

The Legend of the Buddhas

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Buddha Chapter, the First

Praise Him, the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully Complete Buddha!

The Sage of Videha,¹ his body bent, asked
the Thus-Gone-One dwelling in Jetavana,
“Indeed there are those [called] Omniscient Buddhas;
through what causes do they become [so], Hero?”² [1]³

Then spoke the Omniscient, Outstanding, Great Sage,
to lucky Ānanda with [his] honeyed voice,
“Who performed service among former Buddhas,
[but] didn’t get freed in their dispensations,⁴ [2]

because that is the means to awaken, wise,
they with sharp knowing, through knowledge and power,
because of [their] wishes [and] also great strength,
do come to attain that state of omniscience. [3]

I too among former Buddhas
did wish to become a Buddha.⁵
Through [my] mind alone there were
innumerable *Dhamma*-kings.” [4]

[Now] listen, with purified minds,
to the legends of the Buddhas,

¹The Sage of Videha is Ānanda, the Buddha’s cousin and personal attendant.

²BJTS alt. reads *dhīra* (“Wise One”) for *vīra* (“Hero”)

³The first four verses of BJTS are not found in PTS. The first three verses of BJTS are in the more elaborate meter, with eleven syllables per foot, that characterizes the following *Paccekabuddhāpadāna* (and the *sutta* from which it in turn draws), so I have translated accordingly. Indeed, with very small changes, these first three verses are also the first three verses of *Paccekabuddhāpadāna*, even in the PTS edition.

⁴*jinasāsanesu*, lit., “in the Victors’ dispensations”

⁵lit., “did wish for Buddhahood.”

innumerable *Dhamma*-kings
who fulfilled thirty perfections. (1) [5]

I worshipped them [bowing] my head,
having praised with ten fingers pressed,
those World-Chiefs with followers [and]
the Best Buddhas' Awakening. (2) [6]

I brought it all forth with my mind:
things on the ground and in the sky,
uncountable as are the gems
found in the fields of the Buddhas. (3) [7]

I created a palace there,
with a floor made out of silver.
Various floors made out of gems
arose and stretched up toward the sky. (4) [8]

There were varied well-made pillars,
well-proportioned, very costly.
The central beam was made of gold,
the gate was canopy-adorned. (5) [9]

The first floor, lapis lazuli,
was lovely as a stainless cloud.
Lotus ponds were scattered about
on a floor made of superb gold. (6) [10]

A coral [floor], coral-colored,
was red and [very] beautiful;
[that] floor lit up the directions
with light the hue of red beetles.⁶ (7) [11]

Doors and windows and turrets [too],
and four railings were well-laid-out.
It had a scented bamboo net
which was delightful to the mind. (8) [12]

There were excellent gabled roofs
[colored] blue [and] yellow [and] red,
white [and also] mixed black-and-white,
adorned with the seven gemstones. (9) [13]

Lovely [pictures of] birds and beasts
and lotuses fashioned for looks;
it was adorned with moon and sun,
dotted with star-constellations. (10) [14]

⁶*indagopaka*

It was covered with a gold net
furnished with little golden bells.
Those gold garlands sang in the force
of the wind, delighting the mind. (11) [15]

A garland of flags was hoisted,
dyed⁷ in a spectrum⁸ of colors:
some light crimson, others deep red,
tawny, yellow and yellowish. (12) [16]

Numerous various hundreds
of slabs were made out of silver,
made of crystal, made of ruby,
[and] likewise made out of cat's eye. (13) [17]

Various diverse couches were
spread with soft Benares muslin,
rugs, fine silk, and cloth from China,
fibrous cloth and yellow garments.
All of these various carpets
I laid out [on them] with my mind. (14) [17e-f, 18]

On this floor and that [floor] too,
ornamented with huts of gems,
effulgent torches [made of] gems
are being carried and fixed well. (15) [19]

Columns [and] pillars are splendid,
and beautiful golden gateways
made of special gold⁹ and hard woods,
and also made out of silver. (16) [20]

Varied windows, well-proportioned;¹⁰
painted cross-bars [adorned] the doors,
with "pots of plenty" on both sides,
filled with lotuses and lilies. (17) [21]

I conjured up all past Buddhas,
World-Leaders, [their] Assemblies too,
with their natural complexions
[and] forms, and [all] their followers. (18) [22]

Having entered through the doorway
all the Buddhas and followers

⁷I take *sampītaṅ* (BJTS *suppītaṅ*) from *pīta*, "well-saturated."

⁸lit., "various"

⁹*jambonadā*, a special and much-prized variety of gold

¹⁰reading *sandhī suvibhattā* (BJTS, Hew) for *sandhīsu vibhattā* ("divided into openings," PTS)

sat down on chairs all made of gold
[and formed] an exalted circle.¹¹ (19) [23]

Those Buddhas who live here-and-now,
who have no rivals in the world,
and those who lived in former times:
I brought¹² them all into the world.¹³ (20) [24]

Lonely Buddhas, many hundreds,
Self-dependent, Unconquered Ones,
and those who lived in former times:
I brought them all into the world. (21) [25]

There are many wishing-trees there
who are both human and divine.
Having arranged all of the cloth
I give them [each] the triple robe. (22) [26]

Filling lovely bowls made of gems
I then provided [alms] to them:
foods that were soft, [and] hard foods [too],
well-prepared food and drink to taste. (23) [27]

Being given burnished-cloth robes
which were [just like] divine garments,
honey and crystallized sugar,
sesame oil [and] sugar-cane juice,
with milk-rice,¹⁴ each one satisfied,
[they formed] an exalted circle. (24) [28, 29a-b]

Having entered a jeweled room
like a lion its secret cave,
they got onto priceless couches
in the sleeping-lion posture. (25) [29c-d, 30a-b]

Mindfully rising up they [then]
sat cross-legged on those couches,
filled with delight in altered states,
the pasturage of all Buddhas. (26) [30c-f]

¹¹or “noble diagram,” *ariyamaṇḍalā*.

¹²lit., “were brought”.

¹³or “into [my] residence” or “into [that conjured up] residence.”

¹⁴lit., “with the ultimate food,” *parama-anna*. The Sinhala tradition understands this to be milk-rice (*kiri-bat*), which in Sri Lanka is typically made by boiling the rice in coconut milk rather than cow’s milk. In ancient India, the latter was more likely the case. The term may also mean, more generally, “outstanding food.”

Some are preaching their doctrines¹⁵ [then],
 [while] others sport in miracles.
 Others apply special knowledges,¹⁶
 masters of special knowledges.
 Various lakhs of others still
 transform into various shapes.¹⁷ (27) [31]

Buddhas are questioning Buddhas
 about the range of omniscience.¹⁸
 Understanding deep, abstruse points,
 they achieve their Awakenings. (28) [32]

Followers questioning Buddhas;
 Buddhas questioning followers.
 Questioning one another they
 [then] provide each other answers. (29) [33]

Buddhas and Lonely Buddhas [too,]
 followers and the attendants,
 thus delighting in devotions,
 are really enjoying the palace. (30) [34]

Let there be carried over head
 a pearl-net-draped umbrella,
 combined with [more] nets made of gold
 and also of silver and gems. (31) [35]¹⁹

Let there be awnings made of cloth,
 decorated with golden stars
 and with diverse garlands spread out;
 let all be carried over head. (32) [36]

They are spread out with floral wreaths,
 [and] beautified with scented wreaths;
 studded with wreaths made out of cloth
 decorated with wreaths of gems. (33) [37]

They are strewn with varied flowers,

¹⁵ *dhammāni*

¹⁶ *abhiññā*, classically six in number: superpowers or miraculous powers (*iddhi*), “divine ear” (*dibbasotu*), knowing others’ hearts/minds/thoughts, recalling one’s own previous lives, knowing others’ rebirths, certainty of nirvana. The first five are generally accessible religious goals; the sixth is experienced only by Buddhist arahants.

¹⁷ lit., transforming themselves into magical transformations

¹⁸ lit., “about the range of the realm of omniscience.”

¹⁹ here the reading of the Hewawitarne and BJTS editions, echoed in the commentary, is significantly different: “Let there be umbrellas of gems/with gilded handles of scented bamboo//covered in a net of pearls./Let them all be carried out front.”

[and] scented with fragrant perfumes,
 marked with special scented palm-prints,²⁰
 [and] covered with golden covers. (34) [38]

Let lotus-ponds in four directions,
 full of lotuses and lilies,
 appear like they were formed of gold,
 exuding dusty lotus-pollen. (35) [39]

Let all the trees that are around
 the palace burst forth into bloom.
 And in the evening let those flowers
 release sweet scents, sprinkling the realm. (36) [40]

Let peacocks there begin to dance
 to the songs of heavenly swans,
 and let cuckoos make melodies:
 on all sides [there's] a choir of birds. (37) [41]

Let all the drums [now] be sounded;
 let all the stringed instruments²¹ wail.
 Let all the choruses commence
 on every side of the palace. (38) [42]

Let there be couches made of gold —
 very large, endowed with brightness,
 without blemish, fashioned with gems —
 throughout the field of the Buddhas,
 and in the universe beyond.²²
 Let the stands of lamps be lighted;
 let a series of ten thousand
 all burn as though one single flame. (39-40) [43-44]

Let courtesans and dancers dance,
 [and] troupes of celestial nymphs.
 Let them put on various shows
 on all the sides of the palace. (41) [45]

On tree top or mountain top
 or the crest of Mount Sineru,
 I am raising up all the flags,
 decorated [and] five-colored. (42) [46]

²⁰the palm-print is *pañcaṅguli* or *pañcaṅgulika*, Sinhala *pasāṅgul*. Pali-Sinhala-English Dictionary gives: “a mark of five fingers made after the hand immersing [sic] in a solution of sandalwood.” Here the text specifies that it was scented (*gandha*°).

²¹*vina*.

²²reading *tato pare* with BJTS for PTS *ca-m-uppari*

Let people, snake-gods, music-nymphs²³
and all the gods come forth [as well];
in homage, hands pressed together,
they attended on the palace. (43) [47]

Whatever is wholesome karma,
which deeds were to be done by me,
with body, speech and with my mind,
[I] did them well [to reach] heaven.²⁴ (44) [48]

Whichever beings have consciousness
and also those who aren't conscious,
let every one of them receive
the fruit of merit done by me. (45) [49]

That which I did was widely known;
I gave away that good deed's fruit
and gods went off to make it known
to [all] those who were unaware. (46) [50]

Let all the beings in all worlds
whose lives depend on eating food
receive by means of my own mind²⁵
all appetizing things to eat! (47) [51]

With my mind these alms were given,
with my mind the palace was built,
and likewise so were worshipped all
the Buddhas, Lonelies and followers. (48) [52]

Due to that karma done very well,²⁶
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body
I went to Tāvatiṃsa²⁷ [then]. (49) [53]

²³*gandhabba* = *gandharva*

²⁴lit., “for [birth among] the Thirty[-Three gods who reside in Tāvatiṃsa heaven]”. The BJTS Sinhala gloss understands this to imply that the *karma* was *kusala* (“wholesome”) in that it was done for the sake of being reborn in that heaven/among those gods.

²⁵BJTS reads *tejasā*, “by means of my power/inner heat”.

²⁶*tena kammaṇa sukateṇa* is a common foot in *Apadāna* which however breaks meter in the Pāli, having nine rather than the expected eight syllables. It easily could be emended to *tena sukatakammaṇa* in order to keep meter in the numerous verses where it appears, but the Pāli does not witness that. Cf. [5706], below, for a variant *tena kammavisesana*, which does keep the meter. While I am tempted to emend the English so that the foot does keep the eight-syllable meter, “Due to that karma done very well,” I have maintained the lack of metricality — might this be somehow intentional, as to call special attention to this repeated verse? — by translating, “due to that karma done very well,” throughout.

²⁷a heaven of great pleasure, sometimes identified by “the thirty” or “the thirty-three” gods who

I witness two kinds of rebirth,
as a human and as a god.
I do not witness other states:
that's the fruit of mental wishes. (50) [54]

Among the gods I am the chief;
I am the ruler among men.
Endowed with beauty and [good] marks,
in knowledge unrivaled [each] birth. (51) [55]

Savory foods of different types
and fabulous precious gemstones,
likewise clothes of various sorts
quickly come to me from the sky. (52) [56]

On flat earth, so on a mountain,
in the air, in water or woods,
whenever I stretch out my hand,
divine foods are coming to me. (53) [57]

On flat earth, so on a mountain,
in the air, in water or woods,
whenever I stretch out my hand,
all gemstones are coming to me. (54) [58]

On flat earth, so on a mountain,
in the air, in water or woods,
whenever I stretch out my hand,
all perfumes are coming to me. (55) [59]

On flat earth, so on a mountain,
in the air, in water or woods,
whenever I stretch out my hand,
all vehicles [then] come to me. (56) [60]

On flat earth, so on a mountain,
in the air, in water or woods,
whenever I stretch out my hand,
all garlands are coming to me. (57) [61]

On flat earth, so on a mountain,
in the air, in water or woods,
whenever I stretch out my hand,
all ornaments [then] come to me. (58) [62]

On flat earth, so on a mountain,
in the air, in water or woods,

dwell there.

whenever I stretch out my hand,
all maidens are coming to me. (59) [63]

On flat earth, so on a mountain,
in the air, in water or woods,
whenever I stretch out my hand,
granulated sugar comes to me. (60) [64]

On flat earth, so on a mountain,
in the air, in water or woods,
whenever I stretch out my hand,
all solid foodstuffs come to me. (61) [65]

To attain supreme Awakening
I gave [many] excellent gifts
to the poor and to the gypsies,
to beggars and to travelers. (62) [66]

Making the rocky mountains shout
and [likewise] making dense hills roar,
making the world with [its] gods smile,
I become Buddha in the world. (63) [67]

There's no end to going about
in the world in ten directions.
And in this quarter of the world
the Buddha-fields can't be counted. (64) [68]

My two-fold raying miracle
is splendid and [very] well-known.
Therein a net of flames [appears]
and vast effulgence is produced. (65) [69]

In so many universes
let all the people see me [there].
Let them all be made [most] happy
and follow me as their model. (66) [70]²⁸

Beat the drum of deathlessness
with its sweet [and] distinguished sound.
Let all the people in that space
listen [well] to the honeyed song. (67) [71]

May all of them be undefiled
on whom the cloud of *Dhamma* rains;

²⁸Hewawitarne reads, perhaps preferably: "all the way to Brahma's home, let them follow my example." BJTS also records mss. that provide this reading, and gives it parenthetically as an additional line.

let even lowly beings there
become those who enter the stream. (68) [72]

I gave the gifts that should be given,
fully fulfilling the precepts.
Going into perfect disgust,
supreme Awakening's attained. (69) [73]

Having inquired of the learned,
having made extreme exertion,
going into perfect patience,
supreme Awakening's attained. (70) [74]

Strengthening my resolution,
I fulfilled the truth-perfection.
Going into perfect loving,
supreme Awakening's attained. (71) [75]

In getting and in not getting
in pain or pleasure, scorn or fame,
remaining everywhere the same
supreme Awakening's attained. (72) [76]

Looking at laziness with fear,
and with love upon exertion,
be those exerting selves with faith;
that's the advice of the Buddhas. (73) [77]

Looking at quarrels full of fear
and with love upon agreement,
join together in harmony;
that's the advice of the Buddhas. (74) [78]

Looking at carelessness with fear
and with love upon attention,
[now] cultivate the Eight-fold Path;
that's the advice of the Buddhas. (75) [79]

Many Buddhas come together
and also all the arahants.
Pay homage while you're worshipping
the Buddhas and the arahants. (76) [80]

Thus the Buddhas can't be fathomed;
unfathomable their Teaching.
Unfathomable's the result
of pleasure in what can't be fathomed. (77) [81]

Thus the Blessed One spoke the short discourse on *Dhamma* called “The Legend of the Buddhas” which was productive of his own Buddha-conduct.

The Legend of the Buddhas is completed.

