

The bodhisatta's practice of breath retention: self-mortification or an advanced meditative technique? ¹

The Buddha was supposed to practice the most severe forms of self-mortification prior to his awakening. In this paper I would like to focus in particular on the description of the practice of breath retention and its drastic side effects, which may be found in three suttas the Majjhima Nikāya. Johannes Bronkhorst has stated that this account does not belong to the earliest stratum of Buddhist literature and the description of the side effects is most likely unauthentic, as it appears to be copied from different places in the Suttapiṭaka. Johannes Bronkhorst has already shown in his seminal work “The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India”, that the strivings weren't just extravagant ways of self-torment, but meditative methods similar to those of the ancient non-Buddhists. I however disagree with Bronkhorst's claim that this account does not belong to the earliest stratum of Buddhist literature and that the descriptions of the side-effects of strivings are exaggerated and were borrowed from the suttas depicting the sufferings of terminally ill Buddhist monks. By making detailed comparisons of these descriptions with modern accounts of side effects of radical *prāṇāyāma* techniques based on real-life, first hand experiences of Hindu yoga masters I show, that the Buddhist account is strikingly genuine and relatively early. It actually seems to be the first such detailed description of this type of practice in Indian literature. I also argue that it is not likely that this account was merely a polemic, and that the 'strivings' do not necessarily deserve to be labeled as ascetic practices at all.

It seems to be widely accepted that prior to his awakening, the Buddha was an ascetic practicing the most severe forms of self-mortification. The period of ascetic practices is probably one of the most popular episodes of the Buddha's life, almost to the point of overshadowing many of the events which occurred after awakening. The fact that these ascetic practices are traditionally identified with *attakilamathānuyogo* (lit. practice of self-exhaustion), one of the harmful extremes (*anta*) to be avoided, as opposed to the Middle Way, described in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11/v 421)² seems to give them even more significance. It is therefore no wonder, that the image of emaciated bodhisatta has become firmly engraved in our minds, not in the least due to some very impressive Buddhist art. Some very realistic and beautiful sculptures from Gandhara representing a mix of Greek and Indian styles, were inspired by the account of the bodhisatta's asceticism. In 'popular imagination' ascetic practices of the bodhisatta are usually identified with radical fasting and self-inflicted torment. Such is the way, in which ascetic practices are depicted in the classical Buddhist hagiographical work - The *Buddhacarita* or Life of Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa (12.91-12.96). It is worth

¹ The initial version of this paper was presented at the IAHR congress in Erfurt in 2015. It is a part of a much larger unpublished paper, tentatively entitled: *Was the Buddha an ascetic prior to his awakening? A critical comparative analysis of the descriptions of the bodhisatta's practices contained in the suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya.*

² SN 56.11/v 421: dveme, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitaḥḥā. katame dve? yo cāyaṃ kāmesu kāmasukhallikānuyogo hīno gammo pothujjaniko anariyo anattasamphito, yo cāyaṃ attakilamathānuyogo dukkho anariyo anattasamphito.

noticing, that a very important episode of the bodhisatta's training with meditative teachers Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, which precedes the period of self-mortification, has never really become very popular, despite actually being depicted in *the Buddhacarita*. Not many Buddhists seem to even know about Āḷāra and Uddaka, while on the other hand almost anyone knows about the episode of ascetic practices. In the movie *Little Buddha* (which is a good example of stereotypical view of the Buddha's life) prince Siddhartha goes immediately from the luxuries of royal life, to the extremes of self-mortification and fasting, as if to highlight the opposition between these two harmful extremes. The meditative training with Āḷāra and Uddaka doesn't really fit into this simplified account, as there are in fact no apparent elements of asceticism to be found there. There are good reasons to believe, however, that the episode of training with these teachers is authentic, and Alexander Wynne has proposed several convincing arguments in support of such a claim (Wynne, 2007: 11-15).

The narrative which depicts the bodhisatta as practicing the most radical forms of fasting, self-torment and mortification seems to have a solid basis in the Suttapiṭaka, as the Māhasīhanāda Sutta contains a very detailed description of such practices (MN 12/I 68). In this paper I would like to focus, however, on the very interesting account of supposed ascetic practices contained in the three suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya: the Mahāsaccaka Sutta (MN 36/I 237), the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta (MN 85/ii 91), and in the Saṅgārava Sutta (MN 100/ii 209). In all three suttas, the account appears in almost identical form, the only difference being in the person of the Buddha's interlocutor. For the sake of this paper I will be providing quotations from and detailed references to the account contained in the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta (MN 85/ ii 91). In all these texts, the descriptions of the bodhisatta's ascetic practices are part of a larger narrative starting with his decision to leave household (*agāra*), and go forth to homelessness (*anagāriya*). Here we notice the first difference with the 'popular narrative' (cf. *Buddhacarita* (5)), as the act of going forth is performed openly, despite the lamentations of unwilling parents (*akāmakānaṃ mātāpitūnaṃ*), both of whom are mentioned, including mother³ (she was supposed to be dead, by that time, if we are to trust 'popular narrative', as exemplified by the *Buddhacarita*). Then follows the account of training with Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, and of the subsequent disappointment with their methods of meditation. The bodhisatta reaches the delightful vicinity of Uruvelā, and finds it to be a fitting place to undertake several very radical practices of bodily character, which are traditionally considered forms of 'asceticism'. It worth noticing, however, that when the Buddha recalls these practices in the aforementioned three suttas, he labels them collectively as 'striving'/'exertion' (*padhāna*),⁴ and not as, say, *tapas* which is a more

³ MN 85/ii 093: so kho ahaṃ, rājakumāra, aparena samayena daharova samāno susukāḷakeso bhadrena yobbanena samannāgato paṭhamena vayasā akāmakānaṃ mātāpitūnaṃ assumukhānaṃ rudantānaṃ kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajim

⁴ MN 85/ii 093: alaṃ vatidaṃ kulaputtassa padhānatthikassa padhānāyā'ti

straightforward label of asceticism. I shall go back to the issue of differences between practices labeled *padhāna* and *tapas* in the later part of this paper. During the first stage of practice, the bodhisatta restrains (*abhiniggaṇhāti*), crushes/squeezes (*abhinippīleti*) and scorches/burns out (*abhisantāpeti*) the mind by mind (*cetasā cittaṃ*) by having clenched teeth (*dantebhidantamādhāya*) and having pressed the tongue against the palate (*jivhāya tāluṃ āhacca*).⁵ The second stage (of what appears to be the same practice) is performed by stopping in-breaths and out-breaths through the nose, mouth and later also through the ears. When describing the goal of this practice, the Buddha says that he was trying to meditate (*jhāyati*) ‘breathless meditation’ (*appāṇaka jhāna*).⁶ Only the last form of striving appears to be a more typical example of asceticism, as it is described as a sort of a fast practiced by limiting oneself to small amounts of soup (*yūsa*) made from various kinds of beans and vetch.

What can we make of the first two peculiar practices? Johannes Bronkhorst was probably the first scholar who has realized the true character of these practices, and has provided part of an answer to our question in his groundbreaking work *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*. He has decided to initially focus on the descriptions of the solitary ascetic practices of the bodhisatta and not to analyze them in a direct connection with the contemplative practices taught by the first two teachers of the Buddha. Bronkhorst (1986: 5-6) has suggested that some features of the rejected ascetic practices may be connected with the Jains. He has noted, that after the bodhisatta’s meditation without breath, one of the *devatā*-s who were witnessing the event has described the state of Gotama, as that of an Arahant.⁷ But, as Bronkhorst has observed, such a state is definitely not a desired state of a liberated person from a Buddhist point of view. The description used by the *devatā*, may in fact be a reflection of a way of thinking and evaluating present among some sects of that time. The term *arahant* was also used by the Jains and the Ājīvakas, who highly valued ascetic practices, and therefore from their point of view, the state of Gotama could have received a highest praise. Secondly, the phrase ‘fierce, sharp, racking pains’ (*opakkamikā dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā*) used by the Buddha to describe his own state, may also be found in the Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta (MN 14/I 092) and in the Devadaha Sutta (MN 101/ii 218), where it is used to describe the ascetic practices of the Jains. Thirdly, the initial attempt of the bodhisatta to abstain from eating any food at all may correspond to a well-known Jain practice of starving to death. These features are the most evident, and provide grounds for further investigation.

⁵ MN 85/ii 093: “tassa mayhaṃ, rājakumāra, etadahosi — ‘yaṃnūnāhaṃ dantebhidantamādhāya jivhāya tāluṃ āhacca, cetasā cittaṃ abhiniggaṇheyyaṃ abhinippīleyyaṃ abhisantāpeyyaṃ’ ti

⁶ MN 85/ii 093: tassa mayhaṃ, rājakumāra, etadahosi — ‘yaṃnūnāhaṃ appāṇakamyeva jhānaṃ jhāyeyyaṃ’ ti

⁷ MN 85/ii 093: arahaṃ samaṇo gotamo. vihārotveva so arahato evarūpo hotī

Bronkhorst has proposed a following explanation of the character of the ascetic practices rejected by the bodhisatta:

The common denominator in all these practices is easily discerned. All of them aim at non-activity of a part, or the whole of the aspirant. Given the fact that many of the religious movements in the time of the Buddha and later strove to discard the evil consequences of activity, this goal should not surprise us (Bronkhorst 1986: 26).

And this indeed seems to be the case: stopping breathing, crushing the mind during the practice of pressing the tongue against the palate, abstaining from food may all be seen as different forms of restricting one's own activities.

The practices of this type are however even more common in the Hindu scriptures, than in the Jain ones. Therefore Bronkhorst has stated:

It is clear that all the important features of Jaina meditation are found in the early Hindu scriptures. Here too, meditation is only one aspect of a more general process in which all bodily and mental activities are stopped. Fasting to death and stopping the breath, both of which we had come to know as characteristic accompaniments of early Jaina meditation, are also present in the early Hindu scriptures (Bronkhorst, 1986: 47).

According to Bronkhorst, early Jain and Hindu scriptures describe the same type of meditation. He has therefore come up with the idea of a 'main stream of meditation' encompassing both the Jain and the early Hindu meditative teachings (Bronkhorst 1986: 48).

And indeed some advanced meditative methods described in the Hindu texts, such as the Maitrī Upaniṣad, seem to directly correspond to the 'striving' practiced by the bodhisatta. MU 6.20 describes a practice of *dhāraṇā* (concentration) performed by pressing the tip of the tongue to the palate, and by suppression (*nirodha*) of voice, mind and breath (*prāṇa*). *As the result, the meditator sees (paśyati) Brahman, by means of discrimination (tarka).*⁸

Almost all the elements of the bodhisatta's practice can be found in this short passage: the pressing of tongue against the palate, restraint of breath, restraint of mind which may correspond to the bodhisatta's attempt to restrain (*abhiniggaṇhāti*), crush/squeeze (*abhinippīleti*) and scorch/burn out (*abhisantāpeti*) the mind by mind (*cetasā cittaṃ*).

⁸ MU 6.20

While the practice of pressing the tongue against the palate is somewhat specific, breath restraint is a much more prevalent element of Hindu meditative methods, being an integral part of *prāṇāyāma* practices.

The practices performed by the bodhisatta and labeled as ‘strivings’ weren’t therefore just extravagant ways of inflicting self-torment. They were meditative methods in their own right, known well among the non-Buddhists and described in their writings.

The Buddhist account, however, contains an additional element not to be found in the ancient texts of the non-Buddhists: a detailed description of some very peculiar side-effects resulting from the practices described in the passage. They include intense sweating, internal noises being heard in the head, headaches, sharp pain in the belly, and the feeling of burning in the body. Some very illustrative similes are also used to further describe these unpleasant results of bodhisatta’s practices.

The painful character of these side-effects may appear quite surprising in the context of the account of strivings, almost to the point of being out of place. Johannes Bronkhorst (1986: 14) has rightly pointed out that the same descriptions can be found in the following suttas: the Channovāda Sutta (MN 144/ MN iii 263), the Channa Sutta (SN 35.87/ iv 55), and the Phagguṇa Sutta (AN 6.56/iii.380). In these suttas, however, they appear in a different context and are used to describe a state of a terminally sick person. The first two suttas contain an almost identical account of terminal sickness of venerable Channa. They are also quite interesting due to the fact, that Channa’s decision to end his sufferings, by using a knife (*sattha*) is described as blameless (*anupavajja*) by the Buddha himself.⁹ In the Phagguṇa Sutta, the venerable Phagguṇa simply dies due to illness.

Reoccurring fragments of the same text are quite common in the Suttapiṭaka, as it consists of the so-called ‘stock passages’, the building blocks of the suttas. This is undoubtedly due to the oral character of transmission of Early Buddhist texts in the first centuries of their circulation. While the usage of stock passages has made the memorization of the suttas easier, it has also facilitated the introduction of later modifications. If the same passage occurs in two completely different contexts, then it is likely that only one of them is the original one, and the presence of the passage in another context is a result of borrowing and may be a mark of relative lateness and unauthenticity.

On the face of it, it seems that the description of the painful side-effects fits much better in the context of the suttas describing the state of a terminally sick person, then it does in the account of strivings. Such was in fact the conclusion of Johannes Bronkhorst, who has stated:

⁹ MN 144/ MN iii 263: *anupavajjam channo bhikkhu sattham āharissatī*

There can be no doubt, that the comparisons fit a sick person better than one engaged in meditation fully without breath. [...] Further, it is difficult to see, why meditation without breath should bring about the extreme heat of the fourth comparison, which appears to describe fever which is connected with bile (pitta) and not wind (Bronkhorst, 1986: 15).

Therefore, Bronkhorst (1986: 14) has claimed that the episode on meditation without breath and reduced intake of food do not belong to the earliest stratum of Buddhist literature. Although he has pointed out the parallels between the meditative practices of the non-Buddhists and the practices of the bodhisatta, for him they did not constitute an argument for the authenticity of the Buddhist account (in the sense, that it would present the genuine practices of the Buddha himself). He believed that the account of ‘ascetic practices’ was supposed to perform mainly a polemic function, and was meant to ridicule the practices of the non-Buddhists (e.g. the Jains) and depict them as inefficient.

Bronkhorst seems to have a point here. If these descriptions are merely a result of later modification, then his claim that this account simply serves as a polemic against the Jains, seems reasonable. We will also not be able to find any similar descriptions of the painful side-effects in the ancient Hindu scriptures describing *prāṇāyāma* practices. However, there are some descriptions in the modern literature, which can shed new light on this issue. In recent years, several representatives of Hindu meditative tradition have decided to share their knowledge about certain advanced yogic meditative methods. Swami Rama’s book *Path of Fire and Light* is a good example of this trend. The author is a meditation master belonging to the Himalayan tradition of Hindu yoga. In his book, he reveals some first-hand information about many advanced *prāṇāyāma* techniques. The facts revealed in this book are based on his own experiences, and on the oral tradition of the Himalayan yoga.

I will now make detailed comparisons of the descriptions of painful side-effects contained in the account of strivings with Swami Rama’s first-hand information about experiences connected with the practice of advanced *prāṇāyāma* techniques. The results, I believe, will be self-evident:

The first side-effect is connected to the initial stage of practice, when the bodhisatta clenched his teeth and pressed the tongue against the palate. As the result, drops of perspiration (*sedā*) are released (*muccanti*) from his armpits (*kacchehi*). A simile is given, of a strong man (*balavā puriso*) who having grabbed (*gahetvā*) a weaker man (*dubbalataram purisaṃ*) by the head (*sīse*) and trunk of the body (*khandhe*) would restrain him (*abhiniggaṇheyya*), crush/ subdue him (*abhinippīleyya*) and scorch him (*abhisantāpeyya*).¹⁰ This simile appears to illustrate the nature of the practice itself and not necessarily

¹⁰ MN 85/ii 94: seyyathāpi, rājakumāra, balavā puriso dubbalataram purisaṃ sīse vā gahetvā khandhe vā gahetvā abhiniggaṇheyya abhinippīleyya abhisantāpeyya; evameva kho me, rājakumāra, dantebhīdantamādhāya, jivhāya tāluṃ āhacca, cetasā cittaṃ abhiniggaṇhato abhinippīlayato abhisantāpayato kacchehi sedā muccanti

the side-effect. Sweating is probably the least spectacular and surprising of several side-effects given in the account of strivings. According to Swami Rama, it often accompanies initial stages of *prāṇāyāma* practice:

In the beginning one will also perspire freely.(Rama, 2004: 60).

We shall now move to the analysis of the second side effect, or rather a whole group of closely associated side effects. They are described in connection to the second stage of practice, performed by stopping in-breaths and out-breaths (*assāsapassāsesu uparuddhesu*) at first from the mouth (mukhato) and the nose (nāsato). As the result of that, there was an extreme (adhimatto) sound (saddo) of winds going out from ears (kaṇṇasotehi vātānaṃ nikkhamantānaṃ). A simile of smiths bellows (*kammāragaggariyā*) being blown (*dhamamānāya*) and producing extreme sound is then given.¹¹

Swami Rama's explanation sheds some light on the physiological mechanism of this phenomenon:

The head sounds heard during the practice of *prāṇāyāma* are caused by the rushing of blood through the arteries and veins and may indicate congestion (Rama, 2004: 26).

Let us notice that internal sounds arising during the practice of breath restraint were already noted in the Brahminic literature. The Maitrī Upaniṣad explicitly states that some teachers listen to the sound of the ether within the heart while they stop the ears with the thumbs (MU 6.22). Therefore, this side effect should not be particularly surprising. This practice is still performed today, as attested by Swami Rama:

The yogi should practice kumbhaka, closing his ears with the two thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers, the upper lip with the ring fingers, and the lower lip with the little fingers. Firmly confining the air, he should listen attentively for the sound in the right ear ((Rama, 2004: 136).

The same physiological explanation can be probably used to explain the next two side-effects of the same practice. This time, however, the bodhisatta has performed the stopping of in-breaths and out-breaths not only from his mouth and nose, but from his ears as well. As the result, extreme winds (*adhimattā vātā*) disturb/shake up (*ūhananti*) inside the head (*muddhani*) of the bodhisatta. The simile is given of a strong man (*balavā puriso*), who would cleave (*abhimattheyya*) the head by sharp edge of

¹¹ MN 85/ii 94: seyyathāpi nāma kammāragaggariyā dhamamānāya adhimatto saddo hoti, evameva kho me, rājakumāra, mukhato ca nāsato ca assāsapassāsesu uparuddhesu kaṇṇasotehi vātānaṃ nikkhamantānaṃ adhimatto saddo hoti.

the sword (*tiṇhena sikharena*).¹² Afterwards, the bodhisatta experienced extreme headache (lit. head-feelings: *sīsavedanā*), compared to a strong man wrapping a head turban (*sīsaveṭṭhaṃ*) using a firm leather strap (*daḷhena varattakkhaṇḍena*).¹³

It seems probable, that all three abovementioned side-effects can be explained by referring to congestion of head arteries and veins, probably caused by increased blood pressure resulting from breath restraint.

The next side-effect is much more dramatic. As the result of breath restraint, the bodhisatta felt that extreme winds (*adhimattā vātā*) cut through/pierce (*parikantanti*) his belly (*kucchiṃ*). The simile given by the Buddha makes it sound even more excruciating. The experience is compared to a skilled butcher (*dakkho goghātako*) or his apprentice (*antevāsī*), who would cut through the belly (*kucchiṃ parikanteyya*) with a sharp (*tiṇhena*) cow-knife (*govikantanena*).¹⁴

How can the practice of breath–restraint have anything to do with pains experienced in the alimentary tract? On the face of it, this side-effect appears to be completely out of place in this context. If this was truly the case, it would clearly mean that the passage was taken from a different context. There is, however, a very convincing physiological explanation for this side-effect, as Swami Rama attests:

In this practice of *prāṇāyāma*, the air will eventually be able to enter the esophagus and stomach in small quantities and will finally reach the bowels. At this point, some pain will be felt, and the practitioner must endure a reasonable amount of it. The practice will progress slowly until all pain disappears and the stomach and bowels can be freely filled with air (Rama, 2004: 59).

At this point one is able to detect air beginning to enter alimentary canal[...] it will force its way out of lungs, and attempt to enter the alimentary canal[...] Pain will develop and may be initially quite acute, but as time progress it will disappear and the process will become quite easy and natural (Rama 2004: 61).

As far as I know, there is no mention of any side-effect of this type in the ancient Hindu meditative literature. Swami Rama's confirmation and explanation therefore makes the passage in the Buddhist sutta appear even more striking and genuine, and not mere fantasy of Buddhist compiler.

¹² MN 85/ii 94: seyyathāpi, rājakumāra, balavā puriso tiṇhena sikharena muddhani abhimattheyya evameva kho me, rājakumāra, mukhato ca nāsato ca kaṇṇato ca assāsapassāsesu uparuddhesu adhimattā vātā muddhani ūhananti

¹³ MN 85/ii 94: seyyathāpi, rājakumāra, balavā puriso daḷhena sīse sīsaveṭṭhaṃ dadeyya; evameva kho me, rājakumāra, mukhato ca nāsato ca kaṇṇato ca assāsapassāsesu uparuddhesu adhimattā sīse sīsavedanā honti.

¹⁴ MN 85/ii 94: seyyathāpi, rājakumāra, dakkho goghātako vā goghātakantevāsī vā tiṇhena govikantanena kucchiṃ parikanteyya, evameva kho me, rājakumāra, mukhato ca nāsato ca kaṇṇato ca assāsapassāsesu uparuddhesu adhimattā, vātā kucchiṃ parikantanti.

The last side-effect connected to bodhisatta's practice of breath restraint is described as the experience of extreme (adhimatto) heat/burning (*ḍāho*) in the body (*kāyasmim*). A simile is then given of two strong men (*balavanto purisā*) who having grabbed (*gahetva*) a weaker man (*dubbalataram purisaṃ*) each by one arm (*nānābāhāsu*) would heat and burn him (*santāpeyyuṃ samparitāpeyyuṃ*) in the pit of charcoals (*aṅgārakāsuyā*).¹⁵

Johannes Bronkhorst has found the extreme heat of this comparison particularly unfitting in this context (Bronkhorst, 1986: 15). This experience is however confirmed by real-life practice of modern yogins, as attested by Swami Rama:

Kumbhaka increases heat in the body (Rama 2004: 60).

When one has been able to hold his breath for 3,000 to 5,000 counts, he will be able to feel it throughout the body. There will be a tingling and stinging sensation over the entire surface of the body Rama, 2004: 64).

The rise of the temperature of the body connected to breath retention, may perhaps also serve as a partial explanation of the phenomenon of *tummo* practice of Tibetan Buddhists.

Lastly, let us have a look at the fast performed by the bodhisatta, as a final form of striving:

What if I would eat food (*āhāraṃ āhāreyyaṃ*) little by little (*thokaṃ thokaṃ*), a handful each time (*pasataṃ pasataṃ*), whether of bean soup (*muggayūsaṃ*) or lentil soup (*kulathayūsaṃ*) or vetch soup (*kaḷāyayūsaṃ*) or pea soup (*hareṇukayūsaṃ*).¹⁶

While the practices preceding it could be labeled as quasi-*prāṇāyāma*, due to their similarities to the yogic methods described by Swami Rama, this appears to be a practice of a very different character.

It would seem, that at least this fast deserves the label of true 'asceticism' or self-mortification. Johannes Bronkhorst was certain that the bodhisatta's initial attempt to abstain from taking food must be seen as a voluntary fast to death and corresponds to Jain practices. But given the information from Swami Rama, there is small chance that it may not have been merely a simple fast aiming at self-mortification. In *prāṇāyāma*, diet plays an absolutely crucial role.

Swami Rama remarks:

¹⁵ MN 85/ii 94: seyyathāpi, rājakumāra, dve balavanto purisā dubbalataram purisaṃ nānābāhāsu gahetvā aṅgārakāsuyā santāpeyyuṃ samparitāpeyyuṃ, evameva kho me, rājakumāra, mukhato ca nāsato ca kaṇṇato ca assāsapassāsesu uparuddhesu adhimatto kāyasmim ḍāho hoti.

¹⁶ MN 85/ii 94: 'yannūnāhaṃ thokaṃ thokaṃ āhāraṃ āhāreyyaṃ pasataṃ pasataṃ, yadi vā muggayūsaṃ yadi vā kulathayūsaṃ yadi vā kaḷāyayūsaṃ yadi vā hareṇukayūsaṃ'ti

As one develops the practice the diet must be further simplified and should eventually consist almost entirely of liquids (Rama, 2004: 58).

It might be the case that the bodhisatta simply wanted to purify his body to enable the arising of knowledge and vision. There is some possibility, that Gotama would abstain from food only until he would have attained some spiritual breakthrough. Nothing indicates that he wanted to kill himself, by fasting to death. Perhaps he thought that his failure to attain success in the preceding quasi-*prāṇāyāma* practices was due to the impurity of his body. If this was really the case, then the reduced intake of food, could have been seen as having something in common with the practices of restraining the breath and constraining the mind.

We can finally reach some conclusions. I believe that the comparisons between the Buddhist passages and fragments of Swami Rama's book speak for themselves. The similarities are too strong to be simply ascribed to chance. There can be no doubt, that the passage given in the 'account of striving' is a very accurate description of the side effects of advanced *prāṇāyāma* techniques. Now these descriptions no longer appear to be a gross exaggeration and the associated severe side effects become perfectly understandable. The 'account of striving' must therefore have been provided by someone with first-hand knowledge about the practice of breath retention and its side effects.

Secondly, we can now rule out the possibility that the description of the side-effects of breath restraint has been borrowed from the description of a sick person. It is also impossible, that an identical description would be simultaneously and spontaneously used in two different contexts. Therefore, this means that in fact the Channovāda Sutta, the Channa Sutta, and the Phagguṇa Sutta have borrowed the description of side effects of *prāṇāyāma*, and used it to describe the state of an ill person. As I have already remarked, the Suttapiṭaka was for a long time preserved only in oral form, and as a result it has a specific structure, as it consists of "stock-passages". This has however greatly facilitated taking fragments from one context and introducing them in another. Undoubtedly, this is what happened in the case of description of side-effects of strivings.

But this also means, that this description is relatively early. It already had to be in circulation, for the compilers of the Channovāda Sutta, the Channa Sutta, and the Phagguṇa Sutta to use it in their own context.

Of course, we can immediately exclude a possibility, that Swami Rama would base his descriptions of *prāṇāyāma* techniques on some obscure ancient Buddhist suttas. That would be simply nonsensical, as he most likely had no knowledge of these texts and absolutely no reason to draw from them. It is really surprising, but it appears that the account of the breathless meditation in the 'account

of strivings' is the earliest detailed description of the techniques of *prāṇāyāma* existing in the Indian meditative literature.

Can we therefore conclude our research by stating that the account is simply 'authentic'? The problem of 'authenticity' is unfortunately not so straightforward. I've had an e-mail correspondence concerning this issue with Professor Bronkhorst, for which I am grateful. He has pointed out that while the account is 'authentic' in the sense of being an accurate and genuine description of side-effects connected to quasi- *prāṇāyāma* techniques it does not necessarily entail that is 'authentically Buddhist' in the sense of describing practices performed by the Buddha himself or some other Buddhist. The compiler of the account of strivings could simply have access to some non-Buddhist sources which are lost to us now, and which describe in detail such practices and experiences connected with their performance. The account could have also been inserted by some Buddhist who perhaps had performed these practices prior to his conversion to Buddhism. In both of these cases, the account would be meant to serve polemic functions, and not necessarily reflect historical events.

However, we should in no way exclude the possibility that the account presents the authentic practices and experiences of the Buddha himself. When I was presenting an earlier version of this paper during IAHR congress in Erfurt, Johannes Bronkhorst has pointed out to me the problems connected with establishing the relative historicity of events connected with the life of the Buddha. He has noted that the Buddhists could obtain knowledge about the events described in the account of strivings from only one man – the Buddha himself. On the other hand, the knowledge concerning the events surrounding the death and the funeral of the Buddha, should on the face of it have a much higher level of objectivity, as these events were supposedly known to a great number of people in ancient India. And yet, as Bronkhorst has pointed out, there seemed to have been in circulation at least one alternative account of the Buddha's funeral, according to which his remains were not divided but buried under one stupa. When the later Buddhists were faced with the necessity of choosing one of these alternatives as the 'official' version, they simply chose the one contained now in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, as it was more convenient to them. If such uncertainties are connected to supposedly more objective events connected to the death of the Buddha, then what of 'historicity' of the events preceding his awakening? This should teach us certain caution when making claims about the historicity of certain events from the life of the Buddha.

Let's now focus on a slightly different issue: if the account was indeed introduced for polemic reasons, what would be exactly its purpose? The account of the strivings is part of a larger narrative in which certain inefficient practices are juxtaposed to the efficient ones. If the account for introduced for polemic reasons, then its first purpose would be to criticize quasi- *prāṇāyāma* techniques of

meditation as not efficient in bringing awakening. Indirectly it could have been a critique of those who were practicing it: the non-Buddhists. The second purpose would be to praise the authentic, spontaneous and efficient Buddhist jhāna by juxtaposing it with the non-efficient non-Buddhist, forced methods of meditation. After the quasi-*prāṇāyāma* techniques had failed to bring desired effects, the breakthrough comes thanks to the bodhisatta's recollection of the unique experience of the first jhāna, which he underwent during his youth. The first jhāna is portrayed in an entirely different light: as a pleasant, spontaneously attained and most importantly efficient meditative state from the soteriological point of view.

If the motivation for introducing this passage was indeed polemic, it has however failed to bring the desired effect. The later Buddhists were not able to recognize that 'the strivings' of the bodhisatta are in fact quasi- *prāṇāyāma* practices, and saw them as simple 'asceticism'. In the Buddhacarita, for example, nothing is said about any quasi- *prāṇāyāma* methods, and only fasting and self-mortification are described. The later Buddhist eventually also came to believe that there is nothing uniquely Buddhist about the first jhāna, as they were quite certain that it is a meditative state shared with the non-Buddhists and inefficient in bringing liberation by itself. They came to see the four jhāna-s as *samatha* meditation, while it was *vipassanā* that was supposed to be uniquely Buddhist and efficient in bringing liberation. This has of course led to a multitude of new doctrinal problems and development of several different concepts of insight, some of which proved to be impossible to practice.

Therefore if it was a polemic, it proved to be too subtle of a polemic for ancient Buddhists and has failed its purpose. We must be therefore open to the possibility that the passage in question was not introduced for polemic purposes and the compiler who was introducing it thought that it was an account of real events.

We have to ask ourselves at this point, what was in fact the true goal of bodhisatta's practices (according to the account, of course)? Was stopping of all activities seen as directly leading to liberation, or in other words, did the bodhisatta follow the ideology of the 'main stream' of meditation, if we are to use Bronkhorst's term? According to the statements of the Buddha himself and of his five companions, this does not seem to be exactly the case. In the account of strivings we find a fragment, where bodhisatta is contemplating whether Smaṇas and Brahmins who experience painful, sharp, severe, bitter feelings (*dukkhā tikkhā kharā kaṭukā vedanā vedayanti*) are able (*bhabba*) of knowledge and vision (*ñāṇāya dassanāya*), and unsurpassed awakening (*anuttarāya sambodhāya*).¹⁷ After the

¹⁷ MN 85/ii 94: no cepi te bhonto samaṇabrāhmaṇā opakkamikā dukkhā tikkhā kharā kaṭukā vedanā vedayanti, bhabbāva te ñāṇāya dassanāya anuttarāya sambodhāya.

practice of fasting, the bodhisatta acknowledged that he has not attained any superhuman state (*uttarimanussadhamma*), not to speak of any distinction/excellence (*visesa*) of noble knowledge and vision (*ariyañāṇadassana*).¹⁸ The same terms are used by the five bhikkhus, when they express their disbelief in the awakening of the Buddha. They point out, that by a certain posture/movement (*iriyā*), by that path/method (*paṭipadā*) and by the performance of difficult things (*dukkarakārikā*), the Buddha has failed to attain any superhuman state (*uttarimanussadhamma*), not to speak of any distinction/excellence (*visesa*) of noble knowledge and vision (*ariyañāṇadassana*).¹⁹

All these statements seem to suggest, that the bodhisatta and the five bhikkhus did not seem to believe that the stopping of activity was in and by itself conducive to liberation. They seem to have been striving to attain some sort of higher, liberating knowledge, and these practices were merely seen as means to this end.

Johannes Bronkhorst was aware that the non-Buddhist meditators did not follow exactly the same ideology as a basis for their practices. He has stated that the original form of the main stream of meditation had undergone a huge transformation in Hinduism. This transformation has coincided with the development of the notion of liberating knowledge. According to Bronkhorst, this liberating knowledge was achieved by an insight into the unchangeable nature of the soul. The notion of liberating knowledge gave rise to the idea, that liberation may be attained in this life, and not after death (Bronkhorst, 1986: 52). Bronkhorst claims that at some point, the proponents of the notion of liberating insight have adopted the methods of the main stream of meditation. But since the liberation was supposed to happen through knowledge about the nature of the soul, the meditative practice did no longer need to be predominantly bodily (Bronkhorst 1986: 54). As the result, meditation could become the main method of liberation, and the bodily practices were set aside.

It therefore seems, that the practices of the bodhisatta must be seen belonging to that current of non-Buddhist meditation, in which liberating knowledge was considered to be the ultimate goal that should be pursued. But this would entail that this current may have been much older than Bronkhorst suspected, and cannot be merely seen as a later evolution of the original 'main stream'.

Some of Bronkhorst's views have been criticized by Alexander Wynne in his work *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*. Wynne believes that Bronkhorst has conflated the evidence from different texts. He writes:

¹⁸ MN 85/ii 94: na kho panāhaṃ imāya kaṭukāya dukkarakārikāya adhigacchāmi uttarimanussadhammā alamariyañāṇadassanavisesaṃ.

¹⁹ MN 85/ II.94: 'tāyapi kho tvaṃ, āvuso gotama, iriyāya tāya paṭipadāya tāya dukkarakārikāya nājjhagamā uttarimanussadhammā alamariyañāṇadassanavisesaṃ.

He does not recognize the differences between texts that do not include any reference to extreme asceticism, and those that do. The idea of fasting to death [...] is not found in any of the early Brahminic texts on meditation [...] Moreover the passages on yoga in the early Brahminic texts do not mention the ideals of emaciation and painful breath restraint (Wynne, 2007: 112).

According to Wynne, Bronkhorst has misunderstood the true character of the early Brahminic meditative tradition. It was a meditative tradition in its own right, and severe forms of asceticism were either completely absent, or were something superficial (Wynne, 2007: 111). Wynne rightly claims that the realization of *ātman* was from the beginning the main goal of the early Brahminic schools, and that the cessation of bodily activity was never a goal in itself. It seems that Alexander Wynne has pointed out some weaknesses in Bronkhorst's approach which perhaps lead to slightly oversimplified view of the non-Buddhist practices.

The history of the non-Buddhist meditative practices may have been even more complex. The practices of the bodhisatta may have neither strictly belonged to Jain-like stream of meditation, as Bronkhorst wanted it, nor to the early Brahminic yoga mentioned by Wynne. They may have represented a current of meditation which originated in the non-Brahminic circles of *samaṇa-s*, but which may have aimed at achieving liberating knowledge without referring to *ātman*, or Brahman as goals of practice. My personal impression is that the *samaṇa* movement is perhaps still not receiving the credit it deserves, for its role in the development of Indian meditative and philosophical thought. *Samaṇa-s* were boldly introducing new, often radical ideas in their own name and were not afraid of being credited for them. They were also able to challenge and reject the prevailing worldview of the era. In the later centuries, even when Indian thinkers were introducing new ideas, they preferred to see themselves merely as commentators or interpreters of some holy tradition of which they felt part of, or even worse, the innovations were introduced by means of pious forgery. The era of *samaṇa-s* was therefore a golden age of Indian thought, never again to occur. There would not probably be a Buddha, without the *samaṇa* movement, although the Buddhists themselves are somewhat reluctant to realize this, undoubtedly due to the influence of Buddhist views on history, according to which the regular appearance of the Buddhas is a sort of cosmic necessity.

I think it is probable that the real meditative innovations may have appeared among some circles of *samaṇa-s*, but not necessarily amongst the Jains, who never seemed to be meditators par-excellence, but rather ascetics (cf. Polak, 2011: 72-75). We know that Uddaka Rāmaputta was probably a *samaṇa*. In the Vassakāra Sutta (AN 4.187/ii 180-181), the Brahmin Vassakāra tells the Buddha that raja Eleyya has faith in *samaṇa* Rāmaputta, who is described as his advisor.²⁰ His own teacher, Rāma,

²⁰ AN 4.187/ii 180-181: "yasmā ca kho, bho, samaṇo rāmaputto raññā eleyyena paṇḍitena paṇḍitataro karaṇīyādhikaraṇīyesu vacanīyādhivacanīyesu alamattadasatarena alamattadasataro, tasmā rājā eleyyo

must have therefore been a *samaṇa* as well. Ālāra Kālāma is neither explicitly described as *samaṇa* nor as a Brahmin, so we cannot know for certain. On the other hand we have also an evidence of very early Brahminic meditative practices of a ‘yogic’ type in case of Brahmin Pārāsariya.

History is written by the victors, however, and much of the history and ideas connected with the *samaṇa* movement is irreversibly lost to us, and it is a great loss indeed.

We can make some additional considerations concerning the authenticity of the account of strivings and reach some interesting conclusions. As we have already noted, the same stock description of the bodhisatta’s striving is contained in three suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya: the Mahāsaccaka Sutta, the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta and in the Saṅgārava Sutta. Johannes Bronkhorst has attempted to establish the potential authenticity of these suttas by analyzing their narrative context. He has come up with a claim that only the Mahāsaccaka Sutta provides a coherent narrative context for the description of the strivings of the bodhisatta. In this sutta, Saccaka Nigaṇṭhaputta speaks that among the Samaṇas and Brahmins, there are those who dwell given to the practice of the development of the body (*kāyabhāvanānuyogamanuyuttā*), but not develop the mind,²¹ and those who dwell given to the practice of the development of the mind (*cittabhāvanānuyogamanuyuttā*), but neglect the body.²² The Ājīvakas: Nanda Vaccha, Kisa Saṃkicca and Makkhali Gosāla are said to represent the first extreme, and the Buddhists the latter. According to Bronkhorst, the bodily practices supposedly practiced by the Ājīvakas, agree well with what we know about the Jains. In this way, Buddha’s account of his own strivings that appears in the later part of this sutta may be seen as an indirect critique of the Jain extreme of cultivation the body. Bronkhorst’s claim is however based on a presupposition that the description of the strivings of the bodhisatta serves a purpose of ridiculing the Jains. Therefore, the narrative context must somehow be connected to that purpose (Bronkhorst, 1986: 10). On the other hand, the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta and the Saṅgārava Sutta say nothing about the Jains, and therefore according to Bronkhorst they do not provide the context for the critique of the supposedly Jain practices. Bronkhorst seems to take for granted that the account of striving is not an genuine account of Gotama’s life or some historical events, but a Buddhist polemic against the Jains. However, in the Mahāsaccaka Sutta the Buddha explicitly states a very different purpose for the recollection of his strivings. After hearing Saccaka’s views, the Buddha provides his own definitions of wrong and right development of the body and mind. According to the Buddha, when for someone with the developed

samaṇe rāmaputte abhippasanno, samaṇe ca pana rāmaputte evarūpaṃ paramanipaccakāraṃ karoti, yadidaṃ abhivādanaṃ paccuṭṭhānaṃ añjalikammaṃ sāmīcikkammaṃ”.

²¹ MN 36/i 237: santi, bho gotama, eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā kāyabhāvanānuyogamanuyuttā viharanti, no cittabhāvanaṃ.

²² MN36/i 238: santi pana bho gotama eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā cittabhāvanānuyogamanuyuttā viharanti, no kāyabhāvanaṃ.

body (*bhāvitakāyo*) and mind (*bhāvitacitto*) there arises a pleasant or unpleasant feeling, it does not persist after having completely taken hold of the mind (*na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati*).²³ After that, the Buddha relates his own past experiences from the period when he was still an ‘unawakened bodhisatta’. At this place, the stock account of strivings is inserted. But the description of each painful practice is closed by an additional sentence stating that arisen painful feeling of such type did not completely take hold of his mind and remain.²⁴

This seems to indirectly suggest, that the Buddha had already possessed a developed body and mind prior to his awakening. As we see, the account of the strivings in the Mahāsaccaka Sutta does not necessarily seem to serve the function of ridiculing the Jains, as it is supposed to show the greatness of the Buddha. On the other hand, after describing each of the jhānas and the final attainment of certainty of liberation after the destruction of the *āsava*-s (effluents), the Buddha says that arisen pleasant feeling of that type did not completely take hold of my mind and persist. This seemingly mechanical insertion of the same phrase leads to a rather awkward result, because even the experience of the bliss of awakening seems to be regarded as something that can potentially take hold of the *citta* and is said not to have remained in the Buddha’s mind! All of this seems to show that the account of strivings does not harmonize well with the narrative context of the Mahāsaccaka Sutta.

In the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta, on the other hand, the account of bodhisatta’s strivings is given as a reaction to Rājakumāra’s wrong view that happiness should not be attained by means of happiness (*sukhena*), but by means of suffering (*dukkhena*).²⁵ Bronkhorst writes:

Here, the features which point to specific non-Buddhist, probably Jaina practices remain unexplained (Bronkhorst, 1986: 12).

However, there is another way to look at it. It may actually be the only sutta that could really provide the context for the critique of the Jains. In the Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta (MN 14), the Nigaṇṭhas (i.e. the Jains) criticize the Buddha and make a following claim:

Friend Gotama, happiness is not to be gained through happiness. happiness is to be gained through suffering.²⁶

And this is exactly the same claim that is criticized by the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta. The description of the bodhisatta’s strivings is supposed to show, that he was not able to attain liberation by painful

²³ MN 36/i 239: yassa kassaci, aggivessana, evaṃ ubhatopakkhaṃ uppannāpi sukhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati bhāvitattā kāyassa, uppannāpi dukkhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati bhāvitattā cittassa. evaṃ kho, aggivessana, bhāvitakāyo ca hoti bhāvitacitto cā”ti.

²⁴ MN 36/i 244: evarūpāpi kho me, aggivessana, uppannā dukkhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati

²⁵ Mn 85/ii 91: na kho sukhena sukhaṃ adhigantabbam, dukkhena kho sukhaṃ adhigantabbam

²⁶ MN 14/ I 91: na kho, āvuso gotama, sukhena sukhaṃ adhigantabbam, dukkhena kho sukhaṃ adhigantabbam

austerities, but he did attain it by the pleasant experience of jhāna. But even if the narrative context of the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta harmonizes well with the account of the strivings, it does not necessarily constitute in itself an argument in favor of its earliness. The narratives describing the circumstances in which a given talk was delivered by the Buddha (i.e. the time and place, person of the Buddha's interlocutor, and the purpose of the talk) often seem to be a later addition to an already existing stock passage. Therefore even if the doctrinal content of the sutta fits well with its narrative context it may just show the ingenuity of its compiler.

But let us now recapitulate some of the points we have made and go back to our question concerning the true purpose and character of the bodhisatta's strivings. We know now that his practices were not merely forms of self-mortification, they were quite sophisticated quasi-*prāṇāyāma* techniques. The unpleasant feelings associated with these practices were never an aim in itself of these practices, but merely natural, physiological side-effects expected to happen, but not necessarily desired. The strivings seemed to have been aimed at attaining some form of liberating insight, most often described as distinction/excellence (*visesa*) of noble knowledge and vision (*ariyañāṇadassana*). Given all that, we have to perhaps reconsider whether the label of 'asceticism' or 'ascetic practices' gives full justice to what the bodhisatta was really practicing. Standard dictionaries define 'asceticism' as 'the doctrine that a person can attain a high spiritual and moral state by practicing self-denial, self-mortification, and the like' or as 'rigorous self-denial; extreme abstinence; austerity.'²⁷ Neither of these definitions seems to be very fitting in case of the bodhisatta's strivings.

The way in which the practices described in the account of strivings are labeled is also quite telling. Apart from the term *padhāna* ('striving'/'exertion'), we also find terms: *iriyā* (posture/movement), *paṭipadā* (path/method) and *dukkarakārikā* (performance of difficult things). These terms may be found in the statements of the five bhikkhus, when they comment on the bodhisatta's failure to achieve any superhuman state or distinction of noble knowledge and vision due to these practices.²⁸ The usage of term *iriyā* is somewhat interesting. This term is quite common in Jain scriptures, such as the Āyāraṃga Sutta. The third lecture of the second book of this text is in fact entitled *iriyā*.²⁹ However, even in the holy text of the Jains, who are ascetics 'par excellence', *iriyā* has

²⁷ Dictionary.com: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/asceticism> (2015/09/06).

²⁸ MN 27/i 172: āvuso gotama, iriyāya tāya paṭipadāya tāya dukkarakārikāya nājjhagamā uttarimanussadhammā alamariyañāṇadassanavisesaṃ

²⁹ Ayar II.3.1/130/p. 82: Taiyam ajjhayaṇaṃ iriyā

the meaning of ‘walking’, and does not refer to any forms of self-torment. When the bodhisatta himself acknowledges his lack of success, he uses only the term *dukkarakārikā*.³⁰

This is in stark contrast to the extreme practices of self-mortification of the Māhasīhanāda Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya, which are labeled as *tapassita* (asceticism)³¹, and the Buddha recalls in that sutta that he was a *tapassin* (ascetic).³² Similar ascetic practices and similar terms to label them are also used in the Māhasīhanāda Sutta (DN 8/i 16) of the Dīgha Nikāya. There, the Buddha speaks of ascetic undertakings (*tapopakkamā*) of certain Sāmaṇas and Brahmins,³³ and doesn’t agree with Kassapa’s statement, according to which he, the Buddha, reproaches all asceticism (*sabbaṃ tapaṃ garahati*).³⁴ While the term *tapo* (lit. heat) seems to have been always connected in India to austerities, asceticism and self-denial, the term *padhāna* does not necessarily convey such meanings. For example, we often find a phrase: *cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati* – which can be roughly translated as: ‘applies (lit. stretches forth) the mind and strives’ (e.g. DN 22/ii 312). We also find the term *sammappadhānā* (right strivings)³⁵, which is virtually synonymous in meaning with *sammā vāyāma* (right effort), a constituent of the Noble Eightfold Path. Given just how much the practices described in the account of strivings differ from the typical straightforward ascetic practices of the Māhasīhanāda Sutta, we have to perhaps reconsider whether they deserve the label of ‘asceticism’ at all.

It is worth noticing, that the practices described in the account of strivings are still being practiced today. It is quite telling, however, that those practicing them are rarely (if ever) labelled as ‘ascetics’, but rather as ‘yogins’, ‘adepts of *prāṇāyāma*’, or ‘meditative masters’.

The results of our research concerning the authenticity of the account of strivings have far more significance than it may seem at the face of it. It is not merely the question of whether these practices are forms of straightforward, hard-core asceticism or advanced quasi-*prāṇāyāma* techniques. One of the most important and controversial topics of critical Early Buddhist studies is the nature and status of jhāna meditation. The narrative depicting bodhisatta’s own path to awakening is one of the most important parts of the Sutta Piṭaka and many important conclusions about the true character of early Buddhist jhāna can be reached on the basis of it. The account of strivings is an

³⁰ MN 85/ii 94: na kho paṇāhaṃ imāya kaṭukāya dukkarakārikāya adhigacchāmi uttarimanussadhammā alamariyaññadassanavisesaṃ.

³¹ MN 12/I 077: tatrāssu me idaṃ, sārīputta, tapassitāya hoti

³² MN 12/I 077: tapassī sudaṃ homi paramatapassī.

³³ DN 8/ i 16: imepi kho, āvuso gotama, tapopakkamā etesaṃ samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṃ sāmāññasāṅkhātā ca brahmaññasāṅkhātā ca

³⁴ DN 8/ i 16: sutam metam, bho gotama — ‘samaṇo gotamo sabbaṃ tapaṃ garahati, sabbaṃ tapassim lūkhajīviṃ ekaṃsena upakkosati upavadatī’ti

³⁵ AN 4.13/ ii 15: Cattār-imāni, bhikkhave, sammappadhānāni. Katamāni cattāri?

important part of this narrative and closely linked with the account of the bodhisatta's unique reminiscence of his experience of the first jhāna from his youth. Much about jhāna can be indirectly inferred from its juxtaposition to the inefficient methods of meditation, tested and abandoned by the future Buddha. Therefore any conclusions about the relative authenticity and earliness of the account of strivings are of great significance.

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DN *Dīgha Nikāya*

MN *Majjhima Nikāya*

SN *Saṃyutta Nikāya*

Vism *Visuddhimagga*

In this paper, the numerical references to the Pāli suttas are to:

(before the slash)The number of the sutta/ (after the slash) the number of the PTS volume and page in case of the suttas from the Dīgha Nikāya.

The number of the sutta/the number of the PTS volume and page in case of the suttas from the Majjhima Nikāya.

The number of the saṃyutta and the number of the sutta/the number of the PTS volume and page in case of the suttas from the *Saṃyutta* Nikāya.

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