

THE PALIVERSE PROJECT

The Universe of Buddha's Wisdom

Commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā)

The Canon of Discourses - Commentaries (Sutta
Piṭaka - Aṭṭhakathā)

5. The Collection of Minor Texts (5. Khuddaka Nikāya -
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09. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nuns (09. Therīgāthā-
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PaliVerse

5. The Collection of Minor Texts

09. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nuns

10. The Book of the Elevens

1. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Kisāgotamī

213-223. In the Book of Elevens, the verses of the Elder Nun Kisāgotamī beginning with "Good friendship" and so on. This one, it is said, in the time of the Blessed One Padumuttara, having been reborn in a family home in the city of Hamsavatī, having attained discretion, one day, while hearing the Teaching in the presence of the Teacher, having seen the Teacher establishing a certain nun in the foremost position among those who wear coarse robes, having performed the preparatory action, she aspired to that position of rank. She, wandering in the round of rebirths among gods and humans for a hundred thousand cosmic cycles, in this arising of a Buddha, was reborn in a poor family at Sāvattthī. Her name was Gotamī. But because of the leanness of her body, she was called "Kisāgotamī." When she had gone to her husband's family, they treated her with contempt as the daughter of a poor family. She gave birth to one son. And on account of obtaining a son, they showed her honour. But her son, at the time of playing, running here and there, died. On account of that, madness from grief arose in her.

She, through the power of grief-induced madness, thinking "Having formerly been one who received contempt, from the time of my son's birth I received honour; these people are even striving to throw my son outside," having taken the dead body on her hip, goes about in the city from house door to house door in succession, saying "Give medicine for my son." People abused her, saying "Medicine from where?" She did not heed their talk. Then a certain wise man, having thought "This woman has reached mental distraction through sorrow for her son; only the One of Ten Powers will know the medicine for her," said "Mother, having approached the Perfectly Enlightened One, ask about medicine for your son." She, having gone to the monastery at the time of the Teacher's proclamation of the Teaching, said "Give medicine for my son, Blessed One." The Teacher, having seen her decisive support, said "Go, having entered the city, from whatever house where no one has previously died, bring mustard seed from there." She, with a satisfied mind, having said "Good, venerable sir," having entered the city, at the very first house said "The Teacher has me bring mustard seed for the purpose of medicine for my son. If in this house no one has previously died, give me mustard seed." "Who here is able to count the dead?" "What use then is there with mustard seed?" Having gone to a second and third house, by the power of the Buddha, with her madness gone, established in normal consciousness, she thought - "In the entire city this same rule will apply; this must have been seen by the Blessed One who is compassionate for our welfare." Having gained a sense of urgency, having gone out from that very place, having abandoned her son in the charnel grove, she spoke this verse -

"This is not the principle of a village, nor the principle of a town, nor indeed is

this the principle of a single family;
For the whole world including the gods, this alone is the principle, namely
impermanence."

And having said thus, she went to the Teacher's presence. Then the Teacher said to her "Have you obtained the mustard seed, Gotamī?" She said "The task with the mustard seed is completed, venerable sir, but be my support." Then the Teacher spoke to her -

"The man who is infatuated with sons and cattle, with mind attached,
Death takes him away, as a great flood a sleeping village."

He spoke a verse.

At the conclusion of the verse, just as she stood, having become established in the fruition of stream-entry, she requested the going forth from the Teacher. The Teacher allowed the going forth. She, having circumambulated the Teacher three times, having paid homage, having gone to the nuns' quarters, having gone forth, having obtained full ordination, before long, doing the work through wise attention, developed insight. Then the Teacher spoke to her -

"And whoever should live a hundred years, not seeing the Deathless state;
Better is the life of one day, of one seeing the Deathless state."

He spoke this verse of radiance.

She, at the conclusion of the verse, having attained arahantship, having become supremely austere in the use of requisites, having put on a robe endowed with three coarse qualities, went about. Then the Teacher, seated at Jeta's Grove, establishing the nuns in successive positions of rank, established her in the foremost position among those who wear coarse robes. She, having reviewed her own practice, thinking "In dependence on the Teacher, this distinction was obtained by me," by way of praising good friendship, spoke these verses -

213. "Good friendship was praised by the sage, having pointed out to the world;
Associating with good friends, even a fool would become wise.
214. "Good persons should be associated with, wisdom thus grows for those who
associate with them;
Associating with good persons, one would be freed from all sufferings.
215. "One should cognise suffering, and the origin and cessation of suffering;
And the eightfold path, and also the four noble truths.
216. "Womanhood is suffering, declared by the guide of men to be tamed;
Living with a co-wife is also suffering, some women having given birth just
once.
217. "Some even cut their throats, delicate women eat poison;
Caught in the midst of birth and death, both experience disasters.
218. "Going along near to giving birth, I saw my husband dead;

Having given birth on the road, not yet having reached my own home.

219. "Two sons have died, and my husband died on the road for the wretched woman;
Mother, father, and brother are burning on a single funeral pyre.
220. "O you of ruined family, O wretched one, immeasurable is the suffering experienced by you;
And tears have flowed from you, through many thousands of births.
221. "I dwelt in the midst of a cemetery, and also ate the flesh of my sons;
With family destroyed, blamed by all, with husband dead, I attained the Deathless.
222. "The path has been developed by me, the noble eightfold path leading to the Deathless;
Nibbāna has been realised, I have looked into the mirror of the Dhamma.
223. "I am one with the dart removed, the burden laid down, what had to be done has been done;
Kisā Gotamī, the elder nun, with liberated mind, spoke this."

Therein, "good friendship" means one whose friend is good, auspicious, and beautiful - thus "good friend." Whoever is for another an instigator in virtues beginning with morality, a destroyer of misery, a provider of welfare, thus helpful in every way as a friend, that person is a good friend; the state of that is good friendship, the quality of having a good friend. "By the sage" means by the Teacher. "Having pointed out to the world, was praised" means that good friends should be followed - with reference to the world of beings -

"This is the entire holy life, Ānanda, that is to say, good friendship, good companionship, good association." "For a monk with good friends, Meghiya, good companions, good associates, this is to be expected - that he will be virtuous, he will dwell restrained by the restraint of the Pātimokkha" - and by such statements and so on it was praised.

"Associating with good friends" and so on is the showing of the benefit of good friendship. Therein, "even a fool would become wise" means a person associating with good friends, though previously being a fool through the absence of learning and so on, would become wise through hearing what was unheard and so on.

"Good persons should be associated with" means because even for a fool they are the cause of becoming wise, good persons such as the Buddha and so on should be cultivated by approaching them from time to time and so on. "Wisdom thus grows for those who associate" means for those who associate with good friends, wisdom thus grows, increases, and goes to fulfilment. The explanation is: just as among them, whoever of the warrior caste and so on, associating with good persons, would be freed from all sufferings beginning with birth.

But to show the method of liberation by means of the method of good friendship, "one should understand suffering" and so on was stated. Therein, "the four noble truths" - the explanation is: one should understand, one should penetrate these four noble truths, namely suffering, the origin of suffering, cessation, and the eightfold path.

The two verses beginning with "Womanhood is suffering" were spoken by a certain demoness censuring the state of womanhood. Therein, "womanhood is suffering, declared" means womanhood is suffering through such dangers as fickleness, bearing a womb, and being at all times dependent on others in one's livelihood and so on - thus it was spoken by the Blessed One, the guide of men to be tamed. "Living with a co-wife is also suffering" means living with a rival, dwelling together with a co-wife is also suffering; this too is a danger in the state of womanhood - this is the intention. "Some women having given birth just once" means certain women having given birth only once, unable to bear the suffering of giving birth in their first pregnancy. "Some even cut their throats" means they cut even their own necks. "Delicate women eat poison" means those of delicate bodies, unable to endure distress because of their delicate nature, eat even poison. "Caught in the midst of birth and death" - "birth-killer" is called an obstructed womb. The killer of the offspring of a woman; "caught in the midst" means the birth-killers gone into the womb, gone into the belly - the meaning is an obstructed womb. "Both experience disasters" means both the embryo and the pregnant woman, even two persons, reach death and disasters bordering on death. Others, however, say: "Birth-killers are indeed the mental defilements; caught in the midst of them means fallen into the continuity of defilements; both wife and husband here by way of the fever of defilements, and in the future by way of the affliction of unfortunate realms, reach disasters." It is said that these two verses were spoken by that demoness having recollected the suffering experienced by herself in a previous existence. The elder nun, however, spoke echoing them for the purpose of illustrating the dangers in the state of womanhood.

The two verses beginning with "Going along near to giving birth" were spoken referring to the story of the Elder Nun Paṭācārā. Therein, "going along near to giving birth" means going along the road having reached the time of giving birth; the construction is: not having reached my own home, having given birth on the road, I saw my husband dead.

"Of the wretched one" means of the miserable one. These two verses, it is said, were spoken by the elder nun for the very purpose of making clear the danger in the state of womanhood, by way of imitating the manner spoken by Paṭācārā who had then fallen into the madness of sorrow.

Having brought both of these as examples, now making clear the suffering experienced by herself, she said beginning with "O you of ruined family." Therein, "of ruined family" means of one belonging to a family that has reached the loss of wealth and so on. "Wretched" means having reached the state of being supremely despised. Both of these are terms of address to herself. "The suffering experienced by you is immeasurable" means in this individual existence, or in former individual existences, not inconsiderable suffering was experienced by you. Now, in order to classify and show that suffering in part, "and tears have flowed from you" and so on was said. Its meaning is: While wandering in this round of rebirths without discernible beginning,

overcome by sorrow through many thousands of births, tears have flowed; and this was said without distinction - it would be even more than the water of the great ocean.

"I dwelt in the midst of a cemetery" means having become a bitch and a female jackal that eat human flesh and so on, she dwelt in the midst of a cemetery. "The flesh of my sons was eaten" means the flesh of sons was eaten during the times of being a tigress, a leopardess, a cat, and so on. "One whose family is destroyed" means one whose family lineage is destroyed. "Blamed by all" means blamed by all householders, having reached the state of being blameworthy. "One whose husband has died" means a widow. But she speaks of these three kinds, taking them as having been reached by herself in former existences. Even having been of such a state, through the association with a good friend obtained by chance, she attained the Deathless, she reached Nibbāna.

Now, in order to make manifest and show that very attainment of the Deathless, "developed" and so on was said. Therein, "developed" means made manifest, produced, cultivated, penetrated by way of the full realisation of meditative development. "I looked into the mirror of the Teaching" means I saw, I beheld, a mirror made of the Teaching.

"I am one with the dart removed" means I am one whose darts of household life and so on have been eradicated by the noble path. "The burden laid down" means one who has laid down the burden of sensual pleasure, the aggregates, mental defilements, and volitional activities. "what had to be done has been done" means the sixteenfold function consisting of full understanding and so on has been done and completed. "With well-liberated mind she spoke this" means the Elder Nun Kisāgotamī, with mind liberated in every respect, spoke this meaning by way of verse composition beginning with "good friendship" - thus the elder nun speaks of herself as if speaking of another. Herein is the life history of this elder nun:

"The Conqueror named Padumuttara, who has gone beyond all phenomena;
A hundred thousand cosmic cycles ago from now, the Leader arose.

"Then I, in Haṃsavatī, was born in a certain family;
Having approached that excellent man, I went for refuge.

"And I heard his Teaching, endowed with the four truths;
Sweet, of supreme gratification, bringing the happiness of peace from the round of rebirths.

"Then the hero, the highest of men,
Placing her in the foremost position, praised the nun who wore coarse robes.

"Having generated no small joy, having heard of the nun's virtues;
Having done service to the Buddha, according to ability, according to strength.

"Having bowed down to that excellent sage, I aspired for that state;
The Perfectly Enlightened One, the Leader, gave thanks for the attainment of that state.

"A hundred thousand cosmic cycles from now, of the Okkāka clan origin;
Gotama by name, by clan, the Teacher in the world will be.

"His heirs in the teachings, legitimate, created by the Teaching;
Kisāgotamī by name, you will be a disciple of the Teacher.

"Having heard that, having become joyful, for as long as life, then the
Conqueror;
With a mind of friendliness I tended, with requisites, the Guide.

"By that well-done action, and by volition and aspirations;
Having abandoned the human body, I went to Tāvatiṃsa.

"In this fortunate cosmic cycle, a kinsman of Brahma of great fame;
Kassapa by clan, the best of speakers arose.

"The attendant of the great sage, then was the lord of men;
The King of Kāśi named Kikī, in the best city of Bārāṇasī.

"I was his fifth daughter, renowned by the name Dhammā;
Having heard the Teaching of the foremost Conqueror, I delighted in the going
forth.

"Our father did not allow us, while still in the household then;
For twenty thousand years, we wandered untiringly.

"Living the holy life from maidenhood, princesses delicately nurtured;
Devoted to attending upon the Buddha, joyful were the seven daughters.

"Samaṇī and Samaṇaguttā, Bhikkhunī and Bhikkhudāyikā;
Dhammā and Sudhammā, and the seventh Saṅghadāyikā.

"Khemā and Uppalavaṇṇā, Paṭācārā and Kuṇḍalā;
And I and Dhammadinnā, Visākhā is the seventh.

"By those well-done actions, and by volition and aspirations;
Having abandoned the human body, I went to Tāvatiṃsa.

"And in this final existence now, I was born in a millionaire's family;
When it had become poor, without wealth, ruined, I went to a wealthy family.

"Except for my husband, the rest despise me, saying 'she is poor';
But when I had given birth, I was beloved by all then.

"When he was young, august, tender, delicately nurtured;
Pleasant to me like life itself, then he went under Yama's control.

"Afflicted by sorrow, with wretched face, with tearful eyes, with weeping face;
Having taken up the dead corpse, lamenting, I went.

"Then, having been seen by one, having approached the best of physicians;

I said, 'Give medicine for reviving my son, friend.'

"From a house where no dead are found, from there bring mustard seed,"
Said the Conqueror, skilled in the means of monastic discipline.

"Then having gone to Sāvattthī, I did not obtain such a house;
Whence mustard seed? Therefore, from that I obtained mindfulness.

"Having abandoned the corpse, I approached the leader of the world;
Having seen me from afar, he with the sweet voice spoke.

"And whoever should live a hundred years, not seeing rise and fall;
Better is the life of one day, of one seeing rise and fall.

"This is not the principle of a village, nor the principle of a town, nor indeed is
this the principle of a single family;
For the whole world including the gods, this alone is the principle, namely
impermanence.

"I, having heard these verses, purified the eye of the Teaching;
Then having cognised the Good Teaching, I went forth into homelessness.

"Thus having gone forth, being peaceful, engaging in the Conqueror's
Dispensation;
Not long after, I attained arahantship.

"And I am a master in supernormal powers, in the divine ear element;
I know the minds of others, carrying out the Teacher's instruction.

"I know past lives, the divine eye has been purified;
Having eliminated all mental corruptions, I was pure, completely stainless.

"The Teacher has been attended upon by me, the Buddha's teaching has been
fulfilled;
The heavy burden has been laid down, the conduit to existence has been
uprooted.

"For the purpose of which I went forth, from home into homelessness;
That purpose has been attained by me, the destruction of all mental fetters.

"In meaning, teaching, and language, and likewise in discernment;
My knowledge is spotless, pure, owing to the Buddha, the foremost.

"Having brought from rubbish heaps, from cemeteries and from streets;
From that having made a double robe, I wear a coarse robe.

"The Conqueror, satisfied with that virtue, in wearing coarse robes;
The great leader established me in the foremost position, in the assemblies.

"Mental defilements have been burnt by me, etc. the Buddha's teaching has
been fulfilled."

The commentary on the verses of the Elder Nun Kisāgotamī is concluded.

The commentary on the Chapter of Elevens is concluded.



ABOUT THIS TRANSLATION

This translation is part of the PaliVerse Project - the first complete, unified English translation of the Pāli Canon together with its Commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā) and Subcommentaries (Tīkā), accompanied by interactive study tools. PaliVerse is an ongoing project. The AI translations are continuously improved through experts' revisions and feedback. This text is the latest translation as of the date of download.

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