

Pratyekabuddhas in the *Ekottarika-āgama**

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In the present article I study material related to Pratyekabuddhas that is found in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, as part of an attempt to contribute to our appreciation of the significance of the figure of the Pratyekabuddha/Pacceka-buddha in Buddhist thought.

Introduction

Among the Chinese *Āgamas* and the Pāli *Nikāyas*, the *Ekottarika-āgama* stands out for having a substantial number of tales and references related to Pratyekabuddhas. My present study of one such tale that involves Mahākāśyapa comes as the third in a series of articles concerned with Pratyekabuddhas in *Ekottarika-āgama* discourses. In what follows I first briefly summarize the two previous studies, before translating the Mahākāśyapa tale.

One of the two stories I translated and studied previously involves a housewife who, on seeing a Pratyekabuddha out on the road begging his food, falls in love with him. Being informed by her that she is particularly enchanted by his beautiful eyes, the Pratyekabuddha gouges out one of them. After this rather drastic action, he gives her a short but penetrative teaching whose putting into practice leads the housewife to a heavenly rebirth.¹ The story itself can be considered in conjunction with the tale of *bhikkhunī* Subhā in the *Therīgāthā*, who also gouges out an eye when confronted by a lustful male.²

* I am indebted to Rod Bucknell, Adam Clarke, and sāmaṇerī Dhammadinnā for commenting on a draft version of this article.

¹ EĀ 38.9 at T II 724a₇ to 724b₂₇; cf. Anālayo 2014a.

² Thī 396.

In as much as the motif of the Pratyekabuddha is concerned, the protagonist of the *Ekottarika-āgama* story delivers a substantial doctrinal teaching, which confirms that Pratyekabuddhas were not invariably seen by tradition as “silent Buddhas”.³ In keeping with the restricted soteriological function of a Pratyekabuddha, however, the housewife does not attain stream-entry or any other level of awakening, but is reborn in a Brahmā world.

The other tale I studied previously is the *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel to the *Isigili-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*.⁴ Among Pāli discourses, the *Isigili-sutta* stands out for featuring a whole series of Paccekabuddhas who formerly dwelled on mount Isigili.⁵ Its *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel similarly provides such a list of Pratyekabuddhas. In addition, it reports that five hundred Pratyekabuddhas rose up into the air and cremated themselves on being told that the future Buddha was about to be born.⁶

The same *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse continues with another story from the past featuring a king who becomes a Pratyekabuddha. This king had been reflecting on the dire prospect of being born in hell to the extent that he eventually decided to renounce the throne and go forth. Contemplating the impermanent nature of the five aggregates he in turn became a Pratyekabuddha.⁷

The tale of how this king attained realization on his own exemplifies a general feature that distinguished Pratyekabuddhas from arhats: they attain awakening without the guidance of a teacher. This appears to be in fact a central implication of the term, which as far as I can see does not imply that a Pratyekabuddha invariably awakens because of an external cause.⁸

³The fact that Pratyekabuddhas usually do not have disciples is explicitly stated in EĀ 32.5 at T II 676c₁₈, however, and EĀ 31.2 at T II 667c₂₁ clarifies that neither a Pratyekabuddha nor an arahant could equal the way of teaching of a Buddha.

⁴EĀ 38.7 at T II 723a₆ to 723c₅; and MN 116 at MN III 68,1 to 71,7; cf. Anālayo 2010b.

⁵On Paccekabuddhas as authors of the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta* cf. also Anālayo 2014b: 35f.

⁶EĀ 38.7 at T II 723a₂₅; for a similar story cf. the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882: 357,3; for further references cf. Anālayo 2010b: 35 note 71.

⁷EĀ 38.7 at T II 723b₂₀.

⁸This has been suggested by Norman 1983; for a critical reply cf. Anālayo 2010b: 11–14.

The depiction of the self-cremation of Pratyekabuddhas on hearing of the impending birth of the Buddha-to-be reflects another characteristic regularly associated with them, which in a way follows from the fact that they awaken without a teacher, namely that Pratyekabuddhas are expected to live only during periods when no Buddha (and his dispensation) is in existence.⁹

The discourse I have chosen for translation and study in the present paper offers further perspectives on the motif of the Pratyekabuddha, in particular linking it to the personality of Mahākāśyapa. The basic storyline in the discourse revolves around the Buddha inviting Mahākāśyapa to give up his ascetic conduct and live a more comfortable life style in view of his advanced age. The same plot recurs in the *Samyutta-nikāya*, in the two *Samyukta-āgamas*, as well as in another discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama*,¹⁰ although without the Pratyekabuddha motif.

Translation¹¹

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at Rājagr̥ha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Feeding Place, accompanied by a great community of five hundred monks.

At that time the venerable Mahākāśyapa was a forest dweller. When the time came, he begged for food without discriminating between poor and rich. [When meditating] he sat alone and in a solitary place, never moving or changing [posture], at the root of a tree, sitting out in the open, or in a wilderness area. He wore robes of [at least] five patches, keeping to three robes [only]. [At times] he stayed in a cemetery. He took a single meal, eating it [before] noon. [In spite of] being old and advanced in age, he was undertaking [such] ascetic practices.

⁹EĀ 50.10 at T II 814a₁₄ distinguishes between two types of aeon, one in which a Buddha appears in the world and the other when Pratyekabuddhas appear.

¹⁰SN 16.5 at SN II 202,6 to 203,26, SĀ 1141 at T II 301c₇ to 301c₃₀, SĀ² 116 at T II 416b₈ to 416c₆, and EĀ 41.5 at T II 746a₂₁ to 746c₂₄.

¹¹The translated discourse is EĀ 12.6 at T II 570a₂₃ to 570b₁₉, which has already been translated into French by Huyen-vi 1989: 124–126. SN 16.5 has the same setting, the Bamboo Grove at Rājagaha, whereas SĀ 1141, SĀ² 116, and EĀ 41.5 take place at Jeta's Grove.

At the time right after the meal, the venerable Mahākāśyapa went [and sat] under a tree [to practise] meditative concentration. Having [practised] meditative concentration, he rose from his seat, arranged his robes, and approached the Blessed One.¹² Then the Blessed One saw Kāśyapa coming in the distance. The Blessed One said: “Welcome, Kāśyapa.”¹³ Then Kāśyapa approached the Blessed One, paid respect with his head at [the Blessed One’s] feet and sat to one side.

The Blessed One said: “Kāśyapa you are now old and advanced in age, you are feeble and worn out. You could now give up begging for food ... *up to* ... undertaking [such] ascetic practices. You could also accept invitations by householders as well as accepting [ready-made] robes.”¹⁴

Kāśyapa replied: “I will not follow the Tathāgata’s injunction now.¹⁵ The reason is that, if the Tathāgata had not accomplished supreme and right awakening, I would have accomplished Pratyekabuddhahood.¹⁶

“Pratyekabuddhas are all forest dwellers. When the time comes, they beg for food without discriminating between poor and rich. [When meditating] they sit alone and in a solitary place, never moving or changing [posture], at the root of a tree, sitting out in the open, or in a wilderness area. They wear robes of [at least] five patches, keeping to three robes [only]. [At times] they stay in a cemetery. They take a single meal, eating it [before] noon. They undertake [such] ascetic practices.¹⁷ I will not venture to give up my original practice now to train in

¹² Among the parallel versions, only SĀ 1141 at T II 301c₉ and SĀ² 116 at T II 416b₁₀ report that he had been sitting in meditation before approaching the Buddha.

¹³ In none of the parallels does the Buddha explicitly welcome Mahākāśyapa in this way.

¹⁴ EĀ 12.6 at T II 570b₅: 可受諸長者請, 并受衣裳; the translation by Huyen-vi 1989: 125 “*et prendre s’il faut le train d’un bourgeois aisé et reprendre la vie d’un laïc*” does not seem to do justice to the original.

¹⁵ In SN 16.5 at SN II 202,¹⁶ SĀ 1141 at T II 301c₁₃, and SĀ² 116 at T II 416b₁₅ Mahākāśyapa does not openly declare that he will not follow the Buddha’s instruction, but instead points out that he has for a long time been observing ascetic practices and recommending them to others. In EĀ 41.5 at T II 746a₂₄, however, he also openly expresses disagreement, here formulated in terms of his inability to accept (householders’ gifts of) robes and food because he enjoys rag robes and begging alms. SN 16.5 provides a listing of his forms of conduct which mentions forest dwelling, begging alms, rag robes, three robes, as well as several praiseworthy mental qualities; SĀ 1141 lists just forest dwelling, rag robes, and begging alms, and SĀ² 116 mentions only rag robes.

¹⁶ EĀ 12.6 at T II 570b₆: 當如來不成無上正真道者, 我則成辟支佛; the translation by Huyen-vi 1989: 125 “*si je ne parvenais au stade de Bouddha, je deviendrais un Pratyekabuddha*” does not seem to be correct.

¹⁷ This whole paragraph has no counterpart in the parallel versions, which do not refer to Pratyekabuddhas at all.

other forms of conduct instead.”¹⁸

The Blessed One said: “It is well, it is well, Kāśyapa, you are benefitting many, causing countless human beings to cross over, so that all *devas* and human beings far and wide can cross over [*samsāra*].

“Kāśyapa, the reason is that if these ascetic practices exist in the world, then my Dharma will also exist for a long time in the world. If the Dharma exists in the world, then the paths to heaven will increase and the three evil destinies will in turn decrease; and stream-entry, once return, non-return, and the paths of the three *yānas* will all be preserved in the world.”¹⁹

“Monks, you should all train just as Kāśyapa practises. Monks, you should train in this way.”²⁰

Then the monks, having heard what the Buddha said, were delighted and received it respectfully.

Study

A central motif found similarly in the different versions of this discourse is Mahākāśyapa’s ascetic conduct,²¹ thrown into relief as something he wants to continue to observe even when he is being personally invited by the Buddha to live a more comfortable life in view of his advanced age. The version translated above stands alone, however, in reporting that the Buddha explicitly reckoned the ascetic practices as a factor ensuring the longevity of the Dharma.²² The *Samyutta-nikāya* version has no general statement by the Buddha on the ascetic practices, only recording that he permitted Mahākassapa to continue the practices of wearing rag robes, begging food, and dwelling in the forest.²³ The two *Samyukta-āgama*

¹⁸In SN 16.5 at SN II 203,34, SĀ 1141 at T II 301c16, and SĀ² 116 at T II 416b19 he describes the two benefits of his mode of practice, namely a pleasant abiding for himself and his compassionate concern for others by setting an example. The second of these benefits receives a more detailed coverage in EĀ 41.5 at T II 746a25, where Mahākāśyapa depicts in detail the predicament of future monks who are attached to good food and nice robes.

¹⁹The parallel versions differ considerably, cf. the discussion below.

²⁰The parallel versions do not have a comparable injunction that the monks should emulate the example of Mahākāśyapa.

²¹The listing of outstanding disciples, AN 1.14 at AN I 23,18 and EĀ 4.2 at T II 557b8, reckons him foremost in the undertaking of ascetic practices. His eminency in this respect is also recorded in the *Divyavadāna*, Cowell and Neill 1886: 395,23, and in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882: 64,14.

²²For a study of the notion of the decline of the Dharma cf. Nattier 1991.

²³SN 16.5 at SN II 203,23.

versions go a step further than that, proclaiming that one who disparages the ascetic practices disparages the Buddha.²⁴ The other *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse launches into a long description of the deterioration of conditions after the Buddha's demise, one aspect of which is failure to undertake the ascetic practices.²⁵

The *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse makes it clear that undertaking ascetic practices was actually an expression of Mahākassapa's compassion for later generations, explained in the discourse itself as implying that later generations will follow his example.²⁶ In the two *Samyukta-āgama* parallels to the discourse translated above, Mahākāśyapa describes how future generations will recall that monks at the time of the Buddha undertook and spoke in praise of forest dwelling, wearing rag robes, and begging alms.²⁷ The other *Ekottarika-āgama* version describes in detail how future monks would feel free to indulge their desires and attachments if they were to think that monks at the time of the Buddha were also living in a lax manner. It concludes that this would lead to their downfall and eventual rebirth in hell.²⁸ In sum, in different ways the parallel versions throw into relief the importance of Mahākāśyapa's ascetic conduct as a source of inspiration.

²⁴SĀ 1141 at T II 301c₂₅ and SĀ² 116 at T II 416b₂₈, both of which continue by indicating that one who praises ascetic practices praises the Buddha. The reason given in both discourses is that the Buddha himself had spoken in praise of undertaking ascetic practices.

²⁵EĀ 41.5 at T II 746b₉.

²⁶SN 16.5 at SN II 203,5: *pacchimaṃ ca* (B^c, C^c, and S^c: *pacchimañ ca*) *janataṃ anukampamāno*, *appeva nāma pacchimā janatā ditṭhanugatiṃ* (B^c, C^c, and S^c: *ditṭhānugatiṃ*) *āpajjeyyūṃ* (C^c and S^c: *āpajjeyya*). Thus Shults 2014: 248f, in a review of Anālayo 2012b, is not correct in assuming that the implications of the expression *pacchimañ ca janataṃ anukampamāno* can be clarified only by resorting to the Pāli commentaries. In an entry on *viveka* for the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* where, according to the editorial guidelines, my task was just to summarize relevant information from the Pāli texts and avoid footnoting, I briefly referred to two occurrences of the phrase *pacchimañ ca janataṃ anukampamāno* in MN 4 at MN I 23,32 and AN 2.3.9 at AN I 61,1 in relation to the Buddha's *viveka*. Because of the editorial guidelines, I was not able to provide more detailed information or discuss the cultural context, etc. However, a digital search of the phrase would have led Shults quickly to the passage in SN 16.5. An alternative route would have been consultation of relevant scholarship. Here the first that comes to mind is the detailed study of *anukampa* in Pāli sources by Aronson 1980/1986, who p. 11 indeed refers to SN 16.5 and explains that "Mahākassapa, like [the] Buddha, ... undertook beneficial activities with the hope that others would follow him and benefit similarly." As Shults 2014: 248 makes a point of stating that he "certainly would like to know the real significance of the phrase *pacchimañ ca janataṃ anukampamāno*", each of these straightforward avenues of research could have quickly clarified the issue for him.

²⁷SĀ 1141 at T II 301c₁₈ and SĀ² 116 at T II 416b₂₁.

²⁸EĀ 41.5 at T II 746a₂₇.

Mahākāśyapa's inspirational role in adopting ascetic conduct is also reflected in the *Mahāgosīṅga-sutta* and its parallels, which agree that he not only engaged in ascetic practices himself, but also encouraged others to do so.²⁹

In the present case, however, it is noteworthy that this role of Mahākāśyapa in providing a source of inspiration for future generations has its counterpart in the above-translated discourse in Mahākāśyapa's proclamation that he would have become a Pratyekabuddha, had the Buddha not attained full awakening.³⁰

The other versions neither bring in the motif of the Pratyekabuddha, nor do they refer to the three *yānas*. The present *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse is in line with a general tendency evident elsewhere in this collection to incorporate later elements not found in this way in other Chinese *Āgamas* or their Pāli discourse parallels, in particular material related to emerging Mahāyāna thought.³¹ Another general tendency in *Ekottarika-āgama* discourses is that the motif of the Pratyekabuddha is considerably more prominent as an actual form of practice or ideal than in other early discourses found outside of this collection. Given that in the present episode the notion of Pratyekabuddhahood forms the counterpart to what in the other versions is the inspirational role of a chief disciple of the Buddha, it seems fair to conclude that the notion of the Pratyekabuddha could have had an inspirational function similar to that of Mahākāśyapa.³²

Such an inspirational role also seems to underlie other passages. A discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama* reports how someone in a situation of danger and great distress takes refuge in all Pratyekabuddhas in the hope that they will be able to release him from this hardship: "I also take refuge in all Pratyekabuddhas, who awaken on their own, without a teacher — may I be released from this disaster!"³³

²⁹MN 32 at MN I 214,2 and its parallels MĀ 184 at T I 727c₂, EĀ 37.3 at T II 711a₇, and T 154.16 at T III 81b₁₆.

³⁰In what appears to be a partial commentary on the *Ekottarika-āgama*, Mahākāśyapa actually becomes a former Pratyekabuddha; cf. T 1507 at T XXL 30c₅: 迦葉以本是辟支佛 (cf. also T XXL 31b₂₀, and 39a₁₇ as well as the discussion in Palumbo 2013: 185–188). This form of presentation must have originated with someone not too familiar with Buddhist doctrine, making it probable that it reflects the editorial influence of a Chinese hand, instead of stemming from an Indian original.

³¹For a survey of Mahāyāna elements in the *Ekottarika-āgama* cf. Anālayo 2013b.

³²On the inspirational role of Pratyekabuddhas cf., e.g., Wiltshire 1990: 66f and 76ff.

³³EĀ 24.2 at T II 615c₅: 諸辟支佛無師自覺亦復自歸, 使脫此厄. According to EĀ 32.1 at T II 674a₆, the path to such awakening on one's own as a Pratyekabuddha shares in common with other types of awakening that it requires the cultivation of the five faculties; EĀ 38.11 at T II 727a₁₅ as well as EĀ 51.3 at T II 815c₁₂ report actual instances of awakening as a Pratyekabuddha as the result

Another discourse in the same collection indicates that even just worshipping the relics of a Pratyekabuddha has the potential to lead to rebirth in the heaven of the Thirty-three.³⁴

Another *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse reflects a cult of Pratyekabuddhas as one of four types of living beings that are considered worthy of a *stūpa* (the other three are a Buddha, the disciple of a Buddha, and a wheel-turning king).³⁵ Another such reference in the *Ekottarika-āgama* explains that Pratyekabuddhas deserve a *stūpa* because they have awakened on their own, without having had the assistance of a teacher.³⁶

References to *stūpas* for Pratyekabuddhas are found not only in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, however, but also in Pāli discourses.³⁷ The Pratyekabuddha in fact features regularly in the early discourses in lists of those who are worthy of gifts. Such lists present Pratyekabuddhas as superior to arahants or other noble disciples, but inferior to a fully awakened Buddha.³⁸ By integrating the Pratyekabuddha, as an awakened one from the past or the distant future, into what otherwise comprises the present Buddha and his disciples, the hierarchy of gifts becomes invested with

of contemplation of impermanence. That Pratyekabuddhas are of course also themselves subject to the law of impermanence and will pass away is made explicit in EĀ 26.9 at T II 641a₂₀.

³⁴EĀ 51.3 at T II 817a₂; cf. also Legittimo 2009: 1203.

³⁵EĀ 52.1 at T II 823b₁₃.

³⁶EĀ 26.9 at T II 642b₂₀.

³⁷DN 16 at DN II 142,16 (cf. also the parallels DĀ 2 at T I 20b₂₃ and T 7 at T I 200a₂₄) and AN 4.245 at AN II 245,17; cf. also Kloppenborg 1974: 23.

³⁸MN 142 at MN III 254,29 and its parallels MĀ 180 at T I 722b₁₆, D 4094 *ju* 255b₂ or Q 5595 *tu* 291a₃, Tocharian fragment YQ 1.20 1/2 a₆, Ji et al. 1998: 182, and Uighur fragment folio 9a 2684, Geng and Klimkeit 1988: 202; cf. also SHT III 979 R6, Waldschmidt et al. 1971: 242, which refers to this type of presentation. AN 9.20 at AN IV 395,1 and its parallels MĀ 155 at T I 677c₈, T 73 at T I 879c₂, and T 74 at T I 881b₁₂. AN 10.16 at AN V 23,4. Lists of this type in the *Ekottarika-āgama* can be found, e.g., in EĀ 23.1 at T II 609b₁₉, EĀ 47.3 at T II 781b₂₄, and EĀ 48.5 at T II 792a₂₄; cf. also EĀ 27.5 at T II 645b₆ which, although not corresponding to the pattern found in the other passages listed above, is also related to the theme of making offerings to Pratyekabuddhas. Another instance relevant to the present topic is EĀ 41.4 at T II 739b₃, where Ānanda is puzzled by the fact that the Buddha has given a list of those worthy of merit without mentioning Pratyekabuddhas or disciples at various levels of awakening. The placing of the Pratyekabuddha between the arahant and the Buddha recurs also in EĀ 28.5 at T II 653a₁₀ and EĀ 42.3 at T II 751a₁₈ in a list of levels of awakening (cf. also T II 552b₇, which is part of the introduction to the collection), as well as in a listing of seats in EĀ 24.6 at T II 625c₅. EĀ 43.5 at T II 761b₁, EĀ 51.3 at T II 816c₉, and EĀ 52.1 at T II 823b₁₃ list the Pratyekabuddha alongside the *śrāvaka* (cf. also T II 551a₂₁, which is part of the introduction to the collection). EĀ 17.3 at T II 583a₅ reckons the Pratyekabuddha as one of two persons that rarely arise in the world, the other of course being the Buddha.

a timeless validity that applies to past, present and future times. In the absence of a living Buddha, a Pratyekabuddha then becomes the topmost recipient of gifts. Other discourses suggest that such concern with worthiness to receive gifts was a significant issue in the tradition, as they report occasions when a gift given to a former Paccekabuddha yielded abundant fruit for its giver.³⁹

Artistic representations confirming a cult of Pratyekabuddhas are not easily identified. Owing to their outward resemblance to Buddhas or monks in general, it is only when an associated inscription contains explicit indications that it becomes possible to determine that a particular image is indeed intended to represent a Pratyekabuddha.⁴⁰ One such case is extant from Thailand, where the inscription makes it clear that the figure is in fact a Paccekabuddha.⁴¹

³⁹SN 3.20 at SN I 92,⁴ and its parallels SĀ 1233 at T II 337c₈, SĀ² 60 at T II 394b₁₅, and EĀ 23.4 at T II 613a₅ report the fruitfulness of giving to a former Pratyekabuddha combined with the dire consequence of not having had an attitude of faith towards him; cf. also Ud 5.3 at Ud 50,¹⁶ where not giving to a Paccekabuddha and instead behaving disrespectfully has disastrous results. Another instance of a similar type can be found in MĀ 66 at T I 508c₂₆, which reports that in a past life Anuruddha had offered food to a Pratyekabuddha, as a result of which he reaped abundant merit. Parallels to this tale in the Chinese canon are, e.g., T 44 at T I 829b₁₉, T 190 at T III 928b₂₁, and T 203 at T IV 470c₂₅; in the Pāli tradition, versions of this tale are found only in the commentaries; cf. a short reference in Th-a III 72,²³ (commenting on Th 910) and a more detailed version in Dh-p-a IV 120,²³. For another tale involving an offering to a Pratyekabuddha cf. EĀ 52.2 at T II 824b₁₈.

⁴⁰Kloppenborg 1974: 27 comments that “the fact that the *paccekabuddha* is described as having the outward appearance of a monk . . . sheds some light on the problem of why images or representations of *paccekabuddhas* are so strikingly rare. Most probably representations in art of *paccekabuddhas* occurred, but they cannot be distinguished from those of monks, unless an inscription shows that these are indeed images of *paccekabuddhas*.” Skilling 2013: 132 note 64 adds that although “to aspire to Pratyekabodhi does not seem to have been a popular option . . . there is occasional epigraphical or other evidence for this.”

⁴¹Given the absence of an *uṣṇīṣa*, the present image could alternatively only have been of a monk, similar to image 100, Plate LIII in Griswold 1957. However, it is not entirely clear if the absence of an *uṣṇīṣa* is characteristic of representations of Pratyekabuddhas in general; cf. also Zin 2003 for cases documenting that not only Buddhas were depicted with an *uṣṇīṣa*.



*Figure 1: Paccekabuddha, Lanna, 1592/1593
gilded bronze, height 54 cm
Courtesy of The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.*

Regarding the function of the Pratyekabuddha motif taken over by Buddhists from common ancient Indian lore, I doubt that this served to accommodate non-Buddhist sages within the Buddhist fold.⁴² The early discourses show a recurrent tendency to set the followers of the Buddha apart from those of other traditions; in fact the Buddha's claim to awakening is explicitly based on the statement that he had realized what had been unheard of before.⁴³ In other words, he openly claimed to have made a new discovery. This does not seem to require authentication by integrating ancient Indian sages into the Buddhist fold. In fact, once the notion of past Buddhas was in place, there would not have been any need to provide further authentication from the past. Given the ranking of recipients of gifts discussed above, it would indeed be rather surprising if such ancient Indian sages were placed in a position superior to arahants. Yet this is precisely the position of the Pratyekabuddha.

In some passages famous ancient Brahmin sages are not included in the Buddhist fold, but instead are quite openly dismissed as bereft of true vision.⁴⁴ Had there been a felt need to include non-Buddhist sages in the Buddhist tradition, these ancient sages should have been turned into Pratyekabuddhas, instead of being brushed aside as blind and unknowing. The same tendency continues with *Jātakas* where ancient Indian ascetics are clearly shown to be inferior to Pratyekabuddhas, instead of being identified with them.⁴⁵

The references above give the impression that the Pratyekabuddha had a more specifically Buddhist function than the mere accommodating of non-Buddhist sages. Given that the Pratyekabuddha is so prominent in the *Ekottarika-āgama* collection, the function of this motif could have had some relation to develop-

⁴²This has been suggested, e.g., by Kloppenborg 1974: 6: "the concept of the *paccekabuddha* ... presented the opportunity to include pre-buddhist recluses and seers in Buddhism ... in order to find a legitimate place within Buddhist teaching, these ascetics had to fit in the system."

⁴³For a comparative study of the parallel versions of what tradition reckons to have been the first discourse given by the Buddha cf. Anālayo 2012a and 2013a.

⁴⁴Cf., e.g., DN 13 at DN I 238,²¹ and its parallels DĀ 26 at T I 105b²⁴ and an as yet unpublished *Dirgha-āgama* Sanskrit fragment of the *Vāsiṣṭha-sūtra*, folio 449r (I am indebted to Jens-Uwe Hartmann for kindly providing me with a preliminary draft transliteration of the fragments). The three versions agree in providing a list of ancient Indian seers who are then disqualified as being blind and bereft of true vision.

⁴⁵Two examples are Jā 490 at Jā IV 328,²³ where a Paccekabuddha humbles the pride of an ascetic by rising into the air and letting dust from his feet fall onto the other's matted hair, and Jā 496 at Jā IV 372,¹, where a Paccekabuddha is shown to be a superior recipient of gifts compared to an ascetic endowed with the five higher knowledges (*abhiññā*).

ments within Buddhist thought at a stage preceding and overlapping with the initial stages of the emergence of the bodhisattva ideal and Mahāyāna thought, reflected in several *Ekottarika-āgama* discourses.⁴⁶ The various passages found in this collection give the impression that, perhaps only for a brief period, the concept of the Pratyekabuddha was of considerable relevance.

Thus it seems to me significant that in the discourse translated above the Pratyekabuddha motif takes the place of what in the parallel versions is Mahākāśyapa's role as a source of inspiration for future generations. A different approach to the role of Mahākāśyapa in relation to future generations can be seen in the other *Ekottarika-āgama* version, which continues after the plot common to the parallel versions by relating Mahākāśyapa to the future Buddha Maitreya.⁴⁷ This seems to be an allusion to a tale found elsewhere in the *Ekottarika-āgama* and in a number of other sources, according to which Mahākāśyapa will remain until the time of the future Buddha Maitreya, to whom he will pass on the Buddha's robe.⁴⁸ Here Mahākāśyapa's function is to bridge the period between one Buddha and the next, thereby clearly acting as an emblem of the continuity of the Dharma. His role of ensuring the continuity of the Dharma is also central in the accounts of the first *saṅgīti*.⁴⁹

In the discourse translated above, he proclaims that he would have become a Pratyekabuddha, had there been no Buddha. In this way Mahākāśyapa quite plainly states that for one like himself full awakening was certain, independent of whether or not a Buddha existed. This goes a step further than just setting an example for future generations, in that it affirms the possibility of attaining awakening in the absence of a Buddha.

⁴⁶ Cf. above note 31.

⁴⁷ EĀ 41.5 at T II 746C₁₃.

⁴⁸ EĀ 48.3 at T II 789a₆, preceded by reference to his undertaking the ascetic practices (= T 453 at T XIV 422b₁₈; cf. Anālayo 2013c: 39f note 112). For studies and translations of this tale cf., e.g., Przyluski 1914: 521–528, Lévi and Chavannes 1916: 193–197, Leumann 1919: 22, Przyluski 1923: 331–334, Lévi 1929: 40–46, Lamotte 1944/1981: 191–195, Ray 1994: 114f, Jaini 1988/2001: 475–477, Deeg 1999: 153–169, Silk 2003: 181–207, Klimburg-Salter 2005: 543–545, and Tournier 2014: 5–18.

⁴⁹ The different *Vinayas* agree in presenting Mahākāśyapa as the convenor of the first *saṅgīti*; cf. the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 966C₁₈, the (Haimvata?) **Vinayamātrkā*, T 1463 at T XXIV 818a₁₁, the Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya*, T 1425 at T XXII 490b₂₈, the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 190b₂₈, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 402c₁₉, the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 447b₅, the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin II 285₄, and for a comparative study that takes into account other relevant texts as well the classic by Przyluski 1926.

Several *Ekottarika-āgama* discourses report actual predictions that someone will become a Pratyekabuddha in the distant future.⁵⁰ Such predictions fall into the same category, in that they clearly convey the message: awakening will always be possible, even when the Buddha and his teaching have disappeared.⁵¹ The same theme recurs within the context of the relation between making offerings and a Pratyekabuddha. According to two discourses in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, undertaking the practice of giving and making offerings can act as a support for oneself to become a Pratyekabuddha in the future.⁵²

The fact that a Pratyekabuddha embodies the possibility of attaining awakening independently of the existence of a Buddha would have acquired increasing significance once the Buddha Gautama had passed away and his followers were struggling to ensure the survival of their tradition alongside competing groups in ancient India. The lack of a direct contact with the living Buddha as the object in which to take refuge as a Buddhist disciple must have made itself acutely felt, leading to a range of developments in the Buddhist traditions. As an emblem of the possibility of attaining awakening by relying entirely on oneself, in such a setting the figure of the Pratyekabuddha could easily have become a worthy object of worship and a source of inspiration.

Needless to say, to feel inspired by the Pratyekabuddha motif does not necessarily imply aspiring to become a Pratyekabuddha oneself. It could just have served as an inspiration for those aiming at attaining arahantship by relying on the teachings left behind by Gautama Buddha. Nevertheless, in their aspiration to reach this goal, the notion that full awakening is always possible, even when the teachings have disappeared, would have offered a strong source of support. It would have provided a sense of security precisely at a time when the followers of the Buddha were struggling to preserve these teachings.

With the growing prominence of the bodhisattva ideal and the increasing popularity of the possibility of becoming a fully awakened Buddha oneself,⁵³ the

⁵⁰Instances of such predictions can be found in EĀ 35.7 at T II 700b₂₃ (attainment after 60 aeons), EĀ 38.11 at T II 726a₁₆ (attainment after 20 aeons), and EĀ 49.9 at T II 804c₁₂ (attainment after 60 aeons); a description of the manifestation of light at the time a Buddha predicts that someone will in the future become a Pratyekabuddha can be found in EĀ 43.2 at T II 758b₁₇.

⁵¹Oldenberg 1881/1961: 299 comments on the function of the Pratyekabuddha in general: “der Begriff des Paccekabuddha sollte wohl in erster Linie eben dies besagen, daß auch in solchen Zeiten der Zugang zu Erlösung ernstem und kraftvollem Streben nicht verschlossen ist.”

⁵²EĀ 32.10 at T II 681a₂₆ and EĀ 43.2 at T II 757a₁₄.

⁵³On this development cf. in more detail Anālayo 2010a.

symbol of the Pratyekabuddha would have in turn lost importance.⁵⁴ This new ideal no longer needed the Pratyekabuddhas as an emblem of self-reliant awakening. From the viewpoint of the bodhisattva, Pratyekabuddhas would have lost the significance they perhaps earlier had, instead of which past Buddhas would have come to the foreground in their function of predicting and confirming the bodhisattva's progress on the path to Buddhahood.

Probably as a remnant of its by now lost former significance, the Pratyekabuddha has its place in standard references to the three *yānas* of practising for arahantship, for becoming a Pratyekabuddha, or for attaining full Buddhahood, such as found in the discourse translated above.⁵⁵

Given the much more powerful inspiration provided by the idea of becoming a fully awakened Buddha oneself, the motif of the Pratyekabuddha would have naturally become more like a fossil carried along by the tradition. In this way, the motif of the Pratyekabuddha might have gone through a brief period during which it served as an important source of inspiration, soon to be replaced by the bodhisattva ideal.

At present this is of course just a hypothesis based on surveying the early discourses, where in general the Pratyekabuddha appears somewhat peripheral, but then acquires considerably more prominence in the *Ekottarika-āgama*.⁵⁶

Supposing my admittedly hypothetical reconstruction to be correct, the fact that the standard sequence arahant — Pratyekabuddha — Buddha as an ascending hierarchy of recipients of gifts became a hierarchy of spiritual aspirations would to some degree reflect a historical development. This development would have proceeded from aspiring to arahantship at a time when the Buddha was alive, via

⁵⁴Bureau 1985: 649 comments that “le culte des *pratyekabuddha* ... paraît avoir diminué depuis le voyage de Fa-hien.” Perhaps of interest here is also that at times listings of recipients of gifts, such as for example EĀ 23.1 at T II 609b₁₉, list one on the path to Pratyekabuddhahood, followed by a Pratyekabuddha, then one on the path to becoming a Tathāgata (i.e. a bodhisattva), and a Buddha. Such listings show the parallelism of the two concepts and at the same time place the bodhisattva in a hierarchically superior position vis-à-vis the Pratyekabuddha.

⁵⁵References to these three *yānas* abound in the *Ekottarika-āgama*. For occurrences where the Pratyekabuddha is explicitly mentioned (leaving aside instances that just refer to the three *yānas*, 三乘) cf., e.g., EĀ 24.6 at T II 626a₂₁ (which uses the rendering 緣覺, instead of the phrase 辟支佛 used elsewhere in the *Ekottarika-āgama*), EĀ 32.10 at T II 681a₂₆ (adopting a variant reading that adds 佛道 to the list), EĀ 43.2 at T II 757a₁₄, EĀ 45.5 at T II 773b₉, and EĀ 48.5 at T II 792b₁₁ and c₂. On the three *yānas* cf. also, e.g., Nattier 2003: 138–141 and Dhammajoti 2011.

⁵⁶A study of the Pratyekabuddha motif in early Indian Mahāyāna texts as part of an examination of the notion of mahākaraṇā is at present under preparation by Dhammadinnā.

an interim period of aspiring to attain awakening even at a time when a Buddha was no longer alive but his teachings were still available, or perhaps even no longer available, to the wish to become a Buddha oneself.

Abbreviations

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| AN | <i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i> |
| B ^e | Burmese edition |
| C ^e | Ceylonese edition |
| D | Derge edition |
| DĀ | <i>Dirgha-āgama</i> (T 1) |
| Dhp-a | <i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i> |
| DN | <i>Dīgha-nikāya</i> |
| EĀ | <i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125) |
| Jā | <i>Jātaka</i> |
| MĀ | <i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26) |
| MN | <i>Majjhima-nikāya</i> |
| Q | Peking edition |
| SĀ | <i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99) |
| SĀ ² | <i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100) |
| S ^e | Siamese edition |
| SHT | Sanskriithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden |
| SN | <i>Samyutta-nikāya</i> |
| T | Taishō edition (CBETA) |
| Th | <i>Theragāthā</i> |
| Th-a | <i>Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā</i> |
| Thī | <i>Therīgāthā</i> |
| Ud | <i>Udāna</i> |

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