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The Tale of King Nimi in the Ekottarika-āgama

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I. Introduction

With the present article I continue translating and studying the *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel to the *Makhādeva-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, the first part of which was published in the previous issue of the present journal.¹

In the part of the discourse translated in my previous paper, the Buddha smiles when being at a certain spot and, on being asked by Ānanda for the reason, relates the story of a wheel-turning king of the past by the name of Mahādeva. After describing in detail the seven precious possessions of this wheel-turning king, the Buddha relates how, at the sight of the first white hair on his head, King Mahādeva abdicates the throne in favour of the crown prince Dīghāyu, instructing him to follow the same mode of conduct of renouncing the throne when the first white hair manifests on his head.

II. Translation of the second part of EĀ 50.4²

“King Dīghāyu, having ascended to the throne, on the fifteenth day of the month, it being the full-moon day, went up on top of the eastern hall together with his women and looking towards the east he saw a beautiful woman, handsome ... *as [described] above* ... who came approaching through empty space. In due course, Dīghāyu came to be endowed with the seven treasures.

7. “Having become the head of the government of the country, King Dīghāyu ruled over the four continents. [Then] Dīghāyu said to the barber: ‘From now onwards, if while combing my hair you see a white hair, do come and tell me!’ [At that time] he had ascended to the noble throne for the full length of eighty-four-thousand years.

[When] a white hair manifested, the barber told the king: ‘A purely white hair has manifested.’ The king said: ‘Pull it out, come and put it on my palm.’ The barber pulled it out with golden tweezers and put it on the king’s hand. The king held the white hair and gave expression to a verse:

“‘[Right] on top of my own head,
the ruining of health has manifested,
the body’s messenger has come to summon [me],
the time to embark on the path has arrived.’

“The king had the thought in his mind: ‘I have already had the best of the five [types] of human pleasures. Now I shall go forth, having removed hair and beard and having donned Dharma robes.’

“He summoned the crown prince Crown-topknot³ and told him: ‘Prince, I have already white [hair] on my head. [808c] I have already been sated with the five [types] of pleasure in the world, [now] I shall seek divine pleasures. I wish to go forth now to practice the path, shaving off my hair and beard and wearing Dharma robes.

“You shall become the head of the government of the country now. Appoint your eldest [son] as the crown prince. Take proper care to have the barber watch out for a white hair. If a white hair appears, hand over the country to your crown prince and go forth just like me, having removed hair and beard and having donned Dharma robes.’

“The king told the crown prince: ‘Now I dutifully pass on to you the burden of this noble throne. You should make sure this noble royal throne is passed on [like this] from generation to generation, do not let this custom die out. If this custom dies out, you will be just like the people in the border countries. If you let this wholesome practice die out, you will be reborn in a region devoid of Dharma.’

8. “Having given these orders and admonishments, King Dīghāyu handed over the country to his crown prince Crown-topknot and bestowed some farmland on the barber.”

The Buddha told Ānanda: “In this town, this grove and this [spot of] earth, King Dīghāyu removed his hair and beard, put on Dharma robes and embarked on the path.

9. “In this place he practiced the four divine abodes of benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity for eighty-four-thousand years. At the end of his life, he attained rebirth in the Brahmā realm.”

The Buddha told Ānanda: “After King Dīghāyu had gone forth for seven days, the seven treasures spontaneously disappeared.⁴ King Crown-topknot was sad and unhappy. On seeing the king’s displeasure, the courtiers asked the king: ‘Why is your majesty displeased?’ The king replied to the courtiers: ‘Because the seven treasures have disappeared.’ The courtiers told the king: ‘Let the king not be sad!’ The king said: ‘How could I not be sad?’ The courtiers said: ‘Your father, the [former] king, dwells in a grove nearby to practise the holy life. It would be possible to approach him for advice that can then be complied with. He will certainly instruct the king on the way of action that will bring about [a reappearance of] the treasures.’

“The king right away gave order to get the [chariot] harnessed. When the courtiers had complied with the order to get the [chariot] harnessed, they told the king. Together with the company of courtiers the king mounted a chariot adorned with the seven precious substances and, wearing the five insignia [of a king] – a bejewelled turban, a feathered parasol, a sword, a fan and bejewelled shoes – he went towards the grove, followed by his attendants and courtiers.

“On arriving, he descended from his chariot, set aside the five insignia and entered the gate of the grove on foot. He approached his father, the [former] king, paid respect with his head at [his father’s] feet and, sitting back to one side and holding his hands with palms together [in respect], he said: ‘The seven treasures of the king have by now all disappeared.’

“The father had been sitting in meditation. On hearing what had been said, he raised his head and replied: ‘Prince, now this noble Dharma of kings is not inherited as one’s father’s possession. You have to practice the Dharma yourself and comply with it.’

“The king asked again: ‘What is the Dharma and guideline for a noble wheel-turning king?’ The father replied: ‘Reverencing the Dharma, respecting the Dharma, recollecting the Dharma, cultivating the Dharma, [making] the Dharma endure, [making] the Dharma shine, [making] the Dharma become great – with the undertaking of these seven principles a noble king governs properly and is able to obtain the treasures.’

“The king asked again: ‘How to reverence the Dharma ... *up to* ... [make] the Dharma become great?’ [809a] The father replied: ‘You should train in making gifts to the poor, instruct the people to practice filial piety by supporting both of their parents and to observe regularly the fasting day four times [a month, each after a] period of eight [days]. Teach them how to act with patience and how to discard sexual desires, jealousy and foolish practices. These seven principles are befitting the Dharma of a noble king.’

“The king received the teaching. Having taken leave to withdraw, paid respect and performed seven circumambulations, he returned.⁵ Then, always upholding his father’s decrees, he acted according to the seven principles, proclaiming and teaching far and near the vast and lofty royal instructions. The king opened the treasure store and made gifts to the poor. He supported and looked after orphans and the aged, attending on any person in the four directions.

“Then, on the fifteenth day of the month, it being the full-moon day, having washed and cleaned himself, the king went up on top of the eastern hall together with his women and looking towards the east [he saw] a purplish coloured golden wheel with a thousand spokes, a wheel that was at a height of seven palm trees. Approaching through empty space at a height of seven palm trees from the ground, it stood in mid air.

“The king had the thought in his mind: ‘May I get this wheel?’ The wheel promptly lowered itself until it reached the king’s left hand and continued moving into his right hand. The king spoke to the wheel: ‘Conquer for me all those that have not been conquered, take for me all lands that do not belong to me, in accordance with the Dharma, not against the Dharma!’

“With his hand the king hurled the wheel back into the sky. The wheel stood in the midst of the sky near the eastern gate of the palace with its rim pointing towards the east and the hub pointing towards the north.⁶

“After the wheel [had appeared] the white elephant manifested, then the dark purplish coloured horse manifested, then the miraculous jewel manifested, then the beautiful woman manifested, then the steward manifested and then the general manifested.

“These seven treasures appeared and he tried them out, just as King Mahādeva. After eighty-four-thousand years had passed like this, the king gave a grant to the barber and also gave orders to his crown prince, handing over the country’s affairs, and went forth to embark on the path, all just like the way of action of previous kings.”

The Buddha told Ānanda: “King Crown-topknot in this town, this grove and at this [spot of] earth removed his hair and beard, put on Dharma robes and practiced the four divine abodes of benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity for eighty-four-thousand years. At the end of his life, he was reborn in the Brahmā realm.”

10. The Buddha told Ānanda: “Continuing from king Mahādeva’s son and grandson,⁷ for eighty-four-thousand generations the noble wheel-turning kings [ascended] the throne without letting this wholesome custom perish.⁸

12. “The last noble king, called Nimi,⁹ governed by the right Dharma, was wise in his interactions with people and careful to be truthful, without deception.¹⁰ He was endowed with the thirty-two characteristics and his appearance was like a red lotus flower.¹¹

“He delighted in generosity, in giving to recluses and Brahmins, in supporting and looking after orphans and the aged, and in helping and giving to the poor. At the four gates of the town and in the middle of the town he had storehouses established with gold and silver, various jewels, elephants, horses, chariots, clothes, beds and mattresses, medicines for the sick, perfumes and flowers, beverages and food.

“All single [men] were each provided with a wife and various gifts were given in accordance with what people wished for. The king kept the six fasting-days,¹² [809b] and provided orders that inside and outside all should keep the eightfold restraint on such days. The leaders of the heavenly assembly would all come down [on such occasions] and administer the eight precepts.¹³

13. “Sakka, the ruler [of gods] and the gods of the Thirty-three all praised the people of that country: ‘Isn’t it excellent, isn’t it a good fortune to encounter such a Dharma king, who gives various gifts in accordance with what people wish for and is able to observe a pure observance day (*uposatha*) without blemish?’¹⁴ Sakka, ruler of gods, said to the [assembled] deities: ‘Would you like to get to see King Nimi?’ They all answered: ‘We wish to see him! It would be good if he could come here.’

“Sakka, the ruler of gods, gave orders to the heavenly maiden Guṇajinī:¹⁵ ‘Go to the town of Mithilā and tell King Nimi: ‘You have attained a great good fortune, all the gods herein praise your lofty virtues and have sent me to ask dutifully whether you would consent to come here briefly, as all the deities very much wish to see you’.

“Having received the orders, Guṇajinī went down in an instant, just as [swift] as a person might bend or stretch an arm, and stood in the middle of the empty sky. The king was seated on the palace roof, being waited on by a single woman. He was reflecting on the world, wishing that all would obtain peace and that no being should be suffering or in distress.¹⁶

“[Hovering] in the midst of the sky, Guṇajinī snapped her fingers to get attention. The king raised his head. He saw a great light above the palace and heard these words: ‘I am an envoy from Sakka, the ruler of gods, I was dispatched to approach the king.’ The king replied: ‘I do not know: what are the suggestions and orders of the ruler of gods?’

“The heavenly maiden replied: ‘The ruler of gods dutifully sends his regards. All the deities praise your virtues and hope to meet you. Would you consent to a brief [visit]?’ The king assented by remaining silent.

“The heavenly maiden returned and told the ruler of gods: ‘Your decree has been announced and accomplished. He has agreed to come for a visit.’

14. “The ruler of gods promptly gave orders to his royal attendant to harness a flying horse-chariot [adorned] with the seven precious substances and to descend to the town of Mithilā to meet King Nimi. Having received the orders, the royal attendant promptly harnessed the horse-chariot and right away descended.¹⁷

“The king was sitting in the company of a group of courtiers in the city.¹⁸ The chariot stopped in mid air in front of the king. The charioteer said: ‘The ruler of gods had sent this chariot to meet you. The gods in their dignified appearance are waiting [for you]. You may now mount the chariot. Do not turn back longingly.’

“The greater and minor courtiers, on hearing that the king was to leave, were all unhappy. They got up and, standing with their hands held together [in respect], they said: ‘After the king has left, what are the decrees to be obeyed by your assembled courtiers?’ The king said: ‘You should not be sad. After I am gone, make gifts, [observe] the fasting day, support the people, administer the country, just as [you do] when I am there. I will soon be back.’ When the king had completed admonishing and giving orders, the chariot descended to the ground and the king mounted the chariot.

“The royal attendant asked the king: ‘Which way shall we take?’ The king said: ‘What do you mean?’¹⁹ The royal attendant answered [809c]: ‘There are two ways, one proceeds through the evil realms, the other through the good realms. Those who practise evil reach suffering in the evil realms, those who develop what is wholesome reach happy experiences in the good realms.’ The king said: ‘I would wish that today we take the way through both the good and the evil realms.’

“Having heard it, the charioteer took a while to understand it and then said: ‘Very good, great king.’ The charioteer then drove in the middle between the two ways, so that it was possible to see the good and the evil [destinies] completely, until they arrived at the heaven of the Thirty-three.

15. “The ruler of gods and the gods saw the king coming at a distance. Sakka, the ruler of gods, said: ‘Welcome great king’. He [then] gave the order that [the king] should share [Sakka’s] seat.”²⁰

The Buddha told Ānanda: “[When] the king sat close to Sakka, the appearance of the king and of Sakka, the ruler [of gods], their clothing and the sound of their voices were of the same type. The gods had the thought in their minds: ‘Which one is Sakka, the ruler of gods, and which one is the king?’ Moreover, they thought: ‘The nature of humans is to blink [their eyes], but both do not blink’. Each felt very astonished that there was no difference [between the two]. The ruler of gods saw that the gods were puzzled and thought: ‘I shall ask the king to get him to stay [here], afterwards they will understand [who is who].’

“So Sakka, the ruler [of gods], said to the gods: ‘Do you wish that I ask the king to get him to stay [here]?’ The gods said: ‘We really wish you get him to stay!’ The ruler of gods said to Nimi: ‘Great king, will you stay [here]? I will supply you with the five types of the pleasure.’ Because of this [exchange] the gods recognized [who was who].

“The human king said to the ruler of gods: ‘It is well. As you have offered me this grant, I express the wish that all gods may have a lifespan without limit.’²¹ In the same way, the host invited and the guest did [not] accept for three times.

“[Then] Sakka, the ruler [of gods], said to the king: ‘Why don’t you stay [here]?’ The king replied: ‘I shall go forth to cultivate the path. The conditions for training in the path are not present here in the heavens.’ The ruler of gods said: ‘Why [would you want to] undertake the path?’ The king said: ‘I have been so instructed by my father, the [former] king. If a white hair appears, it is my duty that I should go forth.’ Sakka heard this and became silent without replying, letting him go so that he might embark on the path.

“The king had remained in the heavens for a very short while, enjoying himself with the five pleasures. In the meantime, on earth twelve years had passed. As he was about to take his leave, the king spoke about the true Dharma to the gods.²²

16. “Sakka gave orders to the royal attendant: ‘Take King Nimi back to his home country.’ Having received the order, the royal attendant harnessed [the chariot]. When it was harnessed, he told the king: ‘May the king mount the chariot.’

“Then, having taken leave of Sakka, the ruler [of gods], and the gods, the king mounted the chariot and, proceeding along the way [taken] earlier, returned to his palace in Mithilā. The royal attendant returned to heaven.

17. “Several days after having descended and returned, the king gave orders to the barber: ‘If you see a white hair, tell me.’ After some days, on his head a white hair manifested.²³ With golden tweezers the barber pulled out the white hair and put it into the king’s hand. Having seen it, the king gave expression to a verse [810a]:

“‘[Right] on top of my own head,
the ruining of health has manifested,
the body’s messenger has come to summon [me],
the time to embark on the path has arrived.’

“The king had the thought in his mind: ‘I have already had the best of the five [types] of human pleasures. Now I shall go forth, having shaved hair and beard and having donned Dharma robes.’ The king summoned the crown prince, [called] Destroyer of Wholesomeness,²⁴ and told him: ‘A white hair has already appeared to me. I have already been sated with the five [types] of pleasure in the world, now I wish to seek divine pleasures. I shall go forth to practice the path, having removed my hair and beard and having donned Dharma robes. Prince, I now hand over the affairs of this country to you. Look well after the barber. If a white hair appears, hand over the country to your crown prince and go forth to practice the path.

“Prince, now employing this noble [way of succeeding to] the royal throne has accumulated [up to] you, do not let this custom perish. If this custom perishes, you will be just like the people in the border countries.”

18. The Buddha told Ānanda: “King Nimi handed over the country’s administration to his crown prince and, having granted land to the barber, in this town, grove and [spot of] earth he removed his hair and beard, donned Dharma robes and went forth to develop the path.

19. “Seven days after he had [begun] to develop the path, the wheel and the jewel disappeared; the elephant, the horse, the woman, the steward and the general all [manifested their] impermanence.²⁵ In this grove the [former] king practiced the divine abodes – benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity – for eighty-four-thousand years. After having passed away, he was reborn in the Brahmā realm.

20. “The next king, [by the name of] Destroyer of Wholesomeness, did not follow his father’s actions. The right Dharma was abandoned. Consequently the seven treasures did not appear again. The wholesome conduct was not continued.²⁶

“A fivefold decrease set in: people’s life span became shorter, their appearance became shabby. They lacked strength, had many diseases and were without wisdom. Once the fivefold decline had

set in,²⁷ poverty and hardship ensued. Hardship and poverty in turn led to theft. [The thief] was bound and brought to the king, who was informed: ‘This man took what was not given’. The king gave orders that he should be [taken] outside [the town] and be executed.

“The citizens, hearing that those who take what is not given were executed by the king, all became evil. Each took a sharp sword and started to wield the sword themselves. Due to this, the killing of living beings arose. Thus two evils had manifested [stealing and killing].

“In turn there was adultery by violating another’s wife. The husband criticized both. The [adulterer] said of himself: ‘I did not do it’. Thus four evils had been accomplished. With divisive speech [leading to] quarrelling there were then five evils.

“Quarrelling led to abuse, so there were six evils. Saying what is not really sincere [took place], so there were seven evils. [Some] were jealous of others’ harmony, so there were eight evils. [Some] got so angry that their [facial] appearance changed, so there were nine evils. [Some] had a mind full of doubt and confusion, so there were ten evils. With the ten evils having come to fulfilment, the fivefold decline in turn increased.”

21. The Buddha said to Ānanda: “Do you wish to know who was King Mahādeva at that time, the first in this auspicious aeon? It was me.²⁸ Ānanda, do you wish to know who was the king called Nimi at that time, who ruled without fault for eighty-four-thousand years? It was you.²⁹ Do you wish to know who was the last king at that time, called Destroyer of Wholesomeness, who went contrary to the path and let the noble king’s custom perish? It was Devadatta.³⁰

“Ānanda, [810b] at that time you inherited from the noble wheel-turning king Mahādeva a wholesome inheritance, continuing this [way of succeeding] to the throne without discontinuity. You were of virtue, [you acted] according to the Dharma, not contrary to the Dharma.

“Ānanda, I am now the unsurpassable king of Dharma. Now I pass on as inheritance [to you] the unsurpassable wholesome Dharma. I dutifully ask you, as a son of the Sakyans, to endeavour not to let the practice of this custom perish, do not become a man from the border countries!”

Ānanda asked the Buddha: “What is the cause that will make the practice of this custom perish?”³¹

The Buddha told Ānanda: “Even though King Mahādeva practiced a wholesome Dharma, he did not attain the destruction of the influxes, he did not go beyond the world,³² he did not attain the crossing over, he did not eradicate desire, he did not attain the uprooting of the twenty-one fetters,³³ he did not discard the sixty-two views, he did not purify himself from the three impurities, he did not attain penetrative knowledge, he did not attain the right path to liberation, he did not attain Nirvāṇa. Mahādeva’s practice of wholesome Dharma did not go beyond being reborn in the Brahmā realm.

“Ānanda, I now have knowledge of the Dharma that is supreme and unconditioned. My Dharma reaches the true end that is above gods and men. My Dharma is free from the influxes and free from desire, it has as its essence cessation,³⁴ profound knowledge, liberation, real recluse-ship and the attainment of Nirvāṇa.

“Ānanda, I now dutifully ask you to endeavour in this supreme path of Dharma. Do not [allow] an increasing decline of my Dharma.³⁵ Do not become a man from the border countries. If a disciple, Ānanda, intentionally lets the practice of this Dharma perish, then he is also a man from the border countries. If he is able to promote this Dharma, then he is the Buddha’s eldest son and has accomplished family membership. Ānanda, you should accomplish family membership. Do not exterminate the practice of the clan. Ānanda, the Dharma I taught to you, earlier and now, is all out of concern for you. You should practice like this.”

When the Buddha had spoken, Ānanda was delighted and received it respectfully.

III. Study

A central motif in the various versions of the Discourse on Ma(k)hādeva is the peaceful relinquishing of the throne at the sight of a first white hair on the head. The *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse speaks in this context of the white hair as the “body’s messenger”, with the parallel versions instead referring to the white or grey hair as a divine messenger.³⁶ This terminology sets a contrast to the way the average person reacts on seeing the divine messenger of old age.

The *Devadūta-sutta* and its parallels report how an evil-doer is brought before King Yama, who inquires if the culprit had never seen the divine messengers, one of them being old age. On seeing another grow old, did it never occur to the evil-doer that he too will grow old and thus should avoid evil and do what is good?³⁷

In the present tale King Mahādeva shows himself to be of a rather different calibre, as a single white hair suffices for him to renounce the throne, as well as all of his glorious possessions, and he goes forth to practice a life dedicated to renunciation and the meditative cultivation of the *brahmavihāras*.

The episode of the white hair thus appears to be a key scene in the discourse, an importance reflected in the fact that it has been depicted in a Bhārhut relief.³⁸ The same motif recurs among the Jains and elsewhere in Indian literature.³⁹



Bhārhut relief depicting the barber showing the grey hair to the king; drawing by Aldo Di Domenico.

The *Ekottarika-āgama* version stands alone in combining its description of the long succession of ideal kings with narrative pieces that in other *Nikāya* or *Āgama* discourses appear in a different context. One of these is the need for the successor of a wheel-turning king to receive instruction in proper rulership, which has a counterpart in the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and its parallels in the *Dīrgha-āgama* and the *Madhyama-āgama*.⁴⁰

Another such piece in the present *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse is the description of the general deterioration of living conditions and morality due to improper rulership by the time of Nimi's successor, who did not continue the type of conduct upheld by his forefathers; this is also found in the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King and its parallels.⁴¹

Perhaps the fascination exerted by the motif of the *cakravartin* on early Buddhist narrators facilitated an intrusion of narrative pieces from the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King into the present context.⁴²

The narrative in the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King shows considerable underlying humour.⁴³ In my study of the first part of the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse translated above, I drew attention to the humour evident in the description of the *cakravartin* given in this discourse, arguing that a literal interpretation of this part of the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse as encapsulating Buddhist notions of kingship would not do full justice to this description. Needless to say, the humour evident in such passages has a didactic purpose and thus is of a subtle type, quite different from attempts to make an audience roar with laughter.⁴⁴

The same tendency to humour continues through the remainder of the discourse, which describes King Ma(k)hādeva spending four periods of eighty-four-thousand years as a child, a prince, a king, and a recluse;⁴⁵ and his descendants living their lives according to the same pattern for eighty-four-thousand generations.⁴⁶ This description exemplifies a general tendency of numbers in an oral tradition to have a symbolical function, rather than expressing a precise numerical value. The number seven in a symbolic sense stands for a complete time cycle.⁴⁷ Seven as a basic temporal unit multiplied by the twelve months of the year results

in eighty-four. Eighty-four further enhanced by being multiplied by a thousand leads to the number eighty-four-thousand, a number that occurs often in Buddhist literature and simply represents a very long time span.

A literal reading of this description in the Ma(k)hādeva tale would not only be absurd,⁴⁸ it would also miss the humour inherent in various narrative episodes in the discourse.⁴⁹ To appreciate the central message conveyed by this tale, it needs to be borne in mind that the period of ancient Indian history that saw the rise of Buddhism was characterized by a tendency toward political centralization. As is common in political history all over the world, the early stages of such political centralization are often marked by a ruthless push to power among petty kings or among rulers and their descendants. This push to power finds its expression in Buddhist texts in tales reporting how King Pasenadi passed away while trying to rally forces against his son who had usurped the throne,⁵⁰ or how King Bimbisāra was cruelly put to death by his son Ajātasattu in a bid for power.⁵¹

Ling (1973/1976: 68) explains that in ancient India “the king, especially as he grew older and his sons came to manhood, was always at risk from the latter’s jealousy. Various safeguards against this danger were set out in the Indian manuals of kingship ... these ... indicate a general agreement that the ambition of princes constituted a perennial danger to the security of the king.”

Against this background, the description of the peaceful succession of eighty-four-thousand kings, who at the slightest indication of old age are willing to resign peacefully, hand over all power and control to the heir apparent, and spend the rest of their lives secluded from sensual pleasures in renunciation, would not have failed to have its effect on the ancient Indian audience.

In other words, it seems to me that the depiction of the harmonious succession of kings involves a witty criticism of rulership in ancient India. In this way, with a touch of humour the present tale highlights the superiority of renunciation over the insatiable drive for power among Indian kings.

In a country where much spiritual endeavour was and still is aimed at a vision of the gods, the description of these virtuous kings reaches its entertaining culmination point when the gods are so impressed with King Nimi's exemplary conduct that they wish to see him. The entertaining description reaches yet another climax when King Nimi, instead of remaining in heaven and enjoying the bliss of celestial pleasures, prefers to return home quickly in order to continue performing wholesome deeds.

Notably, his decision is taken after the completion of his journey to heaven, a journey during which he witnessed the fruition of good and bad karma. In this way, with a good dose of humour aimed at popular aspirations to heavenly pleasures, the present tale delivers a typical Buddhist teaching by depicting how an exemplary human being will give priority to wholesome conduct over indulgence in sensual pleasures, be these human or divine.

It is against this humorous description of ideal ruler-ship that the Buddha's final message stands out, highlighting that no matter how ideal one may imagine a ruler to be, the real answer to the human predicament can only be found by undertaking the path to liberation. Thus the depiction of the *cakravartin* in the first part of the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse, just as the exemplary kingship described subsequently, are an integral expression of the early Buddhist attitude towards worldly power, which is seen as vastly inferior to renunciation and liberation. In sum, the soteriological message of the discourse as a whole is to highlight the superiority of mastery of one's own mind over worldly dominion.⁵²

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Dīp	<i>Dīpavaṃsa</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Q	Peking edition
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>
T	Taishō (CBETA)
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

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Notes

1. For a survey of the various versions of this discourse cf. Anālayo (2011b: 43f); for a discussion of the distinct translation terminology employed in EĀ 50.4, which shows that this discourse was added to the *Ekottarika-āgama* in China, cf. Anālayo (2013).
2. The translated part of EĀ 50.4 is found at T II 808b17 to 810b19. In order to facilitate comparison between EĀ 50.4 and MN 83, in my translation I adopt the paragraph numbering used in Ñāṇamoli (1995/2005: 694-697). For the same reason, I use Pāli terminology in my translation, except for terms like Dharma or Nirvāṇa, without thereby intending to take a position on the original language of the *Ekottarika-āgama* or on Pāli terminology being in principle preferable. Similar to the procedure adopted in the first part of my translation of EĀ 50.4, in the present translation I have again attempted to reconstruct proper names that have been transcribed in EĀ 50.4 (except for terms that have a clear Pāli counterpart or that have been translated into Chinese) to the best of my abilities, although some of these reconstructions are rather conjectural and should not be considered as implying any certainty about the reading found in the Indic original. In my notes, I often take into account only differences between EĀ 50.4 and MN 83, only at times covering also the other parallel versions, as to attempt a comprehensive survey of variations between all versions would go beyond the bounds of what is feasible in annotation. A survey of the main differences between the parallel version of the present discourse can be found in Anālayo (2011a: 466-474).
3. EĀ 50.4 at T II 808b29: 冠髻, with a variant reading as 冠結. In its usage in other *Ekottarika-āgama* discourses, 冠 often stands for the royal “turban” as one of the five insignia of a king, cf., e.g., T II 609a21, T II 774c12 and T II 828a12, as it does also in the present discourse EĀ 50.4 at T II 808c20. Thus the proper name in the present passage might be *uṣṇīṣaśīras*, the more common rendering of which as 肉髻 does not appear to occur in the *Ekottarika-āgama*. Another possibility would be to follow the indication in the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* no. 5841 in Sakaki (1926: 380) that 冠 corresponds to *kholā*, and then perhaps reconstruct the name as *kholakeśin*. MN 83 does not mention the name of the prince.
4. The present section on the disappearance of the seven treasures and how this motivated the king to visit his father for advice is without parallel in MN 83.
5. Usually in such contexts in *Āgama* discourses only three circumambulations are mentioned, cf. Anālayo (2011a: 21). Perhaps the frequent occurrence of the number seven throughout the discourse has influenced the formulation of the present passage.
6. Adopting the variant 北 instead of 比.
7. Adopting a variant that adds 天 to 大.
8. EĀ 50.4 T II 809a22 actually speaks of eighty-four-thousand “years” at this point, 歲, to which a variant adds “generations”, 代. A reference to years would not fit the present context, though its occurrence could easily be a case of

accidental copying from earlier references to eighty-four-thousand. Hence in my rendering I follow the lead of the variant reading. This is supported by the parallel versions, which at the present junction speak of eight-four-thousand generations, cf. MN 83 at MN II 78,8, MĀ 67 at T I 514b5 and D 1 *kha* 54b2 or Q 1030 *ge* 50a6. MN 83 at MN II 78,11 adds that they practiced the four *brahmavihāras* for eighty-four-thousand years and that each of them for the same time period had also been a child, a crown-prince and a king; this part corresponds to §11 in Nāṇamoli (1995/2005: 694).

9. EĀ 50.4 at T II 809a23: 𑖦, which according to Mathews (1963: 466) among others means “alternating”. This might be an attempt to render *nimi*, for which Monier-Williams (1899/1999: 551) s.v. *nimi* gives “the closing or winking of the eyes, twinkling”. In fact EĀ 50.4 at T II 809c9 indicates that the king was similar to Śakra in regard to not blinking his eyes, both thereby differing in this respect from the average human being. Moreover, the text itself explains 𑖦 to convey the sense of 不𑖦音, where if 𑖦 should be an error for 𑖦, found below at T II 809c9, the idea would be “not blinking” one’s eyes. Be that as it may, MN 83 at MN II 78,28 gives his name as Nimi, cf. also MĀ 67 at T I 514b8: 尼彌. T 152 at T III 48c27 and T 211 at T IV 608b9 render his name as 南, which according to Chavannes (1910: 324) points to Nami, while Willemsen (1999: 220) translates the same as Nemi. The Tibetan *Bhaiṣajyavastu* at D 1 *kha* 54b2 or Q 1030 *ge* 50a7 renders his name as *mu khyud*, “rim”, Skt. *nemi*. Dīp 3.35 in Oldenberg (1879: 28,24) records his name as Nemiyo. Jā 541 at Jā VI 96,17 reports that soothsayers told the king that his newborn son had come to “round off” the number of descendants. The king then associated the idea of “rounding off” with the “rim” of a wheel and decided to give his son the name *nemi*, “rim”. For an explanation of the name of the twenty-second Jain Tirthaṅkara that similarly involves the sense of *nemi* as a wheel-rim cf. Jacobi (1884/1996: 277 note 1) and von Glasenapp (1925/1999: 317).
10. Adopting the variant 妄 instead of 忘.
11. MN 83 does not mention his possession of the thirty-two characteristics. While in the Pāli discourses these are only associated with the Buddha, cf., e.g., MN 91 at MN II 136,6, in the course of time they appear to have been applied also to his previous lives, cf. Lüders (1913: 883), and even to his family members, cf. Zin (2003). For a comparative study of the thirty-two characteristics cf. Anālayo (2011a: 528-539).
12. EĀ 50.4 at T II 809a29: 六齋. Soothill and Hodous (1937/2000: 139) explain that these are “the six monthly *poṣadha* or fast days: the 8th, 14th, 15th, 23rd, 29th, and 30th. They are the days on which the Four Mahārājas 四天王 take note of human conduct and when evil demons are busy, so that great care is required and consequently nothing should be eaten after noon, hence the ‘fast’”. The corresponding part in MN 83 at MN II 78, 30 only mentions his keeping of the *uposatha* days on the fourteenth, fifteenth and eighth of each fortnight, without going into other details of his administering of the country. Hu-von Hinüber (1996: 90f) clarifies that in such references the fourteenth and the fifteenth day are alternatives, so that the overall count for a fortnight will be two *uposatha*

days for laity, one of which falls on the eighth and the other on the fourteenth or the fifteenth; the last is also the *uposatha* for monastics to recite the code of rules.

13. Adopting the variant 授 instead of 受.
14. In MN 83 at MN II 79,3 their praise is about his ruling in accordance with the Dharma.
15. EĀ 50.4 at T II 809b7: 窮鼻尼, whose Early Middle Chinese pronunciation would be *guwɨŋ bji^h nri* according to Pulleyblank (1983: 257, 32 and 223), explained to stand for being “very handsome”, 極端正, where the best I can come up with to fit the case is my rather conjectural reconstruction as *guṇajinī*. In MN 83 at at MN II 79,12 Sakka goes himself to invite Nimi.
16. Such a reflection is not reported in MN 83.
17. MN 83 at MN II 80,2 indicates that the charioteer had the name Mātali and that his chariot was drawn by a thousand thoroughbred horses.
18. MN 83 does not refer to the king's courtiers, to their reaction, or to the way the king instructed them before departing.
19. Their exchange in MN 83 is more brief, as Nimi immediately understands what the charioteer is referring to.
20. MN 83 does not report that Sakka invited Nimi to share his throne.
21. For the king to give a blessing instead of assenting by remaining silent would imply that he does not accept the offer. In MN 83 at MN II 80,19 he explicitly declines, expressed with the word *alam*. He then indicates that he wants to return in order to act in accordance with the Dharma and observe the *uposatha*, without referring to his father's instruction to go forth.
22. MN 83 does not report for how long Nimi stayed in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, nor does it record that he gave an instruction on departing.
23. Adopting a variant that adds 生 after 白髮.
24. EĀ 50.4 at T II 810a4: 善盡, which suggest an original like Kuśalakṣayin. MN 83 at MN II 82,16 gives his name is Kaḷārajanaka.
25. MN 83 does not report the disappearance of the seven treasures.
26. MN 83 at MN II 82,17 just briefly reports that the king did not go forth, broke the good practice and thus was the last man, *antimapurisa*. MN 83 has no counterpart to the ensuing description in EĀ 50.4.
27. Adopting the variant 已 instead of 以.
28. The discourse versions and the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* agree in identifying Ma(k)hādeva as a former life of the Buddha; cf. MN 83 at MN II 82,22, MĀ 67 at T I 515a7 and D 1 *kha* 56a2 or Q 1030 *ge* 51b6. Neumann (1896/1995: 1109 note 200) considers the section in MN 83 at MN II 82,19-24 that identifies King Makhadeva as a former life of the Buddha to be a commentarial interpolation. According to Windisch (1908:10), it is difficult to believe that the historical Buddha should already have identified tales found among the early discourses as *jātakas*. Tanabe (2002/2003: 50) suggests that the tale of King Nimi is based on an ancient Indian tale that was adopted as a story reporting a previous life of the Buddha and then

- introduced into the Buddhist canon; on a general tendency of parables becoming *Jātakas* cf. also Anālayo (2010: 56-71).
29. According to the Pāli and Chinese *Jātaka* collections, Nimi was rather a past life of the Buddha; cf. Jā 541 at Jā VI 96,17 and T 152 at T III 48c25, an identification also reported in the *Lalitavistara*; cf. Lefmann (1902: 170,16). Jā 9 at Jā I 139,28 and Jā 541 at Jā VI 129,16 then report that Ānanda had been Makhādeva's barber and subsequently Sakka's charioteer Mātali, who took King Nimi to the heaven of the Thirty-three.
 30. No such identification is recorded in MN 83.
 31. MN 83 does not report an inquiry by Ānanda and also differs in the wording of the Buddha's indications, although the main import of the two versions is similar.
 32. Adopting a variant that adds 未 before 出.
 33. Adopting a variant that reads 一 instead of 億.
 34. Adopting the variant 滅度神 instead of 滅沒度.
 35. Adopting the variant 滅 instead of 滅.
 36. EĀ 50.4 at T II 808b1: 身使來召, whereas the other versions speak of a divine messenger, *devadūta*/天使/*lha yi pho nya*, cf. MN 83 at MN II 75,18, MĀ 67 at T I 513c8, T 211 at T IV 608b24, D 1 *kha* 53b6 or Q 1030 *ge* 49b4, D 4094 *ju* 77a2 or Q 5595 *tu* 87a3, as does the version of the present tale found in the introduction to the *Ekottarika-āgama*, EĀ 1 at T II 552a1: 天使. On the notion of a divine messenger cf. Anālayo (2007).
 37. MN 130 at MN III 180,12, AN 3.35 at AN I 138,21, DĀ 30.4 at T I 126b25, T 24 at T I 331a8, T 25 at T I 386a5, MĀ 64 at T I 504a15, T 42 at T I 827b7, T 43 at T I 828c23, T 86 at T I 909c13, EĀ 32.4 at T II 674c17, T 212 at T IV 668c28 and T 741 at T XVII 547a25.
 38. Cf. also Barua (1934: 82-85), Lal Nagar (1993: 160f), Cummings (1982: 44 plate 7), Schlingloff (1981: 102) and Sarkar (1990: 124); for further references cf. Grey (1994: 233f). Lüders (1941/1966: 153) notes that the presentation in the relief appears to be closer to the version in MN 83 at MN II 75,17, where Ma(k) hādeva only informs the crown prince, whereas in Jā 9 at Jā I 138,21 he also informs the ministers.
 39. An occurrence of the motif of the grey or white hair can be found in the Jain *Paṇḍitaśiṣṭaparvan* 1.95; cf. Jacobi (1883: 10), translated in Hertel (1908: 25); on the same motif in Indian literature in general cf. Bloomfield (1916: 57-58); for parallels to the notion of the messenger of death in European literature cf. Morris (1885).
 40. DN 26 at DN III 60,9 and its parallels DĀ 6 at T I 39b24 and MĀ 70 at T I 520c14.
 41. DN 26 at DN III 65,15 and its parallels DĀ 6 at T I 40b23 and MĀ 70 at T I 522a28.
 42. On parallelisms between the tales in DN 26 and MN 83 see also Wiltshire (1990: 188). Another instance of such narrative enhancement would appear to be the

description of how Sakka invited King Nimi to share his throne, where parallel descriptions can be found in the Māndhātṛ tale, cf. MĀ 60 at T I 495b17 and the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell and Neil (1886: 222,17). The sharing of the throne is not mentioned in a *Jātaka* version of this story, tale no. 258 at Jā II 312,16.

43. Comments on DN 26 from this perspective can be found in Rhys Davids (1921: 53), Gombrich (1988: 83f), Collins (1998: 480-496) and Anālayo (2010: 97-113).
44. The suggestion by Clasquin (2001: 97) that “ancient Buddhism was opposed to humour and laughter” appears to be based on a lack of distinguishing laughter from humour, as already pointed out by Clarke (2009: 313). The suggestion by Clasquin that the *sekhiya* rule against laughter at Vin IV 187,16 means that laughter is “a matter requiring confession and expiation in front of the entire assembly of fellow monastics” seems to confuse the different categories of rules in the *Vinaya*, as the *sekhiya* rules do not carry such penalty. Moreover, the issue at stake is only unrestrained laughter in public, which appears to have been considered inappropriate according to ancient Indian etiquette. Needless to say, humour is not restricted to laughter. Thus this rule or other strictures against laughter do not imply that humour was in principle opposed in early Buddhism.
45. EĀ 50.4 at T II 807a5 and its discourse parallels MN 83 at MN II 76,17 and MĀ 67 at T I 513a28. DN 17 at DN II 196,3 reports the same for King Mahāsudassana.
46. EĀ 50.4 at T II 809a22 (adopting a variant reading) and its parallels MN 83 at MN II 78,8 and MĀ 67 at T I 514b5; cf. also D 1 *kha* 54b2 or Q 1030 *ge* 50a6. MN 83 at MN II 78,24 and D 1 *kha* 54b2 or Q 1030 *ge* 50a6 even explicitly indicate that King Ma(k)hādeva and each of his descendants spent their fourth life period of renunciation in the same mango grove in Mithilā.
47. Cf. in more detail Anālayo (2011a: 471 note 158).
48. The absurdity of such a reading becomes self-evident when one calculates the time in the past when Mahādeva must have lived, given that he had a life span of four times 84,000 years and was followed by 84,000 generations of successors with the same life span.
49. In relation to *Jātakas* in general, Peris (2004: 37) comments that this type of tale “is not, nor was meant to be taken with the seriousness of a realistic biography ... its ‘truth’ is, rather, metaphorical - and metaphorical with a moralistic intention”.
50. Ps III 355,5 and T 1451 at T XXIV 239a10, cf. also T 211 at T IV 583a27, translated in Willemen (1999: 56), as well as, e.g., Malalasekera (1938/1998: 172), Bareau (1981: 53) and Amritananda (1983: 68-69).
51. A reference to Ajātasattu's patricide can be found in DN 2 at DN I 85,16, with further details provided in the commentary at Sv I 135,13, a translation of which can be found in Bodhi (1989: 54-56), cf. also the parallels DĀ 27 at T I 109c9, EĀ 43.7 at T II 764a16 and the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 251,22. According to *Mahāvamsa* 4:1, this was only the first instance in a series of patricides among his successors. On the succession of patricides among Ajātasattu's descendants cf. also Lamotte (1958/1988: 93), on the motif of the prince killing his father cf. Ling (1973/1976: 68). The Jain tradition has a somewhat different record of

- Ajātaśatru's succession to the throne and his father's death, cf. Deo (1956: 85). For a detailed study of Ajātaśatru narratives cf. Radich (2011).
52. An example that reflects this attitude would be Dhp 103, with Indic language parallels in *Udāna(-varga)* 23.3, Bernhard (1965: 291), Gāndhārī *Dharmapada* 305, Brough (1962/2001: 167), Patna *Dharmapada* 378, Cone (1989: 204); cf. also the *Uttarājjhayāna* 9.34, Charpentier (1922: 98,17).