

# THE STORY OF A BUDDHIST HERO

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One of the important and well-known stories of Buddhism centers around the career of a Bodhisattva known as Sadāprarudita and his journey taken in search for the doctrine of Mahāyāna. The best known version is that which appears in the Sanskrit of the three modern printed editions<sup>1</sup> and the English translation of Edward Conze.<sup>2</sup> This particular form of the Sadāprarudita story in its oldest extant text is in the Chinese translation by Mokṣala in 291 A. D. of the *Pañcaviṃśatisahāsrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*.<sup>3</sup> It is also included in Prajñā texts that were translated by Kumarajiva, Danapala, Hsüan Tsang.<sup>4</sup>

There is an earlier tradition of this story, found only in the Chinese, i. e., the translation of the *Aṣṭasahāsrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* by Lokakṣema in 179 A. D.<sup>5</sup> and another attributed to Chih Ch'ien in 3rd Century A. D.<sup>6</sup> This early form of the story has been left to the obscurity of these seldom read Chinese translations. When the newer version found its way into the literature of both China and India, the old form fell from favor and was no longer used. Nevertheless, a study of the two ways in which the story of Sadāprarudita has been presented reveals much of interest from both a religious and literary point of view.

## THE STORY

### Preparation of the Bodhisattva for the Journey

In both traditions the story is told by the Buddha to Subhūti, one of the most advanced of the disciples in the *Aṣṭa*.<sup>7</sup> He starts the story by admonishing Subhūti to seek the *Prajñāpāramitā* as did Sadāprarudita, who now dwells in a Buddha realm called *Nitya-Gandhavatī* in which there is a Buddha called Gandhālaya. The later tradition says that the Buddha's name is Bhīṣmagarjitanirghosaṣvara, which is very similar to Bhīṣmagarjitasvararāja found in the *Saddharmapūṇḍarika-sūtra* in the story of Sadāparibhūta,<sup>8</sup> a counterpart to our Sadāprarudita.

Since the Buddha has praised Sadāprarudita as a paragon of virtue, Subhūti asks to be told more about him and this sets the stage for the tale. The Sanskrit says only that Sadāprarudita searched for the *Prajñāpāramitā* with diligence, not thinking of his body or personal gain and finding himself in a remote forest heard a voice in the air say "Go East."<sup>9</sup> This very terse introduction fails to portray the struggle and search as described in the early Lokakṣema translation. In the Han text,<sup>10</sup> Sadāprarudita is described as a man with good *karma* who is destined to fulfill a vow of caring for all sentient beings. However, he is not awake to his

destiny. One day while asleep, he dreams of a deva who tells him "You should search for the Great *Dharma*." When he awakes and starts to search for this *Dharma* it is a most difficult task. Nowhere does he find a Buddha preaching the *sūtras* or monks practicing meditation and the religious life. Day after day he is in a state of extreme grief weeping and crying because of his desire to find the great *Dharma* and yet not being able to do so. In the fragment of this section which is included in Liu Tu Chi Ching<sup>11</sup> (六度集經) of the second century A. D. an even blacker picture of the world in which he dwelt is given. All the *sūtras* had been destroyed, the realm was without a Buddha, the world a most impure place in which men reject the good and cleave to that which is evil, like moths attracted to the flame. It is only in a dream that Sadāprarudita managed to hear the teaching of a Buddha who had been in *Nirvāṇa* for a long time.

Finally the devas of *Trāyastriṃśa* Heaven came down and seeing the Bodhisattva weeping so profusely gave him the name of Sadāprarudita--"Ever Weeping."<sup>12</sup> In a second dream, these same devas appear and tell him the name of a former Buddha. When the name of this Buddha has been mentioned, he awakes and leaves home and family ties, retiring to the wilderness to meditate. There says the *Liu Tu Chi Ching* he subsisted on the water and wild fruits of the mountains. However, the meditative life was not sufficient to give him the contact with a Buddha or the hearing of the *Dharma* of a Buddha, and so he wept for a second time.

A deva now appears in the sky and tells the Bodhisattva that the name of the *Dharma* is the *Prajñāpāramitā*. This time the Bodhisattva is able to carry on a dialogue and asks, "How can I attain the *Prajñāpāramitā*?" The Deva replies, "Go East." Following this advice, Sadāprarudita sets out only to be beset with doubts about how far he must go and when he has this doubt he weeps for a third time. In order to calm him another revelation occurs, a magically created Buddha body is manifested in space and preaches the *Dharma*. This Buddha tells him of Gandhavatī and the Bodhisattva Dharmôdgata who lives there preaching the *Prajñāpāramitā*.

After the teaching of the Buddha, Sadāprarudita enters a state of deep *Samādhi* in which he sees all the Buddhas of the Ten Directions. When he emerges from this trance, he thinks to himself that although he has seen the Buddhas he does not know where they go or where they originate. Wondering about this he starts to weep for a fourth time. His weeping is stopped when he remembers the injunction to see Dharmôdgata in the East and with that thought he sets out on the journey.

These first four weeping incidents provide a structure for the revelations which direct him towards the journey he must take and the prize which is to be found there. The tension of the story is achieved through the alternation of doubts, questions, weeping and revelations. At first he hears only a voice of an unidentified deva; this is followed by a second revelation from a deva of *Trāyastriṃśa* Heaven.

The third time there is a voice in the sky and finally in the fourth weeping a magically created Buddha body is manifested. From these four events, the developing awareness of the Bodhisattva can be traced. The first revelation comes from a voice in a dream. Since the Bodhisattva is unconscious he only hears the words but makes no response. The second experience is also in sleep when a deva appears and speaks to him. These two dreams profoundly affect Sadāprarudita and lead him toward the meditation practices of a yogin in the wilderness. After some time of this practice, a disembodied voice is heard from the sky and later there is the actual appearance of the body of a Buddha who teaches the *Dharma*. In this second series, Sadāprarudita is actively involved with the messenger and is able to carry on a dialogue with the Buddha figure. Following the teaching of the *Dharma*, he achieves the deep *Samādhi* in which he experiences supernormal power and sees all the Buddhas in all the world systems. In the next bout of weeping he needs no revelation to quiet his sorrow, for he remembers the words of the Buddha and the injunction to go toward the East. Thus we have the growing awareness of the *Dharma* plus development through the practice of concentration and the hearing of the teaching.

### THE JOURNEY

The Buddha figure warned that the journey to the East is not without danger. It takes Sadāprarudita through the land of the Dark One, the evil Māra. When he enters the realm of Māra, he is overcome with a feeling of great loneliness and poverty. This awareness of his solitary state and lack of any possessions is followed by the sadness that he has nothing to give in *pūja* to the Bodhisattva Dhamōdgata. It seems improper to arrive in the presence of the teacher without gifts to honor him, and since he has no other means to procure the money, he decides to offer his body for sale. However, Māra is not pleased to see this sort of meritorious deed performed, since it will diminish his kingdom. He then uses his great power to prevent any citizen of the realm from seeing or hearing the offer of the Bodhisattva. Here the Bodhisattva is faced with a situation where his strength, the ultimate sacrifice of the body, is not sufficient to ward off the power of the evil one. When he realizes that there will be no sale, he stands and weeps for the fifth and last time.

Obviously new help must be obtained and it must be nothing less than supernatural in order to by-pass the spell of Māra. Intervention comes from the gods in the form of Śakra, who decides to test the resolve of the Bodhisattva. Changing his shape to that of a young Brahmin, he offers to buy the blood and marrow of the bones in order to make a great sacrifice. When this proposal to buy his body is made, Sadāprarudita stops his weeping, takes a sharp knife and cuts up his body and breaks his bones in order to give blood and marrow to the Brahmin in

exchange for money to buy gifts with which to revere his teacher. This story is parallel to the Jataka tale of King Śibi in which Viśvakarman in the form of a pigeon asks for protection from a hawk-Śakra.<sup>(48)</sup> When the king complies with the request, the hawk complains that he has stolen his food and thus his vow of helping all is exclusive of some, or at least exclusive of a hungry hawk. To aid the hawk the king offers to put enough of his own flesh on a scale to balance the weight of the pigeon. However, no matter how much he puts in the pan the scale never balances until he gives his entire body. In the story of Sadāprarudita the account does not stop with this sacrifice. When it appears that he has gone too far with damage to his body another helper arrives. This time it is a woman who comes to his aid. The daughter of a merchant has seen the events in the street, apparently having escaped the attempt of Māra to hide it from all. The sight of the youthful and handsome Sadāprarudita tearing his body apart distresses and amazes her and she rushes out to stop him. Discovering that he is willing to make his supreme effort in order to give gifts to Dharmôdgata, the merchant's daughter offers him the necessary money from her parents if he will stop mutilating his body. At this point, Śakra somewhat belatedly identified himself and as in the Sibi Jataka at the request of the journey makes his mangled body whole again. The dangers of the journey have now been passed and the Bodhisattva emerges from the land of Māra surrounded by great wealth and accompanied by five hundred serving girls, indicative of the diminished host of Māra. Finally the journey is over, he reaches the throne of Dharmôdgata and hears the preaching of the *Dharma* directly from him. As when he first heard the teaching of the magically created Buddha, he enters in a state of *Samādhi*. The chapter comes to a close as Dharmôdgata leaves the platform from which he has preached and enters his house.

### COMPARISON OF TWO VERSIONS

In terms of drama and fortuitious sequence of events, the story as told in the early Chinese translations is superior to the remnant extant in the Sanskrit and later versions. In the Sanskrit we are told that Sadāprarudita is searching for the *Prajñāpāramitā*, but there is no background given as to why he is doing that searching. The first voice is heard in the sky and the entire dream sequence has been dropped. After the sermon from this voice Sadāprarudita feels doubt and this brings about the first episode of weeping which corresponds to the third one in the earlier text. His weeping is stilled by another long sermon from the magically created Buddha, and at the conclusion of this teaching he enters *Samādhi*. When he emerges he asks "Who is our Good friend?" This question brings about the second weeping. When he has recovered from his lamenting, he sets out on the journey and comes up against the power of Māra. The meeting with Śakra and

the merchant's daughter is much the same as in the Han text. However, when he sets out on the last part of the journey accompanied by the retinue of girls, Śakra goes along and is used as a commentator of the action. When Sadāprarudita sees Dharmōdgata he asks "Where do the Buddhas go?" But before the answer can be given the chapter closes.

In comparing the two versions it is apparent that the earlier text in the sense of a drama completes an "act" in the chapter corresponding to Chapter Thirty in the Sanskrit. The questions are all answered, Dharmōdgata has been seen and the Bodhisattva achieves the state of *Samādhi*. If the story stopped at this point it would comprise a completed series of actions. The later texts changes this format and leaves the chapter with an unanswered question ("Where do the Buddhas go?") making it necessary to go into the next chapter to hear the answer.

### HERO ELEMENTS OF THE STORY

The leading figure in this story is the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita. After constructing the unfolding of the plot as presented in the early translation of Lokakṣema, it is interesting to compare the events with those in heroic myth and legends.

Campbell has defined the hero as one who while still alive knows and represents the claims of the superconsciousness, and the journey of this hero represents the moments of his life when he achieves illumination.<sup>14</sup> Even though the hero is born to greatness and like Charlemagne "is sleeping only to arise at the proper time," there is a moment when he emerges from his unconscious state with the "Call."<sup>15</sup> The familiar pattern of life has been negated, the old concepts and ideals no longer fit for the time comes when the hero must pass through the threshold into a new life. It is the "Call" which announces to the world that a person is born to be a hero.<sup>16</sup>

Following the "Call" a hero must go on his journey, a symbolic one in which he comes to grips with the "dragon" or the enemy who is seated on a high throne of power.<sup>17</sup> In order to overthrow this enemy he must rely on a helper. Frequently, a supernature one or a feminine figure. When the heroic quest has been accomplished and the hero accompanied by a retinue of people has penetrated to the source of wisdom, he returns with his trophy.<sup>18</sup>

This very brief outline of the hero in myth is certainly close to the characterization of Sadāprarudita in the story as it is told in the early Chinese texts. He is destined to great things because of his past karma, for he has through many previous lives studied the *Prajñāpāramitā* and has acquired the merit necessary to go on to full enlightenment. However, even though his karma has prepared him for a high position, he must be led from his unconscious state. In this story, Sadāprarudita received his "call"<sup>19</sup> in a dream and the prize which is to be won

is the *Dharma*, later to be identified with the *Prajñāpāramitā*.<sup>20</sup> To find this desired and wonderful thing, he must take a journey toward the East, the new life.<sup>21</sup> On his journey he meets with the enemy who is in possession of great power,<sup>22</sup> Māra. Sadāprarudita is no more able to handle Māra alone than the mythic hero can slay the demon without some intervention from the gods. The supernatural help in the case of Sadāprarudita is Śakra,<sup>23</sup> and the feminine aid is from the merchant's daughter.<sup>24</sup> From this journey into the land of darkness he emerges with a large group of 500 girls and 500 chariots loaded with jewels and precious stone, which he takes as a talisman for reaching the prize that awaits at the end of the journey. When the whole retinue has heard the teaching of Dharmôdgata, then the five hundred girls are transformed into men. Sadāprarudita received his prediction of a time in a later life when he will become a Buddha, thus fulfilling a pattern of the last scene in the story of a hero in which he either dies or passes through one or the other forms of anthropomorphic glorification.<sup>25</sup>

The account of a hero and his journey is unfortunately lost in the later and more common text. First, the clarity and sequence of the plot has been damaged. The rearrangement and infusion of meritorious material results in a story that fails to convey the full import of the symbolic journey of the Bodhisattva to find the *Prajñāpāramitā*. Nevertheless it is this latter form with its piety and garbled plot which has come to be the more acceptable and from the third century until today has been the one to be reproduced in the texts and translations of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras in China, India and Tibet. Were it not for these early Chinese translations which preserve the ancient tradition and in many ways a more meaningful version, it would not be possible to construct with such detail the heroic aspects of the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita.

#### NOTES

1. *Astasahasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, ed. by P. L. Vaidya, (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960).  
Haribhadra, *Abhisamayālamkāralokā-prajñāpāramitā-vyakhyā*, ed. by V. Wogihara, (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1932-35) 2 vols.  
*Ashtasahasrikā*, ed. by R. Mitra, *Bibliotheca Indica*, (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1888).
2. The *Astasahasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, trs. Edward Conze, *Bibliotheca Indica*, vol. 284 (Calcutta, 1958), reprinted in 1972 by Four Season Press.
3. T. 221.
4. T. 223, T. 227, T. 228, T. 220(1).
5. T. 224, Taisho Issaikyo, vol 8, 425c:1 ff (see T. 2148-189b, T. 2154-478c, T. 2147-158c, for the date).
6. T. 225, Taisho Issaikyo, vol 8, 478b:19 ff (translation done under Wu dynasty

- in the year of Huang Wu (222-229 A. D. according to T. 2147-158 and T. 2146-119b).
7. T. 224-470c:20 ff.
  8. *Saddharmapuṇḍarika-sūtra*, ed. by U. Wogihara and C. Tsuchida (Tokyo: Seigo-Kenkyukai, 1934) p. 318 ff.
  9. T. 224-471a.
  10. T. 224-470c.
  11. T. 152-43a:13 ff.
  12. T. 224-471a.
  13. Etienne Lamotte, *La Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nagarjūna*, *Bibliothèque de Museon*, vol. 18 (Louvain, 1944) pp. 255 ff. The original is found in T. 1509-87c ff. Lamotte has provided a very informative footnote tracing the story of King Śibi in Chinese and Sanskrit sources.
  14. Joseph Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949) p. 259 ff.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 358.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
  17. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
  18. Adolph Roeder, *Symbol Psychology*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933) p. 167.
  19. T. 224-470c:29 ff and T. 225-503c:26 ff.
  20. T. 224-471a:16 ff and T. 225-504a:10 ff.
  21. In T. 225-505a:17 ff the West seem to be identified with death.
  22. T. 224-472a:26 ff and T. 225-504c:11 ff.
  23. T. 228-671a:18 and T. 227-582b:8 along with T. 224-472b:14 and T. 225-504c:23.
  24. T. 228-671b:9 and T. 227-583a:23 along with T. 224-472c:1 and T. 225-505a:3.
  25. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic Science and Religion* (Garden City, N. Y.: Double Day-Anchor Books, 1954) p. 171 ff.

# 道行般若經中之薩陀波倫故事

## 蘭 可 思

佛經中有薩陀波倫(Sadāprarudita)菩薩求法故事，頗為著名。大旨謂薩陀波倫於夢中聞東方有般若波羅蜜法，不避艱遠，自往求之。途經魔所樂國，遭遇困窮。自賣軀體，欲以供養其師。為長者(即富人)女拯救脫難，終達目的，取得大法。此故事有梵文本，有英譯。西晉無羅義譯放光般若經，有薩陀波倫品，所述與梵文本同。鳩摩羅什、玄奘等所譯般若經典，亦載其事。但此故事有另一說法，惟見於漢譯本。最早者為後漢支婁迦讖所譯道行般若經。又相傳為吳支謙譯之大明度經亦有之。此說與放光般若經及梵本，頗有出入。取此二說，從宗教上及文學上之觀點，試為比較，殊饒趣味。

本文作者認為，二說之中，較古之道行般若經所述，較為詳密。於薩陀波倫(此言“常啼”，“常悲”)之命名，有所解釋。對此神話人物之英雄經歷，描述亦較為突出。按西方之神話英雄，雖生具超凡之質，未必自知。往往須待神靈夢境，特為啓召，始自覺其天降大任，故有異稟。又往往要經歷艱險，如屠惡龍殺強敵之類，而且常有美麗之女性，為之鼓勵支援，最後始底於成。道行般若經記薩陀波倫最初知有大法，乃自夢寐中聞之於無名之天人。苦心追求，索之不得，日日啼哭。忉利天人見其如此，乃字之為薩陀波倫，意為常啼常悲。薩陀波倫入山苦行，仍不得法，復大啼哭。乃聞虛空中有聲言求此大法，須向東行，莫佈莫息。薩陀波倫東行，苦其遠遠，又復啼哭。時虛空中化現作佛，告以須到犍陀越國，見曇無竭菩薩，此菩薩世世常為其師，所有皆當施與，以供養師，始能得法。既而薩陀波倫得見十方諸佛，仍不見師，又復大哭。復前，途經魔所樂國，孤身困窮，欲自賣身，以供養師。而為魔所障，國中男女不見其形，不聞其聲。賣身不售，又復大哭。是時釋提桓因化作婆羅門，告以將欲大祠，欲買人血肉心髓。薩陀波倫乃割截身體自賣。有長者女，見而憐之。告言欲以金銀珍物，供養其師，且欲與五百婬女，從其求法。釋提桓因使其身體平復如故，與長者女及五百侍女，同達犍陀越國，見曇無竭菩薩，供養般若波羅蜜，受其大法。此故事在魔所樂國受難與長者女相救部分，亦見於放光般若經及梵文本。但此為較後之說，於薩陀波倫最初兩遇天人及前後數度啼哭，所記皆甚簡略，不足以見此神話英雄經歷之艱難。但今日在印度、西藏乃至西方習聞之故事，實為此欠完整欠明晰之新說。是以漢譯所傳舊說，彌可寶貴。(編者按：望月信亨佛教大辭典薩陀波倫條雖據道行般若經為說，而語焉不詳，亦未論及此等新舊歧異。)