

THE STORY OF PACCEKA BUDDHA MATANGA

by Sayagyi U Chit Tin

Ragan ca dosan ca pahaya moham
Sandalayitvana[1] samyojanani
Asantasam jivitasamkhayamhi
Eko care khaggavisanakappo.

Leaving behind passion, hatred, and delusion, having torn the fetters apart, not trembling at (the time of) the complete destruction of life,[2] one should wander solitary as a rhinoceros horn.

Sutta-nipata, v. 74 [3]

This //gatha// (verse) was uttered by Arahats, including the Buddha, on four separate occasions. It was first uttered by the Solitary Buddha Matanga and was only heard by him. Then, following the tradition of previous Paccekasambuddhas (perfectly awakened solitary Buddhas), he spoke the verse again at the Nandamulaka mountain slope in the Himalayas. Later, during the lifetime of Buddha Gotama, when Venerable Ananda requested him, the Lord himself gave this verse. Finally, at the First Council (Sangayana), which was held three months after the Great Demise (Mahaparinibbana) of the Buddha, five hundred Arahats were present as Sangitikarakas (recensionists of the Buddha's Teachings), and Ashin Ananda spoke this verse in answer to a question posed by the Pucchaka (questioner) and convener of the Council, Ashin Maha-Kassapa. It has been recited many times since then, notably at all the Councils up through the Sixth Buddhist Council (or Synod) in Myanmar. At those Councils, the verse was spoken in the presence of the Sangitikarakas.

Pacceka Buddha Matanga first spoke this verse as a solemn utterance (udana) when he was filled with great joy (piti) after attaining the knowledge of solitary awakening (pacceka-bodhi-nana). His //piti// was so great that this verse occurred to him spontaneously.

There is an ancient tradition in India of people turning their backs on life as a householder and taking up the life of an ascetic, carrying an alms bowl for their food and retiring to the forest, especially to the Himalayas in northern India. There, they follow their creed and adopt ascetic practices. This can happen whether the Teachings of a Buddha are available or not. If this is done during a period outside a Buddha-sasana, ascetics who possess the right perfections (parami) can attain the highest knowledge (nana), the Path and Fruition State of Arahatship (arahatta-magga, arahatta-phala). They accomplish this through understanding the Four Noble Truths, just as Fully Awakened Ones (or Teaching Buddhas, Sammasambuddhas) do. They are called Solitary Buddhas or Non-Teaching Buddhas (pacceka-buddhas). The difference between the two types of Buddhas is that //Sammasambuddhas// have developed their //paramis// over a longer period of time.

Everyone who is to reach Arahatship must develop the //paramis// for a certain time. The shortest time required is for a disciple of a Teaching Buddha who attains Arahatship but no more. "Great" disciples (maha-savakas) and the two leading disciples (agga-savakas) of a Teaching Buddha must work longer. Pacceka Buddhas work longer still. For Teaching Buddhas, there are four levels of developing the //paramis//. Our teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, gave a table of these periods in his booklet //The Real Values of True Buddhist Meditation//:[4]

1. For Teaching Buddhas (Sammasambuddhas):

- (a) a Viriyadhika Buddha (one who has effort as the predominating factor): 16 incalculables of world-cycles (asa_kheyya, a unit followed by 140 ciphers) plus 1000,000 world-cycles (kappa),
 - (b) a Saddhadhika Buddha (with faith as the predominating factor): 8 incalculables of world-cycles plus 100,000 world-cycles,
 - (c) a Pannadhika Buddha (with wisdom as the predominating factor): 4 incalculables of world-cycles plus 100,000 world-cycles.
2. For Pacceka Buddhas: 2 incalculables of world-cycles plus 100,000 world-cycles.
 3. For an Agga-savaka (a leading disciple of a Teaching Buddha): 1 incalculable of world-cycles plus 100,000 world-cycles.
 4. For a Maha-savaka (a great disciple of a Teaching Buddha): 100,000 world-cycles.
 5. For an Arahata: 100 to 1,000 world-cycles.

Pacceka Buddha Matanga[5] was the last Pacceka Buddha to appear before the Teaching Buddha Gotama. The residents of Rajagaha who offered him alms food each day could not have known all the details of the attainments he had accomplished. They only saw peace and serenity in his face. That was sufficient for them to want to pay respects to him and offer him the best food they had before they ate themselves.

Pacceka Buddha Matanga resided in a cave in the Pandava foothill near Rajagaha. From there, he went on his alms rounds to Rajagaha and the surrounding villages, one after the other. His boundless compassion and boundlessness //metta// led him to make alms rounds regularly through the residential areas of Rajagaha for the benefit and gain of many. Pacceka Buddha Matanga, like all Solitary Buddhas and Teaching Buddhas, had realized the Four Noble Truths on his own, without a teacher to show him the way. Pacceka Buddhas, however, do not develop the perfections for a long enough period to be able to teach others the Path to Awakening, so he was not able to lead others to the truth he had realized.

Pacceka Buddhas enjoy the attainment of the Fruition State (phala-sammāpatti) at times and at other times they enter the attainment of cessation or suppression (nirodha). Even though they are in the world, there will be no knowledge in the human world of the Paths and Fruition States. This is because they will only live when there is no Buddha-sasana.

One day, Pacceka Buddha Matanga came out of the cessation state (nirodha) and on regaining the use of his senses he heard Deva voices saying, "Sir, sir, a future Buddha has been born in the world." These Devas had come to the human world to worship, venerate, and honour the Bodhisatta.

Pacceka Buddha Matanga had the ability to see into the future (anagatamsa-nana). If he had used this ability before going into the cessation state, he would have realized that twenty-nine years later to the day, the future Teaching Buddha, now born as the Bodhisatta Siddhattha, would come to the very spot where he was. Like him, Siddhattha would go on alms round in the city of Rajagaha and would return to that very place to eat the morning alms food given by the same residents of Rajagaha and the surrounding villages who gave to him.

The day that the Bodhisatta Siddhattha was born there were thirty-two marvels in the world. Summer was over and the rains would soon come. With the thirty-two marvels, trees bore flowers out of season, etc., and the Himalayas were very beautiful. Pacceka Buddha Matanga did not see all this because he had entered the cessation state for seven days; all his senses were suppressed and sealed, and his body would be rigid until the predetermined period was over.

When he heard the voices of the Devas, Pacceka Buddha Matanga reflected, "A Bodhisatta has been born. He will be the future Buddha. //Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu//." He saw that the worlds of the Devas, Brahmas, and humans were filled with joy. Then he used his supernormal mental powers (abhinna) to see when his own life would come to an end. He found that he would attain Parinibbana that same day. So he went through the air to the mountain named Mahapapata, a mountain in the Himalayas where all Pacceka Buddhas attain Parinibbana.

The Burmese commentator describes the scene as follows: Pacceka Buddha Matanga realized that he was the last of the Pacceka Buddhas before the Sammasambuddha Gotama appeared in the world. He saw that he would no longer be in the world when the future Buddha came, so he directed his thoughts towards the destruction of his own life. Then he left the cave where he had resided for many years with the support of the residents of Rajagaha. He had no attachment to his supporters or to his cave. Going through the air, he passed over Rajagaha, which is surrounded by five mountains; he went over all of Magadha, headed for the north into the Himalayas. He went past seven mountain ranges to the Gandhamadana mountain range where the Nandamulaka (or Nandamu) mountain slope is found. On that slope there are three caves: the golden cave (Suvanna-guha), the ruby (or jewel) cave (Mani-guha), and the silver cave (Rajata-guha). Pacceka Buddha Matanga chose the ruby cave in the middle where the Manjusaka Deva tree grows at the entrance. There, he descended from the air, keeping in mind, "All conditioned states are transient, impermanent, //anicca, anicca, anicca// . . .," as he saw the withered flowers of the Manjusaka tree that had fallen all around it like a huge carpet.

Pacceka Buddha Matanga remembered that this was the place where in the past all the Pacceka Buddhas living in the world assembled on full-moon days and new-moon days. At such times, they enjoyed the attainment of the Fruition State (phala-sammapatti) or of cessation (nirodha-sammapatti) together. When a new Pacceka Buddha came, he would take the last of the prepared seats because the Pacceka Buddhas were seated according to seniority. When the predetermined period of going into states was up, the eldest of the Pacceka Buddhas would ask the newly arrived Pacceka Buddha to explain how he attained solitary knowledge (pacceka-nana) and he would explain how he did so and would repeat the solemn utterance (udana) he made on attaining full awakening.

When Pacceka Buddha Matanga appeared in the world, there were no other Pacceka Buddhas, but he kept the tradition by coming to this place and speaking his verse alone. This was the second time that he spoke that verse. When he came back after learning about the birth of the future Teaching Buddha, he had come for the last time. It was time for him to follow in the footsteps of the previous Pacceka Buddhas. Although the actual footsteps had disappeared due to the wind, rain, and snow, they were still clear to him in his mind, and he followed the footsteps and approached a large, flat rock. He took the string of bones mixed with fragments of worn pieces of yellow robe of the Pacceka Buddha who had entered complete extinction before him and threw them into the nearby precipice.[6] Then he lay down on the flat rock.

As a Pacceka Buddha, Matanga had eliminated all craving. He had no craving for continued existence (bhava). He had no craving for anything.

Whatever he did was in accordance with what should be done. There was no reaction in him as he always possessed functional consciousness (kiriya-citta), states of consciousness that do not give future results. There would be no more birth for him. When the light of a candle is extinguished, it disappears with no trace. We cannot say it has gone here or there. The same is true when the Pacceka Buddhas pass away into the sphere of Nibbana without a residue of substratum. They pass away after entering the concentration of the fire element (tejo-dhatu-samadhi). In this way, their bodies are consumed by fire.

Sayagyi U Chit Tin

FOOTNOTES:

[1] PTS edition: //sandalayitva//.

[2] "... the dissolution of life [= the complete destruction of life] means passing away, the breaking up of the mind; and not being frightened by this dissolution of life because of the fact that [the speaker] has eliminated the desire for life, in this way up till then having shown to himself the sphere of Nibbana with a residue of substratum, at the end of the verse he passed away into the sphere of Nibbana without a residue of substratum." Sn-a 129,12. We use the translation by Ria Kloppenborg, //The Paccekabuddha// (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p. 124, n. 163.

[3] We use the translation by K.R. Norman, GD.

[4] See //Dhamma Texts// (Dhamma Texts Series 1, revised ed., 1991), pp. 60f. See also //The Coming Buddha Ariya Metteyya// (Dhammadana Series 7, 1988), pp. 1-4 (references to Pali commentaries are given in the notes).

[5] Details concerning Pacceka Buddha Matanga are taken from a text in the Myanmar language by Ashin Wunnasiri, a Pali scholar of Myanmar. The text was published in //Dhammaramsi Buddhist Magazine//, n 15, March 1991.

[6] Ria Kloppenborg's statement (op. cit., p. 56) that Matanga went to Mount Mahapapata "the mountain from which //paccekabuddhas// can enter final nibbana by throwing themselves down from the rock" seems inaccurate. It is the bones of the last Pacceka Buddha to enter final Nibbana that are thrown down from the rock. According to Sn-a 128f., it is at this moment that he repeated his solemn utterance.

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