

# The Aṭṭhakavagga and Early Buddhism<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Most scholars would, I think, agree that the Aṭṭhakavagga, the fourth vagga of the Sutta-nipāta, containing 210 verses (= 766–975), is very old. It is referred to by name in other Pāli canonical texts and in Sanskrit texts belonging to other traditions.<sup>2</sup> It has a commentary upon it (the Mahāniddeśa) which is sufficiently old to be regarded as canonical, although since we do not know the date of the closing of the canon or how long before that closing the Niddeśa was included in it, any dating can only be relative. The form of Buddhism represented in the Aṭṭhakavagga must therefore be thought to be very old. Hajime Nakamura stated the generally accepted view when he said: "The Aṭṭhakavagga and the Pārāyanavagga are very old; it is likely that they existed even in the lifetime of Gotama Buddha. In these two we notice various Vedic or Brahmanistic and Jain features and wording (grammatical formations and vocabulary) which cannot be traced in later Buddhist literature".<sup>3</sup> He went on to say: "The Suttanipāta is quite unique in describing the earliest stage of Buddhism when monks spent their lives as hermits prior to the days of monasteries, and philosophical speculations were barred (especially in the Aṭṭhakavagga), representing the stage prior to the formation of elaborate systems by Ābhidharma scholars."<sup>4</sup>

Some years ago Professor Grace Burford wrote a doctoral dissertation about the form of Buddhism which is exemplified by the Aṭṭhakavagga, and she later wrote a book on the basis of her doctoral research.<sup>5</sup> While echoing Hajime Nakamura in believing that the Aṭṭhakavagga represents the earliest stage of Buddhism, Professor Burford went further in claiming that the type of Buddhism which is found in this short section of the Suttanipāta differs very much from

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviations of the titles of Pāli texts are those adopted by *A Critical Pāli Dictionary* (CPD). Numbers in bold type, without an abbreviated title, refer to the verses of Sn.

<sup>2</sup> See Norman 1983: 68, n. 242.

<sup>3</sup> Nakamura 1980: 45 (quoting Kōgen Mizuno).

<sup>4</sup> Nakamura 1980: 46.

<sup>5</sup> Burford 1991. It is interesting to note that Professor Burford seems not to make use of CPD. Her Bibliography lists only the Pāli Text Society's *Pāli-English Dictionary*. Her dependence on that dictionary possibly explains some of her translations and interpretations, e.g. of the terms *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna*.

what is usually regarded as the earliest form of Buddhism, as it can be deduced from the first four nikāyas of the Pāli canon. She maintained that the Aṭṭhakavagga represents the *summa bonum* as total desirelessness, to be attained by the gradual elimination of desire and attachment, even attachment to the views of any particular teacher concerning the path to the goal. The goal is non-metaphysical and is obtainable in this life.<sup>1</sup> There is no promise of a better rebirth after obtaining the goal,<sup>2</sup> or of escape from the process of becoming.

Burford maintained<sup>3</sup> that her interpretation was closer to the import of the original teaching, and she alleged that the commentaries on the Aṭṭhakavagga (Mahāniddeśa and Paramatthajotikā II) had interpreted the text in the light of later, standardised Buddhism, and had imposed a new set of metaphysical values on the Buddha's ideal as depicted in the Aṭṭhakavagga. The goal was now treated as transcendent and was no longer accessible to living beings. Burford maintained that a return to the type of Buddhism depicted in the Aṭṭhakavagga would lead to the undermining of what has for centuries been regarded as orthodox Theravāda doctrine and practice, especially the monastic community's dependence on the laity.<sup>4</sup>

I should like in this short paper, offered in honour of Professor Padmanabh S. Jaini, to examine these suggestions, to see whether we can agree that the Aṭṭhaka-vagga does in fact represent the earliest form of Buddhism.

### Comments

(I) It is clear that, since the Aṭṭhakavagga is an early text, it must represent the views of Buddhists at an early stage in the history of Buddhism. The problem is to decide whether it represents the views of all Buddhists at that time, i.e. whether it represents the sum total of Buddhist doctrine at the time. At the risk of pointing out the obvious, it is necessary to say that the fact that a doctrine or practice is mentioned in an early text shows that (unless the reference is an interpolation) the doctrine or practice existed at the time of the composition of the text. The absence of any mention does not prove that it did not exist. To some extent, then, this is an argument based on silence. Burford anticipates this objection and admits that the argument from absence is weak, but maintains that if one looks at the text itself nothing is absent from the Aṭṭhakavagga.<sup>5</sup>

We are entitled to ask whether the Aṭṭhakavagga was intended to give a complete picture of the nature of Buddhism at the time of its composition. The vagga contains sixteen short suttas, none more than twenty-one verses long, and

<sup>1</sup> Burford 1991: 190.

<sup>2</sup> Burford 1991: 188.

<sup>3</sup> Burford 1991: 14.

<sup>4</sup> Burford 1991: 190.

<sup>5</sup> Burford 1991: 27.

it would appear that originally they all had a separate existence. There is no reason to assume that they were all recited at the same time to the same audience. It has been suggested that the *Kāmasutta* is a late addition to the text<sup>1</sup> and that the *Sāriputtasutta* (the longest and last *sutta* in the *vagga*) shows many signs of being a late composition.<sup>2</sup> I agree with the view that the verses are not all by the same author.

The groups of eight (*aṭṭhaka*-s) were probably collected together first, and gave the name to the *vagga* (although the Sanskrit name *Arthavargīya*, which occurs beside *Aṣṭavarga*, implies a different origin), and the remaining *suttas* were added afterwards. The whole collection was then arranged, perhaps at a late date (although late can only be relative – the same order is found in the *Niddesa*), according to the increasing number of verses (from six to twenty-one) the *suttas* contain. If the core *suttas* were collected together because of their length, rather than their contents, we should not expect this disparate collection to give a full picture of Buddhism.

It would not be surprising if the authors included in their poems only those features which were of particular interest to them or their audiences. In these circumstances each poem is not likely to be a complete statement of the whole of Buddhist doctrine. I would not, for example, expect each poem in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* to include references to *jhāna*, *kaṃma*, *saṃsāra*, *mokkha*, etc., even if these were standard beliefs at the time. Some *suttas* are put into a question and answer framework, e.g. *Tissa Metteyya asks (814)* about the dangers of sexual intercourse (*methuna*). The remainder of the *sutta* deals with this subject. Similarly, verses 848 862 895 915 959–62 ask questions, which are answered, about being calmed (*upasanta*), quarrels and disputes (*kalaba-vivāda*), views (*diṭṭhi*), becoming quenched (*nibbāti*), and the life of a *bhikkhu*. The collection, then, is centred around the individual questions of individuals. It is no wonder if there are gaps in the over-all picture, or inconsistencies between individual *suttas*. I can see no evidence whatsoever for Nakamura's belief that philosophical speculations were barred from the *vagga*, if by "barred" he means deliberately excluded.

(II) It is true that there are few references in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* to such basic ideas as *nibbāna*<sup>3</sup> and *nibbuti*,<sup>4</sup> and none to *anattā*.<sup>5</sup> What can we deduce from the small number of references to *nibbāna*? I would say that if any doctrine is

<sup>1</sup> For the metres of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and the *Pārāyanavagga* see Warder 1967: §§ 244, 266. On metrical grounds he identifies the *Kāmasutta* as a later addition.

<sup>2</sup> Burford 1991: 40. "Late" in this connection can only be a relative term, since the *sutta* is commented upon in *Nidd*.

<sup>3</sup> 822 940 (despite her reference to the "goal" [Burford 1991: 21], the word *attha* does not appear in the verse) 942.

<sup>4</sup> 917 933.

<sup>5</sup> The only uses of *atta* are either from Sanskrit *ātta* (the past participle passive of *ā + dā*), or are the reflexive use of the equivalent of Sanskrit *ātman*, e.g. *attano* 940 *samābitatta* 972.

mentioned in any one poem, that is an indication that the doctrine existed at the time of composition, and the frequency or infrequency of references proves nothing about the relative importance of the doctrine. What is important, in my opinion, is not that there are only four references to *nibbāna*, *nibbāti* and *nibbuti* in the Aṭṭhakavagga, but that these occur in three different suttas.

Vetter draws attention<sup>1</sup> to the occurrence of the word *anupādisese* in 876. We may also note the fact that the verb *nibbāti* occurs once (915) in another sutta with the participle *anupādiyāno* ("not grasping"), which implies the existence of the epithet *an-upādi-sesa*. If *an-upādi-sesa* existed, then we may assume that *sa-upādi-sesa* (consistently referred to as *upādi-sesa* by Burford) also existed, which suggests that the distinction between *sa-upādi-sesa nibbāna* and *an-upādi-sesa nibbāna* had already begun to be made.

The existence of some of the things which are said not to be in the Aṭṭhakavagga can, in fact, be deduced. It is correct to say<sup>2</sup> that the word *samsāra* does not occur in the vagga, but we should note the statement that one who had abandoned sensual pleasures would cross the flood (771), which could be taken to indicate that the ideal person would escape *samsāra*, since it is not clear what the flood might be if it were not *samsāra*. There are references to being released (*vimutta* 847 877 975 [*svimuttacitta*]), and we may ask: released from what? We may also note the occurrence of the word *-mokekka* (773).

(III) Some of the things which are said to be missing are points which I would not expect to find in a survey of Buddhist doctrine. We do not find a promise of immortality or deathlessness for the person who achieves the ideal,<sup>3</sup> and the text contains no claim that the goal or the ideal person is either eternal or deathless.<sup>4</sup> Since, in my opinion, these ideas are not part of Buddhism, my only surprise is that anyone should think that they are.<sup>5</sup>

There is evidence that some of the ideas which are alleged to be commentarial additions are in fact old enough to have been part of the Buddhist system from an early date. The reference to the Niddesa explanation of *pariṇīṇā* as tri-partite, the third part involving the abandonment of desire and passion for the object perceived, ignores the fact that exactly the same idea of abandonment is found for *pariṇīṇā* in Jain texts, which suggests that the idea was common to early śramaṇic religions. As Burford notes, the Mahāniddeśa (Nidd I 56,27) quotes a

<sup>1</sup> Vetter 1990: 51.

<sup>2</sup> Burford 1991: 40.

<sup>3</sup> Burford 1991: 38.

<sup>4</sup> Burford 1991: 73.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Kalupahana's comment (1986: 161 ad Dhṛ 21) on Radhakrishnan's translation of *amatapadaṃ* as the "abode of eternal life": "Such a view of immortality seems incompatible with the rest of the teachings of the Buddha".

passage from the Saṃyutta-nikāya (III 27,20) supporting (and going even further than) this interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

When dealing with 771<sup>2</sup> (and 957) the Mahāniddeśa<sup>3</sup> quotes a verse which Burford translates, “For this is the last existence, this is the last confluence (body), for him there is no birth, death, cycle [or] becoming again”. She comments<sup>4</sup>: “The Mahāniddeśa interpretation completely alters this [portrayal] by promising escape from existence, birth, and death to the one who attains the ideal”. The editors of the Mahāniddeśa point out,<sup>5</sup> but Burford does not mention, the fact that this verse is a variation of Th 202, i.e. it is canonical and is not an invention of the commentary at all.

(IV) A number of the discussions about the presence or absence of specific features in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* seem to me to be based upon mistranslations or misinterpretations of texts, e.g. Burford takes *accanta* to mean “eternal”,<sup>6</sup> and gives the same translation for *accanta* in 794, so that her interpretation of *accantasuddhī* as “eternal purity”,<sup>7</sup> instead of the correct translation,<sup>8</sup> leads to a misunderstanding of what the text actually says.<sup>9</sup>

It is said that there is only one reference to the goal being depicted as a transcending of death, and *amataṃ disaṃ* in 960 is translated as the “deathless realm”.<sup>10</sup> This goes against the statement that the goal is not described as *amata*,<sup>11</sup> but it is implied that this is a late addition, justified by the claim that (as already noted) the last sutta of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* shows many signs of late composition, although it is not specified what they are. The translation of *amata* as “deathless”<sup>12</sup> is acceptable if it means “free from death, where there is no death”, but the fact that it is applied to the person<sup>13</sup> suggests that by “deathless” “immortal” is meant. It would seem that Burford does not understand that *amata* as an epithet of

<sup>1</sup> Burford 1991: 76. She does not make life easy for her readers. She identifies neither of these references.

<sup>2</sup> Burford appears to state (p. 89) that the verse is 810. She says, “In explaining the final verse of this sutta the commentary says...”, without making it clear that she is referring to the Kāmasutta.

<sup>3</sup> *tassāyaṃ paṇḍitaṃ bhavo, carimo 'yaṃ sammāsāyo, jālīmaraṇasāṃsāro n' atthi tassa paṇḍitabhavo.* Nidd I 22,4; 460,30.

<sup>4</sup> Burford 1991: 90.

<sup>5</sup> Nidd I, p. 22, n.

<sup>6</sup> Burford 1991: 73.

<sup>7</sup> Burford 1991: 103, 137.

<sup>8</sup> CPD translates “complete purity”; Norman (*The Group of Discourses*, Volume II, p. 93) translates “highest purity”.

<sup>9</sup> McDermott (1996: 605) describes her translation of this verse as “rather opaque”.

<sup>10</sup> Burford 1991: 40.

<sup>11</sup> Burford 1991: 73.

<sup>12</sup> Burford 1991: 40 et passim.

<sup>13</sup> Burford 1991: 73, 85.

*nibbāna* means “where there is no death”, as pointed out long ago by Stcherbatsky.<sup>1</sup> In any case she overlooks the fact that the reading in 960 should probably be *agataṇṇ*, since this is what Nidd I 471,14–21 reads and comments upon. This means that the *disa* is one where there is no *gati* – no place of rebirth – which means an end to the cycle of rebirth. This, then, implies that the doctrine of *gati*-s was prevalent at the time of the poem’s composition.

(V) ● One of the greatest objections to the belief that the *Aṭṭhakavagga* presents the earliest form of Buddhism is the contrast with the form of the Buddhism which can be assumed from another *vagga* in the *Sutta-nipāta* for which equal claims to antiquity can be made, as Hajime Nakamura stated in the quotation I gave at the beginning of this paper – the *Pārāyanavagga*.

Everything which can be said about the *Aṭṭhakavagga* can also be said about the *Pārāyanavagga*, which is the fifth *vagga* of the *Sutta-nipāta* (976–1149). It must be very old, because verses from it are quoted elsewhere in the Pāli canon<sup>2</sup> and, except for the 56 *vatthugāthās* at the beginning,<sup>3</sup> it is commented upon in the canonical *Cūḷaniddeśa*. The fact that the *vatthugāthās* are not commented upon in the *Niddeśa* suggests that these introductory verses were a later addition to the *vagga*,<sup>4</sup> a belief which is supported by the fact that the theme of these verses – the threat of head-splitting if money is not handed over<sup>5</sup> – seems to have little to do with the actual content of the *vagga*. Even the final section, which contains some prose, is commented upon in the *Cūḷaniddeśa*, so we can deduce that, if this too was an addition,<sup>6</sup> it was a very early addition.

The sixteen questions (*puccā-s*) of the *Pārāyanavagga* are of a more metaphysical nature than the suttas of the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, and are concerned with the crossing of the stream and the escape from birth and death, which accounts for the title of the *vagga*. The questions asked in that *vagga*, and the answers which are given to them provide a picture of the Buddha’s teaching which differs somewhat from that found in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*. The reason is not hard to find. The *vagga* has as its core the questions put to the Buddha by sixteen young brahmins, who by the very nature of their training and their interest in the Buddha’s doctrines were likely to ask questions of a more philosophical nature

<sup>1</sup> See Stcherbatsky, 1927: 20, n. 2. Cf. Norman, 1989b: 161 (= *Collected Papers VI*, p. 165) and Norman 1994: 218–21 (= *Collected Papers VI*, pp. 19–23).

<sup>2</sup> See Norman, 1983: 69, n. 257.

<sup>3</sup> Warder (1967: § 266) says they are a later addition. Pj II 580,29–30 ascribes them to Ānanda.

<sup>4</sup> This does not prove that the *vatthugāthās* did not exist earlier, any more than the fact that the *Cūḷaniddeśa* comments only upon the *Khaggavisāṇasutta* of the *Uragavagga* proves that no other suttas of that *vagga* existed at the time of the composition of the *Niddeśa*.

<sup>5</sup> See Insler (1989/90: 116–18) for a discussion of what he describes as a later development of the head-shattering theme.

<sup>6</sup> Pj II 603,28–29 ascribes this passage to the *saṅgāikāra-s*.

than the questions which we find in the suttas of the Aṭṭhakavagga, including questions about what constitutes *nibbāna*.

I think that we may assume that the Aṭṭhakavagga and the Pārāyanavagga are of approximately the same date, although it does not seem possible to decide if one text is earlier than the other, and opinions differ about this. Warder says "The Aṭṭhakavagga may be much later than the Pārāyanavagga",<sup>1</sup> while Vetter disputes this.<sup>2</sup> I have already mentioned my belief that the Aṭṭhakavagga is a collection of suttas delivered to different audiences by different authors at different times, and Vetter maintains<sup>3</sup> that the Pārāyanavagga was a text "composed by a person who wanted to mention as many tenets or methods as he knew". Since, then, it seems likely that both vaggas are composite works, made up of material of different dates, it could well be that some parts of the Aṭṭhakavagga are older than some parts of the Pārāyanavagga, and vice versa.

It is therefore possible, and I accept it as a fact, that the Aṭṭhakavagga and the Pārāyanavagga are both very old texts in origin, although not, of course, necessarily in the exact form in which we have them now,<sup>4</sup> and are among the oldest Pāli texts we possess. We must therefore assume that the picture of Buddhism given in one vagga is as old as that given in the other. There is no doubt that both can accurately reflect different, but simultaneous, aspects of the Buddha's teaching. How are we to explain this apparent discrepancy? Burford has already, in fact, explained it in her realisation that the Buddha might teach different things to different people.<sup>5</sup> His message could therefore include both *jhānic* teaching (i.e. gaining release by meditation) and *kammic* teaching (i.e. gaining release gradually by successive superior rebirths as a result of acquiring good *kamma*).

(VI) I believe that it is essential to consider the Aṭṭhakavagga in the context of what we know about the history of Buddhism from other canonical sources, and the cultural background which led to the origin of Buddhism (and Jainism). It is claimed that the word Buddha is merely a title.<sup>6</sup> If it had become a title by the time the Aṭṭhakavagga was composed, then the concept of being a Buddha must have been already in existence for a while. "Buddha" can only mean someone who has attained *bodhi*, and the question to ask then is how the Buddha obtained *bodhi*. Without any evidence to the contrary, we should take *sambodhi* (963) in the Aṭṭhakavagga to have the same meaning as (*sam-*)*bodhi* when used of the Buddha,

<sup>1</sup> Warder 1967: § 303.

<sup>2</sup> Vetter 1990: 40.

<sup>3</sup> Vetter 1990: 42.

<sup>4</sup> We must presume that they existed at one time in a pre-Pāli dialect. I define Pāli as the language of the Theravādin canon as we have it now, which we may believe is not greatly different from the form in which it was written down in (traditionally) the first century BCE.

<sup>5</sup> Burford 1991: 2.

<sup>6</sup> Burford 1991: 77.

so that the person who is *sambodhikāma* is desirous of awakening, i.e. of becoming *buddha*. In the absence of any other evidence, there is no reason to deny the validity of the versions of the Buddha's awakening which we find, e.g. in the *Atiyapariyesanasutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, which is thought by many to represent an early account of the occurrence.<sup>1</sup>

It is generally accepted that the Buddha's teaching was a reaction against brahmanical, and especially Upaniṣadic, teaching, whereby he taught a denial of the existence of an (eternal) *ātman*, and therefore of any portion of that *ātman* in the individual, i.e. the absence of a permanent self. He also taught a means of release from *saṃsāra*. He was able to give this teaching as a result of having gained his own release from *saṃsāra* by meditative practices. It is hard to see what the Buddha meant when he said "this is my last birth" if it did not mean that he would not have another existence.

If the Buddha obtained *bodhi* by means of *jhāna*, and thereby attained release from *saṃsāra*, and subsequently taught the *paṭicca-samuppāda*, the four Noble Truths and an eight-fold path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*, then all these aspects are features of the earliest form of Buddhism, irrespective of whether they are mentioned in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* or not.

The religious vocabulary which was held in common with Jainism (compare, for example, *nibbāna*, *nibbuta* and *nibbuti* with *nivvāṇa*, *nivvua* and *nivvui*),<sup>2</sup> suggests that the aim of both the Buddha and the Jina was release from *saṃsāra*. If we reject this view, then in view of those parallels, which give a clear indication of the śramaṇic religion as opposed to the brahmanical religion, we should have to assume that the form of Jainism was also affected by the Theravādin commentarial tradition.

To the objection that there is no definition of *nibbāna* in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, we must say that this is not surprising, in that much of Buddhist literature is about the way to *nibbāna*, rather than a description of *nibbāna*, which for the most part the Buddha declined to discuss. The partial failure to discuss the nature of *nibbāna* could well arise, not from the absence of the concept as is implied, but from the fact that it was regarded unequivocally as the goal and therefore did not need discussion.

It might be thought that the ways to release through *jhāna* and *kamma* are in competition, but I agree with those who believe that the two systems are not competing but alternative and in fact complementary.<sup>3</sup> Two ways are essential if the system is to survive. Burford says<sup>4</sup> that it is difficult to justify the dependence upon laity, as it may be self-sacrifice on their part. Despite the belief that the

<sup>1</sup> Norman 1990: 25 (= *Collected Papers IV*, pp. 126-27).

<sup>2</sup> Norman 1989a: 393-97 (= *Collected Papers IV*, pp. 264-70).

<sup>3</sup> See Burford 1991: 4 and 16, n. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Burford 1991: 190.

monastic community's dependence on the laity was a later development, it seems clear that both the Buddha and the Jina correctly realised that no religious institution could survive without the laity being involved in an active way. If there is no laity, or if the laity renounce all their wealth and become beggars, then the institution cannot survive. The Buddha was a pragmatist. If all could follow the Buddha and gain *nibbāna*, then Buddhism would end overnight, as all gained the goal. The fact is that while some are seeking to gain the goal, they require food. The essential concomitant of a wandering beggar is a non-wandering donor,<sup>1</sup> whose generosity enables the wanderer to live and gain release. A layman becomes a donor to gain merit, to amass good *kamma*, to gain a better state of rebirth (*gati*) in his next existence. For a layman, amassing good *kamma* to ensure a good rebirth is as important as destroying *kamma* is for the ascetic. This is part of the reason why the Buddha taught two ways to salvation. We may assume that such differences in teaching arose from the very beginnings of Buddhism, so that there is no question of one aspect being older than the other.

We read in the Uragavagga: *paṇḍito... lokam bhajate sivaṃ* (115) "A wise man... resorts to the blissful world". If it is correct to say that the commentaries imposed later views of Buddhism upon earlier material then we might have expected the blissful world to be *nibbāna*. Nevertheless we find that the Paramatthajotikā, written probably in the 5th century CE, although undoubtedly containing material from an earlier date, explains the wise man's goal as the world of the gods (*devaloka*), not *nibbāna*.<sup>2</sup> The similarity with Aśoka's view that the greatest achievement was the attainment of heaven is remarkable.<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusions

In conclusion we may say that the Aṭṭhakavagga is very old, and the form of Buddhism taught in it must also be very old. If the Aṭṭhakavagga could be shown to be earlier than any other Buddhist text, then we could argue that it described the oldest form of Buddhism of which we have knowledge. There is, however, no reason whatsoever for believing that the form of Buddhism taught in the vagga represents the whole of Buddhism at the time of its composition, and that everything not included in it must be a later addition to Buddhism. There is, in fact, every reason for believing that other aspects of Buddhism were current at the time.

<sup>1</sup> Norman 1991: 35 (= *Collected Papers* IV, p. 180).

<sup>2</sup> *sa lokam bhajate sivaṃ ti so evaṃ sivaṃ kebhamam uttamam ampaddavaṃ devalokam bhajati alliyati upagacchati ti vuttam hoti* (Pj II 173,27–29).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rock Edict IX (Hultzsch 1925: 16): (K) *idaṃ kaṇṇam idaṃ sādhu iti iminā saka svagaṇṇa āvādbetu iti*. (L) *ki ca iminā katavyataram yathā svagāradhi*.

(K) This ought to be done; this is good. By this it is possible to attain heaven. (L) And what is more to be done than this, viz. the attainment of heaven?

I see no *prima facie* reason for rejecting the view that the biographical portions of the nikāyas dealing with the Buddha's awakening have some historical accuracy in them. If they are accurate, then we have to believe that concepts such as *bodhi* and *nibbāna* and the four Noble Truths were part of Buddhism from the start. If they are not accurate, and if those concepts were not part of Buddhism from the start, then we should have to believe that all the things which we regard as the basic elements of Buddhism were not early elements of Buddhism, and we should have to explain how Buddhism came to the form which we know now. The words *bodhi* and *nibbāna* occur in the Aṭṭhakavagga, and we must explain them away before we can accept such a thesis.

We are, then, led to the conclusion that a statement that the Aṭṭhakavagga portrays the earliest form of Buddhism cannot be justified, although it is certainly correct to say that it shows a very early form of Buddhism. It is, however, not correct to imply that this is the whole of the earliest form of Buddhism, and it would be more correct to say that the Aṭṭhakavagga portrays some aspects of a very early form of Buddhism. There was more to Buddhism than this, and some of that we find in the Pārāyanavagga, which equally depicts some aspects of a very early form of Buddhism. From the earliest times, we may deduce, Buddhism allowed two ways to salvation. Having himself obtained *nibbāna* by *jhāna*, the Buddha straightway began to teach the four Noble Truths, which present a path to *nibbāna* by means of *kamma*. Both ways are depicted in the Sutta-nipāta and, moreover, in the oldest parts of the Sutta-nipāta. Burford concludes that the path recommended in the Aṭṭhakavagga resembles the *kammic* path of orthodox Theravāda doctrine,<sup>1</sup> and I see no reason to doubt that the greater part of the teaching in the Aṭṭhakavagga was intended for those who were on the path of *kamma*. We might then say that the Aṭṭhakavagga is all about living one's life in the here and now, while awaiting a transition to the next *gati* and the eventual attainment of *nibbāna*.

<sup>1</sup> Burford 1991: 187.

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