

THE PALIVERSE PROJECT

The Universe of Buddha's Wisdom

Commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā)

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PaliVerse

5. The Collection of Minor Texts

09. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nuns

15. The Book of the Forties

1. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Isidāsī

402-449. In the Group of Forty, "In the city named Kusuma" and so on are the verses of the Elder Nun Isidāsī. This one too, having formed aspirations under former Buddhas, established in the state of manhood in this and that existence, accumulating wholesome action as a decisive support for the end of the round of rebirths, in the seventh existence from her final existence, through unwholesome association, having committed the act of adultery, upon the collapse of the body, having been reborn in hell, having been tormented there in hell for many hundreds of years, having passed away from there, having been reborn in the animal realm in three births, having passed away from there, having become a eunuch in the womb of a female slave, was reborn. Then, having passed away from there, she was reborn as the daughter of a certain poor carter. When she had come of age, one named Giridāsa, the son of a certain caravan leader, having made her his own wife, brought her to his house. And he had a wife who was moral and of good character. Overcome by jealousy towards her, she performed the act of causing enmity between her and her husband. She, having remained there for as long as life lasted, upon the collapse of the body, in this arising of a Buddha, was reborn in Ujjenī as the daughter of a millionaire who was esteemed for his virtues of family, region, morality, conduct, and so on, and who was endowed with wealth; her name was Isidāsī.

When she had come of age, her mother and father gave her to a certain merchant's son who was equal in family, beauty, age, wealth, and so on. She, having become a devoted wife in his house, dwelt for just one month. Then, by the power of her action, her husband, having become dispassionate in appearance, drove her out from the house. All that is known from the Pāḷi text itself. But with a sense of urgency arisen due to being displeasing to those various husbands, having obtained permission from her father, having gone forth in the presence of the Elder Nun Jinadattā, doing the work of insight, before long, having attained arahantship together with the analytical knowledges, spending her time in the happiness of fruition and the happiness of Nibbāna, one day, having walked for almsfood in the city of Pāṭaliputta, after the meal, having returned from her alms round, having sat down on a sandy bank of the great Ganges, being asked by the Elder Nun named Bodhī, her own companion elder nun, about her former practice, she answered that matter by way of verse composition beginning with "In the excellent city of Ujjenī" and so on. Now, to show the connection of those questions and answers -

402. "In the city named Kusuma, in Pāṭaliputta, the ornament of the earth;
Two nuns indeed, virtuous ones, of noble birth from the Sakyan clan.

403. Isidāsī was one of them there, the second was Bodhī - both accomplished in

morality;

Delighted in the practice of meditative absorption, very learned, with mental defilements shaken off.

404. They, having walked for almsfood, having finished the meal, with washed bowls;
Comfortably seated in a secluded place, uttered these words."

These three verses were placed by the compilers of the recitation.

405. "You are lovely, lady, Isidāsī, and your youth is not fallen away;
Having seen what fault, then were you engaged in renunciation?
406. Being thus questioned, she, skilled in teaching the Dhamma in a secluded place;
Isidāsī spoke these words, "Listen Bodhī, how I went forth.

From here onwards are the verses of reply.

407. "In the excellent city of Ujjenī, my father was a millionaire restrained in morality;
I was his only daughter, dear, agreeable, and beloved.
408. Then suitors came to me from Sāketa, of the highest lineage;
A millionaire with abundant wealth, to him my father gave me as daughter-in-law.
409. "To my mother-in-law and father-in-law, evening and morning, having approached with salutation;
With my head I do homage at their feet, I pay respect as I have been instructed.
410. "Whoever were my husband's sisters, brothers or attendants;
Having seen even one of them, agitated I give a seat.
411. "With food and drink, with hard food and whatever is placed there;
I conceal and bring near, and I give what is suitable for whom.
412. "Having attended at the proper time, I approach the house at the threshold;
Washing hands and feet, with joined palms I go to my husband.
413. "Having taken comb, cosmetics, eye ointment, and mirror;
Like a personal attendant, I myself adorn my husband.
414. I myself prepare the cooked rice, I myself washing the vessel;
Like a mother her only son, so I attend to my husband.
415. "Though I was thus devoted, affectionate, industrious, and humble,
Active and not lazy, virtuous - my husband became angry with me.
416. "He speaks to mother and father, 'Having asked permission, I shall go;

With Isidāsī I shall not dwell, in one house with her I shall not live.

417. "Do not speak thus, son, Isidāsī is wise and experienced;
Industrious and not lazy, why does she not please you, son?
418. "She does not harm me in anything, yet with Isidāsī I shall not dwell;
She is disagreeable to me, enough for me, without asking I shall go.
419. "Having heard his word, my mother-in-law and father-in-law asked me:
'What wrong has been done by you? Speak freely, as it really is.'
420. "I do not offend in anything, nor do I harm nor speak harsh words;
What can be done, lady, when my husband feels enmity towards me?
421. They led me back to my father's house, displeased and overcome by suffering;
'While protecting our son, we have lost a beautiful fortune.'
422. Then my father gave me to the house of a wealthy man, a second man of good
family;
For half the price by which you, millionaire, obtained me.
423. "In his house too I lived for a month, then he too rejected me;
Though I attended on him like a slave, blameless and accomplished in
morality.
424. "My father speaks to one wandering for alms, a tamer, tamed:
'You will be my son-in-law, put down the cloth and the bowl.'
425. "He too, having stayed a fortnight, then speaks to father, 'Give me my cloth;
And the bowl and the vessel, I shall walk for almsfood again.'
426. Then my father, mother, and all my group of relatives spoke to him:
'What is not done for you here? Speak quickly, that will be done for you.'
427. "Thus spoken to, he speaks, 'If my self is able, enough for me;
With Isidāsī I shall not dwell, in one house with her I shall not live.'
428. "Dismissed, he went, and I alone pondered;
'Having asked permission I shall go, either to die or to go forth.'
429. "Then the lady Jinadattā came, walking for her food resort;
To my father's family, a bearer of the discipline, very learned, accomplished in
morality.
430. Having seen her at our home, I rose and prepared a seat for her;
And having paid homage at her feet while she was seated, I gave her food.
431. "With food and drink, with hard food and whatever is placed there;
Having satisfied her, I said, 'Lady, I wish to go forth.'
432. "Then my father spoke to me, 'Right here, dear child, practise the Teaching;

With food and drink, satisfy ascetics and brahmins.'

433. "Then I speak to father, weeping, having extended joined palms in salutation;
'For evil was done by me, that action I will destroy.'
434. "Then my father spoke to me, 'Attain enlightenment and the foremost teaching;
And may you obtain Nibbāna, which the foremost of bipeds realised.'
435. "Having paid respect to my mother and father, and to all the groups of relatives;
Seven days after going forth, I attained the three true knowledges.
436. "I know my own seven births, of which this is the resultant fruit;
That I shall tell you, listen to that with undivided mind.
437. "In the city of Erakaccha, I was a goldsmith with abundant wealth;
Intoxicated by the pride of youth, I resorted to another's wife.
438. "I, having passed away from there, was cooked in hell for a long time;
Having risen from there when fully cooked, I entered the womb of a female monkey.
439. "When I was seven days old, the great monkey, the leader of the herd,
castrated me;
This is the fruit of that action, just as I had gone to another's wife.
440. "I, having passed away from there, having died in the Sindh forest;
I entered the womb of a she-goat, one-eyed and lame.
441. "For twelve years I, having been castrated, carried children on my back;
Afflicted by worms, unhealthy, just as I had gone to another's wife.
442. "I, having passed away from there, was born as a cow of a cattle dealer;
A calf, copper-coloured like lac, castrated at twelve months.
443. "Having drawn the plough, I bear the cart;
Blind and afflicted, unhealthy, just as I had gone to another's wife.
444. "I, having passed away from there, was born in the house of a female slave on
the street;
Neither a woman nor a man, just as I had gone to another's wife.
445. "Having died at thirty years, I was born as a girl in a carter's family;
In a poor one with little wealth, beset by many creditors.
446. "Me, from there, the caravan leader, with abundant, extensive interest;
Drags away wailing, having taken by force from the family home.
447. Then in my sixteenth year, having seen me as a maiden who had reached youth;

The son of Orundhata, Giridāsa by name.

448. "He too had another wife, moral, virtuous, and famous;
Devoted to her husband - towards her I caused enmity.
449. "This is the fruit of that action, that having cast me aside they go;
Though I attended on him like a slave, an end to that too has been made by
me."

Therein, "in the city named Kusuma" means in the city bearing the name taken by the word "kusuma" as "Kusumapura"; now it shows that city in its own form as "in Pāṭaliputta." "The ornament of the earth" means that which has become the ornament of the entire earth. "Of noble birth from the Sakyan clan" means daughters of the Sakyan clan; it is said thus because of having gone forth in the Dispensation of the Blessed One, the son of the Sakyans.

"Therein" means among those two nuns. "Bodhī" means the elder nun so named. "Delighting in the practice of meditative absorption" means delighting in the practice of mundane and supramundane meditative absorption. "Very learned" means very learned through great learning of the scriptures. "With defilements shaken off" means with defilements altogether uprooted by the highest path. "Having finished the meal" means having completed the meal duty. "In the deserted" means in a secluded place devoid of people. "Comfortably seated" means comfortably seated with the happiness of the going forth and the happiness of seclusion. "These words" means the pleasant talk now being spoken. "Uttered" means they spoke by way of question and answer.

The verse "You are lovely" was spoken by way of the Elder Nun Bodhī's question. The verse "Being thus questioned" was spoken by the compilers of the rehearsal themselves. For all those beginning with "In Ujjenī" were spoken by Isidāsī herself. Therein, "you are lovely" means you were one who brought confidence to those seeing you through the perfection of beauty. "Your youth too is not fallen away" means your youth too is not declined; the meaning is that you were standing in the first stage of life. "Having seen what fault" means having seen what kind of fault, defect, danger in the household life. "Then were you engaged in renunciation" - "atha" is merely a particle; you were engaged in renunciation, the going forth.

"Being questioned" means being asked; the explanation is: she, Isidāsī. "In a secluded place" means in an empty place. "Listen Bodhī, how I went forth" means: Elder Nun Bodhī, listen, hear that old account of how I went forth.

"In the excellent city of Ujjenī" means in the excellent city in the Avanti country named Ujjenī. "Dear" means one to be held dear by virtue of being an only daughter. "Agreeable" means one who increases the minds of others by the virtue of her morality and good conduct. "Beloved" means one to be treated with compassion.

"Then" means afterwards, at the time when I came of age. "Suitors came to me from Sāketa" means suitors for me came from the city of Sāketa, seeking my hand. "Of the highest lineage" means of the foremost family in that city; the one by whom they were sent was a millionaire with abundant wealth. "To him my father gave me as daughter-in-law" means my father gave me to that millionaire of Sāketa, making me a daughter-in-law, a wife for his son.

"Evening and morning" means in the evening and in the forenoon. "Having approached, I make salutation with my head" means having approached the presence of my mother-in-law and father-in-law, I make salutation with my head; I pay homage at their feet. "As I have been instructed" means as I have been instructed by them, so I act; I do not transgress their instructions.

"Even one dear one" means even one beloved person. "Agitated" means trembling. "I give a seat" means whatever is suitable for whatever person, that I give to that one.

"There" means at the place of food distribution. "Stored up" means having been prepared and being available. "I conceal" means I cover over; having covered over, I bring near; having brought near, I give; and even in giving, whatever is suitable for whom, that very thing I give - this is the meaning.

"At the threshold" means at the door. "Washing hands and feet" means I was one who washed the hands and feet; the explanation is: having washed them, I approach the house.

"A comb" means a comb for combing the beard and hair. "Cosmetic" means a facial ointment made of scented powder and the like. "Pasādhana" is also a reading; it means ornamental articles. "Eye ointment container" means a tube for eye ointment. "Like a personal attendant" means though of the foremost family and endowed with wealth, like a maidservant who attends upon her husband.

"I prepare" means I cook. "Vessel" means and the metal vessel. The explanation is: washing, I attend upon him.

"Devoted" means one who has performed devotion to her husband. "Affectionate" means one possessing affection. "Industrious" means industrious in doing each and every thing that ought to be done. "Humble" means one whose pride has been removed. "Active" means one accomplished in industriousness and energy. "Not lazy" means thereby not indolent. "Virtuous" means one accomplished in morality and good conduct. "He becomes angry" means he becomes corrupted; having become angry, he speaks.

"He speaks 'having asked permission, I shall go'" means "I, having asked permission of you, shall go somewhere or other" - thus my husband speaks to his own mother and father. If one asks "what does he say?" - "With Isidāsī I shall not dwell, in one house with her I shall not live." Therein, "shall dwell" means I shall live.

"Disagreeable" means unpleasant. "Enough for me" means the meaning is: I have no use for that woman. "Without asking I shall go" means if you wish for communal life with her for me, I, without asking you, shall depart to a foreign country.

"Of him" means of my husband. "Of what" means what is it of your husband. What wrong has been done by you, what fault has been committed.

"I do not offend" means nor did I offend against him in anything. Or this itself is the reading. "Nor do I harm" means nor do I afflict. "Harsh words" means ill-spoken words. "What can be done, lady" means what am I able to do, lady. "When my husband feels enmity towards me" means because without any reason my husband feels enmity towards me, producing enmity and agitation of mind.

"Displeased" means sorrowful. "While protecting our son" means protecting their own son, my husband, by guarding his mind. "We have lost a beautiful fortune" means we have been defeated, we have indeed been defeated, we have lost the beautiful Sirī; the meaning is we have indeed been deprived of the goddess Sirī who was moving about in human guise.

"To the house of a wealthy man, a second man of good family" means with reference to the first husband, he gave me to the house of a second wealthy son of good family, and when giving, he gave for half the price of the first price. "By which you, millionaire, obtained me" means by which price the millionaire first obtained me, received me - for half that price; this is the explanation.

"He too" means the second husband too. "He sent me away" means he removed me; he drove me out from the house. "Though I attended on him" means though I was attending on him, performing attendance like a female slave. "Blameless" means one who does not commit treachery.

"A tamer" means one who tames the minds of others through the standpoint of compassion. So that others will give something, having made his own body and speech tamed and appeased, one who wanders for almsfood given by others. "Son-in-law" means a daughter's husband. "Put down the cloth and the bowl" means throw away the piece of rag worn by you and the alms-bowl.

"He too, having stayed a fortnight" means that beggar man too, having stayed with me for about half a month, departed.

"Then my father spoke to him" means my father, mother, and all my group of relatives, forming groups, spoke to that beggar. How? "What is not done for you here" means what indeed is not done, not accomplished for you? Speak quickly. "That will be done for you" means that will be done for you.

"If my self is able" means if my self is self-dependent and a freeman, enough for me, there is no use for that Isidāsī; therefore I shall not dwell together, I shall not live together; in one house I shall not live together with her - this is the explanation.

"Dismissed, he went" means that beggar, dismissed by my father, went as he pleased. "Alone" means just a solitary woman. "Having asked permission I shall go" means having taken leave of my father, I shall go. "To die" means to die. "Or" is an indeclinable particle in the sense of an alternative.

"For food resort" means for alms; the explanation is: she came to my father's family.

"Her" means that Elder Nun Jinadattā. "I rose and prepared a seat for her" means having risen, I prepared a seat for that elder nun.

"Right here" means standing in this very house. "Dear son" - he addresses his daughter with compassion using a common expression. "Practise the Teaching" means you, having gone forth, practise the Teaching beginning with the holy life that should be practised. "Twice-born" means of the brahmin caste.

"I shall wear away" means I shall cause to decay, I shall destroy.

"Enlightenment" means the full enlightenment to the truths; the meaning is path-knowledge. "The highest state" means the fruition state, arahantship. "Which the foremost of bipeds realised" means whatever supramundane state designated as path, fruition, and Nibbāna, which the foremost of bipeds, the Perfectly Enlightened One, realised - may you obtain that - this is the explanation.

"Seven days after going forth" means having gone forth, within seven days. "I touched" means I touched, I realised.

"Of which this is the resultant fruit" means of whatever evil action, this result, which is the natural outcome fruit reckoned as the state of being disagreeable to the husband. "That I shall tell you" means I shall tell you that action. "That" means that very action being told, or that word of mine. "With one mind" means with a fully focused mind. Or this itself is the reading.

"In the city of Erakacca" means in the city so named. "He resorted to another's wife" means I resorted to the wife of another.

"Tormented for a long time" means burnt by the fire of hell for many hundreds of thousands of years. "And having arisen from there" means having emerged from there, from hell, having passed away. "I entered the womb of a female monkey" means I took conception in the womb of a female monkey.

"Leader of the herd" means the leader of the herd. "Castrated" means he castrated, removed the seeds that are the characteristics of masculinity. "This is the fruit of that action" means this is the fruit of that action done by me in the past. "Just as having gone to another's wife" means just as having transgressed with another's wife.

"From there" means from the monkey realm. "In the Sindh forest" means in a forest place in the Sindh country. "Of a she-goat" means of a she-goat.

"Having carried children about" means having mounted on the back and carried youngsters. "Worm-infested" means having been as if covered with worms at the place of birth, afflicted, distressed. "Unwell" means sick; the remainder of the expression is "was."

"Of a cattle trader" means of one who lives by selling cows. "Lac-coloured" means endowed with copper-coloured hairs as if dyed with lac colouring.

"Having drawn" means having carried. "Plough" means a plough; the meaning is "and I bear the cart." "Blind and afflicted" means having become as if one-eyed, afflicted, oppressed.

"On the street" means on the city street. "Born in the house of a slave girl" means born in the womb of a household slave girl. Some also say "of a courtesan." "Neither a woman nor a man" means I was neither a woman nor a man; the meaning is a eunuch by birth.

"Having died at thirty years" means having been a eunuch, died at the age of thirty years. "In a carter's family" means in a carter's family. "Abounding in the attacks of creditors" means abounding in the assaults of creditor men, to be overwhelmed by many debtors.

"Accumulated" means built up. "Extensive" means great. "Interest" means interest on debt. "Drags away" means pulls away. "From the family house" means from my birth family's house.

"The son of Orundhata" means the son of this caravan leader, with his mind enamoured of me, Giridāsa by name - "puts under restraint" means makes her his own possession in the house.

"Devoted to her husband" means one who follows her husband. "Towards her I caused enmity" means I performed the act of enmity towards that wife, the co-wife, of that husband. I proceeded in such a way that he became angry with her.

"That having cast me aside they go" means that the husbands here and there, having cast aside and abandoned me who attended on them carefully like a slave, depart without concern. This is the result flowing from that action of adultery and the act of enmity towards the co-wife done by me at that time. "An end to that too has been made by me" means the limit of that likewise cruel evil action of attachment has now been made by me who has attained the highest path; from here onwards there is no suffering whatsoever. But whatever here has not been analysed in between, that is of clear meaning since the method has been stated.

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

The commentary on the Chapter of Forties 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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