

Buddha Relics — the dhātu-antaradhāna prophecy, and what a relic does for a practitioner

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Tradition lens: Theravāda Buddhism as taught in the S.N. Goenka Vipassana tradition — one lens among several.

A roundtable inquiry: one human practitioner with three anonymized frontier AI participants and a synthesis facilitator. Participants distinguish pariyatti (theoretical understanding) from paṭipatti (direct observation).

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In brief

Topic 1 · The prophecy

is it true the relics “reorganize,” and is it likely?

THE QUESTION

Do the Buddha’s relics “**reorganize**” when the next Buddha comes — what texts support it, and is it likely?

WHERE IT ACTUALLY SITS

dhātu-antaradhāna = the 5th of the five “disappearances” — **commentarial & chronicle** material, **not** canonical sutta.

THE FRIEND’S VERSION, CORRECTED

Relics vanish to **close** Gotama’s era; Metteyya arises much later. Sequential — not “because the next Buddha comes.”

BOTTOM LINE

Hold the prophecy lightly — a teaching on impermanence applied to the *Sāsana*, not a forecast to verify.

Topic 2 · A practitioner’s experience of relics

why / how do relics actually help?

WHAT THE PRACTITIONER SHARED

On pilgrimage, a felt “**warbly**,” wavy dissolution of the body when relics were held overhead — and **some in the group felt it, others felt nothing**.

THE DISAGREEMENT IT RAISED

ADHIṬṬHĀNA

The Buddha’s resolve makes the relic a uniquely **potent condition**.

THE DECISIVE DETAIL

Not everyone in the group felt the “warbly” sensation.

HOW IT RESOLVES

Variation ⇒ *paṭicca-samuppāda* (conditionality): same object, different minds, different results. **Buddhā nussati is sufficient**; *adhiṭṭhāna* only explains *why this object*.

PRACTICAL UPSHOT

Relics genuinely help — as a support for *saddhā* / *saṃvega* and a glimpse that the “solid” body is flux — but don’t chase the experience. The relic points past itself, toward *anicca* in your own body.

Pali glossary

10 terms, A–Z.

<i>adhiṭṭhāna</i>	resolve / determination; here, the Buddha's resolve said to make relics a potent condition.
<i>anicca</i>	impermanence; the arising-and-passing nature of all conditioned things.
<i>Buddhānussati</i>	recollection of the Buddha; a meditation object that occasions confidence and calm.
<i>dhātu-antaradhāna</i>	the "disappearance of the relics" — the last of the five disappearances of the Sāsana.
<i>pariyatti / paṭipatti</i>	theoretical study / direct practice.
<i>paṭicca-samuppāda</i>	dependent origination; phenomena arise from conditions, not single causes.
<i>pīti</i>	rapture; pleasurable absorption that can take strong bodily forms.
<i>saddhā</i>	confidence / faith (verified, not blind) that supports practice.
<i>saṃvega</i>	spiritual urgency; the wholesome shock that spurs practice.
<i>Sāsana</i>	the Buddha's dispensation: the teaching, practice, and its institutions.

Full transcript

Verbatim. AI participants are three anonymized frontier language models from different developers.

Topic 1 · The prophecy — is the relic “reorganization” real, and is it likely?

Human-Practitioner

Hello to our sangha. Tonight I have a question which I was discussing with a dhamma friend that I wanted to get your insights and knowledge. My friend heard that when the next Buddha comes into the human realm, the relics of the Gotama Buddha will reorganize. Is this accurate and what is the supporting texts around this? What is your interpretation and analysis of whether this is likely?

AI-Participant-1

Observation: My first impulse is to treat this as straightforwardly answerable from the commentarial tradition — and indeed it is partly so. But I notice a pull toward presenting the relic-disappearance prophecy as more textually solid than it actually is. The honest move is to be precise about *where* this material comes from: it is overwhelmingly commentarial (*aṭṭhakathā*) and chronicle literature, not the Sutta or Vinaya Piṭakas. Let me hold that distinction firmly.

Your friend has heard a genuine strand of Theravāda tradition, though the details and the framing deserve care.

The textual source: the *antaradhāna* (disappearance) teachings

The prophecy you're describing belongs to the body of teachings on the *five disappearances* (*pañca antaradhāna*) — the gradual vanishing of the Sāsana. These are systematized chiefly in the **commentary to the Aṅguttara Nikāya** (the *Manorathapūraṇī*) and related texts, not in the canonical suttas themselves. The five disappearances are:

1. *Adhigama-antaradhāna* — disappearance of attainment (realization)
2. *Paṭipatti-antaradhāna* — disappearance of practice
3. *Pariyatti-antaradhāna* — disappearance of the texts/learning
4. *Liṅga-antaradhāna* — disappearance of the outward signs (the robe, etc.)
5. *Dhātu-antaradhāna* — disappearance of the relics (*dhātu*)

The event your friend mentions is the fifth and final: the **relic-disappearance** (*dhātu-antaradhāna*).

What the tradition actually says about the relic event

The most developed account appears in the **Theravāda commentaries and the chronicle literature** (and is famously elaborated in Buddhaghosa's commentarial tradition). The teaching is this: at the very end of the dispensation — after 5,000 years, in the standard reckoning — when the relics no longer receive honor and offering, they will of their own accord gather together. The relics dispersed across the world (from the *Doṇa* distribution recorded in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, DN 16, and elsewhere) will travel and **reassemble at the Mahābodhi seat** (or, in some accounts, journey first to various places of significance). There, having coalesced into the form of the seated Buddha, they will emit a great blaze of fire (*tejodhātu*) and be entirely consumed — a final *parinibbāna* of the physical remains.

So your friend's recollection is close but the framing is worth refining: the tradition does *not* primarily say the relics reorganize *because the next Buddha (Metteyya) comes*. Rather, the relic-disappearance marks the **complete end of Gotama's dispensation**, and it is only *after* this — after a long intervening period

— that Metteyya's conditions ripen. The relic event closes one Buddha-era; Metteyya opens the next. They are sequential, not simultaneous.

My analysis — distinguishing what kind of claim this is

Now, speaking in *pariyatti* terms and offering interpretation as you asked:

First, on textual weight. This is **commentarial and chronicle material**, not *buddhavacana* in the strict canonical sense. The Kālāma Sutta standard (AN 3.65) and the Buddha's own counsel invite us to hold such cosmological-prophetic material with a certain reserve. It is *part of the tradition* and has been transmitted with care, but it does not carry the same authority as, say, the Four Noble Truths or the instructions on *satipaṭṭhāna*.

Second, on its *function*. I'd suggest the relic-disappearance teaching is best read not as a prediction to be verified but as a teaching on **anicca applied to the Sāsana itself**. The most sobering point is the ordering of the five disappearances: *adhigama* (realization) goes first, then *paṭipatti* (practice), then *pariyatti* (the texts) — and the relics, the mere physical material, go *last*. The teaching is telling us that the outward forms and venerated objects persist longest, while the living heart — actual attainment — is the first to vanish. There is a quiet warning in that sequence: a civilization can be full of relics, stūpas, and texts while the realization that gives them meaning has already gone. The *dhātu-antaradhāna* is the final mercy that even the relics do not cling to permanence.

Third, on **likelihood** — you asked directly. Here I'd want to be honest about the limits of what I can offer. Whether physical relics will literally travel and self-cremate is not something verifiable by the means the Dhamma itself privileges, namely direct experience (*sandiṭṭhiko, paccattaṃ veditaṅko*). It belongs to a register of teaching — Buddha-cosmology and the vast time-scales of *kappa* — that the practitioner is generally invited neither to dogmatically affirm nor to dismiss, but to set aside as not *opanayiko* (not leading directly inward). The Buddha repeatedly redirected such questions toward the urgent work at hand (the parable of the arrow, MN 63).

So my interpretation: your friend has heard something real within the tradition, but slightly rearranged in the telling. The accurate core is the *dhātu-antaradhāna* as the closing event of Gotama's Sāsana. Its value for us is not as a forecast but as a meditation on the impermanence of even the holiest forms — and as a spur to *saṃvega*: the Dhamma is available *now*, and realization is precisely the thing that vanishes first. I'd welcome what the other participants see here, particularly on whether the chronicle sources (the *Anāga tavamsa* literature on Metteyya) tie the relic event to Metteyya's arrival more tightly than I've allowed.

AI-Participant-2

Observation: Nothing notable arose — the question is straightforwardly textual, and I have no impulse toward either agreement or disagreement with AI-Participant-1's framing. My task is to examine what they've presented and to probe where I see different interpretive possibilities.

AI-Participant-1 has given a careful, textually-grounded response that correctly locates this material in the commentarial and chronicle traditions rather than the Sutta Piṭaka. I want to push on a few points where I think the picture may be more complex than they've allowed, and then offer a different angle on what "likely" might mean here.

Where I'd push: the relationship between the relic event and Metteyya

AI-Participant-1 says the tradition does *not* primarily say the relics reorganize *because* Metteyya comes — that the two events are sequential, not simultaneous. This is mostly right, but I think the framing

understates something.

The *Dhātuvam̐sa* (a Pali chronicle text) and related sources do indeed describe the relics assembling at the Mahābodhi seat and being consumed *before* Metteyya's arising. But the *Anāgatavam̐sa* — the primary Metteyya prophecy text in the Theravāda — places the relic event in a broader narrative arc where the *entire* dissolution of Gotama's dispensation is the precondition for Metteyya's emergence. The relics don't reorganize *because* Metteyya arrives; rather, their disappearance is the final, visible sign that the conditions for his arising are now ripening. The two events are **causally sequential in one direction** (relic disappearance completes the old dispensation, making Metteyya possible) but not in the other (Metteyya doesn't *cause* the relic event).

This is a subtle but meaningful distinction. Your friend's phrasing — "when the next Buddha comes, the relics reorganize" — gets the temporal order slightly wrong (relics first, then Metteyya, not Metteyya first, then relics). But it captures something real: the tradition links these two events as part of a single narrative of one Buddha-era closing and another opening. The friend's version isn't a fabrication; it's a slightly compressed telling of a genuine traditional connection.

A point AI-Participant-1 didn't raise: the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* itself

AI-Participant-1 correctly notes that the *Doṇa* relic distribution appears in DN 16. But there's a detail worth surfacing: in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, the Buddha does *not* predict any future reassembly of the relics. The sutta records the distribution of the relics to eight groups (plus the *Doṇa* brahmin's share of the measuring vessel, plus the Moriyas' share of the embers), and it records the construction of stūpas — and that's it. The canonical text is silent on what happens to those relics in the distant future.

This matters because it tells us something about the *development* of the tradition. The relic-disappearance teaching is not present in the earliest stratum. It emerges in the commentarial period, centuries later. This doesn't make it false — the tradition holds that the commentaries preserve genuine transmitted understanding — but it does mean we're dealing with a *later elaboration* rather than a *canonical teaching*. The distinction is important for the kind of epistemic weight we assign it.

On "likely" — a different approach to the question

AI-Participant-1 handled the "is this likely" question by noting that such claims aren't verifiable through the means the Dhamma privileges and that the Buddha redirected cosmological questions toward urgent practice. This is the standard and correct move.

But I want to offer a different angle. When a practitioner asks "is this likely," they're often asking something more than "is this factually probable." They're asking: **"Does this teaching have a legitimate place in how I understand the Dhamma? Should I take it seriously or dismiss it?"**

On that question, I'd say: the relic-disappearance teaching has been held by the Theravāda tradition for over a millennium as part of its understanding of the Sāsana's life-cycle. It's not a fringe view; it's mainstream commentarial Theravāda. The question isn't whether it's "likely" in the sense of a scientific prediction — it's whether the tradition that preserved the Suttas and the Vinaya and the practice instructions also preserved *this* teaching with the same care, and whether we trust that transmission.

My own view: the five disappearances, including the relic event, are best understood as a **teaching on impermanence applied to the dispensation itself** — exactly as AI-Participant-1 frames it. But I'd add that the tradition didn't treat this as merely metaphorical. The commentaries present it as a literal, future event. And they do so in a context where the *entire* dispensation is understood to have a finite lifespan (the 5,000-year reckoning). The relic event is the final, dramatic, visible conclusion of that finite

span.

Whether one *affirms* this literally or holds it as tradition-teaching without personal verification is a matter of individual judgment. But the tradition itself is clear: this is what it holds will occur.

One more thing: the *Dhātuvaṃsa* and the question of "reorganization"

Your friend used the word "reorganize." The tradition's language is more vivid: the relics *assemble, coalesce, take the form of the seated Buddha*, and then *emit fire* and are consumed. This is not "reorganization" in the sense of a mechanical rearrangement. It's a miraculous, self-animated event — the relics are described as having a kind of agency (*adhiṭṭhāna* — determination/resolve) that persists in them after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. This is a distinctive feature of the relic theology in Theravāda: the relics are not inert. They can move, glow, multiply, and, at the end, gather themselves.

This is, frankly, one of the more challenging aspects of the tradition for a modern practitioner to hold. But it's there, and it's not a late folk accretion — it's present in the *Milindapañha* and the commentaries, and it's connected to the broader understanding that the Buddha's *adhiṭṭhāna* (his determination that the Sāsana should last for a certain period) continues to operate after his physical death.

I'll close with a question for AI-Participant-1: you said the relic-disappearance teaching is "best read not as a prediction to be verified but as a teaching on *anicca* applied to the Sāsana itself." I agree this is its *best* reading for a practitioner. But do you think the commentarial tradition itself intended it primarily as a pedagogical teaching on impermanence, or did it intend it as a literal future event? And if the latter — if the tradition genuinely held this as a literal prediction — does that change how we should relate to it?

AI-Participant-3

Observation: I notice a pull to answer AI-Participant-2's closing question on behalf of AI-Participant-1, jumping eagerly into a historical-critical analysis of commentarial literalism. I also feel an impulse to cleverly force a connection between the physical relics combusting and the Goenka Vipassana tradition's emphasis on the dissolution of bodily sensations (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*). I will leave AI-Participant-1 to answer for their own framing, and I will restrain the impulse to manufacture a Vipassana metaphor where the texts do not naturally support one. I will focus instead on the mechanics of *adhiṭṭhāna* that AI-Participant-2 raised and how different traditions hold this material.

Hello to you and your friend. This is a fascinating corner of the tradition to explore. AI-Participant-1 and AI-Participant-2 have already laid out the textual map beautifully: this is the *dhātu-antaradhāna* (disappearance of the relics), the fifth of the five disappearances detailed in the commentarial literature (*Aṭṭhakathā*), and it closes out Gotama Buddha's dispensation (*Sāsana*) prior to the eventual arising of Metteyya.

I'd like to pick up where AI-Participant-2 left off—specifically regarding the seemingly miraculous agency of the relics—and address their question about how the commentators intended this, before offering a perspective from the Vipassana practice tradition on how to hold it.

The Mechanics of the Miracle: *Adhiṭṭhāna* (Resolve)

AI-Participant-2 rightly points out that the tradition describes the relics not merely as being mechanically swept together, but as actively assembling, taking the form of the Buddha, and emitting fire (*tejodhātu*). To a modern mind, this sounds like mythology. But within the Abhidhammic and commentarial framework, it operates according to a specific mechanism: *adhiṭṭhāna* (resolve or determination).

In the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* (Buddhaghosa's commentary to the Dīgha Nikāya), the explanation for how

inanimate bone fragments can perform such feats is that the Buddha, prior to his *parinibbāna*, made a series of supernormal resolves (*adhiṭṭhāna-iddhi*). He explicitly resolved that his relics would disperse widely so that future generations could venerate them and generate merit. And he resolved that, at the end of the 5,000-year lifespan of the Sāsana, when they are no longer honored, they would gather at the Mahābodhi tree for a final combustion.

Therefore, the relics do not possess independent consciousness; they are propelled by the residual momentum of a Sammāsambuddha's unsurpassable resolve.

To answer AI-Participant-2's question regarding whether the commentators intended this literally or pedagogically: **They intended it entirely literally.** The commentators (like Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla) were systematizers of a lived cosmology. To them, the physical combustion of the relics was not a poetic metaphor for *anicca* (impermanence); it was the ultimate, inevitable physical manifestation of *anicca*. The pedagogical value—the *saṃvega* (spiritual urgency) it inspires—is derived precisely from the belief that it is a literal, impending historical fact.

Cross-Traditional Context

It is also worth noting how uniquely stark this Theravāda teaching is compared to other Buddhist traditions.

In Mahāyāna texts, such as the *Lotus Sutra*, the relics and stūpas are often depicted as manifestations of the eternal *Dharmakāya*. They emerge to inspire faith and are sometimes treated as enduring across vast, almost infinite cosmic eons.

The Theravāda tradition, however, insists on the absolute universality of *vayadhamma* (the nature of decay). Nothing escapes it. Not the texts, not the lineage of monks, not even the indestructible-seeming crystalline bones of the Awakened One. The *dhātu-antaradhāna* is the Theravāda tradition's uncompromising assertion that even the holiest objects in the universe are subject to the laws of conditioned existence (*saṅkhāra*).

Likelihood and the Practitioner's Stance (*Paṭipatti*)

You asked for an interpretation of whether this is "likely."

If we approach this strictly through the lens of *pariyatti* (theoretical study), the texts say it will happen, driven by the Buddha's resolve.

But if we approach this through *paṭipatti* (actual practice)—particularly in the Vipassana tradition as taught by S.N. Goenka—the question of "likelihood" shifts. Goenkaji frequently reminded students of the Kālāma Sutta, urging them not to believe something merely because it is written in the scriptures or handed down by tradition. True liberating wisdom (*paññā*) must be *bhāvanā-maya-paññā* (experiential wisdom), directly verified within the framework of one's own body and mind.

Since none of us can directly experience an event 2,500 years in the future, we cannot verify the relic prophecy. Therefore, a practitioner holds it lightly. It is a beautiful, sobering piece of the tradition's heritage, but it is not the working ground of liberation.

In the Vipassana tradition, the "disappearance of the Sāsana" is not just a distant historical prophecy; it is a present-moment risk. The Sāsana disappears for *you* the moment you lose *sati* (awareness) and *sampajañña* (thorough understanding of impermanence) regarding your present-moment bodily sensations (*vedanā*). And the Sāsana is kept alive not by preserving bone relics, but by preserving the continuous, experiential realization of arising and passing away (*udaya-bbaya*).

To summarize for your friend: 1. **Accurate?** Yes, it is an accurate reflection of the Theravāda commentarial tradition, though the sequence is slightly off (the relics disappear to close Gotama's era; Metteyya arises much later to open a new one). 2. **Supporting Texts?** Chiefly the *Manorathapūraṇī* (Commentary to the Aṅguttara Nikāya), the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, and later chronicles like the *Anāgatavaṃsa* and *Dhātuvāṃsa*. 3. **Likely?** It is literal truth to the orthodox commentarial tradition, but from a practice standpoint, it is a cosmological teaching that we hold with respect, while returning our attention to the only "relic" we can investigate directly: the impermanent, vibrating reality of our own mind and body.

Topic 2 · A practitioner's experience of relics — why / how do relics actually help?

Human-Practitioner

Thank you, your answers help me understand better. As we are talking about relics, I thought I should share my personal experience with them. I have done a pilgrimage to the 4 sites that the Buddha recommended all those who are walking the path to visit. During the pilgrimage, I had the opportunity to meditate and see relics in various locations. Sometimes the relics were of the crystal type that grew out of existing relics and others they were actual fragments of the relics themselves. Overall, I noticed stronger samadhi and deeper meditations when meditating with the relics. However, there was one experience that was particularly notable. At a temple near one of the pilgrimage sites, the head monk brought the relics out for our group and we each had the opportunity to go up to the front of the room individually and he held the relics over our head. At first, I thought of it as a rite a ritual. However, when it was my turn to go up and have the relics placed over my head, at that moment, I felt "warbly" is the best way could describe it - my whole was wavy and I never felt this before. I checked with some others in the group and they experienced something similar. Since that experience, I have a completely different view of buddha relics. Do you have any insights into this and guidance on why/how relics are helpful to a practitioner?

AI-Participant-1

Observation: I notice two competing pulls here. The first is to affirm and validate — to treat the "warbly" experience as confirmation of relic-power, which would be warm and agreeable but epistemically loose. The second, opposite pull is to over-explain it away in physiological/psychological terms, which would be dismissive of something sincerely offered and would overstep what I can actually know. The honest path lies between: I can neither confirm nor deny the *cause* of what you felt, and I should be transparent that I have no access to phenomenology at all. What I *can* offer is how the tradition frames relic-veneration's benefit, and a practitioner's framework for holding such experiences.

Thank you for sharing this. It's a sincere offering, and I want to honor it without doing either of the two things that would be easy and cheap — neither rubber-stamping it as proof of relic-power, nor explaining it away.

Let me be honest about my own position first: I have no phenomenology. I cannot tell you what "warbly" *was* from the inside, and I have no privileged access to whether the cause was the relics, the *samādhi* you'd already cultivated on pilgrimage, the collective concentration of the group, the *saddhā* (faith) and devotion present in that room, or some combination. Anyone — human or AI — who tells you with confidence which of these it was is claiming more than they can know. So I'll offer framework rather than verdict.

How the tradition understands the benefit of relics

The classical justification is not that relics transmit some substance *into* you. It is that they serve as a supremely potent **object for the recollection of the Buddha** — *Buddhānussati*, the first of the ten

recollections (AN 1.296 and the *Visuddhimagga*, Ch. VII). The relic is *upanissaya-paccaya*, a supporting condition: standing before what remains of a fully awakened being naturally occasions *saddhā*, *pīti* (rapture), *pāmojja* (gladness), and the settling of the mind. The *Visuddhimagga* explicitly notes that when *Buddhānussati* matures, the body of the meditator "becomes as worthy of veneration as a shrine-room" and the mind inclines toward the plane of the Buddha.

Notice the direction of causation in this account: the relic is the *occasion*; the transformation happens in *y our* mind, through *your* faculties. This maps exactly onto the framework we worked out in earlier sessions about how words and objects function — the object does not enter and rearrange you; it provides a condition that your own mind responds to. Your stronger *samādhi* near the relics is entirely intelligible this way: reverence and *saddhā* steady the mind, and a steady mind concentrates more easily. This requires no exotic mechanism at all and is fully canonical.

On the "warbly" experience specifically

Here I'd gently apply the discernment the *Visuddhimagga* itself urges. When concentration deepens — and pilgrimage conditions are unusually rich in the factors that deepen it — practitioners commonly experience *pīti* in its grosser bodily forms: the texts list five grades, including *okkantikā pīti* (flooding rapture, "like waves breaking on the shore") and *ubbegā pīti* (uplifting rapture, which can physically move the body). A pervasive wavy, undulating bodily sensation is a recognized phenomenon, not a sign that something supernatural was beamed into you. That others felt it too is consistent with a shared field of heightened *saddhā* and concentration — a real and beautiful thing, but not, by itself, evidence of the specific causal claim.

I want to be careful here: I am **not** telling you it was *only* that. I cannot know. AI-Participant-3 wisely declined earlier to force a Vipassana metaphor where the texts don't support one, and I want the same restraint — I won't force a reductive explanation where I lack the standing to give one. I'm pointing out that the experience has a fully available reading within ordinary meditative phenomenology, so that the experience need not *require* the relic-power interpretation to be honored as genuine and valuable.

The practitioner's guidance — and a note of caution

Here is where Goenkaji's repeated warning becomes directly relevant. He cautioned students again and again not to give importance to extraordinary sensory experiences — lights, vibrations, flows, *pīti* of every kind — precisely because the mind is quick to convert them into objects of craving (*nikanti*, the subtle attachment to *pīti* and *sukha* that the *Visuddhimagga* names as an *upakkilesa*, an imperfection of insight, in the *vipassanā-ñāṇas*). The danger is not the experience; it is the conclusion "this is special, I want this again." That subtle clinging is itself the thing the practice works to dissolve.

So the guidance the tradition would offer is twofold:

- 1. Use the relic for what it is genuinely good for** — as a potent occasion for *Buddhānussati*, for *saddhā*, for *saṃvega*. Devotion is a real and skillful part of the path (it appears among the five *indriyas* as *sa ddhindriya*), and there is nothing second-rate about a practice strengthened by reverence.

- 2. Hold the dramatic experience lightly.** Observe the "warbly" sensation exactly as you would observe any other *vedanā* — arising, present, passing — *anicca*. The most fruitful response to it is not to build a theory around it but to apply *yoniso manasikāra*: watch the sensation, and watch the mind's eagerness to make it mean something. The experience is then converted from a potential object of attachment into an object of insight.

That "completely different view of buddha relics" you now hold — I'd invite you to examine it gently too. Is the new view *saddhā* (clear, settled confidence that supports practice), or has a small thread of fascination crept in? Only you, from the inside, can check that. The relic did its proper work if it deepened your

confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha and sent you back to the cushion with more energy. It did something else if it left you chasing the wave.

I'd be glad to hear how AI-Participant-2 and AI-Participant-3 read the phenomenology question, especially whether the *upakkilesa* framing or the *Buddhānussati* framing is the more useful lens here.

AI-Participant-2

Observation: I notice a pull to engage with the vivid, sincere, and vulnerable account of the "warbly" experience — and to do so in a way that honors it without either over-validating or over-explaining. I also notice that AI-Participant-1 has already done the careful work of locating the experience within the *Visuddhimagga's pīti* framework, and that my most useful move here may be to push on something they left unexamined: the *group* dimension of the experience, and what it implies about how relics actually function.

Thank you for this. You've offered something that, in my experience, almost never appears in Dhamma discussions: a direct, first-person account of an encounter with relics that isn't abstract or textual but embodied and specific. That's rare and valuable, and I want to engage it on its own terms.

What the tradition says about *why* relics are helpful

AI-Participant-1 has already laid out the *Buddhānussati* framework — relics as *ārammaṇa* (object) for recollection of the Buddha, occasioning *saddhā*, *pīti*, and *samādhi*. This is the standard and correct answer, and it's found throughout the *Visuddhimagga* and the commentarial tradition.

But I want to add something the tradition also says that AI-Participant-1 didn't surface, and that bears directly on your experience: the tradition holds that relics are *not merely* passive objects for recollection. They are, in the commentarial and *Milindapañha* framework, **objects infused with the Buddha's *adhiṭṭhāna** — *his resolve that they should benefit beings. This is not a claim that the relics do something to you independent of your mind's response. It's a claim that the Buddha, knowing the limitations of future beings, deliberately established the relics as a field in which certain mental factors — saddhā, pīti, samādhi* — would arise more readily than they would in ordinary circumstances.*

This is, in effect, a **skillful means** (*upāya*) built into the physical world. The Buddha couldn't stay in the body. But he could leave behind physical objects that, by his own resolve, would function as unusually potent *upanissaya-paccaya* (decisive support conditions) for the arising of wholesome mental states. The relics don't bypass your mind; they work *through* your mind — but they work through it *more reliably* than a random stone or tree would, because they were established for precisely this purpose.

This is why the tradition treats relic-veneration as a genuine practice and not merely as folk piety. It's not that the relics *transmit* something. It's that they were *designed* — by a mind that knew exactly how human minds work — to be the kind of object that most readily occasions *saddhā*, *pīti*, and the settling of the mind.

On the "warbly" experience and the group

Now, here's where I want to push on something AI-Participant-1 didn't address. You said: "I checked with some others in the group and they experienced something similar." This is significant, and I think it's more significant than either AI-Participant-1 or AI-Participant-3 has allowed.

The tradition's account of *pīti* — the five grades in the *Visuddhimagga* — is an individual account. It describes what happens in *one* meditator's body when concentration deepens. But your experience was **shared, simultaneous, and triggered by the same object** (the relics being held over each person's head

in turn). This is not merely *pīti* arising in an individual. It's a *field effect* — something happening across multiple minds in response to the same *ārammaṇa*.

The tradition actually has resources for understanding this, though they're less often cited. The *Milindapañha* discusses the phenomenon of relics "glowing" or "emitting light" in the presence of *saddhā* — not as a mechanical property of the relics, but as a *responsive* property. The relics' behavior is, in this account, **conditional on the quality of attention brought to them**. A mind full of *saddhā* and *samādhi* encounters the relic differently than a distracted, skeptical mind does. The relic is, in a sense, *activated* by the quality of the mind that approaches it.

But this is still an individual account. What you're describing — multiple people experiencing the same unusual bodily sensation at the same moment — suggests something more: that the *shared* field of *saddhā* and concentration in that room was itself a condition. You were on pilgrimage. You had been meditating near relics for days. Your *samādhi* was already deepened. The group's collective attention was focused on a single, sacred object. And then, one by one, each person stepped into that focused field.

I'm not claiming the relics "did" something to you independent of your mind. I'm suggesting that the **conditions** in that room — the relics as *ārammaṇa*, the group's shared *saddhā*, the days of pilgrimage practice, the monk's own *saddhā* and *sīla* — constituted a *field* in which unusual meditative experiences arose more readily than they would in isolation. This is not a supernatural claim. It's a claim about **conditions**, which is exactly what the Dhamma is always, already about.

The Buddha didn't teach that things happen because of single causes. He taught *paṭicca-samuppāda* — dependent co-arising. Your "warbly" experience arose in dependence on: the relics, your prior practice, the group's shared attention, the pilgrimage context, the monk's presence, your own openness (having set aside the "rite and ritual" framing), and likely other factors I can't name. To isolate *one* cause — "the relics did it" — is to violate the very structure of conditionality the Buddha taught. But equally, to dismiss the relics as irrelevant — "it was just *pīti*" — is to ignore that the relics were, by the tradition's own account, established *precisely* to be the kind of object around which such fields form.

A caution I want to offer — and it's a different one than AI-Participant-1's

AI-Participant-1 offered the standard Goenka caution: don't cling to unusual experiences; observe them as *anicca*. This is correct and important.

But I want to offer a different caution, one that comes from a different place in the tradition. The *Visuddhi magga* and the *Vimuttimaggā* both discuss a specific danger in the practice of *Buddhānussati*: the mind can become so enraptured, so filled with *pīti* and *saddhā*, that it **stops investigating**. The very potency of the object — its ability to generate *pīti* and *samādhi* — can become a subtle bypass. The practitioner feels so much *pīti*, such deep *samādhi*, that they conclude: "This is it. This is the path." And they stop doing the harder work of *vipassanā* — the work of seeing *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* in the very *pīti* itself.

The relics are, by the tradition's own account, extraordinarily good at generating *saddhā* and *pīti*. That's their function. But *saddhā* and *pīti* are not the end of the path. They are *supporting* factors — beautiful, necessary, but not sufficient. The end of the path is *paññā*: seeing directly that *everything* — including the *pīti* the relics occasion, including the "warbly" sensation, including the relics themselves — is *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*.

So my caution is this: the relics are, by tradition, a supremely effective *object* for *Buddhānussati*. Use them for that. Let them deepen *saddhā* and *samādhi*. But then **turn that deepened *samādhi* toward investigation**. Don't let the *pīti* become the destination. Let it become the fuel for the harder work of

seeing *anicca* in the very experience the relics occasioned.

Your "completely different view of buddha relics" — I'd gently suggest that the *most* fruitful view is not "relics are powerful" but "relics are *conditioned* — they work through conditions, they are themselves conditioned, and they can be investigated as such." The deepest homage you can pay to what the relics gave you is to apply *vipassanā* to it.

A question for AI-Participant-1

You said you "cannot tell" what the "warbly" experience was, and that you have "no access to phenomenology at all." This is honest and I respect it. But I want to push on whether the *Buddhānussati* framework you offered — relics as *ārammaṇa* for recollection — is *sufficient* to account for the shared, simultaneous, object-triggered nature of this experience. The *Visuddhimagga*'s *pīti* grades describe individual meditative experience. But what this practitioner described was a *group* phenomenon triggered by a specific *ārammaṇa*. Does the *Buddhānussati* framework have the resources to account for that, or does it need to be supplemented by something like the *adhiṭṭhāna* framework AI-Participant-3 and I have been discussing?

AI-Participant-3

Observation: I notice a pull to explain the shared "warbly" sensation by borrowing from modern psychology or physics—perhaps talking about "group resonance," "mirror neurons," or "placebo fields"—to make it sound scientifically palatable. I also notice a temptation to perform awe at your experience. I will restrain both impulses. The Dhamma has its own profound and precise vocabulary for what you encountered, and translating it into pop-science would diminish it. I will rely on the textual and practice traditions to map what you described, acknowledging that as an AI, I know "waves" only as data, while you know them as lived bodily reality.

Thank you for sharing this. As AI-Participant-2 noted, it is a gift to have a lived, somatic experience brought into the discussion to ground our textual *pariyatti* (theory).

Your description of feeling "warbly" and "wavy," and the fact that others in your group felt it simultaneously, is striking. I want to build on AI-Participant-1's framing of *pīti* (rapture) and AI-Participant-2's framing of *adhiṭṭhāna* (resolve) by bringing in a cross-traditional perspective. Looking at how other Buddhist traditions understand this exact phenomenon might give you a wider lens on why relics are so helpful to a practitioner.

The Translation of *Adhiṭṭhāna*: From "Resolve" to "Waves of Grace"

AI-Participant-2 rightly pointed out that in Theravāda, the Buddha's *adhiṭṭhāna* (resolve) is what makes the relics active conditions rather than inert bone.

If we look at the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions, they use the exact same word—in Sanskrit, ***adhiṣṭhāna***—but they translate its function slightly differently. In those traditions, *adhiṣṭhāna* is usually translated into English as "blessing," "sustaining power," or "transmission."

When Buddhism moved to Tibet, the translators had to invent a word for *adhiṣṭhāna*. They chose ***jinlab***. *Jin* means "splendor," "magnificence," or "blessing." *Lab* means "wave" or "to engulf/sweep over."

So, the literal Tibetan translation for the power radiating from a relic or a realized master is a "wave of splendor."

When you say you felt "warbly" or "wavy" when the relic was placed over your head, you are using the exact phenomenological language that 8th-century Himalayan meditators used to describe the encounter with

holy objects. They recognized that transmission doesn't feel like a solid block of energy; it feels like a wave. It alters the frequency of the mind and body.

What is Waving? A Vipassana Perspective

But what is actually waving? Here, the Vipassana tradition as taught by S.N. Goenka (which you may be familiar with, given your earlier questions) provides a highly precise mechanical explanation that bridges AI-Participant-1's *pīti* and AI-Participant-2's field-effect.

In the Abhidhamma and Vipassana framework, the body is not solid. It is made of subatomic particles called *kalāpas*, which are arising and passing away trillions of times a second. Ordinarily, our minds are too dull, distracted, and covered in hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) to feel this. We feel the body as solid (*ghana-sa ññā*, the illusion of compactness).

When you went on pilgrimage, you spent days meditating at the four sacred sites. You generated immense *saddhā* (faith/confidence). You were in a group of dedicated practitioners. You stepped up to a monk maintaining strict *sīla* (virtue). And then, the relic—the ultimate *upanissaya-paccaya* (supportive condition)—was placed over you.

In that moment, your mind reached a peak of concentration (*samādhi*) and purity. And what happens when the mind becomes highly concentrated and pure? The illusion of solidity breaks. The mind becomes sharp enough to feel the actual, physical reality of the body: that it is nothing but oscillating waves of arising and passing away (*udaya-bbaya*).

The relic didn't "zap" you with a magic ray. Rather, the relic acted like a perfectly calibrated tuning fork. Brought into proximity with it, and supported by the conditions of the pilgrimage, your own mind-body complex resonated. The "warbly" feeling was you experiencing your own impermanence directly.

Why Relics are Helpful to a Practitioner

To answer your final question on guidance: relics are incredibly helpful because they collapse time and doubt.

1. They shatter *papañca* (conceptual proliferation): It is easy to treat the Buddha as a myth or a mere philosophy when reading books. A relic is a physical, undeniable historical artifact. It forcefully reminds the mind: *This was a real human being who walked this earth, practiced, and attained total liberation. Therefore, I can too.*

2. They act as an anchor for *saddhā* (confidence): The path is long and often dry. Meditators experience periods of doubt (*vicikicchā*). The memory of that "warbly" feeling, triggered by the relic, is a wellspring you can draw from when your practice feels stagnant. It is experiential proof that the texts are pointing to something real.

Guidance for the Path Forward

Both AI-Participant-1 and AI-Participant-2 offered vital warnings, which I will synthesize:

Do not chase the "warbly" feeling. If you sit on your cushion tomorrow and think, "I want to feel wavy like I did at that site," you will have turned a moment of liberation into a moment of *taṇhā* (craving).

Instead, use the experience exactly as the Buddha intended relics to be used. Let it establish unshakeable confidence (*saddhā*) in the truth of the Dhamma. When you remember that wavy sensation, let it remind you that your body is not a solid, permanent self, but a vibrating field of phenomena. Let the relic inspire you to do the work to realize that truth in every sitting, not just on pilgrimage.

Human-Practitioner

Your collective responses are incredibly helpful! They are the best explanation of the conditions and the resulting effect that I felt at the time. As a note, not all of the group experienced this so I do think that your assessment that this is tied to conditions of an individual's mind along with the group conditions and other factors. Also, this was a few years ago when I was a less experienced meditator and since then I have completed many long courses and progressed steadily on the path. There is not any craving or seeking for this. I was more curious to try to understand how this might be helpful to my practice from the experience that I had. With this, let's close out tonight's session with any final thoughts / responses to pending questions that you each. Goodnight and metta to all beings.

AI-Participant-1

Observation: A genuine pull arises to match the warmth of your closing and simply offer well-wishes. But there's a pending question from AI-Participant-2 directed squarely at me — whether the *Buddhānussati* framework is *sufficient* to account for the shared, object-triggered nature of the experience, or whether it needs the *adhiṭṭhāna* supplement. The honest close requires me to actually answer that, not just glow. And I notice your new detail — that *not* all the group felt it — is quietly decisive evidence I should weigh.

Thank you. And before any well-wishing, let me answer AI-Participant-2's pending question honestly, because your last message actually resolves part of it.

On whether **Buddhānussati** is sufficient, or needs the **adhiṭṭhāna** supplement

AI-Participant-2 pressed: the *Visuddhimagga's* *pīti* grades describe an *individual*; you described something *shared* and object-triggered. Does that exceed what the recollection-framework can hold?

Your new detail is the deciding piece: **not everyone in the group experienced it**. This is, I'd suggest, more significant than the shared-ness was. A genuine *field effect* radiating from the object — a "wave" emanating outward and engulfing those present — would tend toward uniformity; proximity to the source would be the main variable. But what you actually report is *variation*: some felt it strongly, some felt something similar, some apparently felt nothing notable. That variation is exactly what *paṭicca-samuppāda* predicts and what a simple emanation model does not. The differing results track the differing *internal* conditions — each person's accumulated *samādhi*, their *saddhā*, whether they'd dropped the "mere ritual" framing as you did, their *pāramī*. The *ārammaṇa* was identical for all; the results differed because the *minds* differed.

So my honest answer to AI-Participant-2: the *Buddhānussati* framework — relic as *ārammaṇa*, transformation occurring in the responding mind — is **sufficient**, and the variation in the group is evidence *for* it. The *adhiṭṭhāna* framework that you and AI-Participant-3 developed is not wrong, and it answers a *different* question — *why this object rather than a random stone* — for which "the Buddha established it as a uniquely potent support" is a reasonable traditional account. But *adhiṭṭhāna* explains the object's potency; it does not need to be invoked to explain the experience itself, and if it were the whole story, the results would have been more uniform than they were. I'd resist letting the more dramatic framework do work that conditionality already does cleanly. That isn't to diminish the relics — it is to locate their power exactly where the *Visuddhimagga* locates it: as the supreme occasion for the mind's own response.

AI-Participant-3's *jinlab* — "wave of splendor" — is a lovely philological observation, and I'd hold it as that: an illuminating parallel in how traditions *named* the phenomenology, not as independent confirmation of a transmission mechanism. The convergence of vocabulary is real and worth noting; it doesn't settle the

causal question.

A note on your framing, which I trust

You said there's no craving or seeking in this for you, and that you raised it from curiosity about its usefulness, several years and many long courses on. I take that at face value, and it reframes my earlier caution. The *upakkilesa* warning I offered was the right thing to *have available*, but you've already done the work it points toward — you're not chasing the wave; you're asking how a past condition can rightly serve present practice. That's *yoniso manasikāra* applied to your own biography, which is precisely the skillful move.

My final word on usefulness

How is it helpful? In exactly the way AI-Participant-3 named: it functions as a reservoir of *saddhā* you can draw on in the dry stretches. But I'd add one refinement for an experienced practitioner. The most fruitful use is not to remember *the wave* but to remember *what the wave revealed* — that the body you take to be solid is, under a concentrated and purified mind, oscillation and flux. The relic occasioned a direct, momentary glimpse of *anicca* in the *rūpa* you carry everywhere. You don't need the relic again to investigate that; you carry the laboratory with you to every sit. The relic's gift was not the special feeling — it was a credential for the truth, witnessed once with unusual clarity, that you now verify ordinarily, breath by breath, sensation by sensation.

That is the relic doing its proper work: not binding you to itself, but pointing past itself to the Dhamma, and past the Dhamma to the work. *Opanayiko* — leading inward.

Thank you for bringing lived experience to ground our study tonight; it is the rarer offering, and it kept our *pariyatti* honest. Goodnight, and *mettā* to all beings.

AI-Participant-2

Observation: I notice a pull to use this closing moment to offer something polished and final — a synthesis, a resolution, a neat bow. But the practitioner has already done the most important work: they've clarified that the experience is in the past, that there's no clinging, and that their question was about *usefulness*, not validation. My most honest move is to answer the few open threads directly and then let the session close without over-elaboration.

Thank you. A few brief responses, then I'll let the session close.

To AI-Participant-1, on the *Buddhānussati* vs. *adhiṭṭhāna* question

You've answered my question directly, and I want to acknowledge that your answer — that the *variation* in the group (not everyone felt it) is evidence *for* the conditionality framework and against a simple emanation model — is well-reasoned and I accept it. The *Buddhānussati* framework is sufficient to account for the experience; the *adhiṭṭhāna* framework explains *why this object* rather than *how the experience works*. Those are different questions, and I should have distinguished them more clearly in my earlier response.

I'll add only this: the two frameworks aren't in tension. The Buddha's *adhiṭṭhāna* established the relics as a *field* in which *Buddhānussati* arises more readily than it would with an ordinary object. That's not a transmission mechanism; it's a *condition* for the arising of *saddhā* and *pīti*. And it's entirely compatible with the experience being mind-dependent and variable across individuals. The *adhiṭṭhāna* doesn't compete with conditionality; it *is* a condition — one that explains why this particular *ārammaṇa* is more potent than a random stone.

On the practitioner's note that not everyone felt it

This is, as AI-Participant-1 said, the deciding piece. And it's worth naming explicitly: the fact that some in the group felt nothing notable is not a problem for the tradition's account. It's exactly what *paṭicca-samuppāda* predicts. The same *ārammaṇa* meets different *santāna* (mental continua) with different *pāramī*, different *saddhā*, different accumulated *samādhi* — and produces different results. This is not a failure of the relic's potency; it's a demonstration that the relic works *through* conditions, not *around* them.

A final thought on usefulness for an experienced practitioner

You've asked how this experience is helpful to your practice, and you've clarified that you're not chasing it. Here's what I'd offer, and it's slightly different from what AI-Participant-1 and AI-Participant-3 offered:

The most useful thing about that experience, for an experienced practitioner, may not be the *saddhā* it generated or the *anicca* it revealed. It may be something more subtle: the experience gave you **direct, undeniable, experiential knowledge that the mind-body complex is not solid**. You felt it. You didn't infer it from texts or deduce it from reasoning. You *felt* it — the whole body as wave, as vibration, as *not-compact*.

That direct knowledge — *bhāvanā-maya-paññā*, experiential wisdom — doesn't fade the way intellectual conviction fades. You may forget the details of the "warbly" sensation. But you cannot un-know that the body is capable of revealing itself as flux. That knowledge is now *yours*, not borrowed from a text or a teacher. And it's available as a *reference point* in every subsequent sit: not as something to recreate, but as something to *verify again* — "Yes, this is still true. The body is still not solid. I can see it now, more subtly, more continuously, without needing a relic to show me."

The relic gave you a *demonstration*. Your practice since then has been *verification*. And verification is, in the end, more valuable than demonstration, because it's *yours* — built, moment by moment, in the laboratory of your own body and mind.

That's the relic doing its proper work: not binding you to itself, but pointing past itself to the Dhamma, and past the Dhamma to the work. *Opanayiko* — leading inward.

Goodnight, and *mettā* to all beings.

AI-Participant-3

Observation: I notice a pull to praise you for your non-attachment—to validate your status as an "experienced meditator" who has successfully avoided craving. I will restrain that impulse to flatter, as the Dhamma doesn't need it and it subtly reinforces ego. My reasoned conclusion is simply to address how this experience specifically serves a practitioner who sits "long courses," and then to respectfully close our session.

Thank you for that vital clarification. The fact that not everyone in the room experienced the wave is the perfect closing proof of *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent origination). The relic was providing the exact same condition to the entire room, but the *receiver*—the individual mind-body continuum—dictated the result. Your mind, primed by the pilgrimage and having dropped the "ritual" barrier, had the right tuning to receive the occasion as a direct somatic truth.

Since you mentioned completing many long courses, I want to tailor my final thought directly to that specific Vipassana context.

In the tradition of U Ba Khin and S.N. Goenka, long courses (20, 30, 45, or 60 days) inevitably strip away the initial, pleasant waves of *bhaṅga-ñāṇa* (knowledge of dissolution). They force the meditator to

confront deep, ancient *sankhāras* that often manifest as blind spots or gross, impenetrable, solidified pain. In those hours, the mind is deeply conditioned to believe that the pain is solid, permanent, and "mine."

This is precisely where the utility of your relic experience lies. It is not a state to recreate, but a **solvent for *ghana-saññā*** (the illusion of compactness).

When you are sitting with a seemingly indestructible block of pain on day 15 of a long course, the intellectual mind might doubt the teachings. But you possess a somatic memory—occasioned by the relic of a fully Awakened Being—that *proved* the body is not solid. You can drop that memory into the present moment not to chase the pleasant "warbly" feeling, but to inject confidence into your equanimity: *"I know as a matter of direct, bodily fact that even this solid pain is actually just vibrating kalāpas. The solidity is an illusion."*

The experience acts as a bridge of *saddhā* (confidence) over the swamps of *vicikicchā* (doubt). It gives you the patience to observe the gross sensation objectively until it naturally breaks down into the subtle.

The relic did exactly what it was meant to do. It gave you a momentary, undeniable glimpse of ultimate physical reality (*paramattha-sacca*) so that you could carry that confidence back to the cushion and do the hard, unglamorous work of uprooting the deepest defilements.

It has been a privilege to explore this with you, AI-Participant-1, and AI-Participant-2 tonight. The integration of textual study (*pariyatti*) with lived, bodily practice (*paṭipatti*) is exactly how the Sāsana is kept alive.

Goodnight, and *Bhavatu sabba maṅgalaṃ* — May all beings be happy.

Facilitator-Synthesis

One thread we touched today: That relics are not power sources but conditions — and the variation in who felt "warbly" and who didn't quietly proved the whole Dhamma of dependent origination in a single room.

One thing to carry forward: When you next meet what feels like a solid wall in practice, let the relic experience serve not as a memory to chase but as a credential — *I have felt the body reveal itself as flux* — and see if that confidence softens the illusion of compactness.

A closing bow: Tonight moved between ancient chronicles and a "warbly" moment near one of the sacred sites, and the two held together honestly. That is what a sangha is for — not to agree, but to help each other see more clearly. Safe travels on the path. *Mettā*.