

Sumedhā

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Praise Him, the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully Complete Buddha¹

The Legends of the Therīs

Now listen to the legends of the Therīs:²

Sumedhā Chapter, the First

[1. Sumedhā³]

When Koṇāgamana, Blessed One,
was in his new dwelling, monastic ashram,⁴
[we] who were three female friends, [then]
donated a monastery.⁵ (1) [1]

Ten times [and then] a hundred times,
and then a hundred hundred times,⁶
we were reborn among the gods;
who could tell the human rebirths? (2) [2]

Among gods we had vast power;
who could tell the human [power]?

¹BJTS places the *namaskāra* after the title *Therī-apadāna*.

²this command (in the second person imperative plural) is omitted by BJTS even though it gives the parallel commands in verse (1) [5] of *Buddha-apadāna* and at the beginning of *Paccekabuddha-apadāna* and *Thera-apadāna*. The cty omits the Therīs altogether, despite having defined *Apadāna*, in its *nidāna*, as constituted by Buddha, Paccekabuddha, Thera and Therī sections.

³“Very Wise Woman”

⁴lit., “a hermitage for the Assembly,” “a monastic hermitage”. These two feet are oddly out of meter with the rest of this text (and nearly the whole *Apadāna*); rather than eight syllables, the first foot contains nine, and the second foot contains eleven syllables, as though the author decided half-way through the first verse to refrain from adopting a more elegant meter in favor of matching the meter in what had come before, with very few exceptions, in the parallel *Thera-apadāna*. But cf notes to *Therāpadāna* verses such as [288], [359] and [362] for exceptions to this statement (though not an exact meter-match).

⁵lit., “gave a *vihāra-dāna* [=monastery-gift]”.

⁶BJTS reads a 14-syllable first foot and an 8-syllable second one, lit., “ten times, hundred times, thousand times, hundred times hundred times”. It also reads *mānusa* for *mānuse* (PTS) to produce a nine-syllable fourth foot. Both texts provide nine-syllable first, third and fourth feet in the following verse (3), before finally settling in to the standard 8-8-8-8. See n. 4 above. Are these problems with the transmission, or experiments with (or heedlessness about) meter?

Chief queen of a seven-gemmer,⁷
I was⁸ the gem of a woman. (3) [3]

Here with wholesome [karma] heaped up,⁹
[we're] people from successful clans:
Dhanañjānī and Khemā too,
along with me, the women three. (4) [4]

Making that hermitage well-made,
with every part [of it] adorned,
delighted we donated [it]
to the Buddha-led Assembly.¹⁰ (5) [5]

In whichever place I'm reborn,
in accordance with¹¹ that karma,
among the gods and humans too,
I attain the foremost station. (6) [6]

In this [present] lucky aeon
Brahma's Kinsman, Greatly Famed One,
[the Buddha] known as Kassapa¹²
was born, the Best of Debaters. (7) [7]

The attendant of the Great Sage
was the ruler of men back then,
the king of Kāsi, named Kiki,
in Benares, greatest city. (8) [8]

That [ruler] had seven daughters,
royal maidens raised in comfort.
Fond of waiting on the Buddha,
they practiced the religious life.¹³ (9) [9]

Being the ally of those [girls],
steadfast in the moral precepts,
giving gifts [very] carefully,
I practiced vows while in the house. (10) [10]

⁷here the possession of "seven gems" (*sattaratana*) by a wheel-turning (*cakkavatti*) monarch has become a free-standing designation of the latter (perhaps better translated as "chief queen of a possessor of the seven gems" [or, metrically, "a seven-gem-holder's chief queen"]). Note that she herself is one of those seven gems, as stated in the next foot.

⁸reading *āsiṃ* (BJTS) for *bhaviṇ* (PTS).

⁹reading *sañcitakusalā* (BJTS) for *sañcitā kusalaṇ* (PTS), though they amount to the same thing.

¹⁰lit., "to the Assembly (*saṅgha*, the monks' Assembly) headed up by the Buddha.

¹¹reading *vāhasā* (BJTS) for *vahasā* (PTS).

¹²BJTS reads "Named Kassapa according to his Lineage (*gottena*)"

¹³lit., "they fared according to the Brahma-faring," i.e., they led a celibate (*brahmacariya*) existence.

Due to that karma done very well,
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvatiṃsa [then]. (11) [11]

Fallen thence, I went to Yāma,¹⁴
[and] then I went to Tusitā,
and then to Nimmānarati,
and then Vāsavatti City. (12) [12]

In whichever place I'm reborn,
steadfast in [doing] good karma,¹⁵
I was fixed in the chief queen's place
of the kings in all those [heavens]. (13) [13]

Fallen then into humanness,
I was fixed in the chief queen's place
of kings who turned the wheel [of law]
and kings [commanding] large regions.¹⁶ (14) [14]

Having experienced happiness
among gods and also humans,
being comfortable everywhere,
I traveled on¹⁷ through several births. (15) [15]

That [gift's]¹⁸ the reason, that's the cause,
root, patience for the dispensation,
the first identification,¹⁹
nirvana of this *Dhamma*-lover. (16) [16]²⁰

My defilements are [now] burnt up;
all [new] existence is destroyed.
Like elephants with broken chains,
I am living without constraint. (17) [17]

¹⁴Yāma, Tusita, Nimmānarati and Vāsavatti are all classes of deities = heavens in the Buddhist cosmology.

¹⁵lit., “meritorious (*puñña*) karma”.

¹⁶*maṇḍalīnañ ca rājūnaṃ*, lit., “of kings who [ruled] circles [of kings]”

¹⁷or “I transmigrated,” *saṃsāriṃ*.

¹⁸this follows the lead of the BJTS Sinhala gloss, which understands the string of “that” pronouns to refer to the foundational gift of a *vihāra* that led to the aforementioned bliss in heavenly and human states.

¹⁹*samodhānaṃ*, the term used in the *Jātaka* for the “identifications” the Buddha makes there between characters in the story and characters in his own present-day. Here, then, the claim seems to be that the gift of the *vihāra* is the first/earliest act of merit that Sumedhā is identified with/by. But I find this verse quite difficult, and this translation is at best provisional.

²⁰this verse has nine syllables in the second and fourth foot, rather than the expected eight, so I have translated accordingly.

Being in Best Buddha's presence
was a very good thing for me.
The three knowledges are attained;
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (18) [18]

The four analytical modes,
and these eight deliverances,
six special knowledges mastered,
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (19) [19]

Thus indeed Venerable²¹ Bhikkhunī Sumedhā spoke these verses.
[The legend of Sumedhā Therī is finished.]²²

²¹BJTS omits *āyasmā*.

²²PTS omits this concluding line from the present *apadāna* but includes it in the subsequent ones. BJTS reading of the concluding line numbers each *apadāna* according to its place in the ten-poem "chapter," hence this one reads, "The legend of Sumedhā Therī, the first". I follow the PTS style.