

Legends of the Buddhist Saints

Apadānapāli

TRANSLATED BY
JONATHAN S. WALTERS,
WHITMAN COLLEGE, 2017

Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā

Jonathan S. Walters

Copyright © 2026 Jonathan S. Walters.

PUBLISHED BY JONATHAN S. WALTERS AND WHITMAN COLLEGE

<https://apadanatranslation.com>

Licensed under the Attribution, Non-Commercial, Share Alike (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).

Printed September 2026

Kuṇḍalakesā Chapter, the Third

[21. Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā¹]

The Victor, Padumuttara,
was a Master of Everything.
[That] Leader arose in the world
one hundred thousand aeons hence. (1) [639]

I was born in Haṃsavatī,
in a clan of millionaires then,
glistening with various gems,
endowed with supreme happiness. (2) [640]

Having approached that Great Hero,
I heard [him] preaching the *Dhamma*.
Then, pleasure born [in my heart,] I
approached the Victor for refuge. (3) [641]

Then the Great Compassionate One,
the Leader, Padumuttara,
fixed a nun² in the foremost [place]³
of those with quick intuition.⁴ (4) [642]

Hearing that, being overjoyed,
having given the Great Sage alms,
bowing [my] head down at [his] feet
I aspired to [attain] that place. (5) [643]

The Great Hero approved [of that]:
“Lucky one,⁵ there will be success
in everything for which you wish.
Be happy, [you should feel] appeased. (6) [644]

In one hundred thousand aeons,
arising in Okkāka’s clan,
the one whose name is Gotama
will be the Teacher in the world. (7) [645]

¹“Lucky one with Tangled Hair,” a historical nun, remembered as foremost among those nuns with quick intuition

²*bhikkhuniṇ subhaṇ*, lit., “a Buddhist nun who was pure” (or “who was good”)

³*aggatte ṭhapesi*, lit., “fixed in foremostness”

⁴*khippābhiññānam*

⁵“Bhaddā” is her name as well as term of endearment (which is also used for those whose name it is not, e.g. *Khemāpadāna*, v. 84 [498], above)

Worthy heir to that one's *Dhamma*,
Dhamma's legitimate offspring,
named Bhaddākuṇḍalakesā
you'll⁶ be the Teacher's follower." (8) [646]

Due to that karma done very well,
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvatiṃsa [then]. (9) [647]

Fallen thence, I went to Yāma,⁷
[and] then I went to Tusita,
and then to Nimmānarati,⁸
and then Vāsavatti city. (10) [648]

In whichever place I'm reborn,
in accordance with that karma,
everyplace I was made chief queen
of [the gods who were] the kings [there]. (11) [649]

Fallen thence, in the human state,
[everyplace] I was made chief queen
of kings who turn the wheel [of law],
and [powerful] regional kings. (12) [650]

Having experienced success,
among gods as well as humans,
becoming happy everywhere,
I transmigrated for aeons.⁹ (13) [651]

In this [present] lucky aeon,
Brahma's Kinsman, Greatly Famed One,
[the Buddha] known as Kassapa¹⁰
was born, the Best of Debaters. (14) [652]

The attendant of the Great Sage
was the ruler of men back then,
the king of Kāsi, named Kiki,
in Benares, greatest city. (15) [653]

⁶reading *hessasi* with BJTS for PTS *hessati* ("she will be")

⁷Yāma, Tusita, Nimmānarati and Vāsavatti are all heavens in the Buddhist cosmology.

⁸BJTS reads *nimmānaratiṃ*

⁹*anekakappesu*, lit., "during various aeons"

¹⁰BJTS reads "Named Kassapa according to his Lineage (*gottena*)"

I was [then] that [king's] fourth daughter,
well-known as Bhikkhadāyikā.¹¹
Hearing the Best Victor's Teaching,
I chose [to seek] ordination. (16) [654]

Our father did not permit it;
we [stayed] at home during that time,
comfortable¹² 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. (17-18) [655-656]

Samaṇī, and Samaṇaguttā,¹³
Bhikkhunī, Bhikkhadāyikā,
Dhammā, and also Sudhammā,
and seventh Saṅghadāyikā, (19) [657]

[now] Uppalavaṇṇā, Khemā
[also] Paṭācchārā and I,
Kisāgotamī, Dhammadinnā,¹⁴
and Visākhā is the seventh. (20) [658]

Due to those karmas¹⁵ done very well,
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvatiṃsa [then]. (21) [659]

And now, in [my] final rebirth,
in Giribbaja,¹⁶ best city,

¹¹“Alms-giver”. Texts read Bhikkhadāyī

¹²*sukhe thitā*, 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”

¹³I 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.

¹⁴given the long names, this foot is unavoidably nine-syllables long, both in Pāli and in English

¹⁵here the text (in both PTS and BJTS editions) substitutes *tehi kammehi* (plural instrumental) for the ordinary *tena kamma* (singular instrumental) in this *Apadāna* stock phrase. Perhaps “good deeds” would be better here.

¹⁶= Rājagaha, Rajgir, in Bihār

[I was] born to rich millionaires.¹⁷
When I'd become a young woman,¹⁸ (22) [660]

attracted to a thief I saw
being led to execution,¹⁹
my father, [paying] a thousand,
had him freed from execution. (23) [661]

After that, discerning my mind,
[my father] gave me to that [thief].
I was trustworthy for him, [and]
extremely kindly [and] friendly. (24) [662]

He, out of greed for my jewels,²⁰
that enemy with ill-intent,²¹
led me to the thieves' precipice²²
on a mountain, plotting murder. (25) [663]

Then stretching out to Sattuka,²³
hands which were well pressed together,²⁴
protecting [my] own breath [of life,]
I spoke these words [to him just then:] (26) [664]

"This bracelet which is made of gold,
[containing] many pearls and gems,
Sir, carry all of this away;
announce that [I'm your] bed-slave."²⁵ (27) [665]

"Take it off, O beautiful one,
and do not feel a lot of grief;
I am unable to accept
wealth that I did not kill to get. (28) [666]

For as long as I remember,

¹⁷lit., "born in a rich clan of millionaires"

¹⁸*yobbane ñhitā*, lit., "established in youth" or "when I attained puberty"

¹⁹lit., "in order to be executed" (*vadhatthaṇ*). In the era to which *Apadāna* belongs, this would likely have implied beheading.

²⁰*me bhūsanalobhena*, lit., "out of greed for my ornaments"

²¹reading *khalitajjhāsayo diso* (lit., "enemy intent on wrong-doing") with BJTS for PTS *mālapaccchāhataṇ diso* ("[led me] carrying a garland, the enemy")

²²*cchorappapātaṇ*, BJTS Sinh. gloss explains "where thieves are killed"

²³"Enemy," but apparently used as a proper name

²⁴*paṇāmetvāna...sukatañjali*

²⁵"slave" being the seventh of the seven types of wives

ever since I reached discretion,²⁶
I have accepted no other
more beloved than you [to me].“ (29) [667]

“Come here! Having embraced you, [just
one more] circumambulation.
And after²⁷ now there will not be
intercourse between you and me.”²⁸ (30) [668]

The man is not the one who’s wise
in every single circumstance;
paying attention, here and there,
the woman is the one who’s wise. (31) [669]

The man is not the one who’s wise
in every single circumstance;
quick-thinking, [with good] strategy,
the woman is the one who’s wise. (32) [670]

Quickly indeed, in just a flash,
I came up with a clever trick:
like a deer by a mighty bow,
Sattuka was slaughtered [by] me. (33) [671]

Who fails quickly to understand
the circumstances that arise,
he gets murdered, that silly thief,
in the belly of a mountain. (34) [672]

Who does not fail to quickly grasp
the circumstances that arise,
she is freed from creaturely bonds;
such was I from Sattuka then. (35) [673]

Then I made him, Sattuka, fall
from²⁹ a treacherous mountain road.
Coming into the presence of
some white-clad [adepts,] I went forth. (36) [674]

²⁶or “since I reached puberty,” *yato patto ‘smi viññutaṇ*, lit., “starting from when I reached puberty;”

²⁷*puno*, lit., “again”

²⁸lit., “of me, of you”

²⁹lit., “on”

Then after plucking out my hair
altogether, using³⁰ tweezers,
being ordained, in no long time,
they detailed their own tradition. (37) [675]

Then after I had learned [all] that,
[gone off by] myself, sitting down,
I thought about that tradition.
[Then] a dog brought a human hand,
chewed off,³¹ and after dropping [it]
in my vicinity, ran off.
Seeing that maggoty hand, I
took it up for meditation.³² (38-39) [676-677]
Then producing deep emotion,
I asked my co-religionists.
They said: “the Śākya [Buddhist] monks
know the answer[s] [to your questions].” (40) [678]

“I’ll ask that meaning, approaching
the followers of the Buddha.”
Taking me along they [all] went
into the Best Buddha’s presence. (41) [679]

He preached *Dhamma* to me: the heaps
in the thought-spheres and elements;
the Leader taught unpleasantness,
impermanence, dis-ease, no-self. (42) [680]

After hearing his *Dhamma*, I
[then] purified the “*Dhamma* eye.”
Learned in the good Teaching, I
asked to go forth and be ordained.³³
At that time he said [this to me:]
“Come, lucky one,” [said] the Leader.
Then being fully ordained, I
saw a little bit of water. (43-44) [681-682]
Cleaning [my] feet, discerning [that]

³⁰lit., “with”

³¹or “cut”: *chinnar*

³²*nimittar alabhiṇ*, lit., “I got it as an object of concentration”

³³lit., “I asked for going forth and for higher ordination”

[some water splashed] up, [some spilled] down,³⁴
then at that time I realized,
“all conditioned things are like that.” (45) [683]

Then my heart was liberated,
altogether, without clinging.³⁵
Then the Victor dubbed me foremost
of those with quick intuition. (46) [684]

I’ve mastered the superpowers
[like] the “divine ear” element.
I know the hearts of others [too,]
I have done what the Teacher taught.³⁶ (47) [685]

I remember [my] former lives;
[my] “divine eye” is purified.
Throwing off all the defilements,
I am³⁷ purified, [I’m] stainless. (48) [686]

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. (49) [687]

The reason for which I went forth,
from [my] home into homelessness —
I have [now] achieved that purpose:
destruction of all the fetters. (50) [688]

In meaning and in the Teaching,
etymology and preaching,
my knowledge is vast³⁸ and flawless,
through the Great Sage’s majesty. (51) [689]

My defilements are [now] burnt up;
all [new] existence is destroyed.
Like elephants with broken chains,
I am living without constraint. (52) [690]

³⁴*sa-udayaṇvyayaṇ*

³⁵*anupādaya* or “with not-clinging”

³⁶*satthu sāsana-kārīkā*, lit., “[I am] a doer of the Teacher’s dispensation”

³⁷reading *amhi* (“I am”) with BJTS for PTS *āsiṇ* (“I was” “I became”)

³⁸lit., “pure” (*suddhaṇ*)

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! (53) [691]

The four analytical modes,
and these eight deliverances,
six special knowledges mastered,
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (54) [692]

Thus indeed Bhikkhunī Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā spoke these verses.

The legend of Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā Therī is finished.