



An Exposition on Buddhānussati in Theravāda Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

Buddhānussati, or a recollection of the Buddha, is a fundamental teaching of the Buddha which plays a significant role in meditation practice within the framework of Theravada Buddhism. Its origin can be traced back to early Buddhist texts, including the Pāli canon, where the suttas offer glimpses of the Buddha encouraging his disciples to recollect his virtues and qualities as a means to cultivate mindfulness, inspiration, devotion, and spiritual insight. Buddhānussati is categorized as one of the important meditation methods in the post canonical texts, such as the Visuddhimagga. This practice has its roots in the early Buddhist meditation described in the Pāli Tipiṭaka and its commentaries. Buddhānussati serves dual purposes: it is both a recollection of the qualities of the Buddha and a direct contemplation of the Buddha himself. This research paper seeks to enhance our comprehensive on the correlation between philosophical doctrines, with a particular emphasis on elucidating the fundamental origins of the nine qualities of the Buddha encapsulated in the itī pi so formula, and their significance in the practice of Buddhānussati within the Theravāda tradition.

Keywords: *Buddhānussati*, *Visuddhimagga*, *Tipiṭaka*, nine qualities, the Buddha

I. Introduction

Buddhānussati, or the recollection of the Buddha, is a profound meditation practice central to Theravāda Buddhism. This practice involves reflecting on the nine sublime qualities of the Buddha, serving as a means to cultivate mindfulness, devotion, and spiritual insight. Categorized as one of the meditation methods in later Buddhist texts such as the *Visuddhimagga*, *Buddhānussati* has its roots in the early Buddhist meditation techniques described in the Pāli *Tipiṭaka* and its commentaries.

Buddhānussati operates on two levels: it is both a recollection of the Buddha's qualities and a direct contemplation of the Buddha himself. The first aspect of *Buddhānussati*, which involves recalling the Buddha's attributes, is well-documented in many places within the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*, its commentaries, and the *Visuddhimagga* (Chapter VII-VIII). The second aspect, which involves a more direct contemplation, appears in numerous texts and is particularly associated with a group of monks known as "*saddhādhimuttānaṃ*" (e.g., Piṅgiya, Siṅgālamātā, and Vakkali).

The main theme of this research paper is the exploration of the core concept of *Buddhānussati*, emphasizing the Buddha's nine virtues which profound origins as preserved in the Pāli Canon. In Theravāda contexts, contemporary *Buddhānussati* has evolved to suit diverse settings, serving as a means of spiritual nourishment in monastic retreats and lay meditation groups. Its adaptability evolving from early teachings to a central component of meditation and mindfulness practices. This development highlights the integration of *Buddhānussati* into various aspects of Theravada practice, emphasizing the enduring importance of recollecting the Buddha's qualities and virtues within the tradition.

II. Meaning of Buddhānussati

"*Buddhānussati*" is etymologically derived from the terms "Buddha," "*anu*," and "*sati*." "Buddha" denotes an individual who possesses profound knowledge, is the first to achieve enlightenment, and maintains a state of enduring equanimity. The prefix "*anu*" implies smallness or subtlety, while "*sati*" refers to mindful awareness, memory, and recognition. Therefore, *Buddhānussati* fundamentally involves the mindful recollection of the Buddha's virtues and the contemplation of his exemplary qualities. This practice, however, extends beyond mere recollection to include reflection on the physical form of the Buddha and other attributes. Engaging in *Buddhānussati* enables practitioners to cultivate a tranquil and focused mind, contributing significantly to their spiritual development. This practice is integral in fostering a deeper connection to the teachings of the Buddha and serves as a foundational element in the meditative and devotional life within the Theravāda tradition.

Buddhānussati can be identified as a subset within the broader category of "*anussati*," as delineated in numerous sections of the Pāli canon. The prefix "*anu*-" in Pāli conveys a sense of following, continuity, or in accordance with, indicating that the *anussati* involves sustained and continuous recollection

or mindfulness. These recollective practices are central for the cultivation of concentration (*samādhi*), insight (*vipassanā*), and the development of wholesome mental states (*kusala citta*) in Buddhist meditation. By systematically engaging in *anussati*, practitioners enhance their mental discipline, deepen their understanding of the dhamma, and progressively purify their minds. Thus, *Buddhānussati*, through its focus on the mindful recollection of the qualities or virtues of the Buddha, serves as a crucial role aiding in the attainment of enlightenment

Anussati, in the context of Buddhist meditation, refers to the practice of recollection or mindfulness. It involves focused contemplation on a particular object, theme, or aspect of the dhamma. *anussati* meditation is commonly used to cultivate wholesome qualities, deepen concentration, and progress on the path toward liberation. There are several classifications such as three, four, five, six, and ten kinds of *anussati* in which the three, six, and ten recollections are often described.¹

The development of *Buddhānussati* in Theravāda philosophy involves a nuanced approach to doctrinal analysis, exploring how this practice has evolved within the framework of Theravada Buddhism. Its origins can be traced back to early Buddhist texts, including the Pāli Canon, where the suttas provide glimpses of the Buddha encouraging his disciples to recollect his virtues and qualities as a means of inspiration and mindfulness.

As Theravāda Buddhism evolved, *Buddhānussati* later became an integral component of meditation practices. The recollection of the Buddha's attributes, such as wisdom, compassion, and enlightenment, was incorporated into mindfulness and concentration exercises. This integration reflects the broader Theravada emphasis on individual liberation and the attainment of arahantship, with practitioners reflecting on the Buddha's path to enlightenment as a guide for their own spiritual journey.

Buddhānussati also plays a significant role in Insight Meditation (*Vipassana*), a central practice in Theravada. As practitioners deepen their insight into the nature of existence, reflecting on the Buddha's teachings and qualities becomes a source of wisdom and guidance. This practice can be linked to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*), particularly mindfulness of the mind (*citta*), as practitioners cultivate awareness of mental states and qualities.

Within the Theravada monastic tradition, *Buddhānussati* is an integral part of daily devotional practices, where monks and nuns reflect on the Buddha's life and virtues to deepen their spiritual commitment. This practice reinforces Theravāda ethics by highlighting the importance of virtuous conduct on the path to liberation, serving as a moral and inspirational guide. The evolution of *Buddhānussati* from early Buddhist teachings to its key role in contemporary practice underscores its enduring significance in Theravada philosophy, integrating aspects of ethics, meditation, and individual liberation by continually recollecting the Buddha's qualities and virtues.

III. Nine Qualities of the Buddha

The Buddha's virtues (*guṇa*) or titles are collectively expressed in Buddhism in the *iti pi so* formula which reads as follows: “*Iti pi so Bhagavā araham sammā-sambuddho vijjā-caraṇa-sampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammasārathi sathhā devamanussānaṃ buddho Bhagavā.*”² These epithets of the Buddha portray his personality in different aspects.

The recollection of the Buddha is an ancient practice, recommended by the Buddha himself such as mention in the *Dhajagga Sutta*.³ The formula lists nine qualities of the Buddha came to be known as the *Navabuddhagūṇa*. While these are often cited, it was also recognized early on that the Buddha's virtues are limitless, as expressed by several prominent brāhmaṇas of the time and later reformulated as a general principle.

The recollection of the Buddha, recommended by the Buddha himself in texts like the *Dhajagga Sutta*, involves the *Navabuddhagūṇa*, listing nine qualities of the Buddha. Early on, it was recognized that the Buddha's virtues are limitless, as noted by prominent brāhmaṇas like Soṇadaṇḍa, Kūṭadanta, and Caṅkī, who declared⁴ that the Buddha merits unlimited praise⁵ (*aparimāṇavaṇṇo*). This idea evolved into a general principle: “The Buddhas, the Blessed Ones, merit unlimited praise.”⁶ In the *Apadāna*, Gatasāññaka Thera describes the past Buddha Tissa as “an ocean of unlimited virtues” (*anantaḡuṇasāgara*),⁷ reflecting a mystical understanding of the limitless qualities of the Buddha.

The commentaries offer a considerable amount of explanations regarding each of the virtues or titles individually or collectively.

1. Accomplished (*araham*)
2. Fully enlightened (*sammā-sambuddho*)
3. Endowed with clear vision and virtuous conduct (*vijjā-caraṇa-sampanno*)
4. Sublime (*sugato*)
5. The knower of worlds (*lokavidū*)
6. The incomparable leader of men to be tamed (*anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi*)
7. The teacher of gods and men (*sathhā deva-manussānaṃ*)
8. Enlightened (*buddho*)
9. Blessed (*bhagavā*)

The nine qualities of the Buddha can be translated as follows:

“The Blessed One is recognized for being accomplished and fully enlightened, possessing clear vision and virtuous conduct. He is exalted, the knower of worlds, and the unparalleled guide for those who require taming guidance, the teacher of both gods and humans, enlightened, and blessed.” (M I 37; A III 285)

We will now consider the meaning of each virtue as follow.

1. Accomplished (*araham*)

The canonical texts employ specific patterns in describing the state of the *arahant*.⁸ An *arahant* is characterized by the destruction of cankers (*āsava*),⁹ a term frequently used throughout history to refer to them. Here are some commonly cited phrases depicting the condition of arahants: "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what needed to be done has been done, there is no more beyond this present life" (*khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ nāparaṃ itthattāya*); "solitary, secluded, diligent, ardent, self-mastered" (*eko vūpakaṭṭho appamatto ātāpī pahitatto*); "an *arahant* is one whose cankers are destroyed, who has fulfilled a higher life, completed what needed to be done, laid down the burden, attained the goal, eradicated the fetters of becoming, and is liberated by profound knowledge" (*araham khīṇāsavo vusitavā katakaraṇīyo ohitabhāro anu patta-sadattho parikkhīṇa-bhava-saññjano sammadāñña vimutto*); "insight arose in me, the emancipation of my heart became unshakeable, this is my last birth, there is now no rebirth for me" (*ñāṇaṃ ca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi akuppā me cetovimutti ayaṃ antimā jāti natthi dāni punabbhavo*).¹⁰

The term "*araham*" is derived from "*arahant*," which denotes individuals who have attained the highest stage of liberation, the fourth and final stage. The verse suggests that the Buddha was an *arahant*, implying that anyone achieving complete liberation through his teachings also becomes an *arahant*. However, the Buddha holds a unique and supreme position as the first and most adept *arahant*. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, a significant Buddhist text, "*araham*" carries five meanings in relation to the Buddha:

1. He stands far removed from mental defilements (*kilesa*).
2. He has vanquished the enemy (*ari*), i.e., mental defilements, and thus achieved accomplishment (*arahanta*).
3. He has eradicated all spokes (*ara*) of the wheel of rebirth (*ara-ham*).
4. He is deserving (*araha*) of receiving offerings (*araham*).
5. He cannot cause harm, even in secrecy (*rahabhava*).

2. Fully Enlightened (*sammā-sambuddho*)

The main idea is the evolution of the term "*sammāsambuddha*" in Buddhism through three stages. Initially, it was a general notion across various religious traditions before Buddhism's emergence. Later, "*sambuddha*" emerged, used interchangeably with "Buddha" for any *arahants*. Eventually, the need to distinguish the historical Buddha from his disciples led to "*sammāsambuddha*" specifically denoting Gotama Buddha. This distinction prompted further exploration of "*sammāsambodhi*," the unique enlightenment attained by all Buddhas. Canonical texts detail its components, though not exclusive to Buddhas, while later texts refine the categorization of Buddhas, highlighting the complex nature of Buddhahood. Commentaries, like the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, further elucidate these distinctions, emphasizing the multifaceted dimensions of enlightenment in Buddhist tradition.¹¹

In the *Aṭṭhakathā* texts, the definitions attributed to the term "*sammāsambuddha*" align with the concept of "self-awakened" frequently mentioned in the canonical texts. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, a *sammāsambuddha* is considered fully enlightened because they have correctly and independently discovered all phenomena. They have done so by realizing the necessity of directly knowing, fully understanding, abandoning, realizing, and developing various aspects of existence. In other contexts, the phrase "*sabbadhammanaṃ ca sammā dhammiṃ ca buddhassa sammāsambuddho*" from the *Visuddhimagga* substitutes "*sabbadhammanaṃ*" with "*saccāni*" or "*saccānaṃ*," emphasizing the aspect of truthfulness or realization. This underscores the idea that a *sammāsambuddha* comprehends and embodies the truth of all phenomena, thus achieving complete enlightenment.¹²

The Buddha achieved full awakening by understanding and following the direct path outlined in the Four Noble Truths. He correctly identified the nature of suffering, eradicated its root causes, attained its cessation, and cultivated the path leading to that cessation. His enlightenment involved independently rediscovering the Dhamma, the universal truths governing existence, setting him apart from those who later understand these truths through their own efforts. As long as the Buddha's teachings endure, they are practiced according to the path he established.

3. Possessing Profound Insight and Exemplary Moral Conduct (*Vijjācaraṇasampanno*)

The term "*vijjācaraṇasampanno*," signifying one endowed with both knowledge and conduct, has been used since ancient times to describe the highest among gods and humans. Interestingly, this designation is absent in the *Milindapañha*. In *Aṭṭhakathā* texts, the interpretation of "*vijjā*" (knowledge) and "*caraṇa*" (conduct) aligns with the canonical enumeration, with Buddhaghosa's explanations being the standard. However, commentarial explanations of this term are relatively scarce compared to other titles of the Buddha, likely because discussions on the Buddha's knowledge were already extensive among Buddhists.¹³

Buddhaghosa identifies three types of knowledge (*vijjā*) as outlined in the *Bhayaverava Sutta*¹⁴ and eight types as detailed in the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta*,¹⁵ which include the six kinds of higher knowledge (*chaḷabhiññā*), insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), and psychic power (*manomaya-iddhi*). Buddhaghosa highlights different facets of the Buddha's enlightenment, encompassing various types of knowledge (*vijjā*) and conduct (*caraṇa*). These range from six kinds of higher knowledge, insight knowledge, and psychic power to fifteen forms of conduct, such as "restraint by virtue" and "guarding the senses" (*indriyesu guttadvāratā*).¹⁶ Later, the emphasis shifts towards recognizing the Buddha's omniscience (*sabbāññuta-ñāṇa*) and profound compassion.

According to Buddhaghosa, *vijjā* signifies the Buddha's omniscience, while *carana* symbolizes his boundless compassion. (*vijjāsampadā Bhagavato sabbaññutaṃ pūretvā jhītā; caranasampadā mahākāruṇikataṃ*).¹⁷

The term “*vijjā*” and “*carana*” guide noble disciples towards *Nibbāna*. The Buddha, while not omniscient in knowing everything continuously, could attain any desired knowledge through focused meditation, surpassing ordinary arahants. Ancient scriptures, like the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*,¹⁸ highlight aspects of the Buddha's *vijjā*, including recalling past lives, observing rebirths, and possessing supernatural powers, crucially including the eradication of defilements leading to *Nibbāna*. The Buddha's impeccable behavior, always aligning with the Dhamma, extends to all arahants, who cannot act immorally. The Buddha consistently demonstrated moderation, mindfulness, and mastery of concentration and *jhānas*.

4. Sublime (*Sugato*)

The term “*sugata*” has been consistently used to describe Buddhists throughout history. In *Aṭṭhakathā* texts, various commentators define it similarly. Buddhaghosa interprets “*sugata*” as meaning “well-gone” due to a good manner of going, reaching an excellent destination, going rightly, and speaking rightly. Other commentaries echo these definitions, often emphasizing aspects of reaching a beautiful or excellent destination, going rightly, and speaking or achieving rightly. While explanations in other texts may simplify the *Visuddhimagga*'s explanations, they consistently highlight the qualities of goodness, excellence, and correctness inherent in the term “*sugata*.”

Dhammapāla provides a detailed explanation of “*sugata*” in his *Udana-Aṭṭhakatha*, similar to that found in the *Visuddhimagga*, but with additional sources. In the *Aṭṭhakathā* texts, explanations of “*sugata*” are sparse. This is likely because commentators like Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla focused more on the term “*tathāgata*,” which required extensive clarification from both etymological and conceptual perspectives, particularly regarding the meanings of “-gone” and “-come.”

The term “*sugata*” has a dual meaning. It refers to the Buddha as “he who has reached the right destination,” indicating his attainment of *Nibbāna*, and it also highlights the beneficial impact of his teachings. Additionally, it signifies that the Buddha always spoke what was true, correct, and beneficial. The *Visuddhimagga* elaborates that “*sugata*” means the Buddha traveled the path correctly, reached a good place, traveled irreversibly, and spoke rightly.

5. The Knower of Worlds (*Lokavidū*)

The term “*lokavidū*” is thoroughly explained in the *Visuddhimagga*¹⁹ and the *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā*.²⁰ These texts state that the Buddha is considered “*lokavidū*” because he comprehensively understands the world in all its aspects. This concept is echoed in several other sources, albeit more briefly. The explanations cover three types of worlds: *saṅkhāraloka* (the world of formations), *sattaloka* (the world of beings), and *okāsaloka* (the world of location).²¹

The term “*lokavidū*” (knower of the world) signifies the Buddha's comprehensive understanding and perception of all worlds and beings. This includes both physical locations (like planets and other realms of existence) and the conceptual world of conditioned formations (*saṅkhāra*). The Buddha could perceive all beings and places, regardless of their distance, through his divine faculties. Additionally, he understood the arising and decay of all things and the path to liberation, making him the knower of all aspects of existence.

The term “*lokavidū*” refers to the Buddha as the “knower of the world,” and its elaboration is most detailed in the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā*. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, the Buddha is called *lokavidū* because he comprehensively knows the world in all its aspects. This idea is reiterated in various sources such as the *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā*, where it is explained that the Buddha's knowledge encompasses three realms: the world of formations (*saṅkhāra-loka*), the world of beings (*sattaloka*), and the world of locations (*okasa-loka*). Buddha's profound understanding of the world and its constituents, illustrating his supreme wisdom and insight.

6. The Incomparable Leader of Men to be Tamed (*Anuttaro Purisadammasārathi*)

In Theravāda tradition, *anuttara* and *purisadammasārathi* are generally considered as one combined title. However, the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā* suggest that they can be understood either separately or collectively. When explained separately, “*anuttara*” is interpreted first, followed by “*purisadammasārathi*.” Alternatively, they can be taken as one phrase, indicating the incomparable nature of the Buddha's mastery as the supreme charioteer guiding individuals to the highest goal.

The term “*anuttara*” denotes the unparalleled qualities of the Buddha across ethical, intellectual, and physical dimensions. The commentaries, such as those by Buddhaghosa, stress the extraordinary nature of the Buddha's virtues, asserting that his qualities surpass all others. The “*Sumaṅgalavilāsini*” outlines various domains where the Buddha is deemed incomparable,²² including excellence in virtuous actions, mastery of mental foundations, understanding of concepts, proficiency in telepathy, attainment of profound insight, classification of individuals, diligence in practice, mastery of spiritual paths, excellence in speech, virtuous conduct, proficiency in teaching, knowledge of liberating others, exposition of eternal truths, understanding of past lives, mastery of clairvoyance, and proficiency in psychic abilities. These descriptions emphasize the multifaceted excellence and unparalleled virtues of the Buddha, reflecting the comprehensive breadth of his supreme enlightenment.

The term “*purisadammasārathi*” finds its roots in a similar terminology prevalent in ancient India, where individuals were identified as tamers of various entities, such as horses (“*assadammasārathi*”). In this context, “*purisa*” encompasses animals, humans, and non-humans who are untamed but have the potential to be tamed. Additionally, according to Buddhaghosa, “*purisa*” includes those who are already tamed, with the Buddha guiding them towards a higher spiritual path. Thus, the designation “*purisadammasārathi*” highlights the Buddha's role as the one who tames and guides individuals, whether they are yet to be tamed or already on a path of cultivation.

The term “*purisa*,” traditionally understood as referring only to humans in the canonical texts, takes on a broader interpretation in the commentaries, particularly in works like the *Visuddhimagga* and *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā*. Buddhaghosa extends its meaning to encompass various categories of beings, including animals and non-humans, aligning with instances found in the Canon where the conversion or taming of humans, animals, and celestial beings is described. This expansion of the term's scope reflects a broader understanding of the Buddha's role as a guide and teacher across different realms of existence, emphasizing the potential for all sentient beings to benefit from his teachings and guidance.

The titles “*Anuttaro Purisadammasārathi*” bestowed upon the Buddha signify his unparalleled role as a guide and leader who imparts the gift of Dhamma to beings. He possessed an exceptional ability to tailor his teachings according to the individual's disposition, understanding, and spiritual readiness. With profound insight into people's tendencies and high mental qualities, he adeptly adapted his teachings, whether through brief gestures, single sentences, or extensive discourses, to effectively convey the Dhamma. His boundless compassion, loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity enabled him to guide disciples even through challenging spiritual journeys, fostering their growth and understanding.

7. The Teacher of Gods and Men (*Satthā Deva-Manussānam*)

Buddhaghosa's interpretation of “*satthā*” in texts like the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā* is deeply rooted in the *Mahā-niddesa*, as he explicitly acknowledges. He portrays the Blessed One as a leader (*satthar*) who guides caravans (*sattha*) home, metaphorically representing the Buddha's role in leading beings toward spiritual liberation. Additionally, the Buddha teaches about present and future lives and the ultimate goal, tailored to individuals' needs, earning him the title of Teacher (*satthar*). Dhammapala and other commentaries echo this interpretation. Buddhaghosa also expands the understanding of “*satthā*,” suggesting that anyone capable of guiding others on the path to enlightenment can be called a teacher, whether they are Buddhas or disciples. Thus, the term encompasses the role of guiding individuals toward emancipation.

The term “*devamanussanam*” in this context is ambiguous, as noted by Buddhaghosa, referring both to the best individuals and those capable of progress.²³ Buddhaghosa also suggests that the Blessed One, as a teacher, imparts teachings not only to humans but also to animals. The term “*ukkaṭṭha*,” associated with “*deva*,” likely describes beings who experience sensual pleasures more intensely than humans. Devas are classified into three categories: *sammutidevā* (gods by convention), *upapattidevā* (gods by birth), and *visuddhidevā* (gods by purification),²⁴ indicating a hierarchy among deities, including royal and celestial beings.

The Buddha's relationship with divine beings was unique: while ordinary people or teachers sought contact with devas for instruction, creatures from all realms, including the heavens, came to the Buddha for guidance. Even the highest gods recognized him as a teacher who could assist them. Notably, among his followers were not only honorable individuals and ascetics but also notorious figures. The Buddha could guide all beings, leading them towards the liberation of Nibbāna. This ability establishes him as the unparalleled teacher of both humans and gods.

8. Enlightened (Buddho)

The verb “*bujjhati*” (*/budh*) signifies being awake, enlightened, or knowing. In the *Aṭṭhakathā* texts, Buddhaghosa provides two explanations for the Buddha's enlightenment. The first suggests that the Buddha possesses the knowledge of liberation, having discovered all that can be known. The second explanation highlights the Buddha's self-discovery of the Four Noble Truths and his enlightenment of others, earning him the title of “enlightened.” This aligns with *Mahā-niddesa*²⁵ or the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*.²⁶ Other *Aṭṭhakathā* texts by Buddhaghosa²⁷ and Buddhadatta also stress the Buddha's realization of the Four Noble Truths. Dhammapāla further reinforces that “Buddha” refers to this realization, drawing from Nd ii 457-458, though his descriptions are more concise.

NdA and PtsA draw heavily from the explanations in MNd ii 457-458, adding their own commentary on specific expressions found in the *Mahāniddesa*. These texts also explore grammatical nuances of the word “Buddha.” While KhpA 15-16 provides similar explanations, it may omit or diverge in certain areas. For example, KhpA 15 interprets “*ekāyanamaggam gato*” as a metaphor for the one-way path to enlightenment. NdA ii 442 and PtsA ii 485-486 offer more detailed explanations of this phrase, emphasizing that “*ekāyanamaggo*” refers to the path leading to a single Nibbāna. KhpA 15 interprets “*ekāyanamaggam gato*” as a metaphor for the one-way path to enlightenment. NdA ii 442 and PtsA ii 485-486 offer more detailed explanations of this phrase, emphasizing that “*ekāyanamaggo*” refers to the path leading to a single Nibbāna.

The term “*buddho*” signifies the Buddha's awakened state, his discovery of the Four Noble Truths, and completion of the Eightfold Path. It contrasts with “*sammā-sambuddho*,” which highlights the perfection of his enlightenment. Unlike ordinary individuals driven by ignorance, desire, and anger, the Buddha has transcended ignorance. In Northern Thai forest practices, “*buddho*” is used in meditation to embody the Buddha's awakened mind, serving as a focal point for samatha meditation and prompting practitioners to cultivate this awareness within themselves. It can also be interpreted as “the one who knows,” emphasizing the Buddha's awakened mind and serving as a meditation focal point, urging practitioners to develop this awareness.

9. Blessed (Bhagavā)

Buddhaghosa provides two explanations of the term “*Bhagavanti*” in his works, one sourced from the *Mahāniddesa*²⁸ and another potentially his own interpretation. These elucidations are found in the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism 209-212), *Sammohavinodānī* (VA i 122-125), and *Khuddakapāṭha-aṭṭhakathā* (KhpA 106-109), with a comparative analysis in the *Niddesa-aṭṭhakathā* (NdA ii 264). While Vism and VA texts largely overlap, KhpA introduces some textual variations. The origins of these passages in KhpA may stem from Vism or VA, both authored by Buddhaghosa, or from the Sinhalese commentaries underlying KhpA's Pāli translation. Despite the specific source, these interpretations likely share a common foundation, underscoring their collective lineage and scholarly resonance.

In *Aṭṭhakathā* literature, the Buddha concept is elaborated with detailed descriptions of his physical form. This tradition is continued in Buddhaghosa's interpretation of the word “*bhagavant*.” The Buddha is depicted as bearing the marks of a hundred merits (*satapuññalakkhaṇa*)²⁹ and radiating glory (*siri*) from every limb. He is depicted as flawless in every aspect, capable of bringing solace to those who behold his form. Moreover, the Buddha's desires (*kāma*) are instantly fulfilled, whether for his own benefit or for others, showcasing his extraordinary nature. This commentary underscores the deep reverence and admiration evoked by the Buddha's physical presence.

IV. Buddhānussati Kammatṭhāna in the Visuddhimagga

In the *Visuddhimagga*, “*Kammattṭhāna*” denotes the meditation object used by practitioners to cultivate mindfulness, concentration, and insight. It guides attention during meditation, facilitating the development of mental qualities leading to liberation. *Buddhānussati*, the contemplation of the Buddha, is elucidated in Chapter VII of the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification)³⁰ by Buddhaghosa. Specifically detailed in the section on “Recollections as Objects of Concentration” (*Anussati Kammatṭhāna*), it explains the practice and benefits of reflecting on the qualities of the Buddha to cultivate concentration and spiritual devotion.

Prior to the post-canonical commentaries, the term *Kammattṭhāna* comes up in only a handful of discourses and then in the context of “work” or “trade.”³¹ Buddhaghosa uses “*Kammattṭhāna*” to denote each of the forty meditation objects enumerated in the third chapter of the *Visuddhimagga*, which are partly sourced from the Pāli canon. In this sense “*Kammattṭhāna*” can be understood as “occupations” in the sense of “things to occupy the mind” or “workplaces” in the sense of “places to focus the mind on during the work of meditation.” In his translation of the *Visuddhimagga*, Ñānamoli consistently translates this term as “meditation subject.”³²

The *Visuddhimagga* describes the benefits of *Buddhānussati*, where contemplating the Buddha's virtues liberates the mind from greed, hate, and delusion, fostering mental clarity and rectitude. This practice engenders sustained reflection on the Buddha's qualities, yielding happiness, tranquility, and bliss. While typically leading to access concentration rather than full absorption, it yields manifold spiritual benefits: heightened faith, mindfulness, understanding, merit, happiness, and fearlessness. It cultivates reverence and a palpable sense of the Buddha's presence, dignifying the meditator's body and aligning the mind with the Buddha's realm, bolstering moral conscience and ensuring a favorable rebirth in the absence of higher realization.

According to the *Visuddhimagga*, *Buddhānussati* is one significant form of *anussati* which is contained in the forty *Kammattṭhāna*.³³ The specific choice of *Kammattṭhāna* can vary, and there are different meditation objects that practitioners may use based on their inclination, level of practice, and the guidance of their meditation teacher. This meditation method aims to inspire and connect practitioners with the enlightened qualities, reflecting on the qualities, virtues, and teachings of the Buddha.

Buddhaghosa explains that apart from mindfulness of breathing and body mindfulness, other recollections do not lead to *jhāna* but rather to a state called *upacāra*, or access concentration. At this stage, which is not mentioned in the canonical texts, the hindrances are suppressed, but the five faculties of faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom are not yet sufficiently developed for the mental image to become stable enough for the meditator to enter full meditation. The reasons for this limitation vary with each object, but generally, the objects are seen as too complex or broad. Some objects are considered too profound to lead to *jhāna*, as they encourage reflective or investigative qualities that are important or helpful in the stages leading to enlightenment.

Buddhaghosa notes that certain *samatha* practices, such as contemplating the loathsomeness of food (39), determining the four elements (40), mindfulness of death (27), and mindfulness of peace (30), do not lead to *jhāna* but are suited for individuals with an intelligence type.³⁴ The canon and the commentaries consider these recollections to be important and even essential for ensuring a balanced development in meditation. The canonical *Mahāniddesa* advises those with faith to cultivate signs that inspire confidence, such as reflections on the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha (21-23), and virtue (*sīla*, 24).³⁵

4.1 The Triple Gem (Three Recollections) 21–23.

The significance of the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha) in Buddhist devotional practices and its foundational role in meditation. It emphasizes the importance of paying homage, taking precepts, and chanting to the Triple Gem as a way to instill calm, confidence, and direction in practitioners, and highlights the role of these practices in preventing over-attachment and fostering mental stability.

4.2 The Six Recollections 21-26.

The Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, virtue (*sīla*), generosity (*cāga*), and recollection of deities (*devas*) are grouped together. The most common arrangement includes either the entire list or a subset, typically the first three and one or more of the next three. The first three recollections (21, 22, 23) are usually presented together with the same formula for each. These recollections also appear as a group of five; in one instance, they exclude generosity (21, 22, 23, 24, 26: AN I 30), and in another, they omit the recollection of *sīla* while emphasizing its practice (21, 22, 23, 25, 26).³⁶ This grouping tendency indicates that these six recollections are intertwined with daily practice, Buddhist devotion, and the belief in constant rebirth in different realms, making it difficult to consider each recollection in isolation.

4.3 The Ten Recollections 21-30.

The ten recollections, recommended by the Buddha, when diligently practiced, lead to detachment, dispassion, cessation, peace, higher knowledge, awakening, and ultimately Nibbāna. Emphasizing their significance, the Buddha stated that diligent cultivation would result in profound spiritual benefits, including turning away from attachments, cessation of suffering, and peace. These recollections include Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, virtue, generosity, *devas*, as well as mindfulness practices like breathing, death, body, and peace. Diligently practicing these provides a comprehensive path to spiritual liberation and enlightenment.³⁷

V. Analyzing Buddhānussati in the Pāli Canon

5.1 Buddhānussati within the Group of Recollections

Within the forty *Kammaṭṭhāna* (meditation subjects), *anussati* (recollection) is important for spiritual development. Among the ten recollections, a key focus is *Buddhānussati*, the recollection of the qualities of the Buddha. This technique is detailed in various canonical texts such as AN I 41, Nd 1 360, and AN I 30. Additionally, a subset of six recollections is delineated in texts like AN III 284, AN III 312–14, AN V 332–4, DN III 250, and Nid 1 492. These texts expound on various themes related to recollection, including the contemplation of the Buddha, the Dhamma (teachings), the Saṅgha (community of practitioners), virtuous companionship (*kalyāṇamittatā*), and divine beings (*devatā*). Another grouping of five recollections emphasizes the contemplation of the Buddha, the Dhamma, virtuous companionship, generosity (*cāga*), and divine beings, as evidenced in texts such as AN I 206–11 and AN V 334–7. Moreover, SN V 394 elaborates on a set of four recollections centered on the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and ethical conduct (*sīla*). Lastly, Three of recollections comprising the contemplation of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha is expounded upon in texts like Dh 188–92 and MN I 36–40, where they are compared to the process of cleansing cloth in preparation for dyeing. Additionally, the *Ratana-sutta* (Sn 222–38) further elucidates these recollections, emphasizing their significance akin to precious gems in spiritual practice. These diverse recollections serve as potent contemplative tools for cultivating mindfulness, gratitude, and insight, thereby nurturing the practitioner's spiritual growth along the path to liberation.³⁸

5.2 Buddhānussati in the Related Suttas

The Recollection of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*) holds significant prominence as a contemplative practice aimed at invoking reverence and gratitude towards the Buddha. Canonical sources such as AN I 207, Ap 7–54, and DN II 1–54 provide comprehensive accounts of this recollection, presenting narratives of past Buddhas and detailing the life story of the present Buddha, Siddhattha Gautama. Additionally, texts such as DN III 142–5, Dh 296, and Sn 1133–49 offer insights into the contemplation of the Buddha's physical attributes, including the enumeration of the thirty-two marks of a Great Man (*Mahāpurisa*). The practice of *Buddhānussati* is depicted as a means to evoke the sublime presence of the Buddha, fostering a sense of spiritual connection and aspiration among practitioners. Moreover, the efficacy of this recollection is underscored in SN V 233, where it is described as a practice observed by *arahats*, advanced practitioners who have attained the highest stage of spiritual realization. Through the Recollection of the Buddha, devotees engage in profound reflection on the exemplary qualities and teachings of the Buddha, thereby cultivating qualities of reverence, inspiration, and wisdom on their spiritual journey.³⁹

VI. Conclusion

It can be seen that the conception of *Buddhānussati* has been represented into the development of meditation techniques as expressed in the forty *Kammaṭṭhāna* of *Samatha* meditation of the *Visuddhimagga*. The conception of *Buddhānussati* as found in the Pāli canonical sources could be stated into two main originating ideas which are (1) recollecting to him with his nine virtues, and (2) contemplate visualizing to the Buddha.

The Nine Qualities of the Buddha embody his enlightenment and function as a guiding framework for practitioners. "*Arahaṃ*" highlights his moral perfection, free from defilements, inspiring ethical living. "*Sammā-sambuddho*" signifies his self-enlightenment, as a pioneer in discovering the path to enlightenment. "*Vijjā-carāṇa-sampanno*" reflects his balanced development of knowledge and conduct, demonstrating practical wisdom. "*Sugato*" implies his flawless journey to enlightenment and effective communication of the Dhamma. "*Lokavido*" signifies his profound understanding of all realms, fostering awareness and detachment. "*Anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi*" highlights his unparalleled ability to guide beings towards enlightenment with skillful means. "*Sathā-deva-manussānaṃ*" emphasizes his role as a universal teacher, showcasing the inclusivity of the Dhamma. "*Buddho*" signifies his complete awakening, inspiring practitioners to seek their own enlightenment. Lastly, "*Bhagavā*" conveys deep reverence for the Buddha, acknowledging his spiritual accomplishments and encouraging devotion. Together, these qualities encapsulate the Buddha's wisdom, compassion, and exemplary path, guiding practitioners towards spiritual awakening.

Buddhānussati holds a significant place as both a meditative exercise and a devotional ritual. The recollection and contemplation of the qualities and virtues attributed to the Buddha not only venerates the historical figure of the Buddha but also facilitates the internalization of his teachings and ideals within the practitioner. Drawing from canonical sources such as the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* and *Samyutta Nikāya*, as well as authoritative texts like the *Visuddhimagga*, practitioners immerse themselves in the attributes of the Buddha, deepening their comprehension of his wisdom, compassion, and enlightenment. Through sustained engagement with *Buddhānussati*, individuals embark on a transformative journey toward inner tranquility, spiritual

insight, and the ultimate goal of enlightenment. This enduring practice persists as a timeless and indispensable aspect of Buddhist tradition, offering a profound pathway for spiritual growth and development across generations of practitioners.

NOTES

1. The first six recollections are fully explained in Vism VII, the latter four of ten kinds found in Vism VIII.
2. SN 11.3 (PTS SN I 218–220) E.g., D i 49, iii 76; M i 267; A i 168; So 103, 1 32; etc. In the Northern Buddhism, the ten titles or appellations are usually grouped into a set and are called the Ten Titles of the Buddha. A marked difference between the Pali tradition and that of the Northern Buddhism is that the latter includes tathāgata' in the list, while the former does not.
3. SN 11.3 PTS: S i 218.
4. *Soṇadaṇḍa-sutta* (DN 4, PTS I 117.14): *ettake kho ahaṃ bho tassa bhoṭo gotamassa vaṇṇe pariyāpuṇāmi, no ca kho so bhavaṃ gotamo ettakavaṇṇo, aparimāṇavaṇṇo hi so bhavaṃ gotamo*; also at *Kūṭadanta-sutta* (DN 5, PTS I 133.23) and *Caṅkī-sutta* (MN 95, PTS II 168.3); Peter Skilling, *Buddhism and Buddhist Literature of South-East Asia*, 2009, p.155.
5. 'And so far only do I know the excellences of the Samaṇa Gotama, but these are not all of them, for his excellence is beyond measure': T.W. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Vol. I (London 1973 [1899]), p. 150; 'However much I might praise the ascetic Gotama, that praise is insufficient, he is beyond all praise': Maurice Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (London: 1987), p. 128; 'To this extent I, sirs, know the good Gotama's splendour, but this is not the (full) extent of the good Gotama's splendour – immeasurable is the splendour of the good Gotama': I.B. Horner, *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-nikāya)*, Vol. II (London: 1975 [1957]), p. 358; 'This much is the praise of Master Gotama that I have learned, but the praise of Master Gotama is not limited to that, for the praise of Master Gotama is immeasurable': Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Kandy: 1995), p. 778.
6. *Udāna-aṭṭhakathā* (Mm 524.1; PTS 415): *aparimāṇavaṇṇā hi buddhā bhagavanto*. see also *Majjhimaṇṇāsa-aṭṭhakathā* (PTS III 24), *Saḷāyatanavagga-aṭṭhakathā* (PTS III 49) and *Saḷāyatanavagga-ṭīkā* (ChS II 336) where we find *appamāṇavaṇṇā*.
7. *Apadāna* (Nālandā ed. I 151; PTS 127).
8. See more in I.B.Horner, *The Early Buddhist Theory of Man Perfected*. Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1979, 328 pp.
9. 'Asavas' are defined at DhA 48 also DhA 369-372 for a classification of *āsavas*.
10. PED, s.v. Arahant.
11. For a historical development of the concept of Omniscience in Buddhism, see Tilak Kariyawasam, *The Development of the Concept of Omniscience in Buddhism*, Ananda, Essays in honour of Dr.Ananda, W.P.Guruge, ed. Y.Karunadasa, Colombo, 1990, pp.223 ff. Also see Tochi Endo, 2002, pp. 175-177.
12. Vism 201, see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Path of Purification*, p.196., SA ii 197; SA ii 20-21; MA ii 189.
13. See S I 153, 167; ii 284; D I 99,98, 196f; M I 358; A iv 238; etc.
14. MN i 22 f
15. DN i 100
16. Vism 202; VA i 116
17. Ibid.
18. DN 2 (PTS: D i 47)
19. Vism 204-207
20. VA i 1 17-120
21. Three kinds of worlds are also enumerated at DA i 173; AA i 97; ItA 8 1-82; etc.
22. Vism 208; VA i 120-121; MA iv 154; SA i 52; DhA i 423 where ideas expressed are similar to those in Vism.
23. Vism 208; VA I 121
24. See also Vibh 422; KhA 123; VibhA 518, etc., for a similar classification of *devas*.
25. Nd ii 457
26. PtS I 174
27. MA ii 282, iii 437; SNA i 66, ii 283; etc.

28. Nd i 142-143
29. Vism 211; VA i 124, ct, KhpA 108
30. English translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *Buddhānussati* is covered in Chapter VII, paragraph 1-67.
31. Taken from the *Subha Sutta* ([MN 99](#)).
32. Vism chapter III.
33. 40 *Kammaṭṭhāna* is composed of 1-10 *Kasiṇa*, 11-20 *Aśubha*, 21-30 *Anussati*, 31 *Brahma-Vihāra*, 32-35 *Āyatana*, 36 *Aharepatikūlasanna*, and 37-40 *Catu-dhātu-vavatthāna*. *Buddhānussati* is no. 21.
34. Vism III 121–2
35. Nd I 360
36. AN V 338
37. AN I 30
38. Sarah Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology of Texts from the Pāli canon*, 2006, pp. 22-23.
39. Ibid.

ABBREVIATIONS OF TEXTS

AN	Āṅguttara Nikāya
Ap	Apadāna
ApdA	Apadāna-aṭṭhakathā
Bv	Buddhavaṃsa
BvA	Buddhavaṃsa-aṭṭhakathā
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
DNA	Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā
Dh	Dhammapada
DhA	Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā
Div	Dīpavaṃsa
J	Jātaka
JA	Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā
Khp	Khudhaka Pātha
KhpA	Khudhakapātha-aṭṭhakathā
Mhv	Mahāvaṃsa
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
MNA	Majjhima Nikāya-aṭṭhakathā
MNd	Mahā-Niddesa
Nd	Niddesa
NdA	Niddesa-aṭṭhakathā
Pṭṣ	Paṭisambhidāmagga
PṭṣA	Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
SNA	Saṃyutta Nikāya-aṭṭhakathā
Sn	Suttanipāta

SnA	Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā
Thag	Theragāthā
ThagA	Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā
Thīg	Therīgāthā
ThīgA	Therīgāthā-aṭṭhakathā
Ud	Udāna
UdA	Udāna-aṭṭhakathā
Vin	Vinaya-piṭaka
VA	Vinaya-piṭaka-aṭṭhakathā
Vibh	Vibhaṅga
Vism	Visuddhimagga
Vismṭ	Visuddhimagga-ṭīkā

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