

A Study of the Nature of Bodhisatta Life as Depicted in the Pāli Suttapiṭaka

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Abstract

In *Theravāda* Buddhism, the *Bodhisatta* is one who aspires to attain the Buddhahood through the gradual perfection of moral and spiritual qualities named as perfections (*Pāramitā*). This idea is described in Prince Siddhartha's quest for the Enlightenment and in the *Jātaka* tales depicting his past lives of perfection. Apart from heroic self-sacrifice, the *Bodhisatta* path emphasizes ethical awareness, interpersonal responsibility, and deliberate involvement with the world's suffering. The study further considers the ethical implications of such an ideal in the development of *Theravāda* Buddhist thought, where the *Bodhisatta's* journey is taken as an exemplary model of moral resolve and selflessness. This is not merely taken as an ideal, however, but rather as a pedagogical framework by which lay and monastic communities alike may be exhorted towards the development of generosity, patience, truthfulness, and compassion in their everyday lives. The *Bodhisatta* ideal is seen as a bridge between individual emancipation and communal responsibility in the *Theravāda* ethic. Finally, the *Pāli Suttapiṭaka* presents the *Bodhisatta* as a comprehensive figure of religious aspiration and loving effort. By means of persistent discipline, mindful endurance, and unswerving compassion, the *Bodhisatta* realizes the integration of wisdom (*Paññā*) and compassion (*Karuṇā*), and thus offers Buddhahood as the result of a long process of moral and spiritual maturation, rather than as a sudden transcendence. Moreover, this article highlights that awakening is not separable from ethical engagement, presenting spiritual progress as a responsibility performed in relation to the wider world rather than in isolation.

Keywords: *Bodhisattava, Buddhahood, Perfections, Suttapiṭaka, Theravāda Buddhism*

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1. Introduction

The concept of the *Bodhisatta* (Sanskrit: *Bodhisattva*, “awakening-being”) lies at the heart of Buddhist thought, but its interpretation and application evolved differently in *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* traditions. (Williams, 2009, pp.17-21) The verse from *Samantapāsādikā* reflects the *Theravāda* understanding of the *Bodhisatta* path, emphasizing that Buddhahood is not attained in a single life. A *Bodhisatta* makes the aspiration (*Abhinīhāra*) before a living Buddha and then cultivates the Ten *Pāramī* over incalculable aeons (*Asaṅkheyya kappā*), engaging in acts of profound difficulty and enduring hardship for the benefit of all beings. “*Yo kappakoṭṭhi pi appameyyaṃ kālāṃ karonto atidukkarāni khedaṃ gato lokahitāya nātho, namo mahākāruṇikassa tassa*” (Samantapāsādikā, 1924, p.1) means Homage to that Great Compassionate One, who for countless aeons performed extremely difficult deeds, enduring hardship for the welfare of the world, becoming the protector of all beings.

2. Literary Review

The concept of the *Bodhisatta* in the Pāli Suttapiṭaka is primarily presented as Siddhattha Gotama’s life. Early textual studies by Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli highlight the human and practical dimensions of the *Bodhisatta*’s spiritual quest as depicted in key suttas such as the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta and Mahāsaccaka Sutta.

Scholars like Richard Gombrich, Peter Harvey, and Analayo emphasize that the early texts portray the *Bodhisatta* in a simple, non-mythological way,

focusing on practice, insight, and moral discipline rather than later cosmological elaborations. L. S. Cousins similarly notes that the *Bodhisatta* in the earliest layers of the canon refers mainly to the historical Buddha before awakening.

Further contributions include studies on perfections (*Pāramī*) by Ven. San Van Xien, and interpretative models by Suphakorn Chanachaidham, which explain

the Bodhisatta's gradual development. Shanta Ratnayaka discusses the Theravāda Bodhisattva ideal, while the Jātaka Tales compiled by H. T. Francis illustrate moral and narrative dimensions of Bodhisatta life.

3. Research Problem

Although the concept of the Bodhisatta has been widely discussed in Buddhist studies, most existing research focuses on later doctrinal developments such as the Pāramī system, Jātaka narratives, and Mahāyāna interpretations. Therefore, the central research problem of this study is:

How is the nature of Bodhisatta life conceptualized and represented in the Pāli Suttapiṭaka, and what ethical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions can be derived from these canonical portrayals?

4. Research Objectives

1. To analyze how the concept of the Bodhisatta is represented in the Pāli Suttapiṭaka.
2. To identify and collect references to the Bodhisatta within selected Pāli suttas.
3. To examine the ethical dimensions of Bodhisatta life as depicted in the Suttapiṭaka.
4. To analyze the psychological and spiritual characteristics of the Bodhisatta in early Buddhist texts.
5. To distinguish the Suttapiṭaka portrayal of the Bodhisatta from later Theravāda interpretations such as the Pāramī tradition and Jātaka narratives.
6. To understand the Bodhisatta's role as a model of spiritual development leading to Buddhahood.

5. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in textual and doctrinal analysis of early Buddhist scriptures, specifically the Pāli Suttapiṭaka.

1. Primary sources: Selected discourses from the Pāli Suttapiṭaka (especially the Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, and Saṃyutta Nikāya) that contain references to the Bodhisatta and Jātaka stories.
2. Secondary sources: Scholarly books, journal articles, and commentarial studies by modern Buddhist scholars such as Bhikkhu Bodhi, Peter Harvey, and others.

6. Discussion

In *Theravāda* Buddhism, the *Bodhisatta* is understood primarily as the Buddha-to-be in his pre-enlightenment lifetimes. The *Bodhisatta's* moral heroism and his cultivation of has the ten *Pāramī* (perfections) as;

1. Generosity (*Dāna Pāramī*) - *Vessantara Jātaka*

Generosity (*Dāna*) is the foundation of spiritual cultivation. The *Vessantara Jātaka* narrates the story of Prince *Vessantara*, who, devoid of attachment, relinquished all his belongings, even his children. This supreme act of selflessness serves to cleanse the mind of greed (*Lobha*) and foster a compassionate (*Karuna*) disposition. Perfect generosity (*Dāna*) is indispensable for attaining Buddhahood, as it cultivates detachment and the capacity to benefit all sentient beings without anticipating any recompense.

2. Morality (*Sīla Pāramī*) - *Buridatta Jātaka*

Morality (*Sīla*) is the restraint of unwholesome actions and development of wholesome actions. In *Buridatta Jātaka*, the *Bodhisatta* showed unshakeable morality even under threat and demonstrated courage in morality. For the Buddha, perfect morality (*Sīla*) ensures that actions of body, speech, and mind are pure, creating a stable foundation for wisdom and spiritual insight.

3. Renunciation (*Nekkhamma Pāramī*) - *Makhādeva Jātaka*

Renunciation (*Nekkhamma*) is the letting go of attachment to worldly pleasures. In *Makhādeva Jātaka*, there is a story about a king who gave up his throne to attain spiritual enlightenment. Renunciation (*Nekkhamma*) is needed for the Buddhahood because it liberates one's mind from all desires and allows for meditation and contemplation on impermanence, suffering, and non-self.

4. Wisdom (*Paññā Pāramī*) - *Ummagga Jātaka*

Wisdom (*Paññā*) is the capacity to see truth and act in conformity with it. The *Bodhisatta* in the *Ummagga Jātaka* demonstrates great wisdom and insight into the nature of reality. Perfect wisdom (*Paññā*) is essential in achieving the Buddhahood, as it enables one to understand the Four Noble Truths, dependent origination, and ultimately realize *Nibbāna*.

5. Energy (*Viriya Pāramī*) - *Mahājanaka Jātaka*

Energy (*Viriya*) is constant effort in the development of virtues and wisdoms. In the *Mahājanaka Jātaka*, the *Bodhisatta* overcomes tremendous hardships with determination and valor. For Buddhahood, unceasing energy ensures perseverance on the long path of training across many lifetimes, overcoming obstacles and distractions.

6. Patience (*Khanti Pāramī*) - *Khandalaka Jātaka*

Patience (*Khanti*) is the capacity to bear suffering, insult, or injury without resentment. Tolerance is demonstrated by the *Bodhisatta* in the *Khandalaka Jātaka*. Perfect Patience (*Khanti*) for the Buddha enables one to be calm and compassionate at all times, as this is the only way to guide numerous beings.

7. Truthfulness (*Sacca Pāramī*) - *Vidurapanditha Jātaka*

Truthfulness (*Sacca*) means honesty in thought, word, and deed. The *Vidurapanditha Jātaka* story describes the *Bodhisatta* practicing truth even when it was difficult.

To achieve Buddhahood, the perfection of Truthfulness (*Sacca*) guarantees moral integrity and the trust of all beings, providing a clear understanding for enlightenment.

8. Determination (*Adhiṭṭhāna Pāramī*) - *Temiya Jātaka*

Determination (*Adhiṭṭhāna*) is resolute commitment to the spiritual path. The *Bodhisatta* demonstrates determination in the *Temiya Jātaka* by holding fast in spite of extreme test and temptation. For Buddhahood, perfect Determination (*Adhiṭṭhāna*) ensures that the *Bodhisatta* shall never falter in his pursuit of liberation.

9. Loving-kindness (*Mettā Pāramī*) - *Sāma Jātaka*

Loving-kindness (*Mettā*) is defined as universal goodwill towards all living beings. In *Sāma Jātaka*, the *Bodhisatta* is seen showing compassion towards all living beings, including those who did him harm. Perfect Loving-kindness (*Metta*) is essential for the Buddha since it allows for infinite love without discrimination, thus providing the emotional foundation for leading all living beings to enlightenment.

10. Equanimity (*Upekkhā Pāramī*) - *Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka*

Equanimity (*Upekkhā*) is a balanced mind which is not disturbed by pleasure or pain. In the *Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka*, the *Bodhisatta* shows equanimity in all conditions. Perfect equanimity (*Upekkhā*) is the perfection of *Pāramīs* for the Buddhahood, which enables a Buddha to see everything clearly, impartially, and calmly.

These perfections are practiced at three levels:

1. Basic Level (*Pāramī*)
2. Intermediate Level (*Upapāramī*)
3. Ultimate Level (*Paramatthapāram*)

According to *Theravāda* commentarial tradition, the *Bodhisattva* destined for full Buddhahood is required to complete thirty perfections (*Pāramīs*).

The *Paccekabuddha* must fulfill twenty perfections, and the *Arahant*, enlightened through the teaching of the Buddha, perfects only ten. For *Theravāda*

practitioners, the *Bodhisatta* path is revered as inspiring, but it is not prescribed for all; the arahant ideal of personal liberation through direct realization of the Four Noble Truths remains the normative goal.

In contrast, *Mahāyāna* Buddhism universalizes the Bodhisattva ideal. *Mahāyāna* texts such as the *Lotus Sūtra*, *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, and *Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra* urge all practitioners to take the *Bodhisattva* vow a commitment to pursue enlightenment not solely for their own sake but for the liberation of all sentient beings. (Williams, 2009, pp. 25–29) The *Mahāyāna* tradition emphasizes qualities such as compassion (*Karuṇā*), wisdom (*Prajñā*), and skillful means (*Upāya*), presenting the Bodhisattva as the supreme religious ideal. This approach reframes the goal of practice, prioritizing collective awakening over individual *Nirvāṇa*.

Thus, while *Theravāda* preserves the *Bodhisatta* path as an extraordinary vocation culminating in the historical Buddha, *Mahāyāna* transforms it into a universal paradigm for all aspirants. The difference reflects broader doctrinal emphases: *Theravāda* focuses on the historical Buddha's example and personal liberation, whereas *Mahāyāna* expands the path into a cosmic, altruistic ideal. Despite these differences, both traditions honor the Bodhisattva as a symbol of selfless striving, moral perfection, and compassionate wisdom, making it one of the most enduring and inspiring archetypes in the Buddhist world.

The Bodhisattva Concept in Theravāda Buddhism

The term *Bodhisattva* (Pāli: *Bodhisatta*) refers to a being who aspires to attain *Bodhi* or Enlightenment. It literally means a “Buddha-to-be.” The word is derived from two parts: *Bodhi*, meaning “awakening” or “enlightenment,” and *Sattva*, meaning “a being.” Therefore, a *Bodhisattva* is understood as “a being whose nature or essence is enlightenment.”

The concept represents one who seeks spiritual awakening and strives toward Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. Some interpretations also suggest that the term may mean “one who is attached to or desires enlightenment.” (Kariyawasam, 2002, p. 4) In *Theravāda* Buddhism, the concept of the *Bodhisatta* (*Bodhisattva*) is discussed in two main ways. Prince Siddhartha’s life from his birth until his Enlightenment, describing the period when he was striving for Buddhahood through the practice of perfection (*Pāramitā*). During this stage, he was known as the *Bodhisatta*, meaning one who is destined to become the Buddha.

The concept extends to the Buddha’s numerous past lives as recorded in the *Jātaka* stories, where he appeared in different forms; human, animal, or divine; perfecting moral virtues such as generosity, patience, and wisdom. These stories illustrate his long journey of selfless effort and moral development across countless existences.

Thus, in the *Theravāda* tradition, the *Bodhisatta* ideal emphasizes the gradual cultivation of perfections (*Pāramitā*) through compassion, wisdom, and sacrifice, ultimately leading to the supreme attainment of Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.

In original *Pāli* Buddhism, the term *Bodhisatta* (*Bodhisattva* in Sanskrit) is mainly used to refer to the Gautama Buddha before his enlightenment. The idea of the *Bodhisattva* as the world-ruler (*Cakravarti*) existed even before the Buddha’s time. (Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya, 2020, p. 130). When Queen *Māyā* conceived Prince *Siddhārtha*, it was predicted that he would become either a world ruler or the Buddha. (Acchariyabbhutadhamma Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya, 2020, p. 290) The Buddha himself explained that he was not a god or spirit but one among the succession of Buddhas.

The *Sammāsambodhi* (Perfect Enlightenment) is described as a universal, impersonal event a rediscovery of the lost Dhamma. The Gautama Buddha, like earlier Buddhas, rediscovered and proclaimed it anew. Originally, the word *Bodhisatta* referred to Siddhārtha’s period from renunciation to enlightenment, later expanded to include from conception to enlightenment, and then to all Buddhas in their pre-enlightened stages.

With the doctrines of *Kamma* and rebirth, the term also came to represent previous lives of those aspiring to Buddhahood, as seen in the *Jātaka* stories.

The *Mahāpadāna Sutta* mentions six Buddhas before Gautama, giving details of their lives. Later, the *Buddhavaṃsa* expanded this list to twenty-eight Buddhas, a number accepted in *Theravāda* tradition, though not meant to be final Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas* are considered innumerable. (Mahāpadāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya, 2020, p.4) When Prince *Siddhārtha* attained Enlightenment, he did so as a human being, not as a divine or supernatural figure. He described himself simply as a Buddha, a discoverer of truth that others had lost. His uniqueness lay in his moral and intellectual perfection a *Mahāpurisa* (great man).

In *Theravāda* Buddhism, the Buddha is not worshipped as a deity but respected as a fully perfected human being who attained the highest wisdom through self-realization. The concept emphasizes human potential and moral development, not divine revelation or blind faith.

Scriptural Foundations of the Bodhisattva Life

The concept of the *Bodhisatta* in the *Pāli Suttapiṭaka* primarily refers to the historical Buddha *Gotama* before he attained full enlightenment. Unlike in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, where the term encompasses a broad ideal of universal salvation, the *Theravāda* canon applies the *Bodhisatta* in a more restricted and biographical sense. Under these subcategories, we discussed the nature of the Bodhisattva life.

1. Noble Search of the *Bodhisatta* (*Ariyapariyesana Sutta*)

In the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*, the Buddha recalls his decision to leave the household life. He describes the Bodhisatta as recognizing the limitations of worldly existence: “Household life is crowded and dusty; life gone forth is wide open.” By choosing renunciation, the *Bodhisatta* demonstrates the spirit of detachment (*Nekkhammapāramī*), one of the essential perfections.

“So kho ahaṃ, bhikkhave, aparena samayena daharova samāno susukāḷakeso, bhadrena yobbanena samannāgato paṭhamena vayasā akāmakānaṃ mātāpitūnaṃ assumukhānaṃ rudantānaṃ kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajim̐.” (Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya, 2020, p. 400)

In the Noble Search of the *Bodhisatta*, the Buddha recalls how, while still in the vigor of youth and blessed with health, strength, and beauty, he deliberately gave up the comforts of lay life. Though his parents longed for him to stay, overcome grief and tears, he felt compelled to leave behind wealth, status, and sensual pleasures, seeing them as subject to decay and ultimately unsatisfactory. With deep resolve, he shaved off his hair and beard, clothed himself in the ocher robe, and embraced the life of homelessness. His quest was not for things conditioned and perishable, but for the unconditioned peace of *Nibbāna*, a noble search directed toward the highest and deathless goal.

In Buddhist texts, the noble search of the Buddha often appears as *kim sacca gavesī*. (Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya, 2020, p. 400.) In the sense of questioning what kind of truth one is seeking, whether it is the truth bound with decay, illness, and death (the ignoble search), or the truth leading to the deathless, *Nibbāna* (the noble search).

2. The Struggle of the *Bodhisatta* with Austerities (*Mahāsaccaka Sutta*)

The *Bodhisatta* practices extreme self-mortification, such as breath control and fasting, in his search for awakening. He endured severe physical pain but remained mentally unshaken. These passages show his extraordinary determination (*Adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī*) and willingness to explore every possible path, even when it brought him to the brink of death.

“Ahampi sudam̐, bhikkhave, pubbeva sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisattova samāno attanā jātiddhammo samāno jātiddhammaṃyeva pariyesāmi, attanā jarāddhammo samāno jarāddhammaṃyeva pariyesāmi, attanā byādhidhammo samāno byādhidhammaṃyeva pariyesāmi, attanā

marañadhammo samāno marañadhammaṃyeva pariyesāmi, attanā sokadhammo samāno sokadhammaṃyeva pariyesāmi, attanā saṅkilesadhammo samāno saṅkilesadhammaṃyeva pariyesāmi.” (Mahāsaccaka Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya, 2020, p. 584)

In his struggle with austerities, the *Bodhisatta*, driven by the quest for awakening, subjected himself to extreme practices of fasting, breath-holding, and severe bodily torment, believing such self-mortification might lead to liberation. For six years he endured these hardships, reducing his body to skin and bones, yet realized that such extremes only brought suffering without yielding true insight. Abandoning futile austerities, he embraced the Middle Path, avoiding indulgence and self-torture, thus preparing himself for the attainment of Enlightenment.

3. The *Bodhisatta*’s Realization of the Middle Way (*Bodhirājakumāra Sutta*)

After rejecting extreme asceticism, the *Bodhisatta* recalls a childhood experience of natural meditative absorption (first *jhāna*) and realizes this form of happiness is not bound to sensuality. This insight leads to the discovery of the Middle Path between indulgence and self-mortification. It demonstrates the *Bodhisatta*’s wisdom (*Paññāpāramī*) in discerning the balanced way to liberation.

“Tassa mayhaṃ, rājakumāra, etadahosi: abhijānāmi kho panāhaṃ pitu sakkassa kammante sītāya jambucchāyāya nisinno vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamāṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharitā... (Bodhirājakumāra Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya, 2020, p. 484)

The *Bodhisatta*’s realization of the Middle Way arose when, reflecting on his childhood experience under the cool shade of the rose-apple tree, he remembered the natural ease and joy of the first *Jhana*, free from sensual indulgence and self-torment. This recollection revealed that true awakening could not be found in extremes of luxury or harsh austerities, but in a balanced path of calm, mindfulness, and insight.

Recognizing this as the way to liberation, he accepted nourishment to restore his strength and firmly resolved to follow this Middle Way, which ultimately led him to full Enlightenment.

4. Miraculous Events Around the *Bodhisatta's* Birth (*Acchariyabbhutadhamma Sutta*)

This sutta highlights the marvelous and extraordinary events surrounding the *Bodhisatta's* conception and birth. It portrays him as a being of exceptional destiny, marked by symbolic gestures such as taking seven steps and declaring his final birth. Though more mythic in tone, it emphasizes the uniqueness and rarity of the *Bodhisatta*.

1. Descent from *Tusita* Heaven – The *Bodhisatta*, before his final birth, dwells in the *Tusita* heaven and, when the time is ripe, descends into his mother's womb.
2. Mindful Conception – The *Bodhisatta* enters the womb of Queen *Māyā* mindfully and with full awareness.
3. Immaculate Womb – At the moment of conception, Queen *Māyā* becomes naturally pure in body; she experiences no discomfort or impurity.
4. Divine Protection – Devas guard and protect the *Bodhisatta* and his mother throughout the pregnancy.
5. Queen *Māyā's* Happiness – She experiences only happiness and comfort during her pregnancy.
6. Transparency of the Womb – Queen *Māyā's* body becomes translucent, allowing devas and humans with divine vision to see the *Bodhisatta* sitting cross-legged inside her womb.

“*Seyyathāpi, ānanda, maṇiratanam kāsike vatthe nikkhittam neva maṇiratanam kāsikam vattham makkheti nāpi kāsikam vattham maṇiratanam makkheti.*” (*Acchariyabbhutadhamma Sutta*, Majjhima Nikāya, 2020, p. 290)

This passage symbolizes the purity and uniqueness of the *Bodhisatta's* birth. Unlike ordinary beings, the intent on awakening (the *Bodhisatta*) is said to be born unsullied, free from impurities, just as a priceless jewel placed on fine

Kāsi cloth remains untainted as “*Na kho panassāhaṃ, bhikkhave, akāsikaṃ candanaṃ dhāremi. Kāsikaṃ, bhikkhave, su me taṃ veṭhanaṃ hoti, kāsikā kañcukā, kāsikaṃ nivāsanaṃ, kāsiko uttarāsaṅgo.*”. (Sukhumāla Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya, 2020, p. 264). The imagery emphasizes his exceptional nature and the extraordinary destiny he carries to attain Buddhahood. It illustrates that from the very beginning, his life was marked by purity, dignity, and an unshakable potential for awakening, setting him apart from worldly defilements.

- 7 Birth in *Lumbinī* – When Queen *Māyā* gives birth, she holds a tree branch, and the *Bodhisatta* is born standing upright.
- 8 Seven Steps – Immediately after birth, the *Bodhisatta* takes seven steps in the four cardinal directions.
- 9 Proclamation of Destiny – He declares: “I am the foremost in the world; this is my last birth; there will be no more becoming for me.”

5. The Bodhisatta’s Perfections in the Jātaka Tales

The *Jātaka* collection illustrates the *Bodhisatta*’s gradual cultivation of the ten perfections (*Pāramī*). Each life story demonstrates one or more virtues perfected across many rebirths: the *Jātaka* tales illustrate the *Bodhisatta*’s moral heroism and his cultivation of the ten *Pāramī* (perfections);

1. Generosity (*Dāna Pāramī*) - Vessantara Jātaka

“*Tadāsi yaṃ bhiṃsanakaṃ, tadāsi lomahaṃsanam; Mahādāne padinnamhi, medanī sampakampatha.*” (Vessantara Jātaka, Jātaka Pāli, 2020, p. 456)

Then there was something dreadful, then there was something hair-raising; when the Great Gift was given, the earth quaked.

2. Morality (*Sīla Pāramī*) - Buridatta Jātaka
3. Renunciation (*Nekkhamma Pāramī*) - Makhādeva Jātaka
4. Wisdom (*Paññā Pāramī*) - Ummagga Jātaka
5. Energy (*Viriya Pāramī*) - Mahājanaka Jātaka

6. Patience (*Khanti Pāramī*) - Khandalaka Jātaka
7. Truthfulness (*Sacca Pāramī*) - Vidurapanditha Jātaka
8. Determination (*Adhiṭṭhāna Pāramī*) - Temiya Jātaka
9. Loving-kindness (*Mettā Pāramī*) - Sāma Jātaka
10. Equanimity (*Upekkhā Pāramī*) - Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka

6. The Future Bodhisatta – Metteyya Buddha (*Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*)

The *Pāli* texts consistently define the *Bodhisatta* as “the future Buddha,” a being who is destined to realize supreme enlightenment and to establish the dispensation for others. This role sets him apart from other noble disciples. Whereas arahants realize liberation by following the Buddha’s teaching and paccekabuddhas attain enlightenment independently but do not establish a dispensation, the *Bodhisatta*’s vocation is unique: he not only seeks his own liberation but also the founding of a Dhamma path that leads multitudes to emancipation. Thus, the canonical sources depict the *Bodhisatta* as a rare figure, characterized by extraordinary resolve (*Adhiṭṭhāna*) and the gradual cultivation of perfections across many lifetimes, culminating in the attainment of Buddhahood.

Asītivassasahassāyukesu, bhikkhave, manussesu metteyyo nāma bhagavā loke uppajjissati araham sammāsambuddho vijjācaraṇasampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammasārathi satthā devamanussānaṃ buddho bhagavā. (*Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya*, 2020, p. 130)

And the Blessed One named *Metteyya* will arise in the world perfected, a fully awakened Buddha, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those who wish to train, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, and blessed just as I have arisen today.

Dasabodhisattuppattikathā, or “Ten Bodhisattva Birth Stories,” is a late Pali text that describes the lives of ten Bodhisattvas during their time as Bodhisattvas.

It is unique in Pali literature in that it is the only text that exclusively deals with Bodhisattvas that are destined to attain Buddhahood in the future. The text has several recensions, and these recensions vary in terms of vocabulary. However, their sequence and content are the same. The stories are about a virtuous person at the end of their cycle of rebirth, and their actions are full of merit and selfless deeds, including self-sacrifice, and are meant for the universal Buddha. The Bodhisattvas in this text are destined to be reborn one last time and attain Buddhahood.

1. Maitreya Buddha - *Maitreya* was formerly the monk Ajita, who accepted Gotamī's golden robe when others refused it. He demonstrated his destined role by retrieving the Buddha's hidden alms bowl and later donated the robe to the monastery. He currently resides in the *Tushita* realm, awaiting his future Buddhahood.
2. Rāma Buddha - Uttarakāma, who was Nārada in the time of Kassapa Buddha, once offered his life by burning himself as an act of devotion. It was predicted that he will become Rāma Buddha after 100,000 Sunya-Kalpas in the Maṇḍa-Kalpa.
3. Dhammaraja Buddha - Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, was a devoted lay follower (Upāsaka) of Gautama Buddha. He protected the Buddha from the sun and often invited him to the palace. In a past life, he was Śuddhā, a young man tending lotuses, and he is destined to become Dhammaraja Buddha.
4. Dhammassāmi Buddha - Abhibhū is a Bodhisatta who will appear in the next Sārā-Kalpa, several Sunya-Kalpas later. He will attain Buddhahood, after which 100,000 more Sunya-Kalpas will pass.
5. Nārada Buddha - Dīghasoṇī, a deva born as a Rāhu Asura in a newly formed Kalpa, is destined to become the first Buddha of that Kalpa.

6. Raṁsimunino Buddha - Caṅkī, also called Candanī, was a Brahmin who is destined to be the successor of Dīghasoṇī. He practices virtues that will lead him to future Buddhahood.
7. Devadevas Buddha - Subha, the son of Todeyya, was initially skeptical of the Buddha's insights. He learned about past lives through observing his pet dog and later devoted himself to the practice of Pāramitās and the Dhamma.
8. Narasīhassa Buddha - Todeyya, a wealthy Brahmin, hoarded possessions and neglected generosity during his life. In the afterlife, he was reborn as Subha's pet dog, and he will eventually cultivate merit that leads toward Buddhahood.
9. Tissa Buddha - Nālāgirī, an elephant sent by Devadatta to kill the Buddha, was fed alcohol but was tamed by the Buddha's compassion. He learned to follow the Five Precepts and was also called Danapāla, serving as an example of how even harmful beings can be transformed through Dhamma.
10. Sumangala Buddha - Pālileyya, the Elephant King, left his family to live alone and met the Buddha, learning the benefits of solitude. He cared for the Buddha during the Vassa season, guarded him, and followed him for alms. He died of grief but was later reborn as a deva in the Tāvātimsa Realm, and Myanmar traditions hold that he will have future lives as meditating kings.

7. Conclusion

In Mahayana Buddhism, a Bodhisattva is one who has realized the essence of Nibbana, characterized by boundless compassion and profound wisdom, both equally important and mutually reinforcing. The Bodhisattva path, called *Ekayāna* or "*One Vehicle*," is the sole route to Buddhahood, where the Bodhisattva vows to delay personal Nirvana until all beings are liberated.

By understanding emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and mind-matter (*citta-mātra*), the Bodhisattva acts selflessly, free from ego, attachment, and dualistic concern. They cultivate the six paramitas; generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom as the foremost, accumulating merit without expectation and sharing it universally for the benefit of all beings.

In *Theravāda* Buddhism, the *Bodhisatta* is a being who aspires to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. The term literally means “one whose life is dedicated to awakening (*Bodhi*).” Unlike Arahants, who seek personal liberation, or *Pacceka*buddhas, who attain solitary enlightenment, a *Bodhisatta* works over countless lifetimes to cultivate the qualities necessary to become a fully enlightened Buddha.

The nature of *Bodhisatta* life, as depicted in the *Pāli Suttapiṭaka*, illustrates a path of selfless dedication, moral excellence, and unwavering pursuit of Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. Through the cultivation of the ten *Pāramīs* (perfections) over countless lives, the *Bodhisatta* exemplifies extraordinary virtue, compassion, and wisdom, serving as a model of ethical and spiritual conduct. Canonical texts such as the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* and *Bodhirājakumāra Sutta*, along with the *Jātaka* tales, highlight both the sacrifices and noble actions of the *Bodhisatta* in past lives and in the final life of *Siddhattha Gotama*. Ultimately, the *Bodhisatta* ideal emphasizes that enlightenment is not merely a personal goal but, but a commitment to the liberation and welfare of all beings, demonstrating the profound altruism and perseverance that underpin the *Theravāda* vision of Buddhahood.

8. Reference list

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