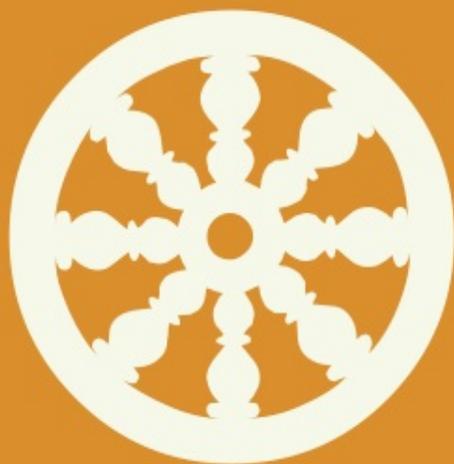


Wheel Publication No. 360/361

**Mātr̥ceṭa's  
Hymn to the Buddha**

*An English Rendering  
of the Śatapañcāśatka*

**Ven. S. Dhammika**



# Mātr̥ceṭa's Hymn to the Buddha

An English Rendering of the  
Śatapañcāśatka

By

Ven. S. Dhammika

**Buddhist Publication Society**  
**Kandy • Sri Lanka**

**The Wheel Publication No. 360/361**

First Published: 1989

Copyright © BPS, 1989

Digital Transcription Source: Buddhist Publication Society  
and Access to Insight

For free distribution. This work may be republished, reformatted, reprinted and redistributed in any medium. However, any such republication and redistribution is to be made available to the public on a free and unrestricted basis and translations and other derivative works are to be clearly marked as such and the Buddhist Publication Society is to be acknowledged as the original publisher.

# Introduction

For centuries people have stood in awe of the Buddha and his attainments and have strived to express their feelings in stone and bronze and with brush and ink. Some have been moved by what the Buddha said, its logical consistency, its scope and its humanism. Others have been inspired by the personality of the Lord himself, his manner and conduct, and even his physical form. The joyful faith and appreciation that is evoked on recollecting the Buddha's personality and singing his praise gives such people the strength they need to walk the Path. For them the Dhamma comes alive through the life and example of the Buddha.

Such a person was the poet Mātr̥ceṭa. He was born in India in about the first century A.D., and was converted from Hinduism to Buddhism by the great philosopher Āryadeva. He wrote about a dozen works, some of such beauty that he came to be regarded as one of India's greatest poets. [1] I-tsing, the Chinese pilgrim who travelled through India in the seventh century A.D., says of Mātr̥ceṭa's poems:

These charming compositions are equal in beauty to the heavenly flowers and the high principles which they contain rival in dignity the lofty peaks of a mountain. Consequently in India all who compose hymns imitate his style,

considering him the father of literature. Even men like Bodhisattvas Asaṅga and Vasubandhu admire him greatly. Throughout India everyone who becomes a monk is taught Māṭṛceṭa's two hymns as soon as they can recite the five and ten precepts.

I-tsing also recounts a beautiful legend that was told about the poet indicating his wide popularity:

While the Buddha was living, he was once, while instructing his followers, wandering in a wood among the people. A nightingale in the wood, seeing the Buddha,... began to utter its melodious notes, as if to praise him. The Buddha, looking back at his disciples, said: "That bird transported with joy at the sight of me unconsciously utters its melodious notes. On account of this good deed, after my passing away this bird shall be born in human form, and named Māṭṛceṭa, shall praise my virtues with true appreciation."

Other than these few scraps of information we know nothing of Māṭṛceṭa and today his name is remembered only for its association with his greatest work, the *Śatapañcāśatka*.

The name *Śatapañcāśatka* literally means "Hymn in a Hundred and Fifty Verses," although there are actually a hundred and fifty-two, or in some versions, a hundred and fifty-three verses in the work. It lies very much within the *bhakti* or devotional genre of Indian literature but is refreshingly free from the florid style that so often

characterises such works. Shackleton-Bailey notes that the “style of the Hymn is simple and direct, free from swollen compounds and elaborate conceits.” [2] Warder says that “the restraint of these verses is that of complete mastery of the medium, able to express rich meaning with a few carefully chosen words and without the support of outward display.” He goes on to say that the verses “are handled with a kind of reticence suggestive of the poet’s humility and detachment, both of which are probably sincere.” [3] Certainly all who are familiar with the Hymn in its original Sanskrit acknowledge the great beauty of both its language and meaning. In ancient India numerous commentaries were written on the Hymn. It was popular with the followers of all schools of Buddhism and was translated into several different languages. Tāranātha, the great Tibetan historian, says the Hymn had an important part to play in the spread of Buddhism outside India, and should it become as well known as it once was it may continue to create an interest in the Buddha and his teachings. [4]

Centuries before Mātr̥ceṭa, the householder Upāli was so inspired by the Buddha’s presence that he too composed a hymn of praise. When asked why he had done so he replied: “It is as if there were a great heap of different flowers which a clever garland maker or his apprentice might string into a variegated garland. Likewise the Lord has many splendid qualities. And who would not give praise to one worthy of praise?” [5]

There can be no doubt that Māṭṛceṭa's hymn likewise is an expression of a deep devotion to the Buddha and an admiration of his qualities. But quite apart from the author's motive in writing it, the value and indeed the purpose of the Hymn to the Buddha is twofold. First it is meant to awaken our faith. Māṭṛceṭa recognised as did the Lord himself that faith has the power to arouse a tremendous amount of positive zeal and energy. Long before we have directly experienced it, faith keeps our eyes fixed firmly on the goal. When we stumble and fall, faith picks us up; when doubt causes us to falter, it urges us on; and when we get side-tracked, it brings us back to the Path. Without faith in the Buddha and the efficacy of his Dharma we would never even bother to try to put the teachings into practice. As Nāgārjuna says:

One associates with the Dharma out of faith, but one knows truly out of understanding; understanding is the chief of the two, but faith precedes. [6]

The Buddha's qualities are worthy of respect in themselves, but when they are described so fully and so beautifully in verses like those of Māṭṛceṭa, our faith can only be strengthened and grow.

The other purpose of the Hymn is to urge us into action. Māṭṛceṭa highlights the Buddha's gentleness, his non-retaliation, his patience and his other qualities, knowing that when we have a deep admiration for someone it is natural to try to emulate him. One feels that he used his

poetic skills to the full in the hope that we would be inspired enough to make the Buddha our model and follow his example. When we read that the Buddha extended the hand of friendship to all without exception we feel we should try to do the same. On being reminded that the Buddha endured abuse and hardship without complaint we find the strength to be a little more forbearing. When brooding over our imperfections casts us down, nothing fills us with new determination and vigour more than calling to mind the Buddha's attainments. The receptive mind will transform admiration into action.

The Hymn may have another value as well: as an aid to meditation. In concentration meditation thoughts are silenced, in mindfulness meditation they are observed with detachment, but in recollection meditation thoughts are directed to a specific subject which is then carefully pondered upon. The Buddha says: "Monks, whatever a monk ponders on and thinks about often the mind in consequence gets a leaning in that way," and this is certainly true. [7] Any type of thought that is prominent in our mind will have an influence upon our personality and behaviour. To consciously and intentionally think positive thoughts will, in time, allow such thoughts to arise quite naturally, and from that will spring deeds associated with such positive thoughts. In practising the Recollection of the Buddha, *Buddhānussati*, one sits silently, and having made the mind receptive, thinks about the Buddha's many deeds and qualities. In time, faith and devotion, both of which are

important spiritual faculties, begin to gain in strength, thus adding energy and even fervour to our practice. Those who do this meditation usually either read or recite the well-known *Iti pi so* formula to help guide their thoughts. But they may find that reading extracts from the Hymn to the Buddha can be used together with this formula, or at times as a substitute for it, with very positive results.

D.R. Shackleton-Bailey has done a complete English translation of the Hymn to the Buddha and Edward Conze has translated parts of it. [8] Both these translations are literal and scholarly but do not give sufficient regard to the spirit of the work and the author's intention in writing it—to inspire and to uplift. By reworking these two translations and occasionally referring to the Sanskrit text with the help of my friend, Ven. Hippola Paññakitti, I have attempted to produce a readable rendering of this beautiful and important work. Those interested in a scholarly version of the Hymn are advised to read Shackleton-Bailey's translation with its copious notes on language, manuscript variations and textual difficulties.

# Hymn to the Buddha

## 1. Invocation

- 1           No faults in any way are found in him;  
          All virtues in every way dwell in him.
- 2           To go to him for refuge, to sing his praise,  
          to do him honour and to abide in his Dharma  
          is proper for one with understanding.
- 3           The only Protector,  
          his faults are gone without residue.  
          The All-knowing One,  
          his virtues are present without fail.
- 4           Even the most spiteful man  
          cannot with justice find fault  
          in the thoughts, words or deeds of the Lord.
- 5           To be born human and encounter the great joy  
          of the good Dharma is a chance rarer than  
          a turtle thrusting its neck through a yoke  
          floating freely in the great ocean.
- 6           So how could I not put voice to good use now,  
          for it is impermanent and may soon be liable  
          to change.
- 7           Though I know that the Sage's virtues  
          are beyond all human calculation,

still I will recount a portion of them,  
if only for my own delight.

8 Homage to you, O Self-developed One  
whose good works are many and wondrous,  
whose virtues are too numerous and awesome  
to define.

9 Their number? They are infinite.  
Their nature? Words must fail.  
But to speak of them bestows great good, so I  
shall speak much.

\* \* \*

## 2. In Praise of Causes

10 Having brushed aside doubts  
about whether or not it could be done,  
of your own free will you took  
this helpless world under your protection.

11 You were kind without being asked,  
you were loving without reason,  
you were a friend to the stranger  
and a kinsman to those without kin.

12 You gave even your own flesh  
not to mention your wealth and possessions.  
Even your own life's breath, O Kindly One,  
you gave to those who wished for it. [9]

- 13        A hundred times you ransomed your own  
            body and life  
            for the bodies and lives of living beings  
            in the grip of their would-be slayers.
- 14        It was not fear of hell or desire for heaven  
            but utter purity of heart  
            that made you practise the good.
- 15        By always avoiding the crooked  
            and adhering to the straight,  
            you became the highest receptacle for purity.
- 16        When attacked you used your fiery power  
            against the defilements, but in your noble  
            heart  
            felt only sympathy for those who were defiled.
- 17        The joy beings feel on saving their lives  
            equals not the joy you experienced  
            when you gave your life for others.
- 18        No matter how often murderers cut you to  
            pieces,  
            regardless of the pain  
            you felt only compassion for them.
- 19        That seed of perfect enlightenment,  
            that jewel-like mind of yours,  
            only you, Great Hero, know its essence.  
            Others are far from understanding it.
- 20        “Nirvana is not won without perseverance”:

thinking thus you roused great energy  
without a thought for yourself.

21 Your progress towards excellence never  
faltered  
and now you have attained  
the state that cannot be bettered.

22 But you did not practise in order to experience  
the pleasant and fruitful results of meditation.  
Always in your heart the motive was  
compassion.

23 For the happiness which, though sublime,  
cannot be shared with others,  
pains rather than pleases  
those like you, O Righteous One.

24 You imbibed good speech, bad speech you  
shunned like poison,  
from mixed speech you extracted what was  
sweet. **[10]**

25 Purchasing words of wisdom even with your  
own life,  
in birth after birth, O Knower of Gems,  
you were zealous for enlightenment.

26 Thus striving through the three incalculable  
aeons  
accompanied only by your resolution,  
you gained the highest state. **[11]**

### 3. In Praise of Incomparability

- 27 By not envying the superior,  
despising the inferior,  
or competing with equals,  
you attained pre-eminence in the world.
- 28 You were devoted to virtues for their own  
sake,  
not for the rewards that come from them,  
and thus due to your right progress  
they have all come to completion within you.
- 29 So much good have you gathered by your  
deeds  
that even the dust on your feet  
has become a source of merit.
- 30 You dissolved and uprooted your faults,  
you purified and brought to completion your  
virtues,  
and by this wise procedure  
you reached the highest attainment.
- 31 You struck at faults with your might  
so that not even their shadow  
lingers in the depths of your mind. [12]
- 32 Step by step you nurtured the virtues

and established them in yourself, so that now  
not even their likeness is found elsewhere.

- 33 All worldly objects of comparison  
can be damaged or obstructed,  
limited by time and space, easily acquired.
- 34 How can they be compared with your virtues  
—  
virtues unrivalled, unapproachable,  
stable, unceasing, unsurpassed?
- 35 When measured against the unfathomable  
and boundless depth of your understanding,  
the ocean becomes as if a mere puddle.
- 36 When matched with your calm equanimity,  
the firmness of the earth  
seems like the quivering of a flower petal.
- 37 Beside the radiance of your wisdom,  
which destroys the darkness of ignorance,  
the sun does not attain even the brightness of a  
firefly.
- 38 The purity of the moon, the sky or a pool in  
autumn  
appears clouded when compared  
with the purity of your words, thoughts and  
deeds.
- 39 I have compared you with all that is admired  
in the world,

but still how far are those miserable things  
from the qualities of a Buddha.

40 For there is only one thing that resembles you,  
O Kindly One, and that is the jewel of the  
Dharma  
through which you attained the highest.

41 But if something were to be found comparable  
to you,  
to make such comparison  
would be the act of a foolish and disrespectful  
man.

\* \* \*

## 4. In Praise of Wonders

42 Your victory over Māra evokes wonder in  
people  
but considering your great virtues  
I think this is but a minor thing. **[13]**

43 Even those who lash out in fury to assault you  
are not a heavy burden for your patience to  
bear  
housed as it is in such a worthy vessel.

44 What is truly wondrous is this:  
after you conquered Māra, on that same night  
you were able to conquer your own

defilements.

- 45 He who is amazed at your victory over  
opponents,  
might well be amazed at the sun for dispelling  
the darkness  
with its garland of a thousand rays.
- 46 You have overcome three things with three  
things:  
passion with passionlessness,  
anger with love,  
and ignorance with wisdom.
- 47 Good deeds you praise, bad deeds you blame,  
but towards those who act thus  
you are free from any “for” or “against.”
- 48 Is any praise high enough for you  
whose mind transcends  
attachment to the noble and dislike for the  
ignoble? [14]
- 49 You did not cling to virtue  
nor yearn for those who were virtuous.  
Ah! See the purity of this most tranquil being!
- 50 How permanently calm your mind is can be  
known  
by seeing how unalterably calm your senses  
are.
- 51 Even the foolish acknowledge the purity of

your mind.

The goodness of your words and deeds  
reflects your pure thoughts.

\* \* \*

## 5. In Praise of Form

- 52      Lovely yet calming, bright but not blinding,  
gentle  
yet strong. Who would not be inspired just to  
see you?
- 53      The joy one feels on beholding you for the first  
time  
does not diminish even after seeing you a  
hundred times.
- 54      Each time it is seen, your form gives joy;  
its beauty is such that one is never satisfied.
- 55      Your body is worthy as a receptacle  
and your virtues are worthy as occupants.  
Both are excellent in themselves  
and both complement each other perfectly.
- 56      Where else could the virtues of a Tathāgata  
be so well housed as in your body,  
shining as it does with auspicious marks and  
signs? **[15]**
- 57      Your body seems to say to your virtues:

"I am blessed to have you,"  
and your virtues seem to respond:  
"Where better could we dwell?"

\* \* \*

## 6. In Praise of Compassion

- 58 You long bound yourself to compassion in  
order to free  
all those in the world who were bound by  
defilements.
- 59 Which shall I praise first, you or the great  
compassion  
by which you were long held in saṃsāra  
though well you knew its faults? **[16]**
- 60 Although you preferred the delights of  
solitude,  
compassion led you to spend your time  
among the crowd.
- 61 Like a mighty dragon drawn from its lake by a  
spell,  
compassion led you from forest to town  
for the sake of those to be taught.
- 62 Though abiding in deep tranquillity, the  
development of  
compassion made you take up even the

musical art. [17]

63 Your powers, your lion's roar  
and the manifestation of virtues are but glitter  
rubbed off the nugget of your innate  
compassion. [18]

64 Your compassion was kind only towards  
others,  
but was cruel towards her own master.  
Towards you alone, O Lord, compassion was  
pitiless. [19]

65 That same compassion  
had you cut into a hundred pieces  
and cast you like an offering to the four  
quarters,  
all for the sake of others.

66 But clearly compassion always acted in  
accordance  
with your will. For although she oppressed  
you,  
he did not transgress against your desires.

\* \* \*

## 7. In Praise of Speech

67–8 Well worded and significant, true and sweet,  
deep or plain or both together, condensed or

copious.

Hearing such words of yours, would not even  
an opponent  
be convinced that you were all-knowing?

69 Generally your speech was wholly sweet  
but when necessary it would be otherwise.  
But either way, every word was well spoken  
because it always achieved its purpose.

70 Soft or hard or possessing both qualities,  
all your words when distilled had but one  
taste. [20]

71 Ah! How pure, perfect and excellent your  
actions are,  
that you employed these jewel-like words in  
such a way.

72 From your mouth pleasing to the eye, drop  
words  
pleasing to the ear, like nectar from the  
moon. [21]

73 Your sayings are like a spring shower settling  
the dust of  
passions, like a garuḍa killing the serpent of  
hatred. [22]

74 They are like the sun again and again  
dispelling the darkness of ignorance,  
like Śakra's sceptre splitting the mountain of

pride. [23]

- 75 Your speech is excellent in three ways:  
based on fact it is truthful,  
because its motive is pure it causes no  
confusion,  
and being relevant it is easily understood.
- 76 When first heard your words excite the mind  
but when their meaning is pondered over  
they wash away all ignorance and passion.
- 77 They go to the hearts of all.  
While comforting the grieving they alarm the  
heedless  
and rouse those preoccupied with pleasures.
- 78 Truly your words are for all: they delight the  
wise,  
strengthen those of middling intelligence  
and illuminate the minds of the dull.
- 79 Your sayings coax men from false views  
and draw them towards Nirvana.  
They remove faults and rain down virtues.
- 80 Your knowledge embraces all things,  
your mindfulness is ever present  
and thus what you say will always come to  
pass.
- 81 Because you never speak at the wrong time  
or in the wrong place or towards the wrong

person,  
your words, like energy rightly applied, are  
never wasted.

\* \* \*

## 8. In Praise of Teaching

- 82 Your dispensation and only yours is the true  
path:  
its methods are pleasant, its fruits good,  
it is free from faults and lovely  
in the beginning, the middle and the end. [24]
- 83 If fools, because of their attachment to deluded  
views,  
condemn your wonderful teaching,  
then deluded views are their own worst  
enemy.
- 84 Remembering the suffering which you  
endured  
for the sake of others, it would be good  
to listen to your teachings even if they were  
wrong.
- 85 But coming from one so kind in words and  
deeds,  
how much more should your teachings be  
practised  
with all the vigour one would use to remove

a blazing turban from one's head .

- 86 Freedom, the joy of enlightenment,  
praiseworthy virtues and peace:  
these four benefits are all gained from your  
teaching.
- 87 O Great Hero, your teachings brought  
trembling to sectarians,  
misery to Namuci, but rejoicing to both gods  
and men. [25]
- 88 Even the rule of Death, which extends  
without impediment or obstacle over the triple  
world,  
has been crushed by your teaching. [26]
- 89 For those who fathom your teachings can live  
an aeon  
if they so desire, but freely they depart  
to the realm where death cannot tread. [27]
- 90 Only in your dispensation is time divided  
for studying the scriptures, pondering their  
meaning  
and practising meditation.
- 91 What is more distressful than this, Great Sage,  
that some people do not revere your teaching,  
full of goodness as it is?

\* \* \*

## 9. In Praise of Benefits Conferred

- 92 Just to hear you brings joy;  
just to look upon you calms the heart;  
your speech refreshes and your teaching frees.
- 93 People rejoice at your birth,  
they celebrate as you grow,  
they benefit from your presence  
and sorrow in your absence.
- 94 To praise you removes faults,  
to recollect you brings joy,  
to follow you gives understanding,  
to know you purifies the heart.
- 95 To approach you brings good fortune,  
to serve you gives wisdom,  
to worship you dispels fear,  
to wait upon you bestows prosperity.
- 96 You are a great lake of goodness,  
with waters purified by virtue,  
surface calmed by meditation  
and depths stilled by wisdom.
- 97 Your form is a jewel to see,  
your speech is a jewel to hear,  
your teachings are a jewel to reflect upon.  
Truly, you are a mine bearing the jewels of  
goodness.

- 98 You are an island for those swept along by the flood,  
a shelter for the stricken,  
a refuge for those in fear of becoming,  
a resort for those who aspire to liberation.
- 99 To all living beings  
you are a useful vessel because of your virtue,  
a fertile field because of your perfect fruit,  
a true friend because of the benefits you confer.
- 100 You are admired for your altruism,  
charming for your tenderness,  
beloved for your gentleness  
and honoured for your many virtues.
- 101 You are cherished because of your  
flawlessness,  
delightful because of the goodness of your  
form and speech,  
opulent because you promote the good of all,  
and blessed because you are the abode of  
virtues.

\* \* \*

## 10. In Praise of Guidance

- 102–3 You admonish the stubborn,  
restrain the hasty and straighten the crooked.

You encourage the slow and harness the tamed.

Truly, you are the unsurpassed guide of men.

104 You have pity for the suffering, good-will for the happy,  
compassion for the distressed, benevolence for all.

105 The hostile evoke your warmth,  
the immoral receive your help, the fierce find you tender.  
How wonderful is your noble heart!

106 If father and mother are to be honoured because of concern for their children,  
what reverence should you receive who love has no limits?

107 You are a wall of safety  
for those hovering at the edge of the cliff,  
those blind to their own welfare,  
those who are their own worst enemy.

108 For the welfare of the two worlds  
and to help beings transcend them,  
you lit the lamp of wisdom  
among those who dwell in darkness. [28]

109 When worldly enjoyments are at stake,  
men and gods act at variance with each other.  
But because they can enjoy the Dharma in

harmony,  
they are reconciled in you.

110 O Blessed One, you have given the comfort  
of the Dharma unstintingly to all,  
regardless of birth, age or caste,  
regardless of time or place.

111 As if amazed and envious  
the gods honour with joined palms even your  
disciples,  
who unlike them are free from amazement  
and envy.

112 Ah! How brilliant is the arising of a Buddha,  
that cream of saṃsāra.  
Because of him the gods envy mankind.

\* \* \*

## 11. In Praise of Arduous Deeds

113 Fatigue, loss of the joy of solitude,  
the company of fools, the press of the crowd  
and the pairs of opposites: all these  
discomforts  
you endure as if they were blessings. [29]

114 With mind detached, you quietly work  
for the welfare of the world.  
How awesome is the Buddha-nature of the

Buddha! [30]

- 115 You ate poor food, sometimes you went hungry.  
You walked rough paths and slept on the ground  
trampled hard by the hooves of cattle. [31]
- 116 Though you are the Master, in order to serve others  
you endured insults and adapted your clothes  
and words,  
out of love for those whom you taught.
- 117 You are the Lord, but you never lord it over others.  
All may use you as a servant to obtain the help they need.
- 118 No matter who provoked you,  
where or how, never did you transgress  
your own path of fair conduct.
- 119 You help those who wish you ill  
more than most men  
help those who wish them well.
- 120 To an enemy intent on evil  
you are a friend intent on good.  
To one who gleefully seeks faults  
you respond by seeking virtues.
- 121 Those who sought to give you poison and fire

you approached with compassion and nectar.

122 You conquered revilers with patience,  
the malicious with blessings,  
slanderers with truth and the cruel with  
kindness.

123 You reversed in an instant  
the manifold natures and evil destinies  
of those depraved from beginningless time.

\* \* \*

## 12. In Praise of Skill

124 Through your skill in teaching the rough  
became gentle,  
the mean became generous and the cruel  
became kind.

125 A Nanda became serene, a Mānastabdha [32]  
humble,  
an Aṅgulimāla compassionate.  
Who would not be amazed? [33]

126 Delighted with the flavour of your teaching,  
many wise ones left their beds of gold  
to sleep on beds of straw.

127 Because you knew time and temperaments,  
sometimes you remained silent when  
questioned,

sometimes you spoke first, and at other times  
you aroused  
their interest and then spoke.

128 Having first scrubbed clean the garment of the  
mind  
with talk on generosity and other virtues,  
you then applied the dye of the Dharma.

129 There is no expedient or opportunity  
which you did not use  
in order to rescue this pitiful world  
from the fearful abyss of saṃsāra.

130 To train people in different situations,  
according to their state of mind,  
many and various were the words and deeds  
you used.

131 They were pure and friendly, honoured and  
praised,  
saluted and acclaimed by both gods and men.

132 Difficult it is to speak well and then do good.  
But for you, O Truthful One, both these things  
come easily.

133 By your purity alone you could have cleansed  
the whole universe.  
In the triple world no one is to be found like  
you.

134 You rose up for the welfare of all beings

lost in the beginningless and fearful straits of becoming.

\* \* \*

### 13. In Praise of Freedom from Debt

- 135 I know not how to repay you  
for what you have done;  
even those who have attained Nirvana  
are still in your debt.
- 136 Established in the Dharma by you,  
they accomplished their own welfare only.  
But you worked by yourself for the welfare of  
all,  
so how can you be repaid for that?
- 137 You look upon those who slumber and gently  
awaken them.  
You are a kind and heedful friend to those  
who are heedless.
- 138 You have declared the destruction of the  
defilements,  
you have exposed Māra's delusions,  
you have taught the evils of saṃsāra,  
you have revealed the place without fear.
- 139 Those who work for the welfare of the world  
and those of compassionate heart, what could

they do  
wherein you have not already led the way?

140 If your good qualities could be given to others,  
surely you would have shared them with all,  
even with Devadatta. [34]

141 Out of compassion for the world  
you promoted the good Dharma for so long on  
earth.  
Many disciples have you raised  
capable of working for the welfare of the  
world. [35]

142 Many personal converts have you trained,  
Subhadra being the last.  
What still remains of your debt to living  
beings? [36]

143 Powdering your bones into tiny pieces  
with the diamond of concentration,  
even in the end you continued to do what was  
hard to do.

144 “My Dharma body and my physical body both  
exist  
only for the sake of others.” Speaking thus  
even in Nirvana you taught this reluctant  
world. [37]

145 Having given your entire Dharma body to the  
virtuous,

you broke your physical body into fragments  
and attained final Nirvana.

- 146      What steadfastness! What conduct!  
            What form! What virtue!  
            Truly there is nothing about the Buddha's  
            qualities  
            that is not wonderful.
- 147      Yet even to you whose speech and actions are  
            so helpful  
            are some men hostile. Behold the ferocity of  
            delusion!
- 148      O ocean of good, treasury of gems,  
            heap of merit, mine of virtues!  
            Those who honour you are themselves worthy  
            of honour.
- 149      Your virtues are limitless  
            but my capacity to praise them is not.  
            Therefore I shall finish, not because I am  
            satisfied  
            but for fear of running out of words.
- 150      Only you can measure your own qualities  
            being as they are beyond measure,  
            beyond number, thought and comparison.
- 151      I have hardly begun to sing your praise  
            and yet already my heart is filled with joy.  
            But need a lake be drained before one's thirst

be quenched?

152

Through the merit arising from my good deed,  
born of faith in the Sage,  
may the minds of beings now tossed by evil  
thoughts  
be free from distress and come to peace.

# Notes

All references to the Pali Nikāyas are to volume and page number of the Pali Text Society editions.

1. A. K. Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature* (Delhi, 1974), Vol. II, Chapter 7, contains a detailed and informative analysis of the style, contents and alliterations in Mātr̥ceṭa's works and of their place in the Indian Kavya tradition.
2. D. R. Shackleton-Bailey, *The Śatapañcāśatka of Mātr̥ceṭa* (Cambridge, 1951).
3. *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. II, p.234.
4. Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, *Taraṇatha's History of Buddhism in India* (Calcutta, 1980), Chapter 18.
5. Majjhima Nikāya, II:387.
6. Ratnavālī 5.
7. Majjhima Nikāya, II:115.
8. Edward Conze, *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* (New York, 1954).
9. Here and in verses 13, 17 and 18 reference is to the Buddha sacrificing his life in former births as recounted in the Jātaka Stories.

10. A mixture of truth and falsehood, useful and useless.
11. It is said to take a bodhisattva at least three incalculable aeons to attain full enlightenment. See Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (London, 1932).
12. *Ātmasamtāne*: literally, “the flow (of consciousness) that makes up the self.” Pali, *cittasantati*.
13. *Māra*: evil personified, the Tempter in Buddhism.
14. *Arahant*: literally, a saint. *Tīrthika*: an adherent of a non-Buddhist sect
15. *Tathāgata*: An epithet of the Buddha meaning the “Thus Come One” or the “Thus Gone One.” The thirty-two major marks and the eighty minor signs are special features of a Buddha’s physical body.
16. *Samṣāra*: the beginningless round of birth and death.
17. In one of his former lives the Buddha was born as a musician and used his skills to convert the gods. See Guttala Jātaka.
18. On the ten psychic powers, see Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary* (Colombo, 1972) under *Iddhi*. The “lion’s roar” is the Buddha’s bold and confident claim to enlightenment. The meaning of this verse is that compassion, the nugget is the most important thing while the powers, etc., “the glitter,” are just a by-product of that compassion.

19. Here and in verses 65 and 66 compassion is personified as one who acts for the sake of others even to the extent of causing discomfort to the Buddha.
20. The taste of liberation (*vimuttirasa*)—Udāna 56.
21. The ancient Indians believed that nectar fell from the moon.
22. The *garuḍa* is a mythological bird, the natural enemy of the serpent.
23. *Śakra* is the king of the gods in Vedic mythology. He has a sceptre of unbreakable hardness.
24. *Ekāyanam*: literally, the one way, thus “the true path.”
25. *Namuci*: another name for Māra.
26. The triple world: the world of desire, the world of form and the formless world. See *Buddhist Dictionary* under *Loka*.
27. For the notion that those who have mastered the teaching can live for an aeon, see *Dīgha Nikāya*, II: 103,118.
28. The “two worlds” are the world of gods and the world of humans.
29. The pairs of opposites are praise and blame, cold and heat, sickness and health, ease and discomfort, etc.
30. *Buddhadharmatā*. See *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol. III (Colombo, 1973), p.435.

- 31.** For a description of the hardships and simplicity of the Buddha's life similar to those mentioned here, see *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, 1:34.
- 32.** *Mānastabdha* means "stiff with pride."
- 33.** Nanda was so distracted by sensual thoughts that he was unable to meditate—*Udāna* 21. *Manastabdha* was so proud that he would not even respect his parents—*Saṃyutta Nikāya*, I:177. *Angulimala* was a terrible murderer—*Majjhima Nikāya*, II: 98–103. All were skillfully transformed by the Buddha.
- 34.** *Devadatta* was the Buddha's evil cousin who caused a schism in the monastic community and even tried to kill the Buddha.
- 35.** *Shackleton-Bailey* includes, prior to this verse, a verse of which he notes that its grammatical peculiarities and exclusion from early texts are "sufficiently strong grounds for doubting its authenticity." I have therefore decided to omit it.
- 36.** As he lay on his death-bed the Buddha taught and made a disciple of *Subhadra*. See *Dīgha Nikāya*, II:149, 153.
- 37.** Here and in verse 145 the Buddha's teaching or *Dharma* body, which lasts as long as people understand and practise his teachings, is compared with his physical body which disintegrates at death. See I.B. Horner's discussion on *dhammakāya* in *Milinda's Questions* (London, 1963), p:x

# THE BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY

The BPS is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for all people.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is—a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

For more information about the BPS and our publications, please visit our website, or write an e-mail or a letter to the:

Administrative Secretary

Buddhist Publication Society

P.O. Box 61 • 54 Sangharaja Mawatha

Kandy • Sri Lanka

E-mail: [bps@bps.lk](mailto:bps@bps.lk) • web site: <http://www.bps.lk>

Tel: 0094 81 223 7283 • Fax: 0094 81 222 3679

# Table of Contents

|                                    |    |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Mātr̥ceṭa's Hymn to the Buddha     | 2  |
| Introduction                       | 4  |
| Hymn to the Buddha                 | 10 |
| 1. Invocation                      | 10 |
| 2. In Praise of Causes             | 11 |
| 3. In Praise of Incomparability    | 14 |
| 4. In Praise of Wonders            | 16 |
| 5. In Praise of Form               | 18 |
| 6. In Praise of Compassion         | 19 |
| 7. In Praise of Speech             | 20 |
| 8. In Praise of Teaching           | 23 |
| 9. In Praise of Benefits Conferred | 25 |
| 10. In Praise of Guidance          | 26 |
| 11. In Praise of Arduous Deeds     | 28 |
| 12. In Praise of Skill             | 30 |
| 13. In Praise of Freedom from Debt | 32 |
| Notes                              | 36 |