

THE PALIVERSE PROJECT

The Universe of Buddha's Wisdom

Commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā)

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

1. The Collection of the Long Discourses - Commentaries
(1. Dīgha Nikāya - Aṭṭhakathā)

3. Commentary on the Chapter on Pāthika
(3. Pāthikavaggaṭṭhakathā)

9. Commentary on the Discourse on the Āṭānātā Protective
Verses (9. Āṭānāṭīyasuttavaṇṇanā)

[DN 32, PTS 3.194-3.206]



PaliVerse

1.The Collection of the Long Discourses - Commentaries

3. Commentary on the Chapter on Pāthika

9. Explanation of the Discourse on the Āṭānāṭā Protective Verses

Commentary on the First Recitation Section

275. "Thus have I heard" - this is the Discourse at Āṭānāṭā. Herein this is the explanation of terms not previously explained - "Having set up protection in the four directions" means having set up protection in the four directions for Sakka, the lord of the gods, for the purpose of warding off the army of titans. "Having set up troops" means having set up troops of soldiers. "Having set up guards" means having set up guards in the four directions. Thus, having well arranged the protection for Sakka, the lord of the gods, seated in the city of Āṭānāṭa, having composed this protective discourse referring to the seven Buddhas, having made the proclamation "Those who do not heed the Teacher's command of the Teaching and our royal command, to them we shall do this and that," having themselves too arranged protection in the four directions with the four armies beginning with a great army of demons, when the night was far advanced, etc. they sat down to one side.

"When the night was far advanced": here the word "abhikkanta" is seen in the senses of passing away, beautiful, handsome, appreciation, and so on. Therein, in such passages as "The night has passed, venerable sir, the first watch has gone, the Community of monks has been seated for a long time; let the Blessed One, venerable sir, recite the Pātimokkha to the monks," it is seen in the sense of passing away. In such passages as "This one of these four persons is more brilliant and more sublime," in the sense of beautiful.

"Who pays respect to my feet, blazing with supernormal power and fame;
With surpassing beauty, illuminating all directions?"

In such passages as these, in the sense of handsome. In such passages as "Excellent, Master Gotama," in the sense of appreciation. Here, however, in the sense of passing away. Therefore, "when the night was far advanced" means "when the night was spent" is what is said.

"With surpassing beauty": here the word "abhikkanta" is in the sense of handsome. The word "vaṇṇa," however, is seen in the senses of skin, praise, caste group, reason, shape, measure, visible form sense base, and so on. Therein, in such passages as "The Blessed One is of golden colour," in the sense of skin. In such passages as "But when, householder, were these praises of the ascetic Gotama concocted by you?" in the sense of praise. In such passages as "There are these four castes, Master Gotama," in the sense of caste group. In such passages as "Then for what reason is one called a scent-thief?" in the sense of reason. In such passages as "Having created a great elephant-king appearance," in the sense of shape. In such passages as "There are three sizes of bowls," in the sense of measure. In such passages as "Colour,

odour, flavour, nutritive essence," in the sense of visible form sense base. That here should be understood in the sense of skin. Therefore, "with surpassing beauty" means "with handsome skin" is what is said.

"Kevalakappaṃ": here the word "kevala" has many meanings such as without remainder, for the most part, unmixed, not exceeding, firm, and separation. For thus indeed, in such passages as "the holy life that is complete in its entirety and pure," the meaning is without remainder. In such passages as "Almost all the Aṅgas and Magadhans, having taken abundant solid and soft food, wished to proceed," the meaning is for the most part. In such passages as "There is the origin of this whole mass of suffering," the meaning is unmixed. In such passages as "Surely this venerable one is of mere faith alone," the meaning is not exceeding. In such passages as "The Venerable Anuruddha's co-resident pupil named Bāhika is standing almost entirely for schism in the Community," the meaning is firmness. In such passages as "A consummate one, one who has lived the holy life, is called the highest person," the meaning is separation. Here, however, the meaning of without remainder is intended.

Now this word "kappa" has many meanings such as believing, conventional expression, time, description, cutting, alternative, pretext, all around, and so on. For thus indeed, in "This is trustworthy of Master Gotama. As is natural for a Worthy One, a Perfectly Enlightened One" and so on, the meaning is believing. In "I allow, monks, to consume fruit by means of five procedures proper for ascetics" and so on, it is a conventional expression. In "By which I constantly dwell" and so on, it is time. In "Thus said the Venerable Kappa" and so on, it is a description. In "Adorned, with trimmed hair and beard" and so on, it is cutting. In "The practice as to two finger-breadths is allowable" and so on, it is an alternative; in "There is reason to lie down" and so on, it is a pretext. In "Having illuminated almost the entire Bamboo Grove" and so on, it is all around. Here, however, the meaning of all around is intended. Therefore, in "kevalakappaṃ gijjhakūṭaṃ" here, the meaning should be understood thus: completely, all around, the Vulture's Peak.

"Having illuminated" means having pervaded with the radiance arisen from garments, garlands, ornaments, and body; the meaning is having made one light, one radiance, like the moon and like the sun. "Sat down to one side" means the place for sitting of deities in the presence of the One of Ten Powers is not much by nature, but in this discourse they sat down out of respect for the protective discourse.

276. "Vessavaṇa" - although the four great kings had come, Vessavaṇa however was intimate with the One of Ten Powers, experienced in conducting discussion, and well-trained; therefore the great king Vessavaṇa said this to the Blessed One. "Eminent" means accomplished in influence and power. "For abstention from killing living beings" means having shown the danger pertaining to the present life and the future life in killing living beings, he expounds the Teaching for abstention from that. The same method applies in the remaining ones too. "There dwell eminent demons" means in those lodgings there are eminent demons who are permanent dwellers. "Āṭānāṭiya" - it is so named because it was composed in the city of Āṭānāṭa. But is there anything that is not directly known to the Blessed One? There is not. Then why did Vessavaṇa say beginning with "May the Blessed One, venerable sir, learn"? For the purpose of obtaining permission. For he said thus while seeking permission to

make the Blessed One hear this protection. He also said this because this protection will be held in high regard when spoken by the Teacher. "For comfortable dwelling" means for pleasant abiding in the four postures beginning with the place of going and so on.

277. "Of the one endowed with vision" means not only Vipassī is endowed with vision; all seven Buddhas are endowed with vision. Therefore, each and every Buddha has these seven names each. All Buddhas are endowed with vision, all are compassionate towards all beings, all are ones who have bathed because of having bathed away the mental defilements. All are crushers of Māra's army, all have lived the holy life, all are liberated, all are Aṅgīrasas because of rays having gone forth from their limbs. And not only do the Buddhas have just these seven names; it has been said "the great sage has incalculable names by virtue of his qualities."

But Vessavaṇa spoke thus by way of their well-known names. "Those people" - here "people who have eliminated the mental corruptions" is what is intended. "Without divisive speech" - this is merely the heading of the teaching; the meaning is without false speech, without divisive speech, without harsh speech, speakers of wise speech. "Of great selves" means those who have attained greatness. "Mahantā" is also a reading; the meaning is "great ones." "Free from timidity" means without timidity, free from horripilation.

"Welfare" means welfare through the suffusion of friendliness. In "yaṃ namassanti," here "yaṃ" is merely a particle. "Mahattaṃ" means "great." Or this itself is the reading; this is what is meant: "Those who are quenched in the world through the quenching of the mental defilements, who saw with insight as it really is, and who pay homage to Gotama, who is accomplished in true knowledge and other qualities, the welfare of gods and humans - those people are without divisive speech; homage to them too." In the commentary, however, "those people are without divisive speech" means "those Buddhas are without divisive speech" - thus in the first verse the praise of the Buddhas alone is stated; therefore the first verse is spoken by way of the seven Buddhas. In the second verse, "Gotama" - this is merely the opening of the teaching. For this too should be understood as spoken by way of the seven Buddhas only. For the meaning here is this: The wise gods and humans in the world pay homage to Gotama; homage to him and to the Buddhas before him.

278. "From where it rises" means it rises from whatever place. "Ādicca" means the son of Aditi, or this is merely a synonym for the word "sun." "Having a great orb" means "maṇḍalīmahā" (the great orbbed one) because it has a great disk. "When it is rising" means when it is rising. "Even the night ceases" means the night disappears. "When it has risen" means when it has risen.

"Lake" means a lake of water. "There" means in that place from where the sun rises. "Ocean" means that which was called "a lake" is none other than the ocean. "With flowing waters" means with widespread waters, or "with flowing waters" because rivers of various kinds have entered into its waters. "Thus they know it there" means they know that lake there thus. How do they know it? They know it thus: "the ocean with flowing waters."

"From here" means from Sineru or from their place of sitting. "People" means this great multitude. "Of one name" means of one name by the name of Inda. It is said

that they gave to all of them the very name of Sakka, the king of gods. "Eighty, ten, and one" means ninety-one persons. "Named after Inda" means having the name thus: "Inda." "The Buddha, kinsman of the sun" - he is the Buddha also by the removal of the sleep of defilements. He is the kinsman of the sun also by being of the same clan as the sun. "With skill you observe" means with blameless or subtle omniscient knowledge he looked upon the great multitude. "Even non-humans pay homage to you" means even non-humans, having said "He looked upon the great multitude with omniscient knowledge," pay homage. "We have heard this repeatedly" means this has been heard by us constantly. "Pay homage to the Victor Gotama, we pay homage to the Victor Gotama" - when asked by us, they say "We pay homage to the Victor Gotama."

279. "By which ghosts are called" - ghosts means the deceased; they are said to be carried out in whatever direction. "The divisive, the backbiters" means those of divisive speech and those who blame others in their absence, as if eating the flesh of their backs. And those are said to be carried out in whatever direction - all of these, having been taken out through the southern gate, to the south of the city, let them be burnt or let them be cut or let them be slaughtered - thus it is said. "From here that is the southern direction" - in whatever direction those ghosts and the divisive and so on are said to be carried out, from here that is the southern direction. "From here" means from Sineru or from their place of sitting. "Of the kumbhaṇḍas" - those gods, it is said, have big bellies, and their private parts too are great like a water-pot. Therefore they are called "kumbhaṇḍas."

280. "Where the sun sets" means in whichever region the sun sets.

281. "Where" means in whatever direction. "The great Neru" means the great Sineru, the king of mountains. "Of beautiful appearance" means beautiful to behold because of being made of gold. For the eastern side of Sineru is made of silver, the southern side is made of jewels, the western side is made of crystal, the northern side is made of gold; that is delightful to behold. Therefore, "in whatever direction Sineru is of beautiful appearance" - this is the meaning here. "Humans are born there" means there in Uttarakuru humans are born. "Without attachment" means free from selfish attachment even regarding clothing, ornaments, drink, food and so on. "Without possessions" means without possessions by way of possession of a wife. It is said that for them there is no selfish attachment thinking "This is my wife," and having seen a mother or a sister, desire and lust does not arise.

"Nor are ploughs drawn" means ploughs too are not drawn there to the field thinking "We shall do agriculture." "Ripening without cultivation" means grown by itself in an uncultivated piece of ground, in the forest. "Rice-grain fruit" means rice grains alone are its fruit.

"Having cooked it in pots" means having poured it into a cooking pot and having cooked it with fire of smokeless embers. There, it is said, there are stones called fire-stones. Then they set up three stones and place the pot upon them. Heat arising from the stones cooks it. "From that they eat their food" means from that pot they eat only food; there is no other lentil curry or vegetables; for those eating, the flavour is just

agreeable to their mind. They simply give it to those who have arrived at that place; there is indeed no stingy mind. Buddhas, Paccekabuddhas and others of great supernatural power, having gone there, receive almsfood.

"Having made a cow into a single-hoofed mount" means having taken a cow and having made it into just a single-hoofed vehicle. Having mounted that, the attendant demons of Vessavaṇa. "They travel in every direction" means they travel in this and that direction. "Having made a beast into a single-hoofed mount" means apart from the cow, having made the remaining four-footed animal of whatever species into just a single-hoofed vehicle, they travel in every direction.

"Or having made a woman into a vehicle" means mostly having made a pregnant woman into a vehicle. Having sat on her back, they travel about. It is said that her back is able to bend down. But the other women they harness to vehicles. "Having made a man into a vehicle" means having taken men, they harness them to vehicles. And when seizing, they are unable to seize those with right view. They mostly seize those dwelling in the border regions among barbarians. It is said that here a certain country-dweller, having sat down near a certain elder monk, falls asleep; the elder asked "Lay follower, you sleep exceedingly much." He said "Today, venerable sir, I have been wearied the whole night by the slaves of Vessavaṇa."

"Having made a girl into a vehicle" means having taken girls and made them into single-hoofed vehicles, they harness them to chariots. In the case of a boy-vehicle too, the same method applies. "The attendants of that king" means the attendants of that king. "Elephant vehicles, horse vehicles" means not only cow-vehicles and so on, but having mounted elephant-vehicles, horse-vehicles and so on too, they go about. "Divine vehicle" means other manifold divine vehicles are also available to them; these, however, are their vehicles for harnessing. But they go about even while lying down on excellent beds in mansions, and even while seated on chairs, palanquins and so on. Therefore it was said "mansions and palanquins too." "Of the famous great king" means these vehicles arise for the famous great king who is thus endowed with power.

"And his cities were well-built in the sky" means those cities beginning with Āṭānāṭā and so on were well built in the sky of that king; the meaning is they were cities. For one of his cities was named Āṭānāṭā, one was named Kusināṭā, one was named Parakusināṭā, one was named Nāṭasūriyā, one was named Parakusiṭānāṭā.

"To the north Kasivanta" means standing in that place, straight in the northern direction is another city named Kasivanta. "And beyond that Janogha" means beyond this, in the further part, is another city named Janogha. "Navanavatiyo" means there is also another city named Navanavatiyo. Another named Ambaraambaravatiyo. "Āḷakamandā" means there is also another royal city named Āḷakamandā.

"Therefore the great king Kuvera" means it is said that when a Buddha had not yet arisen, this one, having been a brahmin named Kuvera, having had sugar-cane planted, set up seven machines. He made merit by giving the income produced from one machine-hall to the public who came again and again. From the remaining halls, even more income arose right there; he, being pleased by that, having taken the produce from the remaining halls too, gave gifts for twenty thousand years. Having died, he was reborn as a young god named Kuvera among the gods ruled by the four

great kings. Afterwards he exercised kingship in the royal city of Visāṇā. From then on he is called Vessavaṇa.

"Investigating, they proclaim" means investigating, examining matters separately, instructing, twelve other demon officials proclaim. It is said that those demon officials, having received the message, report it to the twelve demon doorkeepers. The demon doorkeepers report that message to the great king. Now, showing the names of those demon officials, he said beginning with "Tatolā." Among them, it is said, one is named Tatolā, one is named Tattalā, one is named Tatotalā, one is named Ojasi, one is named Tejasi, one is named Tatojasī. "Sūra, Rājā" means one is named Sūra, one is named Rājā, one is named Sūrorājā; "Ariṭṭha, Nemi" means one is named Ariṭṭha, one is named Nemi, one is named Ariṭṭhanemi.

"There too is a lake named Dharaṇī" means there, however, there is one lake of water named Dharaṇī by name; it is said that there is a great pond of fifty yojanas. "From which the clouds rain" means from which pond, having taken water, the clouds rain. "From which the rains pour down" means from which the rains, spreading out, descend. It is said that when the clouds have risen, from that pond the old water falls down. Above, the cloud, having risen up, fills that pond with new water. The old water, having become the lower portion, goes out. When the pond is full, the rain clouds depart. "Sabhāpi" means an assembly hall. It is said that on the bank of that pond there is a jewelled pavilion of twelve yojanas, surrounded by a creeper named Sālavatī; with reference to that, this was said.

"They attend" means they sit down. "There are trees with perpetual fruit" means it shows that in that place, surrounding that pavilion, there are trees such as mango, rose-apple and others that are always bearing fruit, and also campaka, jasmine and others that are always in bloom. "Filled with various flocks of birds" means crowded with diverse groups of birds. "Resounding with peacocks and herons" means resounded with, sung to by, peacocks and heron birds.

"Here is the sound of jīvañjīvaka birds" means there is here also the sound of jīvañjīvaka birds that cry out thus "jīva jīvā." "Oṭṭhavadittaka birds" means the uṭṭhavadittaka birds that cry out thus "arise, citta, arise, cittā" also wander about there. "Jungle fowl" means wild jungle fowl. "Crabs" means golden crabs. "In the forest" means in the lotus forest. "Pokkharasātaka birds" means birds named pokkharasātaka.

"Here is the sound of parrots and mynas" means here is the sound of parrots and of mynas. "And daṇḍamāṇavaka birds" means birds with human faces. It is said that they, having grasped a golden stick with both hands, having stepped upon one lotus leaf, go about placing the golden stick down on the next lotus leaf. "That shines beautifully at all times" means that pond shines beautifully at all times. "The lotus pond of Kuvera" means Kuvera's lotus pond, being a lotus lake; that pond named Dharaṇī shines beautifully always, without interruption.

282. "For whoever" - this Vessavaṇa said while showing the preliminary work for the Āṭṭhāṇṇiya protection after having concluded it. Therein, "rightly taken" means having purified both the meaning and the phrasing, well learnt. "Complete and thoroughly learnt" means learnt in full without omitting any terms and phrases. For one who recites the protection having distorted both the meaning and the Pāḷi text, or having

made it altogether unfamiliar, it is not powerful; it is powerful only for one who recites it having made it altogether familiar. It shows that even for one who has learnt it for the sake of material gain and recites it, it does not accomplish its purpose; it is for the benefit only of one who, standing on the side of escape, recites it having made friendliness the forerunner. "Demon servant" means a demon attendant.

"A site" means a house site. "A habitation" means a permanent habitation there. "Assembly" means a gathering. "Unfit for marriage" means not fit for marriage arrangement from the bride's side. "Unfit to be given in marriage" means not fit for marriage arrangement from the groom's side. The meaning is that they would not enter into marriage arrangements with him. "With complete abuses referring to his own nature" means they would abuse him with complete phrases of abuse referring to the individual existence of these ones, spoken as "tawny-eyed, tawny-toothed" and so on; the meaning is that they would revile him with what are called demon revilings. "An empty bowl on his" - there is an iron bowl just like the monks' bowl. That, turned upside down on the head, falls down as far as the bottom of the throat. Then they beat it in the middle with an iron stake.

"Fierce" means prone to wrath. "Hostile" means opposed. "Violent" means uncontrollable in their actions. "Do not heed the Great Kings" means they do not accept their word, they do not carry out their command. "The men of the Great Kings" means of the twenty-eight demon generals. "The men" means those who are the servants of the demon generals. "Called rebels" means adversaries, enemies. "Should be informed" means by one who, having recited the protection, is unable to make the non-human spirits retreat, these demons should be informed; the meaning is that these should be made to know.

Discourse on the Preliminary Work of Protection

But standing here, the preliminary work for the protection should be spoken of. For at first the Discourse at Āṭānāṭā should not be recited; the Metta Sutta, the Dhajagga Sutta, and the Ratana Sutta - these should be recited for seven days. If it releases, that is good. If it does not release, the Discourse at Āṭānāṭā should be recited; the monk who recites it should not eat flour or meat, and should not dwell in a cemetery. Why? Non-human spirits gain opportunity. Having had the place for performing the protection smeared with green plaster, having prepared a pure seat there, one should sit down.

The monk performing the protection should be led from the monastery to the house surrounded by those carrying shield-weapons. He should not recite having sat down in the open air; having closed the doors and windows, seated, surrounded by those with weapons in hand, having made a mind of friendliness go before, he should recite. First, having made him undertake the training rules, the protection should be performed for one established in morality. If even thus one is unable to release him, having brought him to the monastery, having made him lie down in the shrine courtyard, having made an offering of seats, having had lamps lit, having swept the shrine courtyard, a discourse on blessings should be spoken. A general assembly should be announced. In the grove near the monastery there is a tree called the chief tree; a message should be sent there: "The community of monks awaits your arrival." Not coming to the place of general assembly is not permissible. Then the one seized

by a spirit should be asked "What is your name?" When the name has been stated, he should be addressed by that very name. "So-and-so, there is a share of merit for you in garlands, scents and the like, a share of merit in the offering of seats, a share of merit in almsfood; by the community of monks a great discourse on blessings has been spoken for you as a gift; out of respect for the community of monks, release this one" - thus he should be made to release. If he does not release, the deities should be informed: "You take note, this spirit does not heed our word; we shall carry out the command of the Buddha" - thus the protection should be performed. This is the preliminary work for laypeople. If, however, a monk has been seized by a spirit, having washed the seats, having had a general assembly announced, having given a share of merit in scents, garlands and the like, the protection should be recited. This is the preliminary work for monks.

"Should be cried out to" means having had a general assembly announced, the twenty-eight demon generals should be called upon. "Should be called upon" means by one reciting such things as "This demon seizes," one should speak with them. Therein, "seizes" means he resolves upon the body. "Possesses" is a synonym for that very thing. Or alternatively, it is said that he clings and does not depart. "Harasses" means increasing an arisen disease, he afflicts. "Vexes" is a synonym for that very thing. "Harms" means making one deficient in flesh and blood, he causes suffering. "Injures" is a synonym for that very thing. "Does not release" means having become one who seizes without letting go, he does not wish to release; thus it should be called upon to them.

283. Now, in order to show those to whom one should thus call upon, he said beginning with "Which demons." Therein, "Inda, Soma" and so on are their names. Among them, "Vessāmitta" is one demon dwelling on Mount Vessāmitta. "Yugandhara" too is indeed a dweller on Mount Yugandhara. "Hiri, Netti, and Mandiya" means Hiri and Netti and Mandiya. "Maṇi, Māṇi, Vara, Dīgha" means Maṇi and Māṇi and Vara and Dīgha. "And also Serīsaka together" means another one named Serīsaka together with them. "These demons, etc. should be informed" means it should be reported to these demon generals thus: "This demon harasses this one, vexes him, does not release him." Thereupon they will make an effort, thinking: "The Community of monks carries out the command of their own Teaching; we too shall carry out the command of our demon king." Showing that thus there will be no opportunity for non-human spirits, and there will be comfortable dwelling for the disciples of the Buddha, he said beginning with "This, sir, is the Āṭānāṭiya protection." All of that, and what follows thereafter, is of manifest meaning.

In the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, the Commentary on the Dīgha Nikāya,

the explanation of the Discourse on the Āṭānāṭiya Protective Verses is finished.



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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