

THE PALIVERSE PROJECT

The Universe of Buddha's Wisdom

Commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā)

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

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

7. The Book of the Sevens (7. Sattakanipāto)



PaliVerse

5. The Collection of Minor Texts

09. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nuns

7. The Book of the Sevens

1. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Uttarā

175-181. In the Book of Sevens, "Having taken pestles" is the verse of the elder nun Uttarā. 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, gradually with developed wholesome roots, with accumulated requisites of deliverance, having become one whose qualities for the ripening of liberation had matured, in this arising of a Buddha, having been reborn in a certain family home in Sāvattthī, having received the name Uttarā, gradually having attained discretion, approached the presence of the Elder Nun Paṭācārā. The elder nun expounded the Teaching to her. She, having heard the Teaching, with a sense of urgency arisen regarding the round of rebirths, having become devoted to the Dispensation, went forth. And having gone forth, having completed the preliminary functions, having established insight in the presence of the Elder Nun Paṭācārā, devoting herself to meditation, through the achievement of decisive support and because her faculties had reached maturity, before long, having aroused zeal in insight, together with the analytical knowledges, attained arahantship. But having attained arahantship, having reviewed her own practice, by way of an inspired utterance -

175. "Having taken pestles, young men pound grain;
Nourishing children and wife, young men gain wealth.
176. "Strive in the Buddha's teaching, which having done one does not regret;
Quickly having washed your feet, sit down on one side.
177. "Having established the mind, fully focused, well concentrated;
Review activities as alien and not as self.
178. "Having heard her word, the instruction of Paṭācārā;
Having washed my feet, I sat down to one side.
179. "In the first watch of the night, I recollected past births;
In the middle watch of the night, I purified the divine eye.
180. "In the last watch of the night, I shattered the mass of darkness;
Possessing the threefold true knowledge, thereupon I arose, your instruction
has been fulfilled.
181. Like the deities of the Thirty-three honour Sakka, unconquered in battle;

Having put her in front, I shall dwell, I am a possessor of the threefold true knowledge, without mental corruptions."

He spoke these verses.

Therein, "having established the mind" means having established the meditation mind upon the meditation subject. How? "Fully focused, well concentrated, review" means examine the practice; contemplate activities with the triad of characteristics as impermanent, as suffering, and as non-self - this is the meaning. And this was said at the time of exhortation by way of repeating the exhortation to herself and to other nuns, elder nuns, and so on. "The instruction of Paṭācārā" means the admonition of the Elder Nun Paṭācārā. Or the reading is "Paṭācārā's teaching."

"Thereupon I arose" means afterwards, after attaining the state of possessing the threefold true knowledge, I arose from my seat. This elder nun too, one day, having clarified her meditation subject in the presence of the Elder Nun Paṭācārā, having entered her own dwelling place, sat down folding her legs crosswise. Having made the determination "I will not break this cross-legged posture until my mind is liberated from the mental corruptions by non-clinging," having begun exploration, having gradually aroused zeal in insight, having attained arahantship accompanied by the direct knowledges and analytical knowledges by the succession of paths, when the nineteen reviewing knowledges had occurred, being joyful thinking "Now I have done what had to be done," having uttered these verses as an inspired utterance, she stretched out her feet at the time of the break of dawn. Thereupon, when the night had properly become light, having approached the presence of the elder nun, she recited these verses. Therefore it was said "Your instruction has been fulfilled" and so on. All the remainder is by the same method as stated above.

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

2. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Cālā

182-188. The verses of the elder nun Cālā beginning with "Having established mindfulness." This one too, having formed aspirations under former Buddhas, having accumulated wholesome action as a decisive support for the end of the round of rebirths in this and that existence, in this arising of a Buddha, was born among the Magadhans in the village of Nālaka in the womb of the brahmin woman Rūpasārī. On her name-giving day they gave her the name Cālā; to her younger sister, Upacālā; and then to her younger sister, Sīsūpacālā. These three too were the younger sisters of the General of the Teaching; the three sons of these also had this very same name. With reference to whom it has come in the Theragāthā: "Cālā, Upacālā, Sīsūpacālā."

But these three sisters too, having heard "The General of the Teaching has gone forth," thinking "Surely that Teaching and discipline is not inferior, surely that going forth is not inferior, where our master has gone forth," with enthusiasm arisen, with keen desire, having abandoned the tear-faced weeping circle of relatives and attendants, went forth. And having gone forth, striving and endeavouring, before long they attained arahantship. But having attained arahantship, they dwell in the happiness of Nibbāna and the happiness of fruition.

Among them, the nun Cālā, one day, after the meal, having returned from her alms round, having entered the Blind Men's Grove, sat down for the day residence. Then Māra, having approached her, enticed her with sensual pleasures. With reference to which it was said in the discourse -

"Then the nun Cālā, having dressed in the earlier period of the day, taking her bowl and robe, entered Sāvattthī for almsfood. Having walked for almsfood in Sāvattthī, after the meal, having returned from her alms round, she approached the Blind Men's Grove for the day residence. Having plunged into the Blind Men's Grove, she sat down for the day residence at the foot of a certain tree. Then Māra the Evil One approached the nun Cālā; having approached, he said this to the nun Cālā."

Māra, having approached her while she was seated for the day residence in the Blind Men's Grove, wishing to cut her off from the abiding by the holy life, asked beginning with "with reference to whom are you shaven." Then, having made known the virtues of the Teacher and the nature of the Teaching as leading to liberation, by demonstrating the state of having accomplished her task, she declared her going beyond his domain. Having heard that, Māra, afflicted and unhappy, disappeared right there. Then she, relating the verses spoken by herself and by Māra by way of an inspired utterance -

182. "Having established mindfulness, a nun with developed faculties;
She penetrated the peaceful state, the stilling of activities, happiness.
183. "With reference to whom are you shaven, you appear like a female ascetic;
Yet you do not approve of heresy, why do you wander about in sheer delusion?
184. "Outside of this, heretics are dependent on views;
They do not cognise the Teaching, they are not skilled in the Teaching.
185. "There is one born in the Sakyan clan, the Buddha without equal;
He expounded the Teaching to me, the transcendence of views.
186. Suffering, the origin of suffering, and the overcoming of suffering;
The noble eightfold path, leading to the peace of suffering.
187. "Having heard his word, I dwelt delighted in the Dispensation;
The three true knowledges have been attained, the Buddha's teaching has
been fulfilled.
188. "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, "having established mindfulness" means by means of the development of the establishment of mindfulness, having made mindfulness well established in the body and so on by way of foulness, suffering, impermanence, and non-self. "A nun" - she speaks with reference to herself. "With developed faculties" means with the five faculties beginning with faith developed through the development of the noble path.

"She penetrated the peaceful state" means she penetrated, she realised the peaceful state, Nibbāna, through the penetration of realisation. "The stilling of activities" means that which is the cause of the stilling of all activities. "Happiness" means perpetual happiness.

The verse "With reference to whom" was spoken by Māra. Therein this is the meaning in brief - In this world there are many doctrines and their teachers are many founders of sects; with reference to whom among them are you shaven, are you one with shaven hair? Not only is she shaven, but indeed by wearing the orange robe she appears like a female ascetic. "Yet you do not approve of heresy" means you do not approve of the heresies that serve as mirrors for hermits, wandering ascetics, and so on, in any of those various doctrines. "Why do you wander about in sheer delusion" means what is this, that having abandoned the straight path to Nibbāna arranged by the heresy, proceeding upon a temporal wrong path, you wander about, you roam around, exceedingly deluded?

Having heard that, the elder nun, threatening him by way of giving a reply, said beginning with "outside of this." Therein, "outside of this, heretics" means those such as Kuṭṭisaka, Bahukāra, and so on, who are outside of this, outside of the Dispensation of the Perfectly Enlightened One. For they cast, they lay down the snare of craving and the snare of wrong view upon beings - thus they are called heretics. Therefore he said - "Dependent on views" means having approached and depended upon eternalist wrong views; they took up wrong views - this is the meaning. And inasmuch as they are based on wrong views, to that extent they are based on heresy. "They do not cognise the Teaching" means those heretics who are based on eternalist wrong views do not cognise as it really is even the phenomenon of occurrence, that "this is occurrence, thus it occurs." "They are not skilled in the Teaching" means they are also unskilled in the phenomenon of cessation, that "this is cessation, thus it ceases"; for they are deluded even regarding the path of the phenomenon of occurrence, how much less then regarding the phenomenon of cessation.

Having thus shown the non-liberating nature of the doctrines of the heretics, now, to answer the question "with reference to whom are you shaven," "there is one born in the Sakyan clan" and so on was stated. Therein, "the transcendence of views" means the means of transcending all views, the disentanglement from the net of views. The remainder is according to the method already stated.

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

3. Commentary on the Verses of the Elder Nun Upacālā

189-195. The verses of the elder nun Upacālā beginning with "Mindful" and so on. Her story has been told in the story of the elder nun Cālā. For this one too, like Cālā, having gone forth, having established insight, having attained arahantship, uttering an inspired utterance -

189. "Mindful, with vision, a nun with developed faculties;
She penetrated the peaceful state, not practised by wretched persons."

spoke this verse.

Therein, "mindful" means accomplished in mindfulness; the meaning is that in the

preliminary stage, having been endowed with the highest mindfulness and discretion, afterwards, because of the development of the noble path, through the attainment of the expansion of mindfulness, she was endowed with the highest mindfulness. "With vision" means endowed with the eye of wisdom; from the beginning, having been endowed with wisdom that discerns rise and fall, noble, penetrative, through the attainment of the expansion of wisdom, she was endowed with the supreme eye of wisdom - this is what is meant. "Not practised by wretched persons" means not by inferior persons, but practised by the highest persons, by noble ones, by the Buddha and others.

The verse "Why do you not approve of birth" was spoken by Māra wishing to bring the elder nun towards sensual pleasures. For when asked by Māra "What is it that you, nun, do not approve of?" the elder nun said - "Birth indeed, friend, I do not approve of." Then Māra, showing her that for one who is born there are sensual pleasures to be enjoyed, therefore birth too should be desired, and sensual pleasures too should be enjoyed -

190. "Why do you not approve of birth? One who is born enjoys sensual pleasures;
Enjoy sensual delights, do not be one who regrets afterwards."

He spoke a verse.

Its meaning is - What is that reason by which you, Upacālā, do not approve of birth, would not approve of it? That reason does not exist. Because one who is born enjoys sensual pleasures - here one who is born, indulging in forms and so on connected with the types of sensual pleasure, enjoys sensual happiness. For that does not exist for the unborn; therefore, enjoy sensual delights, experience the delights of sensual play. "Do not be one who regrets afterwards" means do not be one who regrets afterwards thinking "While youth existed, while possessions existed, sensual happiness was not experienced by me." In this world, teachings are only for the purpose of achieving benefit, and benefit is for the purpose of sensual happiness - this meaning is well known - this is the intention.

Having heard that, the elder nun, having made clear the nature of birth as a sign of suffering and her own transcendence of his domain, threatening him -

191. "For one who is born there is death, the cutting off of hands and feet;
Murder, imprisonment and hardship, one who is born undergoes suffering.
192. "There is one born in the Sakyan clan, the Enlightened by himself,
unconquered;
He expounded the Teaching to me, the transcendence of birth.
193. Suffering, the origin of suffering, and the overcoming of suffering;
The noble eightfold path, leading to the peace of suffering.
194. "Having heard his word, I dwelt delighted in the Dispensation;
The three true knowledges have been attained, the Buddha's teaching has
been fulfilled.
195. "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, "for one who is born there is death" means because death exists for a being who is born, not for the unborn. Not only death alone, but indeed ageing, disease, and so on, whatever misfortunes there are, all of them exist for one who is born, having birth as their cause. Therefore the Blessed One said - "With birth as condition, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, suffering, displeasure, and anguish come to be." Therefore he said - "The cutting off of hands and feet" means the cutting off of hands and feet exists only for one who is born, not for the unborn. It should be seen that by the indication of the cutting off of hands and feet, the thirty-two forms of bodily punishment are also shown here. Therefore he said - "Murder, imprisonment and hardship, one who is born undergoes suffering." The hardship of murder reckoned as deprivation of life, blows with fists, and so on, and the hardship of imprisonment reckoned as binding with fetters and so on, and whatever else is called suffering - all that only one who is born undergoes, not the unborn; therefore I do not approve of birth.

Now, showing that the state of having absolutely transcended birth and sensual pleasures by herself, beginning from the root - she said beginning with "there is one born in the Sakyan clan." Therein, "unconquered" means not defeated by anyone, whether the defilement-Māra and so on. For the Teacher is the overlord of all, having indeed overcome the world with its gods; therefore he is unconquered. The remainder is clear in itself since the method has been stated.

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

The commentary on the Book of Sevens 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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