

Buddhism
Astral Religion
Garry Phillipson
Notes

Introduction:

This week is concerned with Buddhism, and more specifically Theravadin Buddhism - the earliest form of Buddhism, still found in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma.

The Buddha lived in northern India. The dates most often quoted for his life are 566 – 486 BCE, but scholarly opinion – whilst not unanimous – suggests that his life was probably more recent than that by about 40 years.¹ The primary source for this form of Buddhism is the Pali Canon – a collection of the Buddha's sayings which were, according to tradition, recited and memorised at the 'First Council' held by the Buddha's followers immediately after his death, and preserved by regular oral recitation by recluses until finally being written down in the first century BCE. Whilst the reality seems to have been rather more complicated than this, contemporary scholarly opinion is that a large part of the Canon as we now have it must date back to at least the third century BCE. Also associated with the Canon is a large collection of 'Commentaries' – texts intended to explicate difficult passages in the Canon or to add further information. It seems that most of the Commentaries were written between the time the Canon was first assembled, and the sixth century CE.² There will not be space in this paper to refer more than occasionally to the way in which Buddhism developed as it migrated from India to other countries such as China, Tibet and Japan. I recommend texts by Conze and Skilton to anyone who wishes to pursue that vast topic.³ Also the Encyclopedia Britannica has an article on Buddhism which provides a reasonable overview of the entire subject.

The primary focus in what follows will be on what the Buddha had to say about cosmology. In order for anything in Buddhism to really make sense, however, one thing needs to be somewhat clear. This is enlightenment, *Nibbāna* (as it is in Pali; *Nirvāna* in Sanskrit). The Buddha only characterised this in negative terms – for instance:

There is, monks, a domain where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no wind... there is not this world, there is not another world, there is no sun or moon. I do not call this coming or going, nor standing, nor dying, nor being reborn; it is without support, without occurrence, without object. Just this is the end of suffering.⁴

And sometimes, as above, the description is quite incomprehensible. Which is not necessarily a criticism, because *Nibbāna* is indeed described as beyond the scope of the rational mind. And yet it is also described as being already familiar. For instance, in *Majjhima Nikaya Sutta* 1, he says of the ordinary unenlightened person:

He perceives *Nibbāna* as *Nibbāna*. Having perceived *Nibbāna* as *Nibbāna*, he conceives [himself as] *Nibbāna*, he conceives [himself] in *Nibbāna*, he conceives *Nibbāna* to be 'mine', he delights in *Nibbāna*.⁵

¹ Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.14. I recommend this book as an introduction to the subject.

² For more on the Pali Canon, see: Andrew Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism* (Birmingham: Windhorse, 1994) chapter 9; Gethin (1998), pp.41-5. For sources and referencing convention in this text, see 'Note on Pali Material' in the Bibliography.

³ Edward Conze, *A Short History of Buddhism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980); Skilton (1994).

⁴ from the *Udana*; this translation from Gethin 1998 p.76-7. For the original see e.g. Masefield 1994, p.165.

⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi, p.87.

The point of this is to tell us that *Nibbāna* is not an otherworldly or superhuman experience. It is, as Buddhist teachers never tire of saying, always present here and now. This is an enigma. And yet unless one has some intellectual purchase on the idea of *Nibbāna*, none of the Buddha's teaching is going to make much sense. For a comprehensive and scholarly treatment of *Nibbāna* (and the Four Noble Truths), please see the 'Four Truths' Reading, which is Chapter 3 from Rupert Gethin's *The Foundations of Buddhism*.

To introduce *Nibbāna* in a relatively brief and colloquial way, I think the most useful characterisation I have heard of it is as follows:

Imagine, firstly, a situation of extreme self-consciousness (e.g. finding yourself at a party where you don't know anyone); then a situation where you almost forget yourself (e.g. listening to music that really grips you). You will see that these experiences exist at points on a continuum, with a strong sense of separation at one end, and relatively little sense of separation at the other. Loosely speaking, we can say that *Nibbāna* lies in the direction of the 'no separation' experience. It can be suggested that when human beings pursue the types of experience we do, what we are really pursuing are these moments where the sense of being separate fades away for a while. But from the Buddhist perspective, we usually go wrong when we reflect on such moments, by interpreting them in terms such as 'I was having a great time', when the most significant feature was that the sense of a separate 'I' was more or less absent.

The Buddha's message is that it is belief in the absolute reality of our existence as separate selves, and the actions we take on that basis, that cause suffering (*dukkha* in Pali, *duhkha* in Sanskrit; see the 'Four Truths' online reading for more on this). And that by coming to understand, experientially, the way our minds and bodies work, it is possible to see how this sense of separateness is our own creation; and, by seeing this clearly, to go beyond suffering, which is to say, realise *Nibbāna*.

The way this is most usually set out in the Buddha's teaching is in terms of the Four Noble Truths:

- There is suffering ('suffering' is a common translation of the Pali word *dukkha*) – this is a sense of being unfulfilled, not at peace, of one's life being less than it might be. To the Buddha, this is an intrinsic part of the human condition, not (for instance) a sign of neurosis.
- There is a cause of suffering, which is craving – that is to say, the desire to get something or become something different is, ultimately, responsible for perpetuating our suffering.
- There is the cessation of suffering – the Buddha states categorically that something more than the "ordinary unhappiness" to which Freud aspired is possible. The cessation of suffering is *Nibbāna*.
- There is a path which leads to the cessation of suffering – which in Buddhism is the Eightfold Path, comprising elements of ethical behaviour, meditation, and wisdom.

Nibbāna is of course not the exclusive property of Buddhists, but is one way of characterising a state which is also known as union with God, realisation of the Self, and so forth.

Any short description leaves an intelligent person with more questions than answers. And so at this point I refer you once more to the online reading 'Four Truths'. You might also like to try

The Four Noble Truths by Francis Story, which can be downloaded for free (along with many other titles) from the Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka.⁶

Cosmology in Buddhism

And with that, we turn to Buddhist cosmology. Here is a concept of central importance:

The key to understanding the Buddhist cosmological scheme lies in the principle of *the equivalence of cosmology and psychology*. I mean by this that in the traditional understanding the various realms of existence relate rather closely to certain commonly (and not so commonly) experienced states of mind. In fact Buddhist cosmology is at once a map of different realms of existence and a description of all possible experiences.⁷

⁶ http://www.bps.lk/wheels_library/wheels_pdf/wh_034_035.pdf

⁷ Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.119-20.

The following table lists Buddhism's 31 realms of existence:

TABLE 5.1: THE 31 REALMS OF EXISTENCE

PLANE	REALM		LIFE-SPAN	
Immaterial-Sphere Plane 4		31. Neither perception nor non-perception	84,000	G.A.
		30. Nothingness	60,000	"
		29. Infinite consciousness	40,000	"
		28. Infinite space	20,000	"
Fine-material-Sphere Plane 16	4th Jhāna Plane Pure Abodes 23-27	27. Highest Pure Abode	16,000	G.A.
		26. Clear-sighted " "	8,000	"
		25. Beautiful " "	4,000	"
		24. Serene " "	2,000	"
		23. Durable " "	1,000	"
		22. Non-percipient Realm	500	"
		21. Great Reward	500	"
	3rd Jhāna Plane	20. Steady Aura	64	G.A.
		19. Infinite Aura	32	"
		18. Minor Aura	16	"
	2nd Jhāna Plane	17. Radiant Lustre	8	G.A.
		16. Infinite Lustre	4	"
		15. Minor Lustre	2	"
	1st Jhāna Plane	14. Mahā Brahmā	1	I.A.
		13. Brahmā's Ministers	1 / 2	"
		12. Brahma's Retinue	1 / 3	"

TABLE 5.1 — Continued

PLANE	REALM		LIFE-SPAN	
Sense - Sphere Plane 11	Sensuous Blissful Plane	11. Paranimmitavasavatti	16,00	C.Y.
		10. Nimmānarati	8,000	"
		9. Tusita	4,000	"
		8. Yāma	2,000	"
		7. Tāvātimsa	1,000	"
		6. Cātummahārājika	500	"
		5. Human	Indefinite	
	Woeful Plane	4. Asura	Indefinite	
		3. Peta	"	
		2. Animal	"	
		1. Hell	"	

G.A. = great aeon
I.A. = incalculable aeon
C.Y. = celestial years

This description of 31 levels of existence is frequently found in the commentaries to the Pali Canon.⁸ These break down into three broad categories: three world-systems, or *lokas*. The human realm belongs to the lowest of the three, *kāma-loka*. Besides the human realm, *kāma-loka* includes the “Woeful Way”—four states which involve more suffering than the human, and the Celestial Realms—states populated by *devas* (deities or gods) where life is more pleasant than it is in this world.

Moving to the states below human, the lowest state in the Woeful Way is Niraya Hell. The other realms below human show similar levels of involvement with the senses: for example, *petas*, or hungry ghosts, are often depicted as having mouths the size of a pin-head, and stomachs the size of a mountain. They are continually driven to satisfy impossible desires. The states “above” the human involve increasing levels of absorption in ever more refined pleasures. Above *kāma-loka* stands the world system known as *rūpa-loka*—the realm of form—or, as it is sometimes put, the “fine material” realm. Of the five physical senses known in *kāma-loka*, only seeing and hearing are considered to exist at this level.⁹ The highest world-system is *arūpa-loka*—the formless realms—in which mind has temporarily left matter behind altogether.

The expectation might be that there would be a linear progression through the thirty-one worlds to *nibbāna*. This, however, is exactly what does not happen; there is, as it were, a glass ceiling in heaven. The highest realm of *arūpa-loka* is “the realm of neither-perception nor non-perception”. The point here is that the being at this level has almost shaken off the limitations of individuality; the sense of separation from all-that-is has become attenuated. However, there lingers in mind a fragment of belief in separation so that the being at this level thinks something to the effect of, ‘Wow, look at this, I’m almost at one with the cosmos’ and thereby perpetuates their separateness. That is the meaning of ‘neither perception nor non-perception’: the dualistic perception of ‘me as a separate self, separate from the universe’ has not *quite* been shaken off. From the Buddhist point of view, this is a major problem.

For although life in many of the thirty-one realms can go on for huge periods of time, a life in any realm is transient: sooner or later any being, in any realm, will die and take rebirth in some other realm, in accordance with their past *kamma*.¹⁰ This is the nature of *samsara*—the word means “perpetual wandering”. As if to underline the ultimately unsatisfactory nature of life as a god, the commentaries to the Pali Canon state that there are five signs of impending death in a *deva* (a god in *kāma-loka*): their flower garland withers; their clothes get dirty; sweat comes from their armpits; their bodies become unsightly; and they get restless.¹¹

Buddhism as Apophatic Discourse

You may be wondering why there should be exactly *thirty-one* realms of existence. In considering this it will be useful to introduce the concept that Buddhist discourse is *apophatic*.

The term ‘apophatic’ is often used in contradistinction to ‘kataphatic’ (or ‘cataphatic’): ‘apophatic theology’ denies that it is possible to describe the attributes of God, and therefore proceeds by saying what S/he is not, whilst kataphatic theology *does* describe God’s attributes. Related terms are ‘negative theology’ and ‘*via negativa*’. If you want to pursue *apophasis* in depth then I recommend *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* by Michael Sells as a (heavy duty, but readable)

⁸ This particular table is from Bhikkhu Bodhi, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1993), 186-7. A good, accessible analysis will be found in Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), ch.5.

⁹ See article ‘Loka’ in Nyānatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, 4th edn. (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980), 108.

¹⁰ The Pali form of the Sanskrit *karma*.

¹¹ Ñānamoli (tr.), *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1979), 667, n.43.

introduction; and *On What Cannot Be Said* by William Franke which is mainly a collection of apophatic readings.¹²

We saw earlier how the Buddha defines *Nibbāna* in negative terms, which is the apophatic approach. Now to consider how this relates to Buddhist cosmology's thirty-one realms. Thirty-two was seen as a good, round number in the Buddha's day—for instance there are the thirty-two marks of the great man, thirty-two parts of the body, thirty-two kinds of *kamma*-resultant and so on. So the significance of there being thirty-one realms may be that *nibbāna* is implied, through the incompleteness of the number. There is, as it were, something more, but it cannot be mentioned except by implying that something is missing. As far as I know, the Buddhist scholar Rupert Gethin is the first person in modern times to suggest this.¹³ Some support for the thesis may be found in the aniconic nature of early Buddhist sculpture:



The point here is that in this representation of the Buddha, an empty chair is all that is shown: telling us that the goal of the spiritual path cannot be depicted by an image, any more than by words.¹⁴

What Is Reborn?

As we saw above, Buddhist cosmology comprises a range of different worlds, with beings taking repeated and always temporary rebirth in them dependent on their *kamma*. At the same time, the Buddha also taught that there is no such thing as a permanent, enduring soul or self. The Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* literally translates as 'no self'. The question naturally arises, if there is no self or soul, what is it which takes rebirth?

In order to address this, it is necessary to understand something about the doctrine of *anattā*. It has often been misunderstood as annihilationist – that is, teaching that real beings are annihilated at some point. This is to miss the point that these 'beings' are regarded as never having been real in the first place. The Buddha did not intend this to be accepted as part of a

¹² Michael A Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (University of Chicago Press: 1994); William Franke, *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts Vols 1 & 2* (University of Notre Dame Press: 2007).

¹³ Gethin, 126.

¹⁴ The picture is from Bechert, H. & Gombrich, R.(eds), *The World of Buddhism* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1984) p.19.

dogmatic belief system, but to be used in order to look at experience. In order for something to be a 'self', he insisted, it would need to be a continuous component of experience. The point of the doctrine of non-self is to look at all of experience in order to see whether any such thing can be discovered. Thus, although it appears to contradict teachings which say that there is a soul, the contradiction is not substantial. Teachings which assert the reality of the soul generally also assert that this soul is connected to God. So that in the final analysis, a state of not being separate from God is realised. The import of *anattā* is that the 'self' which is believed to be separate from the rest of life does not exist and therefore a state of not being separate from *nibbāna* is realised. The end-point of the 'soul' and the 'no soul' approaches may therefore be more similar than might be expected.

On an historical note it seems likely, as Gethin remarks, that the Buddha was deliberately going against the teachings of the *Upanishads* with this aspect of his teaching.¹⁵ One might speculate that he felt people had grown too accustomed to the idea of a soul, and that the no-soul idea would prove more challenging and therefore lead people to investigate their experience more urgently.

This still leaves the question, if there is no soul, what is reborn? The Buddha was clear that, to most of us, it *seems* as if there is a separate self. And this belief is seen as being sufficiently strong to fuel repeated rebirth. But a distinction needs to be drawn between the world as we generally experience it, of which our separate self-hood is a foundational assumption, and the world as it actually is, in which the only reality "self" has is that of an idea which arises and passes like everything else. After discussing matters relating to the individual self, the Buddha often voices a disclaimer along these lines:

...these are merely names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world, which the Tathāgata [Buddha] uses without misapprehending them.¹⁶

In Buddhist doctrine, consequently, two kinds of truth—conventional truth and ultimate truth—are distinguished.¹⁷ These refer, respectively, to the level at which separate beings are believed to exist, and to the level at which it is seen they do not. It can be noted that there are, as McEvilley points out, interesting parallels between this aspect of Buddhist philosophy, and the Pyrrhonism of Sextus Empiricus.¹⁸

The Demotion of God in Buddhism

It may be seen as part of an apophatic approach that the Buddha did not characterise the goal of the spiritual quest as being anything to do with God. Indeed there is, as is well known, no such thing as an all-powerful God in Buddhism. The Buddha did, however, describe how the *idea* of God Almighty arises. He described a being who is reborn in a heavenly realm, and is on his own for a few aeons, whereupon "there arises in him mental weariness and a longing for company thus: 'Would that some other beings come to this place!'"¹⁹ And it just so happens that some other beings happen to be born there, at around that time. Then, the Buddha said, that individual—believing he has just populated the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing)—thinks to himself:

¹⁵ Gethin (1998), p.137.

¹⁶ *Dīgha Nikāya* i.202, 169.

¹⁷ See article 'Paramattha' in Nyanatiloka (1980), 152-3.

¹⁸ Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), 474. See also McEvilley's 'Early Greek Philosophy and Mādhyamika' in *Philosophy East and West*, vol.31, no.2. (Apr. 1981), 141-164.

¹⁹ *Dīgha Nikāya* i.18 (76).

I am Brahmā, the great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, the All-Powerful, the Lord, the Maker and Creator, Ruler, Appointer and Orderer, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be.²⁰

And the other beings there believe this too. Eventually, one of them dies and appears in the human realm, and—based on memories of this previous life—begins to preach of an almighty God. This illustrates the familiar point that there is an element of scepticism, even iconoclasm, running through the Buddha's teaching.

The absence of a God, and the relative unimportance of superhuman beings, has led to much discussion about whether Buddhism should be defined as a religion or a philosophy. For a treatment of this theme, I refer you to 'Buddhism and the Definition of Religion – One More Time' by William Herbrechtsmeier which is available via JSTOR.²¹

Where Does the Human Realm Fit Into this Schema?

The location of the human realm is fifth from bottom of the table of the 31 realms, so that (you might think) if we were a Premiership football team, we would be in danger of relegation. In a comment on the human realm, however, the Buddha states that he has seen hell, where the experience of the six senses (the five physical senses and mind as the sixth) is exclusively painful; he has seen heaven, where the six-sensory experience is exclusively pleasant. And he just says, enigmatically, "Monks, it is a gain for you, it is well gained by you, that you have obtained the opportunity for living the holy life."²² The commentary to this volume offers amplification of this theme:

It isn't possible to live the holy life of the path either in hell, because of extreme suffering, or in heaven, because of extreme pleasure, on account of which negligence arises through continuous amusements and delights. But the human world is a combination of pleasure and pain, so this is the field of action for the holy life of the path.²³

Leibniz famously said that we live in "the best of all possible worlds". Here, the Buddha suggests that this *is* the best of all possible worlds (from a soteriological – i.e. 'concerned with salvation' - perspective), precisely because it is *not* the best or worst of worlds (in terms of quotidian pleasure). It is seen as possible, in a human life, to experience the delights and agonies of all possible worlds and, through so doing, to realise that even the highest gods have not found a lasting solution to life's problems.

The article 'Cosmology and Meditation' by Rupert Gethin gives an excellent overview of Buddhist cosmology, including some themes which I will not cover here in order to avoid repetition. It can be found on JSTOR.²⁴

The Buddha was not a Metaphysician

²⁰ *Dīgha Nikāya* i.18 (76).

²¹ William Herbrechtsmeier, 'Buddhism and the Definition of Religion: One More Time' in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol.32 No.1 (March 1993), pp.1-18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1386910?origin=JSTOR-pdf> (checked 9th January 2009).

²² *Samyutta Nikāya* IV.126 (1207).

²³ Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.) *Connected Discourses of the Buddha—a New Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2000), 1419 (quoting the commentary to *Samyutta-Nikāya*).

²⁴ Rupert Gethin, 'Cosmology and Meditation: From the Aggañña-Sutta to the Mahāyāna' in *History of Religions*, Vol.36 No.3 (February 1997), pp.183-217. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3176457?origin=JSTOR-pdf> (checked 9th January 2009).

One often meets with the expectation, when religion is discussed, that a complete intellectual model of the universe should be provided. It needs to be emphasised that the Buddha did not see this goal as either desirable or even possible. He was not interested in setting out a metaphysical system, and thus he deliberately avoided answering various speculative questions about cosmology or anything else. Pages 66-7 of the 'Four Truths' online reading will begin to make this clear.

Also, the Buddha seems to have had little time for ritual. See 'Text #1' in the 'Buddhist Texts' online reading, for his advice to a Brahmin about ritual bathing. Note, here, how the Buddha appropriates an idea which was current in his culture – the idea of purification through ritual bathing – and gives it a new meaning, that of practising non-harming, thereby making it relevant to his teaching. It seems that this was often his *modus operandi* – rather than creating a teaching from scratch, he put a new twist on existing concepts.

The following brief excerpts on related themes now follow below:

From the *Canki Sutta*, in which the Buddha emphasises the need to get experience for oneself of whether a particular teaching works or not, criticising the Brahmins who he judges to rely totally on faith.

The 'handful of leaves' simile in which the Buddha states that he has only taught a small amount of what he knows.

From *Majjhima Nikaya Sutta 95, Canki Sutta* (Nanamoli/Bodhi pp779-80) Canki, a Brahmin student of the 3 *Vedas*, has suggested to the Buddha that only the religious teachings contained in the *Vedas* can be regarded as definitely true. After questioning Canki, the Buddha says:

...true, anything else is wrong : – [170] NO, Master Gotama.

"Sô, Bhāradvāja, it seems that among the brahmins there is not even a single brahmin who says thus: 'I know this, I see this: only this is true, anything else is wrong.' And among the brahmins there is not even a single teacher or a single teacher's teacher back to the seventh generation of teachers, who says thus: 'I know this, I see this: only this is true, anything else is wrong.' And the ancient brahmin seers, the creators of the hymns, the composers of the hymns...even these ancient brahmin seers did not say thus: 'We know this, we see this: only this is true, anything else is wrong.' Suppose there were a file of

blind men each in touch with the next: the first one does not see, the middle one does not see, and the last one does not see. So too, Bhāradvāja, in regard to their statement the brahmins seem to be like a file of blind men: the first one does not see, the middle one does not see, and the last one does not see. What do you think, Bhāradvāja, that being so, does not the faith of the brahmins turn out to be groundless?"

CHAPTER IV.—SĪNSAPĀ GROVE

(i) *Sīnsapā*.¹

Once the Exalted One was staying at Kosambī in Sīnsapā Grove.

Then the Exalted One, gathering up a few sīnsapā leaves in his hand, said to the monks:

‘What think ye, monks? Which are the more numerous, just this mere handful of sīnsapā leaves I have here, or those in the grove overhead?’

‘Very few in number, lord, are the leaves in the handful gathered up by the Exalted One: much more in number are those in the grove overhead.’

‘Just so, monks, much more in number are those things I have found out, but not revealed; very few are the things I have revealed. And why, monks, have I not revealed them?’

Because they are not concerned with profit, they are not rudiments of the holy life, they conduce not to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquillity, to full comprehension, to the perfect wisdom, to Nibbāna. That is why I have not revealed them.²

And what is it, monks, that I have revealed?

Just that This is Ill. This is the arising of Ill. This is the ceasing of Ill. This is the practice that leads to the ceasing of Ill. And why so?

Because, monks, this is concerned with profit. It is the rudiments of the holy life. It does conduce to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquillity, to full comprehension, to the perfect wisdom. It does conduce to Nibbāna. Therefore have I revealed it.

Wherefore, monks, an effort must be made to realize: This is Ill . . . this is the practice that leads to the ceasing of Ill.’

¹ Of the tree *Dalbergia Sissu* or the Asoka tree. Cf. *A.* i, 136; *D.* ii, 316; *M.P.* 413.

² Cf. *D.* ii, 100.

Signs & portents in Buddhist texts

In order to elucidate the approach of the Buddha to divinatory practices, as presented in the Pali Canon, we need to look in some detail at various episodes from the life of the Buddha. There are, for sure, plenty of supernatural goings-on.

Prophecy features immediately after the Buddha's birth. The sage Asita, seeing that the devas are "wildly cheering", enquires why and is told about the birth of the Buddha. He goes to see the boy, and confidently predicts—as an "adept in construing signs and marks"—that the boy will "reach the summit of true knowledge". Though he then weeps, knowing that he himself will be dead before the Buddha begins teaching.²⁵

See the 'Buddhist Texts' online reading, 'Text #2' for the text of the above episode.

In the commentaries to the Pali Canon there is an additional account, involving a group of eight court astrologers. According to one version, five of the eight predicted that Siddhattha Gotama would definitely become a Buddha, whilst the other three said that he would either be a Buddha or a universal monarch. Other commentaries say that seven of the eight astrologers hedged their bets as to whether he would be a Buddha or a universal monarch, and only one—Kondañña—made a definite prediction, that it would indeed be Buddhahood.²⁶ It is worth remarking that, again according to the commentaries, the astrologers who predicted accurately, (either the five or just Kondañña, depending on the commentary), formed part or all of the group of five who were with the Buddha before enlightenment and who were the first people he taught after enlightenment.

In one *sutta* *Ānanda*, the Buddha's attendant for many years, recites a list of "wonderful and marvellous qualities" of the Buddha: when he entered his mother's womb, a great measureless light suffused all the worlds; four *devas* came to protect him from the four quarters (it would be interesting to explore the parallel here with the "guardians of the four quarters" found in contemporary paganism).²⁷ At his birth there is again light, plus a quaking and trembling of all the worlds.²⁸

See the 'Buddhist Texts' online reading, 'Text #3' for this *sutta*. It is worth noting how the Buddha acquiesces in the enumeration of various miracles, but then in the final paragraph of the reading, uses this context to emphasise awareness of transience in all experience, a fundamental Buddhist teaching.

The night before the Buddha's enlightenment, he had five dreams, each of which presented, in symbols, an omen of what the future held for him.²⁹ Immediately after his enlightenment, the Buddha was protected by the king of the *nāgas*—the *nāgas* being giant snake-like spirits.³⁰ After

²⁵ *Sutta-Nipāta* III.11 (116-117).

²⁶ Mahasi Sayadaw, 'Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta—The Great Discourse on the Wheel of Dhamma' at http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/damachak.pdf, 43 [accessed 9th May 2006]. This is a discourse delivered in 1962 about the eponymous *sutta* found at Samyutta Nikāya 56.11 (1843) and drawing upon the commentaries to it. For some instances of the story of the astrologers and the Buddha's birth cropping up in medieval Arabic texts, see Zeina Matar, 'The Buddha Legend: a Footnote from an Arabic Source' in *Oriens*, vol.32 (1990), 440-2.

²⁷ E.g. Anon, 'The Four Quarters/Corners' at <http://www.paganpath.com/cgi-bin/wit/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=25;t=314;st=0> [accessed on 9th May 2006].

²⁸ *Majjhima-Nikāya* Sta.123 (iii.118-124; 979-984). It is worth noting that the Buddha eventually intervenes and turns this recitation of supernatural occurrences back to the central theme of his teaching—that enlightenment is uncovered through the perception of transience.

²⁹ Ñānamoli, *The Life of the Buddha* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1972), 22. Original source is *Anguttara-Nikaya* v.196.

³⁰ *Udāna* 2.1 (19); Ñānamoli 1972, 33.

enlightenment, the Buddha had some significant interactions with the *Brahmā* Sahampati (a *Brahmā* god who had been a monk in a previous life and continued to take a keen interest in such matters). Sahampati successfully pleaded with the Buddha to teach when the latter pondered how obscure enlightenment was, and therefore started inclining towards not teaching.³¹

A number of other *suttas* make it clear that it was not the exclusive prerogative of the Buddha to interact with gods. For instance we hear of Bāhiya, who thinks that he must be enlightened, or nearly so. Whereupon a *deva*—a deceased relative, we are told—appears and advises him that not only is he not currently enlightened, but that the ascetic practice he has been pursuing will never get him there. Bāhiya then asks for advice as to whom he should approach for instruction, and the *deva* suggests a visit to the Buddha, which Bāhiya immediately undertakes.³²

On Dealing with Gods

This raises the question of how we should think of our relationships with all these gods, and how we should interact with them. In order to begin addressing this question, let me quote another episode from the Pali Canon.

Sāriputta and Moggallāna were the two chief disciples of the Buddha for most of his ministry. One day, just after their regular head-shaving, the two monks were meditating outside. Two *yakkhas* happened to be passing by (a *yakkha* is a discarnate being—usually rather boisterous and troublesome, more demon than god). One said to the other, “Something tempts me, my friend, to give this recluse a blow on the head”. The other replied, “Whoa my friend—do not lay hold of that recluse! Lofty is this recluse, my friend, one of great potency, one of great majesty.” After further discussion, however, the first *yakkha* went ahead and gave Sāriputta a blow on the head. The text runs, “And so great was it, that with that blow one would not only cause a *nāga* of seven ratanas or one of seven and a half ratanas³³ to sink but also cleave a great mountain peak.” Immediately thereon, the *yakkha* was reborn in hell, saying “I’m burning! I’m burning!”

Moggallāna—who was particularly gifted psychically and saw celestial beings as a matter of course, saw what happened. He approached Sāriputta and said: “I trust, friend, that you are bearing up, I trust you are finding sustenance; I trust you are feeling no pain?” To which Sāriputta replied, “I am well, friend Moggallāna, I am bearing up. But I do have a slight headache.” At this, Moggallāna described what he had seen, and expressed his admiration that Sāriputta was of such power and integrity as to withstand the blow. Sāriputta in turn expressed his admiration for Moggallāna’s ability to see all these celestial beings, concluding that he had not seen “even a dust-heap *pisācaka*” (a sprite or goblin).³⁴

So in the Buddhist cosmos, we are interacting with beings from other worlds whether we know it or not; and the quality of their intentions is not exclusively benevolent. The figure of Māra is frequently met with in the Pali Canon; often referred to as “the evil one”, he performs a similar function in many ways to Satan in Christianity. And it is clear that he is able to interact with human beings in a number of ways. For instance, on one occasion he takes possession of the minds of some villagers, with the result that they did not give the Buddha anything to eat. On another occasion he just caused a loud noise—“as though the earth were splitting open”—in order to distract some monks from a *Dhamma* talk with the Buddha. Another time he appeared

³¹ *Samyutta Nikāya* i.137 (231). For another interaction, which includes *Brahmā* Sahampati’s previous life as a monk, see *Samyutta Nikāya* v.232 (1699).

³² *Udāna* 1.10 (8).

³³ A ratana equals roughly 1.5 kilometres.

³⁴ *Udāna* 4.4 (68-70).

as a human being—“in the form of a Brahmin, with a large matted topknot, clad in an antelope hide, old, crooked like a roof bracket, wheezing, holding a staff of udumbara wood” and suggested to a group of young monks that they would be better advised to pursue the pleasures of youth than the quest for enlightenment.³⁵

In the commentary to the *Khuddakapāṭha* (“Minor Readings” of the Pali Canon), we have the following statement about the beings from heaven-worlds with whom the theurgist might hope to interact:

...when deities come for any purpose to the human world, they do so like a man of clean habits coming to a privy. In fact the human world is naturally repulsive to them even at a hundred leagues’ distance owing to its stench, and they find no delight in it.³⁶

In short, Buddhism presents the would-be theurgist with good news and bad news. The good news is that it is entirely possible to interact with non-human beings. The bad news is that it is by no means guaranteed that such interactions will be recognisable as such, nor that they will be helpful in character. The question to be asked might not, therefore, be how to interact with beings from other realms, but how to exercise some quality control over the beings with whom the (apparently inevitable) interactions take place.

A Thai monk named Achaan Mun lived from 1870 to 1949. In his biography it is stated that he talked with *devas* regularly. He once asked them whether they found the smell of a human body repugnant. It is not stated whether he had the preceding quotation from the *Khuddakapāṭha* in mind, but it seems plausible. The response of the *devas*’ leader was (we are told) as follows:

A human being whose life is sustained by dharma is never repulsive to us... Such a person emits a fragrant odor inspiring a reverential respect which draws us to him at all times... The smell of an evil human being who shuns the Teachings and morality is sickening. Such people are blind to the value of the dharma which is supreme in all the Three Realms. Their bodies give out a most putrid and evil stench. No angel would ever think of associating with the likes of them.³⁷

This discussion between Achaan Mun and the *deva*, together with the *yakkha*’s failure to harm Sāriputta, are illuminated by these verses from the *Dhammapāda*:

Mind is the forerunner of (all evil) states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox.

Mind is the forerunner of (all good) states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one’s shadow that never leaves.³⁸

This characterises the underlying principle of the law of *kamma*—that ethical actions have consonant resultants for their perpetrator. One way these resultants manifest is in the individual’s relationship to the gods. *Kusala kamma* (“skilful action”—what would generally be

³⁵ *Samyutta Nikāya* I.4.18 (207); I.4.17 (206); I.4.21 (210-11).

³⁶ Ñānamoli (tr.) *Paramatthajotikā* v.81 (117) (127).

³⁷ Maha Boowa, *The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatta Thera* (Bangkok: Funny Publishing, 1982), 97. A different translation of this book is available for download from http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/acariya-mun-bio.pdf (checked 10th May 2006). The passage cited appears on 186 of this version.

³⁸ *Dhammapāda* verses 1 and 2 (1 and 5).

recognised as “good karma”; unselfish action) tends to protect one from malevolent influences from non-human realms and open the way for benevolent influences, whilst unskillful actions tend to keep one from the company of the higher gods, and render one susceptible to harmful influences from the lower realms.

This is made explicit in the commentarial description of *mettā* (loving-kindness) meditation, where it is stated that amongst the benefits to the practitioner of this kammically skilful practice are that:

...he is dear to non-human beings... deities guard him... if he penetrates no higher he will be reborn in the Brahmā World.³⁹

The Sun and Moon

The Sun and the Moon were seen as *devas* in the early Buddhist tradition. In the following excerpts, the Buddha is depicted as intervening to help during an eclipse, which is portrayed as an attack by the *asura* (demon). Rahu is, of course, the name of the north node of the Moon in Indian astrology.

From *Samyutta Nikaya I.2.9* (pp144-5 in Bodhi, 2000)

9 (9) *Candimā*

At Sāvattthi. Now on that occasion the young deva Candimā had been seized by Rāhu, lord of the asuras.¹⁵⁶ Then, recollecting the Blessed One, the young deva Candimā on that occasion recited this verse:

281 “Let homage be to you, the Buddha!
O hero, you are everywhere released.
I have fallen into captivity,
So please be my refuge.”

Then, referring to the young deva Candimā, the Blessed One addressed Rāhu, lord of the asuras, in verse:

³⁹ *Visuddhi-Magga* IX.37 (331).

282 "Candimā has gone for refuge
To the Tathāgata, the Arahant.
Release Candimā, O Rāhu,
Buddhas have compassion for the world."

Then Rāhu, lord of the asuras, released the young deva Candimā and hurriedly approached Vepacitti, lord of the asuras.¹⁵⁷ Having approached, shocked and terrified, he stood to one side.
<115> Then, as he stood there, Vepacitti, lord of the asuras, addressed him in verse:

283 "Why, Rāhu, did you come in a hurry?
Why did you release Candimā?
Having come as if in shock,
Why do you stand there frightened?"

284 "My head would have split in seven parts,
While living I would have found no ease,
If, when chanted over by the Buddha's verse,
I had not let go of Candimā." [51]

The same formula is then repeated, reading 'Suriya' instead of 'Candima'. Notes #158 & 159 in the following refer to this section of text.

Notes on this section, from p.388 Bodhi (2000):

-
- 156 Candimā is a deva dwelling in the mansion of the moon; the word itself usually simply means the moon. Obviously his seizure by Rāhu represents the lunar eclipse.
- 157 Although both Rāhu and Vepacitti are described as “lords of the asuras” (*asurinda*), it seems that Vepacitti is the overlord and Rāhu a subordinate. Vepacitti is the perennial antagonist of Sakka, lord of the devas, as seen at 11:4, 11:5, 11:23, and 35:248.
- 158 Suriya (usually meaning simply the sun) is the deva dwelling in the mansion of the sun. Here the solar eclipse is being represented. Spk, after impressing us with Rāhu’s physical dimensions, offers some interesting insights into ancient Buddhist views about eclipses: When Rāhu sees the sun and moon shining brightly, he becomes jealous and enters their orbital paths, where he stands with mouth agape. It then seems as if the lunar and solar mansions have been plunged into the great hell, and the devas in those mansions all cry out simultaneously in terror. While Rāhu can cover the mansions with his hands, jaw, and tongue, and can even stuff his cheeks with them, he is unable to obstruct their motion. If he did make such an attempt they would split his head and come through the other side or pull him along and push him down [Spk-pt: because their motion is determined by the law of kamma and is extremely hard for anyone to stop directly].
- 159 *Pajam mama*. Spk: It is said that on the day the Buddha spoke the Mahāsamaya Sutta (DN No. 20) the two young devas Candimā and Suriya attained the fruit of stream-entry. Hence the Blessed One says “my child,” meaning “he is my (spiritual) son.” C.Rh.D’s conjecture (at KS 1:72, n. 2) that the Buddha speaks thus with reference to his own (legendary) solar descent seems unlikely.

A passage such as this is open to interpretation, but personally I do not think that we should read too much into it. Its purpose, in my judgement, is best understood as (so to speak) Buddhist publicity. It advances a revised hierarchy in which the Sun and Moon, who might have been objects of worship to the people whose ears were now being reached by the Buddha’s teachings, are portrayed as subordinate to the Buddha. Since the Sun and Moon are characterised as *devas*, it is reasonable to take it that the principles affecting interactions with devas apply to one’s relationship with the Sun and Moon. Perhaps the same applies to one’s relationship with the planets and stars, though I am not aware of this being discussed directly in the Pali Canon. Another figure who might be mentioned here is Sakka, King of the Gods. This is the name given to Indra in the Pali Canon. Indra was a figure of worship in the culture into which the Buddha was born, but in the Canon it is made clear that he looks to the Buddha for teaching. The figure of Sakka/Indra is sometimes described as overlapping with the figure of Jupiter⁴⁰, but it seems that it would be simplistic to simply conflate the two.

The Divinatory Arts in the Pali Canon

‘Text #4’ in the ‘Buddhist Texts’ online reading is an excerpt from the *Brahmajāla Sutta* in which the Buddha lists various activities which he refrains from, including numerous forms of

⁴⁰ For instance: “Indra’s origin appears to be linked with the Roman deity Jupiter.” – Akira Sadakata, *Buddhist Cosmology* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 1997), p.126.

divination. It is worth remarking that some forms of divination not so different from the ones listed by the Buddha in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* can be found today as established practices within Tibetan Buddhism.⁴¹

Astrology is also specifically mentioned in the following passage which identifies the qualities a recluse should have (from the *Sutta Nipata IV.14*: Norman 1985 p.152)

152

The Group of Discourses

926. <181> He would not pay much attention to sleep. Being energetic he would apply himself to wakefulness. He would abandon sloth, deception, laughter, sport, (and) sexual intercourse, together with their appurtenances.

927. He would not practise Atharva-charms, or (interpretation of) dreams, or signs, or even astrology. My follower would not devote himself to (the interpretation of animal) cries, or (the art of) [impregnation, or healing.]

928. A bhikkhu would not tremble at blame; he would not be puffed up when praised. He would thrust aside greed together with avarice, anger and slander.

This raises the question of whether the Buddha was opposed to astrology *per se*. The context of the passages prevents them from supporting such a reading. Monks were also prohibited from (for instance) watering fruit-trees or practising as doctors. There is no suggestion that either of these activities is wrong *per se*; but, the Buddha's judgement was that, in order to maintain an appropriate relationship between his mendicant monks and the laity who supported them, they should avoid involvement in any and all activities which might introduce inappropriate elements into that relationship. It can also be noted that the fact astrology was prohibited suggests that some monks probably would have practised it if left to their own devices.

Another question that is raised here is, what 'astrology' would have meant exactly in that culture at that time. There isn't the time to go into that question in detail, but here are a few leads for anyone who wants to pursue the question. Around 530 BCE the Achaemenid invasion of Northern India took place, under the Persian Darius I.⁴²

Immediately thereafter, references in Vedic texts begin to appear to omens appearing via the shapes of animals seen in clouds, haloes around the Sun and Moon, meteors and comets. These appear similar to what is found in contemporaneous Babylonian sources, so the suggestion is that the culture into which the Buddha was born may have had a strong Babylonian influence on its beliefs about omens. You may also wish to note an article by Linda Johnsen in which she argues that the majority of the ideas, at least regarding astrology, may have been travelling *from* India rather than to it at this time.⁴³

⁴¹ See: <http://www.tibet.com/Buddhism/divination.html> (checked 2nd January 2009). For an introduction to Tibetan astrology, see: Philippe Cornu, *Tibetan Astrology* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2002).

⁴² Encyclopaedia Britannica under 'Darius I'; Whitfield 'Astrology, a History' p.31; David Pingree, 'Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran', *Isis*, June 1963, Vol.54 no.2, pp 229 – 246; William F Warren, 'Problems Still Unsolved in Indo-Aryan Cosmology' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol.26 (1905), pp.84-92; Thos McEvilley 'Shape of Ancient Thought' *passim*.

⁴³ Linda Johnsen, 'Astrology in the Indus Valley' *The Mountain Astrologer* April-May 2005

Conclusion & Questions

I'm aware that this document, together with the readings, is plenty to wade through. All the same, there are large areas that are not even touched on here. I look forward to discussing some of these with you on the forum. Here are a few questions you may like to ponder:

- Should Buddhism be defined as a religion, or as a philosophy? Does it matter?
- Is Buddhism in essence the same as theistic religions? Why (not)?
- What implications might the Buddhist world-view have for astrological and/or divinatory practices?



Note on Pali Source Material

References to volumes of the Pali Canon are given by volume and page number of the original texts published by the Pali Text Society, (in the form “ii.xx”), and by a page number which refers to a translation of the text. Unless otherwise noted, the translations referred to are as follows:

Dhammapada: Nārada Thera, *The Dhammapada—a Translation* (Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan PKS, 1978).

Dīgha-Nikāya: Maurice Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard—The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (London: Wisdom, 1987).

Khuddakapāṭha: ‘Minor Readings’ in Ñānamoli, *Minor Readings and Illustrator* (London: Pali Text Society, 1960).

Majjhima Nikāya: Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).

Milindapañha: I.B. Horner, *Milinda’s Questions (Vols. 1 & 2)* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1996 & 1999).

Paramatthajotikā: ‘The Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning’ in Ñānamoli, *Minor Readings and Illustrator* (London: Pali Text Society, 1960).

Samyutta-Nikāya: Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha – A New Translation of the Samyutta-Nikāya* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2000).

Sutta-Nipāṭa: K.R.Norman et al, *The Rhinoceros Horn and Other Early Buddhist Poems* (London: Pali Text Society, 1985).

Udāna: Peter Masefield, *The Udāna* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1994).

Visuddhi-Magga: Ñānamoli (tr.), *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1979).

Useful Websites:

www.accesstoinight.org has a large amount of the Pali Canon available in translation (n.b. that you can download the entire site and keep it on your PC for easier browsing – see the page <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/bulk.html>)

<http://www.palitext.com/> is the site of the Pali Text Society – of use only if you want to join and order books from them

<http://www.bps.lk/> - site of the Buddhist Publication Society. Their 'Online Library' contains a host of useful texts for download.

(Sites checked 19/1/08)

Bibliography:

Basham, A.L., *The Wonder that was India* (3rd Rev.) (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1967) – useful for general background on early Indian history; little specific information on cosmology or astrology.

Bechert, H. & Gombrich, R.(eds), *The World of Buddhism* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1984)

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (ed.), *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma (a translation of the Abhidhammatha Sangaha)* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1993)

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (tr.), *The All-Embracing Net of Views (The Brahmajala Sutta and its Commentarial Exegesis)* (Kandy, Sri Lanka, Buddhist Publication Society, 1978)

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (tr.) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya Vol.1* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2000)

Conze, Edward, *A Short History of Buddhism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980)

Cornu, Philippe, *Tibetan Astrology* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2002).

Franke, William, *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts Vols 1 & 2* (University of Notre Dame Press: 2007).

Gethin, Rupert, 'Cosmology and Meditation: From the Aggañña-Sutta to the Mahāyāna' in *History of Religions*, Vol.36 No.3 (February 1997), pp.183-217.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3176457?origin=JSTOR-pdf> (checked 9th January 2009).

Gethin, Rupert, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) – very good summary of Theravadan Buddhism, includes chapter on cosmology. Academically referenced but readable, and he knows what he's talking about.

Herbrechtsmeier, William, 'Buddhism and the Definition of Religion: One More Time' in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol.32 No.1 (March 1993), pp.1-18.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1386910?origin=JSTOR-pdf> (checked 9th January 2009).

Johnsen, Linda *Ancient Skies – Astrology in the Indus Valley* in *The Mountain Astrologer* #120, April-May 2005, pp71 – 76.

Kloetzli, W.R., *Buddhist Cosmology* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1983) Explores Buddhist cosmology as it developed in the later Buddhist tradition.

Maha Boowa, *The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatta Thera* (Bangkok: Funny Publishing, 1982), 97. A different translation of this book is available for download from http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/acariya-mun-bio.pdf (checked 10th May 2006).

Matar, Zeina, 'The Buddha Legend: a Footnote from an Arabic Source' in *Oriens*, vol.32 (1990), 440-2.

McEvilley, Thomas, 'Early Greek Philosophy and Mādhyamika' in *Philosophy East and West*, vol.31, no.2. (Apr. 1981)

McEvilley, Thomas, *The Shape of Ancient Thought* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002)

Ñānamoli (Bhikkhu), *Minor Readings and Illustrator* (London: Pali Text Society, 1960) (includes *Paramatthajotikā*: 'The Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning').

Ñānamoli (Bhikkhu), *The Life of the Buddha* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1972).

Ñānamoli (Bhikkhu) (tr.) *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* (Kandy, Sri Lanka, Buddhist Publication Society, 1979)

Ñānamoli (Bhikkhu), Bodhi (Bhikkhu) (trs.), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston, Mass: Wisdom Publications, 1995)

Norman, K.R. (tr.) *The Rhinoceros Horn (translation of the Sutta Nipata)* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1985)

Nyānatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, 4th edn. (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980)

Pingree, David, 'Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran', *Isis*, June 1963, Vol.54 no.2, pp 229 – 246
JSTOR

Sadakata, A. *Buddhist Cosmology* (Tokyo, Kosei Publishing, 1997) – Explores the way a cosmological scheme was developed in later Buddhism

Sells, Michael A, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (University of Chicago Press: 1994)

Skilton, Andrew, *A Concise History of Buddhism* (Birmingham: Windhorse, 1994)

Walshe, Maurice (tr.) *Thus Have I Heard (translation of the Digha Nikaya)* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1987)

Warren, William F, 'Problems Still Unsolved in Indo-Aryan Cosmology' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol.26 (1905), pp.84-92
JSTOR

Whitfield, Peter, *Astrology: A History* (London: The British Library, 2001)

Woodward, F.L. (tr.), *The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Sanyutta Nikaya) Part V* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1930)