

Maitreya Misquote

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Maitreya (Sanskrit), or Metteyya (Pali), is regarded as a future Buddha. We have encountered several Maitreya claimants, either by themselves or their followers.

In the voluminous Pali suttas, Metteyya is only mentioned once, in a sutta which appears to be a fable for a king to rule righteously. This sutta is known as the Cakkavati Sutta or Cakkavatti-Sihanada Sutta.

Some of these 'Maitreya claimants' often quotes a passage from the above mentioned sutta to justify their claims. However, the passage does not appear in that sutta. The source of the passage can be traced to the book, *The Gospel of Buddha* by Paul Carus, first published in 1894. Any student of comparative religions who has read Carus' book would be aware that some passages are freely rendered, rearranged, abbreviated, and some are the author's own contribution. In fact, Carus mentioned this in the Preface. It would be too lengthy to discuss Carus' justification here.

Here, I would like to quote Martin Verhoeven who wrote an 'Introduction' (2004) to Carus' book, to highlight the 'misquote':

"In a famous and telling canonical passage, the disciple Ananda poses final questions to the Buddha while he lies dying. One query stands out: who should the community follow after the Buddha's passing? Carus accurately reports the original content taken from the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, but then inserts his own version to the final question. In the original, Ananda asks the Buddha: "The teacher's instruction has ceased, now we have no teacher! Who will teach us when you are gone?" The Buddha replies, "What I have explained to you as the Dhamma and the discipline (vinaya) will, at my passing, be your teacher." Carus instead interposes a savior in answer to Ananda's question – a messiah who will come again to replace the Buddha.

I am not the first Buddha who came to earth, nor shall I be the last. In due time another Buddha will arise in the world, a Holy One,...He will reveal the same eternal truths which I have taught you.

Carus then has Ananda ask, "How shall we know him?" To which the Buddha supposedly replied, "He will be known as Metteyya, which means 'he whose name is kindness,'" (Carus actually provides a description of Maitreya, but it is taken, "rearranged" as he put it, from another Buddhist text, the Cakkavatti-Sihanada Sutta)."

In the original text, quite the opposite purport is conveyed by the Buddha. He exhorts the monks to diligently work out their own deliverance, and ends with, "Now, monks, I declare to you all: all conditioned things are of a nature to decay – strive on untiringly." Even in the sutta from which Carus pulls out the prophecy of Maitreya, the Buddha clearly gives no sense that

the Buddha-to-come will function as redeemer, or savior. Maitreya, will merely recapitulate the Buddha's own path to enlightenment; and like the Buddha, will act as a teacher, a guide. Thus the Buddha ends his description of Maitreya with the famous word of exhortation:

"Monks, be an island unto yourselves, be a refuge unto yourselves with no other refuge. Let the Dhamma be your island, let the Dhamma be your refuge with no other refuge."

Reference:

Verhoeven, Martin J. (2004) "The Dharma through Carus's Lens." Introduction to Paul Carus. The Gospel of Buddha According to Old Records. Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing, 1-102 (p.78-79)