

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)

3. The Book of the Threes (3. Tikanipāto)



PaliVerse

5. The Collection of Minor Texts

09. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nuns

3. The Book of the Threes

1. Commentary on the Verses of the Other Elder Nun Sāmā

39-41. In the Book of Threes, the verse beginning with "Twenty-five years" is the verse of another elder nun, Sāmā. This one too, having formed aspirations under former Buddhas, accumulating wholesome action as a decisive support for the end of the round of rebirths in this and that existence, in the time of the Blessed One Vipassī, was reborn in the realm of kinnaras on the bank of the river Candabhāgā. She there, devoted to amusement, wandered about together with the kinnaras. Then one day the Teacher, for the purpose of planting a wholesome seed for her, having gone there, walked up and down on the riverbank. She, having seen the Blessed One, full of mirth, having taken sal flowers, having gone to the Teacher's presence, having paid homage, venerated the Blessed One with those flowers. She, by that meritorious action, wandering in the round of rebirths among gods and humans, in this arising of a Buddha, having been reborn in a family home in Kosambī, having come of age, having become a companion of Sāmāvatī, when she had died, with a sense of urgency arisen, having gone forth, not having obtained concentration of mind for twenty-five years, in the time of old age, having received the exhortation of the Fortunate One, having developed insight, attained arahantship together with the analytical knowledges. Therefore it was said in the Apadāna -

"On the bank of the Candabhāgā river, I was a kinnara woman then;
I saw the god of gods, the lord of men walking up and down.

"Having plucked a sal flower, I, a slave of the foremost Buddha, gave it;
The great hero sniffed at the sal flower with divine fragrance.

"Having accepted, the Perfectly Enlightened One, Vipassī, the leader of the world;
The great hero sniffed at it while I was looking on then.

"Having raised my joined palms, having paid homage to the highest of bipeds;
Having gladdened my own mind, I then ascended the mountain.

"Ninety-one cosmic cycles ago from now, when I gave flowers then;
I do not know of an unfortunate realm, this is the fruit of honouring the Buddha.

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

But having attained arahantship, having reviewed her own practice, by way of an inspired utterance -

39. "Twenty-five years, since I went forth;
I do not know of having attained tranquillity of mind at any time.
40. "Not having gained peace of mind, not having control over my mind;
Then I attained religious emotion, having remembered the Conqueror's Dispensation.
41. "By many painful states, for me who delights in heedfulness;
The elimination of craving has been attained, the Buddha's teaching has been fulfilled;
Today is my seventh night, since when craving was dried up."

He spoke these verses.

Therein, "tranquillity of mind" means the appeasement of mind, the concentration of serenity of mind, path, and fruition - this is the meaning.

"Thereby" means therefore, because of the inability to bring the mind under control. "Attained religious emotion" means even while the Teacher was still living, being unable to bring the task of one gone forth to its summit, thinking "How shall I bring it to completion afterwards?" I attained religious emotion, the terror of knowledge. "Having remembered the Conqueror's Dispensation" means having recollected the Teacher's exhortation such as the simile of the blind turtle and so on. The remainder is according to the method already stated.

The commentary on the verses of the other elder nun Sāmā is completed.

2. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Uttamā

42-44. The verse beginning with "Four times, five times" is the verse of the excellent elder nun. This one too, having formed aspirations under former Buddhas, accumulating wholesome action as a decisive support for the end of the round of rebirths in this and that existence, in the time of the Blessed One Vipassī, was reborn as a household slave girl in the home of a certain householder in the city of Bandhumatī. She, having come of age, lived performing service for her masters. And at that time King Bandhuma, on the full moon day, having become an observer of the Observance, before the meal having given gifts, after the meal having gone, listens to the Teaching. Then the public, just as the king proceeds, in the same way on the full moon day, having undertaken the Observance factors, they carry on. Then this occurred to that slave girl - "Now indeed the great king and the public, having undertaken the Observance factors, carry on; what if I were to undertake the Observance morality on Observance days and carry on." She, doing so, having observed the completely pure Observance morality, was reborn among the Tāvatiṃsa gods, wandering again and again only in fortunate destinations, in this arising of a Buddha, having been reborn in a millionaire's family in Sāvatthī, having attained discretion, having heard the Teaching in the presence of the Elder Nun Paṭācārā, having gone forth, having established insight, she was not able to bring it to its

culmination. The Elder Nun Paṭācārā, having known the disposition of her mind, gave exhortation. She, having stood firm in her exhortation, together with the analytical knowledges, attained arahantship. Therefore it was said in the Apadāna -

"In the city of Bandhumatī, there was a warrior named Bandhumā;
On the full moon day, he observed the Observance.

"I at that time, a water-carrying slave girl I was there;
Having seen the army with its king, thus I reflected then.

"Even the king, having abandoned kingship, observed the Observance;
Surely that action was fruitful, the crowd of people was glad.

"Having wisely reviewed, the bad destination and poverty;
Having gladdened the mind, I observed the Observance.

"Having observed the Observance in the teaching of the Perfectly Enlightened One;
By that well-done action, I went to Tāvatiṃsa.

"There my divine mansion was well made, risen up two yojanas high;
Endowed with excellent pinnacle buildings, well adorned with great seats.

"A hundred thousand nymphs stand close to me always;
Surpassing other gods, I outshine them always.

"I attained the status of chief queen of sixty-four kings of gods;
I attained the status of chief queen of sixty-three universal monarchs.

"Having become gold-coloured, I wander in the round of rebirths through existences;
Everywhere I am the noble one, this is the fruit of the Observance.

"Elephant vehicles, horse vehicles, chariot vehicles and palanquins;
I obtain all this indeed, this is the fruit of the Observance.

"Made of gold, made of silver, and also made of crystal;
And made of coral, I obtain all.

"Silks and woollen blankets, linens and cottons too;
And very costly garments, I obtain all.

"Food, drink, solid food, cloth and lodgings;
All this one would obtain, this is the fruit of the Observance.

"Excellent odour and garlands, scented powder and cosmetics;
All this one would obtain, this is the fruit of the Observance.

"A pinnacle building and a mansion, a pavilion, a long building, a cave;
All this one would obtain, this is the fruit of the Observance.

"Seven years old by birth, I went forth into homelessness;
Before a fortnight had passed, I attained arahantship.

"Mental defilements have been burnt by me, all existences have been
uprooted;
With all mental corruptions eliminated, there is now no more rebirth.

"Ninety-one cosmic cycles ago from now, the action which I did then;
I do not know of an unfortunate realm, this is the fruit of the Observance.

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

But having attained arahantship, having reviewed her own practice, by way of an
inspired utterance -

42. "Four times, five times, I went out from the dwelling;
Not having gained peace of mind, not having control over my mind.
43. "I approached a nun, who was trustworthy to me;
She expounded the Teaching to me, the aggregates, sense bases, and
elements.
44. "Having heard the teaching from her, as she instructed me;
For seven days in a single cross-legged posture, I sat, endowed with joy and
happiness;
On the eighth day I stretched out my feet, having shattered the mass of
darkness."

He spoke these verses.

Therein, "I approached a nun, who was trustworthy to me" means she who was to be
trusted by me, whose words were trustworthy, that nun I approached, I went to; it
refers to the Elder Nun Paṭācārā by way of faith. "That nun approached, who was my
accomplisher" is also a reading. That nun Paṭācārā out of compassion approached
me, she who was the accomplisher of my own welfare - this is the meaning. "She
expounded the Teaching to me, the aggregates, sense bases, and elements" means
that Elder Nun Paṭācārā, having classified and shown the aggregates and so on thus:
"these are the five aggregates, these are the twelve sense bases, these are the
eighteen elements," expounded the Teaching to me.

"Having heard the Teaching from her" means having heard, in the presence of that
elder nun who had attained the analytical knowledges, the subtle and refined insight
teaching expounded preceded by the classification of the aggregates and so on,
leading to the noble path. "As she instructed me" means that elder nun, just as she
instructed me, exhorted me, so practising, having brought the practice to its
culmination, even so for seven days I sat in a single cross-legged posture. How?
"Endowed with joy and happiness" means possessed of the joy and happiness born of
meditative absorption. "On the eighth day I stretched out my feet, having shattered

the mass of darkness" means having shattered completely the mass of delusion by the highest path, on the eighth day, breaking the cross-legged posture, I stretched out my feet. This itself was her declaration of final liberating knowledge.

The commentary on the verses of the elder nun Uttamā is completed.

3. Commentary on the Verses of the Other Elder Nun Uttamā

45-47. The verses of another elder nun, Uttamā, beginning with "These seven factors of enlightenment." This one too, having formed aspirations under former Buddhas, accumulating wholesome action as a decisive support for the end of the round of rebirths in this and that existence, in the time of the Blessed One Vipassī, was reborn as a household slave girl in the city of Bandhumatī. She, one day, having seen a certain elder who had eliminated the mental corruptions, a disciple of the Teacher, walking for almsfood, with a gladdened mind, gave three sweet-meats. She, by that meritorious action, wandering in the round of rebirths among gods and humans, in this arising of a Buddha, having been reborn in a wealthy brahmin family in a certain place in the Kosala country, having attained discretion, having heard the Teaching in the presence of the Teacher who was wandering on a journey through the country, having gained faith, having gone forth, before long attained arahantship together with the analytical knowledges. Therefore it was said in the Apadāna -

"In the city of Bandhumatī, I was a water-carrying slave girl;
Having taken my share, I went as a water carrier.

"Having seen an ascetic on the road, with peaceful mind, composed;
With a confident mind, glad, I gave sweet-meats for thirteen days.

"By that well-done action, and by volition and aspirations;
For ninety-one cosmic cycles, I do not go to the nether world.

Having achieved that success, I experienced all;
Having given three sweet-meats, I have attained the unshakeable state.

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

But having attained arahantship, having reviewed her own practice, by way of an inspired utterance -

45. "These seven factors of enlightenment, the path for the attainment of Nibbāna;
All of them were developed by me, as taught by the Buddha.
46. "Of emptiness and the signless, I am an obtainer at will;
A legitimate daughter of the Buddha, always delighting in Nibbāna.
47. "All sensual pleasures have been cut off, those that are divine and those that are human;
The cycle of birth and wandering is eliminated, there is now no more rebirth."

He spoke these verses.

Therein, "of emptiness and the signless, I am an obtainer at will" means I am an obtainer at will of the emptiness attainment and the signless attainment; therein, whatever attainment I wish to enter, wherever, whenever, that very attainment, there, then, having entered upon it, I dwell - this is the meaning. For even though for any path whatsoever named emptiness, desireless, and so on, the threefold fruition distinguished as emptiness and so on comes to be. But this elder nun enters only upon the emptiness and signless attainment. Therefore it was said - "Of emptiness and the signless, I am an obtainer at will." Or this was said mostly. Others say this is merely an illustration.

"Those that are divine and those that are human" means whatever objective sensual pleasures included in the heavenly world and those included in the human world - all of them have been completely cut off by me through the abandoning of desire and lust bound to them, made unworthy of enjoyment. For it is said - "A monk who has eliminated the mental corruptions is incapable, friend, of consuming sensual pleasures. Just as formerly when he was a householder." The remainder is according to the method already stated.

The commentary on the verses of the other elder nun Uttamā is completed.

4. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Dantikā

48-50. The verses of the elder nun Dantikā beginning with "Having come out from the day residence." This one too, having formed aspirations under former Buddhas, accumulating wholesome action as a decisive support for the end of the round of rebirths in this and that existence, in a time void of a Buddha, was reborn in the realm of kinnaras on the bank of the river Candabhāgā. She, one day, playing together with the kinnaras, wandering about, saw a certain Individually Enlightened One seated for the day's abiding at the root of a certain tree. Having seen him, with a gladdened mind, having approached, having made an offering with sal flowers, having paid homage, she departed. She, by that meritorious action, wandering in the round of rebirths among gods and humans, in this arising of a Buddha, having been reborn in the house of the royal chaplain brahmin of the king of Kosala in Sāvattihī, having attained discretion, having gained faith at the acceptance of the Jeta Grove, having become a female lay follower, afterwards having gone forth in the presence of Mahāpajāpati Gotamī, while dwelling in Rājagaha, one day, after the meal, having ascended Vulture's Peak, seated for the day's abiding, having seen an elephant stretching out its foot for the elephant driver to mount, having made that very thing her object, having developed insight, attained arahantship together with the analytical knowledges. Therefore it was said in the Apadāna -

"On the bank of the Candabhāgā river, I was a kinnara woman then;
I saw the stainless Buddha, the Self-Become One, the unconquered.

"With a confident mind, glad, filled with joy, with joined palms;
Having taken a sal garland, I venerated the Self-Become One.

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

"I attained the status of chief queen of thirty-six kings of gods;
What is wished for by my mind, arises as desired.

I attained the status of chief queen of ten universal monarchs;
Having become as if gathered, I wander in the round of rebirths from existence
to existence.

"Wholesome deed is found in me, I went forth into homelessness;
Worthy of veneration am I today, in the Sakyan son's Dispensation.

"With purified mind today, rid of mental evil;
With all mental corruptions eliminated, there is now no more rebirth.

"Ninety-four cosmic cycles ago from now, when I honoured the Buddha;
I do not know of an unfortunate realm, this is the fruit of the sal garland.

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

But having attained arahantship, having reviewed her own practice, filled with joy and
happiness, by way of an inspired utterance -

48. "Having come out from the day residence, on Vulture's Peak mountain;
I saw an elephant that had plunged in and emerged, on the riverbank.
49. "A man, having taken a goad, requests 'Give your foot';
The elephant stretched out its foot, the man mounted the elephant.
50. "Having seen the untamed one tamed, come under the control of human
beings;
Thereupon I concentrated my mind, indeed having gone to the forest for that
reason." - He spoke these verses.

Therein, "an elephant that had plunged in and emerged" means a noble elephant,
having made a plunge into the river, having plunged in, then come out from there. Or
the reading is "ogayha muttiṇṇa." The syllable "ma" serves as a word-connector. "I
saw on the riverbank" means I beheld on the bank of the river Candabhāgā.

"What were they doing?" - to show this, "a man" and so on was said. Therein,
"requests 'give your foot'" means "give your foot" - he gives a signal to stretch out
the foot for the purpose of mounting the back; indeed, giving a signal as previously
trained, here he is said to "request."

"Having seen the untamed one tamed" means one previously untamed by nature,
now having undergone the taming and training by the elephant trainer through
elephant training. What kind of tamed? "Come under the control of human beings" -
the explanation is: having seen whatever human beings command, that and that.
"Thereupon I concentrated my mind, indeed having gone to the forest for that
reason" - "khalu" is an indeclinable particle in the sense of emphasis. Thereupon,
after seeing the elephant, having gone to the forest, the wilderness, by reason of that
action of the elephant which was the cause, I concentrated my mind indeed. How?

"Even this elephant, an animal, has come to taming through the influence of the elephant tamer; why should the mind of one who has become a human being not come to taming through the influence of the Teacher, the tamer of persons?" - with a sense of urgency arisen, having developed insight, through the concentration of the highest path, I concentrated my mind; by perpetual concentration, I exhausted the mental defilements in every respect - this is the meaning.

The commentary on the verses of the elder nun Dantikā is concluded.

5. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Ubbirī

51-53. The verses of the elder nun Ubbirī beginning with "Mother, Jīvā." This one too, having formed aspirations under former Buddhas, accumulating wholesome action as a decisive support for the end of the round of rebirths in this and that existence, 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, when her mother and father had gone to another house to enjoy a blessing, being alone, left behind by herself at home, at the approaching time, having seen a certain elder who had eliminated the mental corruptions, a disciple of the Blessed One, going near the house door, wishing to give almsfood, having said "Venerable sir, enter here," when the elder had entered the house, having paid homage to the elder with the fivefold prostration, having prepared a seat with long-fleeced rugs and so on, she gave it. The elder sat down on the prepared seat. She, having taken the bowl, having filled it with almsfood, placed it in the elder's hands. The elder, having given thanksgiving, departed. She, by that meritorious action, having been reborn among the Tāvātimsa gods, having experienced lofty heavenly success there as long as life lasted, having passed away from there, wandering only in fortunate destinations, in this arising of a Buddha, having been reborn in a very wealthy householder's family in Sāvatthī, received the name Ubbirī; she was lovely, beautiful, and pleasing. She, at the time of coming of age, was led to his own house by the king of Kosala, and after the passing of several years, she obtained one daughter. They gave her the name Jīvantī. The king, having seen her daughter, with a satisfied mind, gave the consecration to Ubbirī. But her daughter, at the time of running about and roaming around, died. The mother, having gone to the cemetery where the laying down of her body was done, laments day after day. One day, having gone to the Teacher's presence, having paid homage, having sat down for a short while, having gone, standing on the bank of the river Aciravatī, she laments referring to her daughter. Having seen that, the Teacher, while just seated in the perfumed chamber, having shown himself, asked "Why do you wail?" "I wail referring to my daughter, Blessed One." "Cremated at this cemetery, your daughters number eighty-four thousand; with reference to which of them do you wail?" Having shown the respective cremation places of those -

51. "Mother, 'Jīvā!' you weep in the forest, understand yourself, Ubbirī;
Eighty-four thousand, all bearing the name Jīvā;
Were cremated at this cremation ground, for which of them do you grieve?"
He spoke a verse and a half.

Therein, "Mother, Jīvā" is an address to the daughter by the affectionate name for mother, and this is a showing of the manner of her wailing. "You weep in the forest" means you lament in the midst of the forest. "Understand yourself, Ubbirī" means

Ubbirī, first awaken to your own self, know as it really is. "Eighty-four thousand" means eighty-four thousand. "All bearing the name Jīvā" means all those too are Jīvantīs, who are of the same name. "Cremated at this cremation ground" means cremated at this cemetery. "For which of them do you grieve" means with reference to which among those eighty-four thousand named Jīvantī do you bewail, do you fall into sorrow - thus, when the Teaching was expounded by the Teacher, in accordance with the teaching, having sent forth knowledge, having undertaken insight, through the beauty of the Teacher's instruction and through the maturity of her own conditions, just as she stood, having aroused zeal in insight, she became established in the highest fruition, arahantship, by the succession of paths. Therefore it was said in the Apadāna -

"In the city of Hamsavatī, I was a girl then;
My mother and father too, they went to work.

"When the sun was at midday, I saw an ascetic;
Going along the road, I prepared a seat.

"Having prepared my seat with woollen carpets with long fleece;
With a confident mind, glad, I spoke these words.

"The ground is heated and boiling, the sun standing at midday;
And the winds do not blow, and this is the time for rain."

"This seat has been laid down for your benefit, O great sage;
Out of compassion, sit down upon my seat.

"There sat the ascetic, well tamed, with purified mind;
Having taken his bowl, I gave according to what was prepared.

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

"There my divine mansion was well made, well-fashioned with a seat;
Sixty yojanas in height, thirty yojanas in width.

"Made of gold, made of jewels, and also made of crystal;
And made of ruby, various are my divans.

"Cotton mattresses with various coverings, and with silk painted ones;
And with fur on one side, my divans are well-established.

"Whenever I wish for passage, devoted to laughter and play;
Together with the excellent divan, I go to what I wished for.

"I attained the status of chief queen of eighty kings of gods;
I attained the status of chief queen of seventy universal monarchs.

"Wandering in the round of rebirths from existence to existence, I obtain great wealth;
There is no deficiency in my wealth, this is the fruit of a single seat.

"I wander in two existences, in divinity and also in humanity;
I do not know other existences, this is the fruit of a single seat.

"I am born in two families, in the warrior caste and also in the brahmin caste;
Of high birth everywhere, this is the fruit of a single seat.

"I do not know displeasure, the sorrow of my mind;
I do not know disfiguration, this is the fruit of a single seat.

"Nurses attend upon me, hunchbacks and cloth-wearers, many;
I go from lap to lap, this is the fruit of a single seat.

"Some bathe me, some feed me, some delight me always;
Some anoint me with fragrance, this is the fruit of a single seat.

"In a pavilion or at the root of a tree, or for one dwelling in an empty house;
Having understood my thought, a divan stands close.

"This is my last, the final existence goes on;
Even today, having abandoned kingship, I went forth into homelessness.

"A hundred thousand cosmic cycles ago from now, the gift that I gave then;
I do not know of an unfortunate realm, this is the fruit of a single seat.

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

But having become established in arahantship, making known the distinction attained
by herself -

52. "He has indeed drawn out my dart, difficult to see, lodged in my heart;
He who, for me overcome with sorrow, dispelled my grief for my daughter.

53. "Today I have the dart pulled out, without hunger, attained final Nibbāna;
I go to the Buddha, the Teaching, and the Community for refuge, the sage."

He spoke these two verses.

Therein, "he has indeed drawn out my dart, difficult to see, lodged in the heart"
means difficult to see as it really is for those who have not accumulated the
requisites of merit, based upon my mind, called a "dart" because of generating
affliction, because of being difficult to remove, and because of piercing within - he
has indeed drawn out, indeed taken out, sorrow and craving. "He who, for me
overcome with sorrow" means because he dispelled my grief for my daughter for me
who was overcome with sorrow, removed it without remainder, therefore "he has
indeed drawn out my dart" - this is the explanation.

"Today I have the dart pulled out" means she, I, today, with the dart of craving pulled
out in every respect, thereby indeed without hunger, attained final Nibbāna. "The
sage" means the omniscient Buddha, and the ninefold supramundane Teaching

distinguished as the path, fruition, and Nibbāna taught by him, and the Community reckoned as the assembly of eight noble persons established therein, and because of connection with those unsurpassed ones and because of the destruction of the entire suffering of the round of rebirths, they are refuge, shelter, rock cell, and ultimate goal. "I go to" means I approach, I understand, and I practise - this is the meaning.

The commentary on the verses of the elder nun Ubbirī is concluded.

6. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Sukkā

54-56. The verses of the Elder Nun Sukkā beginning with "What have they done in Rājagaha" and so on. This one too, having formed aspirations under former Buddhas, accumulating wholesome action as a decisive support for the end of the round of rebirths in this and that existence, in the time of the Blessed One Vipassī, having been reborn in a family home in the city of Bandhumatī, having attained discretion, having gone together with female lay followers to the monastery, having heard the Teaching in the presence of the Teacher, having gained faith, having gone forth, she was very learned, a bearer of the Teaching, and possessing discernment. She, having lived the holy life there for many thousands of years, having merely made a worldling's death, was reborn in Tusita. Likewise in the time of the Blessed One Sikhī, and in the time of the Blessed One Vessabhū - thus having kept morality in the Dispensation of three Perfectly Enlightened Ones, she was very learned and a bearer of the Teaching; likewise, having gone forth in the Dispensation of the Blessed One Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, and Kassapa, she was of pure morality, very learned, and a speaker of the Teaching.

Thus she, having accumulated much merit here and there, wandering only in fortunate destinations, in this arising of a Buddha, was reborn in a very wealthy householder's family in the city of Rājagaha; her name was Sukkāṭissā. She, having attained discretion, having gained confidence at the Teacher's entry into Rājagaha, having become a female lay follower, at a later time, having heard the Teaching in the presence of the Elder Nun Dhammadinnā, with religious emotion arisen, having gone forth in her very presence, doing the work of insight, before long attained arahantship together with the analytical knowledges. Therefore it was said in the Apadāna -

"Ninety-one cosmic cycles ago from now, the Leader named Vipassī;
Arose, lovely to behold, one with insight into all phenomena.

"Then I in Bandhumatī, was born in a certain family;
Having heard the Teaching of the sage, I went forth into homelessness.

"Very learned, bearers of the Teaching, possessing discernment likewise;
Brilliant speakers too, workers in the Conqueror's Dispensation.

"Having then given a talk on the Teaching, for the welfare of many people;
Having passed away from there to Tusita, I was reborn, one of fame.

"Thirty-one cosmic cycles ago from now, like a peacock, the crested
Conqueror;
Shining with glory in the world, the best of speakers arose.

"Even then, having gone forth, skilled in the Buddha's Dispensation;
Having illuminated the Conqueror's words, from there too they went to the
celestial abode.

"In the thirty-first cosmic cycle, the Leader named Vessabhū;
Arose, the one of great wisdom, and even then likewise was I.

"Having gone forth, a bearer of the Teaching, I illuminated the Conqueror's
Dispensation;
Having gone to the charming city of the gods, I experienced great happiness.

"In this fortunate cosmic cycle, Kakusandha, the highest conqueror;
Arose, the refuge of men, and even then likewise was I.

"Having gone forth according to the sage's teaching, having illuminated it for
my lifespan;
Having passed away from there, I went to the celestial abode as to my own
dwelling.

"In this very cosmic cycle, Koṇāgamana, the leader;
Arose as the refuge of the world, without conflict, gone to the Deathless.

"Even then, having gone forth, in the Dispensation of that Such One;
Very learned, a bearer of the Teaching, I illuminated the Conqueror's
Dispensation.

"In this very cosmic cycle, Kassapa, the highest sage;
Arose as the refuge of the world, without conflict, gone beyond death.

"Of that hero among men too, having gone forth in the Dispensation;
Having thoroughly learnt the Good Teaching, confident in interrogation.

"Virtuous and conscientious, skilled in the three trainings;
Having given many talks on the Teaching, for as long as life, O great sage.

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

"And in this final existence now, in Giribbaja, the best of cities;
Born in a prosperous millionaire's family, with a great accumulation of jewels.

"When, surrounded by a thousand monks, the leader of the world;
Approached Rājagaha, praised by the thousand-eyed one.

"Tamed, together with the tamed, the former matted-hair ascetics, free,
together with the free;
With the colour of refined gold, the Blessed One entered Rājagaha.

"Having seen that majestic power of the Buddha, and having heard the
accumulation of virtues;

Having gladdened my mind in the Buddha, I worshipped him according to my strength.

"And at a later time, in Dhammadinnā's presence;
Having gone forth from home, I went forth into homelessness.

While my hair was being cut, I burnt up the defilements;
I learned the entire teaching, not long after I had gone forth.

Then I expounded the Teaching, at the assembly of the public;
While the Teaching was being taught, there was the full realisation of the teaching.

"Having known that of many thousands of living beings, greatly astonished;
The demon devoted to me, having roamed around Giribbaja.

"What have the people of Rājagaha done, that they lie as if drunk on honey;
Who do not attend upon Sukkā, teaching the Deathless state.

"And that which is irresistible, full and delicious in itself, nourishing;
The wise drink it, methinks, like travellers from a rain cloud.

"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;
Knowledge for me, O great hero, arisen in your presence.

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

But having attained arahantship, she was a great speaker of the Teaching with a retinue of five hundred nuns. She, one day, having walked for almsfood in Rājagaha, having completed the meal duty, having entered the nuns' quarters, as if squeezing a honeycomb and giving a very sweet drink to the great assembly that had sat down, as if sprinkling with the Deathless, she expounds the Teaching. And the assembly listens to her talk on the Teaching with ears inclined, with undistracted minds, attentively. At that moment, a deity dwelling in a tree at the end of the elder nun's walking path, devoted to the proclamation of the Teaching, having entered Rājagaha, having wandered from road to road, from crossroads to crossroads, making clear her virtues -

54. "What have the people of Rājagaha done, that they lie as if drunk on honey;
Who do not attend upon Sukkā, teaching the Buddha's teaching.

55. "And that which is irresistible, full and delicious in itself, nourishing;
The wise drink it, methinks, like travellers from a rain cloud."

He spoke these two verses.

Therein, "What have the people of Rājagaha done" means these people of Rājagaha, what have they done, in what task indeed are they occupied? "As if drunk on honey, they lie" means just as those who, having taken honeycomb honey, having drunk the honey, having become unconscious, are unable to raise their heads, so these too, having become unconscious through the perception of the Teaching, methinks, are unable to raise their heads; they merely lie there - this is the meaning. "Who do not attend upon Sikkā, teaching the Buddha's teaching" means those who do not attend upon, do not wait upon the elder nun Sikkā, who teaches, who makes known the teaching of the Buddha, the Blessed One, as it really is. Those people of Rājagaha, what have they done - this is the explanation.

"And that which is irresistible" means and that Teaching which brings about the state of non-returning, leading to liberation; or by its excellence, which cannot be taken away because of its nature of captivating the hearing of the audience; full and delicious in itself, not requiring anything added, by nature itself of great flavour, and therefore nourishing. "Osadha" is also a reading. Being a medicine for the treatment of the disease of the suffering of the round of rebirths. "The wise drink it, methinks, like travellers from a rain cloud" means just as travellers in a waterless wilderness drink water that has come forth from amidst the rain clouds, so wise persons, learned men, drink that Teaching, methinks - they listen as if drinking.

The people, having heard that, with gladdened minds, having approached the presence of the elder nun, listened to the Teaching attentively. At a later time, at the end of the elder nun's life span, at the time of final Nibbāna, for the purpose of making manifest the nature of the Dispensation as leading to liberation, declaring the final liberating knowledge -

56. "Sikkā, with bright qualities, without lust, concentrated;
Bears her final body, having conquered Māra with his army."she spoke this verse;

Therein, "Sikkā" - the elder nun Sikkā shows herself as if speaking of another. "With bright qualities" means with well-purified supramundane states. "Without lust, concentrated" means by the highest path altogether without lust, concentrated through the concentration of the fruition of arahantship. The remainder is according to the method already stated.

The commentary on the verses of the elder nun Sikkā is concluded.

7. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Selā

57-59. The verse of the elder nun Selā beginning with "There is no escape in the world." This one too, having formed aspirations under former Buddhas, accumulating wholesome action as a decisive support for the end of the round of rebirths in this and that existence, having been reborn in a family home in the city of Hamsavatī, having attained discretion, given by her mother and father to a son of good family of the same birth, having lived together with him in pleasant communal life for many hundreds of years, when he had deceased, she herself too, having traversed the span of life, having reached the final stage of life, with a sense of urgency arisen, seeking

what is wholesome, from time to time wandered about from park to park, from monastery to monastery, thinking "I shall listen to the Teaching in the presence of ascetics and brahmins." She, one day, having approached the Teacher's Bodhi tree, sat down thinking "If the Buddha, the Blessed One, is matchless, equal to the matchless, without equal, let this Bodhi tree show me a wonder." Immediately upon the arising of her consciousness thus, the Bodhi tree blazed up, branches entirely made of gold arose, all directions shone brilliantly. She, having seen that wonder, with a gladdened mind, having established respect and consideration, having raised joined palms on her head, sat down right there for seven nights and days. On the seventh day she made a lofty veneration and honour. She, by that meritorious action, wandering in the round of rebirths among gods and humans, in this arising of a Buddha, was reborn as the daughter of King Āḷavika in the country of Āḷavī. Her name was Selā. But because she was the daughter of King Āḷavika, they also call her Āḷavikā. She, having attained discretion, when the Teacher, having tamed Āḷavaka, having given the bowl and robes into his hands, had approached the city of Āḷavī together with him, being a girl, having gone together with the king to the presence of the Teacher, having heard the Teaching, having gained faith, became a female lay follower. She, at a later time, with religious emotion arisen, having gone forth among the nuns, having completed the preliminary functions, having established insight, contemplating the activities, because of being endowed with decisive support, with matured knowledge, before long attained arahantship. Therefore it was said in the Apadāna -

"In the city of Hamsavatī, I was a wandering ascetic then;
From park to park, I wander seeking the wholesome.

"On a day in the dark fortnight, I saw the highest enlightenment tree;
Having gladdened my mind there, I sat down at the foot of the Bodhi tree.

"Having cultivated a respectful mind, having made a salutation with joined palms at my head;
Having declared my pleasure, thus I thought at that very moment.

"If the Buddha is of immeasurable virtue, matchless,
Let him show me a miracle, let this Bodhi tree shine forth.'

"As soon as it was reflected upon by me, the Bodhi tree blazed up at that very moment;
Entirely made of gold it was, all directions shine brilliantly.

"For seven nights and days there, at the foot of the Bodhi tree I sat down;
When the seventh day arrived, I made an offering of lamps.

"Having surrounded the seat, five lamps blazed;
Until the sun rose, my lamps blazed then.

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

"There my divine mansion was well made, called 'Five Lamps';

Sixty yojanas in height, thirty yojanas in width.

"Countless lamps blazed in my retinue;
As far as the divine abode, it shines with the light of lamps.

"Having sat down with face turned away, if I wish to see;
Above, below, and across, I see all with my eye.

"As far as I wish to see those in good and bad destinations;
There is no obstruction, whether in trees or mountains.

"I attained the status of chief queen of eighty kings of gods;
Of a hundred universal monarchs, I attained the status of chief queen.

"Whatever realm of rebirth I am reborn in, whether divinity or human;
A hundred thousand lamps blaze in my retinue.

"Having fallen away from the world of the gods, I was born in my mother's
womb;
While gone into my mother's womb, my eye does not close.

"A hundred thousand lamps, endowed with meritorious deeds;
Blaze in the maternity house, this is the fruit of five lamps.

"When the final existence was attained, I turned away my mind;
I touched Nibbāna, the ageless, deathless, state of coolness.

"Seven years old by birth, I attained arahantship;
The Buddha, Gotama, gave me full ordination, having understood my virtues.

"In a pavilion or at the root of a tree, or for one dwelling in an empty house;
Then a lamp blazes, this is the fruit of five lamps.

"The divine eye is pure in me, I am skilled in concentration;
Having attained the perfection of direct knowledge, this is the fruit of five
lamps.

"Having accomplished all that was to be accomplished, having done what had
to be done, without mental corruptions;
Five lamps, O great hero, I pay homage at your feet, O One with Vision.

"A hundred thousand cosmic cycles ago, when I gave a lamp then;
I do not know of an unfortunate realm, this is the fruit of five lamps.

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

But having attained arahantship, the elder nun, while dwelling at Sāvattthī, one day,
after the meal, having departed from Sāvattthī, having entered the Blind Men's Grove
for the purpose of the day residence, sat down at the root of a certain tree. Then
Māra, wishing to cut her off from seclusion, having approached in the guise of an

unrelated person -

57. "There is no escape in the world, what will you do with seclusion;
Enjoy sensual delights, do not be one who regrets afterwards." He spoke a
verse.

Its meaning is - In this world, even when all doctrines are being examined, there is no escape called Nibbāna; what is acknowledged according to the desire of those various ascetics and brahmins is merely a conventional expression. Therefore, "what will you do with seclusion" means standing in such a form, in the accomplished first youth, what will you do with this bodily seclusion? Then "enjoy sensual delights" means experience the delights of play based upon objective sensual pleasure and sensual pleasure as mental defilement. Why? "Do not be one who regrets afterwards" - the intention is: do not be one who is remorseful afterwards, thinking "The very Nibbāna for the sake of which I live the holy life does not exist; therefore this has not been attained, and sensual enjoyments have been lost - alas, this is harmful to me."

Having heard that, the elder nun thought: "This Māra is indeed foolish, who rejects Nibbāna that has become evident to me. And he invites me to sensual pleasures; he does not know my state of having eliminated the mental corruptions. Well then, having made him know that, I shall threaten him" - having thought thus -

58. "Sensual pleasures are like stakes of spears, the aggregates are their
chopping block;
What you call 'sensual delight', that is now discontent for me.
59. "Delight has been destroyed everywhere, the mass of darkness has been split
open;
Know thus, Evil One, you are defeated, O Death." She spoke this pair of verses.

Therein, "sensual pleasures are like stakes of spears" means sensual pleasures by name, by whomever they are determined upon, because of piercing through that being, should be seen as like a sharp spear and like a stake. "Aggregates" means the aggregates of clinging. "Their" means of those. "Chopping block" means the locus for cutting, the place for excessive seizing - this is the meaning. Because, having excessively seized the aggregates, beings arrive at cutting and breaking punishments through sensual pleasures. "What you call 'sensual delight', that is now discontent for me" means Evil One, that which you speak of as sensual delight, making it something to be delighted in and to be cultivated, that is now for me, because of the arising of discontent, like excrement; there is no use whatsoever of it for me.

Therein, she states the reason by the phrase beginning with "delight has been destroyed everywhere." Therein, "know thus" means know me as "one whose craving and ignorance have been abandoned in every respect"; therefore, precisely by the overcoming of power, destruction, and domain, O Death, one of inferior conduct, Māra, you are defeated, afflicted by me, but I am not to be afflicted by you - this is the meaning.

Thus threatened by the elder nun, Māra disappeared right there. The elder nun too, having spent the daytime in the Blind Men's Grove with the happiness of fruition attainment, in the evening went to her dwelling place.

8. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Somā

60-62. The verses of the elder nun Somā beginning with "That which is to be attained by sages." This one too, having formed aspirations under former Buddhas, accumulating wholesome action as a decisive support for the end of the round of rebirths in this and that existence, in the time of the Blessed One Sikhī, having been reborn in a wealthy warrior family, having attained discretion, was the chief queen of King Aruṇa - thus the entire past story is similar to the story of the elder nun Abhayā. As for the present story, this elder nun, wandering here and there among gods and humans, in this arising of a Buddha, was reborn in Rājagaha as the daughter of the chaplain of King Bimbisāra. Her name was Somā. She, having attained discretion, having gained faith at the Teacher's entry into Rājagaha, having become a female lay follower, at a later time, with religious emotion arisen, having gone forth among the nuns, having completed the preliminary functions, doing the work of insight, before long attained arahantship together with the analytical knowledges. Therefore it was said in the Apadāna -

"In the city of Aruṇavatī, there was a warrior named Aruṇa;
I was the wife of that king, I prevented what was to be prevented.

"As far as, etc. the Buddha's teaching has been fulfilled."

All is similar to the life history of the elder nun Abhayā.

But having attained arahantship, dwelling in the bliss of liberation at Sāvattthī, one day, having entered the Blind Men's Grove for the purpose of the day residence, she sat down at the root of a certain tree. Then Māra, wishing to cut her off from seclusion, having approached in an invisible form, standing in the sky -

60. "That state which is to be attained by sages, difficult to reach,
That cannot be attained by a woman with her two-finger wisdom." He spoke this verse.

Its meaning is - What is to be attained by those of great wisdom such as the Buddhas and others who have received the name "sage" in the meaning of searching for the aggregates of morality and so on, that is difficult to reach by others, difficult to accomplish. That which is the state of supreme comfort reckoned as arahantship, that cannot be attained by a woman of two-finger wisdom, of inferior wisdom. For women, from the age of seven or eight years onwards, cooking rice at all times, having put rice-grains into boiling water, do not know "To this extent the rice is cooked"; but having lifted out the rice-grains with a ladle and having squeezed them with two fingers, they know; therefore they are said to have "two-finger wisdom."

Having heard that, the elder nun, rebuking Māra -

61. "What does womanhood matter to us when the mind is well concentrated,
When knowledge is progressing, rightly seeing the Teaching.

62. "Delight has been destroyed everywhere, the mass of darkness has been split open;

Know thus, Evil One, you are defeated, O Death."

She spoke the other two verses.

Therein, "what does womanhood matter to us" means what would the state of being a woman do to us, what kind of fetter would it produce for the attainment of arahantship. "When the mind is well concentrated" means when the mind is well concentrated through the concentration of the highest path. "When knowledge is progressing" means thereupon when the knowledge of the path of arahantship is occurring. "Rightly seeing the Teaching with insight" means seeing properly the Teaching of the four truths by the method of full understanding and so on. For here this is the summary - Evil One, whether one be a woman or a man, when the highest path is attained, arahantship has come into one's possession.

Now, showing directly that she herself had attained that state, she spoke the verse "delight has been destroyed everywhere." That is of the meaning already stated.

The commentary on the verses of the elder nun Somā is concluded.

The commentary on the Book of Threes 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. 3. The Book of the Threes 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