

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 -
Aṭṭhakathā)

09. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nuns (09. Therīgāthā-
aṭṭhakathā)

11. The Book of the Twelves (11. Dvādasakanipāto)



PaliVerse

5. The Collection of Minor Texts

09. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nuns

11. The Book of the Twelves

1. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Uppalavaṇṇā

224-235. In the Book of Twelves, the verses beginning with "Both mother and daughter" and so on are the verses of the Elder Nun Uppalavaṇṇā. This one too, in the time of the Blessed One Padumuttara, having been reborn in a family home in the city of Haṃsavatī, having attained discretion, having gone together with the great multitude to the presence of the Teacher, while hearing the Teaching, having seen the Teacher establishing a certain nun in the foremost position among those possessing supernormal power, having given a great gift to the Community of monks headed by the Buddha for seven days, she aspired to that position of rank. She, having done wholesome deeds for as long as life lasted, wandering in the round of rebirths among gods and humans, in the time of the Buddha Kassapa, having taken conception in the house of Kikī, the King of Kāsi, in the city of Bārāṇasī, having been among the seven sisters, having lived the holy life for twenty thousand years, having had a residential cell built for the Community of monks, she was reborn in the heavenly world.

Having passed away from there, coming again to the human world, she was reborn in a certain small village in a place where one earns a living by working with one's own hands. She, one day, going to the field hut, on the road, having seen in a certain lake a lotus flower that had bloomed right early, having descended into that lake, having taken both that flower and a lotus leaf for the purpose of putting parched corn into, having cut rice ears in the paddy field, seated in the hut, having roasted parched corn, having made five hundred portions of parched corn, she set them aside. At that moment, a certain Individually Enlightened One who had emerged from the attainment of cessation on Mount Gandhamādana, having come, stood in a place not far from her. She, having seen the Individually Enlightened One, having taken the lotus flower together with the parched corn, having descended from the hut, having put the parched corn into the Individually Enlightened One's bowl, having covered the bowl with the lotus flower, she gave it. Then, when the Individually Enlightened One had gone a little way, this occurred to her - "Those gone forth have no need for flowers; I shall take the flower and adorn myself" - having gone, having taken the flower from the Individually Enlightened One's hand, she thought again - "If the noble master had no need for the flower, he would not have placed it on the top of the bowl; surely the noble master must have need of it" - having gone again, having placed it on the top of the bowl, having asked forgiveness from the Individually Enlightened One, she made the aspiration: "Venerable sir, as an outcome of these parched corn of mine, may I have sons equal in number to the parched corn; as an outcome of the lotus flower, in whatever place I am reborn, at every step may a lotus flower arise." The Individually Enlightened One, while she was still watching, having

gone through the sky to Mount Gandhamādana, having made that lotus into a foot-wiping mat near the steps of approach of the Individually Enlightened Ones at the Nandamūlaka cave, placed it there.

She too, as an outcome of that action, took conception in the heavenly world. From the time of her rebirth, at every step a great lotus flower arose. She, having passed away from there, was reborn in the interior of a lotus in a certain lotus lake at the foot of a mountain. In dependence on that, a certain hermit dwelt. He, having gone to the lake right early for the purpose of washing his face, having seen that flower, thought - "This flower is larger than the rest, and the rest have bloomed but this one is still in bud; there must be a reason for this" - having descended into the water, he took that flower. That bloomed the very moment it was taken by him. The hermit saw a girl lying inside the lotus. From the time of seeing her, having developed affection for a daughter, having led her together with the lotus itself to the hermitage, he laid her down on a small bed. Then, by the power of her merit, milk was produced in her thumb. He, when that flower had withered, having brought another new flower, laid her down in it. Then, from the time she was able to play by running to and fro, at every step a lotus flower arose, and her bodily colour was like a heap of saffron. She had not attained divine beauty, but had surpassed human beauty. She was left behind in the hermitage when her father had gone for the purpose of gathering fruits.

Then one day, when she had come of age, when her father had gone for the purpose of gathering fruits, a certain forester, having seen her, thought - "Human beings do not have such beauty; I shall investigate" - and looking out for the coming of the hermit, he sat down. She, when her father was coming, having gone to meet him on the way, took the carrying pole and water pitcher from his hand, and having come, showed her duties of service to him who was seated. Then that forester, having known her human nature, having paid respect to the hermit, sat down. The hermit, having invited that forester with forest roots and fruits and with drinking water, asked: "My dear man, will you stay in this very place, or will you go?" "I shall go, venerable sir; what shall I do here?" "Will you be able to go from here without speaking of this thing seen by you?" "If the noble master does not wish it, for what reason would I speak of it?" - having paid homage to the hermit, he departed, making marks on branches and marks on trees for the purpose of recognising the path at the time of coming again.

He, having gone to Bārāṇasī, saw the king. The king asked "Why have you come?" "I, Sire, your forester, having seen a marvellous woman-treasure at the foot of a mountain, have come" - he related the whole story. He, having heard his word, having gone with speed to the foot of the mountain, having set up camp in a place not far away, together with the forester and other men, having done the meal duty of the hermit, at the time when he was seated, having gone there, having paid respect, having exchanged friendly welcome, sat down to one side. The king, having placed the articles of a recluse's requisites at his feet, said "Venerable sir, what shall we do at this place, shall we go?" "Go, great king." "Yes, I am going, venerable sir, but we have heard that near the noble one there is an unsuitable company; this is not fitting for those gone forth. Let her go together with me, venerable sir." The mind of human

beings is difficult to satisfy; how will she dwell in the midst of many? From the time she is agreeable to us, having placed her in the position of chief among the rest, we shall look after her, venerable sir.

He, having heard the king's words, by way of the very name given in childhood, called his daughter "Dear, Padumavatī." She, at just a single word, having come out from the hermitage, having paid respect to her father, stood. Then his father said to him - "You, dear, have come of age; from the time you have been seen by the king, it is not fitting for you to dwell in this place. Go together with the king, dear." She, having accepted her father's word saying "Good, father," having paid respect, stood weeping. The king, thinking "I shall win over her father's mind," having placed her upon a heap of coins at that very place, performed the consecration. Then, having taken her, having brought her to his own city, from the time of her arrival, without looking at the remaining women, he delighted together with her alone. Those women, overcome by jealousy, wishing to cause a rift between her and the king, said thus - "This one, great king, is not of human birth. Where indeed have you ever seen lotuses springing up in a place where human beings walk about? Surely this one is a demoness. Remove her, great king." The king, having heard their talk, remained silent.

Then at another time the borderland was in revolt. He, having left Padumavatī, who was heavy with child, in the city, went to the borderland. Then those women, having given a bribe to her female attendant, said "As soon as this one's child is born, having removed it, having smeared one wooden door-latch with blood, place it near her." For Padumavatī too, before long, the delivery took place. Prince Mahāpaduma alone took conception in the womb. The remaining four hundred and ninety-nine boys, having come forth from the mother's womb of Prince Mahāpaduma, at the time of lying down, having become moisture-born, arose. Then, having known "She has not yet regained consciousness," that female attendant, having smeared one wooden door-latch with blood, having placed it nearby, gave the signal to those women. Those five hundred women too, each one having taken one boy, having sent to the turners, having had caskets brought, having laid the boys taken by each one therein, having made a mark on the outside, placed them.

Padumavatī too, having regained consciousness, asked that female attendant "What have I given birth to, mother?" She, having threatened her, having said "From where will you obtain a child?" placed the blood-smeared wooden door-latch before her, saying "This is the child that came out from your womb." She, having seen that, having reached displeasure, said "Quickly split it and remove it; if anyone should see it, it would be a cause for shame." She, having heard her words, as if well-wishing, having split the wooden door-latch, threw it into the oven.

The king too, having come from the borderland, waiting for the celebration, having set up camp outside the city, sat down. Then those five hundred women, having come out to meet the king, said - "You, great king, do not believe us; what was said by us appears to be without reason. You, having summoned the queen's female attendant, ask her in return - your queen has given birth to a wooden doll." The king, without even investigating that matter, thinking "She must be of non-human birth," drove her out from the house. Together with her very departure from the royal palace, the lotus flowers disappeared, and her bodily complexion too became faded.

She, all alone, set forth along the side streets. Then a certain old woman who had come of age, having seen her, having aroused affection as for a daughter, said "Where are you going, mother?" "I am a visitor, I am wandering about looking for a dwelling place." "Come here, mother," and having given her a dwelling place, she prepared food.

While she was dwelling there in just this manner, those five hundred women, being of one mind, said to the king - "Great king, when you had gone to war, we made an aspiration to the deity of the Ganges: 'When our lord has come back victorious in battle, having made an oblation, we shall have water-sport.' We inform you of this matter, Sire." The king, pleased by their words, went to the Ganges to have water-sport. They too, having concealed the caskets taken by each one, having taken them, having gone to the river, for the purpose of concealing those caskets, having wrapped themselves again and again, having fallen into the water, they released the caskets. Those caskets too, all having gone together, got caught in a net spread downstream. Then, having played water-sport, when the king had come out, while lifting up the net, having seen those caskets, they brought them to the king's presence.

The king, having looked at the caskets, said "What is in the caskets, dear sons?" "We do not know, Sire." He, having had those caskets opened, while looking, first had the casket of Prince Mahāpaduma opened. But for all of them, on the very days they had been laid down in the caskets, by the power of merit, milk was produced from their thumbs. Sakka, the king of gods, for the purpose of removing that king's doubt, had letters inscribed inside the caskets - "These princes were born in the womb of Padumavatī, sons of the king of Bārāṇasī. Then Padumavatī's co-wives, five hundred women, having placed them in caskets, threw them into the water. Let the king know this matter." As soon as the caskets were opened, the king, having read the letters, having seen the children, having lifted up Prince Mahāpaduma, having swiftly yoked the chariots, "Harness the horses! Today, having entered the inner city, I shall show my affection to certain women," having ascended the excellent mansion, having placed a bag of a thousand on the elephant's neck, he had a drum beaten in the city - "Whoever sees Padumavatī, let him take this thousand."

Having heard that announcement, Padumavatī gave a signal to her mother - "Take the thousand from the elephant's neck, mother." She said "I do not dare to take such a thing." When it was said a second and a third time, she said "Saying what shall I take it, mother?" "Having said 'My daughter sees Queen Padumavatī,' take it." She, thinking "Be it whatever it may be," having gone, took the bag of a thousand. Then people asked her - "Do you see Queen Padumavatī, mother?" She said "I do not see her; my daughter, it is said, sees her." They, having said "But where is she, mother?" having gone together with her, having recognised Padumavatī, fell at her feet. At that time she, having known "This is Queen Padumavatī," said "A weighty deed indeed has been done by a woman, who, being the chief queen of such a king, dwelt without protection in such a place."

Those king's men too, having had Padumavatī's dwelling enclosed with white curtains, having placed a guard at the door, having gone, reported to the king. The king sent a golden palanquin. She said: "I shall not go thus. From my dwelling place up to the king's palace, in between here, having had excellent painted canvas coverings spread, having had a cloth canopy decorated with golden stars tied above, when all

ornaments have been sent for the purpose of adornment, I shall go on foot only; thus the citizens will see my success." The king said: "Do as Padumavatī wishes." Then Padumavatī, having adorned herself with all decorations, set out on the road thinking "I shall go to the king's palace." Then at every place she stepped upon, breaking through the excellent painted canvas coverings, lotus flowers arose. She, having shown her success to the public, having ascended to the king's dwelling, had all those cloth painted coverings given to that old woman as a fee for nurturing.

The king too, having summoned those five hundred women, said: "These I give to you, queen, having made them your female slaves." "Good, great king, make it known throughout the entire city that they have been given to me." The king had a drum beaten in the city: "The five hundred women who were treacherous to Padumavatī have been given as female slaves to her alone." She, having known "Their status as female slaves has been observed by the entire city," asked the king: "May I make my female slaves into freewomen, Sire?" "It is your wish, queen." "That being so, having summoned that very same drum-beater - 'The five hundred women given as her own female slaves to Queen Padumavatī have all been made freewomen' - have the drum beaten again," she said. She, when their status as freewomen had been made, having given the four hundred and ninety-nine sons into their very hands for the purpose of nurturing, herself took only Prince Mahāpaduma.

Then at a later time, when those princes had reached the age for playing, the king had various kinds of playing places built in the park. They, at the time when they were about sixteen years of age, all having come together, while playing in the park at the auspicious pond covered with lotuses, having seen new lotuses in bloom and old lotuses falling from their stalks, thought: "Even for this much, which is not clung-to, such ageing reaches it; how much more then for our bodies. This too will indeed have just such a destiny" - having taken this as their object, all of them, having produced the knowledge of individual enlightenment, rising up one after another, sat cross-legged on the pericarps of the lotuses.

Then the king's men who had gone together with them, having known that much of the day had passed, said: "Noble sons, be aware of the time." They were silent. The men, having gone, reported to the king - "The princes, Sire, are seated on the pericarps of the lotuses; even when we speak to them, they make no verbal expression." "Allow them to sit according to their liking." They, having kept guard the whole night, in the same manner of sitting on the pericarps of the lotuses, saw the dawn arise. The men, having approached on the following day, said: "Sires, be aware of the time." "We are not sires; we are called Individually Enlightened Ones." "Sirs, you speak a weighty word; those called Individually Enlightened Ones are not like you; they have hair and beard two inches long and the eight requisites fastened upon their bodies." They touched their heads with their right hands; at that very moment the layman's outward sign disappeared. And the eight requisites were fastened upon their bodies. Then, while the great multitude was still watching, they went through the sky to the Nandamūlaka cave.

Queen Padumavatī too, having reached heart-sorrow thinking "I, having had many sons, have become sonless," having died by that very sorrow, was reborn in a village outside the city gates of the city of Rājagaha in a place where one earns a livelihood by doing work with one's own hands. Then afterwards, having gone to a family house,

one day, while carrying rice gruel to her husband's field, having seen eight Individually Enlightened Ones going through the sky at the time of the alms round among those who were her own sons, having gone very quickly, she informed her husband - "Look, noble sir, at the Individually Enlightened Ones; having invited them, let us feed them." He said - "These are ascetic-birds; they roam about thus elsewhere too; these are not Individually Enlightened Ones." While they were still speaking, they descended at a place not far away. That woman, having given them her own meal of food, solid food and soft food on that day, said "Tomorrow too, eight of you, please accept almsfood from me." "Good, female lay follower, let your honour be just this much, and let the seats be only eight; having seen many other Individually Enlightened Ones too, may your mind become confident." She, on the following day, having prepared eight seats, having arranged honour and respect for eight, sat down.

The invited Individually Enlightened Ones gave a signal to the rest - "Sirs, today, without going elsewhere, all of you show support to your mother." They, having heard their words, all together, having come through the sky, appeared at the door of their mother's house. She too, because she had previously received the signal, even though seeing many, was not shaken. Having ushered all of them into the house, she caused them to sit down on seats. As they sat down in succession, the ninth one, having created another eight seats, himself sat down on the front seat; as the seats increased, so the house increased. Thus, when all of them were seated, that woman, having given the honour prepared for the eight Individually Enlightened Ones as much as they liked even to the five hundred, having brought eight bundles of blue waterlilies, having placed them at the feet of the invited Individually Enlightened Ones alone, said - "May my bodily complexion, venerable sirs, in whatever place I am reborn, be like the colour of the interior of these blue waterlilies" - she made the aspiration. The Individually Enlightened Ones, having given thanksgiving to their mother, went to Mount Gandhamādana itself.

She too, having done wholesome deeds for as long as life lasted, having passed away from there, having been reborn in the heavenly world, in this arising of a Buddha, took conception in a millionaire's family in Sāvattthī. And because her complexion was similar to the interior of a blue waterlily, they gave her the name Uppalavaṇṇā. Then, when she had come of age, kings and millionaires throughout the whole Indian subcontinent sent a messenger to the millionaire saying "Let him give us his daughter." There was no one who did not send. Then the millionaire thought - "I shall not be able to take hold of the minds of all; but I shall employ one strategy" - having summoned his daughter, he said "Dear, will you be able to go forth?" Because she was a being in her final existence, her father's words were to her like oil prepared a hundred times poured on the head. Therefore she said to her father: "I shall go forth, dear father." He, having made an offering for her, having led her to the nuns' quarters, gave her the going forth. When she had only recently gone forth, her turn came at the Observance hall. She, having lit a lamp, having swept the Observance hall, having taken a sign from the flame of the lamp, standing right there, looking again and again, having produced meditative absorption with the fire kasiṇa as object, having made that itself the foundation, attained arahantship. Together with the fruition of arahantship itself, the direct knowledges and analytical knowledges too succeeded. But in particular, she was a master through practice in the miraculous transformation of supernormal power. Therefore it was said in the Apadāna -

"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 millionaire's family;
Radiant with various jewels, endowed with great happiness.

"Having approached that great hero, I heard the teaching of the Dhamma;
Then, with confidence arisen, I go to the Conqueror for refuge.

"The Blessed One, the Leader, praised as foremost among those possessing
supernormal power;
A nun who was conscientious, such a one, skilled in concentration and
meditative absorption.

"Then with a joyful mind, I, wishing for that state;
Having invited the one of ten powers, the leader of the world together with the
Community.

"Having fed them for seven days, and having given the three robes;
Having taken a garland of seven strands, waterlilies fragrant as a goddess.

"Having placed them at the Teacher's feet, I venerated his knowledge;
Having bowed down with my head at his feet, I spoke these words.

"She who was praised, O hero, the sage in the eighth cosmic cycle from now;
Such shall I become, if it succeeds, O leader.

"Then the Teacher said to me, 'Be confident, girl;
In the future time, you will obtain that wish.

"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;
Uppalavaṇṇā by name, and glorious in beauty.

"Having attained mastery over the direct knowledges, carrying out the
Teacher's instruction;
With all mental corruptions eliminated, you will be a disciple of the Teacher.'

"Then I, having become joyful, for as long as life, then the Conqueror;
With a mind of friendliness I attended, the leader of the world together with
the Community.

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

"Having passed away from there, among humans, I was reborn of the Self-
Become One;
Covered with water lilies, I gave almsfood.

"Ninety-one cosmic cycles ago from now, the Leader named Vipassī;
Arose, lovely to behold, having vision regarding all phenomena.

"Having been a millionaire's daughter then, in the best city of Bārāṇasī;
Having invited the Enlightened by himself, the leader of the world together
with the Community.

"Having given a great gift, with water lilies to the Guide;
Having venerated him with my mind, I aspired to beauty of complexion.

"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 second daughter, named Samaṇaguttā;
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.

"I and Khemā the wise, Paṭācārā and Kuṇḍalā;
Kisāgotamī, Dhammadinnā, Visākhā is the seventh.

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

"Passed away from there among human beings, reborn in a great family;
Yellow, polished, excellent cloth, I gave to the Worthy One.

"Having passed away from there, in Ariṭṭha city, I was born in a brahmin
family;
The daughter of Tiriṭivaccha, Ummārantī, the charming one.

"Passed away from there, in a country, in a certain family, I;
Was born in one not very prosperous, I guarded rice then.

"Having seen a Paccekasambuddha, I gave five hundred portions of parched
corn;
Covered with lotuses, I have five hundred sons.

"I aspired, they too aspired, having given honey to the Self-Become One;
Passed away from there, in the forest I was born in the belly of a lotus.

"Having been the chief queen of the King of Kāsi, honoured and revered;
I gave birth to princes, a full five hundred.

"When they, having reached youth, were playing water sports;
Having seen a fallen lotus, they became Solitary Leaders.

"I, separated from them, the learned heroes, sorrowful;
Passed away on the slope of Isigili, I was born in a small village.

"When Sutamatī, awakened, for her sons and husband too;
Taking rice gruel, was going to the eight individual leaders.

"While going to the village for alms, having seen children, I remembered;
A stream of milk flowed out, then, due to my love for my son.

"Thereupon I gave them rice gruel, devoted, with my own hands;
Having passed away from there, I was reborn among the deities, in Nandana.

"Having experienced happiness and suffering, having wandered in the round
of rebirths from existence to existence;
For your benefit, O great hero, life was given up.

"Your daughter, O great hero, wise one, radiant one;
And much difficult action, done by me, exceedingly difficult.

"Rāhula and I, for many hundreds of births;
Born in one existence, with the same desire and mind.

"Rebirth is together, and by birth also together;
When the final existence is attained, both are of different origins.

"The meeting with the former supreme conquerors has been pointed out by
you;
Much aspiration of mine, for your benefit, O great sage.

"Whatever wholesome action was fulfilled by me, remember it, O sage;
For your benefit, O great hero, merit was accumulated by me.

"Having avoided the state of inability, preventing misconduct;
For your benefit, O great hero, my life was given up many times.

"Thus manifold suffering, and success of many kinds;
When the final existence was attained, I was born formerly in Sāvattthī.

"In a family of a millionaire of great wealth, happy and well-prepared likewise;
Shining with various jewels, prosperous with all sensual pleasures.

"Honoured and venerated indeed, revered and esteemed likewise;
Endowed with personal splendour, greatly honoured among families.

"I was very much desired, for my beauty, splendour, and glory;

Desired by merchants' sons, by many hundreds too.

"Having abandoned the house, I went forth into homelessness;
Before a fortnight had passed, I attained the four truths.

"Having created by supernormal power a chariot with four horses, I;
Paid homage at the feet of the Buddha, the Protector of the World, such a one.

"And I am a master in supernormal powers, in the divine ear element;
In the knowledge of others' mental states, I am a master, O great sage.

"I know past lives, the divine eye has been purified;
With all mental corruptions eliminated, there is now no more rebirth.

"In meaning, teaching, and language, and likewise in discernment;
My knowledge is spotless, pure, by the power of the great sage.

"Robes and almsfood, requisites and lodgings;
In a moment they offer, thousands from all around.

"The Conqueror, satisfied with that virtue, established me in the foremost
position;
As the foremost among those possessing supernormal power," said the great
leader in the assemblies.

"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.

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

But this elder nun, when the Blessed One approached the foot of the kaṇḍamba tree to perform the Twin Miracle at the gate of the city of Sāvattihī, then having approached the Teacher and having paid homage, said thus - "I, venerable sir, shall perform the wonder, if the Blessed One permits," she roared the lion's roar. The Teacher, making this reason the occasion, seated in the midst of the noble company at the great monastery of Jetavana, while establishing the nuns in successive positions of rank, established this elder nun in the foremost position among those possessing supernormal power. She, spending her time in the happiness of meditative absorption, the happiness of fruition, and the happiness of Nibbāna, one day, reviewing the danger, degradation, and defilement of sensual pleasures, echoing the verses spoken by one in whom spiritual urgency had arisen with reference to the co-wife life together with the mother and daughter of the Elder Gaṅgātīriya -

224. "Both mother and daughter, we were co-wives;

For me there was spiritual urgency, wonderful and terrifying.

225. "Shame on sensual pleasures, unclean, foul-smelling, full of thorns;
Where mother and daughter, we were co-wives.
226. "Having seen the danger in sensual pleasures, having seen security in
renunciation;
She went forth in Rājagaha, from the household life into homelessness."

She spoke these three verses.

Therein, "both mother and daughter, we were co-wives" means as mother and daughter, both of us were mutually co-wives.

It is said that in Sāvattihī, towards the break of dawn, an embryo was established in the womb of the wife of a certain merchant; she did not know it. The merchant, when the night became light, having loaded goods onto carts, departed heading for Rājagaha. As time went on, the embryo, having grown, reached maturity. Then her mother-in-law said to her thus - "My son has been away from home for a long time and you are pregnant; an evil deed has been done by you." She said: "I do not know any other man apart from your son." Even having heard that, the mother-in-law, not believing her, drove her out from the house. She, seeking her husband, gradually arrived at Rājagaha. At that very moment, while her kamma-born winds were stirring, having entered a certain hall near the road, the delivery took place. She, having given birth to a son resembling a golden image, having laid him down in a poorhouse, went outside for the purpose of the water-function. Then a certain childless caravan leader, going by that road, thinking "The child belongs to a woman without a husband; he shall become my son," gave him into the hands of a nurse. Then his mother, having done the water-function, having taken water, having turned back, not seeing her son, overcome by sorrow, having lamented, without even entering Rājagaha, set out on the road. A certain chief of thieves, having seen her on the road, with his mind enamoured, made her his wife. She, dwelling in his house, gave birth to one daughter. Then she, one day, while standing holding her daughter, having quarrelled with her husband, threw the daughter onto the small bed. The girl's head was slightly split. Thereupon she too, fearing her husband, having returned to Rājagaha itself, wanders about freely. Her son, standing in early youth, not knowing her as his mother, made her his wife. At a later time, not knowing the daughter of the chief of thieves to be his sister, having performed the marriage, he brought her to his own house. Thus he made his own mother and sister his wives and made them dwell together. On account of that, they both lived as co-wives. Then one day, the mother, having loosened her daughter's hair-knot, while looking for lice, having seen a wound on her head, having asked "Could this perhaps be my daughter?" with a sense of urgency arisen, having gone to the nuns' quarters in Rājagaha, having gone forth, having completed the preliminary functions, dwelling in a secluded residence, having reviewed her own former practice, spoke the verses beginning with "both mother" etc. But echoing those very verses spoken by her, by way of seeing the danger in sensual pleasures, this elder nun said beginning with "both mother and daughter" etc.

Therefore it was said - "She, spending her time in the happiness of meditative absorption, the happiness of fruition, and the happiness of Nibbāna, spoke these three verses."

Therein, "impure" means impure through the trickling of the impurity of mental defilements. "Foul-smelling" means of putrid odour through the blowing of a poisonous odour. "Full of thorns" means having manifold thorns of mental defilements in the sense of piercing through good conduct by the occurrence of envy. For thus they are said to be "sensual pleasures like stakes of spears." "Where" means in those sensual pleasures that are to be enjoyed. "A co-wife" means a shared wife; the meaning is "a co-wife."

227. "I know past lives, the divine eye has been purified;
And the knowledge of others' minds, the ear-element purified.
228. "Supernormal power has been realised by me, the elimination of mental corruptions has been attained by me;
The six higher knowledges have been realised, the Buddha's teaching has been fulfilled."

The two verses beginning with "Past lives" were spoken by the elder nun who had become filled with joy and pleasure after reviewing the distinction she had attained. Therein, "knowledge of others' minds" means the knowledge of others' mental states; the connection is with "realised" or "attained."

229. "Having created by supernormal power a chariot with four horses, I;
Having paid homage at the feet of the Buddha, the Protector of the World,
such a one."

This verse was spoken with faith when the Blessed One approached the foot of the Kaṇḍamba tree to perform the Twin Miracle, and this elder nun, having created such a chariot, having gone together with it to the Teacher's presence, having said "Blessed One, I shall perform the wonder for the crushing of the vanity of the sectarians; please allow me," stood near the Teacher. Therein, "having created by supernormal power a chariot with four horses, I" - the intention is: having created by supernormal power a chariot yoked with four horses, having paid homage at the feet of the Buddha, the Blessed One, she stood to one side.

230. "Having approached the tree in full bloom at its top, you stand alone at the foot of the sal tree;
And there is no companion of yours whatsoever, foolish one, do you not fear the cheats?"

Therein, "in full bloom at its top" means well bloomed at the top, the meaning is blossoming in every branch beginning from the top. "Tree" means a tree; but here a sal tree is intended. "You alone" means you, a solitary woman, stand here. "And there is no companion of yours whatsoever" means there is no one who is a friend and protector of yours; or there is no one equal to you in beauty, you of incomparable form stand alone in this place secluded from people. "Foolish one, do you not fear the cheats" means young woman, how do you not fear the wicked men; the intention is

cheats who cause harm. It is said that Māra spoke this verse one day, having seen the elder nun seated for the day residence in a sal grove covered with flowers, having approached, wishing to cut her off from seclusion, testing her. Then the elder nun, frightening him, by the power of her own spiritual might -

231. "Even a hundred thousand cheats, such as these, were to come together;
I would not stir a hair nor would I tremble, what will you do to me, Māra, alone?"
232. "I can disappear, or I can enter your belly;
I can stand between your eyebrows, and standing there you will not see me.
233. "I have become master over my mind, the bases for spiritual power are well developed;
The six higher knowledges have been realised, the Buddha's teaching has been fulfilled.
234. "Sensual pleasures are like stakes of spears, the aggregates are their chopping block;
What you call 'sensual delight', that is now discontent for me.
235. "Delight has been destroyed everywhere, the mass of darkness has been split open;
Know thus, Evil One, you are defeated, O Death."

He spoke these verses.

Therein, "even a hundred thousand cheats, such as these, were to come together" means if cheats of such a kind as you, of such a form, even numbering many hundreds of thousands, were to come together. "I would not stir a hair nor would I tremble" means not even a hair's breadth would stir nor would tremble. "What will you do to me, Māra, alone" means Māra, what will you, all alone, do to me?

Now, making clear the very inability of Māra to do anything to her, she spoke the verse "I can disappear." Its meaning is - Māra, I, standing right before you, disappear, go to invisibility; without your even knowing, I enter your belly, or I stand between your eyebrows; and thus standing, you do not see me.

If one asks why? "I have become master over my mind, the bases for spiritual power are well developed" - I am indeed, Māra; my mind has attained mastery; the four bases for spiritual power too have been well developed and cultivated by me; therefore I am capable of the aforesaid extent of supernormal power. All the remainder is clear in itself since the method has been stated above.

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

The commentary on the Chapter of Twelves 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.

PDF Creation Date: 14 September 2026

HOW TO CITE

PaliVerse (2026). Commentaries. The Canon of Discourses - Commentaries. 5. The Collection of Minor Texts. 09. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nuns. 11. The Book of the Twelves Retrieved from paliverse.org

© 2026 The PaliVerse Project · All Rights Reserved
Centre for Study and Practice of Theravāda Buddhism
Civic Non-Profit Company registered in Greece
This PDF may be freely distributed for study and practice.

PaliVerse.org