

Legends of the Buddhist Saints

Apadānapāli

TRANSLATED BY
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Kisāgotamī

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[22. Kisāgotamī¹]

The Victor, Padumuttara,
was a Master of Everything.
[That] Leader arose in the world
one hundred thousand aeons hence. (1) [693]

I then [lived] in Hamsavatī,
born in an undistinguished clan.
Having approached the Best of Men,²
I went to him as [my] refuge. (2) [694]

And I listened to his *Dhamma*,
containing the Four [Noble] Truths,
supremely sweet [like] honey, [which]
brings happiness and mental peace. (3) [695]

One time the Hero, [the Buddha,]
was placing in that foremost place
a Buddhist nun who wore rough robes;³
he praised [her,] the Ultimate Man. (4) [696]

Producing not a little joy,
hearing that Buddhist nun's virtue,
doing service for the Buddha,
according to powers and strengths, (5) [697]

bowing down to that Hero-Sage,
I aspired to [attain] that place.
The Sambuddha approved [of that]
attainment of that [foremost] place, (6) [698]

"In one hundred thousand aeons,
arising in Okkāka's clan,
the one whose name is Gotama
will be the Teacher in the world. (7) [699]

Worthy heir to that one's *Dhamma*,
Dhamma's legitimate offspring,
the one named Kisāgotamī
will be the Teacher's follower." (8) [700]

¹"The Lean Gotamī" a historical nun, remembered as foremost among the nuns who wore robes made of coarse cloth.

²*varanaraṇ*

³*lūkhacchivaradhārikaṇ*

At that time being overjoyed,
as long as life, heart [full of] love,
I attended on the Victor,
the Guide, providing requisites. (9) [701]

Due to that karma done very well,
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvatiṃsa [then]. (10) [702]

In this [present] lucky aeon,
Brahma's Kinsman, Greatly Famed One,
[the Buddha] known as Kassapa⁴
was born, the Best of Debaters. (11) [703]

The attendant of the Great Sage
was the ruler of men back then,
the king of Kāsi, named Kiki,
in Benares, greatest city. (12) [704]

I was his fifth [royal] daughter,
well-known by the name of Dhammā.⁵
Hearing the Best Victor's Teaching,
I chose [to seek] ordination. (13) [705]

Our father did not permit it;
we [stayed] at home during that time,
comfortable⁶ 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. (14-15) [706-707]

⁴BJTS reads "Named Kassapa according to his Lineage (*gottena*)"

⁵"Teaching"

⁶*sukhe t̥hitā*, 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"

⁷I 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.

Samaṇī, and Samaṇaguttā,⁷
Bhikkhunī, Bhikkhadāyikā,
Dhammā, and also Sudhammā,
and seventh Saṅghadāyikā, (16) [708]

[now] Khemā, Uppalavaṇṇā,
Paṭācchārā and Kuṇḍalā,⁸
[the nun] Dhammadinnā and I
and Visākhā is the seventh. (17) [709]

Due to those karmas⁹ done very well,
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvātimsa [then]. (18) [710]

And now, in [my] final rebirth,
I'm born in a millionaire's clan,
poor, without wealth, unprosperous,
[but] married¹⁰ into a rich clan. (19) [711]

Except [my] husband, the others
are pointing at me [saying,] "Poor!"
But after¹¹ I became with child,
then I was loved by all of them. (20) [712]

When that lucky young boy [of mine,]
tender-bodied, comfortable,¹²
as dear to me as [my] own breath,
then fell into Yama's power,¹³ (21) [713]

grief-struck, voicing [my] misery,
teary-eyed, [my] mouth crying out,
carrying [that young boy's] dead¹⁴ corpse,
I'm going around lamenting. (22) [714]

⁸ = Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesī

⁹ here 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.

¹⁰ *gatā*, lit., "gone to," perhaps to be read as "given to"

¹¹ *yadā ccha*, lit., "and when"

¹² *sukheṭṭhito*, lit., "fixed in comfort"

¹³ that is, "died," reading *yamavasam gato* with BJTS for PTS *parasaṅgato* ("associated with the other [world?]")

¹⁴ reading *matam* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *evaṇ* ("thus")

Then examined by one [doctor,
approaching the Best Physician,¹⁵
I said, “give [me] a medicine
to bring [my] son back to life, Sir.”¹⁶ (23) [715]

The Victor, Skilled in Crafty Speech,¹⁷
said, “bring [me] a white mustard seed,¹⁸
[collected] in whichever home
where [people] dying is not known.” (24) [716]

Then having gone to Śrāvastī,
not encountering such a house,
where [could I get] white mustard seed?
Thereupon I gained mindfulness. (25) [717]

Throwing away [my baby’s] corpse,
I went up to the World’s Leader.
Having seen me from a distance
the Sweet-Voiced One¹⁹ [then] said [to me]. (26) [718]

“Better than a hundred years’ life,
not seeing [how things] rise [and] fall,
is living for a single day,
seeing [things] rising [and] falling. (27) [719]

Not the condition²⁰ of the village, or the town,
and also not the condition of one clan.
This is the condition of the entire world
with its gods: the impermanence of [all] that is.” (28) [720]²¹

Upon hearing those [two] verses,
I purified [my] “Dhamma eye,”

¹⁵reading *bhisamuttamaṇ* for PTS ‘*Bhisamuttamaṇ*’ (“the ultimate Abhisa”); BJTS reads *bhisajuttamaṇ*

¹⁶*puttasañjīvanaṇ*; RD cites this passage at *sañjīvana*, s.v. (“reviving”)

¹⁷*vinayopāyakovidō*, lit., “skilled in tricks/expedients in the way of speaking”

¹⁸*siddhatthakan*. See RD s.v., again citing this passage

¹⁹*madurassaro*

²⁰*dhammo*. The term, usually translated “Teaching” here, has a wide semantic range including teaching, doctrine, truth, destiny, fact, thing. An alternate translation, using the play here on the various “teachings” and “the Teaching,” would be: “Not a village-teaching and not a town-teaching, also not a teaching for one family./ This Teaching is for the whole world with [its] gods: that which is, is impermanent.”

²¹both PTS and BJTS present this in a more complex, 12-11-11-12 meter, and I translate accordingly.

then learned in the great Teaching,
I went forth into homelessness. (29) [721]

Then being one who had gone forth,
engaged in the dispensation,²²
after not a very long time,
I attained [my] arahantship. (30) [722]

I've mastered the superpowers
[like] the "divine ear" element.
I know the hearts of others [too,]
I have done what the Teacher taught.²³ (31) [723]

I remember [my] former lives;
[my] "divine eye" is purified.
Throwing off all the defilements,
I am²⁴ purified, [I'm] stainless. (32) [724]

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. (33) [725]

The reason for which I went forth,
from [my] home into homelessness —
I have [now] achieved that purpose:
destruction of all the fetters. (34) [726]

In meaning and in the Teaching,
etymology and preaching,
my knowledge is vast²⁵ and flawless,
through the Great Sage's majesty. (35) [727]

I am wearing robes which are rough,
[my] *saṅghāṭi* being made of
[a shroud picked up and] brought from a
cemetery along the road. (36) [728]

The Victor, pleased by [my]²⁶ virtue,

²²*jīnasāsane*, lit., "in the Victor's dispensation"

²³*satthu sāsana-kārikā*, lit., "[I am] a doer of the Teacher's dispensation"

²⁴reading *amhi* ("I am") with BJTS for PTS *āsiṇ* ("I was" "I became")

²⁵lit., "pure" (*suddhaṇ*)

²⁶lit., "in the" "in that"

the Guide, among the multitudes,²⁷
[then] placed [me] in the foremost place
[of] those who wear robes which are rough. (37) [729]

My defilements are [now] burnt up;
all [new] existence is destroyed.
Like elephants with broken chains,
I am living without constraint. (38) [730]

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! (39) [731]

The four analytical modes,
and these eight deliverances,
six special knowledges mastered,
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (40) [732]

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

²⁷or assemblies (even four parts of the Assembly), multitudes, retinues