

# Brahman and Brāhmaṇism

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## ABSTRACT

*In an earlier paper, I made the observation that Gotama was raised in a milieu that was dominated by Brāhmaṇical teaching and culture.<sup>1</sup> What does this statement entail from the viewpoint of religion? Does it imply the Brāhmaṇical ritualism that is prevalent in the Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, and Aranyakas? Does it imply, separately or additionally, the teachings of the Upaniṣads? Although we have no conclusive evidence the extent to which Gotama was exposed to such teachings, he certainly was aware of aspects of both. The classic overview of many of the views that existed appears in the Brahmajāla Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. Furthermore, there are numerous examples of brāhmaṇas discoursing with the Buddha or one of his disciples, all with the design to highlight a specific teaching. To a degree, it is my opinion that an understanding of Buddhist teachings in large part depends upon our understanding of the Brāhmaṇical milieu. Gotama's teaching bears a universal message, it is true, but it is organized and interpreted vis-à-vis the dominant culture of his day. Similarities arise in non-Buddhist texts that may help explain the Gotama's motive in choosing the method of teaching as well as its content. These similarities demonstrate the need to reevaluate certain reflections and opinions that often are passed on as fact. What is meant by caste? Were the four classes or castes based upon birth? Why do the terms brahman- and brāhmaṇa- and other related terms remain important in Buddhist teaching? If Gotama rejected Brāhmaṇism, what is it in the latter that he was opposed to? How is this revealed in the Buddhist teaching? Is Gotama a revolutionary or evolutionary teacher when his teachings are compared to Brāhmaṇism? There is a note of caution when examining an ancient culture such as Vedic India. Many elements of the culture may be gleaned from the texts, but it is impossible to arrive at a complete or nearly complete picture of the culture. Can we know any more about the England of 1550 only through the Book of Common Prayer than we can the India of the time of the Ṛgveda? Or the Italy of the early 1300s only through Dante Alighieri's *La divina commedia*? Or the Arthurian Britain of the 6<sup>th</sup> century through Thomas Malory's 15<sup>th</sup> century work, *Morte D'Arthur*? Attempting to determine whole cultures through narrowly demarcated sources can only disclose inadequate results. If we remove opinion, ideologies, comparative analyses, even the best methodologies can only disclose for certain what we do not know. What follows is a reexamination of some basic of the questions that may shed some light on Gotama's teachings.*

## Who is a Brāhmaṇa?

In the Pāli texts, there are frequent discussions between the *kṣatriya*- Gotama and *brāhmaṇa*-, just as there are discussions between kings and *brāhmaṇical* teachers in the Upaniṣads and in earlier Vedic texts. It is expected that Gotama will win over the questioning and sometimes doubting *brāhmaṇa*-s, but it is very curious that *brāhmaṇas* are sometimes compelled to learn from a *kṣatriya*-. Granted that it is not

any *kṣatriya*- but a king and that the teachings make up the central core Upaniṣadic doctrine. Such kings as Ajātaśatru<sup>2</sup> and Janaka,<sup>3</sup> Aśvapati Kaikeya, the king of Kekaya<sup>4</sup> and Pravāhaṇa Jaivali, the king of Pañcāla<sup>5</sup> who teach the central core of Upaniṣadic teaching to *brāhmaṇas*. That the king is the teacher to the teacher-*brāhmaṇa*- is an important observation, especially when the *kṣatriya* founder of the Buddhist community and reformer of the Jain community relegated the *brāhmaṇa*-s to irrelevance. Rather than taking the view that the core Upaniṣadic instructions were the results solely of *kṣatriya*- or royal speculation at the expense of the *brāhmaṇas*,<sup>6</sup> perhaps a more realistic explanation might be, as Patrick Olivelle observes,<sup>7</sup> that the *brāhmaṇa*- composers of the texts may have had “political, religious, economic, and even literary reasons for including or creating these episodes”<sup>8</sup> It is curious also that two kings already mentioned—Janaka, the king of Videha and Aśvapati Kaikeya—appear in an earlier non-Upaniṣadic composition, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.<sup>9</sup>

Turning to the Pāli texts *brāhmaṇa*-s are considered of two types: those who are *brāhmaṇa*-s in name only and those who are true *brāhmaṇa*-s based on their merit. The archetypal discussion on a definition of the true *brāhmaṇa*-s appears in the *Vāseṭṭha Sutta*.<sup>10</sup> Therein, two young *brāhmaṇa*- students, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja, argue over the meaning of a true *brāhmaṇa*. One (Bhāradvāja) argues that is based upon a pure birth; the other (Vāseṭṭha) argues on the basis of virtue and of fulfilling the observances. Unable to convince the other, Vāseṭṭha suggests that they approach Gotama to get his opinion<sup>11</sup>:

Is one a Brahmin by birth or action?<sup>12</sup>  
Explain to us who do not know  
How we should recognize a Brahmin.

The short answer given by the Buddha is that one is a *brāhmaṇa*- by action. There is no distinctive mark (*liṅga*-) that distinguishes humans by birth or by any part of the body; rather, a human is identified by what he does. Thus a person who makes a living by agriculture, for instance, is a farmer. Even one who makes a living by serving as a family priest (*porohicca*-) is not a *brāhmaṇa*- but rather a priest (*yājaka*-).<sup>13</sup> What follows is Gotama’s description of a *brāhmaṇa*-: one who has severed himself from all attachments and fetters, one who displays a patience that is so pronounced that there is no sign of anger, hatred, violence and abuse, one who no longer clings to sensual pleasures, one who knows the destruction of suffering, one who knows the Path, and one who has self-control and inner training.<sup>14</sup> In brief, the true *brāhmaṇa*- is the *arhant*-.<sup>15</sup>

### **Does the Buddha directly contradict the perception of a Brāhmaṇa- in Brāhmaṇical circles?**

The conventional response to this question is in the affirmative, but it is not as obvious as one would assume. The argument in which Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja were engaged concerned does not confirm the assumption that *brāhmaṇa*-s considered their status to be based solely on birth. It is impossible to know for certain whether the view held by Bhāradvāja was a majority opinion within the *brāhmaṇical* community or whether it was even a view that was only beginning to take on significance at this time. Although Bhāradvāja is quite clear that he is speaking about biological birth, there is also that other birth that takes place. Heesterman<sup>16</sup> observes that in the *śrauta*-

ritual the *yajamāna*- or patron of the ritual, no matter what is varṇa or class is ritually reborn a *brāhmaṇa*-. Furthermore, in the royal consecration ritual (the *rājasūya*-), the *kṣatriya*-, following his anointing and enthronement, addresses the four as “brahman” with each responding, “thou, O king, art Brahman.”

This would seem to indicate that the two varṇas were not mutually exclusive regarding status or function. One account that reflects Gotama’s instruction of the *brāhmaṇical* students is that of king Ajātaśatru of Kāśī and the *brāhmaṇa*- Gārgya.<sup>17</sup> After presenting a series of fundamental truths or revelations on the ultimate Reality<sup>18</sup> by Gārgya Bālāki—known as Dṛṣṭabālāki or Bālāki the Proud—King Ajātaśatru rejects each of the explanations as inadequate and inconsequential. According to the version given in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Gārgya declares as his first explanation that it is the person (*puruṣa*-) in the sun (*āditya*-) whom he worships as Brahman. Ajātaśatru discounts this explanation by stating that the person is but the head and king of all beings and so is the most eminent (*atiṣṭhāh*) element, but not the Brahman. Anyone who worships the person in the sun will likewise become like him in status. Gārgya then moves on to eleven other persons: the person in the moon (*candra*-), in lightning (*vidyut*-), in space (*ākāśa*-), in the wind (*vāyu*-), in the fire (*agni*-), in the waters (*ap*-), in the mirror (*ādarśa*-), the sound drifting behind a man as he walks (*ya evāyaṃ yantaṃ paścāc-chabdo ’nūdeti*), in the quarters (*diś*-), the shadow (*chāyā*-), and in the body (*ātman*-).<sup>19</sup> Each was rejected by Ajātaśatru as not equivalent to the Supreme because they did not supercede this cosmos or the elements therein. None are not creators but rather creatures<sup>20</sup> or products of the creator, and nothing more. Following this failed instruction, Gārgya realizes that the king must know the Supreme Truth and so begs him to teach him as his pupil. This reversal of roles is as unusual as Ajātaśatru’s observation that surely people would rush to hear Gārgya’s revelation of the Truth, shouting “A Janaka! A Janaka!”

Why Gārgya —the quintessential *brāhmaṇa*- who would be expected to solve the mystery for Ajātaśatru, who was said to be learned in the Vedas and Vedāṅgas (*anūcāna*-) since he came from a prominent family of Vedic scholars,<sup>21</sup> and who must have gained considerable practical experience having lived in many lands,<sup>22</sup>—was declared a Janaka seems strange, for Janaka was a king and not a *brāhmaṇa*-. If we assume that only *brāhmaṇa*-s were in the sole possession of the sacred knowledge or supreme truth, this is a strange declaration on the peoples’ part, but only if we assume that *brāhmaṇa*-s and *kṣatriya*-s represent fixed and separate natal classes. This does not seem to be the case, however. We know that birth played an important role in later Hinduism, but what are we to make of Vāseṭṭha’s emphasis that a *brāhmaṇa*- is truly a *brāhmaṇa*- because he is virtuous (*śilavā*) and fulfills the observances (*vata-sampanno*)?<sup>23</sup> Or, as we shall see in the next account, that Janaka himself is declared a *brahmān*-. *Brāhmaṇa*-s and *kṣatriya*-s were not separated by birth but in some instances converged, either in the ritual context or in the context of the debate (*brahmodya*-), a very important function undertaken by teachers, usually *brāhmaṇa*-s, but not limited to this group, as we observed with a number of kings assuming this role most notably in the Upaniṣads.

The declaration that Gārgya was a Janaka demands some explanation. It is fairly certain that Janaka lived sometime prior to the Buddha’s time, for Videha was a non-monarchical<sup>24</sup> territory during his time. Also important is that Janaka—if we

accept a single king of Videha by that name—is mentioned both in the early and later Veda,<sup>25</sup> an important observation in establishing the relationship between these portions of the Veda. As with Janaka, so too with the *brāhmaṇa* who is associated with the king, Yājñavalkya, a teacher who is mentioned numerous times in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.<sup>26</sup>

The relationship between Janaka and Yājñavalkya is not consistent, that is, their roles are not always consistent. Unlike the Ajātaśatru and Gārgya episode, Janaka is the one who assumes Gārgya's role after he failed to instruct Ajātaśatru (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.1) despite the fact that he was considered learned in the Vedas and instructed in the hidden teachings (*upaniṣad*-).<sup>27</sup> In this account Janaka relates what he had already been told about Brahman by other teachers, namely, that it is speech (*vāc*-), the life breath (*prāṇa*-), sight (*cakṣu*-), hearing (*śrotra*-), the mind (*manas*-), and the heart (*hrdaya*-), all proposed by various teachers. Since, however, none of the teachers revealed their sphere (*āyatana*-) and foundation (*pratiṣṭhā*-), each was considered one-legged (*eka-pād*-),<sup>28</sup> i.e., incomplete. Yājñavalkya then supplies the missing part of the explanation. To Vidagdha Śākalya's identification of the heart with Brahman, Yājñavalkya adds that the heart itself is its sphere and space (*ākāśa*-) its foundation. One should worship it as stability (*sthiti*-).

Yājñavalkya is one of the more important teachers because of his introduction of the *via negativa* as a means of explaining the Ātman.<sup>29</sup> This does not signify, however, that Janaka was always the one inferior in learning. In a non-Upaniṣadic passage,<sup>30</sup> Janaka asks three *brāhmaṇa*-s,<sup>31</sup> of which Yājñavalkya is one, how they perform one of the basic Vedic rituals, the Agnihotra. After they presented their views, Janaka declares that none has captured the exact nature of the ritual although Yājñavalkya came closest. The three, upset that they were challenged by a *rājanya*- (*kṣatriya*-), decided to challenge the king to a debate (*brahmodya*-). But Yājñavalkya argued that it would be pointless to engage in such a contest because of Janaka's status. Indeed, what if Janaka should win the debate? So they decided not to pursue this route. What Yājñavalkya decided to do, however, was to ask the king in private what he knew about the Agnihotri—the Vedic ritual in which an oblation is presented to the fire god, Agni—to which Janaka replies by giving an explanation about the two libations presented in the ritual that replicate the cycles of nature and human birth. Yājñavalkya, satisfied, granted a wish to Janaka, who responded, 'Allow me to ask any question I wish, Yājñavalkya!' From that time on Janaka was a *brahmā*.<sup>32</sup>

Based on these passages, it would appear that there was no hard and fast division between the two highest classes—*brāhmaṇa*- and *kṣatriya*—based on birth. If anything, more emphasis was placed on the knowledge of the *brāhmaṇa*-, whether it was knowledge of the ritual (as in the *brahmodya*- conducted above between Janaka and the three *brāhmaṇa*-s), or whether it was the knowledge of Brahman or of Truth as expressed in the Upaniṣads. One additional observation that might add more weight to this argument by Vāseṭṭha's claim that he and Bhāradvāja were very learned in Vedic knowledge because they were students of teachers who were not related. Although this is not conclusive proof, the fact that a teacher would and could take any prospective boy under his wing would tend to weaken the argument that *brāhmaṇa*-s acquired their knowledge and training only within the family, extended or otherwise.<sup>33</sup>

This would indicate a group of individuals set apart from the rest of society whose chief function involved the knowledge and manipulation of cosmic (micro- and macro-) powers that that either are beneficial or detrimental to the life of the community and individual.

The *brāhmaṇa* as described by Gotama would seem to combine both features of the Vedic texts. Knowledge is emphasized in the Upaniṣads; action (in this case ritual action) and the knowledge thereof in the earlier Veda. Gotama, however accepts both action and knowledge but in a radically different manner. As described above the knowledge is the equivalent to *paññā-* (represented in the above Vāseṭṭha Sutta as knowing the destruction of suffering) or even *aññā-* as the equivalent to the knowledge of the *arahant-*.

### **Brāhmaṇism, Brāhman- and Brāhmaṇa- as an indicator of Buddhist teaching**

Buddhism is very often studied in a vacuum or in light with a culture that has no fundamental association with it. It is for this reason that I chose to connect Buddhism with the orthodox, Brāhmaṇical religion by exploring the role of the *brāhmaṇa-s*,<sup>34</sup> or members of the first class of society who invented the religion. By assuming a connection with the Brāhmaṇical religion, our understanding of the Buddha's teachings may deepen once we understand the context in which they developed. It is, however, a context based primarily upon the Great Tradition of the Brāhmaṇical religion rather than the more derivative and sometimes independent Little or Village Tradition, since the only evidence that we can rely upon are those compositions which reflect the Great Tradition: the Vedas. Whether the Buddha was fully cognizant of the contents of the Vedas, especially the later portions (the Upaniṣads), is open to serious doubt.<sup>35</sup> Yet, some understanding was present, but it was an understanding from a cultural milieu, a view of the world that was more reflexive rather than premeditated. What follows are suggestions in adding to the elucidation of the teaching by focusing on the possible origins of selected teachings and attitudes. These include the following:

- 1) The interpretation of the *brāhmaṇa-* in light of the Veda;
- 2) *Karman-* or "action";
- 3) *Ātman-* as contrasted to *anātman-* and the *khandha-s*;
- 4) "Desire" and Second Noble Truth;
- 5) The notion of *tapas-* in relation to *nibbāna-*.

The first, the interpretation of the *brāhmaṇa-* in light of the *brāhman-*, has already been discussed. It is obvious that the *brāhmaṇa-* class was considered the paragon in the society. As the repository of wisdom and as ritualists, *brāhmaṇa-s* guaranteed the survival and prosperity of the tribal society. Whether all individuals subscribed to this view is irrelevant. The fact is that Gotama did not reject the title but rather reinterpreted it in the light of his own teaching. That he could do so justifies the argument that *brāhmaṇa-s* were not identified solely by birth but rather by merit. It is most likely that there was a momentum during the Buddha's time to create a brāhmaṇical class based solely on birth, and that this status was considered by some to be a requirement based in large part on the preservation of purity and the avoidance of pollution. This shift to an exclusive position in society based on was not fully enacted

until after Gotama's time. Indeed, one scholar proposed that when heredity and birth became the dominant view in determining a *brāhmaṇa*-, Brāhmaṇism came into being.<sup>36</sup> What is significant in this light is that Gotama's reinterpretation of the *brāhmaṇa*- is not to be viewed exclusively as a rejection of the notion of heredity as a determining factor in defining the true *brāhmaṇa*-. Included in his rejection was a reinterpretation of the knowledge and actions of the *brāhmaṇa*-. The use of the term *kamma*- to indicate Vāsetṭha's interpretation provides us with a clue that this position was also not accepted, at least not completely. Gotama regarded the *brāhmaṇa*- not merely as virtuous—which in general terms agrees with his view of the initial and continual moral development of a *brāhmaṇa*—he also views the *brāhmaṇa*- as a gnostic, one who possesses the supreme wisdom or Dharma.

There is another semantic development that takes place regarding the *brāhmaṇa*-. In the early Veda, with few exceptions, the *brāhmaṇa*- is engaged in This World. But what does "This World" mean? It is a world alive with entities or potencies connected in a vast network mutually influential on one other. Understanding the Vedic viewpoint, therefore, demands that we assume an entirely different perspective, an approach that encompasses a "magical worldview."<sup>37</sup> If Western science and philosophy and Judeo-Christianity separate humanity from the rest of the world and the powers therein, the magical worldview does not. Sigmund Mowinckel has suggested that the magical world view orders the world in a way entirely distinctive from the Western attitude through the natural sciences.<sup>38</sup> There is no sharp division between humanity and the world, between humans and non-humans, between the living and non-living. Indeed, one expression of this connection is the *puruṣa-sūkta* (Rgveda X.90), which establishes not only the interconnectiveness of nature—including humanity—but also views the cosmos as the product of a "person" or "male" (*puruṣa*-). The role of the *puruṣa*- continues to retain its role both as the source of the world and as that entity that possesses all entities, all forces within the world. The connectedness of natural forces takes on varied forms, but there can be no doubt that much of the Veda consists of these connections or *bandhu*-s. One scholar who has made a study of these *bandhu*-s is Brian K. Smith,<sup>39</sup> who argues that the *varṇa*- ("characteristic"; "attribute"<sup>40</sup>) provided an organizational framework "generating and negotiating connections of both the vertical and horizontal type."<sup>41</sup> An example of this type of classification involving the *varṇa*-s appears in Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa 6.1.6 – 11)<sup>42</sup>:

[Prajāpati] desired, 'May I emit the sacrifice.' From his mouth he emitted the nine-versed (*trivṛt*) hymn of praise (*stoma*); along with it he emitted the *gāyatrī* among the meters, Agni among the gods, the Brahmin among men, spring among the seasons. Therefore among the hymns of praise the nine-versed is the mouth [or the first, the chief one], among the meters the *gāyatrī* among the gods Agni, among men the Brahmin, among the seasons the spring. Therefore the Brahmin makes himself strong (*vīrya*) with his mouth, for from the mouth was he emitted. He makes himself strong with his mouth who knows this. He emitted from his chest, from his arms, the fifteen-versed (*pañcadaśa*-) hymn of praise; along with it he emitted the *triṣṭubh* among the meters, Indra among the gods, the Kshatriya among men, the hot season among the seasons. Therefore the hymn of praise of a Kshatriya is the fifteen-versed, the meter the *triṣṭubh*, the god is Indra, the season is the summer. Therefore his strength is his arms, for he was emitted from the arms. He makes himself strong with his arms who knows this.<sup>43</sup>

A review of all the connections in the Veda reveal inconsistencies to be sure, but what is important is the efficacy of the connection in the magical sense and not the historical, economic, political, or social sense. This suggests that the pervasive theme in the Veda is magic, which may be described as the manipulation or control of forces in the cosmos by certain techniques. The individual who can control these forces is the magician or, in this context, the *brāhmaṇa*-. It is curious that the Indo-European root \**magh* ‘to be able, to have power,’ is related to our English ‘may’ (< O.E. *magan* ‘to be able’) as well as *magic* and *magus*: both of which based upon a suffixed form \**magh-u* (from Old Persian *magush* ‘a member of a priestly class.’). From a more technical point of view, what Antoine Faivre has suggested as one component of Western esotericism is equally true of the Vedic worldview: the notion of “living nature.”<sup>44</sup> His interpretation of magic or *magia* is that it “is simultaneously the knowledge of the networks of sympathies or antipathies that link the things of Nature and the concrete operation of these bodies of knowledge.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, humanity participates in the world, is effected by the world, and can affect the world. Based upon Faivre’s description Vedic magic or ritual, although lexically differentiated, are identical as efficacious activities. If there is a distinction, I would conjecture that it would be on a more superficial basis, such as the sociological distinction between magical activity as client- or practitioner-oriented, and ritual activity as community-oriented. Yet Vedic ritual is focused not on the community but on the client, the *yajamāna*- or sacrificer-patron.” From the Vedic perspective, therefore, magic and ritual are identical.

If we consider the *brāhmaṇa*- to be a magician who can control or manipulate the forces in the cosmos through magic, ritual or sacrifice (*yajña*-), what are we to make of *karman*-, which finds its origins in this sort of activity? From the perspective of the early Vedic compositions, the term suggests an ineffable and absolute linking of an action to its result. This is mentioned in the *Kātyāyana Śrautasūtra* (1.1.2), which describes *karman*- as the gaining of a reward (*phala*-). In the early Veda, the reward was external, such as offspring, cattle, prosperity, the possession of a village, the overcoming of one’s enemies or demons, or the living out of one’s full lifetime.<sup>46</sup> This external reward is then replaced by an internal or personal reward or retribution when it is first introduced in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.4.5). This does not alter the “magical worldview” of the teacher but rather internalizes the concept. Indeed, the causality that is associated with *karman*- resembles more the *bandhu*-s or connections described in the early Veda than a scientific description of causality. Although one may argue that Gotama taught in a more practical manner, a manner that may be interpreted as more philosophical rather than “theological,” it may be the case that his viewpoint still reflected a magical worldview rather than a purely positivistic perspective. If indeed a paradigm shift took place in which the magical worldview of the Vedic *brāhmaṇa*-s was replaced by the positivist, empiricist worldview of the heterodox *samaṇa*-s, then we might consider 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. India as a region wherein a genuine intellectual revolution took place. Even if it did not take place, we are still able to recognize elements of Buddhist teaching that may have been based not on independent deliberation but rather on the rejection of a commonly accepted view of the orthodox religion. One such example reflects the third item above, *ātman*- as contrasted to *anātman*- and the *khandha*-s. In the Upaniṣads, *ātman*- is oftentimes equated with Brahman as the supreme reality.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, there is one example that suggested that the Supreme could be located in some part of the individual.<sup>48</sup> This

occurs in the dialogue between Janaka and Yājñavalkya in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (4.1). Janaka was taught by various teachers that Brahman is the same as speech (*vāc-*), the life breath (*prāṇa-*), sight (*cakṣu-*), hearing (*śrotra-*), the mind (*manas-*), and the heart (*hṛdaya-*). Yājñavalkya, however, identified the heart as Brahman. There are numerous passages in the Upaniṣads that either attempt to identify Brahman-ātman with some part of the body or sense function. If this approach were known to Gotama, a possibility because of the debates that took place among the wandering teachers during his time, it is not unreasonable to assume that his assertion that no *ātman-* can be equated with any of the aggregates (materiality, feeling, perception, volitional formations, or consciousness) is a direct response to this observation.<sup>49</sup> What is of interest is that the aggregates individually are explained as a “group” or “mass” (*ṛṣi-*)<sup>50</sup>, an observation diametrically opposed to the Upaniṣadic notion of a single entity of the *ātman-*

Similarly, the mention of excessive and uncontrollable desire (*taṇhā-*) as the cause of *dukkha-* is curious, especially if ignorance (*avijjā-*) seems a more likely culprit for this malady. The two obviously go hand in hand, but why place *taṇhā-* in perhaps the most important fundamental teaching of Gotama, the Four Noble Truths.<sup>51</sup> There is a possibility that creation myths of various sorts in the Vedas place a great deal of emphasis on “desire,” as well as the existence of those ‘special rites’ *Kāmyā Iṣṭi-s*, all of which are based upon desires.

Finally, the notion of *tapas-* or heat and fire in the Vedic ritual is strikingly offset in Buddhism with the opposite concept of coolness. According to one source<sup>52</sup> the role of heat and fire in the Vedic ritual is crucial in linking the divine and human, heaven and earth, and This World and the Other World.<sup>53</sup> The consecrated fire makes it possible to transcend This World. Later, when the sacrifice is abandoned by the Upaniṣadic teachers, there is still a retention of the *tapas* or interiorized fire that is used to burn the residue that binds him to this world.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, the Summum Bonum or *nirvāṇa-* pertains not to the kindling of the fire but to its quenching. Thus it is written in Majjhima Nikāya III.245:

Bhikkhu, just as an oil-lamp burns in the dependence on oil and a wick, and when the oil and wick are used up, if it does not get any more fuel, it is extinguished [*nibbāyati*] from lack of fuel; so too when he feels a feeling terminating with the body... a feeling terminating with life, he understands: ‘I feel a feeling terminating with life.’ He understands: ‘On the dissolution of the body, with the ending of life, all that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cool right here.’<sup>55</sup>

Unlike the earlier Veda, which places so much emphasis on heat and fire, the Buddhist teaching takes a distinctly opposite track. My conclusion from the observations made in this paper is to suggest that although the Buddha did not necessarily have a direct knowledge of the teachings contained within the earlier Veda and its emphasis on the ritual, nor the teachings of the Upaniṣadic teachers of the later Veda, the populace—or at least those who were qualified to hear the Veda (the educated and aristocratic twice-born)—certainly had the opportunity to witness the ritual being performed and to be aware of the great debates surrounding the notions of the Self and Transcendent Brahman. Gotama, because of his status and educational background, probably received enough information from his teachers to develop his own teachings within the framework of the *brāhmaṇical* worldview. Knowing the



*brāhmaṇical* worldview does not necessarily mean being on the cutting edge of such practices and teachings. That is necessarily reserved for only most best and brightest of society. Having a general and imperfect grasp of the teachings is still sufficient to launch a teaching such as the Buddha's in contrast with the dominant ideology of his day and those who developed it. Thus the contrast of *samaṇa* with the *brāhmaṇa*-, the redefinition of the *brāhmaṇa*- to be one not defined according to one's descent but in accordance with one's meritorious actions (as defined by the Buddha), the reinterpretation of *karman*- to be not the connection between human action and the ensuing reward but rather the ultimate hindrance to one's ultimate reward of *nibbāna*-, the denial of that very substance that is the recipient of the reward (the *ātman*-), the utter rejection of that natural quality that defines human beings as unique among creatures—including divine beings—for their urge to savor disequilibrium (*taṇhā*-), and to let go and extinguish the flames of this existence (*nibbāna*-).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Educational Concepts and Practices in Early Southern Buddhism," *Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism*, vol. 4 (2003): 58.

<sup>2</sup> Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.1.1f. and Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 4.1f.

<sup>3</sup> Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XI.6.2.

<sup>4</sup> Chāndogya Upaniṣad 5.11 – 24. Also mentioned in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa X.6.1.2.

<sup>5</sup> Chāndogya Upaniṣad 1.8 – 9.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*. Translated by Rev. A.S. Geden (N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), 17 – 19. The following is Deussen's reasonable but in my opinion an erroneous observation:

When we consider that the passages quoted discuss such subjects as the knowledge of Brahman as ātman, the knowledge of this ātman as the all-quickener, and the fate of the soul after death, that is, precisely the most important points of Upanishad teaching; that not only is the king represented in them as endowed with wisdom, but is expressly contrasted with the Brāhmaṇ who is ignorant or deluded; and that these narratives are preserved to us by the Vedic Śākhās, and therefore by the Brāhmaṇs themselves; we are forced to conclude, if not with absolute certainty, yet with a very high degree of probability, that as a matter of fact the doctrine of the atman, standing as it did in such sharp contrast to all the principles of the Vedic ritual, thought the original conception may have been due to Brāhmaṇs, was taken up and cultivated primarily not in Brāhmaṇ but Kshatriya circles, and was first adopted by the former in later times.

<sup>7</sup> On this point, see Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation* (N.Y. and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11 – 12.

<sup>8</sup> Olivelle (*The Early Upaniṣads*, 12) further adds the following:

We must bear in mind that the Brahmin community itself was not a monolithic entity. The most we can say is that some segments of the Brahmanical community must have perceived it as advantageous to present doctrines they favored as coming from the royal elite.

<sup>9</sup> Respectively, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XI.6.2.1 and XI.6.3 and X.6.1.2.

<sup>10</sup> Majjhima Nikāya, sutta 98. This is the same text as the Sutta Nipāta.

<sup>11</sup> This translation is from Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Translation edited and revised by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 799.

<sup>12</sup> The verse, as quoted from the Suttanipāta (3. 9, vs. 198) in Pāli is as follows:

*jātayā brāhmaṇo hoti, udāhu bhavati kammunā*. This appears in *The Khuddakapāṭha-Dhammapada-Udāna-Itivuttaka-Suttanipāta* [Khuddakanikāya Vol. I],

Bhikkhu J. Kashyap, general editor (Pāli Publication Board, Bihar Government, 1959), 363 [Nālanda-Devanāgarī-Pāli-Series].

<sup>13</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 800 – 802 (*Suttanipāta* 14 – 25); *The Khuddakapāṭha-Dhammapada-Udāna-Itivuttaka-Suttanipāta* 3.9.206 – 217.

<sup>14</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 802 – 807 (*Suttanipāta* 27 – 63). Verses 27 – 54 are repeated in the Brāhmaṇa Vagga of the Dhammapada (vss. 396 – 423).

<sup>15</sup> Dhammapada, vs. 420 and *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 805 (vs. 51): *khīnāsavaṃ arahantaṃ tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ* [Suttanipāta 3.9.243, in *Khuddakapāṭha-Dhammapada-Udāna-Itivuttaka-Suttanipāta* [Khuddakanikāya Vol. I], 367.

<sup>16</sup> J.C. Heesterman, “Brahmin, Ritual, and Renouncer,” in *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 30.

<sup>17</sup> Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.1.1f.; Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 4.1f.

<sup>18</sup> *brahma te bravāṇīti*. This statement may be translated as ‘Let me speak brahman to you’ or ‘let me tell you about Brahman.’ *Brahman* may be viewed as a substantive or as the equivalent to ‘fundamental truth.’ In this passage, it seems that the substantive makes more sense.

<sup>19</sup> Rather than *ātman-*, *śarīra-* appears in the Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 4.16. Rather than *ātman-*, the Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad includes the person in thunder (*sthanayitni*: vs. 6), in the echo (*pratiśrut-kāyā-*: vs. 7), the person in dreams (*puruṣa supta svapnayā carati*), in the right eye (*dakṣinākṣin-*: vs. 17), in the left eye (*savyākṣin-*: vs. 18).

<sup>20</sup> Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 4.19: *yo vai bālāka eteṣāṃ puruṣāṇāṃ kartā yasya vai tat-karma sa vai veditavya iti*.

<sup>21</sup> A number of Gārgyas are mentioned, including two from the *vaṃsa* or lineage of teachers given in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.6.2, two in the *Nirukta* I.3.12 and III.13, and Gārgya the son of Garga (according to Sāyaṇa) in Taittirīya Āraṇyaka 1.7.3. These occurrences would establish that Bālāki descended from a family in both the Vedas and Vedāngas.

<sup>22</sup> Uśīnara, Satvan, Matsyas, Kuru and Pañcāla, Kāśi and Videha are mentioned in Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 4.1.

<sup>23</sup> *Suttanipāta* 9.3 (p. 362) and *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 798.

<sup>24</sup> “Republic” is the term sometimes used by scholars. This is based on the terms *gaṇa* or *saṅgha*. For a discussion of the used of these terms, see J.P. Sharma, *Republics in Ancient India* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 1-14.

<sup>25</sup> The early Veda refers to the Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, and Āraṇyakas, all of which are concerned with Vedic ritual (*yajña-* or *karman-*), whereas the later Veda, the Upaniṣads, is concerned with knowledge (*jñāna-*).

<sup>26</sup> I.1.1,9; 3.1.21 and 26; 9.3,16; II.3.1,21; 4.3,2; 5.1,2; III.1.1,4; 2,21; 3,10; 8.2,24; IV.2.1,7; 6.1,10; 8,7; XI.3.1,2; 4.2,17; 3,20; 6.2,1; 3,1; XII.4.1,10; XIII.5.3,6.

<sup>27</sup> Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.2,1.

<sup>28</sup> See Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.18.

<sup>29</sup> Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.9.28; 4.2.4; 5,15.

<sup>30</sup> Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XI.6.2.

<sup>31</sup> Śvetaketu Āruṇeya, Somaśuṣma Sātyayaṅni, and Yājñavalkya.

<sup>32</sup> Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XI.6.2.10: *kāma-praśna eva me tvayi yājñavalkyāsaditi tato brahmā janaka āsa*. Why a *brahmā* and not a *brāhmaṇa*? Since this passage is a *brahmodya-* (‘discussions on *brāhman*), the person who participates in this dialogue and who apparently knows the answer is a *brahmān-*. *Brahmā* indicates the masculine form.

<sup>33</sup> This is not to say that birth had absolutely nothing to do with a *brāhmaṇa*’s status.

The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa II.19 and Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa XII.3 relate the story in the Aponaptrīya ritual of Kavaṣa Ailūṣa, with whom the Mādhyamās refused to eat because of his being born of a female slave, proved his worth by drawing and attracting

the Sarasvatī waters by seeing the hymn (Rg Veda X.30) that is recited in this rite.

This proves his power as a true *brāhmaṇa*-.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of the Buddha's connection with the earlier and dominant religious culture, see Ananda Guruge, *Facets of Buddhism* (Colombo: Swabhāṣā, 1967), (Singapore: Samadhi Buddhist Society, 1990), pp. 72 – 101 (“The Place of Buddhism in Indian Thought”).

<sup>35</sup> This is made abundantly clear in the excellent discussion of Ananda Guruge's *Facets of Buddhism*, 81 – 89. On page 88, he writes:

It is very doubtful whether one can still hold the view that the Upanisadic teachings were the life-spring of Buddhism. ... The basic difference between Buddhism and the Upanisadic philosophy relates to their notions of the origin and the nature of the Universe.

One example of the disparity between Upanisadic and Buddhist teaching was given in an earlier paper of mine, “Educational Concepts and Practices in Early Southern Buddhism,” *Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism*, vol. 4 (2003): 59 and endnote 12 (64). The compound *brahma-sahavyatā*- and phrase, *brahmāṇam saḥavyūpagā* “union with Brahmā” refer to a masculine deity rather than the transcendent reality (*brahman*-). This observation was also made many years earlier by Ananda Guruge, *Facets of Buddhism*, 83-84 and 88.

<sup>36</sup> Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2003), 43.

<sup>37</sup> Wax, Murray and Rosalie Wax, “Notion of Magic,” *Current Anthropology*, vol. 4, no.5 (1963): 495 – 518.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Wax and Wax, “Notion of Magic”: 501.

<sup>39</sup> *Classifying the Universe* (NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Classifying the Universe*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Classifying the Universe*, 12.

Vertical connections between elements of the same type of things or beings. The *brāhmaṇa*-, for instance, is vertically connected to the other *varṇas*. Horizontal connections occur between two different hierarchically organized orders. Thus a *brāhmaṇa*- is horizontally related to other entities, such as an animal, a season, or a meter.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted from *Classifying the Universe*, 65 – 66.

<sup>43</sup> The cosmogony continues with the *vaiśya*- and the *śūdra*-.

<sup>44</sup> Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994 [original in French: *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental*], 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Access to Western Esotericism*, 11.

<sup>46</sup> Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa 2.21f.

<sup>47</sup> Chāndogya Upaniṣad 5.11.1: *ko nātmā kiṃ brahme 'ti*. The text is based upon Olivelle's text (*The Early Upaniṣads*, 238. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, 85 – 87, 91.

<sup>48</sup> Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, 89 – 117.

<sup>49</sup> The five *khandha*-s or aggregates are *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṃkhārā*, and *viññāṇa* (materiality, feeling, perception, mental confections, and consciousness).

<sup>50</sup> This is mentioned in Buddhaghosa's *Atthasālinī*, 141. This appears in Edward Müller, editor, *The Atthasālinī*, (London: Pali Text Society, Henry Frowde, 1897).

<sup>51</sup> The term also appears in the Paṭicca Samuppāda but without the importance as it has in the Four Noble Truths.

<sup>52</sup> Uma Marina Vesci, *Heat and Sacrifice in the Vedas*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985).

<sup>53</sup> Vesci, *Heat and Sacrifice in the Vedas*, 11-15; Ganesh Umakant Thite, *Sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇa-Texts* (Poona: University of Poona, 1975), 257-58.

<sup>54</sup> A similar passage is the Prajñā Upaniṣad 4.6, which refers to the heat (*tejas*-) that burns away the dream state so that the body attains a state of pleasure or bliss. (*sukha*-).

<sup>55</sup> Quoted from *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, translated by Bhikkhu —Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 1093.