

Legends of the Buddhist Saints

Apadānapāli

TRANSLATED BY
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Uppalavaṇṇā

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[19. Uppalavaṇṇā¹]

The nun [named] Uppalavaṇṇā,
master of the superpowers,
having worshipped the Teacher's feet,
spoke these words [to him at that time:] (1) [511]

"Birth and rebirth² crossed beyond,
I've attained the unshaking state.
All suffering's destroyed by me;
I'm declaring [it,] O Great Sage. (2) [512]

Throughout the multitudes³ who are
pleased in Buddha's⁴ dispensation,
if I've wronged [some] people may they
forgive [it] facing⁵ the Victor. (3) [513]

Great Sage, I am declaring that
if there's [some] mistake [I've made,]
transmigrating in existence,
may you forgive that transgression." (4) [514]

"Show [your] superpowers to those
who practice my⁶ dispensation.
Cut off today the doubts throughout
the multitude, which is fourfold." (5) [515]

"Great Hero, I am your daughter.
O Wise One,⁸ O Effulgent One,⁹
I've done very difficult deeds,
difficult and numerous [too]. (6) [516]

¹"Blue Lotus-Colored," a historical nun, one of the two chief female followers and designated foremost among those nuns who possess the superpowers. See DPPN I: 418-421.

²or "transmigration," °saṃsāra

³or "retinue" "following" "group" "people"

⁴lit., "the Victor's"

⁵or "face-to-face with"

⁶this is the Buddha speaking, in response to Uppalavaṇṇā's request to be forgiven any mistakes

⁷cchatasso parisā, I assume the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, but it could also be cchatasso...kaṅkhā, fourfold doubt

⁸paññāvanta

⁹jutindhara

My [skin] is blue-lotus-colored;
by name I am named “Blue Lotus.”¹⁰
I’m your follower, Great Hero,
worshipping your feet, Eyeful One. (7) [517]

Rāhula¹¹ and I myself
due to our similar mindsets,
were born in the same conditions¹²
various hundred many [times]. (8) [518]

Rebirth is together [with him]
and after birth too, together.
[Now] in [our] final existence
both, [born in] varied¹³ conditions, (9) [519]

together: Rāhula’s [your] son;
I’m [your] daughter, named “Blue Lotus.”
See my superpowers, Hero;
I’ll show [my] strength to the Teacher.“ (10) [520]

She put the four great oceans down
into the palm of [her own] hand,
just like a youthful physician¹⁴
does oil destined for the bladder.¹⁵ (11) [521]

Tearing up earth, she put [it] down
into the palm of [her own] hand,

¹⁰*nāmena Uppalanāmikā*

¹¹the Buddha’s biological son

¹²*akasmīṇ sambhave*, lit., “in a single coming-to-be-with,” “in a single origin” “in a single production”. Rāhula and Uppalavaṇṇā were born in this present moment together to be (literal and figurative) son and (only figurative) daughter of the Buddha, that is brother and sister (only figuratively), having however experienced many previous lifetimes together — sometimes as literal brother and sister, or mother and son — in the *Jātaka* stories. For a mention of some of these, see DPPN I: 421. Because (as in the present birth) these “same origins” are not *always* familial/genealogical/literal, I have preserved the ambiguity of the Pāli (“being together”) in the translation, so the same word can be translated correspondingly in v. 519, below.

¹³reading *nānāsambhavā* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *nāmasambhavā*, (“Conditions in name” — to be read as “only figuratively” [??])

¹⁴*vejjo komārako*, “a juvenile doctor” or perhaps “a young/inexperienced doctor”? Or a pediatrician, i.e., “a doctor connected with juveniles”? It depends on/shapes the interpretation of this anyway ambiguous (to me) verse.

¹⁵*telāṇ vatthigataṇ c’eva*, i.e., administering an enema? Or *vatthigataṇ* as a second thing being handled (carefully, gingerly), not only oil but also that “gone to [or from?] the bladder”?

like a tender young boy¹⁶ picking
a [flower that's] full of color.¹⁷ (12) [522]

Her palm, [big] as the universe,¹⁸
covering [the world] from the top,
caused raindrops of various hues
to rain forth again and again. (13) [523]

Making earth into [a] mortar,
making Mount Meru [her] pestle,
as though a youthful grinding girl,
grinding¹⁹ grain [flour], [she made] gravel. (14) [524]

"I am the Best Buddha's daughter;
by name I am named "Blue Lotus."
A master of superpowers,
I practice your dispensation." (15) [525]

Making varied transformations,²⁰
showing them to the World's Leader,
announcing name and lineage,
I worship [your] feet, Eyeful One. (16) [526]

I've mastered the superpower
[called] the "divine ear" element.
I'm also a master, Great Sage,
of the knowledge in others' hearts. (17) [527]

I remember [my] former lives;
[my] "divine eye" is purified.
All the defilements are destroyed;
[I] will not be reborn again. (18) [528]

In meaning and in the Teaching,
etymology and preaching,
my knowledge is vast²¹ and flawless,
through the Great Sage's majesty. (19) [529]

¹⁶reading *luñcchi komārako yuvā* with BJTS for PTS *luñcchiko mārako yuvā* ("plucky devilish youth"?)

¹⁷or is *cchittapunna* the name of a flower, i.e., "picks a *cchittapunna* flower"

¹⁸*cchakkavālasamaṇ*, lit., "the same as the ring of cosmic mountains surrounding the universe"

¹⁹lit., "doing" "making"

²⁰*nānāvīkubbanāṇ*

²¹lit., "pure" (*suddhaṇ*)

In the presence and the absence²²
of the Chief Victors, formerly,
much service was performed by me
for the sake of you,²³ O Great Sage. (20) [530]

What good²⁴ karma was done by me,
formerly in existence, Sage;
[that] merit heaped up by me was
for the sake of you, Great Hero. (21) [531]

Avoiding²⁵ wrong behavior²⁶ [and]
the [nine] impossible places;²⁷
the ultimate life's my duty
for the sake of you, Great Hero. (22) [532]

I donated from my [own funds]
ten thousand ten millions²⁸ [in gold];
my [very] life was abandoned
for the sake of you, Great Hero." (23) [533]

Then all of them, greatly composed,
hands pressed together on [their] heads,
said, "Sister, how'd you make the effort
for such unmatched superpower?" [534]²⁹
One hundred thousand aeons hence

²²reading *sammukhā ccha parammukhā* with BJTS (and PTS alts.) for PTS *saṅkamante nidassitaṇ* ("pointed out when transmigrating"?)

²³that is, for the sake of meeting you, in order to be part of your future dispensation, cf. how contemporary Buddhists perform service in the hopes of meeting Maitreya or some even further-into-the-future Buddha.

²⁴or "wholesome": *kusalaṇ*

²⁵*vajjetvā*. Reading BJTS *parivajjenti* (also "avoiding" "abstaining from" "renouncing") for PTS *paripācchento* ("developing") in the subsequent foot (note both recensions differently present it as a nine-syllable foot), but anyway leaving it untranslated here, lit., "avoiding avoiding"

²⁶reading *anācchāraṇ* with BJTS for PTS *anāvaraṇ* ("not mean" = "noble things; PTS alt. *bahuṇ janaṇ*, "many people" [!])

²⁷*abhabba-ṭṭhāne*, the nine moral states or spheres of activity into which an arahant will not/cannot fall, D.iii.133 (and cf. D.iii.235 where only the first five appear as a set). This is *Pāsādika Sutta*, #29 of *Dīghanikāya*, section 26. The nine are: (1) cannot deliberately take the life of a living being (2) cannot steal (3) cannot have sexual intercourse (4) cannot deliberately lie (5) cannot hoard anything for his own indulgence (6) cannot act wrongly through attachments (7) cannot act wrongly through hatred (8) cannot act wrongly through folly (9) cannot act wrongly through fear

²⁸or "one hundred billion"

²⁹this verse does not appear in PTS. BJTS reads: *tadātisaṃhitā sabbā sirasāva katañ-jalī/avoc' ayye kathaṃ āsi atul'iddhiparakkamā//*

I was a cobra[-god] maiden,
known by the name of Vimala,³⁰
well-honored among the maidens. (24) [535]

The great cobra Mahoraga,³¹
pleased in Buddha's³² dispensation,
invited Padumuttara
of Great Power,³³ with followers. (25) [536]

Sounding musical instruments,
going out to meet the Sambuddha,
he made the Buddha's road ready³⁴ —
a pavilion made out of gems,
a palanquin made out of gems,
things to enjoy made out of gems,
strewn with sand that was [mixed with] gems,
adorned with flags [covered in] gems. (26-27) [537-538]

The World's Leader, surrounded by
the multitude, which is fourfold,
sat down on an excellent seat
there in Mahoraga's palace. (28) [539]

The cobra-king, greatly famed one,
gave excellent and excellent
food and drink, hard food [that's filling,]
soft food [to drink,] very costly. (29) [540]

Having eaten, having rinsed the
bowl completely, the Sambuddha
[then] made [an expression of] thanks
to [us,] the cobra[-god] maidens. (30) [541]

Discerning [what was in] my heart
and [my] mind which was fixed [on him,]
[taking] pleasure in the Teacher,
[when] the cobra maidens had seen
the one whose name was Best Lotus,

³⁰“Stainless”

³¹“great snake,” *mahā + urago*

³²*jina*°, lit., “the Victor's”

³³*mahātajan*, or “the Hot One”

³⁴reading *paṭiyādesi* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *paṭipādesi*, to impart, to offer, to present

Greatly Famed All-Knower³⁵ in bloom,
[that] Great Hero, at that moment,
showed a nun with superpowers. (31-32) [542-543]

That Buddhist nun, very skillful,
displayed diverse superpowers.
Thrilling with delight, [and] awe-struck,
I said this to [him,] the Teacher: (33) [544]

“I [too] saw the superpower
of this happy [Buddhist nun].³⁶
Just how, Hero, did she become
so skillful³⁷ in superpowers?” (34) [545]

“[This nun] with great powers is my
legitimate daughter, mouth-born;³⁸
she’s followed my instructions, thus³⁹
she’s so skilled⁴⁰ in superpowers.” (35) [546]

Hearing the words of the Buddha,
delighted indeed I aspired,
“I too shall become such a one,
so skillful in superpowers. (36) [547]

I am delighted, I’m happy;
in the not-yet-become future,
[my] supreme aspiration reached,
I will be like her, O Leader.” (37) [548]

Satisfying with food and drink⁴¹
the World’s Leader with Assembly,
on a palanquin made of gems,
within a shining pavilion, (38) [549]

I worshipped [him,] the World’s Leader,
[that] my color should be that of

³⁵reading *sabbaññūṃ* with BJTS for PTS *sabbañ ccha* (“all...and”)

³⁶reading *sumanāy’ itarāyapi* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *sumitaṇ itarāya pi* (“well-measured by the other to”), and following BJTS Sinhala gloss

³⁷reading *suvisāradā* with BJTS (and subsequent verses here) for PTS *ccha visāradā* (“and skillful”)

³⁸*orasāmukhato jātā*

³⁹lit., “and”

⁴⁰reading *suvisāradā* with BJTS for PTS *ccha visāradā*, as above

⁴¹reading *annapānena* with BJTS for PTS *mahājanena* (“with the great multitude”)

an *aruṇa*⁴² [type] blue lotus,
foremost flower of the cobras. (39) [550]

Due to that karma done very well,
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvātimsa [then]. (40) [551]

Fallen from there, being reborn
as a human being, I gave
a Self-Become [Lonely Buddha]
alms food covered with lotuses. (41) [552]

In the ninety-first aeon hence
the Leader known as Vipassi
arose, the One Good to Look At,⁴³
the One with Eyes for Everything. (42) [553]

Being a millionaire's daughter
in Benares, supreme city,
inviting [him,] the Sambuddha,
the World's Leader with Assembly, (43) [554]

after donating a very
large almsgiving to the Guide,⁴⁴ and
worshipping⁴⁵ with lotuses, I
wished through them for splendid color.⁴⁶ (44) [555]

In this [present] lucky aeon
Brahma's Kinsman, Greatly Famed One,
[the Buddha] known as Kassapa⁴⁷
was born, the Best of Debaters. (45) [556]

The attendant of the Great Sage
was the ruler of men back then,
the king of Kāsi, named Kiki,
in Benares, greatest city. (46) [557]

⁴²"sun"

⁴³*ccharunayano*

⁴⁴reading *vināyakaṃ* with BJTS (and PTS alts.) for PTS *vimissitaṃ* ("mixed")

⁴⁵lit., "doing *pūjā*"

⁴⁶reading *vaṇṇasobhaṃ* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *vaṇṇasettaṃ* ("white color"?)

⁴⁷BJTS reads "Named Kassapa according to his Lineage (*gottena*)"

I was that [king's] second daughter,
who was named Samaṇaguttā.⁴⁸
Hearing the Best Victor's Teaching,
I chose [to seek] ordination. (47) [558]

Our father did not permit it;
we [stayed] at home during that time,
comfortable⁴⁹ royal maidens
doing [our] practice with vigor
in virginal celibacy,
for twenty times a thousand years,
fond of waiting on the Buddha,
[the king's] seven joyful daughters. (48-49) [559-560]

Samaṇī, and Samaṇaguttā,⁵⁰
Bhikkhunī, Bhikkhadāyikā,
Dhammā, and also Sudhammā,
and seventh Saṅghadāyikā, (50) [561]

[now] I, and [the nun named] Khemā,
Paṭācchārā and Kuṇḍalā,⁵¹
Kisāgotamī, Dhammadinnā,⁵²
and Visākhā is the seventh. (51) [562]

Due to those karmas⁵³ done very well,
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvatiṃsa [then]. (52) [563]

Fallen from there, being reborn
as a human, in a great clan,

⁴⁸“Guarded Nun” “Protected Female Renouncer”

⁴⁹*sukhe ʔhitā*, lit., “remaining in comfort.” Pronounce all four syllables when chanting to keep the meter or, to chant as a three-syllable word, read “comfortable royal princesses”

⁵⁰I follow the original (in both recensions) in making this first foot a nine-syllable foot through the addition of the (superfluous) “and” (*ccha*). The comma amplifies its effect, to syncopate the verse such that the (respective, exact) parallelism of the following verse (in which, however, all four feet contain the expected eight syllables) becomes apparent.

⁵¹= Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesī

⁵²given the long names, this foot is unavoidably nine-syllables long, both in Pāli and in English

⁵³here the text (in both PTS and BJTS editions) substitutes *tehi kammehi* (plural instrumental) for the ordinary *tena kammēna* (singular instrumental) in this *Apadāna* stock phrase. Perhaps “good deeds” would be better here.

I gave an arahant a robe
of costly saffron-colored silk.⁵⁴ (53) [564]

Fallen from there, reborn among
brahmins⁵⁵ in Aritṭhapura,
daughter of Tirīṭavacchcha,
I was charming⁵⁶ Ummāganti.⁵⁷ (54) [565]

Fallen from there, I [was born] in
an undistinguished⁵⁸ rural⁵⁹ clan.
I was then engrossed in guarding
rice in a not-quite-ripened field. (55) [566]

Having seen a Lonely Buddha,
giving [him] five hundred grains of
roasted paddy,⁶⁰ lotus-covered,
I wished [to have] five hundred sons.⁶¹ (56) [567]

With those wishes⁶² having given
honey to [that] Self-Become One,
fallen from there I was reborn
in a lotus in the forest. (57) [568]

Being the Kāsi king's chief queen,
I was respected and worshipped.⁶³
I bore royal princes [for him,]
not one fewer than five hundred. (58) [569]

When [my sons] had become young men,⁶⁴
while sporting at [their] water sports,
seeing fallen lotus [petals,]

⁵⁴*pīta-maṭṭha-varaṇ dussaṇ*, BJTS (and PTS alt.) read *pītamaṭṭhaṇ varaṇ dussaṇ*

⁵⁵in a brahmin clan

⁵⁶*manohara*, lit., “carrying the mind away”

⁵⁷“Maddening” “Intoxicating”

⁵⁸*aññatare*, or “a certain”

⁵⁹*janapade*, lit., “in the country”

⁶⁰*lāja*

⁶¹BJTS reads *pañcchaputtasātāni pi* (“and also [my] five hundred sons”), in keeping with its variant reading of the first foot of the following verse

⁶²BJTS reads *te pi patthesuṇi* (“and they [the five hundred sons posited as already-existing in the BJTS variant of the prior verse] wished”) for PTS *tesu patthesu*, “with those wishes”

⁶³lit., “offered *pūjā*”

⁶⁴*yobbanāṇ patta*, lit., “attained youth,” “went through puberty”

they turned into⁶⁵ Lonely-Leaders.⁶⁶ [59] [570]

I was then grieved, being bereft
of those heroes who were [my] sons.⁶⁷
Fallen [from there], I was born in
a village near Isigili.⁶⁸ (60) [571]

When [I], Buddha-mother [reborn,]
then well-guarded myself,⁶⁹
was going carrying rice gruel,⁷⁰
having seen eight Lonely-Leaders
going to the village for alms,
I remembered [my former] sons.
Then a stream of milk spurted out
from me out of love for [my] sons. (61-62) [572-573]

And then I gave rice gruel to them,
[feeling] well-pleased by [my] own hands.
Fallen from there I was reborn
in “Joy” with the thirty[-three gods.] (63) [574]

Feeling⁷¹ [both] happiness and pain,
transmigrating from birth to birth,
my [very] life was abandoned
for the sake of you, Great Hero. (64) [575]

Thus suffering in varied forms,
various forms of happiness:
when [my] last rebirth was attained,
I’m born in Śrāvastī city,
in a wealthy millionaire’s clan,
comfortable, decorated,⁷²
glistening with various gems,
endowed with every sense-pleasure. (65-66) [576-577]

⁶⁵lit., “they were”

⁶⁶*pacchchekanāyakā*, i.e., Pacchchekabuddhas, Lonely Buddhas

⁶⁷*sutavirehi*. BJTS reads *sutavarehi* (“excellent sons”)

⁶⁸one of the five mountains surrounding Rajagaha (a.k.a. Giribajjapura, now Rajgir in Bihar, India), famous as the long-time home of five hundred Lonely Buddhas

⁶⁹*su-tānaka-sakaṇ*. BJTS reads

⁷⁰*yāguṇ*

⁷¹or “experiencing:” *anubhotvā*

⁷²*sukhite sajjite tathā*; when chanting pronounce “comfortable” as four syllables, or insert “and” to pronounce it as three syllables.

I was respected and worshipped,⁷³
revered, likewise [also] esteemed.
I achieved radiant beauty,
much-respected among the clans. (67) [578]

And I was very much desired,
through the good fortune of beauty,
desired by various hundreds
of millionaire's sons [living there]. (68) [579]

After abandoning [my] house,
I went forth into homelessness.
When eight months had not yet elapsed,
I attained the Four [Noble] Truths. (69) [580]

"With⁷⁴ superpowers creating
a chariot with four horses,
I will worship the feet of the
Buddha, World's Lord, Resplendent One." (70) [581]

"O nun, having approached a tree in full bloom,
you remain alone, at [that] *sāla* tree's roots.
You have no second in natural beauty.
Foolish one, aren't you afraid of wanton men?" (71) [582]⁷⁵

"Even if a hundred thousand wanton men
come to this place, should behave in such a way,
I would not be terrified, not a hair raised:
I'm not afraid of [you,] Death, when I'm alone. (72) [583]

I, this [nun] am disappearing;
I am hiding in your belly;
you do not see me, standing [here]
in the [spot] between [your] eyebrows. (73) [584]

⁷³lit., "offered *pūjā*"

⁷⁴this and the following five verses seem to be a dialogue between the nun and Death (*Māra*) or "the Evil One" (*Pāpimant*) personified; this first verse is thought by her, v. 71 is spoken by Death, v. 72-76 contain her response, addressed to him in the second person, while v. 77 suggests that the Buddha witnesses the scene.

⁷⁵this and the next verse are presented with feet of eleven syllables each in both PTS and BJTS and I translate accordingly. The present verse has 12 syllables in the first foot, which I take as a mistake (read *pupphitaggaṃ* for *supupphitaggaṃ*?).

⁷⁶*cchittasmiṃ vasibhūtasmiṃ*, lit., "when i became master of (or "over") [my own] mind"

Becoming master of [my] mind,⁷⁶
[I] developed⁷⁷ superpowers;
I'm liberated from all bonds:
I am not afraid of you, friend. (74) [585]

Sense pleasures are⁷⁸ swords [and] daggers;
the heaps⁷⁹ executioner's blocks.
I now dislike⁸⁰ the enjoyment
of sense-pleasures of which you spoke. (75) [586]

Everywhere, enjoyments are slain;
the mass of darkness is destroyed.
Know it like this, O evil one:
you have been killed, O end-maker." (76) [587]

The Victor, pleased by [my]⁸¹ virtue,
[then] placed me in that foremost place.
To⁸² the crowds⁸³ the Guide [announced] me
"best⁸⁴ of those⁸⁵ with superpowers." (77) [588]

The Teacher's been worshipped by me;
[I have] done what the Buddha taught.
The heavy load has been laid down,
the ties to existence severed. (78) [589]

The reason for which I went forth
from [my] home into homelessness —
I have [now] achieved that purpose:
destruction of all the fetters. (79) [590]

By the moment they're bringing [me]
monastic robes and begging bowls,

⁷⁷*subhāvitā*, lit., "[by me] well-developed" or "well-cultivated" "well-meditated"

⁷⁸*sattisūlūpamā kāmā*, lit., "swords [and] daggers are like (or "are similes for") sense pleasures"

⁷⁹*khandhā pi adhikuṭṭanā*, lit., "even the aggregates (or dimensions [of personal existence: name and form, sensation, perception, configuration and consciousness])"

⁸⁰lit., "is now disliked by me"

⁸¹lit., "in the" "in that"

⁸²lit., "among"

⁸³or assemblies (even four parts of the Assembly), multitudes, retinues

⁸⁴*setṭhan*, etymologically related to her designation "millionaire;" BJTS, more typical of the whole work, reads *aggam*, "[she is] foremost"

⁸⁵*matīnaṃ*, lit., "of those (females) endowed"

[all] the requisites and lodgings,
[in] the thousands from everywhere. (80) [591]

My defilements are [now] burnt up;
all [new] existence is destroyed.
Like elephants with broken chains,
I am living without constraint. (81) [592]

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! (82) [593]

The four analytical modes,
and these eight deliverances,
six special knowledges mastered,
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (83) [594]

Thus indeed Bhikkhunī Uppalavaṇṇā spoke these verses.
The legend of Uppalavaṇṇā Therī is finished.