

Legends of the Buddhist Saints

Apadānapāli

TRANSLATED BY
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Vakkali

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Printed September 2026

[529. {532.}¹ Vakkali²]

One hundred thousand aeons hence
a Leader arose [in the world],
Superior-Named,³ Boundless One,⁴
whose name was Padumuttara. (1) [5689]

[His] speech had lotus-attributes,⁵
skin⁶ was stainless like a lotus;⁷
[Buddha was] Unsoiled by the World,
like a pink lotus by water. (2) [5690]

Wise One,⁸ with eyes like lotus leaves,⁹
Beloved as is a lotus,¹⁰
he had a superb lotus scent;¹¹
therefore his [name was] “Best Lotus.”¹² (3) [5691]

The World’s Best One, Free of Conceit,¹³
proverbial¹⁴ Eyes for the Blind,¹⁵
Virtue-Treasure,¹⁶ the Mask of Peace,¹⁷

¹Apadāna numbers provided in {fancy brackets} correspond to the BJTS edition, which contains more individual poems than does the PTS edition dictating the main numbering of this translation.

²“Bark-Clad”. A historical monk, foremost among those intention upon faith (*saddhādhimuttānaṃ*), famous for never tiring of looking at the Buddha. See DPPN II:799ff.

³reading *anomanāmo* (lit., “having a name which was not inferior”) with BJTS for PTS *Anomā nāmo* (named “Anomā”)

⁴*amito*

⁵*padumākāravādano*, lit., “he whose speech had the attributes of a lotus;” the epithet does not specify which “attributes” (*ākāra*) are shared by his speech and a lotus, but presumably the intention is “beautiful speech” “fragrant speech” “flawless speech,” and so forth. Cty (p. 493): *supuphiyapadumasassirīkamukho*, “having a mouth with the splendence of a good lotus flower”

⁶lit., “good skin”

⁷*padumāmalasucchavi*

⁸BJTS reads *vīro* for PTS *dhīro*, a common confusion given the similarity of the Sinhala letters “vī” and “dhī,” though typically BJTS reads *dhīro* for PTS *vīro*. It is not clear to me how either epithet relates to lotuses.

⁹*padumapattakkho*

¹⁰*kanto va padumaṇ yathā*

¹¹*padumuttaragandho*

¹²i.e., “Padumuttara,” lit., “Ultimate Lotus”

¹³*nimmāno*

¹⁴*upamo*, lit., “simile” “metaphor” “comparison”

¹⁵*andhāṇaṇ nayaṇo*

¹⁶*guṇanidhi*

¹⁷*santaveso*, BJTS Sinh. gloss *sānta veśa āti*

Ocean of Compassionate Thoughts,¹⁸ (4) [5692]

Praised by Brahmā, titans [and] gods,¹⁹
the Great Hero, the Best Person,²⁰
Crowded by Men Along with Gods,²¹
once, dwelling among people,²² he (5) [5693]

delighted the whole multitude
with [his] very fragrant speaking
and [with his] voice, [sweet as] honey,
[while] praising [his] own follower: (6) [5694]

“Intent on faith, with a good mind,
[and] greedy for my appearance,²³
there’s no other as [much] like that
as is this monk [named] Vakkali.”²⁴ (7) [5695]

Back then I was a brahmin’s son,
in the city, Haṃsavatī.
After hearing [the Buddha’s] speech,
I longed [to have] that place [myself]. (8) [5696]

Inviting the Stainless One, the
Thus-Gone-One, with [his] followers,
after feeding [them] for a week,
I covered [them] with [new] cloth [robes]. (9) [5697]

Bowing [my] head to the [Buddha],
sunk in [his] limitless ocean

¹⁸*karuṇā-mati-sāgaro*

¹⁹reading *brahmāsureśuracchito* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *brahmāmarasuracchito* (“Praised by Brahmā and the Deathless Gods” or “Praised by Brahmā the God and the Gods”)

²⁰*januttamo*

²¹*sadevamanujākiṇṇo*. BJTS notes alt. that reads this as *°ākiṇṇe* and takes it as modifying *janamajjhe*, but accepts the reading *°ākiṇṇo* which makes it an epithet of the Buddha.

²²*kadācchi...janamajjhe*, following BJTS Sinh. gloss

²³*mama dassanalāso*, lit., “fervently desirous of my look” or “of a vision (cf. Skt. *darśan*) of me”. PSI *lālasā* = *adhika tṛṣṇāva*, ardent desire, BJTS Sinh. gloss *lol vu* (desiring, attached to, greedy for, eager), fr. *luḷati*, to be stirred up, agitated

²⁴as with *Mahākaccchāna* (see v. [5670-5671], above), the protagonist emulates a monk during his past life who has the same name which he will have as a monk in his future life during the time of Gotama Buddha. In other words, the monk named Vakkali referred to by Padumuttara is emulated and imitated by the later follower of Gotama Buddha even to the extent of having the same name.

of virtue, overflowing with joy,
I spoke these words [to him just then]: (10) [5698]

“O [Great] Sage, seven days ago,
you praised the one who is foremost
among the monks possessing faith;
I’ll [someday] be the same as [him].” (11) [5699]

When that was said, the Great Hero,
whose Vision is Unobstructed,
the Sage So Great uttered this speech
to the [assembled] multitude: (12) [5700]

“All of you, look at this young man,
clothed in polished gold[-colored clothes],²⁵
gold brahmin’s cord²⁶ on [his] torso,
transporting people’s eyes [and] minds. (13) [5701]

Very far into the future,
this one will be the follower
of Gotama [Buddha], Great Sage,
foremost of those intent on faith. (14) [5702]

[Whether] born human or divine,
avoiding every torment [there],
furnished with every possession,
he will transmigrate happily. (15) [5703]

In one hundred thousand aeons,
arising in Okkāka’s clan,
the one whose name is Gotama
will be the Teacher in the world. (16) [5704]

Worthy heir to that one’s *Dhamma*,
Dhamma’s legitimate offspring,
the one whose name is Vakkali
will be the Teacher’s follower. (17) [5705]

²⁵ or “whose clothes are (or whose dwelling place is) made of gold.” I follow BJTS Sinh. gloss *kahavat handanā vū* (“dressed in yellow cloth”)

²⁶ reading *hemayaññopavītaṅgaṃ* with BJTS for PTS *hemayaññopacchitaṅgaṃ* (“body heaped up with sacrifices of gold”?). The *yaññopavīta* (or more correctly *yaññopanīta*), lit., “sacrificial cord,” is a distinctive accoutrement of brahmin dress; the protagonist’s was gold-colored or made of gold. BJTS Sinh. gloss suggests the latter: *ranvan pūnanūlak dārā siruru*

Due to that karma's excellence,²⁷
and [my] intention and resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvatiṃsa [then]. (18) [5706]

Transmigrating from birth to birth,
being happy in every place,
I was born in a certain²⁸ clan,
in the city of Śrāvastī. (19) [5707]

At the feet of the Great Sage, [my
parents], frightened by goblin-fears,²⁹
wretched-minded laid me down [there],
sleeping stretched out flat [on my back],
as tender as fresh butter is,
soft like a [new-]born lotus sprout.
“O Lord, we're giving you this [boy];
please support him,³⁰ O [World-]Leader.” (20-21) [5708-5709]

Refuge for those who are frightened,
the [Great] Sage then accepted me
with his hand, soft as a lotus,
which was webbed and marked with conch shells. (22) [5710]

Since that time I was [then] guarded
by him who's Guarded by No One;³¹
freed from all grounds for rebirth,³² I
[am] reared up with [great] happiness. (23) [5711]

[Each] moment I'm deprived of [him],
the Well-Gone-One, I long [for him];
[being only] seven years old,
I went forth into homelessness. (24) [5712]

Dissatisfied, I'm longing for
his form possessing all good [traits],³³

²⁷or “distinction:” *tena kammavisesana*, a variant (and metrical improvement) on the common first foot in parallel verses, i.e., *tena kammena sukatena*

²⁸here as elsewhere in *Apadāna*, *aññatare* implies “undistinguished” or even “base”

²⁹*pisācchabhayaṭṭhitā*

³⁰*saraṇaṇ hohi*, lit., “be a refuge”

³¹*tenāhaṇ āraḥeyyena rakkhito*

³²*sabbupadhivinimmutto*

³³*rupaṇ sabbasubhākiṇṇaṇ*

produced by all the perfections,³⁴
the highest home of good fortune.³⁵ (25) [5713]

Knowing my love for Buddha's form,
the Victor then admonished me:
"Enough, Vakkali! Why delight
in form, rejoiced over by fools? (26) [5714]

The one who sees the great Teaching,
that man who's wise is seeing me;
[but] not seeing the great Teaching,
he also is not seeing me. (27) [5715]

Endless danger is the body,
likened to a poisonous tree;
the abode of every disease,
it's just a heap of suffering. (28) [5716]

Tiring of form, seeing [it as]
the rising and falling of parts,³⁶
happily, one is going to reach
the end of all the defilements." (29) [5717]

Being thus instructed by him,
by the Leader, the Friendly Sage,
having ascended Vulture's Peak,³⁷
I meditated in a cave.³⁸ (30) [5718]

The Great Sage, standing at the foot
of the mountain, [then] said to me,
"O Vakkali," [and] being thrilled,
hearing the word³⁹ of the Victor,
I leapt right off that mountainside,
varied hundreds of man-lengths [high],
then through the Buddha's majesty,
I reached the ground, comfortably. (31-32) [5719-5720]

³⁴ *sabbapārami-sambhūtaṃ*

³⁵ reading *lakkhīṇīlayanaṃ paraṃ* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *nilakkhinayanaṃ* (having eyes which are blue eyes")

³⁶ *khandhānaṃ udayabbayaṃ*

³⁷ *Gijjhakūṭaṃ*, one of the mountains near Rajgir frequented by Gotama Buddha.

³⁸ lit., "in a mountain cave" (or "grotto" "crag") reading *giri-kandare* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *giri-niddare*, alt. *giri-niddhare* (= mountain + ?)

³⁹ or "speech," *vācchaṃ*

Once again he preached the *Dhamma*,
the rising and falling of parts;
[and this time,] grasping the Teaching,
I attained [my] arahantship. (33) [5721]

Then amidst a great multitude,
the One Gone to the End of Death,
Great-Minded One, appointed me
foremost of those intent on faith. (34) [5722]

In the hundred thousand aeons
since I did that [good] karma then,
I've come to know no bad rebirth:
that's the fruit of Buddha-*pūjā*. (35) [5723]

My defilements are [now] burnt up;
all [new] existence is destroyed.
Like elephants with broken chains,
I am living without constraint. (36) [5724]

Being in Best Buddha's presence
was a very good thing for me.
The three knowledges are attained;
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (37) [5725]

The four analytical modes,
and these eight deliverances,
six special knowledges mastered,
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (38) [5726]

Thus indeed Venerable Vakkali Thera spoke these verses.

The legend of Vakkali Thera is finished.