

The Last Blade of Grass? Universal Salvation and Buddhism (1)

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to tease out the meaning and philosophical implications of the Bodhisattva Vow after it escalated in the context of some Mahāyāna teachings from a simple aspiration to become a Buddha in order to show many other beings the path to liberation into a promise to save all sentient beings in the world ‘down to the last blade of grass.’ This amounts to a promise of bringing about universal salvation. The paper investigates whether this promise and the very notion of universal salvation fit at all into the body of mainstream Buddhist doctrines and can be accommodated within Buddhism’s ultimate message of liberation. The paper is not a research paper in the strict sense, it is rather a piece of individual philosophising on the given theme, albeit based on scriptural evidence. It should fit, within the context of the academic discipline known as ‘History of Religions’ or ‘Study

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of Religions,' under the label of 'Philosophy of Religion.'

It first investigates briefly the origin of the notion of universal salvation as it appeared in Zoroastrianism and in early European thought, and whether it is relevant to the three monotheistic religions. It then looks at the main traditions of Asia to see if the notion is applicable to them. The core part of the paper is then concerned with the emergence of the idea of liberation for all, 'down to the last blade of grass,' as expressed in some formulations of the Bodhisattva Vow in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and whether it is in any way foreshadowed in early Buddhism. Finally I ponder the apparent absurdity of the vow's claim and, in an attempt to make sense of it, suggest a novel philosophical interpretation which might appear 'unorthodox' and contentious to some. But is it?

Key Words: Bodhisattva Vow, Three *Yānas*, Buddhayāna,
'Permanent' Bodhisattvahood, Ālaya Vijñāna.

I. Universal Salvation—the Concept, Its Origin and Spread

There is only one religious tradition in which universal salvation is an unequivocal part of its message. It is Zoroastrianism, arguably the oldest living religion (originating some time between 1500-1200 BCE), with its offshoot, Parsiism. It asserts that in the struggle between the forces of good and evil throughout the history of the world, the ultimate victory will belong to the forces of good which is understood, in the final (zurvanic) phase of the development of Zoroastrian theology, as universal salvation of all mankind in a redeemed world (Boyce 1988, 1992; Hinnells 1996).

Whether under the influence of Zoroastrianism or independently, the notion of universal salvation emerged clearly as a concept in Western thought for the first time in early Christianity in the teachings of Origen (185-254) who also taught, like Plato, the pre-existence of souls, and envisaged final salvation for all. He used the term *apocastasis* (restitution), which represented for him the final destruction of evil and the restoration of all souls to God,

including fallen angels and even Satan (Russell 1946, 347; Reese 1996, 538-39). The notion of universal salvation could be regarded as implicit in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic idea of the Last Judgment if it were not for the limitation put on it by orthodox dogmas which proclaim eternal damnation for some. But not all believers have been, over the centuries, fully convinced by such a final solution. Judaism has remained rather vague about the resolution of mankind's alienation from the Lord following the Fall, but certain passages of the Old Testament have been given different interpretations, some of which seem to point to a possible universal salvation. Thus Psalm 14, 7, originally understood as referring to Israel's deliverance from the Babylonian captivity, was later interpreted as meaning also the restoration of the Jewish diaspora and its return to the promised land prior to the end of time. Cabalistic and other esoteric traditions have gone further. At the end of time God will bring his chosen people and also the whole world to their state before the Fall with a new earth and a new heaven. Exclusion of some people does not seem implied, so how would non-Jews or evildoers deserve such a favourable outcome? Some sources assume that other nations and all individuals will in the long run accept the guidance of Israel. They see it implied in *Genesis* 28, 14 where God says to Abraham: "Through you and your descendants will be blessed the families of the earth" (Jacobs 1995, 571). But these are late ideas developed possibly under the influence of Greek thought where renewal and cyclic recreation of the world are important concepts. In any case, the notion of universal salvation does seem to have a kind of floating presence in the Judaic tradition, probably in the wake of external influences, but its acceptance is left, it seems, to personally adopted faith.

Christianity envisages a final outcome of the world's history on the Day of Judgment, combined with the expectation of the second coming of Christ. He will do the judging and assign the souls of the righteous to heaven and condemn to eternal damnation the evildoers who have not repented. Orthodox Christianity, such as Roman Catholicism and Calvinism as well as some modern evangelical sects and the so-called 'end-of-timers,' subscribe to this doctrine of exclusion for eternity. The threat of eternal punishment in hell is

the main asset of their trade, attracting followers concerned about their fate after death. This of course cannot be classified as universal salvation.

However, not all Christian thinkers could reconcile themselves to the idea of exclusion of some souls from the final salvation. After Origen it was Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-90) who taught “the final restoration of evil men and evil spirits to the blessedness of union with God, so that He may be ‘all in all’” (*Sermo Catecheticus Magnus*). In the Middle Ages Johannes Scotus Eriugena followed Origen in holding that all souls would be saved, including devils (Russell 1946, 427). There are also indirect indications of final restitution of all in the works of John Ruysbroeck and Juliana of Norwich. But the idea of salvation of all was condemned as heresy in England by or in 1388, so it was already floating about then. It was later disseminated by Anabaptist refugees from Germany who were condemned for their beliefs by the Augsburg Confession (1530); they returned to Germany in 1553 on the accession of ‘Bloody Mary.’ But the heresy continued in anonymous writings and was condemned by a decree of Parliament in 1648. The belief in universal salvation was current, even before it was discussed by Protestants, among Unitarians who immigrated to Britain from Middle Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries fleeing Catholic persecution. With them it reached colonial North America, eventually becoming the main tenet of the merged Unitarian Universalist church, no longer regarded as Christian (Odgers 1921; Carpenter 1921). In the course of the nineteenth century and up to the present time attitudes in many denominations to the dogma of eternal damnation have been steadily softening. This includes the East-Orthodox church. In the words of the Russian Orthodox Bishop Hilarion “the Orthodox understanding of hell corresponds roughly to the Catholic notion of purgatory” (Lawler 2008), which would most likely be endorsed also by Anglicans and many other protestant believers.

Islam appears to be adamant about the Last Judgment and the exclusivist salvation for the “people of the right hand,” with the infidels and the “people of the left hand” condemned to everlasting hell (*Sura* 56). However, the idea of a renewal, a new beginning, a new time cycle, a new

Golden Age is also vaguely echoed in the Koran, which can hardly be reconciled with the exclusion of some. But in several *Suras* the idea of the new life in salvation for the “people of the left hand” and infidels is explicitly quashed. They are all destined for hellfire. Dissenting ideas have been voiced in some Sufi quarters, but Sufism has very limited influence, if any, in mainstream Islam.

II. Universal Salvation and Chinese Traditions

In Asian traditions the notion of universal salvation does not occur in a straightforward way, but it hovers in the background of some of them. In Daoism the eternal rhythmical flow of Dao does not imply any final resolution. In archaic thought the idea was that one emerged into the world from the yellow springs of the earth and after a harmonious life returned to them. But with the idea of a kind of dynamic oscillation of Dao between its principal manifestations of *yin* and *yang* and perhaps in face of the cyclic renewal of natural phenomena in the seasonal return of growth in spring, there also emerged the notion of periodic renewal of individual life. But that may have come about under the influence if not as a direct result of the encounter with Buddhism. The ancient idea of leading a full and worthy life in harmony with Dao was then developed by philosophical minds into the desire to master the rhythm of Dao rather than be governed by it, and to overcome it by attaining personal immortality during one’s lifetime, whereupon one would or could depart east for the islands of the blessed immortals. For philosophers this was no doubt a metaphor for a transcendental dimension where individuals with superior wisdom, the true aristocrats of the mind, would find their lasting abode. In the religious trend of Daoism simple minds envisaged the eastern isles of blissful life to be real places on earth where the immortals lived an ethereal existence moving effortlessly above the ground and living on dew from fragrant flowers. During the dynasties of Qin (Ch’in, 221-206 BCE) and Han (206 BCE-220 CE) several expeditions were sent to find those isles, but they never returned.

Although theoretically, given the notion of periodic return to earthly life, everybody would eventually be able to reach immortality, no suggestion can be found that this was envisaged in the Daoist tradition, philosophical or popular. Daoism was possibly prevented from developing more articulated and independent eschatological ideas by the arrival of Buddhism with its fully formulated, albeit also in some points diversified, eschatological teachings.

Confucianism was concerned even less than Daoism with speculation about the final solution to the riddle of existence and only developed strong allegiance to the ancient practice of ancestor worship. This was more as a part of the social system strengthening its hierarchical structure of five cardinal relations within family and society and focussing on ethics. Although of course it contained religious notions, it never treated them in a comprehensive way. Neo-Confucianism did later stray deep into metaphysics and quasi-theology, but was hardly original in its speculations. It was Daoism and Buddhism that provided the relevant teachings; and as is well known, everybody could pick and use elements from one or other of the 'three doctrines' as they suited different occasions during their lifetime (Fung 1983; Smith 1968).

III. Vedic-Brāhmanic Attitudes and Aurobindo's Solution

And so it is India which appears to be the home of elaborate systems of thought focussed on the destiny of man and his world. Its oldest scripture, the *Ṛg Veda* (fully redacted by 1,500 BCE), contains several creation myths, one of which is particularly interesting. It gives us a clue to the idea of renewal and has links to the Indo-European past. Creation, or rather manifestation, of the world happens when the god Indra, representing the active principle, pierces with his spear the dragon Vṛtra, who represents the pre-creational or pre-manifestation latency. Indra thereby liberates (*muñcati*, hence *mokṣa* and *mukti*) the creative forces, symbolised as waters, cows or nymphs, so that the manifestation of the universe can proceed (RV 10, 104, 9; 1, 32, 11; 4, 22, 7).

The Indo-European antiquity of this myth is demonstrated by surviving mythological versions of it in the Hittite tradition (Tarkhunza/Illuyankash) and in Greece (Zeus/Typhon; Perseus/Andromeda; Theseus/Ariadne) and in European folklore (e.g. in the Czech and Slovak fairytale about Prince Bajaja who kills the dragon, rescues three princesses, and having married the youngest, starts a new era). This creation myth later passed, from the Hittite and possibly Greek traditions, into Christian legendary hagiology as the story of St George and the Dragon and through various adaptations into literature, e.g. in the epic narration about Orlando Furioso and Angelica.

It is important to note that in the Vedic myth Vṛtra is not killed, with the result that Indra has to fight him again and again. This is an early expression of the periodical nature of creation or manifestation of the universe which is subsequently incorporated into practically all systems of Indian thought about the world, including the Buddhist one, but excluding the materialists (*lokāyata*). The idea of regular renewal of the world was current also in ancient Greece and it would seem that a remote echo of it, whether from Greece or India, has survived in the context of the St George legend as suggested in the painting by Paolo Uccello (1397-1475) in the National Gallery in London. It shows St George when he has just pierced the dragon with his spear, but the Dragon has not been killed. He has been chained and the rescued princess is holding the end of the chain.

There can be little doubt that the periodic renewal of the world is an ancient Indo-European idea, but nowhere is there any suggestion of universal salvation. In the Vedas the gods are said to be immortal and as to humans, they are subjected to successive lives (*anūcīnā jīvitā*, RV 4, 54, 2), so liberation for them means being granted immortality (*amṛta*, *amṛtatva*), i.e. release from repeated deaths and births (Miller 1974, 184; Werner 1978, 1996 throughout), which is expressed in their ardent prayers: “Lead us to immortality!” (RV 5, 55, 4). “May I be released from death, not reft of immortality!” (RV 7, 59, 12). “Place me in that deathless, undecaying world...make me immortal...” (RV 9, 113, 7-11). These pleas for immortality show that there was no assumption that everlasting life was automatically

granted even if one reached heaven as a result of good deeds (RV 10, 14, 8) and religious fervour (*tapas*, RV 10, 54, 2); it was temporary so that the process of successive lives would continue.

Individuals also supplicated gods to grant them immortality in the post-Vedic time: repeated death (*punarṃtīṅyu*) lurked there too, as is asserted by the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (10, 4, 3, 10), so the search for immortality continued. The implied idea of rebirth or reincarnation was subsequently clearly spelled out in the oldest Upaniṣads (700–600 BCE): when one dies, knowledge (*vidyā*), deeds (*karmāṇi*) and previous experience (*pūrva prajñā*) follow one (BU 4, 4, 2). One may live in higher worlds whilst the merits of one's actions last, but eventually one returns to this world (BU 4, 4, 4–6). However, one has affinity with the ultimate; one's inner self (*ātman*) is, at bottom, identical with the core of reality (*brahman*, BU 4, 4, 5). When one realises it and can proclaim "I am *brahman*" (*ahaṃ brahmāsmi*, BU 1, 4, 10), one becomes the self of everything, including gods, and is freed from reincarnation.

But this liberation or salvation is only individual; no notion of universal salvation is ever mentioned or implied. Later elaboration in Hindu texts deals in detail with the periodic emergence of the world and non-liberated beings from *brahman* and their reabsorption into it at the end of each world period. This process, which does not seem to have a beginning, continues without any conceivable end. But it is not quite straightforward, it appears to be cyclic and this would allow for some interesting philosophical implications to be pursued; however, they have no direct bearing on the notion of universal salvation. We even find justification for this timeless cosmic spectacle in the notion of divine play (*līlā*). Some followers of the Hindu Pāśupata sect even vow to please the Lord by partaking in his divine self-amusement forever without aspiring to liberation. So there is for them no final solution, only temporary respite during the cosmic night.

Suddenly there appears within the Hindu philosophical tradition a fully fledged notion of universal salvation in terms of spiritualisation of the whole universe in connection with man's struggle for liberation through yoga. It is a

modern development, and its source is Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950). For him the Upaniṣadic brahman, the absolute, the infinite, is a power whose dynamic nature necessitates action. But being infinite, the absolute can become active only by descent into the finite, as there is nowhere else to go. But the finite also harbours that same power and drive for action and must therefore struggle for the infinite. The method by which it can proceed is integral yoga pursued individually. Nevertheless, the struggle for the infinite does not remain only individual; it assumes the evolutionary drive towards universal accomplishment via the dynamism of the infinite. The finite, i.e., man, conceives the dynamic infinite at a point of his evolution, as the cosmic mind or consciousness. He then decides to embark on the yoga path to reach it. He does not have the capacity to take others with him, though; there is no saviour in Aurobindo's scheme. Neither does the Cosmic Mind extend grace to men to elevate them by its dynamism.

So how, according to Aurobindo, can universal salvation come about? It is only if a sufficient number of individuals who have reached this evolutionary point prepare themselves through integral yoga to receive the cosmic consciousness, that universal salvation can happen in the form of the spiritualisation of the Earth or, in the last instance, of the whole universe; the rest of mankind would be taken along in tandem, as it were. But there is no guarantee: despite the evolutionary drive, it does not happen as a matter of course. It is dependent on a galaxy of advanced individuals, a spiritual élite. The appearance of such an élite is not predictable. One can only prepare oneself by struggling for the infinite and when one becomes aware of the possibility of universalisation of one's final achievement with the parallel effort of a number of others, one can then try to enhance the process by spreading the idea in order to win further individuals to participate in the hope that sufficient numbers of individuals will take up the struggle so that a spiritual élite will eventually emerge (Aurobindo 1949). No doubt Aurobindo set up his *āśram* with this task in mind, albeit with little success, judging from the present state of the world and the *āśram* itself.

From where did Aurobindo derive the notion of universal salvation? It

may have been a result of his knowledge of ancient Greek philosophers and post-Darwinian Western evolutionist thought. Theosophy, which adopted the idea of mankind's steady evolutionary progress towards higher levels of spirituality, may also have had some influence. But it is also conceivable that he was inspired by the development in Buddhism of the idea of superior beings (*mahāsattvas*) or Bodhisattvas who promised to bring into the state of salvation all beings, including the whole world 'down to the last blade of grass,' as outlined below. That tallies well with Aurobindo's notion of spiritualisation of the universe.

IV. The Great Bodhisattva Vow—What does it imply?

Now we come to the main concern of this article, namely to ponder and possibly unravel the meaning of the Great Bodhisattva Vow and the questions associated with it. This vow entered buddhological discussions after the publication of *The Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra* (Müller 1894). It was well summarised by R. F. Johnston (Hastings 1921, 12:648): "So long as there remains a single being who has not attained Buddhahood, I vow that I will not become Buddha." The later extension of the vow to "delivering the last blade of grass" (Oldmeadow 1997) makes it only more emphatic.

Can it truly be regarded as a promise of final liberation for all?

Early Buddhism is clearly concerned, on the basis of the Buddha's message as far as it can be gleaned from discourses preserved under his name (mainly in the *Suttapiṭaka* of the Pāli Canon and partly in equivalent texts in Sanskrit), only with individual liberation. But by implication it also contains the possibility of individuals training for future Buddhahood as Bodhisattvas. One such was predicted by the Buddha as his distant fully enlightened successor named Metteyya (DN III, 76; Skt. Maitreya). Gotama Buddha himself is reported in a later canonical work to have started his Bodhisattva training under the Buddha Dīpaṅkara a hundred thousand world periods and four incalculable ages earlier (Bv, 9-17). He could do so only because he was, as a practising ascetic, spiritually so advanced that he could then and there have

achieved *nibbāna* (Skt. *nirvāṇa*), a state beyond the realms of suffering and therefore free from rebirth anywhere in *samsāra*. But impressed by the sight of the teaching Buddha Dīpaṅkara and inspired by his example, he postponed his individual liberation and vowed to become a Buddha himself to teach others how to achieve liberation. This was a purely individual decision on his part. Similarly, the future Buddha Metteyya must have gone through a comparable experience and made a conscious decision to embark on the Bodhisattva path. The same goes for all other future Buddhas, who must be presumed to be even now in different stages of training as Bodhisattvas for their chosen mission in some future world period. Their aspiration is to enable by their teaching large numbers of beings to work out their individual salvation and reach *nibbāna*. At the end of their natural lifespans the teaching Buddhas would pass into *parinibbāna* (*parinirvāṇa*), as happened in the case of the historical Buddha Gotama who is reported to have passed away at the age of eighty. Their disciples who reached liberation from the round of rebirths would have done so with their help, but only as a result of their own effort—their individual resolution and perseverance on the path revealed to them by their Buddha. Many more beings are always left behind after a Buddha's passing, unliberated and bound to the 'wheel of life.' Nowhere is there any indication that eventually all beings will reach the goal so that *samsāra*, which is by definition a 'global flow' of periodic renewals of the world systems and continuous rounds of rebirths of beings within them, will come to a stop.

However, at some point in the history of Buddhism the idea of becoming the Buddha of a certain time and at a certain place to teach the path to liberation to many, but only for a time limited by the natural duration of human life, lost its appeal. When the Buddha Gotama passed into *parinibbāna* or the 'state' of final liberation at the end of his lifespan, he still left behind multitudes of unliberated beings with a prospect of long stretches of time or even world periods before the appearance of the Buddha Metteyya/Maitreya. The same would happen after the end of Metteyya/Maitreya's mission. So aspirants for the role of helpers embarking on the Bodhisattva path would decide to practise ardently to reach, as quickly as

possible, the threshold of *nibbāna/nirvāṇa*, becoming virtually equal to Buddhas in their spiritual achievements and teaching ability, in other words reaching enlightenment (*bodhi*). But they would abstain from ‘entering’ *nirvāṇa* and becoming temporarily teaching Buddhas; they would rather remain active in the world for the benefit of its suffering beings as, if I may coin a phrase, ‘permanent’ Bodhisattvas.

V. The Three *Yānas* and *Ekayāna*

This type of Bodhisattva figure is attested in the early stages of the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism (possibly during the first century BCE to the first century CE) by the *Lotus Sūtra (Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, Chapter 2). In it the Buddha Śākyamuni, elevated into a cosmic personality and preaching on a transcendental level, discloses that he originally revealed (presumably on the earthly level as the Buddha Gautama) three spiritual paths (*yānas*): (1) the *śrāvakayāna* which is followed, under his instruction, by his disciples (*śrāvakas*) who may achieve *nirvāṇa* and become *arahats*; (2) the *pratyekabuddhayāna* which is pursued by solitary aspirants for enlightenment (*bodhi*) who may become, by their own effort, singular Buddhas (*pratyekabuddhas*) who do not teach; (3) the *bodhisattvayāna* which is adopted by those whose aspiration is to remain forever active in *samsāra* as helpers bringing liberation from suffering to innumerable beings; they may reach the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) and become Bodhisattvas-Mahāsattvas like Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta and others who have already saved innumerable beings. But the new message of the Buddha Śākyamuni in the *Lotus Sūtra* is that none of these three categories of achievers had reached the final goal, but that each one of them had still to accomplish the *buddhayāna* and fulfil his mission as a teaching Buddha at some point in future and in one of the innumerable universes before reaching their *parinirvāṇa*. The teaching of the three lower *yānas* was just a skilful (*kauśalya*) expedient (*upāya*) employed by him (presumably in his earthly projection as the Buddha Gautama) to rescue those of his disciples with a

spiritual potential from karmically conditioned rebirths in saṃsāric realms by telling them that their achievements (arahatship, pratyekabuddhahood and extended bodhisattvahood) represented final goals. Only after rescuing them from the immediate ills of *saṃsāra* would he be able to reveal to them the task of achieving full-scale buddhahood to complete their spiritual growth and career. If he had revealed all that to them in the first place, many of them would have been frightened away by the enormity of the task and become lost in *saṃsāra* for many aeons. The cosmic Buddha Śākyamuni then justifies his deception or ‘white lie’ by the well-known simile of the ‘burning house’ (Chapter 3).

In early Pāli Buddhism the earthly Buddha Gotama is of course presented as having taught only the *sāvakayāna* (*śrāvakayāna*), while *paccekabuddhas* (*pratyekabuddhas*) were described by him as great seers who had attained final liberation (*maheṣī parinibbute*, MN III, 71) without any suggestion being made that he would ever have taught them the path. According to a commentary (SnA, I, 46ff.) the canonical verses praising solitude with the ‘rhinoceros’ refrain (Sn, 6-12, verses 35-75) were originally uttered by *paccekabuddhas* some of whom are even referred to by name. The Buddha Gotama repeated their utterances to Ānanda when he asked him about the nature of the *paccekabuddha* attainment. *Mahāvastu* (I, 357ff.) elaborates the story by relating that 500 *pratyekabuddhas* were living in R̥ṣipātana (Isipātana) where the Buddha later delivered his first discourse to his five companion ascetics who had previously abandoned him when he discarded severe ascetic practices and adopted his ‘middle way.’ When the *pratyekabuddhas* heard of the imminent coming of the Buddha Gautama, they disappeared, while each was reciting one of the verses. They obviously preferred solitude and did not feel any need to meet a preaching Buddha from whom they had nothing to gain.

Contrary to the early tradition, the implication of the preaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* by the cosmic Buddha Śākyamuni is, as already mentioned above, that he did teach the three *yānas*, but only as a skilful expedient (*upāya kauśalya*) to save beings from the perils of *saṃsāra*, namely *śrāvakas* and

pratyekabuddhas into a provisional, temporary *nirvāṇa*, and *bodhisattvas* into a state of permanent cruising in *samsāra* on the threshold of *nirvāṇa*, yet in possession of *bodhi* so that they could teach the Dharma; their renunciation of final liberation for the sake of assisting suffering beings made them into *mahāsattvas*, beings superior to the other two types of spiritual personalities, although even theirs was only a temporary status. However, this does not yet represent a drive for universal salvation. The *Lotus Sūtra* does not indicate that any of the scores of named and unnamed Bodhisattvas aspired to saving all sentient beings let alone the whole universe. They would therefore have never-ending careers as saviours, if their status as *bodhisattvas* had not been granted to them as only a temporary expedient.

I cannot provide any textual evidence for the existence of the so-called ‘permanent’ bodhisattvahood outside the *Lotus Sūtra*. But we must assume, I think, that such a stage in the development of the idea of salvationist activity of *bodhisattvas* did exist and this status would not have been regarded by them as limited in time. The traces of such an attitude among followers of Buddhism who are active in spreading the message can be encountered even in our time. In my recollection, Christmas Humphreys, the founder of the British Buddhist Society in London, regarded himself as a Bodhisattva and let it be known during some of his lectures, at one of which I was present, that he did not wish ever to enter *nirvāṇa*, but wanted to continue helping others along the path indefinitely.

It would appear that the *Lotus Sūtra* appropriated and reinterpreted the idea of arahatship and pratyekabuddhahood as well as ‘permanent’ bodhisattvahood for its own purpose which was to proclaim that their achievements were not final and that the sole path (*ekayāna*) to truly final liberation was only *buddhayāna*, the way to the supreme, perfect enlightenment (*samyaksambodhi*) of a Buddha which involved teaching in many projected historical missions before entering their truly final *parinirvāṇa*, as revealed by the cosmic Buddha Śākyamuni about himself and illustrated by the ancient Buddha Prabhūtaratna who even came out from his final *parinirvāṇa* in order to be present when the *Lotus Sūtra* was being preached (Chap. 11, cf. Werner

2004). Every *arahat*, *pratyekabuddha* and even *bodhisattva-mahāsattva*—although he would have aspired in his vow to remain permanently engaged in helping others in *samāsāra*—will have to accomplish the *buddhayāna* and become a teaching Buddha with full powers in one of the innumerable worlds in some future world period. In the course of preaching the *Lotus Sūtra* the cosmic Buddha Śākyamuni, who was at the time less than halfway to his final *parinirvāṇa* (Chapter 15), gave many of the attending listeners predictions of their careers as Buddhas. That included even the notorious Devadatta who must by then have been released from hell (Chapter 11, cf. Werner 2004).

Presumably, if we apply the logic of the *Lotus Sūtra* (which, of course, transcends rationality) and project its vision further, the innumerable beings saved from suffering in due course by the future Buddhas through realising one of the three levels of achievement will themselves have in turn to embark eventually on their own *buddhayāna* and so on *ad infinitum*. However, there may be a more sober explanation or interpretation of what the *Lotus Sūtra* points to which does not violate logic (as argued below).

(To be continued)

Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
BCE	Before Common Era
BU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
Bv	Buddhavaṃsa
CE	Common Era
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
P.	Pāli
RV	Ṛg Veda
Skt.	Sanskrit
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sn	Sutta-Nipāta
SnA	Sutta-Nipāta Aṭṭhakathā
Vis.	Visuddhi-magga

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