

Legends of the Buddhist Saints

Apadānapāli

TRANSLATED BY
JONATHAN S. WALTERS,
WHITMAN COLLEGE, 2017

Eighteen Thousand Buddhist Nuns Headed Up by Yasodharā

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

[30. Eighteen Thousand Buddhist Nuns Headed Up by Yasodharā¹]

Buddhist nuns, eighteen thousand [strong,
[who were] born in the Śākya [clan],
headed up by Yasodharā,
went up to [him,] the Sambuddha. (1) [1044]

All those eighteen thousand women
are superpower-possessors.
Worshipping the feet of the Sage,
they're announcing their strength's extent. (2) [1045]

"Birth is destroyed, old age, disease,
and death is [as well,] O Great Sage;
Guide, we travel the peaceful path,
deathless and without defilement. (3) [1046]

If there's trouble in the city,
even for everyone, Great Sage,
they [all] know [our] imperfections;
Leader, [give us your] forgive[ness]." (4) [1047]

"[Now] display [your] superpowers,
doers of my dispensation;
to that extent cut off the doubt
among all of the assemblies." (5) [1048]

"We're Yasodharās, Great Hero;
desirable, speaking sweet words.
[And] in the home, O Great Hero,
[we] all [were fixed as] your chief queens.² (6) [1049]

In your household, O Hero, we
were the leaders, the lords of all
of the [women there, who numbered]
one hundred thousand ninety six. (7) [1050]

[All us women are] endowed with
the virtues of beauty and grace;
youthful, well-spoken, we're revered,
like gods³ [are revered by] people. (8) [1051]

¹BJTS reads "The Apadāna of Eighteen Thousand Buddhist Nuns"

²*te pajāpatī*

³*devatā*, or "deities" "supernaturals" "fairies" "spirits"

All [us] eighteen thousand [women,
born in the clan of the Śākya,
are famous ones,⁴ [Yasodharās,
the leaders of thousands back then. (9) [1052]

Beyond the essence of desire,
fixed as the essence of beauty,
[we're] unmatched in terms of beauty
among [other] thousands, Great Sage." (10) [1053]

Worshipping⁵ the Sambuddha, they
showed the Teacher superpowers.⁶
They displayed great superpowers,
diverse, having various forms. (11) [1054]

Body big as the universe,⁷
they [made] the continent⁸ up north
[their] head[s]; both other islands wings;
[and made] India [their] torso[s]; (12) [1055]

tail feathers: the southern ocean;
[other] feathers: varied rivers;
[their] eyes were the moon and the sun,
[their] crests [were] cosmic Mount Meru. (13) [1056]

[In their] beak[s], mountain at world's end,⁹
[they carried] a tree¹⁰ with its roots.
Coming up to [him,] fanning [him,]
they're worshipping the World's Leader. (14) [1057]

[Then] they made themselves¹¹ elephants,
likewise horses, mountains, oceans,

⁴*yasovatī*, = Yasodharā

⁵*abhivādetvā*, or "after saluting"

⁶*iddhiṃ*

⁷*cchakkavālaṇ samaṇ* (BJTS *cchakkavālasamaṇ*) *kāyaṇ*, lit., "body the same as the ring surrounding the universe"

⁸or "island" (*dīpa*). This verse presumes knowledge of the ancient Indian understanding of India (here *jambudīpaṇ* [BJTS *°dīpo*], "the Island of Rose-Apples") as one of the four great islands or continents making up the whole world. It lies to the south, with the other three being north, east and west of India.

⁹lit., "in the ring surrounding the universe" (*cchakkavālagiri°*; BJTS *cchakkavālagiri°*)

¹⁰*jamburukkha°*, lit., "a rose-apple tree"

¹¹*°vaṇṇaṇ...dassayaṇ*

the moon and the sun, Mount Meru,
and Śakra, [the king of the gods]. (15) [1058]

“We’re like Yasodharās,¹² Hero;
We worship [your] feet, Eyeful One.
Through your majesty, Hero,
we’re perfected, Leader of Men. (16) [1059]

We’ve mastered the superpowers
[like] the “divine ear” element.
We’re also the masters, Great Sage,
of the knowledge in others’ hearts. (17) [1060]

We remember [our] former lives;
[our] “divine eye[s]” are purified.
All the defilements are destroyed;
[we] will not be reborn again. (18) [1061]

In meaning and in the Teaching,
etymology and preaching,
[this] knowledge of ours was produced
in your presence, O Great Hero.¹³ (19) [1062]

Our meeting with [all] the Buddhas,¹⁴
the World-Lords, was displayed [to you];
our extensive service [to them]
was for the sake of you, Great Sage. (20) [1063]

O Sage, recall the good karma,
which formerly [was done] by us;
[that] merit was heaped up by us
for the sake of you, Great Hero. (21) [1064]

We kept from misconduct, hindered¹⁵
the [nine] impossible places;¹⁶

¹²*yaśovaṇṇā*, lit., “we have the the appearance of Yaśo” “we are the color (or have the appearance) of fame”

¹³here as elsewhere, reading the voc. *mahāmunue* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *mahāmuni*

¹⁴reading *buddhānaṃ* with BJTS (or PTS alt. *Buddhāna*) for PTS *pubbānaṃ* (former); but cf. below [1133] where BJTS and PTS both give *pubbānaṃ* in a repetition of this verse (and several around it)

¹⁵reading *vārayitvā anāccharam* with BJTS for PTS *pācchayantī anāvaraṇ* (“burning/tormenting?”)

¹⁶*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).

we have sacrificed¹⁷ life [itself]
for the sake of you, Great Hero. (22) [1065]

We were given to be [your] wives,
several tens of billions [of times].
We were not distressed about that,
for the sake of you, O Great Sage. (23) [1066]

We were given to do service,
several tens of billions [of times].
We were not distressed about that,
for the sake of you, O Great Sage. (24) [1067]

We were given to [provide] food,
several tens of billions [of times].
We were not distressed about that,
for the sake of you, O Great Sage. (25) [1068]

We have given you [all our] lives,
several tens of billions [of times].
We'll liberate [ourselves] from fear,
giving up our lives [once more]. (26) [1069]

Great Sage for your sake we do not¹⁸
conceal the things of a woman,
numerous clothes of varied types,
ornaments affixed to¹⁹ [our] limbs. (27) [1070]

Wealth and grain have been given up,
villages and also small towns,
fields and sons and daughters [as well]
have been given up, O Great Sage. (28) [1071]

Elephants, horses, also cows,
slaves [as well as] servant-women

This is *Pāsādikā 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

¹⁷reading *sañcchattaṃ* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *samattaṃ* (“fulfilled” “completed”)

¹⁸reading *°bhaṇḍe na gūhāma* with BJTS for PTS *bhaṇḍena gūhāmi* (“I conceal with a thing”)

¹⁹lit., “gone to”

are given up beyond all count,
for the sake of you, O Great Sage. (29) [1072]

Whatever we are told [to give]
as alms to beggars, we give [that];
we don't witness²⁰ any distress
from giving the ultimate gift. (30) [1073]

[We have] experienced²¹ dis-ease
of diverse types, beyond all count,
in [this] much-varied existence²²
for the sake of you, Great Hero. (31) [1074]

Attaining comfort[s,] we don't thrill;
[We do]n't get distressed by²³ troubles.
Everywhere we remain balanced
for the sake of you, O Great Sage. (32) [1075]

After experiencing [both]
pleasure [and] pain along the way,
the Great Sage reached Awakening,
the Teaching for which²⁴ Buddha²⁵ strived. (33) [1076]

By you [and] by us there was much
meeting with the other World-Lords,
[whether you're] the god Brahmā or²⁶
Gotama Buddha,²⁷ World's Leader. (34) [1077]

We performed a lot of service,
for the sake of you, O Great Sage;
while you sought the Buddha's Teaching,²⁸
we were [always] your attendants. (35) [1078]

One hundred thousand aeons [and]
four incalculable [aeons]

²⁰lit., "see," fig. "know"

²¹reading *anubhuttaṃ* with BJTS for PTS *pariccchattaṃ* ("are sacrificed")

²²*saṃsāre*, or "wheel of life"

²³lit., "in"

²⁴*yaṃ dhammaṃ*

²⁵lit., "Sambuddha"

²⁶lit., "and"

²⁷lit., "Sambuddha," paralleling the usage in the previous verse

²⁸reading *gavesato buddhadhamme* with BJTS for PTS *gavesantā buddhadhammaṃ*
("We, searching for the Buddha's Teaching")

hence, Dīpaṅkara, Great Hero,
the Leader of the World was born. (36) [1079]

[Some]place in a nearby country,
inviting [him,] the Thus-Gone-One,
happy-minded folks are cleaning
the road [on which] he is coming. (37) [1080]

At that time there was a brahmin,
[known by] the name of Sumedha.
He was making the road ready
for the All-Seer who was coming. (38) [1081]

At that time we all were maidens,
who had been born in brahmin [clans];
we carried to that assembly
flowers grown in water, on land.²⁹ (39) [1082]

Just then the Greatly Famed Buddha,
Dīpaṅkara, the Great Hero,
prophesied³⁰ [future Buddhahood]
[for that] sage with a lofty mind. (40) [1083]

The earth together with [its] gods
was shaking, roaring [and] quaking,
as he was praising his karma
[for that] sage with a lofty mind. (41) [1084]

Divine maidens, human women,
we and the [whole world] with [its] gods,
worshipping³¹ with various things
to be offered,³² we made wishes. (42) [1085]

The Buddha with the name “Bright Lamp”
prophesied to them [at that time:]
“Who wished today, they’re going to be,
[reborn together,] face-to-face.” (43) [1086]

Rejoicing about [Buddha’s] speech,
we lived behaving in that way

²⁹reading *thaludajāni* with BJTS for PTS *phaludakajāti* (“born in fruit-juice”)

³⁰lit., “the Great Hero prophesied”

³¹lit., “doing *pūjā*”

³²lit., “*pūjā*-worthy”

the Buddha prophesied for us
numberless aeons ago. (44) [1087]

We brought pleasure to [our] mind[s] when
that karma was well done [by us];
we experienced countless wombs,
divine [as well as] human [ones]. (45) [1088]

Undergoing pleasure [and] pain,
among gods [and] human beings,
when [our] last rebirth was attained,
we were born in the Śākya clan. (46) [1089]

Beautiful and very wealthy,
famous and likewise virtuous;
endowed with every attainment,
we're much-honored among the clans. (47) [1090]

Riches, fame, hospitality,
[and] indulgence in worldly things –
[they] do not agitate [our] minds;³³
we have no fear from anything. (48) [1091]

We were appointed to attend
on what the Blessed One had said
within the harem of the king
in the kṣatriya city then. (49) [1092]

[We are] women who are servants,
and [those] who feel pleasure and pain,
and women who declare the facts,
women who are compassionate. (50) [1093]

Well-practiced, the Teaching-practice;
that practice is not ill-practiced.
[We're] at ease practicing Teaching,
in this world and in the other. (51) [1094]

After abandoning the home,
going³⁴ forth into homelessness,

³³lit., “there is no agitation [to my mind]”

³⁴reading *pabbajitvāna* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *pabbajīṇ* (“I went forth”)

³⁵*aṭṭhamāse*, BJTS reads *addhamāse* (“half a month”)

when eight months³⁵ had not yet elapsed,
we attained the Four [Noble] Truths. (52) [1095]

Like the waves upon the ocean,
[folks] are bringing many varied³⁶
monastic robes and alms to eat,
requisites [as well as] lodgings. (53) [1096]

Our defilements are [now] burnt up;
all [new] existence is destroyed.
Like elephants with broken chains,
we are living without constraint. (54) [1097]

Being in Best Buddha's presence
was a very good thing for us.
The three knowledges are attained;
[we have] done what the Buddha taught! (55) [1098]

The four analytical modes,
and these eight deliverances,
six special knowledges mastered,
[we have] done what the Buddha taught! (56) [1099]

Thus many sorts of suffering
and many types of happiness;
the pure life [now] has been achieved,
we have obtained all achievements. (57) [1100]

Woman who are giving themselves
for the merit of the Great Sage
attain companionship [with him],³⁷
[and] unconditioned nirvana.³⁸ (58) [1101]

The past is thoroughly destroyed,
and the present [and] the future;
all of³⁹ our karma is destroyed:
we⁴⁰ worship your feet, Eyeful One.“ (59) [1102]

³⁶reading *bahu 'neke* with BJTS for PTS *buhun eke*

³⁷reading *sahāyasampadā honti* with BJTS for PTS *pabhāyasampadā bhonti* (“becoming attained with light”?)

³⁸reading *nibbānapadam asaṅkhatam* with BJTS for PTS *nibbān'-amat'-asaṅkhatam* (“unconditioned, deathless nirvana”)

³⁹reading *sabbam* with BJTS for PTS *saccchayaṃ* (“the truth of”)

⁴⁰reading *vandāma* with BJTS for PTS *vandāmi* (as in v. [1028], above)

“What more can I say to women
who are going⁴¹ to nirvana?
Pacifying conditioned flaws⁴²
you should attain the deathless state.” (60) [1103]

Thus indeed Eighteen Thousand Buddhist Nuns Headed Up by Yasodharā
spoke these verses.

The legend of Eighteen Thousand Buddhist Nuns Headed Up by Yasod-
harā is finished

The Summary:

Kuṇḍalā, also Gotamī,
Dhammadinnā and Sakulā,⁴³
Excellent Nandā and Soṇā
Kapilāni, Yasodharā,
and the ten thousand Buddhist nuns
[also] the eighteen thousand [nuns:]⁴⁴
the verses that are counted here
[number] one hundred and forty
and also seventy-eight [more].

The Kuṇḍalakesā Chapter, the Third

⁴¹reading *vajantīnaṃ* with BJTS for PYS *vadantīnaṃ* (“who are saying”)

⁴²*santasaṅkhatadoso* (BJTS °*dosam*)

⁴³reading the correct spelling with BJTS for PTS *Sākulā*

⁴⁴reading *dasasahasabhikkhunī atṭhārasasahasakā* with BJTS for PTS
dasatṭhārasasahasā (“the ten-eighteen thousand”)