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Overcoming Fear by Recollecting the Buddha: His Role in Early Buddhist Texts

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Abstract

The employment of mindfulness in a traditional setting includes the practice of recollection, which can serve to counter fear. In the early discourses, the role of the Buddha as the object of such recollection is not to embody some kind of cosmic principle, as has recently been suggested by Eviatar Shulman. Instead, the inspiration to be gained from recollecting the Buddha springs in particular from his having become totally free from defilements and teaching others how to do the same.

Keywords *anussati* · *anusmṛti* · Fear · The nature of the Buddha · *paritta* · Protective texts · Recollection of the Buddha · The role of the Buddha

The early Buddhist discourses provide various perspectives on the topic of fear (Brekke 1999; Giustarini 2012; Weerasinghe 1997). One way of facing fear with mindfulness relates to the four postures of walking, standing, sitting, and lying down (Anālayo 2020b). The task is simply to remain with awareness in whichever of these four postures one happens to be when fear arises, rather than reacting in one way or another. This illustrates a type of attitude that is indeed salient in mindfulness training in general, namely the ability to remain aware of what happens without immediately reacting to it.

Another dimension of the employment of mindfulness in the early discourses relates to the practice of recollection (Anālayo 2020a). In addition to the Buddha himself, the practice of recollection described in the early discourses can take up the following objects:

the teaching (Dharma) of the Buddha,
the community of his noble disciples,
one's own accomplishment in morality,
one's own accomplishment in generosity,
one's own accomplishment in qualities shared with celestial beings.

When employed as a way to counter fear, the task of such recollection is not so much about directing mindfulness toward the experience of fear itself. Instead, reminding oneself of a source of inspiration, such as the Buddha, is what serves to counter fear. This apparent potential brings up the question of what the Buddha stood for in early Buddhist thought. Whereas the potential reassurance of recollecting one's own accomplishment in morality, generosity, or other qualities probably does not require much comment; the potential of the same practice in relation to the Buddha depends very much on the associations he calls up in the mind of the practitioner.

Disciples of the Buddha can in principle be expected to be able to relate to the other objects of recollection, listed above, from within their personal sphere of experience. Practicing disciples would have had at least some exposure to the Buddha's teaching, probably have at least heard of other disciples considered to be noble ones, and would be acquainted with their own morality and generosity, as well as with whatever other qualities they possess that in the ancient Indian setting were considered to be conducive to a heavenly existence. In view of this setting, it could be expected that the Buddha similarly represented something which disciples could relate to from within the viewpoint of their own personal experience.

The Buddha in the Early Texts

Scholarship on early Buddhism seems to be in general agreement that a shift in perspective regarding the Buddha took

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place in the course of time. Whereas in early Buddhist thought the Buddha was predominantly seen as an exceptional human being (which would fit the above-mentioned requirement of being more relatable to personal experience) in later tradition he became increasingly deified. The general agreement on this tendency can be exemplified with the help of a few selected quotes from various scholars.

In a study of later Pāli texts believed by tradition to record past lives of the Buddha, Behm (1971, p. 41) found "definite and unmistakeable signs of the divinisation of the Buddha." According to Coomaraswamy (1928, p. 838), Buddhist texts in general show that "the activity of the earthly Buddha, originally a living memory, has become, as it were, the *līlā* [display] of a deity; it is related in the later literature with a corresponding miraculous enhancement." Chaudhary (1994, p. 65) observed that in the ancient Indian setting the

> concept of God was that He was all omnipotent and omniscient and He would protect him who would go to His refuge. The common people naturally felt drawn towards such a God. Buddha was [eventually] also conceived in such a way as to possess divine qualities. Thus Buddha was gradually shorn of human characteristics and superhuman qualities were bestowed on him. He was deified.

Gokhale (1994/2001, p. 71) pointed out that soon enough "the Buddha ceases to be an ordinary human being, and is elevated to the status of a person greater than some of the great gods of the Vedic mythology." Dayal (1932/1970, p. 28) explored the background to such developments, explaining that

> the competition of the rival Indian sects and movements also led the Buddhists to advance new claims on behalf of their leader … they transformed him into a living immortal, powerful and gracious *deva* … his humanity, his physical body and his death were therefore denied or thrown into the background.

Harrison (1978, p. 37) succinctly summed up that "with the passage of time the Buddha became less an object of emulation and more an object of devotion, growing in stature as memories faded."

Horner (1936/1979, p. 203) similarly observed that "the idea of Gotama as a god … came more and more to be in the air as his life on earth became more distant and more legendary." Karunaratne (1973, p. 496) explained that the Buddha "was respected, adored and idealised. This tendency … culminated in the belief that the Buddha was not a human being, but a superhuman being, a *deva*." Nakamura (1960, pp. 152 and 157) contrasted early texts in which the Buddha "was in every respect regarded merely as a superior man" with

later times when "as a consequence of the gradual process of deification … he works wonders, he is omniscient."

Pachow (1976, p. 267) commented on the Buddha that "after his death he was elevated to the plane of a superman, and then made into a great divinity." Werner (1991, p. 16) explained that the "Buddha was no longer seen as a mere man who had found the way to Enlightenment and led others towards it, but came to be regarded as an embodiment of the cosmic principle of Enlightenment," leading to an "elevation of the Buddha to a cosmic figure, if not a virtual deity."

The assessment evident in the above quotes has recently been challenged by Shulman (2017a, b, 2019) who argued that the Buddha's role as a cosmic figure is already characteristic of early Buddhist texts. This would of course substantially change the implications of recollecting the Buddha as described in the early discourses. Hence, a closer examination of the proposed arguments is required in order to see to what extent the early discourses cited in support of these ideas testify to such a role.

The Buddha as the Main Concern of the Discourses?

Regarding the overall role of the Buddha in the early discourses, Shulman (2017b, p. 365) proposed that "the orientation of all other characters in the discourses" serves to achieve a "positioning of the Buddha as a superhuman hero." Thus, "early Buddhist texts are about the Buddha, not as a historical figure but as an ideal type, as a unique cosmic being" (p. 366):

> Buddhist texts are thus also pictures of the Buddha and include an aspect of visualization; they are continuous to, and even participate in, the traditional meditative practice of *Buddha-anusmṛti*, "mindfulness of the Buddha" or "commemoration of the Buddha."

There can hardly be any doubt that the Buddha is the most important protagonist in the early discourses. However, it also needs to be acknowledged that some discourses are spoken by disciples and do not involve the Buddha. For example, the *Pāyāsi-sutta* in the *Dīgha-nikāya* could not be considered to reflect an overall orientation of positioning the Buddha as a superhuman hero (DN 23 and its parallels DĀ 7, MĀ 71, and T 45), something that in this case is particularly evident in the circumstance that a similar discourse exists in the Jain tradition (Bollée 2002). The Buddhist version of this discourse takes place after the Buddha had passed away and thus at a time when recollecting him must have acquired increasing importance. Yet, the whole discourse does not even refer to him, which could have easily been done by mentioning him as

the source of the teachings presented by the Buddhist monk who serves as the main protagonist of this discourse.

It also does not seem possible to consider the early discourses to be invariably presenting the Buddha as a hero. A case in point is the report of a mass suicide of monastics after the Buddha had apparently given a brief recommendation regarding meditation on the lack of attractiveness of the human body (Anālayo 2012). The narrative quite definitely does not accord to the Buddha the role of an ideal type of meditation teacher, given that some of his disciples became so unbalanced that they killed themselves. Another example would be the report of the recently awakened Buddha's first encounter with a potential disciple. The *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* and its parallel agree that the person in question remained simply unconvinced by the Buddha's claims and left (MN 26 and MĀ 204; Anālayo 2011, p. 183). This is hardly a portrayal of the Buddha as a superhuman hero.

The early discourses do not even present a complete biographical account of the Buddha, nor do they so much as mention his personal name. Their overall concern is much rather the Dharma discovered by him. This is not to deny that at times early discourses eulogize the Buddha in various ways. But alongside such occurrences there are also cases like the *Sampasādanīya-sutta* and its parallels, which report the Buddha quite explicitly discouraging his chief disciple Sāriputta from voicing praise of the Buddha in a way that went beyond what Sāriputta could actually ascertain based on his own personal experience.

Manné (1990, p. 61) then went to the other extreme in interpretation by alleging that the Pāli version of this discourse (DN 28) is a debate in which "it is the Buddha who is defeated" (see also DiSimone 2016). The idea that the early discourses would present Sāriputta as successfully challenging his teacher does not concord with what the actual discourse conveys. The *Sampasādanīya-sutta* sets out with Sāriputta voicing his conviction that nobody in past, present, or future times was superior to the Buddha in matters of awakening. The Buddha replied by querying if Sāriputta had examined the minds of past, present, and future Buddhas with telepathic knowledge before making such a proclamation. Sāriputta had to admit that he had not done so. However, he was able to know by inference that all Buddhas, past, present, and future, overcame the five hindrances, dwelled with the mind well established in the four establishments of mindfulness, and cultivated the seven awakening factors. Sāriputta then reported his own experience in hearing instructions from the Buddha and benefitting from them, followed by listing various types of teachings the Buddha had promulgated. The Buddha thereon approved of Sāriputta's presentation.

This is not a depiction of adversaries in a debate, with one defeating the other. Rather, the main point of the discourse appears to be that the Buddha's eminence should be seen in what he taught. Instead of some general acclaim of the Buddha's superiority that goes beyond what the speaker can personally verify, similar in type to the statement reportedly made by Sāriputta at the outset of this exchange, what the early discourses deem praiseworthy is the efficacy of the Buddha's teachings. As testified to by Sāriputta, this is something that can be personally experienced. The main concern here is not a vision of the Buddha but a vision of the Dharma.

The Buddha and Ajātasattu

Another instance relevant to evaluating the role of the Buddha occurs in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* and its parallels, which report an encounter between the patricide King Ajātasattu and the Buddha (DN 2 and its discourse parallels DĀ 27, T 22, and EĀ 43.7). Shulman (2017b, p. 376) commented on the concluding narrative, which depicts the king admitting his patricide in front of the Buddha, that here the "emotional power of the king's transformation … is deeply significant as a depiction of the Buddha's unique cosmological status." The passage then supposedly shows that the "Buddha is reflected here not only as a religious teacher but also as an embodiment of fundamental truth" (p. 375). The proposed interpretation is based on the assumption by Shulman (2017b, p. 374) that the king was searching for "a religious teacher who has the power to pardon his sin" and that the discourse "hints that the Buddha has the ability to pardon the king in a manner that is karmically consequential" (Shulman 2017b, p. 375 n. 55 reflects a more nuanced understanding, although this does not seem to have led to a reconsideration of the overall conclusions on the import of this episode).

The idea that the Buddha's acceptance of the king's declaration in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* involved some form of pardon is unconvincing. As explained by Derrett (1997, p. 59), based on studying the present episode, those who accept such acknowledgements of one's misdeed "do not forgive or pardon him, nor is the offence atoned for, or washed away. No 'amends' are made … condonation is not in point here … [but] an acceptance occurs like a creditor's issuing a receipt." In an article dedicated to the same episode, Attwood (2008, p. 299) concluded that "on Buddhist doctrinal grounds it would be inconsistent to say that by confessing Ajātasattu had 'made amends' for his crime," an idea not supported by the actual narrative (see also Anālayo 2016a, p. 6). It seems, then, that this episode may just be intending to portray how the inspiration gained from hearing a discourse on the benefits of becoming a Buddhist monastic motivated the king to acknowledge his patricide in public, and this acknowledgement was then accepted by the Buddha. This much does not suffice to establish the Buddha's unique cosmological status, at least in the early discourses concerned with this episode (the same does not hold equally for later texts, see Radich 2011).

The Buddha as a Manifestation of Cosmic Structure?

In a publication mainly dedicated to the theme of the cosmological dimensions of Buddhahood in early and later Pāli texts, Shulman (2017a, p. 167) argued that even the former type of texts shows that the Buddha "is truth itself, not just a person who has discovered the truth—a manifestation of cosmic structure rather than a mere man;" in fact, the Buddha even allegedly takes on the role of "an eternal cosmic element." As one out of several arguments in support of the Buddha's supposed cosmological role, Shulman (2017a, p. 176) took up the introductory narration to the *Pārāyana-vagga* and its chief protagonist, the brahmin Bāvari (or Bāvarī, see Bodhi 2017, p. 1358 n. 224), in the following way:

> The mere fact that there is a Buddha to be found has dispelled Bāvarī's fears. Knowing that a Buddha "manifestation" (*pātubhāvo*) "has arisen in the world" (*lokamhi uppanno*) he is confident that truth will prevail. Here, clearly, the Buddha is not a man but an embodiment of cosmic structure.

Consultation of the actual text (Sn 976–1031) makes it doubtful that the Buddha functions here as an embodiment of cosmic structure. Bāvari has been cursed by another brahmin and is terrified at the thought that within a week his head will split into seven parts as a consequence of this curse. The trope of splitting the head is a recurrent one in Indian literature in general and as such does not necessarily carry specific Buddhist connotations (see, e.g., Insler 1989/1990 and Witzel 1987).

When informed that there is a "Buddha" who knows about head-splitting, Bāvari sends his students to meet the Buddha and inquire about this matter. He instructs them to check first if the Buddha has indeed the thirty-two special physical marks of a Buddha and then ask some questions just in their minds, without verbalizing them aloud, in order to find out if the Buddha would understand and provide the appropriate answers. Only after having in this way checked him thoroughly should they inquire about the topic of head-splitting.

Given that Bāvari provides such detailed instructions on how the Buddha should be tested, it seems that at this point he is not yet sure "that truth will prevail." In fact, the term truth does not appear to occur at all in the introductory narration. Although hearing the word "Buddha" does have a remarkable effect on Bāvari, the overall situation could hardly be considered to reflect the Buddha functioning as "an embodiment of cosmic structure." This is not to deny that the Buddha is qualified with somewhat hyperbolic terms in this narration, such as Sn 991: *lokanāyako* and Sn 995: *lokanātho*. Yet, being a "world leader" and a "world protector" are still compatible with the notion of the Buddha's humanity and do not suffice to make him an embodiment of cosmic structure.

Another argument by Shulman (2017a, p. 190) proposed that, from "a philosophical viewpoint, the thirty-two marks can be understood as an elaboration and fortification of the logic of patterned, cosmological Buddhahood." Closer inspection shows that the early discourses only testify to the beginnings of tendencies toward such later conceptions rather than to their full development. Such incipient tendencies can be discerned with the help of comparative study, which shows that the trope of the thirty-two characteristics of the body of a Buddha originally would have served as a means for the conversion of brahmins, who were trained in the lore of recognizing these characteristics (Anālayo 2017a, pp. 43–101). Due to an apparent cross-fertilization between texts and art, the marks gradually came to be conceived of as more readily visible by the general public, without any need to train in their lore. This in turn paved the way for them to acquire more general functions related to conversion and inspiration in the texts. It is only at a stage of considerable maturation of these developments that it would be meaningful to bring in the idea of cosmological Buddhahood.

The same comparative study also brings to light that envisioning the possession of the thirty-two bodily marks as a "rule" or "law" (*dhammatā/dharmatā*) for Buddhas in general is also the outcome of a gradual development, as such possession was apparently not from the outset considered indispensable for becoming a Buddha (Anālayo 2017a, pp. 87–89). Moreover, even once the thirty-two bodily marks feature as such a rule or law, in the early discourse this only finds application to the six Buddhas believed to have lived prior to the Buddha Gotama. The main narrative function of the list of six former Buddhas appears to be to authenticate the Buddha Gotama by providing him with predecessors, similar to the Vedic sages and *tīrthaṃkara*s of the Brahminical and Jain traditions. Such authentication carries no necessary implications of an invariable cosmic principle. However, Shulman (2017a, p. 186f) took the qualification *dhammatā* (translated by him as a "law of nature") to imply the following:

> Buddhahood is conceived as a natural event that participates in an elaborate cosmic movement; it is part of the very structure of nature … a Buddha is the prime expression of "nature." According to this logic there is no separation between a divine realm or identity and the human world or being, since there is only one integrated, holistic cosmos. This cosmos is not static, but one in continuous movement toward Buddhahood. The movement of cosmos makes space not only for Buddhahood as a cosmic principle, but for the continual endeavor for it to come into full being, "to arise."

In other Pāli discourses, the term *dhammatā* can convey quite ordinary meanings. For example, it is *dhammatā* that no

regrets will arise in a virtuous person (AN 10.2: *dhammatā esā, bhikkhave, yaṃ sīlavato sīlasampannassa avippaṭisāro uppajjati*, with a counterpart in MĀ 43: 但法自然, 持戒者便得 不悔). In other words, the term *dhammatā* as such can simply convey that something can safely be expected; it will usually occur. In the words of Shulman (2017a, p. 186), it can simply refer to "a regularity or natural occurrence of events." It follows that the term as such need not carry any cosmic significance. The Pāli phrase just quoted also testifies to a usage of the verb "to arise" (*uppajjati*) that similarly can have quite ordinary connotations. This helps put into perspective another suggestion by Shulman (2017a, p. 183), according to which the "idea regarding the Buddha's 'arising' is crucial to understanding the metaphysical and cosmological conception of the Buddha." This suggestion concerns a standard phrase with which the Pāli discourses introduce an account of the gradual path, which reads: "a Tathāgata arises in the world," *tathāgato loke uppajjati*. Shulman (2017a, p. 184) reasoned that this phrase

> presents the Buddha's attainment not as an earthly culmination of a spiritual path, but as an expression of an underlying cosmic reality … this articulation regarding the Buddha is heavily metaphysical and the idea of his "arising" possesses important cosmological and theological underpinnings. That is to say … the cosmological event of the manifestation of Buddhahood.

Yet, one of three marks of the conditioned nature of phenomena is that they "arise" (AN 3.47: *uppādo* and its parallels EĀ 22.5: 從起 and Up 2061: *skye bar*). In fact, the whole "world" can be said to "arise," in the sense that it arises in the "six" senses (SN 1.70: *chasu loko samuppanno* (see also Sn 169) and its parallel SĀ 1008: 六法等起; another parallel in SĀ² 235 conveys a different sense). The whole phrase *loke uppajjati*, "arises in the world," can elsewhere refer to the arising of counterfeit teachings (SN 16.13: *saddhammapaṭirūpakaṃ loke uppajjati*, with parallels in SĀ 906: 相似像法出世間 and SĀ² 121: 像法出 (the last thus does not refer to the "world"); see also SHT III 867 V4, Waldschmidt et al. 1971, p. 117: *saddharmapratirūpakeṣu loke prādurbhūte[ṣu]*, which employs a different verb).

The proposed interpretation of the phrase *tathāgato loke uppajjati*, at least as far as the Pāli discourses is concerned, is unconvincing. The phrase in question can simply be understood to refer to the Buddha's awakening as a necessary condition for his teaching activity and hence disclosure of the gradual path to awakening. The commentary on the first occurrence of this phrase in the Pāli discourses (DN 2) employs the same verb in relation to a range of different beings (Sv I 173: *tathāgato, paccekabuddhā, aggasāvakā, asīti mahātherā, buddhamātā, buddhapitā, cakkavattirājā, aññe ca sārappattā brāhmaṇagahapatikā etth' eva uppajjanti*). This shows that even the commentarial tradition did not invest

the phrase "to arise in the world" with the type of connotation proposed.

In sum, the above surveyed arguments in support of envisioning the role of the Buddha in the early discourses to point to his embodying the cosmic structure are not convincing. The presentation appears to conflate different historical strata of texts. Although it is indeed the case that there has been a tendency among early generations of scholars of Buddhism to ignore mythic and supernormal aspects of early Buddhism, correcting this lack of balance should not go overboard by projecting later developments onto the early texts.

The Buddha in the *Jātaka*s

The need to adopt a text-historical perspective holds similarly for the role accorded to the Buddha in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection. According to Shulman (2018, p. 18),

> in some stories, for example, the Buddha is a tangential figure or one of questionable moral character. This supposed anomaly is easily explained when we see that much of the focus of the JA [*Jātaka* collection] is not necessarily on the stories of the past, but on the Buddha's ability to tell them. This is the Buddha's omniscience.

The identification of tangential figures or those with questionable moral character as past lives of the Buddha is more meaningfully understood as the result of such narratives originating from the adoption of various folk tales and stories (Anālayo 2010, pp. 56–71). With a limited number of protagonists, one of which must be considered a former life of the Buddha so as to incorporate the tale into the *Jātaka* collection, at times the choice fell on a "tangential figure or one of questionable moral character."

The incorporation of originally non-Buddhist tropes can be illustrated with the perhaps most famous among Theravāda *jātaka* tales, which depicts Prince Vessantara giving away his possessions, children, and wife as gifts to brahmins. Shulman (2018, p. 28), who takes this tale up only briefly, reasoned that "when the prince gives away his children and wife … we find the Bodhisatta clearly aware that his efforts are directed toward omniscience." Comparative study of this particular *jātaka* shows that the main theme is to inculcate the need to give to begging brahmins whatever they demand (Anālayo 2016b). Presumably having originated in a setting imbued with Brahminical values, the adoption of the tale by Buddhist storytellers would have served the closely similar function of encouraging lay supporters to give to begging Buddhist monastics, who in a traditional Buddhist society had come to occupy the role of brahmins. In this setting, the notion of efforts directed toward omniscience is best seen as a

later adjustment that happened when integrating this tale into the *Jātaka* collection; in fact, the very attribution of omniscience to the Buddha is also a development later than the period reflected by the majority of early discourses (Anālayo 2006).

The case of Vessantara also helps to put into perspective the position taken by Shulman (2018, p. 13) that, even though previous scholarship has often focused on the origination of such stories from non-Buddhist settings, the *Jātaka*s should rather be seen as "a genuine, legitimate expression of Buddhist consciousness, precisely because they offer Buddhist versions or adaptations of stories of wider consequence." Vessantara's decisions to give away his children and wife are not easily reconciled with basic Buddhist ethical values and are hardly a genuine expression of Buddhist consciousness. The popularity of the tale could well be due to the fertile field of friction caused by the transposition of a Brahminical plot into the setting of a past life of the Buddha without being fully adapted to Buddhist ethical values (as that would have compromised its encouragement of relentless giving). In this way, a comparative study and the adoption of a text-historical perspective make it possible to develop a considerably more nuanced appreciation of the narrative functions of this tale.

Protective Texts

In another publication concerned with texts that serve a protective function, *paritta*, Shulman (2019, pp. 226 and 227) argued that "the *Ratana[-sutta]* speaks of the Buddha as the deepest truth … who is a power of a different order, the very truth to which all beings and worlds adhere." Yet, the only mention of "truth" in the actual discourse is a recurrent phrase according to which "by this truth, may there be safety" (Sn 224 to 235: *etena saccena suvatthi hotu*), and two references to thoroughly seeing and clearly understanding the noble truths (Sn 229: *ariyasaccāni avecca passati* and Sn 230: *ariyasaccāni vibhāvayanti*). The former type of reference reflects ancient Indian conceptions of the power of statements of truth (see, e.g., Brown 1968, 1972a, b, Burlingame 1917, Coomaraswamy 1944, Venkatasubbiah 1940, Wayman 1968). The latter type concerns insight into the noble truths by disciples. None of these provides a sound basis for assuming that there is a "powerful ideology at work in the text: that the Buddha not only expresses or realizes truth, but that *he is this* truth" (Shulman 2019, p. 230), or that "the truth beckoned by the *Ratana[-sutta]* is not only a philosophical or theoretical one but consists of the very ontological reality that Buddha is truth itself … the fundamental reality of the cosmos, the supremacy and immanent power of the Buddha" (p. 231).

Regarding the *Metta-sutta* (Sn 143 to 152), Shulman (2019, p. 234) argued that this discourse reflects "a crucial element in the Buddhist understanding of the Buddha," namely that "the Buddha is a cosmological element at the core of reality; there is nothing abstract about him; he protects because he cares, because he has become utter care, so that he is fully identified with the protective power of love itself." Yet, the entire discourse does not have an explicit reference to the Buddha at all, who only features as the unnamed speaker of a text which describes the appropriate conduct and mental cultivation of *mettā* by a disciple. This undermines the proposed conclusions.

In relation to the *Maṅgala-sutta* (Sn 258 to 269), Shulman (2019, p. 235) proposed that it "positions the Buddha as the embodiment and source of Blessing … the Buddha is the complete materialization of goodness and truth." The discourse lists different types of conduct and qualities as forms of blessings; the only reference to truth concerns again seeing the noble truths (Sn 267: *ariyasaccāna dassanaṃ*). What Shulman (p. 235) himself qualifies as "simple and direct moral instructions" like, for example, "not associating with fools," "residing in a suitable place," or "supporting one's mother and father" (Sn 259, 260, 262) can hardly be construed to imply that the Buddha himself is the source of blessing.

Again, in relation to two Pāli discourses that describe the deities of the moon and the sun going for refuge to the Buddha in order to avert an eclipse (SN 2.9 and SN 2.10), which in the ancient Indian imagination was conceived of as a seizure by the demon Rāhu, Shulman (2019, p. 219) argued:

> The Buddha commands the worlds, including the skies and the divine or demonic beings that inhabit them. He exercises control over the universe, and specifically over the threatening powers within it. The Buddha has the ability to avert even the most dangerous and exceptional natural events of solar and lunar eclipses.

The actual episodes are not about the Buddha exercising control over the universe. Similar to other instances already discussed above, they rely on the ancient Indian conception of the power of making statements of truth. In the present case, this power lies in the proclamation by the moon and the sun deities that they have gone for refuge to the Buddha. Due to the power of this truth, the demon Rāhu has to release them, otherwise his head would split into seven pieces (another ancient Indian trope, as already mentioned above). According to Kong (2012, p. 81), "the power of [a] truth utterance and the person who declares a true statement are two separate entities. The power is activated when [the] spoken words correspond with fact."

Shulman (2019, p. 218) attempted to buttress his interpretation by translating a statement made by the demon Rāhu as "I have been bound by a verse sung by the Buddha," adding in a footnote (23): "Literally Rāhu says that he has been sung a verse by the Buddha; I understand this to convey that being sung a verse, he is captured by it, which reflects the power of

Buddha's speech." Yet, the original is just about a verse recited by the Buddha, without a hint at any capture. A Sanskrit fragment parallel to the first of the two discourses, concerned with the moon, has preserved the term in question, confirming that the issue is something "recited" (Waldschmidt 1970, p. 183: *abhigītena*). Chinese parallels to the second of these two discourses, concerned with the sun, convey the same sense of a verse recited by the Buddha (SĀ 583: 說呪偈 and SĀ² 167: 說偈).

According to Kong (2012, p. 79), "the feature—that the power of truth and the person who activates it are two separate entities—may perhaps explain the reason why the *Parittā* chanting … is believed to be powerful and efficacious." On this interpretation, then, the effect of reciting a protective chant or verse relies on its relationship to truth, rather than on the Buddha being invested with some sort of control over the universe. In sum, although there can be little doubt that texts with a protective function assumed a variety of roles in later times, it seems fair to conclude that the instances surveyed above do not support the proposed role of the Buddha as a cosmological element at the core of reality.

The Buddha as a Refuge from Fear

The potential role of recollecting the Buddha in a situation that is fearful is a central theme in a Pāli discourse with a range of parallels (SN 11.3, Waldschmidt 1932, pp. 43–53, SĀ 982, EĀ 24.1, Skilling 1994, pp. 264–309). The discourse depicts the ruler of the celestial troops addressing his followers on the eve of a battle against the demons with the recommendation that, in case they experience fear during the actual combat, they should look at the crest of his standard. In the same way, a disciple of the Buddha should, in case fear arises, recollect the Buddha.

The effect of such recollection finds a convenient illustration in the idea of the crest of a standard. In actual warfare, it would indeed be helpful to have something elevated high above the chaos of battle to provide an orientation and serve as a potential source of inspiration in order to overcome fear. The role of recollecting the Buddha appears to be similar, in the sense of relating to something elevated that can provide an orientation and serve as a potential source of inspiration in order to overcome fear.

The parallel versions then draw a contrast between the ruler of the celestial troops, who is not free from defilements, and the Buddha, who is free from defilements. Skilling (1997, p. 461) expressed the underlying reasoning, in the way this is evident in the Tibetan version in particular, as follows:

if gazing upon (or recollecting) Śakra's [the ruler of the celestial troops] standard can dispel fear, even though Śakra himself is not free from defilements, suffering and indeed fear itself, then recollection of the Buddha should

be all the more effective, since the Buddha is free of these states.

In line with the unconvincing proposals surveyed above, Shulman (2019, p. 224) commented on the Pāli version of this discourse that "the recollection draws on a more metaphysical understanding," as supposedly the Buddha's "accomplishment is not private but public and cosmic; being devoid of passion, he is of a different ontological order." However, being devoid of passion is a quality shared by the Buddha and those of his disciples who have reached the higher two levels of awakening, which leaves little room for assuming that in the case of the Buddha this quality should be invested with substantially different implications.

Recollecting the Buddha

Given that the proposal of a substantially different understanding of the Buddha's role in the early discourses, in the sense of serving as an embodiment of a cosmological principle, is unconvincing, it does seem reasonable to propose that his condition of being a fully awakened one was central to the potential of recollecting him when facing fear. Understood in this way, a central aspect of recollecting the Buddha would be confidence in his awakening (Anālayo 2017b, p. 227).

The actual undertaking of such recollection often finds description with the help of a standard phrase, introduced with a reference to the Tathāgata, the "thus-gone one" (Anālayo 2017c). According to the early discourses, the Buddha frequently used this term to refer to himself. The standard phrase in question proceeds as follows:

A noble disciple recollects the Tathāgata: "The Blessed One is an arahant, fully awakened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, a well-gone one, a knower of the world, a supreme trainer of persons to be tamed, a teacher of celestials and humans, an awakened one, a blessed one." At the time when a noble disciple recollects the Tathāgata, at that time their mind is not overwhelmed by lust, their mind is not overwhelmed by anger, and their mind is not overwhelmed by delusion. At that time their mind has indeed become upright with reference to the Tathāgata.
(AN 6.10: *ariyasāvako tathāgataṃ anussarati: iti pi so bhagavā arahaṃ sammāsambuddho vijjācaraṇasampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammasārathi satthā devamanussānaṃ buddho bhagavā ti. yasmiṃ … samaye ariyasāvako tathāgataṃ anussarati, nev' assa tasmiṃ samaye rāgapariyuṭṭhitaṃ cittaṃ hoti, na dosapariyuṭṭhitaṃ cittaṃ hoti, na mohapariyuṭṭhitaṃ cittaṃ hoti; ujugatam ev' assa tasmiṃ samaye cittaṃ hoti tathāgataṃ ārabbha*).

A noble disciple recollects with the Tathāgata as the object: "The Tathāgata is an arahant, fully awakened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, a well-gone one, a knower of the world, a supreme person, a tamer of persons, a teacher of celestials and humans, an awakened one, a blessed one." At the time of recollecting in this way, the noble disciple does not give rise to the entanglement of lustful desire and does not give rise to a mind of anger or of delusion. That mind is straight and upright, having reached the significance of the Tathāgata. (SĀ 931: 聖弟子念如來事: 如來, 應, 等正覺, 明行足, 善逝, 世間解, 無上士, 調御丈夫, 天人師, 佛, 世尊. 聖弟子如是念時, 不起貪欲纏, 不起瞋恚, 愚癡心; 其心正直, 得如來義).

One recollects the Tathāgata, the arahant, the fully awakened one, endowed with knowledge and conduct, a well-gone one, a knower of the world, a supreme person, a tamer of persons, a teacher of celestials and humans, an awakened one, a blessed one. At that time there is no lustful desire, anger, or delusion; there is just purity and straightness of the mind. Because of the straightness of the mind, one gains the teachings, gains their meanings, and gains drawing close to the Buddha. (SĀ^2 156: 念於如來, 應供, 正遍知, 明行足, 善逝, 世間解, 無上士, 調御丈夫, 天人師, 佛, 世尊. 當于爾時, 無有貪欲, 瞋恚, 愚癡, 唯有清淨質直之心; 以直心故, 得法, 得義, 得親近佛).

The parallel versions agree in depicting how such recollection results in the arising of joy that in turn leads over to mental composure. The source of such joy, according to the passages translated above, has its starting point in bringing to mind that the Buddha is an arahant, which signifies that he has totally removed all mental defilements. Needless to say, this is a quality the Buddha shares with all of his arahant disciples. The next quality differs in this respect, as it represents a unique quality of the Buddha. It reflects his accomplishing the difficult feat of reaching awakening without having a teacher to guide him. In this respect, his disciples are in an easier position, as they can follow the example set by him and implement his instructions in order to become arahants. As pointed out by Bodhi (2013, p. 9), in this way "the Buddha is extolled, not primarily as the one who has attained his own liberation, but as the one who opens the doors of liberation for others."

The reference to being endowed with knowledge and conduct reflects the importance accorded in the early discourses to the complementary nature of these two. The epithet "well-gone one" conveys nuances similar to the expression "thus-gone one." The Buddha's penetrative insight makes him a "knower of the world." The next two epithets relate to his teaching activity, in that he is a "supreme trainer of persons to be tamed" and that he teaches both celestials and humans. The first of these two epithets has suffered from a mistranslation in the Chinese versions. Nattier (2003, p. 227) explained that this type

of translation is based on taking the terms "supreme" and "person(s)" as a first epithet in its own right. The remainder of the compound became a second epithet.

The final two epithets are "an awakened one," corresponding to the term Buddha, and "a blessed one." Elsewhere in the early discourses, the latter term regularly occurs when disciples refer to the Buddha. Although in the ancient Indian setting this term was used for celestials, Williams (1989/2009, p. 174) explained that "it was natural to refer to the Buddha in terms also used of gods. Such indicated little more than an attitude of deep respect and humility on the part of his followers." Endo (1997/2002, p. 16) noted that the same term occurs in the *Upaniṣad*s and the *Mahābhārata*, where it serves "as a respectful address to the teacher by pupils. This meaning was inherited in Buddhism."

What emerges from the above translated versions of the standard phrase is well in keeping with a suggestion made at the outset of the present exploration. Since the other recollections listed earlier fall within the sphere of personal experience of disciples of the Buddha, it could be expected that the Buddha also represents something that a disciple can relate to from the viewpoint of personal experience. Such relationship to personal experience is in fact brought out quite explicitly in the three versions translated above, which show how, by dint of recollecting the Buddha, the mind becomes temporarily free from lust, anger, and delusion. The complete and permanent absence of the same three root defilements is in turn what marks the difference between the Buddha and the ruler of the celestial troops, according to the passage examined earlier.

In sum, recollection of the Buddha can be understood to revolve in particular around the inspiration to be gained by bringing to mind the person who realized permanent freedom from defilements on his own and taught others how to achieve the same aim (Anālayo 2017b). By recollecting this and then personally experiencing the result of at least a short-term abeyance of defilements in the mind, the disciple would be enacting in a temporary manner what according to early Buddhist thought can be achieved on a permanent basis through wholehearted dedication to the teachings. This would explain why the inspiration gained through such recollection can be expected to offer substantial support for overcoming fear.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

(T 26); MN, *Majjhima-nikāya*; SĀ, *Saṃyukta-āgama* (T 99); SĀ², *Saṃyukta-āgama* (T 100); SN, *Saṃyutta-nikāya*; Sn, *Suttanipāta*; Spk, *Sāratthappakāsinī*; Sv, *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* T, Taishō edition; Up, *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā*

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