

Legends of the Buddhist Saints

Apadānapāli

TRANSLATED BY
JONATHAN S. WALTERS,
WHITMAN COLLEGE, 2017

Sumedhā

Jonathan S. Walters

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Praise Him, the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully Complete Buddha¹

The Legends of the Therīs

Now listen to the legends of the Therīs:²

Sumedhā Chapter, the First

[1. Sumedhā³]

When Koṇāgamana, Blessed One, was in his new dwelling, monastic ashram,⁴ [we] who were three female friends, [then] donated a monastery.⁵ (1) [1]

Ten times [and then] a hundred times, and then a hundred hundred times,⁶ we were reborn among the gods; who could tell the human rebirths? (2) [2]

Among gods we had vast power; who could tell the human [power]? Chief queen of a seven-gemmer,⁷ I was⁸ the gem of a woman. (3) [3]

¹BJTS places the *namaskāra* after the title *Therī-apadāna*.

²this command (in the second person imperative plural) is omitted by BJTS even though it gives the parallel commands in verse (1) [5] of *Buddha-apadāna* and at the beginning of *Paccchekabuddha-apadāna* and *Thera-apadāna*. The cty omits the Therīs altogether, despite having defined *Apadāna*, in its *nidāna*, as constituted by Buddha, Paccchekabuddha, Thera and Therī sections.

³“Very Wise Woman”

⁴lit., “a hermitage for the Assembly,” “a monastic hermitage”. These two feet are oddly out of meter with the rest of this text (and nearly the whole *Apadāna*); rather than eight syllables, the first foot contains nine, and the second foot contains eleven syllables, as though the author decided half-way through the first verse to refrain from adopting a more elegant meter in favor of matching the meter in what had come before, with very few exceptions, in the parallel *Thera-apadāna*. But cf notes to *Therāpadāna* verses such as [288], [359] and [362] for exceptions to this statement (though not an exact meter-match).

⁵lit., “gave a *vihāra-dāna* [=monastery-gift]”.

⁶BJTS reads a 14-syllable first foot and an 8-syllable second one, lit., “ten times, hundred times, thousand times, hundred times hundred times”. It also reads *mānuse* for *mānuse* (PTS) to produce a nine-syllable fourth foot. Both texts provide nine-syllable first, third and fourth feet in the following verse (3), before finally settling in to the standard 8-8-8-8. See n. 4 above. Are these problems with the transmission, or experiments with (or heedlessness about) meter?

⁷here the possession of “seven gems” (*sattaratana*) by a wheel-turning (*cchakkavatti*) monarch has become a free-standing designation of the latter (perhaps better translated as “chief queen of a possessor of the seven gems” [or, metrically, “a seven-gem-holder’s chief queen”]). Note that she herself is one of those seven gems, as stated in the next foot.

⁸reading *āsiṃ* (BJTS) for *bhaviṇ* (PTS).

Here with wholesome [karma] heaped up,⁹ [we're] people from successful clans: Dhanañjānī and Khemā too, along with me, the women three. (4) [4]

Making that hermitage well-made, with every part [of it] adorned, delighted we donated [it] to the Buddha-led Assembly.¹⁰ (5) [5]

In whichever place I'm reborn, in accordance with¹¹ that karma, among the gods and humans too, I attain the foremost station. (6) [6]

In this [present] lucky aeon Brahma's Kinsman, Greatly Famed One, [the Buddha] known as Kassapa¹² was born, the Best of Debaters. (7) [7]

The attendant of the Great Sage was the ruler of men back then, the king of Kāsi, named Kiki, in Benares, greatest city. (8) [8]

That [ruler] had seven daughters, royal maidens raised in comfort. Fond of waiting on the Buddha, they practiced the religious life.¹³ (9) [9]

Being the ally of those [girls], steadfast in the moral precepts, giving gifts [very] carefully, I practiced vows while in the house. (10) [10]

Due to that karma done very well, with intention and [firm] resolve, discarding [my] human body, I went to Tāvātimsa [then]. (11) [11]

Fallen thence, I went to Yāma,¹⁴ [and] then I went to Tusitā, and then to Nimmānarati, and then Vāsavatti City. (12) [12]

In whichever place I'm reborn, steadfast in [doing] good karma,¹⁵ I was fixed in the chief queen's place of the kings in all those [heavens]. (13) [13]

Fallen then into humanness, I was fixed in the chief queen's place of kings who turned the wheel [of law] and kings [commanding] large regions.¹⁶ (14) [14]

Having experienced happiness among gods and also humans, being com-

⁹ reading *sañcchitakusalā* (BJTS) for *sañcchitā kusalaṇ* (PTS), though they amount to the same thing.

¹⁰ lit., "to the Assembly (*saṅgha*, the monks' Assembly) headed up by the Buddha.

¹¹ reading *vāhasā* (BJTS) for *vahasā* (PTS).

¹² BJTS reads "Named Kassapa according to his Lineage (*gottena*)"

¹³ lit., "they fared according to the Brahma-faring," i.e., they led a celibate (*brahmacchariya*) existence.

¹⁴ Yāma, Tusita, Nimmānarati and Vāsavatti are all classes of deities = heavens in the Buddhist cosmology.

¹⁵ lit., "meritorious (*puñña*) karma".

¹⁶ *maṇḍalināñ ccha rājūnaṃ*, lit., "of kings who [ruled] circles [of kings]"

fortable everywhere, I traveled on¹⁷ through several births. (15) [15]

That [gift's]¹⁸ the reason, that's the cause, root, patience for the dispensation, the first identification,¹⁹ nirvana of this *Dhamma*-lover. (16) [16]²⁰

My defilements are [now] burnt up; all [new] existence is destroyed. Like elephants with broken chains, I am living without constraint. (17) [17]

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! (18) [18]

The four analytical modes, and these eight deliverances, six special knowledges mastered, [I have] done what the Buddha taught! (19) [19]

Thus indeed Venerable²¹ Bhikkhunī Sumedhā spoke these verses.

[The legend of Sumedhā Therī is finished.]²²

¹⁷or "I transmigrated," *saṃsāriṃ*.

¹⁸this follows the lead of the BJTS Sinhala gloss, which understands the string of "that" pronouns to refer to the foundational gift of a *vihāra* that led to the aforementioned bliss in heavenly and human states.

¹⁹*samodhānaṃ*, the term used in the *Jātaka* for the "identifications" the Buddha makes there between characters in the story and characters in his own present-day. Here, then, the claim seems to be that the gift of the *vihāra* is the first/earliest act of merit that Sumedhā is identified with/by. But I find this verse quite difficult, and this translation is at best provisional.

²⁰this verse has nine syllables in the second and fourth foot, rather than the expected eight, so I have translated accordingly.

²¹BJTS omits *āyasmā*.

²²PTS omits this concluding line from the present *apadāna* but includes it in the subsequent ones. BJTS reading of the concluding line numbers each *apadāna* according to its place in the ten-poem "chapter," hence this one reads, "The legend of Sumedhā Therī, the first". I follow the PTS style.