

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)

4. The Book of the Fours (4. Catukkanipāto)



PaliVerse

5. The Collection of Minor Texts

09. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nuns

4. The Book of the Fours

1. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Bhaddā Kāpilānī

63-66. In the Book of Fours, the verses of the elder nun Bhaddā Kāpilānī beginning with "The son, the heir of the Buddha." It is said that she, in the time of the Blessed One Padumuttara, having been reborn in a family home in the city of Haṃsavatī, having attained discretion, while hearing the Teaching in the presence of the Teacher, having seen the Teacher establishing a certain nun in the foremost position among those who recollect past lives, having performed the preparatory action, herself too having aspired to that position of rank, having made merit for as long as life lasted, having passed away from there, wandering in the round of rebirths among gods and humans, when a Buddha had not arisen, having been reborn in a family home in Bārāṇasī, having gone to her husband's family, one day, while making a dispute with her husband's sister, when that one had given almsfood to an Individually Enlightened One, thinking "This one, having given a gift to him, will obtain lofty success," having taken the bowl from the hand of the Individually Enlightened One, having thrown away the food, having filled it with mud, she gave it. The public reproached - "Foolish one, what has the Individually Enlightened One done wrong to you?" She, being ashamed by their words, having again taken the bowl, having taken out the mud, having washed it, having rubbed it with scented powder, having filled it with the four sweets, having placed it shining with ghee of the colour of the interior of a lotus poured over the top in the hands of the Individually Enlightened One, made the aspiration "Just as this almsfood has become radiant, so may my body become radiant." She, having passed away from there, wandering only in fortunate destinations, in the time of the Buddha Kassapa, was reborn as the daughter of a millionaire of great wealth in Bārāṇasī. Having a foul-smelling body as a result of former action, having become one to be loathed by people, with a sense of urgency arisen, having had a golden brick made from her own ornaments, she established it at the shrine of the Blessed One, and made an offering with a handful of water-lilies. On account of that, her body became fragrant and charming in that very existence. She, having become dear and agreeable to her husband, having done wholesome deeds for as long as life lasted, having passed away from there, was reborn in heaven. There too, having experienced divine happiness for as long as life lasted, having passed away from there, having become the daughter of the king of Bārāṇasī, experiencing there success similar to divine success, having attended upon the Individually Enlightened Ones for a long time, when they had attained final Nibbāna, with a sense of urgency arisen, having gone forth in the going forth of a hermit, dwelling in a park, having developed the meditative absorptions, having been reborn in the Brahma world, having passed away from there, having been reborn in the house of a brahmin family of the Kosiya clan in the city of Sāgala, having grown up with great care, having come of age, she was led to the house of the young man

Pipphali in the great ford village. When he had departed to go forth, having abandoned a great mass of wealth and a great circle of relatives, having gone out for the purpose of the going forth, having entered a sectarians' park for five years, at a later time, having obtained the going forth and full ordination in the presence of Mahāpajāpati Gotamī, having established insight, before long she attained arahantship. 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 in Haṃsavatī, Videha by name;
A millionaire with abundant wealth, I was his wife.

"Sometimes he, together with his retinue, having approached the sun among men;
Heard the teaching of the Buddha, which dispels all suffering and fear.

"The Leader praised as foremost the disciple of those who advocate ascetic practices;
Having heard, having given a week-long gift to the Buddha, such a one.

"Having bowed down with my head at his feet, I aspired for that state;
He, the bull among men, gladdening the assembly then.

Out of compassion for the millionaire, he spoke these verses;
'You will obtain the wished for state, be one with passion quenched, dear son.

"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 heir in the teachings, legitimate, created by the Teaching;
Kassapa by clan, will be a disciple of the Teacher.'

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

Having illuminated the Dispensation, having crushed the false teachers;
And having trained those fit to be trained, he, together with his disciples, attained final Nibbāna.

"When that chief of the world was quenched, for the purpose of venerating the Teacher;
Having brought together relatives and friends, together with them he made an offering.

"A stupa seven yojanas high, lofty, made of jewels;
Blazing like the sun with a hundred rays, like a fully blossomed king of sal trees.

"Seven hundred thousand bowls he had made there;

Shining like a fire of reeds, with the seven jewels.

"Having filled with scented oil, he lit lamps there;
For the purpose of venerating the great sage, compassionate towards all
beings.

"Seven hundred thousand full pots he had made;
Filled with jewels indeed, for the purpose of venerating the great sage.

"In the midst of the eight times eight pots, raised golden flames;
They outshine in beauty, like the sun in autumn.

"At the four gates shine arched gateways made of jewels;
Raised delightful planks shine, made of jewels.

They shine, fenced around, garlands well-fashioned;
Banners hoisted, the jewels shine brilliantly.

"Well-dyed, well made, variegated, the shrine made of jewels;
It outshines in beauty, like the sun at evening.

"The three platforms of the stupa, he filled with yellow orpiment;
One with red arsenic, and one with eye ointment.

"Having made such a charming offering to the excellent speaker;
He gave a gift to the Community, for as long as life, according to his strength.

Together with that millionaire, those meritorious deeds in every respect;
Having done so for as long as life, together they went to a fortunate
destination.

"Having experienced realms of success, in divinity and also in humanity;
Like a shadow with the body, together with that very one I wandered in the
round of rebirths.

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

"Then this one, in Bandhumatī, a brahmin highly honoured;
Being wealthy in virtue, but very poor in riches.

"Even then I was his wife, a brahmin woman of righteous mind;
Sometimes that excellent twice-born one met with the great sage.

"Seated among the crowd of people, teaching the Deathless state;
Having heard the Teaching, greatly delighted, he gave a single cloth.

"Having gone home with one cloth, he said this to me;
Rejoice in the great merit, the cloth given to the Buddha.

"Then I, having made salutation with joined palms, gave thanks, greatly

pleased;

The cloth is well given, my lord, to the Buddha, the foremost, such a one.

"Having been happy and prepared, wandering in the round of rebirths from existence to existence;

In the charming city of Bārāṇasī, there was a king, a lord of the earth.

"Then I was his chief queen, the highest among the group of women;
I was beloved to him, through former affection for my husband.

"Wandering for almsfood, those eight individual leaders;
Having seen them, being greatly delighted, having given very precious almsfood.

"Having invited again, having made a jewelled pavilion;
A bowl made by smiths, golden, indeed of such size.

"Having brought them all together, he gave a gift to them;
To those seated on golden seats, devoted, with his own hands.

"That gift too I gave together with a slave, with the king of Kāśi, I then;
Again I in Bārāṇasī, was born in a Kāśika village.

"In a prosperous householder's family, he was happy together with his brothers;
I was the wife of the eldest brother, a devoted wife.

"Having seen an Individually Enlightened One, for my youngest husband;
Having given him a portion of food, when he came I spoke to him.

"He did not delight in that gift, therefore I gave to him;
Having brought that food in a pot, he gave it again to that very one.

"Having thrown away that food, corrupted, I then to the Buddha;
That bowl filled with mud, I gave to such a one.

"In giving and in receiving, in honouring and even in offending;
Having seen his face with equanimous mind, then I was stirred exceedingly.

"Having taken the bowl again, having cleaned it with fragrance,
With a confident mind, having filled it, I gave ghee and sugar.

"Wherever I am reborn, I am handsome owing to giving;
But with foul-smelling speech owing to injury to the Buddha.

"Again, at the shrine being built for the hero Kassapa;
I gave an excellent golden brick, joyful.

"With the four kinds of perfume, having heaped up that brick;
Freed from the fault of bad odour, well-endowed with all limbs.

"Seven thousand bowls, with the seven jewels;
Having made them filled with ghee, and wicks by the thousands.

"Having placed and lit them, I set up seven rows;
For the purpose of honouring the Protector of the World, with a clear mind.

"Even then in that merit, O sister, distinctively;
Again born among the Kāsis, renowned as Sumitta.

"I was his wife, happy, adorned, beloved;
Then to the solitary sage, I gave a thick head-wrap.

"I was also his sister, having rejoiced in the highest gift;
Again in the Kāsi country, born of the Koliya clan.

"Then, together with five hundred sons of the Koliyas,
Attended upon five hundred Individually Enlightened Ones.

"Having satisfied him for three months, she gave the three robes;
His wife then I was, following the path of meritorious action.

"Having passed away from there, he was a king, named Nanda, of great fame;
I was also his chief queen, endowed with all sensual pleasures.

"Having become a king then, Brahmadatta, lord of the earth;
Of the sons of Padumavatī, the solitary sages then.

"Five hundred less, for as long as life I attended on;
Having housed them in a royal garden, and I worshipped those who were
quenched.

"And having made shrines, having gone forth, both of us;
Having developed the boundless states, we went to the Brahma world.

"Having passed away from there, at the great ford, well-born, of the Pippalī
lineage;
His mother was Sumanadevī, his father a twice-born of the Kosiya clan.

"I, in the Madda country, in Sākala, the best of cities;
I was the daughter of Kappila, a brahmin, my mother was Sucīmatī.

"Having created me with a golden image from the house, my father;
Gave me to Kassapa the wise, to his hermitage, one who had renounced
sensual pleasures.

"Sometimes he, the compassionate one, having gone to inspect the work;
Having seen living beings being eaten by crows and so on, he was stirred.

"When sesame seeds had arisen in the house, having seen them drying in the
sunshine;
Worms being eaten by crows, I then gained a sense of urgency.

"Then that wise one went forth, I went forth after him;
For five rains retreats I dwelt, I as a wandering ascetic.

"When she had gone forth, Gotamī, the nurturer of the Conqueror;
Then I, having approached her, was advised by the Buddha.

"Not long after, I attained arahantship;
Oh, the good friendship of the glorious Kassapa!

"Learned, the heir of the Buddha, Kassapa, well concentrated;
He who knows past lives, and sees heaven and the realms of misery.

"And also has attained the destruction of birth, the sage accomplished through
direct knowledge;
By these three true knowledges, one becomes a possessor of the threefold
true knowledge, a brahmin.

"Likewise Bhaddā Kāpilānī, possessing the threefold true knowledge, victorious
over death;
Bears her final body, having conquered Māra with his mount.

"Having seen the danger in the world, we both have gone forth;
We are ones who have eliminated the mental corruptions, tamed, become
cool, quenched.

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

But having attained arahantship, she was a master through practice in the knowledge of past lives. Therein, because she had made her aspiration with surpassing distinction, afterwards the Teacher, seated in the midst of the noble company at Jeta's Grove, while establishing the nuns in succession in their respective positions, established her in the foremost position among those who recollect past lives. She, one day, preceded by praise of the virtues of the Elder Mahākassapa, uttering an inspired utterance by way of making clear her own fulfilment of duty and so on -

63. "The son, the heir of the Buddha, Kassapa, well concentrated;
He who knows past lives, and sees heaven and the realms of misery.
64. "And also has attained the destruction of birth, the sage accomplished through
direct knowledge;
By these three true knowledges, one becomes a possessor of the threefold
true knowledge, a brahmin.
65. "Likewise Bhaddā Kāpilānī, possessing the threefold true knowledge, victorious
over death;
Bears her final body, having conquered Māra with his army.
66. "Having seen the danger in the world, we both have gone forth;

We are ones who have eliminated the mental corruptions, tamed, become cool, quenched."

He spoke these verses.

Therein, "the son, the heir of the Buddha" means a son born after the Perfectly Enlightened One by virtue of being one who has awakened following the Buddha, and thereby an heir through the taking up of the nine supramundane teachings which constitute his inheritance. Kassapa is "well concentrated" through the state of well-concentrated mind by means of mundane and supramundane concentrations. "He who knows past lives" means the Elder Mahākassapa who, having made manifest the past lives - the continuity of aggregates dwelt in by himself and others - through the knowledge of recollecting past lives, knew, understood, and penetrated them. "And sees heaven and the realms of misery" means he sees with the divine eye heaven with its division into twenty-six god realms and the fourfold realm of misery, as if an emblic myrobalan on the palm of the hand.

"And also has attained the destruction of birth" means beyond that, he has attained arahantship reckoned as the destruction of birth. Through direct knowledge, having directly known with most excellent knowledge the phenomena that should be directly known, having fully understood what should be fully understood, having abandoned what should be abandoned, having realised what should be realised, he is accomplished, has reached the goal, with obligations fulfilled. He is a sage because of having attained wisdom reckoned as the wisdom of the elimination of mental corruptions.

"Likewise Bhaddā Kāpilānī" means just as Mahākassapa is a possessor of the threefold true knowledge by these three true knowledges as stated above, and victorious over death, likewise Bhaddā Kāpilānī is a possessor of the threefold true knowledge and victorious over death. "Therefore she bears her final body, having conquered Māra with his army" - she shows herself as if speaking of another.

Now, showing "just as the elder's practice is good in the beginning, the middle, and the end, so too is mine," she spoke the concluding verse "having seen the danger." Therein, "we are ones who have eliminated the mental corruptions, tamed" means we - the Elder Mahākassapa and I - are tamed with the highest self-control and are in every respect ones who have eliminated the mental corruptions. "Become cool, quenched" means precisely from that, through the absence of the fever of mental defilements, become cool, and quenched through the Nibbāna element with residue of clinging - we are, we exist - this is the meaning.

The commentary on the verses of the elder nun Bhaddā Kāpilānī is concluded.

The commentary on the Book of Fours 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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