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Marketing Morality: The Economy of Faith in Early Indian Buddhism

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“For householders in this world, poverty is suffering...
woeful in the world is poverty and debt.”
- *Āṅguttara-Nikāya* III. 350, 352

It has frequently been argued in scholarly articles and devotional tracts that Buddhism developed, to quote one recent academic work, as “a counter or alternative to the materialist society of...new cities where money ruled” (Bailey and Mabbett 2003: 25). According to this origin story, Buddhism took hold in India during a time of intense urbanization, when domestic and foreign trade boomed and the production and consumption of luxury goods increased the status—and, it seems, desires—of an emerging and emboldened middle class. Buddhism, it is said, offered a remedy for those enmeshed in the commercial world of the market and the inevitable give-and-take, earn and spend, that it entails. But did Buddhism really develop as an antidote to the market and consumerism? The short answer is “no.”¹

¹ There are many possible etiologies for Buddhism's development vis-à-vis the market. Buddhism may have made a deliberate attempt to counter the market by, as it were, fighting fire with fire. It may have tried to compete with commercialism by using its principles, and then ended up actually paying tribute to it by accepting its principles.

In the early centuries of the Common Era, Buddhism had a very close and formative relationship with merchants and mercantilism, and this relationship transformed Buddhism in fundamental ways, leaving the market's imprint on the very foundations of Buddhism. It isn't clear whether Buddhism embraced the market or was overrun by it; nevertheless, the logic of the market became embedded in Buddhist morality. In what follows, we shall first discuss the resultant market-based morality and the ways that merit and virtue in this system are subjected to the forces of commodification.² Second, we will discuss a practice of faith within this system that allows the disenfranchised to accrue enormous reserves of merit, establishing them on the spiritual path and enabling them to leapfrog those who have been more fortunate, if not more virtuous, than they themselves have been. Third, it will be argued that the way that personal agency is configured in this practice of faith offers crucial insight into Buddhist philosophical explanations of the stages of faith and their corresponding spiritual activities.

To this end, a number of stories from the *Divyāvadāna* (Divy), or "Divine Stories," will be considered. The text is a vast compendium of Indian Buddhist narratives written in Sanskrit from the early centuries of the Common Era, and its stories have since spread throughout Asia, as both narrative and narrative art, leaving an indelible mark on Buddhist thought and practice. Many of these stories were incorporated into the monastic code (*vinaya*) of the branch of Buddhists known as the Mūlasarvāstivādins, and this canonical text was

² For more on Buddhist morality before this process of commodification, see Gómez (1976).

later transmitted to Tibet, China, and beyond. As a result, scores of generations of Buddhists in Asia have considered these stories "the word of the Buddha" (*buddhavacana*), and have repeatedly recited, reworked, painted, and sculpted them. These are, in short, some of the most influential stories in the history of Buddhism.

My work on the *Divyāvadāna* has been helped immeasurably by Professor Bahulkar. Over the years, he has corrected my Sanskrit, as well as my Tibetan and Hindi, and it was at his suggestion that I decided to split my research time between Sarnath and Pune, following his excellent example. Professor Bahulkar also taught me the joys of Sanskrit recitation. Sitting with him by the Ganga and listening to him recite Jagannātha's *Gaṅgālaharī* made the holy river and Sanskrit poetry come vividly alive, forever changing my view of both. Such expressions of gratitude are generally abbreviated and relegated to footnotes; it is a pleasure to put them in the body of the text, fully and boldly.

PART I: MERCHANTS, MORAL ECONOMIES, AND MARKET MORALITIES

In more than a quarter of the stories in the *Divyāvadāna*, there are strikingly similar accounts of caravans of merchants bringing their goods to the seashore, loading them on ships, and setting off overseas to make their fortunes.³ Certain

³ The *Kotikarṇa-avadāna* (no. 1), the *Pūrṇa-avadāna* (no. 2), the *Supriya-avadāna* (no. 8), the *Dharmaruci-avadāna* (no. 18), the *Sahasodgata-avadāna* (no. 21), the *Sangharakṣita-avadāna* (no. 23), the *Cūḍapākṣa-avadāna* (no. 35), the *Mākaṇḍika-avadāna* (no. 36), and the

images appear again and again: the caravan leader deciding to organize an overseas venture to make money, the long and dangerous caravan journey to and from the ocean, the boatload of merchants docking at Ratnadvīpa (Treasure Island) to collect precious stones, the distraught relative bemoaning the dangers of the sea, and so on. Numerous other descriptions and stock passages regarding merchants, trade-goods, and maritime commerce are also scattered throughout the text.

There is also an unmistakable mercantile ethos in the conception of morality in these stories. The moral world of Buddhism in these stories is, quite explicitly, a moral economy. Use of the term "moral economy" in the present paper, however, requires some explanation, for it differs from the standard usage. In E. P. Thompson's seminal work on the moral economy of the English working class in the eighteenth century, he examines how and why a time of severe food shortages led that populace to "a pattern of social protest which derives from a consensus as to the moral economy of the commonweal" (1991: 260, 246). "The moral economy," Thompson (1991: 340) explains, "is summoned into being in resistance to the economy of the free market."

In regard to this element of resistance, at least in part, Thompson later criticizes the work of Paul Greenough (1982, 1983) on the Bengal famine of 1943–1944. While unjust food shortages created riots in eighteenth-century England, it seems that in Bengal,

"Food of all sorts lay before their eyes", while people were starving on the streets of Calcutta, "but no one

attempted to seize it by force". The attitude of the people was one of "complete resignation", and "they attribute their misery to fate or *karma* alone..." (Thompson 1991: 346; citing Greenough 1982)

As Thompson (1991: 347) responds, somewhat incredulously, "So deeply are the patriarchal values internalized [here] that the abandoned passively assent to their own abandonment."⁴

While Thompson is doubtful that in twentieth-century Bengal, morality could acquiesce so fully and completely to the market economy—and I'm not sure that it does (cf. Appadurai 1984)—this is just what we find in the *Divyāvadāna*. In its stories, the working population doesn't need to impose its morality on the market to make sure it is treated justly, nor does it need to resist the market. The market, with its notions of commodification and exchange, is the accepted template for moral action, so one needn't try to make the market *moral* by applying one's moral principles. That would be redundant. The dharma of the laity is, in many ways, already an extension of the rules and regulations found in the market. The moral economy in the *Divyāvadāna* is actually a market morality.

In the *Kanakavarṇa-avadāna* ("The Story of Kanakavarṇa"), we also read of a famine, and we are told

⁴ As Greenough (1982: 270) notes, however, "It is absurd to think that Bengali peasants were unresponsive in the face of famine. 'Fatalism,' the uncomplaining surrender to death by starving victims, is in fact the most obvious piece of evidence we have for an active Bengali adaptation to the famine. This was an adaptation, however, which succeeded only by imposing mortality upon some person in order to secure the survival of others."

both its cause and its solution. Long ago, King Kanakavarṇa ruled an incredibly wealthy and enormous kingdom, with eighty thousand cities, 570 million villages, eighteen thousand ministers, and twenty thousand wives. King Kanakavarṇa, the Buddha concludes, "followed the dharma and ruled his kingdom according to dharma."⁵

One day, however, "alone in a secluded place, absorbed in meditation,"⁶ it occurred to King Kanakavarṇa, "I really should exempt all merchants from customs and transit fees. I should exempt from taxes and duties all the people of Jambudvīpa (or "Black Plum Island", which is another name for India)."⁷ King Kanakavarṇa then enacted his plan, but "from ruling his kingdom in this way for many years, eventually the constellations became misaligned so that the heavens would produce no rain for the next twelve years."⁸ Distressed at this terrible predicament, King Kanakavarṇa arranged for all the food in Jambudvīpa to be collected in a single granary and then distributed in equal portions to all the people of Jambudvīpa. There was sufficient food for eleven years, but in the twelfth year "the rice and other means of subsistence collected from Jambudvīpa were finally

⁵ Divy 291.22, *dhārmiko babbhūva dharmeṇa*.

⁶ Divy 291.23, *ekākino rahogatasya pratisamlinasya*.

⁷ Divy 291.24–26, *yannv ahaṁ sarvabañjīo 'sulkān agulmān muñceyaṁ sarvajāmbudvīpakān manuṣyān akarān agulmān muñceyam iti*.

⁸ Divy 292.1–3, *tasy [ānenopāyena]^a bahūni varṣāṇi rājyaṁ kārayato 'pareṇa samayena nakṣatraṁ viṣamībhūtaṁ dvādaśa varṣāṇi devo na varsīsyati*.

^a Following Divy 181.5. Divy 292.1, "in many ways" (*anekopāyena*), presumably "in many wrong ways" (See Vaidya, 1959).

exhausted, except for a single measure of food which remained in King Kanakavarṇa's possession."⁹

At that time, fortuitously, a bodhisattva in King Kanakavarṇa's realm attained awakening as a solitary Buddha. Surveying all of Jambudvīpa with his divine sight, "that lord solitary buddha saw that the rice and other means of subsistence collected from Jambudvīpa were finally exhausted, except for a single measure of food which remained in King Kanakavarṇa's possession. It occurred to him, 'I really should have compassion for King Kanakavarṇa. I really should accept and consume alms from the home of King Kanakavarṇa.'"¹⁰

So the solitary buddha made use of his magical powers, flew over to King Kanakavarṇa's palace, and asked the king for food. King Kanakavarṇa then addressed his entourage: "Permit me, officers, to grant this last bit of rice that I, King Kanakavarṇa, possess. By this root of virtue (*kuśalamūla*) may all the people of Jambudvīpa be completely freed from poverty."¹¹ After placing that last bit of food in the solitary buddha's bowl, the king and his followers all prepared to die, succumbing at last to their hunger. But then the

⁹ Divy 293.15–17, *sarvajambudvīpād annādyam parikṣiṇam anyatra rājñāḥ kanakavarṇasyaikā mānikā bhaktasyāvaśiṣṭā*.

¹⁰ Divy 294.22–27, *sa bhagavān pratyekabuddhaḥ sarvajambudvīpād annādyam parikṣiṇam anyatra rājñāḥ kanakavarṇasyaikā mānikā bhaktasyāvaśiṣṭā | tasyaitad abhavat | yannv ahaṁ rājñāṁ kanakavarṇam anukampeyam yannv ahaṁ rājñāḥ kanakavarṇasya niveśanāt piṇḍapātam apahrtya paribhuñjīya*.

¹¹ Divy 296.5–8, *anumodata yūyaṁ grāmaṇyo 'yaṁ rājñāḥ kanakavarṇasyāpaścima odanātisargaḥ | anena kuśalamūlena sarvajāmbudvīpakānāṁ manuṣyāṇāṁ dāridryasamucchedaḥ syāt*.

solitary buddha caused it to rain, for weeks on end, first "soft foods, such as boiled rice, barley meal, lentils and rice, fish, and meat, and hard foods made from roots, stalks, leaves, flowers, fruits, sesames, candied sugar, molasses, and flour,"¹² and then grains, butter, cloth, and jewels. "Thanks to King Kanakavarṇa," we are told, "all this occurred, and the people of Jambudvīpa were completely freed from poverty."¹³

The cause of the famine in this story is the revoking of taxes. Taxation, as the text makes clear, is both moral and necessary. As a follower of the dharma, the king maintained taxes, duties, and tariffs, and he helped Jambudvīpa (that is, the Indian subcontinent) become a thriving and prosperous kingdom¹⁴. While absorbed in meditation, however, King

¹² Divy 297.10–14, *idam evamrūpaṃ bhojanam odanaśaktavaḥ kulmāṣamatsyamāmsam idam evamrūpaṃ khādaniyaṃ mūlakhādaniyaṃ skandhakhādaniyaṃ patrahādaniyaṃ puspakhādaniyaṃ phalakhādaniyaṃ tilakhādaniyaṃ khaṇḍaśarkaragudakhādaniyaṃ piṣṭakhādaniyaṃ |*

¹³ Divy 297.25–27, *sarvam asya rājñah kanakavarṇasyānubhāvena jāmbudvīpakānām manuṣyānām dāridryamsamucchedo babhūva*

¹⁴ Much the same could be said about King Aśoka. He followed the dharma, at least he professed to do so in his inscriptions, he implemented taxes, and he helped India become "a thriving and prosperous kingdom" (Thapar 1961). Nevertheless, in one of his pillar inscriptions, King Aśoka exempts the village of Lumbini from paying taxes because the Buddha had been born there (Barua and Chaudhury 1990: 38). A proper dharmarāja, it seems, can revoke the taxes for a village but not for an entire nation. Still, in the *Candraprabhabodhisattvacarya-avadāna*, the bodhisattva King Candraprabha rules a kingdom, more or less successfully, in which no taxes were paid (Divy 316.10). But can dharmarājas really be bodhisattvas and vice-versa?

Kanakavarṇa decides to implement an idea that he thinks is for the good of the people but which, unfortunately, contravenes dharma. Meditation, it seems, should be left to monastics¹⁵. The king abolishes taxes, perhaps under a libertarian-like notion of taxation as theft. Yet taxation has a moral and divine importance. As a result of this breach of dharma, a twelve-year famine ensues. The king then implements a policy of 100% taxation on edible goods, so that he can provide for the poor. He reapportions his kingdom's food in equal measure to his citizens, but the damage, both economic and cosmic, is already done.

The solution to the famine comes in the form of a newly awakened solitary buddha who decides to perform an act of compassion. After eleven years of famine, all the food in the kingdom has been consumed except for a single serving in the king's possession. The solitary buddha then flies to the king so that he can receive that last bit of food. In terms of nutrition, that single measure of food won't save the king or the kingdom. As an offering, however, that food serves as moral payment for a power to effect great change in the natural world. While in other cases such offerings give the donor purchase for a fervent aspiration (*praṇidhāna*)—to be reborn in a wealthy family, for example—here the king uses the merit accrued from his offering as the capital to buy his kingdom out of poverty.

The accrued merit is both "root" and "capital", the basis for future good deeds and attainments, and the purchase-power for current ones. Roots of virtue, Luis

¹⁵ The insights one gains in meditation may very well contravene royal laws and norms.

Gomez (1996: 332) observes, "are like roots (*mūla*) because, once performed, they remain as the basis for future virtue, and, if properly cultivated, grow, mature, and bear fruit."¹⁶ In this case, as our narrator the Buddha explains, King Kanakavarṇa's offering functioned as a "root" that helped him develop into a Buddha. Yet the term *mūla* also refers to one's capital or financial principal.¹⁷ To use a probably false cognate, *mūla* here really is the moola, the king's bank of virtue, which allows for the solitary buddha's moral action. King Kanakavarṇa must engage with the solitary buddha in a series of exchanges, first food for merit and then merit for food. King Kanakavarṇa must give to get, but the getting is good indeed when the recipient of one's moral action is such

¹⁶ In the *Divyāvadāna*, this agricultural metaphor is explicit. For example, in a trope that occurs a number of times in the text, the Buddha observes the world and comes to know the answers to many questions: among them, "For whom with roots of virtue unplanted shall I plant them? For whom [with roots of virtue already] planted shall I cause them to mature? For whom [with roots of virtue already] matured shall I cause them to be released" (*kasyānavaropitāni kuśalamūlany avaropayeyam | kasyāvaropitāni paripācayeyam | kasya pakvāni vimocayeyam* | Divy 124.27–125.2)? As Richard Gombrich (2003: 428) notes, "the metaphor underlying the karma doctrine (not, of course, only in Buddhism) is agricultural: one sows a seed and reaps a harvest."

¹⁷ In the *Cūḍapakṣa-avadāna*, to cite one example, the young boy Cūḍapakṣa takes a dead mouse and, acting on the advice of a guild master, uses it to barter and trade his way to a fortune. As a wealthy man, he then goes back to the guild master with a chest full of gold adorned with four jewelled-mice to pay back his debt. As he presents these offerings, he explains, "This is your capital; this is your profit" (*idam te mūlam ayam lābhaḥ* | Divy 504.2–3).

a great field of merit (*puṇyakṣetra*) as a solitary buddha.¹⁸ As the Buddha explains,

"Monks, if beings were to know the result of charity and the consequence of offering charity as I know the result of charity and the consequence of offering charity, then at present they would never eat the very last remaining mouthful of food without giving it away or sharing it, if a worthy recipient of that food were to be found."¹⁹

This famine in the *Divyāvadāna* prompts a remoralization of the kingdom. The king's abolishment of taxes as well as his egalitarian redistribution policy were immoral incursions on the market. The market had it right. Taxes are moral, for they help provide for the kingdom on the

¹⁸ Solitary buddhas are particularly good fields of merit for devotees to "plant" their meritorious deeds. "Thus," as John Strong (1989: 57) notes, "any good (or bad) action directed toward him can have positive (or negative) karmic results beyond all expectations." In the *Meṇḍhaka-avadāna*, for example, which contains another story of a famine, the householder Meṇḍhaka, his wife, son, daughter-in-law, servant, and maid each give the last portion of food that they possess to a solitary buddha. They then make fervent aspirations, all of which are fulfilled *immediately*. When the king hears of this, he exclaims: "Oh! This field is so fertile and faultless! A seed sown today bears fruit today as well (*aho guṇamayam kṣetram sarvadoṣavivarjitam | yatoptam vijam adyaiva adyaiva phaladāyakam* || Divy 135.12–13)! Since the solitary buddha constitutes a particularly fecund field of merit, the karmic results of their respective offerings are obtained on the same day.

¹⁹ Divy 298.2–7, *sa ced bhikṣavaḥ sattvā jāniyur dānasya phalam dānasamvibhāgasya ca phalavipākam yathāham jāne dānasya phalam dānasamvibhāgasya ca phalavipākam apidāniṃ yo 'sāv apaścimakah kavaḍaś carama ālopaṣ tato 'py adattvā 'samvibhajya na paribhuñjīran sa cel labheran dakṣiṇīyam pratigrāhakam.*

ground and among the stars. Taxes should be given to kings just as food offerings should be given to solitary buddhas. Both types of giving help provide for one's self and for one's community, and in both cases the recipients are worthy. The king's redemption comes with his decision to give away his country's last bit of food to a very worthy recipient. By making an offering to a solitary buddha, he earns enough merit to transform a single meal into a bounty sufficient to feed an entire kingdom.

This idea of a market morality, with its emphasis on accruing merit, has similarities to what Melford Spiro (1970) refers to as kammatic Buddhism. This is in opposition to nibbanic Buddhism, which stresses monkhood and meditation and is oriented toward ending rebirth.²⁰ Kammatic Buddhism is a moral system that emphasizes the performance of good deeds, giving (*dāna*) in particular, in order to accrue merit. The accrual of merit leads to health, wealth, and other such good things in life, and the more merit one accrues, the more of these things one experiences. In kammatic Buddhism, Spiro (1970: 119) writes, one's karma is "the net balance, the algebraic sum, of one's accumulated merit and demerit. If the accumulated merit is the larger, one's karma is good and karmic retribution is pleasurable; if the demerit is larger, one's karma is bad and karmic retribution is painful."

This quantification of merit finds its most obvious material manifestation in the widespread practice of what

²⁰ John Strong (1990: 122) rightly notes, however, that giving—such as a gift of food—"is an act that is kammatic and nibbanic at the same time," thus calling into question any simple soteriological distinction between these two forms of Buddhism. Cf. Aronson 1979.

Spiro refers to as "merit bookkeeping." According to Spiro (1970: 111), "Many Burmese keep merit account books, which at any time permit them to calculate the current state of their merit bank." Similar practices have also been observed in Sri Lanka (Rahula 1956: 254), and most notably in China, where merit accounting became quite popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Brokaw 1991). A particularly detailed account of merit bookkeeping occurs in *The Ledger of Merits and Demerits*, a famous Chinese morality book written in perhaps the twelfth century. There the religious practitioner is instructed as follows:

"As for the way of practice, one should always have a pen, an inkwell and a notebook ready by the head of the bed in the bedroom. First one should write down the month, and then write down the day of the month. Under each day, make two columns for merits (*kung*) and demerits (*kuo*). Just before one retires for the night, one should write down the good and bad things one has done during the day. Consult the *Ledger* for the points of each deed. If one has done good acts, record them in the merit column. If one has done bad things, record them in the demerit column. One should not just write down good acts and conceal bad ones. At the end of each month count the total of merits and demerits. Compare the two. Either subtract the number of demerits from the number of merits or use the number of merits to cancel out the number of demerits. After subtraction or cancellation, the number of merits or demerits remaining will be clear." (Yü 1981: 120–21)

Judging by such a description, Spiro's metaphor of the "merit bank" to explain an individual's stock of merit is not anomalous. In Chün-fang Yü's description of Buddhism in the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, she writes that "merit is similar to money" (1981: 122), an observation that holds true for Spiro's account of contemporary Burma and the narratives in the *Divyāvadāna*. Merit in the *Divyāvadāna* is the primary medium of exchange and measure of value for the Buddhist community. It can be earned, stockpiled, transferred, cashed in, and depleted. It is the principle commodity for the Buddhist community, and it is the gold standard for Buddhist morality.

Yet money is also similar to merit. The balance in one's actual bank account is indicative of one's moral standing. Numerous characters in the *Divyāvadāna* "cash in" the merit they've accrued from an offering in order to reborn "in a family that is rich, wealthy, and prosperous."²¹ Conversely, the possession of wealth often indicates an advanced position along the path toward spiritual awakening. Throughout the stories in the *Divyāvadāna*, characters that are destined for spiritual distinction in their own lifetimes are either born into wealth as laymen (such as Koṭikarṇa and Jyotiṣka) or royalty (such as Aśoka and Kanakavarṇa), or else they accrue wealth on their own (such as Pūrṇa and Supriya). It is as though the good karma that results in characters becoming wealthy also leads those characters to spiritual achievement. As Russell Sizemore and Donald Swearer (1992: 4) explain, "Because the law of ka[r]ma guarantees that each receives the fate merited by his [or] her acts and

²¹ Divy 23.18–19, 192.14–15, 289.6–7, 313.223, etc., *ādhye mahādhane mahābhoge kule*.

because wealth, being good, is a fit reward for meritorious action, prosperity is a proof of virtue."²²

The two economies, moral and commercial, don't just mirror each other, they also intersect and interact. Buddhism in the *Divyāvadāna* functions much like a currency exchange, providing places and procedures that allow individuals to exchange one currency for another. Instead of allowing for the conversion of dollars into roubles or rupees, however, it allows one to convert money and moral action into merit, and merit into money and moral attainment. And it offers excellent rates of return. One can accrue merit by giving to Buddhist saints and shrines, and merit can be transformed into roots of virtue for fervent aspirations that promise future wealth, be it economic or spiritual.

Such connections between merit and money are also indicative of much larger connections between the moral and economic spheres in Indian Buddhism. Considering the well-attested similarities between kings and buddhas,²³ as well as those between royal law and Buddhist law, taxes and almsgiving, it shouldn't be surprising that commercial law and moral law in the *Divyāvadāna* are shown to have overlapping jurisdiction.²⁴ These connections are likewise apparent in

²² Prayudh Payutto (1994: 76) likewise remarks that "the common tendency (in Thailand) [is] to praise people simply because they are rich, based on the belief," which he thinks is mistaken, "that their riches are a result of accumulated merit from previous lives."

²³ See also Reynolds 1972 and Collins 1998: 414–496.

²⁴ As Payutto (1994: 20) explains, "Ultimately, economics cannot be separated from Dhamma, because all the activities we associate with economics emerge from the Dhamma. Economics is just one part of a vast interconnected whole, subject to the same natural laws by which

brahmanical treatises, which share many ideas with their Buddhist counterparts. The Hindu system of the *trivarga*, for example, poses that the “trinity” of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*—nicely rendered by Wendy Doniger (2002: xiii) as “piety, profit, and pleasure”—are the three “aims of human life” (*puruṣārtha*). According to the *Arthaśāstra* (1.7.3) and the *Kāmasūtra* (1.2.1), these human aims are “interconnected” (*anyonyānubandham*), and even the *Manusmṛti*, which strenuously advocates the position of *dharma*, recommends that the three aims be pursued together (Manu II.224).²⁵

Such sentiments about money and merit in the *Divyāvādāna* are summed up quite fittingly by Bhartṛhari, the great philosopher of language from perhaps the sixth century. He offers counsel about wealth, greed, and propriety, as well as the relative merits of religious life, political power, and amorous pursuits. In one of his deservedly famous epigrams from the *Nīṭisatakam* (Kosambi 2000: 22, verse 51), he explains,

all things function. Dhamma describes the workings of this whole, the basic truth of all things, including economics. If economics is ignorant of the Dhamma—of the complex and dynamic process of causes and effects that constitutes reality—then it will be hard pressed to solve problems, much less produce the benefits to which it aims.”

²⁵ The *Mahābhārata* (MBh) also connects these three aims back to kingship. In Bhīṣma's instructions regarding the laws for kings, he explains that “the *dharma* of kings is the ultimate recourse for the entire sentient world. Hence the *trivarga* depends upon the *dharma* of kings” (*sarvasya jīvalokasya rājadharmāḥ parāyaṇam | trivargo 'tra samāsakto rājadharmeṣu...|* MBh 12.56.3–4; cf. trans. in Fitzgerald 2004: 296).

yasyāsti vittam sa naraḥ kulīnaḥ
sa paṇḍitaḥ sa śrutavān guṇajñāḥ |
sa eva vaktā sa ca darśaniyaḥ
sarve guṇāḥ kāñcanam āśrayanti ||

“It's the rich man who has high status.
 He's the scholar, the learned and discerning one,
 the only one thought to be an orator and considered
 handsome.
 Gold carries with it all good qualities.”

PART II: WEALTH, FAITH, AND WELFARE

One might expect that the Buddhist moral economy that I have described would adhere to a cross economic determinism whereby a move from the commercial world to the moral world would preserve economic hierarchies. One might expect, that is, that merit can be readily purchased, and so the more money one has, the more merit is at one's disposal. Hence, those rich in money can become rich in merit, and vice versa, and those poor, in finances and in merit, remain as such.

For example, the *Dānādhikaraṇa-mahāyānasūtra* (“The Mahāyāna Sūtra Dealing with the Chapter on Giving”)²⁶ simply lists 37 gifts that a wise man should give and the results that will accrue from each gift. Only some of those results, however, are spiritual, like becoming fully

²⁶ Considering that this text is little more than an enumeration of proper gifts and their results, its presence in the *Divyāvādāna* further attests to this “gold standard” as system of knowledge that had both cachet and currency.

purified from attachment, hate, and delusion. Many of the gifts result only in material benefits. One gives wealth to get more wealth. For example,

[12.] He gives a gift of clothing, which results in his enjoying excellent clothing.

[13.] He gives a gift of shelter, which results in his having distinguished mansions, apartments, palaces, residences, multistoried buildings, gardens, and parks.

[14.] He gives a gift of a bed, which results in his enjoying himself in an upper class family.²⁷

As the text makes clear, wealth is also primary among the reasons that meritorious deeds are performed in the first place. In a number of stories, characters make offerings and then use the merit accrued from such offerings to gain—if not purchase—future wealth. For example, in the Buddha's account of what the merchant Koṭikarṇa did in the past that resulted in what transpired in the present, he narrates how in a previous life Koṭikarṇa—then a caravan leader from the North Country—donated a jewelled earring and additional funds to help repair a broken-down shrine. After making these contributions, he performed a great *pūjā* and then made this fervent aspiration: “By this root of virtue may I be born in a family that is rich, wealthy, and prosperous!”²⁸ As a result

²⁷ Divy 482.16–20, *vastradānam dadāti praṇītavastrabhogavipākā-pratilābhasaṁvartanīyam | pratiśrayaṁ dānam dadāti harṁyakūṭāgā-raprāsādabhavanavimānodyānārāmaṁviśeṣavipākāpratilābhasaṁvartanīyam | śayyādānam dadāti uccakulabhogavipākāpratilābhasaṁvartanīyam.*

²⁸ Divy 23.18–20, *anenāhaṁ kuśalamūlenāḍhye mahādhane mahābhoge kule jāyeyam.*

of his fervent aspiration, the Buddha explains, this is precisely what occurred. Financial wealth accumulated in one life was used to make a vow to ensure financial wealth in the next life as well.

Yet the very mechanism that allows one to participate in this market morality undermines this economic determinism. The poor are given special access and dispensation that allows them to earn more merit than an equal exchange on their finances would yield. This configuration allows one with little material wealth, little knowledge, and even little interest in Buddhism to embark on the Buddhist spiritual path with promise of great results. The rich, conversely, are handicapped by their good fortune and must struggle to join and benefit from this moral economy. Let me explain.

The price of admission into this system of Buddhist morality is *prasāda* or “faith”—not faith *in* the Buddhist moral economy but the faith that admits and empowers one as a Buddhist. Faith is the seed money that allows one to invest in a Buddhist future. It allows one to buy in, creating the possibility for “spiritual growth.” To use the analogy of a card game, faith is like the chips one receives to ante up for a first hand. While one can perform good or bad deeds without faith, one does so not as a Buddhist, and the rewards are limited.²⁹ To be a Buddhist, faith is a requisite. And once one

²⁹ Nevertheless, non-Buddhist practitioners in the *Divyāvadāna* can still acquire some spiritual attainments. In the *Prātihārya-Sūtra*, for example, a mendicant named Subhadra is said to possess the five superhuman faculties (Divy 152.22–23).

has faith, one can participate in the Buddhist moral economy, readily accruing moral value through good deeds.

The form of faith known as *prasāda*, moreover, is worth a lot in this economy. Charged with such faith, one can make offerings with very little worth or utility and earn huge amounts of merit. The *Nagarāvalambikā-avadāna* ("The Story of a Woman Dependent on a City for Alms") provides a particularly graphic representation of this phenomenon. In the story, a leprous beggar woman sees the venerable Mahākāśyapa who "instills *prasāda* through his body and instills *prasāda* through his mind,"³⁰ and decides to make him an offering.

"Then the venerable Mahākāśyapa, understanding her thoughts with his mind, held out his begging bowl. "If you have anything to spare, my sister, please put it in my bowl."

Cultivating *prasāda* in her mind, she poured [some rice-water] into his bowl. Then a fly fell in. She began to take it out when one of her fingers fell off into the rice-water. She reflected, "Although the noble one, out of respect for my feelings, hasn't thrown [this rice-water] away, he won't partake of it."

Then the venerable Mahākāśyapa, understanding her thoughts with his mind, right before her eyes, sat down against the base of a wall and began to eat.

She reflected, "Although the noble one, out of respect for my feelings, has partaken of this, he won't think of this food as a proper meal."

Then the venerable Mahākāśyapa, understanding her thoughts, said this to that woman who was dependent

³⁰ Divy 82.13–14, *kāyaprāsādikaś cittaprāsādikaḥ*.

on the city for alms: "Sister, I am happy! I can pass the whole day and night on the food [that you have given me]."³¹

She became very excited. "The Noble Mahākāśyapa has accepted alms from me!" Then, while cultivating *prasāda* in her mind for the venerable Mahākāśyapa, she died and was reborn among the gods in the heaven known as Tuṣita (Contented).³²

³¹ Elsewhere in the *Divyāvadāna* (Divy 61.28–29, 395.23 [= Aśokāv 90.6]) it is said that Mahākāśyapa is "foremost of those who preach the virtues of the purified" (*dhūtaguṇavādinām agro*). Among these virtues—which are, more accurately, a code of ascetic practices—is "eating in a single place" (*ekāsanika*). If Mahākāśyapa observed this ascetic code, he would eat only once a day and in only one place, and hence whatever the beggar woman offered him would have to suffice as his food for the day (see Ray 1994: 145, note 39). For more on the *dhūtaguṇas*, see Ray 1994: 293–323.

³² Divy 82.17–83.2, *tata āyusmatā mahākāśyapena tasyāś cetasā cittam ājñāya pātram upanāmitam | yadi te bhagini parityaktam dīyatām asmin pātra itī | tatas tayā cittam abhiprasādya tasmīn pātre dattam makṣikā ca patitā | sā tām apānetum ārabdhā / tasyāś tasmīn ācāme 'ṅguliḥ patitā | samlakṣayati | kim cāpy āryeṇa mama cittānurakṣayā na cchorito 'pi tu na paribhokṣayatī | athāyusmatā mahākāśyapena tasyāś cetasā cittam ājñāya tasyā eva pratyakṣam anyatamam kuḍyamūlam niśritya paribhuktam | sa samlakṣayati | kim cāpy āryeṇa mama cittānurakṣayā paribhuktam nānenāreṇāhārakṛtyam kariṣyātī | athāyusmān mahākāśyapas tasyāś cittam ājñāya tām nagarāvalambikām idam avocat | bhagini prāmodyam <utpādayāmi>^a aham tvadiyēnāhāreṇa rātrim divasam atināmayiṣyāmīti | tasyā ativaudbilyam utpannam mamāryeṇa mahākāśyapena piṇḍapātaḥ pratigrhīta itī | tata āyusmati mahākāśyape cittam abhiprasādya kalam gatā tuṣite devanikāye upapannā.*

^a Following Gilgit Manuscript iii 1, 81.12. Divy 82.28–29, *utpādayasi*. Without this emendation, one would be forced to

If the leprous beggar woman's offering of rice-water (with ūnger) were to be judged by its use-value, even though Mahākāśyapa managed to make a meal of it, she no doubt would have earned very little merit. With the enumeration of offerings and their rewards in the previously mentioned *Dānādhikaraṇa-mahāyānasūtra* as a benchmark, an offering of some rice-water wouldn't merit rebirth among the Tuṣita gods. While the woman may have been just one small offering away from attaining the karmic threshold that would allow her such an auspicious rebirth, the emphasis here is on how faith can elevate even a mundane offering into something, karmically speaking, very valuable.

Throughout the *Divyāvadāna* there are numerous accounts of donors, suddenly instilled with faith, making offerings of items that have little market value, and then the Buddha foretelling the great results that such offerings will bring. Likewise, there are also many accounts of individuals attaining some distinction, and then the Buddha explaining that this occurred because these individuals had become filled with faith and then made some particular offerings—once again, ones with little financial value, including a lump of clay,³³ some barley meal,³⁴ some rice gruel,³⁵ and a stanza of

misread the verb as an imperative—as in “be happy” or “you should be happy.”

For a discussion of this story in the context of the various representations of Mahākāśyapa, see Ray 1994: 109–110 and Wilson 2003.

³³ Divy 366.9–11 (= Aśokāv 31.7–8).

³⁴ Divy 67.14–15.

³⁵ Divy 461.25.

poetry.³⁶ These offerings were karmically valuable, however, because they were gifts initiated out of faith.³⁷ What the text emphasizes is that the karmic value of an offering isn't determined exclusively by its material worth. Rather, it is determined by its worth as an object or practice plus the “worth” of the mental state. And what is stressed repeatedly in these accounts is that the mental state of *prasāda* is worth a great deal in terms of its karmic value.

But who gets to have faith? Who gets to be Buddhist? What is stressed in these accounts is that such practices of faith are easily accessible to the poor, especially to those with

³⁶ Divy 72.12–14.

³⁷ This is not to say, though, that *prasāda*-initiated offerings are not in some sense valuable, for they are valuable in terms of an economy of merit. Working from Georg Simmel's (1979: 62ff.) idea that “value” is a function of the resistance that has to be overcome in order to gain access to an object, a certain resistance can be postulated for merit. This resistance isn't due to a high price, for merit cannot simply be purchased; rather, this resistance occurs because merit is accrued through meritorious deeds, and the performance of such deeds takes time, resources, and effort. This accruing of merit, in turn, is what allows one to advance in the karmic hierarchy existence. Even the Buddha is said to have “come into being by [performing] many hundreds of meritorious deeds” (*anekapuṇyaśatanirjāta* - Divy 56.21–22). But in the case of encountering *prāsādika* objects, large amounts of merit can be earned in a short time, with few resources and almost no effort, approaching what Alfred Gell calls “the magic-standard of zero work.” As Gell (1992: 58) explains, “All productive activities are measured against the magic-standard, the possibility that the same product might be produced *effortlessly*, and the relative efficacy of techniques is a function of the extent to which they converge towards the magic-standard of zero work for the same product...” (italics added).

little of value to give, and difficult to access for the rich. Later in the *Nagarāvalambikā-avadāna*, for example, King Prasenajit, ruler of Kośala, and Śakra, lord of the gods, are both incapable of generating faith—and, hence, becoming Buddhists—and both are spiritually surpassed by a beggar woman who, instilled with faith, offered a single oil lamp to the Buddha. Testifying to the power of this woman's offering is the quite literally unbelievable reward that she will receive as a result. She will be Śākyamuni Buddha himself. Regardless of whether this means that she will be a future Śākyamuni Buddha who is seemingly identical to his predecessor or, more ontologically troubling, the very Śākyamuni Buddha to whom she has just made an offering, the prediction has an unmistakable force. A poor person who makes an offering initiated out of faith toward an appropriate field of merit can achieve the very highest results. Conversely, the text is explicit that within the discourse of *prasāda* only “those beings who suffer” (*duḥkhitajana* | Divy 84.7) can generate faith and make the valuable offerings that faith engenders. Kings and gods don't fit into this category because they are “established in the results of their own merit” (*svapūṇyaphale vyavasthitah* | Divy 83.17-18). According to the text, there is something wrong about someone successful, someone luxuriating in the results of previous good deeds, trying to make offerings to earn additional merit. It runs contrary to the “law of nature” (*dharmatā*).

Two central ideas about personal agency are at work in this discourse of *prasāda*. First, the text emphasizes that certain objects—such as buddhas, images of buddhas, arhats, and stūpas—are “agents of *prasāda*” (*prāsādika*), and when

particular individuals (generally the poor and disenfranchised) come into visual contact with such objects, *prasāda* arises in them. Unlike the Pali materials, the *Divyāvadāna* portrays the arising of this mental state as having less to do with the personal natures and predispositions of individuals than with the impersonal functioning and effects of conditioned existence.³⁸ Second, as it is made clear elsewhere in the *Divyāvadāna*, regardless of such individuals' desires, the mental state of *prasāda* seems to lead, invariably, to an act of giving, which in turn yields beneficial results in the future, and occasionally directly to an auspicious rebirth. As it is explained in *Sahasodgata-avadāna* (“The Story of Sahasodgata”), being possessed of *prasāda* involves “doing the duty of one who has *prasāda*” (*prasannādhikāram* + \sqrt{kr} | Divy 305.5–9, Divy 308.13–309.1), and the text is explicit that this “duty” (*adhikāra*)³⁹ is an almost compulsive need to make an offering.

³⁸ This notion of individuals being moved by an agency outside themselves is particularly apparent in case of the guildmaster's son in the *Māndhātā-avadāna*. When he sees the fully awakened Sarvābhibhū, “intense *prasāda* arises in him” (*atīva prasāda utpannaḥ* | Divy 226.27). This is then glossed by saying that “he is one whose mind is made to be possessed of *prasāda*” (*prasādikṛtacetā* | Divy 226.28). Although no agent is specified, it seems that the arising of *prasāda* is not caused by the efforts of the guildmaster's son but by the power of the fully awakened Sarvābhibhū's visage.

³⁹ The sense of *adhikāra* here is difficult to capture with a single-word translation in English. It is one's duty, one's obligation or prerogative, what one simply does, but yet it neither has a sense of coercion nor of being something that one could easily refuse to do. It is a duty, an impetus, and a compulsion, but also a privilege.

In short, the agency that motivates the mechanics of *prasāda* seems to inhere as much in the object of engagement as in the subject. It is precisely this outside agency of *prasāda* that makes *prasāda*-initiated giving so effective. Within the rigid fatalism of cause and effect that is so conspicuous in the *Divyāvādāna*, only an outside agent can generate a karmic intrusion that will allow one to escape from one's karmic destiny. Individuals are destined to live out their karma and suffer, lifetime after lifetime, reaping precisely what they have sowed, unless there is a karmic intervention to alter the vector of their lives. Within the text, *prasāda* is just such a force. It allows one to escape one's fate and embark on the Buddhist path toward liberation.⁴⁰

PART III: STAGES OF FAITH AND ISSUES OF AGENCY

Although there is no mention in the *Divyāvādāna* of faith coming in stages, my sense is that *prasāda* was understood as a preparatory state that initiated one's development as a Buddhist, but was meant to be supplemented, if not superseded, by additional stages of faith. Some sense of these stages can be inferred from the definition of *śraddhā*, a general term for "faith," in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (Abhidh-sam), a text attributed to the fourth-century philosopher Asaṅga:

"What are the forms of *śraddhā*? It is *conviction* in what is real, *prasāda* regarding that which has virtuous

⁴⁰ According to Andrea Pinkney (personal communication), *prasāda* functions as a kind of divine grace in the Epics, Purāṇas, and Tantras.

qualities, and *longing* for what is possible. It has the function of providing a basis for will (emphasis added)."⁴¹

Here *śraddhā* is conceived of as an encompassing term for three forms of faith: (1) *abhisampratyaya*, (2) *prasāda*, and (3) *abhilāṣa*. In his commentary on this passage, Sthiramati, a sixth-century scholastic, offers this gloss: "*śraddhā* has [1] the form of conviction in what is the case. It has [2] the form of *prasāda* concerning the good qualities possessed [by the three jewels]. And it has [3] the form of yearning for what is possible, as when one thinks 'I can obtain it' or 'I can make it so.'"⁴²

Now what is the relationship between these elements? Judging by a similar commentary on this passage in the eighteenth-century Tibetan text entitled *The Necklace of Clear Understanding: An Elucidation of the System of Mind and Mental States (Sems dang sems byung gi tshul gsal bar ston pa blo gsal mgul rgyan)*,⁴³ these three mental states represent a progression, a sequence of spiritual development. In this text, however, the order is (1) *prasāda*, (2) *abhisampratyaya*, and then (3) *adhimukti*, a common

⁴¹ Abhidh-sam 16.7–8- *śraddhā katamā | astitvaguṇavattvaśakyatv- tvesvabhisampratyayaḥ prasādo 'bhilāṣaḥ | chandasarṇiśraya- dānakarmikā.*

⁴² Abhidh-sam-bh 5.10–12- *astitve 'bhisampratyayākārā śraddhā | guṇavatte prasādākārā | śakyatve 'bhilāṣākārā śakyarṇ mayā prāptum niṣpādayitum veti.* For another translation of Sthiramati's commentary, see Guenther 1976: 64.

⁴³ My thanks to John Dunne for sharing the as yet unpublished translation of the text that he has done with J. B. Apple. For a previous translation, see Guenther and Kawamura 1975.

replacement in the scholastic tradition for *abhilāṣa*⁴⁴. Regardless of the precise ordering and terminology, what is important with regard to the issues in my talk is that there is a progression, a sense of *stages* of faith, and that *prasāda* represents an early one.

In this lineage of scholarship, *prasāda* is a state of mental clarity in which mental disturbances are quieted. It is thus a state of "inspired clarity," as the term is sometimes translated, with regard to "that which has virtuous qualities"—namely, the three jewels: the Buddha, the dharma, and the monastic community. *The Necklace of Clear Understanding* makes clear that *prasāda* provides one with the mental clarity that allows one to develop *abhisampratyaya*. Without the clarity of *prasāda*, most individuals cannot think clearly enough to develop *abhisampratyaya*. *Abhisampratyaya* is a "conviction" or "trusting confidence" in the fact that certain things are the case, that is, that they have *astitva*. Here *astitva* means that something exists, but as in the Vaiśeṣika context, it also conveys the notion that certain claims are true. Basically *abhisampratyaya* entails a reasoned acceptance of the most fundamental Buddhist truths. The Tibetan commentary cites interdependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which is a common example. The process of generating such faith involves examining the Buddha's teaching and realizing through reasoning that what he has said is true. *Abhilāṣa* or *adhimukti* is a "longing" or "yearning" to become like the objects in which one has faith—that is, the three jewels—and

⁴⁴ John Dunne (personal communication) notes that this order is quite common in later Tibetan texts as is *adhimukti* appearing in place of *abhilāṣa*.

it is based on realizing that one can indeed become like them. It thus presupposes *abhisampratyaya*, for it is in the context of developing *abhisampratyaya* that one realizes that it is possible to become a buddha.

One might imagine this sequence in a scenario such as this: An individual sees a stūpa, and then *prasāda* arises in him, along with a sense of mental clarity and tranquillity, and an urge to give. This experience of *prasāda* is relatively passive, for it is the *prasāda*-inducing powers of the stūpa that generates faith in the individual, tilling his field of merit so that roots of virtue can be planted. With the arising of *prasāda*, the individual then becomes an active agent in his development as a Buddhist. He studies the Buddha's teachings and comes to a "conviction" (*abhisampratyaya*) that at a fundamental level they are true. He does not yet have a full realization of the four noble truths, but he grasps the truth of teachings such as interdependent arising and karma. He further understands that, according to these basic principles, he too can become like the Buddha. His experiences of inspired clarity and his study of the Buddha's teaching have led him to greatly admire the Buddha. Hence, now that he knows that he can become buddha-like, his admiration engenders a "longing" to become a buddha.

This third stage of "longing" is well represented in various jātakas and, indeed, in the *Divyāvadāna* itself. There are numerous accounts of bodhisattvas who, yearning to become buddhas, perform exceptionally difficult deeds in pursuit of this goal, like sacrificing one's body to feed a starving beast. In the end, this is a longing for nirvāṇa, not just for a better rebirth, as with *prasāda*-initiated action. This

bifurcation calls to mind Spiro's distinction between nibbanic and kammatic Buddhism, as well as the soteriological limits of the moral economy that kammatic Buddhism entails.

This emphasis on the heroic agency of the bodhisattva, and the trying deeds that he must perform, contrasts with the distinctively non-heroic agency of those in whom faith is shown to awaken. For *prasāda* to arise in an individual, he or she needn't exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually. Simply catching sight of a Buddha image or a shrine—or perhaps even a senior monk (Mrozik 2007: 73–76)—is sufficient. One need not even be aware of the arising of *prasāda*. The exigencies of *prasāda* and the actions that it engenders are sufficient to start one on the Buddhist path, even if one isn't cognizant of faith's arising or its great rewards. It is only later, as the text explains, “after striving, struggling, and straining”⁴⁵, that one can come to experience arhatship.

This formulation of *prasāda* undermines the fantasy of sovereign, imperial, or heroic consciousness in agency, and in doing so offers a glimpse into the ways that power uses people, not just the converse.⁴⁶ Characters in the *Divyāvadāna* are not fully sovereign subjects, and it is soteriologically important that they aren't. As I mentioned previously, faith is represented as a karmic intervention, an outside force that generates thought and action, and as such it

⁴⁵ *tena yujyamānena ghaṭamānena vyāyacchamāna*- Divy 180.21–22.

⁴⁶ As Lauren Berlant (2007: 757) notes, “We persist in an attachment to a fantasy that in the truly lived life emotions are always heightened and expressed in modes of effective agency that ought justly to be and are ultimately consequential, or performatively sovereign.”

provides individuals a means to create for themselves a new existence and a better destiny. With faith, individuals can act *as* Buddhists and *in* the Buddhist moral economy, and the outside agency of *prasāda*-initiated action ensures that it will be performed with the right intention, circumventing any possible base inclinations or motives.

But what are the ethical implications of a system in which one becomes a Buddhist and first acts as a Buddhist with little self-consciousness or choice? In the conclusion to *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*, Joel Robbins (2004: 315) offers this assessment of the ethical field: “Having defined the moral domain as one in which actors are culturally constructed as being aware both of the directive force of values and of the choices left open to them in responding to that force, we have to recognize that it is fundamentally a domain that consists of action undertaken consciously... The ethical field cannot be governed by unconscious cultural compulsion.”

Yet the practice of *prasāda* is governed by just such a compulsion. It is impersonal, in that it is prompted by an outside agent, and seemingly amoral, for it is outside the domain of moral choice. Such a depiction of the awakening of faith challenges the idea of the newly minted Buddhist as an autonomous subject, as well as the normativity of the heroic agency found in stories of the *bodhisattva*. The discourse of *prasāda* is more about negotiating and accommodating the power of others than asserting one's own, and as such requires a conception of the Buddhist ethical field that understands the limitations of personal and practical sovereignty.

This configuration of *prasāda*, with its reliance on a non-heroic human agency, well serves a public that is poor, in terms of both merit and money. While according to karma theory, one reaps what one sows, and as such is in control of one's life and destiny, it is this population, the disenfranchised and disempowered, that has the most difficulty maintaining control of its survival. The king in the *Kanakavarṇa-avadāna* is about to starve. The leprous beggar woman in the *Nagarāvalambikā-avadāna* is in pain with rotten limbs. Though struggling to endure, they needn't worry about mustering the courage, resolve, and determination of the bodhisattva to embark on the Buddhist path. These characters may be karmically responsible for their suffering, but they are not responsible for the faith that will help them escape it. *Prasāda* is a wonderful refuge for the powerless.

Yet not everyone is powerless. While the unfortunate and suffering are shown to make *prasāda*-initiated offerings and progress in the Buddhist moral economy, individuals at more advanced stages of faith may choose to opt out of that economy and participate in a field that is more oriented toward nirvāṇa. In the *Cakravartivyākṛta-avadāna* ("The Story of One Foretold to be a Cakravartin King"), a monk, while prostrating himself before a stūpa containing some of the Buddha's hair and nails, generates in his mind an image of the Buddha and cultivates *prasāda*. Witnessing this, the Buddha enjoins the monastic community to observe that monk, and then he foretells the monk's future:

"As many grains of sand as there are in that space between the land that this monk has tread upon and the

stratum of the golden wheel,⁴⁷ which is eighty thousand leagues down below [in the centre of the earth], this monk will enjoy that many thousands of reigns as a World-Conquering king."⁴⁸

Then it occurs to the monks that-

"One cannot count the grains of sand in a pit that is a man's height in depth, what then of those in the eighty thousand leagues leading down to the stratum of the golden wheel? Who can pass so much time stuck in saṃsāra?" So from then on those monks never again made offerings to a stūpa for [a buddha's] hair and nails."⁴⁹

For the suffering masses engaged in the karmic project of performing good deeds to accrue merit for a favourable rebirth, the experience of *prasāda* is very effective. It assures them a reward in the future. But for those monks who desire to transcend more quickly the repeating cycle of birth, death, and birth again, cultivating *prasāda* isn't very effective. The experience of *prasāda* produces good karma, and that good karma has great purchase within the realm of saṃsāra, but that same good karma also binds one within this realm. The

⁴⁷ For more on the stratum of the golden wheel within cakravāla cosmology, see *Abhidharmakośa* III.45–55 (Abhidh-k 451–455) and Kloetzli 1997: 32–39.

⁴⁸ *anena bhikṣuṇā yāvati bhūmir ākrāntā adho 'śītiyojanasahasrāṇi yāvat kāñcanacakram ity atrāntarā yāvantyo vālukās tāvanty anena bhikṣuṇā cakravartirājasahasrāṇi paribhoktavyāni*- Divy 197.7–10.

⁴⁹ *puruṣamātrāyām yāvad gartāyām na śakyate vālukā gaṇayitum kutaḥ punar aśītiyojanasahasrāṇi yāvat kāñcanacakram iti | kaḥ śakyate iyatkālam saṃsāre saṃsaritum iti | atha te bhikṣavo na bhūyaḥ keśanakṣastūpe kārām kartum ārabdhāḥ*- Divy 197.10–14.

monk in the story will have to pass eons as a *cakravartin* king, with no mention even made of his future awakening. The impropriety of this practice for monks, who are supposed to be eager to escape *saṃsāra*, is apparent in this long karmic sentence. Since *nirvāṇa* is an extinguishing of karma, good karma, including that produced by *prasāda*, can get in the way.

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