



Indra's Net

Indian Buddhism

One night, at the end of one of the vassa retreats, in the Jetavana Park, in Śrāvastī, one of the followers of Buddha asked him:

‘Master, what is the ultimate foundation of life and the world?’

Siddharta Gautama raised his eyes to the sky and contemplated the stars, then he smiled, as if remembering.

‘The ultimate foundation of life and the world is the net of Indra, god of the natural forces that protect and nourish life,’ he finally said, lowering his eyes to look with affection at his disciple. ‘Indra established the foundations of the world in the Tushita Heaven. To do this, he hung over his palace on Mount Meru a net of silk threads, like a spider web, which extends to infinity in all directions. In each knot of the net he put a precious gem, which reflects in its perfect facets all the other gems that cover the net. When you approach to look into any one of those gems, you discover that the gems reflected in it reflect in turn each and every one of the other gems of this immense silk fabric ... and so on to infinity.’

‘I do not understand, Master,’ said the disciple frowning ‘Where are all those gems you're talking about? I do not see them in this world.’

‘You are one of those gems,’ Buddha replied, ‘and every person, every animal, every tree and plant, every insect, every speck of dust that floats up into a sunbeam and down onto a road, is a gem of the net of Indra. Every emotion that you feel, and all the feelings that all beings

have ever felt, even thousands of years ago, and every idea that has crossed the mind of each being since the beginning of time, is a gem of Indra's net.'

'Within you is reflected everything that exists and everything that has ever existed in the universe, and you, yourself, are reflected in everything that exists. You are inside each human being, each animal, tree and plant, each speck of dust, each idea or thought, each feeling to infinity. At every moment, the whole world is within you, and you are inside everything that exists. Although in your mind you see yourself as an independent being and you feel separated from the rest of the world, in truth you are part of the common existence of everything that has ever been. You could never exist by virtue of yourself, by yourself alone; because you exist by virtue of the glorious existence of everything around you.'

A tear appeared in the eye of the disciple, and all the stars in the sky were reflected in it as if in a gem. And Gautama Buddha added, with a look that seemed to caress the soul of the disciple:

'That is why I say to all of you to take care of the happiness of everything that surrounds you, of all beings, whether you believe that they live and feel or not, because they have their existence also in the depths of your heart.' □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda (2018).

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Comments

The metaphor of Indra's net was developed in the 3rd century within Mahāyāna Buddhism, specifically in the Avatamsaka Sutra, and later, between the 6th and 8th centuries, in the Huáyán School, in China. Numerous authors have drawn attention to the metaphor of Indra's net as an explanation, from intuitive knowledge, of scientific discoveries about the non-dual, holographic and fractal relational matrix of the universe.

Sources

There are multiple sources of quality for this story, this one for example:

Wells, L. (2003). The Net of Indra. In Cox, A. & Albert, D. (eds.), *The Healing Heart: Communities Storytelling to Build Strong and Healthy Communities* (p. 50). Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Preamble: We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: The Challenges Ahead.- Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

Principle 1a: Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.

The Way Forward: This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility.

