sāriputta seated in meditation in a bower such as that mentioned in the Devadaha Sutta (SN 22:2), where it is said, “Once the Blessed One lived in the Sakya country, at Devadaha, a market town of the Sākyas. At that time the Venerable Sāriputta was seated not far from the Blessed One, under an Eḷagalā bush.” The commentary to the text tells us, “At Devadaha there was a bower under an Eḷagalā bush. This bush grows where there is a constant supply of flowing water. People had made a bower with four posts over which they let the bush grow, forming a roof. Under it they made a seat by placing bricks

²⁵ SN 28:1/S III 225f.

²⁶ AN 10:7/A V 8ff.

²⁷ The Buddhas, although they are able to divine such matters themselves, ask questions for the instruction and illumination of others.

there and strewing it with sand. It was a cool place for the daytime, with a fresh breeze blowing from the water." It may well have been in some such rustic shelter as this that the Buddha saw Sāriputta deep in meditation, on those occasions when he extolled his disciple's tranquillity and detachment.

Concerning his attainment to analytical knowledge (*paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*), the Venerable Sāriputta speaks of it in the Aṅguttara Nikāya (AN 4:172), where he says:

"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 Dhamma, the analytical knowledge of language, the analytical knowledge of perspicuity. 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). Present is the Master who is well acquainted with our attainments."

From all of this it is evident that the Venerable Sāriputta was a master of all the stages of attainment up to and including the highest insight-knowledge. What could be more aptly said of him than this, in the Buddha's own words:

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

"After me, O monks, Sāriputta rightly turns the supreme Wheel of Dhamma, even as I have turned it." (MN 111, Anupada Sutta)

The Turner of the Wheel

The discourses of Sāriputta and the books attributed to him form a comprehensive body of teaching that for scope and variety of exposition can stand beside that of the Master himself. Sāriputta understood in a unique way how to organize and present the rich material of the Dhamma lucidly, in a manner that was intellectually stimulating and also an inspiration to practical effort. We find this exemplified in two classic discourses of the Majjhima Nikāya, the Sāmaṅgali Sutta (MN 9) and the Greater Sutta on the Elephant Footprint Simile (MN 28).

The *Greater Discourse on the Elephant Footprint Simile*²⁸ is a masterpiece of methodical treatment. It begins with the statement that the Four Noble Truths comprise everything that is salutary, and then singles out the Truth of Suffering as being identifiable with the five aggregates of personality. From these, the aggregate of corporeality is chosen for detailed investigation; it is shown to consist of the four great elements, each of which is said to be internal and external. The bodily parts and functions belonging to the internal element are stated in detail, and it is said of both the internal and external elements that they neither belong to a self, nor constitute a self. This insight leads to disgust and detachment regarding the elements.

The discourse then goes on to show the impermanence of the mighty external elements when they are involved in great upheavals of nature, and against that background it is stressed that this tiny body, the product of craving, can never be regarded as "I" or "mine" or considered in the sense of "I am." And when a monk who has this firm and deeply rooted insight meets with abuse, blame and hostility on the part of others, he is able to analyze the situation soberly and so

²⁸ See *Wheel* No. 101.

remain master of it. He recognizes that the painful feeling that has arisen in him is produced by ear-contact, which is in itself no more than a conditioned phenomenon; and of all the constituent parts of the situation he knows that they are impermanent. This he discerns with reference to contact, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. At this point of the discourse we see that the other four aggregates, the mental components of personality, are introduced in an organic context, together with the already mentioned factor of contact. The discourse then continues, "Then his mind, just by taking only the elements as its object, becomes elated, gladdened, firm and intent; and even if he is beaten and injured he will think, 'This body is of such a nature that is liable to such injuries.'" Thereupon he recollects the Master's Simile of the Saw and will resolve to follow the Buddha's injunction to suffer all injuries in patience, whatever may happen to him.

But, the sermon continues, if when thus remembering the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, the monk's equanimity does not endure, he will be stirred by a sense of urgency and feel ashamed that, in spite of that recollection of the Triple Gem, he could not remain constant. On the other hand, if his endurance persists he will experience happiness. "Even to this extent, much has been achieved by that monk," he says.

Here all the four elements are treated identically. The concluding section starts by comparing the body and its constituent parts with a house, which is made up of its various components. After that follows an exposition of the conditioned arising of the sixfold perceptual consciousness. In mentioning the five sense-organs and sense-objects as the basic conditions for the arising of five-sense consciousness, derived corporeality is here introduced by means of a prominent part of it, thus completing the treatment of the corporeal aggregate. With the state of consciousness having thus arisen, all five aggregates are given, and in that way their conjunction can be understood, as well as their dependent origination. And in this connection Sāriputta quotes the Master, "He who understands dependent origination understands the Dhamma; and he who understands the Dhamma understands dependent origination." Desire, inclination and attachment in regard to the five aggregates is the *origin of suffering*. Removal of that desire, inclination and attachment is the *cessation of suffering*. And of the monk who has understood this it is said, "Even to this extent, much has been achieved by that monk," Thus the exposition is rounded off with the Four Noble Truths. This discourse is indeed like an intricate and beautifully constructed piece of music ending on a solemn and majestic chord.

Another model exposition of the Venerable Sāriputta's is the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta.²⁹ This is a masterpiece of teaching, which also provides a framework for further elaboration, such as given in the extensive commentary to it. The commentary says, "In the Buddha Word as collected in the five great Nikāyas there is no discourse other than the Discourse on Right Understanding, wherein the Four Noble Truths are stated thirty-two times, and thirty-two times the state of Arahatsip." The same discourse also gives us an original exposition of dependent origination, with slight, but very instructive, variations. Each factor of dependent origination is used, as are also the additional sections, to illustrate the right understanding of the Four Noble Truths, the comprehension of which is thus greatly enhanced, broadened, and deepened. This discourse has been widely used for instructional purposes throughout the centuries down to the present day.

Another of the Venerable Sāriputta's discourses is the Samacitta Sutta³⁰ which was listened to by the "devas of tranquil mind." It is concerned with the first three stages of sanctitude: the stream-winner, the once-returner, and the non-returner. Its purpose is to clarify the question of their residuum of rebirths, in the five-sense world or in the fine-material and non-material worlds, which depends upon their mode of practice and on the fetters of existence still

²⁹ See Bhikkhu Bodhi: *Discourse on Right View*, Wheel Publication 377/379, BPS, Kandy.

³⁰ AN 2:4.5/A I 63.

remaining. It is a very short discourse, but had a singular impact on the huge assembly of devas who, according to tradition, assembled to hear it. It is said that a very large number of them attained Arahantship, and innumerable were those who reached stream-entry. This discourse of the Venerable Sāriputta is, in fact, counted among the few which had unusually far-reaching results among beings of the higher worlds; and although it is a very brief text rather cryptic without the commentarial explanation, it had a high reputation in succeeding centuries. It is the sermon that was preached by the arahant Mahinda on the evening of his arrival in Ceylon, and the *Mahāvamsa* (XIV, 34ff), Ceylon's famous chronicle, relates that on this occasion, also, numerous devas listened and achieved penetration of the Dhamma.

The high regard in which the discourse is held, and the strong impact ascribed to it, may be attributed to the fact that it helps those on the Path to define their position as to the kind of rebirths still to be expected by them. Devas on higher levels of development are sometimes inclined to regard their heavenly status as final, and do not expect to be reborn in the five-sense world, as may sometimes be the case. The Great Elder's discourse gave them a criterion by which to judge their position. For worldlings still outside the Path, as well, it must have offered valuable orientation for the direction of their efforts.

The Saṅgīti Sutta ("The Recital") and Dasuttara Sutta ("Up to Ten"), two more of the Venerable Sāriputta's sermons, are the last two texts of the Dīgha Nikāya, the Collection of Long Discourses. Both these texts are compilations of doctrinal terms, in which a large number of topics are classified as falling into groups of from one to ten members. The reason for bringing the compilation only up to ten may have been that there are only very few groups of doctrinal terms extending beyond ten members, and these could be supposed to be well known and easily remembered. The Saṅgīti Sutta was preached in the presence of the Buddha, and at its conclusion received his express approval.

While in the Saṅgīti Sutta the doctrinal terms are arranged solely in numerical groups of one to ten, in the Dasuttara Sutta each of these ten groups has tenfold subdivision which serves to bring out the practical significance of these groups, for example:

"One thing (1) is of great importance, (2) should be developed, (3) should be fully known, (4) should be abandoned, (5) implies decline, (6) implies progress, (7) is hard to penetrate, (8) should be made to arise, (9) should be directly known, (10) should be realized. What is the one thing of great importance? Heedfulness in salutary things..."

These texts must have been compiled at a fairly late period of the Buddha's and the Venerable Sāriputta's life, when there was already in existence a large body of doctrine and carefully transmitted discourses which required organizing for ready use, and also anthologies of salient features of the Dhamma became a useful aid in a comprehensive study of the Teaching. The Saṅgīti Sutta was delivered at the time of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta's death, on the date of which, however, scholars differ. It was, in fact, this event that occasioned the preaching of the sutta, for it speaks of the dissensions, schisms and doctrinal disagreements that arose among the Jains immediately after the death of their Master, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, otherwise known as Mahāvīra. This was taken as a warning example by the Venerable Sāriputta, who in his discourse stresses that this text "should be recited by all in concord and without dissension, so that the Holy Life should last long for the welfare and happiness of gods and men." The commentators say that the Saṅgīti Sutta is meant to convey the "flavour of concord" (*sāmaggi-rasa*) in the Teaching, which is strengthened by doctrinal proficiency (*desanā-kusalatā*).

The purpose of the Dasuttara Sutta is indicated in the Venerable Sāriputta's introductory verses:

The Dasuttara (Discourse) I shall proclaim—
A teaching for the attainment of Nibbāna
And the ending of suffering,
The release from all bondage.³¹

It seems likely that these two suttas served as a kind of index to selected teachings. They may have been useful also to those monks who did not memorize a great many texts; to them they may have been helpful in presenting numerous aspects of the Teaching in a form that was easily memorized and assimilated. Both of these discourses admirably illustrate the Venerable Sāriputta's concern with the preservation of the Dhamma, and his systematic way of ensuring that it was transmitted intact in all its details. It was for that purpose that he provided "study aids" such as these and other discourses, together with works like the Niddesa.

* * *

A summary of other discourses given by the Venerable Sāriputta is included at the end of this book. We shall now turn to a consideration of larger canonical works attributed to him.

The first is the Niddesa, which belongs to the Khuddaka Nikāya of the Sutta Piṭaka. It is the only work of an exclusively commentarial character included in the Pāli Tipiṭaka. Of its two parts, the Mahā Niddesa is a commentary to the Aṭṭhaka-vagga of the Sutta Nipāta, while the Cūla Niddesa comments on the Parāyaṇa-vagga and the Khaggavisāṇa Sutta, likewise of the Sutta Nipāta.

The Aṭṭhaka-vagga and the Parāyaṇa-vagga are the last two books of the Sutta Nipāta, and doubtlessly belong to the oldest parts not only of that work but of the entire Sutta Piṭaka. They were highly appreciated even in the earlier days of the Saṅgha, and of the Buddhist laity as well, as is testified by the fact that the Udāna records a recital of the Aṭṭhaka-vagga by Soṇa Thera and the Aṅguttara Nikāya a recital of the Parāyaṇa-vagga by the female lay disciple, Nandamātā. On at least five occasions the Buddha himself has given explanations of verses contained in these two parts of the Sutta Nipāta. Apart from the high esteem in which they were evidently held, the fact that these two verse collections contain numerous archaic words and terse aphoristic sayings makes it understandable that in very early days a commentary on them was composed which was later included in the canonical scriptures. The traditional attribution of it to the Venerable Sāriputta must be regarded as highly plausible.³² It is quite in character with the great Elder's concern with the methodical instruction of bhikkhus that the Niddesa contains not only word explanations, clarifications of the context and supporting quotations from the Buddha Word, but also material obviously meant for linguistic instruction, such as the addition of many synonyms of the word explained. On this subject, Prof. E.J. Thomas writes as follows:³³

The most characteristic feature of the Niddesa consists of a list of synonyms of the words commented on. Such lists are not used to explain the meaning of a word in a particular context. They are repeated in the same form wherever the word occurs and were evidently intended to be learned in the same way as the modern *kośa* (dictionary). Much of this is also found in the Abhidhamma books, but in the Niddesa it is used as general matter applied to passages for which it was not immediately intended. This shows a system for learning the vocabulary of the Canon, and for explaining archaic forms, but no further grammatical

³¹ *Dasuttaram pavakkhāmi, dhammaṃ nibbānapattiyā dukkhas' antakiriyāya, sabbaganthappamocanaṃ.*

³² The Commentary to the Theragāthā, by Bhadantācariya Dhammapāla, quotes from the Niddesa and attributes it to Sāriputta (Dhammasenāpati).

³³ See "Buddhist Education in Pāli and Sanskrit Schools," by E. J. Thomas in *Buddhistic Studies*, ed. by B.C. Law (Calcutta, 1931), pp. 223ff.

teaching occurs apart from the description of certain terms as particles in the Niddesa we thus have direct evidence of a general system of instruction applied to a definite work, consisting of interpretation, doctrinal teaching and the verbal expositions of the beginnings of grammar. The Abhidhamma books and related works like the Paṭisambhidāmagga give other traces of its existence. It appears to be this system which is expressly referred to in the Niddesa (1, 234) and other places as the four kinds of analysis (*paṭisambhidā*); the analysis of meanings (*attha*), of conditions (*dhamma*), of grammatical analysis (*nirutti*), and clearness of insight (*paṭibhāna*). The Nirutti of the Niddesa is of the kind that we should expect to exist when Pāli was a living language. All the grammatical analysis that was required was a knowledge of those words in the Scriptures that had become obsolete, and the explanation of unusual grammatical forms by means of current expressions. We can see from its different forms and readings that it underwent changes and received additions, and in the case of a work used continually for instruction this would be inevitable.

The Venerable Sāriputta states that he attained to the four kinds of analytical knowledge (*paṭisambhidā*) two weeks after his ordination, that is, on attaining Arahatsip.³⁴ This fact, and the extensive application of *nirutti-paṭisambhidā*, “grammatical analysis,” in the Niddesa, make it quite probable that he was actually the author of both the Niddesa and the Paṭisambhidāmagga.

The Mahā Niddesa contains also the commentary on the Sāriputta Sutta (also called the “Therapañhā Sutta”) which forms the last text of the Aṭṭhaka-vagga. The first part of this text, with verses in praise of the Master and questions put to him, is ascribed to Sāriputta. The Mahā Niddesa explains the opening stanza as referring to the Buddha’s return from Tāvatiṃsa heaven after he had preached the Abhidhamma there. Apart from that it contains only his questions, the essential part of the text being the Buddha’s replies.

The Paṭisambhidāmagga has the appearance of a manual of higher Buddhist studies, and its range is as broad as that of the mind of its reputed author. At the beginning it presents treatises on seventy two types of knowledge (*ñāṇa*) and on the types of wrong speculative views (*diṭṭhi*), both of which show the methodical and penetrative mind of the Venerable Sāriputta. In the Treatise on Knowledge, as well as in other chapters of the work, contains a large number of doctrinal terms appearing for the first time and only in the Paṭisambhidāmagga. It also contains elaborations of terms and teachings that are mentioned only briefly in other and older parts of the Sutta Piṭaka. In addition to this, it contains material on meditation of great practical value, as for example on mindfulness of breathing,³⁵ *mettā-bhāvanā*, and numerous insight-exercises. There is also, to give variety to the subject matter, a passage of hymnlike character and great beauty, on the Great Compassion of the Tathāgata. Mahānāma Thera of Ceylon, who wrote the *Saddhammappakāsinī*, the commentary to the work, confidently ascribes it to the Venerable Sāriputta, and in the introductory stanzas gives eloquent praise of the great Elder. In the Paṭisambhidāmagga itself, Sāriputta is mentioned twice, once as being one who possesses *samādhi-vipphāra-iddhi* (in the Iddhividha-kathā) and again in the Mahā-pañhā-kathā, Soḷasa-pañhā-niddesa, where it is said, “Those whose wisdom is equal to that of Sāriputta, they partake to some extent of the Buddha-knowledge.”

We come now to one of the most important contributions made by the Venerable Sāriputta to Buddhist teaching. According to tradition (e.g., in the *Atthasālinī*), the Buddha preached the *Abhidhamma* in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven to his mother, Queen Māyā, who had been reborn as a deva in that world. He did this for three months, and when returning daily to earth for his meals, he gave to the Venerable Sāriputta the “method” (*naya*) of that portion of Abhidhamma he had preached. The *Atthasālinī* says; “Thus the giving of the method was to the Chief Disciple,

³⁴ AN 4:173/A II 160; see p. 9.

³⁵ Translated in *Mindfulness of Breathing* by Ñāṇamoli Thera, Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society.

who was endowed with analytical knowledge, as though the Buddha stood on the edge of the shore and pointed out the ocean with his open hand. To the Elder the doctrine taught by the Blessed One in hundreds and thousands of methods became very clear." Thereafter, the Elder passed on what he had learned to his five hundred disciples.

Further it is said, "The textual order of the Abhidhamma originated with Sāriputta; the numerical series in the Great Book (Paṭṭhāna) was also determined by him. In this way the Elder, without spoiling the unique doctrine, laid down the numerical series in order to make it easy to learn, remember, study and teach the Law."

The *Atthasālinī*, the commentary to the Dhammasaṅgaṇī, also ascribes to Sāriputta the following contributions to the canonical Abhidhamma:

- (a) The 42 couplets (dyads; *duka*) of the Suttanta Mātikā, which follows the Abhidhamma Mātikā, both of which preface the seven Abhidhamma books. The 42 Suttanta couplets are explained in the Dhammasaṅgaṇī and this likewise has probably to be ascribed to the Elder.
- (b) The fourth and last part of the Dhammasaṅgaṇī, the Atthuddhārakaṇḍa, the "Synopsis."
- (c) The arrangement for the recitation of the Abhidhamma (*vācanamagga*).
- (d) The Numerical Section (*gaṇanacāra*) of the Paṭṭhāna.

In the Anupada Sutta³⁶ the Buddha himself speaks of the Venerable Sāriputta's analysis of meditative consciousness into its chief mental concomitants, which the Elder undertook from his own experience, after rising from each of the meditative attainments in succession. This analysis may well be either a precursor or an abridgment of the detailed analysis of jhāna-consciousness given in the Dhammasaṅgaṇī.

Concerning the Venerable Sāriputta's mastery of the Dhamma, and its exposition, the Buddha had this to say:

"The Essence of Dhamma (*dhammadhātu*) has been so well penetrated by Sāriputta, O monks, that if I were to question him therein for one day in different words and phrases, Sāriputta would reply likewise for one day in various words and phrases. And if I were to question him for one night, or a day and a night, or for two days and nights, even up to seven days and nights, Sāriputta would expound the matter for the same period of time, in various words and phrases." (Nidāna Saṃyutta, No. 32)

And on another occasion the Master employed this simile:

If he is endowed with five qualities, O monks, the eldest son of a World-ruling Monarch righteously turns the Wheel of sovereignty that had been turned by his father. And that Wheel of Sovereignty cannot be overturned by any hostile human being. What are the five qualities? The eldest son of a World-ruling 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, *parisā*).

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

(Aṅguttara Nikāya, V. 132)

³⁶ MN 111.

Other Theras were not behind in their appreciation. The Elder Vaṅgisa, in his encomium in the Theragāthā (vv. 1231–3) praises Sāriputta who “teaches in brief and also speaks in detail,” while in the same compilation other great Elders, Mahā Kassapa (vv. 1082–5) and Mahā Moggallāna (vv. 1158; 1176–7; 1182) also give their reward of praise. And the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna, at the end of Sāriputta’s Discourse on Guiltlessness,³⁷ uttered these words of tribute to his friend’s sermon, “To (virtuous and earnest) monks who have heard the exposition of the Venerable Sāriputta it will be like food and drink to their ears and mind. How well does he lift up his fellow-monks from what is unwholesome, and confirm them in what is good!”

The relationship in which the two Chief Disciples stood to one another in the matter of teaching was explained by the Buddha when he said:

“Associate, O monks, with Sāriputta and Moggallāna; keep company with them! They are wise bhikkhus and helpers of their fellow-monks. Sāriputta is like a mother who brings forth, and Moggallāna is like a nurse to what has been brought forth. Sāriputta trains (his pupils) in the Fruition of stream-entry, and Moggallāna trains them for the highest goal.

“Sāriputta is able to expound the Four Noble Truths in detail, to teach them and make them intelligible, to proclaim, reveal and explain them, and make them clear.” (MN 141, Saccavibhaṅga Sutta)

And in the Aṅguttara Nikāya (AN 2:12):

“A monk of faith, O bhikkhus, should cherish this right aspiration, ‘Oh, may I become such as Sāriputta and Moggallāna!’ For Sāriputta and Moggallāna are the model and standard for my bhikkhu-disciples.”

That the Venerable Sāriputta’s great reputation as a teacher of the Dhamma long survived him, to become a tradition among later Buddhists, is shown by the concluding passages of the *Milinda-pañha*, written some three hundred years later. There, King Milinda compares Nāgasena Thera to the Venerable Sāriputta, saying, “In this Buddha’s Dispensation there is none other like yourself for answering questions, except the Elder Sāriputta, the Marshal of the Law.”

That grand reputation still lives today, upheld by the cherished teachings of the Great Disciple, preserved, and enshrined in some of the oldest books of Buddhism alongside the words of his Master.

The Elder’s Relatives

As we have already seen, the Venerable Sāriputta was born into a brahmin family of Upatissa village (or Nālaka), near Rājagaha, his father’s name being Vaganta and his mother’s Sāri. He had three brothers: Cunda, Upasena and Revata, and three sisters named Cālā, Upacālā and Sisūpacālā. All six took ordination and attained Arahatsip.

Cunda was known by the name Samaṇuddesa, meaning “the Novice” in the Saṅgha, even after becoming a bhikkhu; this was to distinguish him from the Elder Mahā Cunda. At the time of Sāriputta’s death, Cunda was his attendant and it was he who informed the Buddha of his passing away, bringing with him the Chief Disciple’s relics. The story is told in the Cunda Sutta, an outline of which will be given elsewhere in this book.

Upasena, who came to be known as Vagantaputta, or “Son of Vaganta,” as Sāriputta is “Son of Sāri,” was said by the Buddha to be foremost among those of all-pleasing deportment (*samantapāsāḍika*). He died of a snakebite, as is related in the. SN 35:69/S IV 41).

³⁷ MN 5.

Revata was the youngest of the brothers, and their mother, wishing to prevent his seeking ordination, had him married when he was a very young boy. But on the wedding day he saw the grandmother of his future wife, an old woman of 120, stricken with all the signs of decrepitude. At once he became disgusted with worldly life. Escaping from the wedding procession by a ruse, he fled to a monastery and was ordained. In later years he was on his way to see the Buddha when he stopped at a forest of acacia trees (*khadira-vana*), and while spending the rainy season there he attained Arahatsip. After that he became known as Revata Khadiravaniya—“Revata of the Acacia Forest.” The Buddha distinguished him as being the foremost among forest dwellers.

The three sisters, Cālā, Upacālā and Sisupacālā, wishing to follow their brothers’ example, became nuns after their marriage. In marriage, each of them had a son who was named after his mother Cālā (or Cālī) and so on. These three sons were also ordained, being received as novices by Revata Khadiravaniya. Their good conduct was praised by the Venerable Sāriputta, who met them when he went to see his youngest brother who was ill. This is recorded in the commentary to the Theragāthā, v. 42.

Cālā, Upacālā and Sisupacālā as nuns are said to have been approached by Mara with taunting and tempting questions, to which they gave excellent replies. These are recorded in the Therīgāthā and Bhikkhunī Saṃyutta.

In contrast to all these, Sāriputta’s mother was a staunch brahmin and hostile to the Buddha’s Teaching and his followers. In the commentary to the Dhammapada (v. 400) it is related that once, when the Venerable Sāriputta was in his own village of Nālaka with a large retinue of monks, he came to his mother’s house in the course of his alms round. His mother gave him a seat and served him with food, but while she did so she uttered abusive words, “Oh, you eater of others’ leavings!” she said. “When you fail to get leavings of sour rice-gruel, you go from house to house among strangers, licking the leavings off the backs of ladles! And so it was for this that you gave up eighty crores of wealth and became a monk! You have ruined me! Now go on and eat!”

Likewise, when she was serving food to the monks, she said, “So! You are the men who have made my son your page boy! Go on, eat now!”

Thus she continued reviling them, but the Venerable Sāriputta spoke not a word. He took his food, ate it and in silence returned to the monastery. The Buddha learned of the incident from the Venerable Rāhula, who had been among the monks at the time. All the bhikkhus who heard of it wondered at the Elder’s great forbearance, and in the midst of the assembly the Buddha praised him, uttering the stanza:

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.

It was not until right at the close of Sāriputta’s life that he was able to convert his mother; that story will be told later on. But the incident that has been related here leads us to a consideration of the great Elder’s most pleasing characteristics, his humility, patience and forbearance.

The Unresentful

It is the neighbourhood of Jetavana, where the Buddha is residing. Some men are in a group, talking about the noble qualities of the Elder Sāriputta. “Such great patience has our noble

Elder," they are saying, "that even when people abuse him and strike him, he feels no trace of anger."

"Who is this that never gets angry?" The question is from a brahmin, a holder of false views. And when they tell him, "It is our Elder, Sāriputta," he retorts, "It must be that nobody has ever provoked him."

"That is not so brahmin," they reply. "Well, then, I will provoke him to anger." "Provoke him to anger if you can!" "Leave it to me," says the brahmin. "I know just what to do to him."

The Venerable Sāriputta enters the city on his round for alms. Approaching him from behind, the brahmin strikes him in a tremendous blow on the back. "What was that?" says the Venerable Sāriputta; and without so much as turning to look, he continues on his way.

The fire of remorse leaps up in every part of the brahmin's body. Prostrating himself at the Elder's feet he begs for pardon. "For what?" asks the Elder, mildly. "To test your patience I struck you," the penitent brahmin replies. "Very well, I pardon you."

"Reverend sir," the brahmin says, "if you are willing to pardon me, hereafter please take your food only at my house." With these words he takes the Elder's alms-bowl, which the Elder willingly yields, and leading him to his house serves him with food.

But those who saw the assault are enraged. They gather at the brahmin's house, armed with sticks and stones, to kill him. When the Venerable Sāriputta emerges, accompanied by the brahmin carrying his bowl, they cry, "Reverend sir, order this brahmin to turn back!"

"Why, lay disciples?" asks the Elder. They answer, "The man struck you. We are going to give him what he deserves!"

"But what do you mean? Was it you, or me, he struck?"

"It was you, reverend sir." "Well, if it was me he struck, he has begged my pardon. Go your ways." And so, dismissing the people and permitting the brahmin to return, the great Elder calmly makes his way to the monastery.

This incident, recorded in the Dhammapada Commentary, was the occasion of the Buddha's uttering the verses 389 and 390 of the Dhammapada, which are among those that give the Buddha's definition of what constitutes a brahmin, that is to say, rectitude of conduct rather than birth or rank.

Let none strike a brahmin;
Let no brahmin return a blow.
Shame on him that strikes a brahmin!
More shame on the brahmin who returns the blow!
Not small is the gain to a brahmin
Who restrains his mind from what is dear;
As fast as the will to injure wanes
So fast indeed does suffering decline.

(Dhammapada, vv 389, 390)

The Venerable Sāriputta's humility was as great as his patience. He was willing to receive correction from anyone, not only with submission but with gratitude. It is told in the commentary to the Devaputta Saṃyutta, Susīma Sutta, that once, through a momentary negligence, a corner of the Elder's under-robe was hanging down, and a seven-year-old novice, seeing this, pointed it out to him. The Venerable Sāriputta stepped aside at once and arranged

the garment in the proper equally-circular way. Then he stood before the novice with folded hands, saying, “Now it is correct, teacher!”³⁸

There is a reference to this incident in the *Questions of Milinda*, where these verses are ascribed to the Venerable Sāriputta:

One who this very day, at the age of seven, has gone forth—
If he should me, I accept it with (bended) head.
At sight of him, I give him ardent zeal and regard.
With respect may I again and again set him in the teacher’s place!

On one occasion the Buddha mildly reproved Sāriputta for not having carried his teaching far enough. When the brahmin Dhānañjāni was on his deathbed, he was visited by the Venerable Sāriputta. The Elder, reflecting that brahmins are bent on the Brahma-world (or “union with Brahmā”) taught the dying man the way to it through the Brahma-vihāras. As a result, it is said, the brahmin was in fact reborn there.

When the Venerable Sāriputta returned from the visit, the Master asked him, “Why, Sāriputta, while there was more to do, did you set the brahmin Dhānañjāni’s thoughts on the inferior Brahma-world, and then rising from your seat, leave him?” The Venerable Sāriputta replied, “I thought, ‘These brahmins are bent on the Brahma-world. Should I not show the brahmin Dhānañjāni the way to the communion with Brahma?’”

“The brahmin Dhānañjāni has died, Sāriputta,” said the Buddha, “and he has been reborn in the Brahma-world.”

This story, which is found in the Dhānañjāni Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya (97), is interesting as an illustration of the undesirability of rebirth in an inferior Brahma-world for one who is capable of bringing rebirth entirely to an end. For while the Buddha himself sometimes showed only the way to Brahma, as for example in the Tevijjā Sutta, it seems probable that in the case of Dhānañjāni the Master saw that he was fit to receive a higher teaching, while the Venerable Sāriputta, lacking the capacity of knowing others’ hearts (*lokiya-abhiññā*), was not able to discern that fact. The result is that Dhānañjāni will spend an incalculable period in the Brahma-world and will have to take human birth again before he can achieve the goal.

The Venerable Sāriputta received another gentle reproof when, having asked the Buddha why it was that the Sāsana of some of the Buddhas of the past did not last very long, and the Buddha had replied that it was because those Enlightened Ones did not preach very much Dhamma, did not lay down regulations for the disciples, nor institute the recital of the Pātimokkha, Sāriputta said that it was now time for the Blessed One to promulgate the regulations and to recite the Pātimokkha, so that the Holy Life might last for a long period. The Buddha said, “Let it be, Sāriputta! The Tathāgata himself will know the time for it. The Master will not lay down regulations for the disciples nor recite the Pātimokkha until signs of corruption have appeared in the Saṅgha.”³⁹

The disciple’s concern that the Sāsana should endure as long as possible is characteristic of Sāriputta; equally characteristic was it of the Buddha that he did not wish to lay down regulations until such time as it was absolutely necessary to do so. He went on to explain that at that time the least-advanced member of the Saṅgha was a Sotāpanna (perhaps a fact of which the Venerable Sāriputta was not aware), and therefore it was not yet necessary to lay down the rules of the bhikkhu life.

³⁸ A slightly different version of this is found in the Commentary to the Theragāthā where it deals with Sāriputta’s verses.

³⁹ Pārājika Pāḷi I 3.4/Vin III 9f.

The Cātumā Sutta⁴⁰ records another occasion when the great Elder was admonished by the Master. A large number of monks, newly ordained, as the commentary tell us, by the Venerable Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna, had come with the latter to pay their respects to the Buddha for the first time. On arrival they were allotted quarters and started chatting with the resident monks of Cātumā. Hearing the noise, the Buddha summoned the resident monks to question them about it, and was told that the commotion was caused by the new arrivals. The text does not say whether the visiting monks were present at the time, but they must have been, for the Buddha addressed them with the words, “Go away, monks I dismiss you. You should not stay with me.”

The newly ordained monks left, but some persons intervened in their behalf and they were allowed to return.

The Buddha then said to the Venerable Sāriputta, “What did you think, Sāriputta, when I dismissed that group of monks?”

The Venerable Sāriputta replied, “I thought, ‘The Blessed One wishes to remain unconcerned and to abide in the state of happiness here-and-now; so we too shall remain unconcerned and abide in the state of happiness here-and-now.’”

“Hold, Sāriputta! Do not allow such a thought ever to arise in you again!” the Buddha said. Then turning to Mahā Moggallāna, he put the same question.

“When the Blessed One dismissed those monks,” replied Mahā Moggallāna, “I thought, ‘The Blessed One wishes to remain unconcerned and to abide in the state of happiness here-and-now. Then I and the Venerable Sāriputta should now look after the community of monks.’”

“Well spoken, Moggallāna, well spoken!” said the Master. “It is either myself or Sāriputta or Moggallāna who should look after the community of monks.”

The Sutta account is lacking in certain details which would place the story in the proper light necessary for an understanding of all its implications, but it is possible that since the monks who had been dismissed were pupils of Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna, the Elder wished to show his displeasure with them and to indicate by his aloofness that they had behaved badly.

Once, when the Buddha was residing at Jetavana, the Venerable Sāriputta was the victim of a false accusation. It so happened that at the end of the rains the Elder took leave of the Master and departed with his own retinue of monks on a journey. A large number of monks also took leave of Sāriputta, and in dismissing them he addressed those who were known by their personal and family names, by those names. Among them there was a monk who was not known by his personal and family name, but a strong desire arose in him that the Chief Disciple should address him by those names in taking his departure.

In the great throng of monks, however, the Venerable Sāriputta did not give him this distinction, and the monk was aggrieved. “He does not greet me as he does the other monks,” he thought, and conceived a grudge against Sāriputta. At the same time it chanced that the hem of the Elder’s robe brushed against him, and this added to his grievance. He approached the Buddha and complained; “Lord, the Venerable Sāriputta, doubtless thinking to himself, ‘I am the Chief Disciple,’ struck me a blow that almost damaged my ear. And having done that without so much as begging my pardon, he set out on his journey.”

The Buddha summoned Sāriputta into his presence. Meanwhile, the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna and the Venerable Ānanda, knowing that a calumny was about to be exposed,

⁴⁰ MN 67.

summoned all the monks, convoking an assembly. "Approach, venerable sirs!" they called. "When the Venerable Sāriputta is face to face with the Master, he will roar the roar of a lion!"⁴¹

And so it came about. When the Master questioned the great Elder, instead of denying the charge he said, "O Lord, one who is not firmly established in the contemplation of the body with regard to his body, such a one may be able to hurt a fellow monk and leave without apologizing." Then followed the Venerable Sāriputta's lion's roar. He compared his freedom from anger and hatred with the patience of the earth which receives all things, clean and unclean; his tranquillity of mind to a bull with severed horns, to a lowly outcast youth, to water, fire and wind, and to the removal of impurity; he compared the oppression he felt from his own body to the oppression of snakes and corpses, and the maintenance of his body to that of fatty excrescences. In nine similes he described his own virtues, and nine times the great earth responded to the words of truth. The entire assembly was moved by the majestic force of his utterance.

As the Elder proclaimed his virtues, remorse filled the monk who had unjustly traduced him. Immediately, he fell at the feet of the Blessed One, admitting his slander and confessing his fault. Thereupon the Buddha said, "Sāriputta, pardon this deluded man, lest his head should split into seven pieces." Sāriputta's reply was, "Venerable sir, I freely pardon this venerable monk." And, with joined palms, he added, "May this venerable monk also pardon me if I have in any way offended him."

In this way they were reconciled. The other monks were filled with admiration, saying, "See, monks, the surpassing goodness of the Elder! He cherishes neither anger nor hatred against this lying, slanderous monk! Instead, he crouches before him, stretches his hands in reverence, and asks his pardon."

The Buddha's comment was, "Bhikkhus, it is impossible for Sāriputta and his like to cherish anger or hatred. Sāriputta's mind is like the great earth, firm like a gate post, like a pool of still water."

Unresentful like the earth, firm like a gate post,
With mind like a clear pool, such is the virtuous man
For whom the round of births exists no more.⁴²

Another incident of this nature, in the early Saṅgha, did not end so happily, for the calumniator refused to admit his fault. He was a monk named Kokālika, who approached the Buddha with a slander against the two Chief Disciples; "Sāriputta and Moggallāna have bad intentions, O Lord!" he said. "They are in the grip of evil ambition."

The Master replied, "Do not say so, Kokālika! Do not say so! Have friendly and trustful thoughts towards Sāriputta and Moggallāna! They are of good behaviour, and lovable!"

But the misguided Kokālika paid no heed to the Buddha's words. He persisted with his false accusation, and soon after that his whole body became covered with boils, which continued to grow until eventually he died of his illness.

This incident was well-known. It is recorded in the following places in the Sutta-Piṭaka: Brahma Saṃyutta No. 10; Sutta Nipāta, Mahāvagga No. 10; Aṅguttara Nikāya V. 170, and Takkariya Jātaka (No. 481). A comparison of these two incidents reveals the importance of penitence. Neither the Venerable Sāriputta nor Mahā Moggallāna bore the monk Kokālika any ill-will for his malice, and his apologies, had he offered them, would have made no difference to the attitude of the two Chief Disciples. But they would have benefited the erring monk himself,

⁴¹ A "lion's roar" (*sīha-nāda*) is a weighty and emphatic utterance, made with assurance.

⁴² Dhammapada, v. 95.

averting the consequences of his bad kamma. Evil rebounds upon those who direct it towards the innocent, and so Kokālika was judged and punished by himself, through his own deeds.

Part III

The Further Shore

The Last Debt Paid

We now come to the year of the Master's Parinibbāna. The Blessed One had spent the rainy season at Beluva village,⁴³ near Vesāli, and when the Retreat was over he left that place and, going by the way he had come, returned by stages to Sāvattthī and arrived at the Jeta Grove Monastery.

There the Elder Sāriputta, the Marshal of the Law, paid homage to the Blessed One and went to his day quarters. When his own disciples had saluted him and left, he swept the place and spread his leather mat. Then, having rinsed his feet, he sat down cross-legged and entered into the state of the Fruition Attainment of Arahatship.

At the time predetermined by him, he arose from the meditation, and this thought occurred to him, "Do the Enlightened Ones have their final passing away first, or the Chief Disciples?" And he saw that it is the Chief Disciples who pass away first. Thereupon he considered his own life-force, and saw that its residue would sustain him only for another week.

He then considered, "Where shall I have my final passing away?" And he thought, "Rāhula finally passed away among the deities of the Thirty-three, and the Elder Kondañña the Knower at the Chaddanta Lake.⁴⁴ Where, then, will be my place?"

While thinking this over repeatedly he remembered his mother, and the thought came to him, "Although she is the mother of seven Arahats⁴⁵ she has no faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha. Has she the supportive conditions in her to acquire that faith or has she not?"

Investigating the matter he discerned that she had the supportive conditions for the Path-intuition (*abhisamaya*) of stream-entry. Then he asked himself, "Through whose instruction can she win to the penetration of truth?"

And he saw that not through anyone else's but only through his own instruction in the Dhamma, could it come about. And following upon that came the thought, "If I now remain indifferent, people will say, 'Sāriputta has been a helper to so many others; on the day, for instance, when he preached the Discourse to the Deities of Tranquil Mind, a large number of devas attained Arahatship, and still more of them penetrated to the first three Paths; and on other occasions there were many who attained to stream-entry, and there were thousands of families who were reborn in heavenly worlds after the Elder had inspired them with joyous confidence in the Triple Gem. Yet despite this, he cannot remove the wrong views of his own mother? Thus people may speak of me. Therefore I shall free my mother from her wrong views, and shall have my final passing away in the very chamber where I was born.'"

Having made that decision, he thought, "This very day I shall ask the Master's permission and then leave for Nālaka." And, calling the elder Cunda, who was his attendant, he said,

⁴³ See Mahā-Parinibbāna Sutta, Ch. II (*Last Days of the Buddha*, BP 213). It was during his stay at Beluva that the Master fell gravely ill.

⁴⁴ In the Himālayas.

⁴⁵ Sāriputta himself and his younger brothers and sisters.

“Friend Cunda, please ask our group of five hundred bhikkhus to take their bowls and robes, for I wish to go to Nālaka.” And the elder Cunda did as he was bidden.

The bhikkhus put their lodgings in order, took their bowls and robes, and presented themselves before the Elder Sāriputta. He, for his own part, had tidied up his living quarters and swept the place where he used to spend the day. Then, standing at the gate, he looked back at the place, thinking, “This is my last sight of it. There will be no more coming back.”

Then, together with the five hundred bhikkhus he went to the Blessed One, saluted him and spoke, “May, O Lord, the Blessed One permit, may the Exalted One consent, the time of my final passing away has come, I have relinquished the life-force.

Lord of the World, O greatest Sage!
From life I soon shall be released.
Going and coming no more shall be;
This is the last time that I worship thee.
Short is the life that now remains to me;
But seven days from now, and I shall lay
This body down, throwing the burden off.
Grant it, O Master! Give permission, Lord!
At last for me Nibbāna’s time has come,
Relinquished have I now the will to live.

Now, says the text, if the Enlightened One were to have replied, “You may have your final passing away,” hostile sectarians would say that he was speaking in praise of death; and if he had replied, “Do not have your final passing away,” they would say that he extolled the continuation of the round of existence. Therefore the Blessed One did not speak in either way, but asked, “Where will your final passing away take place?”

The Venerable Sāriputta replied, “In the Magadha country, in the village called Nālaka, there in the chamber of my birth shall I finally pass away.”

Then the Blessed One said, “Do, Sāriputta, what you think timely. But now your elder and younger monks in the Saṅgha will no longer have the chance to see a bhikkhu like you. Give them once more a discourse on Dhamma.”

The great Elder then gave a discourse, displaying all his wondrous powers; rising to the loftiest heights of truth, descending to mundane truth, rising again, and again descending, he expounded the Dhamma directly and in symbols. And when he had ended his discourse he paid homage at the feet of the Master; embracing his legs, he said, “So that I might worship these feet I have fulfilled the Perfections throughout an aeon and a hundred thousand kalpas. My heart’s wish has found fulfilment. From now on there will be no more contact or meeting; severed now is that intimate connection. The City of Nibbāna, the unaging, undying, peaceful, blissful, heat-assuaging and secure, which has been entered by many hundreds of thousands of Buddhas—I too shall enter it now.

“If any deed or word of mine did not please you, O Lord, may the Blessed One forgive me! It is now time for me to go.”

Now, once before the Buddha had answered this, when he said, “There is nothing, be it in deeds or words, wherein I should have to reproach you, Sāriputta. For you are learned, Sāriputta, of great wisdom, of broad and bright, quick, keen and penetrative wisdom.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ SN 8:7/S I 190f.

So now he made answer in the same way, "I forgive you, Sāriputta," he said. "But there was not a single word or deed of yours that was displeasing to me. Do now, Sāriputta, what you think timely."

From this we see that on those few occasions when the Master seemed to reproach his Chief Disciple, it was not that he was displeased with him in any way, but rather that he was pointing out another approach to a situation, another way of viewing a problem.

Immediately after the master had given his permission and the Venerable Sāriputta had risen from paying homage at his feet, the Great Earth cried out, and with a single huge tremor shook to its watery boundaries. It was as though the Great Earth wished to say, "Though I bear these girdling mountain ranges with Mount Meru, the encircling mountain walls (*cakkavāḷa*) and the Himavant, I cannot sustain on this day so vast an accumulation of virtue!" And mighty thunder split the heavens, a vast cloud appeared and heavy rain poured down.

Then the Blessed One thought, "I shall now permit the Marshal of the Law to depart," and he rose from the seat of the Law, went to his Perfumed Cell and there stood on the Jewel Slab. Three times the Venerable Sāriputta circumambulated the cell, keeping it to his right, and paid reverence at four places. And this thought was in his mind, "An aeon and a hundred thousand kalpas ago it was, when I fell down at the feet of the Buddha Anomadassi and made the aspiration to see you. This aspiration has been realized, and I have seen you. At the first meeting it was my first sight of you; now it is my last, and there will be none in the future." And with raised hands joined in salutation he departed, going backwards until the Blessed One was out of sight. And yet again the Great Earth, unable to bear it, trembled to its watery boundaries.

The Blessed One then addressed the bhikkhus who surrounded him. "Go, bhikkhus," he said. "Accompany your elder brother." At these words, all the four assemblies of devotees at once went out of the Jeta Grove, leaving the Blessed One there alone. The citizens of Sāvattihī also, having heard the news, went out of the city in an unending stream carrying incense and flowers in their hands; and with their hair wet (the sign of mourning), they followed the Elder lamenting and weeping.

The Venerable Sāriputta then admonished the crowd, saying, "This is a road that none can avoid," and asked them to return. And to the monks who had accompanied him, he said, "You may turn back now! Do not neglect the Master!"

Thus he made them go back, and with only his own group of disciples, he continued on his way. Yet still some of the people followed him, lamenting. "Formerly our Venerable went on journeys and returned. But this is a journey without return!" To them the Elder said, "Be heedful, friends! Of such nature, indeed, are all things that are formed and conditioned!" And he made them turn back.

During his journey the Venerable Sāriputta spent one night wherever he stopped, and thus for one week he favoured many people with a last sight of him. Reaching Nālaka village in the evening, he stopped near a banyan tree at the village gate. It happened that at the time a nephew of the elder, Uparevata by name, had gone outside the village and there he saw the Venerable Sāriputta. He approached the elder, saluted him, and remained standing.

The Elder asked him, "Is your grand-aunt at home?" "Yes, venerable sir," he replied. "Then go and announce our coming," said the Elder. "And if she asks why I have come, tell her that I shall stay in the village for one day, and ask her to prepare my birth chamber and provide lodgings for five hundred bhikkhus."

Uparevata went to his grand-aunt and said, "Grandaunt, my uncle has come."

"Where is he now?" she asked.

“At the village gate.”

“Is he alone, or has someone else come with him?”

“He has come with five hundred bhikkhus.”

And when she asked him, “Why has he come?” he gave her the message the elder had entrusted to him. Then she thought, “Why does he ask me to provide lodgings for so many? After becoming a monk in his youth, does he want to be a layman again in his old age?” But she arranged the birth chamber for the Elder and lodgings for the bhikkhus, had torches lit and then sent for the Elder.

The Venerable Sāriputta then, accompanied by the bhikkhus, went up to the terrace of the house and entered his birth chamber. After seating himself, he asked the bhikkhus to go to their quarters. They had hardly left, when a grave illness, dysentery, fell upon the Elder, and he felt severe pains. When one pail was brought in, another was carried out. The brahmin lady thought, “The news of my son is not good,” and she stood leaning by the door of her own room.

And then it happened, the text tells us, that the Four Great Divine Kings asked themselves, “Where may he now be dwelling, the Marshal of the Law?” And they perceived that he was at Nālaka, in his birth chamber, lying on the bed of his Final Passing Away. “Let us go for a last sight of him,” they said.

When they reached the birth chamber, they saluted the Elder and remained standing.

“Who are you?” asked the Elder.

“We are the Great Divine Kings, venerable sir.”

“Why have you come?”

“We want to attend on you during your illness.”

“Let it be!” said the Venerable Sāriputta. “There is an attendant here. You may go.”

When they had left, there came in the same manner Sakka the king of the gods, and after him, Mahā Brahma, and all of them the elder dismissed in the same way.

The brahmin lady, seeing the coming and going of these deities, asked herself, “Who could they have been, who came and paid homage to my son, and then left?” And she went to the door of the elder’s room and asked the Venerable Cunda for news about the Elder’s condition. Cunda conveyed the inquiry to the Elder, telling him, “The Great Upāsikā (lay devotee) has come.”

The Venerable Sāriputta asked her, “Why have you come at this unusual hour?”

“To see you, dear,” she replied. “Tell me, who were those who came first?”

“The Four Great Divine Kings, Upāsikā.”

“Are you, then, greater than they?” she asked.

“They are like temple attendants,” said the Elder. “Ever since our Master took rebirth they have stood guard over him with swords in hand.”

“After they had left, who was it that came then, dear?”

“It was Sakka the king of the gods.”

“Are you then, greater than the king of gods, dear?”

“He is like a novice who carries a bhikkhu’s belongings,” answered Sāriputta. “When our Master returned from the heaven of the Thirty-three (Tāvatiṃsa), Sakka took his bowl and robe and descended to earth together with him.”

“And when Sakka had gone, who was it that came after him, filling the room with his radiance?”

“Upāsikā, that was your own Lord and Master, the Great Brahma.”

“Then are you greater, my son, even than my Lord, the Great Brahma?”

“Yes, Upāsikā. On the day when our Master was born, it is said that four Great Brahmas received the Great Being in a golden net.”

Upon hearing this, the brahmin lady thought, “If my son’s power is such as this, what must be the majestic power of my son’s Master and Lord?” And while she was thinking this, suddenly the fivefold rapture arose in her, suffusing her entire body.

The Elder thought, “Rapture and joy have arisen in my mother. Now is the time to preach the Dhamma to her.” And he said, “What was it you were thinking about, Upāsikā?”

“I was thinking,” she replied, “if my son has such virtue, what must be the virtue of his Master?”

The Venerable Sāriputta answered, “At the moment of my Master’s birth, at his Great Renunciation (of worldly life), on his attaining Enlightenment and at his first turning of the Dhamma Wheel—on all these occasions the ten thousand world-system quaked and shook. None is there who equals him in virtue, in concentration, in wisdom, in deliverance, and in the knowledge and vision of deliverance.” And he then explained to her in detail the words of homage, “Such indeed is that Blessed One...” (*Iti pi so Bhagavā...*). And thus he gave her an exposition of the Dhamma, basing it on the virtues of the Buddha.

When the Dhamma talk given by her beloved son had come to an end, the brahmin lady was firmly established in the Fruition of stream-entry, and she said, “Oh, my dear Upatissa, why did you act like that? Why, during all these years, did you not bestow on me this ambrosia (the knowledge of the Deathless)?”

The Elder thought, “Now I have given my mother, the brahmin lady Rūpa-Sāri, the nursing-fee for bringing me up. This should suffice.” and he dismissed her with the words, “You may go now, Upāsikā.”

When she was gone, he asked, “What is the time now, Cunda?”

“Venerable sir, it is early dawn.”

And the Elder said, “Let the community of bhikkhus assemble.”

When the bhikkhus had assembled, he said to Cunda, “Lift me up to a sitting position, Cunda.” And Cunda did so.

Then the Elder spoke to the bhikkhus, saying, “For forty-four years I have lived and travelled with you, my monks. If any deed or word of mine was unpleasant to you, forgive me, monks.”

And they replied, “Venerable sir, not the least displeasure has ever come from you to us, who followed you inseparably like your shadow. But may you, venerable sir, grant forgiveness to us!”

After that the Elder gathered his large robe around him, covered his face and lay down on his right side. Then, just as the Master was to do at his Mahā Parinibbāna, he entered into the nine successive attainments of meditation, in forward and reverse order, and beginning again with

the first absorption he led his meditation up to the fourth absorption. And at the moment after he had entered it, just as the crest of the rising sun appeared over the horizon, he utterly passed away into the Nibbāna-element which is without any remnant of clinging.

And it was the full-moon day of the month Kattikā, which by the solar calendar is between October and November.

The brahmin lady in her room thought, "How is my son? He does not say anything." She rose, and going into the Elder's room she massaged his legs. Then, seeing that he had passed away, she fell at his feet, loudly lamenting; "O my dear son! Before this, we did not know of your virtue. Because of that, we did not gain the good fortune to have seated in this house, and to feed, many a hundred bhikkhus! We did not gain the good fortune to have built many monasteries!" And she lamented thus up to sunrise.

As soon as the sun was up, she sent for goldsmiths and had the treasure room opened and had the pots full of gold weighed on a large scale. Then she gave the gold to the goldsmiths with the order to prepare funeral ornaments. Columns and arches were erected, and in the centre of the village the Upāsikā had a pavilion of heart-wood built. In the middle of the pavilion a large, gabled structure was raised, surrounded by a parapet wall of golden arches and columns. Then they began the sacred ceremony, in which men and deities mingled.

After the great assembly of people had celebrated the sacred rites for a full week, they made a pyre with many kinds of fragrant woods. They placed the body of the Venerable Sāriputta on the pyre and kindled the wood with bundles of Usīra roots. Throughout the night of the cremation the concourse listened to sermons on the Dhamma. After that the flames of the pyre were extinguished by the Elder Anuruddha with scented water. The Elder Cunda gathered together the relics and placed them in a filter cloth.

Then the Elder Cunda thought, "I cannot tarry here any longer. I must tell the Fully Enlightened One of the final passing away of my elder brother, the Venerable Sāriputta, the Marshal of the Law." So he took the filter cloth with the relics, and the Venerable Sāriputta's alms-bowl and robes, and went to Sāvattihī, spending only one night at each stage of the journey.

These are the events related in the commentary to the Cunda Sutta of the Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta, with additions from the parallel version in the commentary to the Mahā-Parinibbāna Sutta. The narrative is taken up in the Cunda Sutta which follows.

*Cunda Sutta*⁴⁷

Once the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvattihī, in Anāthapiṇḍika's park. At that time the Venerable Sāriputta was at Nālaka village in the Magadha country, and was sick, suffering, gravely ill. The Novice Cunda⁴⁸ was his attendant.

And the Venerable Sāriputta passed away finally through that very illness. Then the Novice Cunda took the alms-bowl and robes of the Venerable Sāriputta and went to Sāvattihī, to the Jeta Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's park. There he betook himself to the Venerable Ānanda and, having saluted him, seated himself at one side. Thus seated, he spoke to the Venerable Ānanda saying, "Venerable sir, the Venerable Sāriputta has had his final passing away. These are his bowl and robes."

⁴⁷ SN 47:13/S V 161ff.

⁴⁸ Cunda Samaṇuddesa. Comy: "He was the Venerable Sāriputta's younger brother. Before he received Higher Ordination the bhikkhus use to call him „' and even when he was an elder he was still so addressed." (See p. 25)

“On this matter, Cunda, we ought to see the Blessed One. Let us go, friend Cunda, and meet the Master. Having met him, we shall acquaint the Blessed One with that fact.”

“Yes, Venerable sir,” said the Novice Cunda.

They went to see the Blessed One, and having arrived there and saluted the Master, they seated themselves at one side. Then the Venerable Ānanda addressed the Blessed One:

“O Lord, the Novice Cunda has told me this, ‘The Venerable Sāriputta has had his final passing away. These are his bowl and robes.’ Then, O Lord, my own body became weak as a creeper; everything around became dim and things were no longer clear to me, when I heard about the final passing away of the Venerable Sāriputta.”

“How is this, Ānanda? When Sāriputta had his final passing away, did he take from you your portion of virtue, or your portion of concentration, or your portion of the knowledge and vision of deliverance?”

“Not so, Lord. When the Venerable Sāriputta had his final passing away he did not take my portion of virtue... concentration... wisdom... deliverance, or my portion of the knowledge and vision of deliverance. But O Lord, the Venerable Sāriputta has been to me a mentor, teacher, and instructor, one who rouses, inspires, and gladdens, untiring in preaching Dhamma, a helper of his fellow monks. And we remember how vitalizing, enjoyable, and helpful his Dhamma instruction was.”

“Have I not taught you before, Ānanda, that it is the nature of all things near and dear to us that we must suffer separation from them, and be severed from them? Of that which is born, come to being, put together, and so is subject to dissolution, how should it be said that it should not depart? That, indeed, is not possible. It is, Ānanda, as though from a mighty hardwood tree a large branch should break off, so has Sāriputta now had his final passing away from this great and sound community of bhikkhus. Indeed, Ānanda, of that which is born, come to being, put together, and so is subject to dissolution, how should it be said that it should not depart? This, indeed, is not possible.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, be ye an island unto yourself, a refuge unto yourself, seeking no external refuge; with the Teaching as your island, the Teaching your refuge, seeking no other refuge.”

The commentary takes up the narrative thus:

The Master stretched forth his hand, and taking the filter with the relics, placed it on his palm, and said to the monks:

“These, O monks, are the shell-coloured relics of the bhikkhu who, not long ago, asked for permission to have his final passing away. He who fulfilled the perfections for an incalculable period and a hundred thousand aeons—this was that bhikkhu. He who helped me in turning the Wheel of the Law that was first turned by me—this was that bhikkhu. He who obtained the seat next to me—this was that bhikkhu. He who, apart from me, had none to equal him in wisdom throughout the whole ten-thousandfold universe—this was that bhikkhu. Of great wisdom was this bhikkhu, of broad wisdom, bright wisdom, quick wisdom, of penetrative wisdom was this bhikkhu. Few wants had this bhikkhu; he was contented, bent on seclusion, not fond of company, full of energy, an exhorter of his fellow monks, censuring what is evil. He who went forth into homelessness, abandoning the great fortune obtained through his merits in five hundred existences—this was that bhikkhu. He who, in my Dispensation, was patient like the earth—this was that bhikkhu. Harmless like a bull whose horns had been cut—this was that bhikkhu. Of humble mind like an outcast boy—this was that bhikkhu.

“See here, O monks, the relics of him who was of great wisdom, of broad, bright, quick, keen and penetrative wisdom; who had few wants and was contented, bent on seclusion, not fond of company, energetic—see here the relics of him who was an exhorter of his fellow monks, who censured evil!”

Then the Buddha spoke the following verses in praise of his Great Disciple:

“To him who in five times a hundred lives
Went forth to homelessness, casting away
Pleasures the heart holds dear, from passion free,
With faculties controlled—now homage pay
To Sāriputta who has passed away!
To him who, strong in patience like the earth,
Over his own mind had absolute sway,
Who was compassionate, kind, serenely cool,
And firm as earth withal—now homage pay
To Sāriputta who has passed away!
Who, like an outcast boy of humble mind,
Enters the town and slowly wends his way
From door to door with begging bowls in hand,
Such was this Sāriputta—now homage pay
To Sāriputta who has passed away!
One who in town or jungle, hurting none,
Lived like a bull whose horns are cut away,
Such was this Sāriputta, who had won
Mastery of himself—now homage pay
To Sāriputta who has passed away!”

* * *

When the Blessed One had thus lauded the virtues of the Venerable Sāriputta, he asked for a stupa to be built for the relics.

After that, he indicated to the Elder Ānanda his wish to go to Rājagaha. Ānanda informed the monks, and the Blessed One, together with a large body of bhikkhus, journeyed to Rājagaha. At the time he arrived there, the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna had also had his final passing away. The Blessed One took his relics likewise, and had a stupa raised for them.

Then he departed from Rājagaha, and going by stages towards the Ganges, he reached Ukkacelā. There he went to the bank of the Ganges, and seated with his following of monks he preached the Ukkacelā Sutta, on the Parinibbāna of Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna.

*Ukkacelā Sutta*⁴⁹

Once the Blessed One was dwelling in the Vajji country, at Ukkacelā on the bank of the river Ganges, not long after Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna had passed away. And at that time the Blessed One was seated in the open, surrounded by the company of monks.

The Blessed One surveyed the silent gathering of monks, and then spoke to them, saying:

“This assembly, O bhikkhus, appears indeed empty to me, now that Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna have passed away. Not empty, for me, is an assembly, nor need I have concern for a place where Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna dwell.

⁴⁹ SN 47:14/S V 163f.

“Those who in the past have been Holy Ones, Fully enlightened Ones, those Blessed Ones, too, had such excellent pairs of disciples as I had in Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna. Those who in the future will be Holy Ones, fully Enlightened Ones, those Blessed Ones too will have such excellent pairs of disciples as I had in Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna.

“Marvellous it is, most wonderful it is, bhikkhus, concerning those disciples, that they will act in accordance with the Master’s Dispensation, will act in according to his advice; that they will be dear to the four Assemblies, will be loved, respected and honoured by them. Marvellous it is, most wonderful it is, bhikkhus, concerning the Perfect Ones, that when such a pair of disciples has passed away there is no grief, no lamentation on the part of the Perfect One.

For of that which is born, come to being, put together, and so is subject to dissolution, how should it be said that it should not depart? That indeed, is not possible.”

“Therefore, bhikkhus, be ye an island unto yourselves, a refuge unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge; with the Teaching as your island, the Teaching your refuge, seeking no other refuge.”

* * *

And with that profound and deeply moving exhortation, which echoes again and again through the Buddha’s Teaching up to the time of his own final passing away, ends the story of the youth Upatissa who became the master’s Chief Disciple, the beloved “Marshal of the Law.” The Venerable Sāriputta died on the full moon of the month Kattikā, which begins in October and ends in November of the solar calendar. The death of Mahā Moggallāna followed a half-month later, on the Uposatha of the New Moon. Half a year later, according to tradition, came the Parinibbāna of the Buddha himself.

Could such an auspicious combination of three great personages, so fruitful in blessings to gods and men, have been brought about purely by chance? We find the answer to that question in the *Milinda-pañhā*⁵⁰ where Nāgasena says:

“In many hundred thousands of births, too, sire, the Elder Sāriputta was the Bodhisatta’s father, grandfather, uncle, brother, son, nephew or friend.”⁵¹

So the weary round of becoming, which linked them together in time, came at last to its end; time which is but the succession of fleeting events became for them the Timeless, and round of birth and death gave place to the Deathless. And in their final lives they kindled a glory that has illumined the world. Long may it continue to do so!

⁵⁰ This is according to the Commentary to the Ukkacelā Sutta.

⁵¹ *Milinda’s Questions* by I. B. Horner, Vol. I, p. 295. See also the chapter “[Sariputta in the Jātakas](#)” (Part V of this book).

Part IV

Discourses of Sāriputta

The suttas attributed to the Venerable Sāriputta cover a wide range of subjects connected with the Holy Life, from simple morality up to abstruse points of doctrine and meditation practice. A list of them, together with a brief description of the subject matter of each, is given below. Their arrangement in the Sutta Piṭaka does not give any indication of the chronological order in which they were delivered. Some few, however, contain references to particular events which make it possible to assign to them a period in the Buddha's ministry. One such is the Anāthapiṇḍika Sutta, preached just before the great lay disciple's death.

Majjhima Nikāya

No. 3: Heirs of Dhamma (Dhammadāyāda Sutta)

After the Buddha had discoursed on "heirs of Dhamma" and "heirs of worldliness" and had retired into his cell, the Venerable Sāriputta addresses the monks on how they should conduct themselves, and how not, when the Master goes into seclusion. They likewise should cultivate seclusion, should reject what they are told to give up, and should be modest and lovers of solitude. He concludes by speaking on the evil of the sixteen defilements of mind⁵² and says that the Middle Way by which they can be eradicated is the Noble Eightfold Path.

No. 5: Without Blemishes (Anaṅgaṇa Sutta)

On four types of persons: those who are guilty of an offence and know it, and those who are guilty and unaware of it; those who are guiltless and know it, and those who are guiltless and unaware of it. The first of each pair is said to be the better one of the two, and the reason is explained. This discourse shows the importance of self-examination for moral and spiritual progress.

No. 9: Right Understanding (Sammā-diṭṭhi Sutta)

Summary on p. 20

No. 28: The Greater Discourse on the Elephant Footprint Simile (Mahā-hatthipadopama Sutta)

Summary on p. 19

No 43: The Greater Discourse on Explanations (Mahā-vedalla Sutta)

The Elder answers a number of questions put by the Venerable Mahā Koṭṭhita, who was foremost in analytical knowledge. Sāriputta matches the excellence of the questions with the clarity and profundity of his answers. The questions and answers extend from analytical examination of terms, through the position of wisdom and right understanding to subtle aspects of meditation.

⁵² See "The Simile of the Cloth" (MN 7) in Wheel No. 61/62, p. 12.

No. 69: Discourse to Gulissāni (Gulissāni Sutta)

On the conduct and Dhamma-practice to be followed by a forest-dwelling monk. Questioned by the Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna, the Elder confirms that the same duties apply also to monks living in the vicinity of towns and villages.

No. 97: Discourse to Dhānañjāni (Dhānañjāni Sutta)

The Venerable Sāriputta explains to the brahmin Dhānañjāni that the multifarious duties of a layman are no excuse for wrong moral conduct, nor do they exempt one from painful consequences of such conduct in a future existence.

Later, when Dhānañjāni was on his deathbed he requested the Elder to visit him, and the Venerable Sāriputta spoke to him, on the way to Brahma through the Brahma-vihāras. The Buddha mildly reproached the elder for not having led Dhānañjāni to a higher understanding. (See p. 28)

No. 114: To Be Practiced and Not To Be Practiced (Sevitabbāsevitabba Sutta)

The Venerable Sāriputta elaborates upon brief indications given by the Buddha on what should be practiced, cultivated or used, and what should not. This is shown with regard to threefold action in deed, word and thought; in relation to mental attitudes and views, the six sense objects and the monk's requisites.

No. 143: Discourse to Anāthapiṇḍika (Anāthapiṇḍikovāda Sutta)

The Venerable Sāriputta is called to Anāthapiṇḍika's deathbed and admonishes him to free his mind from any attachment whatsoever, beginning with the six sense organs, "Thus should you train yourself, householder, 'I shall not cling to the eye, and my consciousness will not attach itself to the eye.' Thus, householder, should you train yourself." This is repeated in full for each of the other five sense organs, the six sense objects, the sixfold consciousness, sixfold contact, sixfold feeling born of contact; the six elements, the five aggregates, the four incorporeal jhānas, and concludes with detachment from this world and all other worlds; detachment from all things seen, heard, sensed and thought; from all that is encountered, sought and pursued in mind.

In short, detachment should be practiced as to the entire range of experience, beginning with what for a dying person will be his immediate concern; his sense faculties and their function.

This call for detachment drawing ever wider circles and repeating the same mighty chord of thought, must have had a deeply penetrating impact and a calming, liberating, even cheering influence on the dying devotee's mind. This was what Sāriputta, the skilled teacher, obviously intended. And in fact his words had that impact because our text says that Anāthapiṇḍika was moved to tears by the loftiness of the discourse, one in profundity unlike any he had ever heard before. Anāthapiṇḍika passed away soon after, and was reborn as a deity in Tusita Heaven.

Dīgha Nikāya

No. 28: Faith-Inspiring Discourse (Sampasādanīya Sutta)

An eloquent eulogy of the Buddha by Sāriputta, spoken in the Buddha's presence and proclaiming the peerless qualities (*anuttariya*) of his Teaching. It is an expression and at the same time a justification of Sāriputta's deep confidence in the Buddha. It may be regarded as

complementary to Sāriputta's "Lion's Roar" which forms the first section of the discourse and is repeated in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta.⁵³

No. 33: Doctrinal Recitation (Saṅgīti Sutta) and No. 34: Tenfold Series Discourse (Dasuttara Sutta) see p. 21.

Aṅguttara Nikāya

Roman figures denote the number of the book (*Nipāta*) and Arabic figures the number of the sutta. The division of the suttas in the Aṅguttara Nikāya is only numerical.

2:37 (Samacitta-Sutta): On the stream-winner, the once-returner, and the non-returner, and on what determines the places of the rebirths they have still before them. See p. 20.

3:21: On another classification of noble persons (*ariya puggala*): the body-witness (*kāyasakkhi*), the one attained to right understanding (*ditṭhippatta*) and the one liberated through faith (*saddhāvimutto*).

4:79: Sāriputta asks the Buddha why the enterprises of some people fail, those of others succeed, and those of others even surpass their expectations. The Buddha replies that one of the reasons is generosity, or lack of it, shown to ascetics, priests, and monks.

4:156: On four qualities indicative of loss or maintenance of wholesome states of mind.

Here it is said that if one finds in oneself four qualities one can know for certain that one has lost wholesome qualities, and that this is what has been called deterioration by the Blessed One. These four are: excessive greed, excessive hate, excessive delusion, and lack of knowledge and wisdom concerning the diverse profound subjects (relating to wisdom).

If on the other hand, one finds in oneself four other qualities, one can know for certain that one has not lost one's wholesome qualities, and that this is what has been called progress by the Blessed One. These four other qualities are: attenuated greed, attenuated hate, attenuated delusion, and the possession of knowledge and wisdom concerning the diverse profound subjects (relating to wisdom).

4:167f: The four types of progress on the Path. See p. 12.

4:171: Sāriputta elaborates a brief statement made by the Buddha on the four forms of personalized existence (*attabhāva*) and puts an additional question. The Buddha's reply to it was later elaborated by Sāriputta in the Samacitta Sutta (see above).

4:172: Sāriputta states that he attained to the fourfold analytical knowledge (*Paṭisambhidāñāṇa*) two weeks after his ordination (i.e., at his attainment of Arahātship). He appeals to the Buddha for confirmation. See p. 19.

4:173: Discussion with Mahā Koṭṭhita on the limits of the explainable. The Venerable Sāriputta says: "As far, brother, as the six bases of sense-impression (*phassāyatana*) reach, so far reaches the (explainable) world of diffuseness (*papañca*); and as far as the world of diffuseness reaches, so far reach the six bases of sense-impression. Through the entire fading away and cessation of the six bases of sense impression, the world of diffuseness ceases and is stilled."

4:175: On the need of both knowledge and right conduct (*vijjācaraṇa*) for the ending of suffering.

4: 179: On the reasons for obtaining, and not obtaining, Nibbāna in the present life.

⁵³ See *Wheel* No. 67/69, pp. 9f.

5:165: Five reasons why people ask questions: through stupidity and foolishness; with evil intentions and through covetousness; with a desire to know; out of contempt; with the thought: “If he answers my question correctly, it is good; if not, then I shall give the correct answer.

5:167: On how to censure fellow-monks.

6:14–15: Causes of a monk’s good or bad dying.

6:41: Sāriputta explains that a monk with supernormal powers may, if he so wishes, regard a tree trunk merely as being solid, or as liquid, fiery (calorific) or airy (vibratory), or as being either pure or impure (beautiful or ugly), because all these elements are to be found in the tree.

7:66: On respect and reverence, Sāriputta says that these are helpful in overcoming what is unwholesome and developing what is wholesome: that is respect and reverence towards the Master, the Teaching, the Community of Monks, the training, meditation, heedfulness (*appamāda*) and towards the spirit of kindness and courtesy (*paṭisanthāra*). Each of these factors is said to be a condition of the one following it.

9: 6: On the two things needful to know about people, robes, alms-food, lodging, villages, towns and countries: that is, whether one should associate with them, use them, or live in them, or whether one should not.

9: 11: A second “Lion’s Roar” of Sāriputta, uttered in the Master’s presence on the occasion of a monk’s false accusation; with nine similes proclaiming his freedom from anger, detachment from the body, and his inability to hurt others. See p. 30.

9: 13: A discussion with the Venerable Mahā Koṭṭhita about the purpose of living the Holy Life.

9:14: The Venerable Sāriputta questions the Venerable Samiddhi about the essentials of the Dhamma and approves of his answers.

9:26: This text illustrates the Venerable Sāriputta’s scrupulous fairness even towards antagonists. He corrects a statement attributed to Devadatta which was probably wrongly formulated by one of Devadatta’s followers who reported it to Sāriputta. Later, Sāriputta speaks to that monk on the fully developed and steadfast mind, which is not shaken by even the most attractive sense impressions.

9:34: On Nibbāna, which is described as happiness beyond feelings.

10:7: Sāriputta describes his meditation, during which he had only the single perception that “Nibbāna is the ceasing of existence.” See p. 18.

10:65: To be reborn is misery; not to be reborn is happiness.

10:66: To have delight in the Buddha’s Teaching and Discipline is happiness; Snot to have delight in them is misery.

10: 67–68: Causes of progress and decline in the cultivation of what is salutary.

10:90: On the ten powers of a canker-free arahant that entitle him to proclaim his attainment.

Saṃyutta Nikāya

Nidāna Saṃyutta

24: Sāriputta rejects the alternatives that suffering is produced either by oneself or by another, and explains the conditioned arising of suffering through the (sixfold sense-) contact (*phassa*).

25: The same is stated with regard to both happiness and suffering (*sukha-dukkha*).

31: On the conditioned arising of existence from nutriment.

32: Kalāra Sutta. Questioned by the Buddha, Sāriputta says that the knowledge inducing him to declare his attainment of arahatship was that he knew: the cause of birth being extinct, the result (i.e., future birth) becomes extinct. Hence he was able to say, in the words of the stock formula declaring Arahathship: “Extinct is birth...” (*khiṇā jāti*). He then replies to further questions of the Buddha about the cause and origin of birth, becoming and the other terms of dependent origination, leading up to feeling, the contemplation of which had served the Venerable Sāriputta as the starting-point for his attainment of Arahathship. He says that, as he sees impermanence and suffering in all three kinds of feeling, there is in him no arising of any hedonic gratification (*nandi*).

Khandha Saṃyutta

1: Sāriputta explains in detail the Buddha’s saying: “Even if the body is ill, the mind should not be ill.”

2: Monks going to distant border districts are instructed by Sāriputta on how to answer questions posed to them by non-Buddhists. He tells them that the removal of desire for the five aggregates is the core of the Teaching.

122–123: On the importance of reflecting on the five aggregates. If one who possesses virtue (or, in Text 123, learning) contemplates the five aggregates as impermanent, bound up with suffering and void of self, he may be able to attain to stream-entry. If a stream-winner, once-returned or non-returned thus contemplates, he may be able to win to the next higher stage. An arahant should also contemplate the five aggregates thus, as it will conduce to his happiness here and now, as well as to mindfulness and clear comprehension.

126: On ignorance and knowledge.

Sāriputta Saṃyutta

1–9: In these nine texts Sāriputta speaks of his having developed all nine meditative attainments, i.e., from the first jhāna up to the cessation of perception and feeling; and states that in doing so he was always free of any self-affirmation. See p. 18.

10: Once, at Rājagaha, after the alms round the Venerable Sāriputta was taking food his food near a wall. A female ascetic called Sucimukhī (Bright-face) approached him and asked whether when eating he turned to one or other of the directions, as done by some non-Buddhists ascetics. Sāriputta denied it for every one of the directions, explaining them in his own way as being several means of livelihood that are wrong for ascetics, such as geomancy, astrology, going on errands, etc. He said that he did not turn to any of those wrong directions, but sought his alms-food in the right manner; and what he had thus obtained righteously, that he would eat. Sucimukhī was deeply impressed, and thereafter went from street to street and place to place loudly proclaiming: “The Sakya ascetics take their food righteously! They take their food blamelessly! Please give alms-food to the Sakya ascetics!”⁵⁴

Salāyatana Saṃyutta

232: Not the senses and their objects, but the desire for them is the fetter that binds to existence.

⁵⁴ Sāriputta’s method of teaching in this discourse invites comparison with the Buddha’s in the Sigalovāda Sutta (DN 31).

Jambukhādaka Saṃyutta

Sāriputta replies to questions put by his nephew, Jambukhādaka, who was a Paribbājaka, i.e., a non-Buddhist ascetic.

1–2: He defines Nibbāna and Arahatsip as the elimination of greed, hatred and delusion.

3–16: He replies to questions about those who proclaim truth: about the purpose of the Holy Life; about those who have found true solace. He explains feeling, ignorance, the taints, personality, etc. and speaks on what is difficult in the Buddha's Doctrine and Discipline.

Indriya Saṃyutta

44: Questioned by the Buddha, Sāriputta says that not out of faith in him, but from his own experience, he knows that the five spiritual faculties (confidence, etc.) lead to the Deathless.

48–50: On the five spiritual faculties. (These texts are translated in Wheel No. 65/66, *The Way of Wisdom*, pp. 47f, 49f)

Sotāpatti Saṃyutta

55: On the four conditioning factors of stream-entry (*sotāpattiyaṅga*).

Part V

Sāriputta in the Jātakas

As might be expected, the Venerable Sāriputta makes frequent appearances in the Jātakas, the stories of the Buddha's previous lives. In these, the Bodhisatta and Sāriputta assume various roles; in some existences we find Sāriputta as the teacher and the Bodhisatta as pupil, as for example in the Susīma (163), Cūla Nandiya (223), Sīlavimamsa (305), Kārandiya (356) and Mahā Dhammapāla (447) Jātakas. In the last-mentioned Jātaka, however, the Bodhisatta, as pupil, gives his teacher, Sāriputta, a valuable lesson: not to give the five precepts indiscriminately to those who have no desire to accept them nor the intention to observe them.

In several births Sāriputta appears as a human being and the Bodhisatta an animal. Some examples are the Cūla Nandiya Jātaka (223), the Romaka Jātaka (277)—where Sāriputta, as a wise ascetic, instructs a partridge, the Bodhisatta—the Bhojjaniya Jātaka (23) and the Dummedha Jātaka (122).

In other stories the roles are reversed, as in the Jarudapāna (256) and Kuṇḍakakucchi Sindhava (254) Jātakas (for the latter, see below), where Sāriputta is an animal and the Bodhisatta human. Sometimes, as in the Kurungamiga Jātaka (206), both are animals.

The following are summaries of Jātakas in which the Venerable Sāriputta's previous personalities appear.

1. Lakkhaṇa Jātaka (11): As the wise one of two brother stags, each leader of a herd, Sāriputta brings his herd safely back to the hills from a dangerous track, while his foolish brother (Devadatta) loses his whole herd.
2. Bhojjāniya Jātaka (23): The Bodhisatta is a superb war-steed, while Sāriputta is a knight entrusted with the task of capturing seven hostile kings. He succeeds, thanks to the endurance and sacrificing spirit of the steed.
3. Visavanta Jātaka (69): Sāriputta is a snake which refuses to suck back its poison from a man bitten by it, preferring death. This Jātaka was told when Sāriputta, the Great Disciple, gave up the eating of meal cakes, which he enjoyed, and never went back on his resolution.
4. Parosahassa Jātaka (99): Sāriputta, as pupil of a hermit teacher, is able to understand short, enigmatic sayings. A comment on his penetrative mind.
5. Dummedha Jātaka (122): Sāriputta, as a king of Benares, is able to appreciate excellence when he sees it. The Bodhisatta is a superb white elephant. Devadatta, as king of Magadha, had owned that elephant but lost it through jealousy.
6. Rajovāda Jātaka (151): Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna are both charioteers of powerful kings. Meeting one another on a narrow road, each expects the other to give way, and they decide the issue by proclaiming the virtues of their respective monarchs. Sāriputta, whose king is the Bodhisatta, wins the contest by showing that his master's virtue is superior: he is not only good to those who are good, he is good to the bad as well.
7. Alīnacitta Jātaka (156): Sāriputta, as an elephant, shows the virtue of gratitude.
8. Kurungamiga Jātaka (206): Sāriputta as a woodpecker and Mahā Moggallāna as a tortoise save the life of the Bodhisatta, who is an antelope, from a hunter (Devadatta). Later, the woodpecker saves the imprisoned tortoise.

9. Cūla Nandiya Jātaka (223): As a wise brahmin teacher, Sāriputta advises his pupil, Devadatta, not to be harsh, cruel and violent, but his exhortation is in vain.
 10. Kuṇḍakakucchi Sindhava Jātaka (254): Sāriputta, as a wondrous horse owned by the Bodhisatta, a horse-dealer, benefits an impoverished old woman who had owned the horse previously.
 11. Jarudapāna Jātaka (256): Sāriputta, as a Naga king, helps the Bodhisatta, a merchant, to transport some treasure which the latter had found.
 12. Vyaggha Jātaka (272): In a former life as a Yakkha, the monk Kokālika could not live together with Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna, nor could he live without them.
 13. Romaka Jātaka (277): Sāriputta, as a wise ascetic, instructs a partridge, the Bodhisatta.
 14. Abbhantara (281) and Supatta (292) Jātakas: Incidents of Sāriputta's last life. Rāhula, whose mother is a bhikkhunī, requests the Venerable Sāriputta to get sugared mango juice as a medicine for her flatulence, which he does. In (292), for another illness of hers, the Venerable Sāriputta procures rice cooked with ghee and flavored with red fish (*rohita-maccha*).
 15. Sayha Jātaka (310): Ānanda, as a king sends his courtier, Sayha (Sāriputta) to a friend of his youth (the Bodhisatta) who had become an ascetic, asking him in vain to return and be the court brahmin.
 16. Khantivādi Jātaka (313): When the Bodhisatta was a wise ascetic, the preacher of patience (*khantivādi*), and was tortured by King Kālabu (Devadatta), Sāriputta was that king's commander-in-chief of the army. Sāriputta bandaged the Bodhisatta's wounds.
 17. Maṃsa Jātaka (315): Sāriputta was a hunter and the Bodhisatta a merchant's son. Addressing the hunter as "friend," and winning him over with kind words, the Bodhisatta persuaded him to give up his cruel profession.
 18. Vaṇṇoroḥa Jātaka (361): In their last lives, when the Great Disciples Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna were living in solitude, a beggar who attended on them and ate the remnants of their food, tried to set them at variance but failed. Each of them just smiled at the calumnies and told him to go away. The Jātaka relates that the same had happened in an earlier life when the beggar was a jackal and Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna were a lion and a tiger.
 19. Koṭisimbali Jātaka (412): Sāriputta, as a king of the Garudas (*sūpaṇṇa-rāja*) saves a tree which was the home of a tree spirit, the Bodhisatta.
 20. Kaṇhadipāyana Jātaka (444): Sāriputta is the ascetic Aṇimaṇḍaviya. Impaled by the king on a false accusation, he bears the torture patiently and without resentment, knowing it to be the result of past evil kamma. The Bodhisatta is his brother-ascetic, Kaṇhadipāyana, who in an Act of Truth confesses that all throughout he has lived the ascetic life unwillingly, except for the first week.
 21. Mahā Paduma Jātaka (472): Sāriputta, as a hill spirit, saves the life of the Bodhisatta, who is Prince Mahā Paduma.
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Appendix

A Note on the Relics of Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna

On Sāñchī Hill in Bhopal are the remains of ten stupas which are among the oldest buildings still standing in India. By their architectural features and sculpture they have always been recognised as belonging to the high noon of Buddhist art, the characters in which their numerous inscriptions are written placing them at about the period of Asoka; that is, some time around the middle of the third century B.C. Some are in good preservation, while others have been reduced in the course of centuries to mere mounds of earth and stone.

It was in one of these, the now famous Third Stupa, that Sir Alexander Cunningham discovered the sacred Body Relics of the Buddha's Chief Disciples, Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna, in 1851. At about the same time, more relics of the two great Arahats were found in a stupa at Satadhāra, about six miles distant from Sāñchī.

On sinking a shaft in the centre of the stupa on Sāñchī Hill, Cunningham came upon a large stone slab, upwards of five feet in length, lying in a direction from north to south. Beneath the slab were found two boxes of gray sandstone, each with a brief inscription in Brahmi characters on the lid. The box to the south was inscribed "*Sāriputasa*" "(Relics) of Sāriputta," while that to the north bore the legend "*Mahā-Mogallānasa*." "(Relics) of Mahā Moggallāna."

The southernmost box contained a large flat casket of white steatite, rather more than six inches broad and three inches in height. The surface was hard and polished and the box, which had been turned on a lathe, was a beautiful piece of workmanship. Around this casket were some fragments of sandalwood believed to have been from the funeral pyre, while inside it, besides the Relic, various precious stones were found. This casket contained a single bone relic of the Venerable Sāriputta, not quite one inch in length.

The stone box to the north enclosed another steatite casket, similar to that of Sāriputta but slightly smaller and with a softer surface. Inside it were two bone relics of the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna, the larger of them being something less than half an inch in length.

Each of the two steatite caskets had a single ink letter inscribed on the inner surface of the lid: "*Sā*" for Sāriputta on the southern and "*Mā*" for Mahā Moggallāna on that to the north. In Cunningham's words, "Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna were the principal followers of the Buddha, and were usually styled his right and left hand disciples. Their ashes thus preserved after death the same positions to the right and left of Buddha which they had themselves occupied in life."⁵⁵ This is explained by the fact that the Buddha customarily sat facing east.

In the stupa at Satadhāra, one of a group which Cunningham noted was called locally "Buddha Bhīṭā" or "Buddha Monuments," he discovered two caskets of pale mottled steatite. These were inscribed, like those at Sāñchī, "*Sāriputasa*" and "*Mahā Mogallānasa*" respectively. This stupa showed signs of having been violated by robbers, but the bone relics had been left undisturbed. Cunningham, who was a very capable archaeologist, has left a detailed account of everything his excavations brought to light in these and other stupas, and it is thanks to him that the authenticity of the relics is established beyond all doubt.

The relics from both stupas were removed to England and placed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, but some discrepancies between Cunningham's description of the caskets and the actual boxes in which the relics were deposited gives reason to believe that he, or someone else,

⁵⁵ *Bhilsa Topes*, p. 300.

transferred the relics from Sāñchī to the caskets discovered at Satadhāra, and what became of the Sāñchī steatite caskets is not known for certain.

The sacred relics were preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum until 1939, when the Mahā Bodhi Society approached the British government with a request that they be returned to India. The request was at once granted, but owing to the outbreak of the Second World War in that year, the actual transfer was delayed for reasons of safety until Feb 24th, 1947. On that date they were handed over to the representatives of the Mahā Bodhi Society at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and so began their journey back to the land of their origin.

Before being restored to India, however, the relics were taken to Sri Lanka, where they were received with great honour and amid general rejoicing. For two and a half months in 1947, they were displayed for public worship at the Colombo Museum, where it has been estimated that well over two million people paid homage to them. It is said that not only Buddhists but Hindus, Christians and Muslims joined in paying reverence to them.⁵⁶

The next stage of their journey to the new Vihāra that was being erected for their re-enshrinement at Sāñchī, was Calcutta. There the relics were displayed for public homage at the Dharmarājika Vihāra, headquarters of the Mahā Bodhi Society of India. The same scenes of religious devotion were enacted there. Every day for two weeks an unbroken stream of people filed past the shrine where the relics were exposed, from morning until late evening. Most of the devotees were Hindus, but there was also a large number of Muslims among them, and the reverence shown by all was a deeply impressive sight. Many had come from distant parts to pay their respects to the remains of these great sons of India.

Next came a request from Burma that the relics should be taken for exposition here. This was readily granted. The reception given to them in that country revived all the pomp and religious fervour of ancient times. In order that everyone in Burma should be given an opportunity of worshipping them, the relics were conducted on a riverine tour along the Irrawaddy from Mandalay to Rangoon. Boats decorated in traditional Burmese style escorted the steamer that conveyed them, and at every town along the river the relics were taken ashore in procession for worship at the chief pagoda. At the same time religious meetings were held, drawing vast crowds of people from the adjacent villages to hear sermons and the recitation of suttas, which usually continued all through the night.

Subsequently, at the request of the respective governments, the relics were taken for exposition to Nepal and Ladakh.

After they were returned to India, the Burmese government asked that a portion of the Sacred Relics should be given to Burma. The Mahā Bodhi Society of India agreed to this, and the then Prime Minister of Burma went in person to Calcutta to receive them. They were ceremonially transferred to him on the 20th October 1950. The portion allotted to Burma was afterwards enshrined in the Kaba Aye Zedi (World Peace Pagoda), built on the site of the Sixth Great Buddhist Council, close to Rangoon. The elaborate ceremonies connected with the crowning of the pagoda and the installation of the relics lasted from the 5th to 11th of March, 1952.

Another portion was given to Sri Lanka to be enshrined in a new stupa built by the Mahā Bodhi Society of Sri Lanka to receive them. At the time of writing they are housed in the temple of the Mahā Bodhi Society, Colombo, awaiting the completion of the building.

On the 30th November, 1952, the remaining relics were duly enshrined at Sāñchī on completion of the new Chetiyaḡiri Vihāra built to receive them. There they remain, objects of the

⁵⁶ The Cynosure of Sāñchi, p. 28.

deepest veneration to pilgrims from every Buddhist country, and a lasting reminder of the lives of those in whom the Buddha's Teaching bore its finest fruit.

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