

Preliminary Application Exercise #1

(***record choice & rationale on back of this page***)

Which statement below most precisely presents reliable evidence about one or more practices that inspired the source(s) being cited? In explaining your reasoning, make sure to consider the effectiveness of the statement in gathering relevant details from different parts of the source.

IMPORTANT: In addition to explaining how your chosen statement addresses the criteria of reliability of evidence and precision in presenting it, compare it to both of the others.

- A. The legend of Shakyamuni's "great departure" told in the *SanghaBhedaVastu* seems to be inspired at least in part by several festivals that celebrate major events leading up to the night of his enlightenment. First there is the "Festival of the Hairknot," said to have been established by the god Indra, who received the hairknot that Shakyamuni cut off and threw "very high into the air" after escaping from his home with the help of that god (12). There is also a "Festival of the Benaras Silk Robes" where Indra "presented [Shakyamuni] the hempen robes" which had been kept for him by a tree spirit (13); and both this and the Hairknot festival are reported to have been started in a place marked by a shrine "which monks still venerate" (12,13). Finally, the legend claims that Indra appeared again to receive a crystal bowl used to prepare "sweetened rice-milk condensed sixteen times" which Shakyamuni ate when recovering from his period of intense fasting (16). On the other hand, the accounts of Shakyamuni's study with two teachers (14-15) and the description of his three visions during the three periods in his night of enlightenment (17) are parallel to descriptions in first-person sutra accounts. This suggests that the monks involved in the above mentioned festivals also integrated into the story what they learned from the sutra sources they had memorized.
- B. Shakyamuni's first-hand sutra accounts of his search for Unbinding in various sutra sources (A III.38, M 26 & 36) verify that he really did grow up surrounded by lotus ponds, with a different palace for each season, where "servants, workers, and retainers were fed wheat, rice and meat," and surrounded entirely by women entertainers in the rainy season (4-5). It also confirms that his father did everything he could to keep him there after he finally saw an old person, a sick person & a dead person (5): when he decided to leave, his parents "wished otherwise and were grieving with tears on their faces" (6). Finally, the sutras confirm Shakyamuni's self-reliance and determination in pursuing every imaginable austerity: "I beat down, constrained and crushed my mind with awareness;" "I stopped the in-breath and out-breath in my nose and mouth," and he considered, "Suppose I were to consider going altogether without food," opting instead for eating only a handful of soup at a time (8-9). Also, this source's description of the three visionary realizations he had during the first, second and third watches on the night of his enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree are almost identical to descriptions in legends like that of the *SanghaBheduVastu* (17) and in the Sutra entitled "The Fruits of the Contemplative Life" (11) we can reasonably conclude that this really was how he attained "the unborn, unaging, unailing, undying, sorrowless, undefiled, unsurpassed security from bondage: Unbinding" (5).
- C. The *Majjhima & Digha Nikaya* describe ascetic practice for the monks at Kammasadhamma and to king Ajatasattu at Jivaka Komarabhacca's mango grove, respectively. At Kammasaddhama, monks watched their "body in & of itself" internally and externally, "focused on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body," so that "mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance" (1b). In teaching Ajatasattu, Shakyamuni "presented his teaching in a way that was pertinent and sensitive to the needs of his listeners," unlike contemporary teachers who displayed "an inflexible, party-line approach" (1a). Taking into account Ajatasattu's limited understanding, "the Buddha patiently describes the steps of training, beginning at a very basic level and gradually moving up;" Ajatasattu later sponsored the First Council, at which disciples produced the first standardized account of the Buddha's teaching (1b).