

Gotamī

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## [17. Gotamī<sup>1</sup>]

One day the [Great] Lamp of the World,  
the Caravan Leader for men,  
dwelt in the Mahāvana Hall,  
among Vesali’s gabled roofs. (1) [226]

The Victor’s mother’s sister then,  
the Buddhist nun Great Gotamī,  
was dwelling in a nuns’ refuge,  
built in that delightful city.<sup>2</sup> (2) [227]

This reasoning occurred to her,  
thinking [when] she’d gone off alone  
from liberated Buddhist nuns  
numbering five times one hundred: (2e-f, 3a-b)<sup>3</sup> [228]

“I will not be able to see<sup>4</sup>  
the Buddha’s final nirvana,  
[that] of the two chief followers,  
nor Rāhul, Ānanda, Nanda. (3c-f) [229]

## Destroying<sup>5</sup> life’s constituents

<sup>1</sup>“Female Gotama,” “the Gotamid.” Her full name is given in the colophon as Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, as she is addressed throughout the canon. She was a historical nun, the sister of the Buddha’s natural mother (Mahāmāyā) who took over upon the latter’s death, both as the Buddha’s childhood wet-nurse and (surrogate) mother (actually his maternal aunt, Sinh. *puñci ammā*), and as his father’s wife (hence step-mother). She was the founder and leader of the nuns, who convinced Ānanda to beg the Buddha for their order to be established.

<sup>2</sup>there are numerous possibilities for translation of this string of locatives, because “delightful” (*ramme*) can modify either “city” (*pure*) or “nuns’ refuge” (*bhikkhunupassaye*), and the texts disagree on “built” (*kate*), which is the BJTS reading. PTS reads *setapure* (“white city”), which I followed in my previously-published translation of this *apadāna*. There is great disagreement in the manuscripts about this term: PTS offers *petapūre* (“filled with hungry ghosts”?) and *gate* (“[to which she had] gone”); BJTS alt. has *yeva* (“indeed”).

<sup>3</sup>here the first two feet of the BJTS verse are affixed to the previous verse by PTS, causing shuffling in the subsequent verses as indicated in my numbering of them. I have followed BJTS in arranging the verses, which hinges in part on the translation of the third foot here, *bhikkhunīhi vimuttāhi*. PTS seems to take it as an instrumental, as did I in my previous translation, hence its inclusion in the previous verse makes grammatical sense: Gotamī dwells “with” the nuns, rather than (as this reading would have it), going off alone “with” them. I conversely take the terms as ablatives, she’s gone off alone *from* the nuns. BJTS gloss takes them as instrumentals as well. In either event, she lives *with* them but goes off *from* them; the meaning is really the same.

<sup>4</sup>or, as my earlier translation has it, “cannot bear”. The term (*sakkomi*) carries such connotations in vernacular usage and this is how I originally understood the text. However, in keeping with BJTS gloss here, I remain more literal and leave it open to varied interpretations: rather than an emotional reason for letting go of life’s constituents (or additionally an expression of maternal sentiment) it might be a simple statement of fact, i.e., she realizes it’s time to do and that means she’ll die before the Buddha and great followers.

<sup>5</sup>PTS reads *paṭihacc’ āyusañkhāre*, which I follow here, though BJTS *paṭtigacc’* (alt. *paṭikacc’*), =

[and] letting go, I shall go to  
nirvana, permitted by [him,]  
the Great Sage, the Lord of the World.” (4) [230]

[That] reasoning also occurred  
to the five hundred Buddhist nuns;  
that reasoning also [occurred]  
to [nuns] beginning with Khema. (5) [231]

At that time there was an earthquake;  
the thunder of the gods did roar.  
Weighed down by grief, the goddesses  
who lived in that refuge [for nuns,]  
piteously weeping [at that,]  
shed [their] tears there [in the refuge]. (6) [232]<sup>6</sup>

[And then] all of<sup>7</sup> those Buddhist nuns,  
after approaching Gotamī,  
placing [their] heads upon [her] feet,  
spoke these words [they addressed to her,]: (7) [233]

“Sister, gone off alone, there we  
were sprinkled with drops of water.  
The unshaking earth is shaking,  
the thunder of the gods roaring,  
lamentations<sup>8</sup> are being heard:<sup>9</sup>  
what then does this mean, Gotamī?” (8) [234]<sup>10</sup>

She then told everything [to them,]  
just as [she had] reasoned it out.  
All of them too told [Gotamī,]  
just as [they had] reasoned it out. (9) [235]

“If [it’s] desired by you, sister —  
nirvana, unsurpassed [and] pure —  
we too will all reach nirvana,  
with Buddha’s consent, Pious One.<sup>11</sup> (10) [236]

Along with [you] we have gone forth  
from home and from existence too;

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“previous,” in which case *āyusaṅkhāre* might be the object of *ossajitvāna*, hence: “letting go of the constituents of my previous life”.

<sup>6</sup>PTS and BJTS agree in presenting this as a six-footed verse.

<sup>7</sup>BJTS and PTS alt. read *mittā* (“friendly”) for PTS “all” (*sabbā*)

<sup>8</sup>lit., “and lamentations”

<sup>9</sup>*sūyante*, BJTS (and PTS alt.) reads *sūyanti*

<sup>10</sup>PTS and BJTS agree in presenting this as a six-footed verse.

<sup>11</sup>*subbata*, also “Compliant One” “Good Vow”

along with [you] indeed we'll go  
to nirvana, supreme city." (11) [237]

She said, "what is there to be said  
to women who are going out?"<sup>12</sup>  
[And] then along with all [of them]  
she quitted [that] Buddhist nuns' nest.<sup>13</sup> (12) [238]

"May the goddesses forgive me,  
who are dwelling in [this] refuge;  
this will be my final vision  
of [this] Buddhist nuns' residence. (13) [239]

I'll go to unconditionedness,  
where [there's neither] death nor decay,  
one doesn't meet the unpleasant,  
nor get cut off from pleasant things." (14) [240]

Hearing those words, not passionless,  
[those] heirs of the Well-Gone [Buddha,]<sup>14</sup>  
overcome with grief lamented:  
"Alas, we have little merit. (15) [241]

Without those women this Buddhist  
nuns' nest [now] has become empty;  
the Victor's heirs [now] are not seen,  
as stars [disappear] at daybreak. (16) [242]

Gotamī goes to nirvana  
along with the five hundred [nuns],  
like the Ganges [flows to] the sea,  
with five hundred tributaries."<sup>15</sup> (17) [243]

The faithful laywomen,<sup>16</sup> having  
seen her<sup>17</sup> going along the road,  
coming out from [their] houses [then]  
bowing down at [her] feet said this: (18) [244]

<sup>12</sup>lit., "who are going to nirvana"

<sup>13</sup>reading *niggacchi bhikkhunīlayā* with BJTS for PTS *niggañchi bhikkhunīlayanā*

<sup>14</sup>*sugatorasā*, "the [pl. fem.] legitimate descendants of the Well-Gone-One," that is, the goddesses living in the nuns' residence

<sup>15</sup>lit., "rivers"

<sup>16</sup>*upāsikā*. Grammatically, this could be plural (as I take it, following PTS plural verb *abravun*) or singular ("a faithful laywoman"), which seems to be how BJTS takes it (reading the verb as singular, *abraviṃ*)

<sup>17</sup>reading *vajantiṃ taṃ* with BJTS for PTS *vajantīnaṃ* ("them...[their] feet")

“Great-fortuned one,<sup>18</sup> be satisfied.<sup>19</sup>  
Nirvana’s not proper for you,  
abandoning us, destitute” —  
distraught like that those women wailed. (19) [245]

In order to dispel their grief,  
[Gotamī] spoke [this] honeyed speech:  
“Enough with [your] crying, children,  
today, which is your time to laugh; (20) [246]

I have understood suffering,<sup>20</sup>  
the cause of suffering’s allayed,  
I’ve experienced cessation,  
I have cultivated the path. (21) [247]

(The First Recitation Portion)<sup>21</sup>  
The Teacher’s been worshipped by me,  
[I have] done what the Buddha taught!  
The heavy load has been laid down,  
the ties to existence removed. (22) [248]

The reason for which I went forth  
from [my] home into homelessness —  
I have [now] achieved that purpose:  
destruction of all the fetters. (23) [249]

While Buddha and his great Teaching  
are still around, nothing lacking —  
that’s the time for my nirvana;  
do not grieve about me, children. (24) [250]

Koṇḍañña,<sup>22</sup> Ānanda,<sup>23</sup> Nanda,<sup>24</sup>  
Rāhula,<sup>25</sup> the Victor remain;  
the Assembly’s cheerful and close,  
the conceit of rivals is slain. (25) [251]

<sup>18</sup>I follow BJTS Sinh gloss in now taking this as a vocative. BJTS (and PTS alt) reads *mahābhoge* for *mahābhāge*, but glosses *mahābhāgyavat uttamāvani*

<sup>19</sup>or “pleased,” *pasīdassu*. BJTS Sinhala gloss (*apa kerehi*) *pahadinu*, “be satisfied [or pleased] (with us)”

<sup>20</sup>lit., “suffering [*dukkha*] is understood by me”. The following feet of this verse follow the same grammatical pattern, summarizing her full attainment of the Four Noble Truths.

<sup>21</sup>PTS omits this classification, found in BJTS

<sup>22</sup>see *Therāpadāna* above, #7

<sup>23</sup>see *Therāpadāna* above, #10.

<sup>24</sup>see *Therāpadāna* above, #13; 403 {406}; 542 {545}. lit., “...Nanda, etc.,” the point is not merely that these three monks remain, but that all the monks like them remain.

<sup>25</sup>see *Therāpadāna* above, #16. As the Buddha’s son, by the logic of this text in particular, he was Gotamī’s grandson.

The Famed One in<sup>26</sup> Okkāka's clan  
is Exalted,<sup>27</sup> the Death-Crusher;<sup>28</sup>  
children, isn't it now the time  
[for me] to achieve nirvana? (26) [252]

My wish [I've had] for very long  
is [finally] fulfilled today.  
This is the time for drums of joy.  
What then with [all these] tears, children? (27) [253]

If [you feel] compassion for me,  
and if you all appreciate  
the great Teaching's stability,  
then strong and fervent you should be. (28) [254]

Beseeched by me, the Sambuddha  
gave ordination to women.  
Therefore as I have shown myself,  
you all should follow after him." (29) [255]

Having thus advised [those women,]  
placed in front by the Buddhist nuns,  
going up to [and] worshipping  
the Buddha, [she] said this [to him:] (30) [256]

"Well-Gone-One, I am your mother,  
and you are my father, Hero;  
Lord,<sup>29</sup> who Gives the Good Teaching's Joy,<sup>30</sup>  
O Gotama, I'm born from<sup>31</sup> you. (31) [257]

Your body, made of flesh and bones,<sup>32</sup>  
was reared up by me, Well-Gone-One;  
my flawless body, made of Truth,<sup>33</sup>  
was reared up by you, [Gotama.] (32) [258]

I suckled you with mother's milk  
which quenches thirst for a moment.  
From you I drank the milk of Truth,<sup>34</sup>  
peaceful without interruption. (33) [259]

<sup>26</sup>lit., "of"

<sup>27</sup>*ussito*

<sup>28</sup>*Māramaddano*

<sup>29</sup>*nātha*

<sup>30</sup>*saddhammasukhado*

<sup>31</sup>or "through"

<sup>32</sup>*rūpakāyo...tava*

<sup>33</sup>or "of the Teaching": *dhammakāya*

<sup>34</sup>or "of the Teaching": *dhammakhīram*

Great Sage, you owe no debt to me  
for protecting and rearing [you].  
To obtain such a son is what  
women desiring sons [desire].<sup>35</sup> (34) [260]

Mothers of kings, like Mandhātā,  
are sunk into existence sea.  
O son, through you I've crossed over  
[life,] this ocean of becoming. (35) [261]

Women can easily obtain  
the name "King's Mother" or "Chief Queen."  
The name, "Mother of the Buddha"  
is the hardest [name] to obtain. (36) [262]

O Hero, I've obtained that name!  
[I got] my wish because of you.  
Whether little things or big things,  
all of that is fulfilled by me. (37) [263]

Having abandoned this body,  
I want to [reach] full nirvana.  
Give me permission, O Hero,  
O Dis-ease-Ender,<sup>36</sup> O Leader. (38) [264]

Stretch forth your feet, like lilies soft,  
which are marked with wheel, goad and flag.  
I shall make obeisance to you,  
with a [mother's] love for [her] son.<sup>37</sup> (39) [265]

Show [me your] physical body;  
it resembles a heap of gold.  
[One last] good look at your body,  
[then] off I go to peace, Leader." (40) [266]

Marked with the thirty-two great marks,  
it was adorned in radiance:  
the Victor showed her<sup>38</sup> [his] body,

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<sup>35</sup>PTS reads *puttakāmā thiyo tāva labhantaṇ tādisaṇ sutaṇ!* (lit., "women who desire sons, receiving of you as son" which I formerly translated, in retrospect overly loosely, "to get a son like you sates all desire for sons." The present translation follows BJTS reading *puttakāmā thiyo yā tā labhantu nādisaṇ sutaṇ* (lit., "those women who are desiring sons, they [want] to obtain a son such as [you])

<sup>36</sup>*dukkhantakara*

<sup>37</sup>reading *puttapemasā* with BJTS for PTS *putta pemasā* ("with love, O son")

<sup>38</sup>lit., "[his] maternal aunt"



a pale sun<sup>39</sup> through<sup>40</sup> an evening cloud.<sup>41</sup> (41) [267]

Then she laid [her] head down upon  
the soles of [his] feet, marked with wheels,  
which were like lotuses in bloom,  
[as] brilliant as the dawning sun. (42) [268]

“I’m bowing to the Sun for Men,<sup>42</sup>  
the Banner of the Solar Clan;<sup>43</sup>  
when I have died for the last time,  
I will never<sup>44</sup> see you again. (43) [269]

Chief of the World, it is believed  
that women make every error.<sup>45</sup>  
If there’s any error in me,  
forgive it, Mine of Compassion.<sup>46</sup> (44) [270]

I begged [you,] over and again,  
for ordination of women.  
If I was in error in that,  
forgive it, O Bull Among Men. (45) [271]

O Hero, with your permission,  
I instructed the Buddhist nuns.  
If [I gave] bad advice in that,  
forgive it, Lord of Forgiveness.”<sup>47</sup> (46) [272]

“What’s not forgiven to forgive  
in [one who’s] adorned with virtue?<sup>48</sup>  
What more am I to say to you  
when you’re going to nirvana? (47) [273]

Those who are desiring escape from the world  
in my pure [and] complete Assembly of monks,  
are like the fading crescent moon at daybreak

<sup>39</sup>*bālakkāṇ*, lit., “young sun,” “a pale sun.” BJTS Sinh. gloss *bālārka*. lit., “like a pale sun...”

<sup>40</sup>lit., “from,” i.e., “emerging from” “coming out from behind”

<sup>41</sup>*sañjhā-ghanā*, lit., “from an evening cloud”

<sup>42</sup>*narādiccaṇ*

<sup>43</sup>*ādiccakulaketunaṇ* (BJTS reads °*kaṃ*)

<sup>44</sup>lit., “not”

<sup>45</sup>*itthiyo nāma...sabbadosakarā matā*

<sup>46</sup>*karuṇākara*

<sup>47</sup>*khamādhīpa*

<sup>48</sup>here I diverge from my earlier translation, following BJTS in understanding this rather enigmatic verse, starting with taking it as the beginning of the Buddha’s speech rather than the end of Gotamī’s speech, and translating accordingly.

after having seen the ruin of its grasps.”<sup>49</sup> (48) [274]<sup>50</sup>

Like the stars and the moon around Mount Meru,  
the other nuns circumambulated [him,]  
Chief Victor, [and] after bowing at [his] feet,  
they stood there gazing at the [Blessed One’s] face. (49) [275]

“Formerly [my] eyes and ears weren’t satisfied  
by the vision of you nor hearing your speech.  
[But now,] having obtained perfection, my mind  
is satisfied by the taste of the Teaching. (50) [276]

When you roar forth amidst the crowd,  
destroying the sophists’ conceit,  
those [there] who are seeing your face,  
are fortunate, O Bull of Men.<sup>51</sup> (51) [277]

Battle-Ender,<sup>52</sup> fortunate too,  
are they who worship your fine feet,  
which have broad heels, extended toes,  
and nails [the color of] copper. (52) [278]

Fortunate too, O Best of Men,  
are those who listen to your words,  
imperfection-slaying, friendly,  
honey[-sweet] and full of gladness. (53) [279]

Fortunate am I, Great Hero,  
intent on worshipping<sup>53</sup> your feet.  
The existential desert crossed,  
[I] shine due to the good Teaching.”<sup>54</sup> (54) [280]

Then the pious one<sup>55</sup> explained [her  
thoughts]<sup>56</sup> to the Assembly of monks,

<sup>49</sup>*vyasanaṅ gahānaṅ disvāna*

<sup>50</sup>This, and the following two verses present in both BJTS and PTS in a different meter with 11-syllable feet. I translate accordingly.

<sup>51</sup>*narapuṅgava*

<sup>52</sup>*raṇantaḡa*, lit., “O one gone to the end of the battle” or “he by whom the battle reaches its end”. BJTS reads *guṇandhara*, “O Virtue-Bearer”

<sup>53</sup>lit., “doing *pūjā* to”

<sup>54</sup>BJTS reads *suvākyena sirīmato*, “due to the good teaching of the resplendent one”.

<sup>55</sup>*subbata*

<sup>56</sup>lit., “then she caused to hear” (PTS: *tato sā anusāvetvā*) or “then she caused to be admonished/advised/instructed” (BJTS: *anusāsetvā*); PTS also gives alts. *anusāmetvā* (“caused to be appeased/calmed”) and *anubhāvetvā* (“caused to experience”). Really any of these readings would be appropriate to what follows as Gotamī proceeds to tell, informs, advise and console while conveying an emotional message to her beloved kinsfolk/co-monastics/co-followers.

and having worshipped Rāhula,  
 Ānanda [and] Nanda, she said:<sup>57</sup> (55) [281]

“I am weary<sup>58</sup> of [my] body,  
 similar to a serpent’s den,  
 a sickness-house, heap of dis-ease,<sup>59</sup>  
 pasturing in old age and death,  
 covered with varied flaws and drool,<sup>60</sup>  
 dependent on others, actionless.<sup>61</sup>  
 Therefore I desire nirvana;  
 give [me your] permission, children.” (56-57) [282-283]

Nanda and lucky Rāhula,  
 who were griefless, without constraint,  
 wise [and] unshakingly steadfast,  
 reflected on the way things are: (58) [284]

“Woe on greed for conditioned things:  
 as worthless as banana wood,  
 same as a deluded mirage,  
 fleeting and constantly changing. (59) [285]

In flux are all conditioned things,  
 in so far as the Victor’s aunt,  
 the one who suckled the Buddha,  
 Gotamī, goes without a trace.”<sup>62</sup> (60) [286]

Ānanda was then [still] training,  
 fond of the Victor, [but still] sad.  
 [Beseeching her] there, shedding tears,  
 he was wailing piteously: (61) [287]

“Gotamī is going, smiling;<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup>lit., “she said this:”

<sup>58</sup>*nibbinṇā*. BJTS (*nibbinnā*) and PTS alts. (*nibbandā*, *nibbindā*) are all forms of the same verb, *nibbindati*, to be wearied of, which regularly (as here) takes the locative.

<sup>59</sup>reading *dukkhasaṅghāta* with BJTS for the metrically-questionable but evocative PTS *dukkha-paṅke* (“[smeared with] the mud of dis-ease”) and BJTS alt. *dukkhasaṅghāte* (which in addition to “mass” or “heap” [*saṅghāta*]) means “tangle” or “web”). “Dis-ease” translates *dukkha*, often “suffering,” following out one of the term’s literal meanings (physical illness) as well as its connotation of psychological unrest and in keeping with the other descriptions of the aged body in this verse. My earlier translation, following PTS, gives “suffering’s slime”

<sup>60</sup>reading *nānākalimalākiṇṇe* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *nānākalala-m-ākiṇṇe* (“smeared with various mud” — but note that *mala* in the accepted reading can also mean “dirt” or “mud” or any impurity in addition to “flaw” or “fault”)

<sup>61</sup>*nirīhake*, in juxtaposition with the previous adjective *parāyatte*, lit., “activity of others,” hence “dependent on others”

<sup>62</sup>*nidhanaṇ*, lit., “without wealth [of karma],” or more literally, “possessionless”

<sup>63</sup>BJTS divides up the adverb taken as “similing” (*hāsantiṇ*) as *hā santiṇ*, “Alas! peacefully...” or

surely then soon the Buddha too  
will be going to nirvana,  
like a fire whose fuel has run out.” (62) [288]

Gotamī said to Ānanda  
who was lamenting in this way:  
“O son, keen on serving Buddha,  
your wisdom’s deep as is the sea,<sup>64</sup> (63) [289]

[and so] you really should not mourn,  
when the time for smiling has come!  
Son, [through] your assistance to me,  
I have realized nirvana.<sup>65</sup> (64) [290]

Being requested by you, dear,  
[Buddha] gave us ordination.  
[Therefore] do not be distressed, son;  
your effort is [now] bearing fruit. (65) [291]

That state unseen by the ancients,<sup>66</sup>  
and likewise by rival teachers,  
is known by [Buddhist] young maidens,  
when they’re [only] seven years old. (66) [292]

[So take] your final look [at me,]  
preserver of the Buddha’s word;<sup>67</sup>  
Son, I am going to that place  
where one who’s gone cannot be seen.” (67) [293]

Once when he was preaching *Dhamma*,  
the Chief Leader of the World sneezed.  
At that time, compassionately,  
I spoke well-wishing words [to him:] (68) [294]

“Live for a long time, Great Hero!  
Remain for an aeon, Great Sage!  
For the sake of the entire world,  
do not grow old [nor] pass away!” (69) [295]

The Buddha then said this to me  
who had spoken to him like that:

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“Alas! to peace...”

<sup>64</sup>lit., “O deep one, O ocean of wisdom”

<sup>65</sup>reading *nibbānaṃ samupāgataṃ* with BJTS for PTS *nibbānattaṃ* (“nirvana-ness”) and PTS alt (and BJTS alt.) *nibbānantaṃ*, “the goal of nirvana,” which I followed in my earlier translation.

<sup>66</sup>*porāṇehi*, or (as in my earlier translation) “elders”

<sup>67</sup>Ānanda is remembered to have remembered a huge quantity of the Buddhist canon, prior to its fixing and ultimate writing down.

“Buddhas are not to be worshipped,  
as you’re worshipping, Gotamī.” (70) [296]

“How then, O One with Omniscience,  
should the Thus-Gone-Ones be worshipped?  
How should Buddhas not be worshipped?  
Being asked, tell [all] that to me.” (71) [297]

“See [my] followers, united,  
vigorously energetic,  
constantly firm [in their] effort —  
that is worship of the Buddhas.”<sup>68</sup> (72) [298]

Then, going [back] to the refuge,  
[gone off] alone, I reflected:  
“the Lord, who Reached the Three Worlds’ Ends,<sup>69</sup>  
likes a united retinue. (73) [299]

Well then, I’ll reach full nirvana;  
let me see no hindrance to that!”  
I, contemplating in that way,  
after seeing the Seventh Sage, (74) [300]

announced to [the Buddha,] the Guide,  
the time of my full nirvana.  
And then he gave [me] his assent:  
“you know the time, O Gotamī.” (75) [301]

My defilements are [now] burnt up;  
all [new] existence is destroyed.  
Like elephants with broken chains,  
I am living without constraint. (76) [302]

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! (77) [303]

The four analytical modes,  
and these eight deliverances,  
six special knowledges mastered,  
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (78) [304]

“There are fools who doubt that women  
[too] gain *dhamma*-penetration.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup>Thig 161

<sup>69</sup>*tibhavantago*

<sup>70</sup>*thīnaṅ dhammābhisamaye*

To dispel that [wrong] view of theirs,  
display miracles, Gotamī.” (79) [305]

Then bowing to the Sambuddha,  
[and] rising up into the sky,  
with Buddha’s assent, Gotamī  
displayed various miracles. (80) [306]

Being alone, [then] she was cloned;  
and being cloned, again<sup>71</sup> alone.  
Appearing [then] disappearing,  
she walked through walls, walked through the sky. (81) [307]

She traveled unattached to earth;  
she also sank down into it.  
She walked<sup>72</sup> on water as on land,  
leaving its surface unbroken. (82) [308]

Cross-legged, she flew like a bird,  
across the surface of the sky.  
With her body she took control  
of space right up to Brahma’s home. (83) [309]

Taking Mount Meru as handle,  
she made great earth her umbrella.  
Carrying, twirling root and all,  
she walked back and forth in the sky. (84) [310]

And like the time when six suns rose,  
she caused the entire world to fume.  
As though it were the end of time,  
she garlanded the earth in flames. (85) [311]

She took mounts Meru, Mandāra,  
Daddara, great Muccalinda —  
all of them, in a single fist,  
like they were [tiny] mustard seeds. (86) [312]

She concealed with [her] fingertip  
the makers of both day and night,  
as though a thousand suns and moons  
were a necklace she was wearing. (87) [313]

In a single hand she held the  
waters of the four great oceans;

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<sup>71</sup>*tathā*, lit., “thus” “in that way”

<sup>72</sup>or “went”

she rained forth a torrential rain,  
like an apocalyptic cloud. (88) [314]

She made appear up in the sky  
a wheel-turner with retinue.  
She showed [Vishnu as the] boar and  
roaring lion, and Garuḍa. (89) [315]

Being alone, she conjured up  
a boundless group of Buddhist nuns.  
Making them disappear again,  
alone, she said [this] to the Sage: (90) [316]

“Your mother’s sister, Great Hero,  
is one who’s done what you have taught.<sup>73</sup>  
An attainer of [her]<sup>74</sup> own goal,  
she worships your feet, Eyeful One.” (91) [317]

Having shown varied miracles,  
descending from up in<sup>75</sup> the sky,  
worshipping the Lamp of the World,  
she sat down [there, off] to one side. (92) [318]

“O Great Sage, I’m an [old woman,]<sup>76</sup>  
a hundred twenty years from birth.  
That much is enough, O Hero;  
I’m reaching nirvana, Leader.” (93) [319]

Astonished, all the multitudes,  
with [their] hands pressed together then,  
said, “sister, [you] have<sup>77</sup> [great] prowess  
at supernormal miracles.” (94) [320]

The Victor, Padumuttara,  
the One with Eyes for everything,  
the Leader [of the World,] arose  
a hundred thousand aeons hence. (95) [321]

I was born in Haṃsavatī,  
in a clan of ministers then,  
furnished with all [kinds of] servants,  
rich, prosperous, very wealthy. (96) [322]

<sup>73</sup>*tavasāsanakārikā*, “a doer of your dispensation” “one who has performed your teachings”

<sup>74</sup>or “your”?

<sup>75</sup>lit., “from the surface of”

<sup>76</sup>*sā...haṃ*

<sup>77</sup>lit “make” “do”

Once, when tagging on with father —  
attended by a group of slaves —  
along with a large retinue,  
[I] approached that Bull Among Men. (97) [323]

The Victor, like autumnal son,  
surrounded by garlands of rays,  
without constraints, that *Dhamma*-cloud  
rained forth like the king of the gods. (98) [324]

Seeing [him], being pleased at heart,  
and having heard his lovely voice,  
the Leader of Men placed his aunt  
in the foremost [place among] nuns. (99) [325]

Hearing [this,] for an entire day,  
I gave the Neutral One large gifts  
and lots of the requisites to  
the Chief of Men with Assembly. (100) [326]

Having fallen down at [his] feet,  
I aspired [to attain] that place.  
And then the Greatly Mindful One,  
the Seventh Sage, said [to the crowd:] (101) [327]

“This one who for a week has fed  
the World’s Leader with Assembly,  
I shall relate details of her:  
[all of] you listen to my words: (102) [328]

In one hundred thousand aeons,  
arising in Okkāka’s clan,  
the one whose name is Gotama  
will be the Teacher in the world. (103) [329]

Worthy heir to that one’s *Dhamma*,  
*Dhamma*’s legitimate offspring,  
the one whose name is Gotamī  
will be the Teacher’s follower. (104) [330]

She will be his mother’s sister,  
the Buddha’s wet-nurse his [whole] life.  
She will attain the foremost place  
among the senior Buddhist nuns.” (105) [331]

Hearing that I was overjoyed,  
and then as long as life, I served  
the Victor with the requisites.



After that, [having] passed away, (106) [332]

born among the Tāvatiṃsa  
gods with all delights and riches,  
in ten ways I was outshining  
[all the] other [gods who lived there]: (107) [333]

through shapes [and] sounds [and] fragrances,  
through tastes and the [things that I] touch,  
in terms of lifespan, complexion,  
happiness and famousness too (108) [334]

[and] likewise through supreme power  
I shone, having attained [those ten].  
There I became the beloved  
chief queen of the king of the gods. (109) [335]

Transmigrating in the cycle,<sup>78</sup>  
being blown on by karma-wind,  
I was born in a slave-village,  
in the realm of the Kāsi<sup>79</sup> king. (110) [336]

Every day there were five hundred  
slaves dwelling in that very place.  
I was the wife of he who was  
best of all [the slaves living] there. (111) [337]

Five hundred self-become [Buddhas]  
entered our village seeking alms.  
Along with all [my] female kin,  
I was thrilled after seeing them. (112) [338]

All of us having formed a guild,<sup>80</sup>  
we served those [Buddhas] for four months.  
Having given [each] the three robes,  
we transmigrated<sup>81</sup> with husbands. (113) [339]

Fallen from there with our husbands,  
we all went to Tāvatiṃsa.  
And now, in [my] final rebirth,  
born in Devadaha city, (114) [340]

<sup>78</sup>or “in existence”: *saṅsāre saṅsārantī 'haṅ*

<sup>79</sup>that is, Benares

<sup>80</sup>BJTS reads *katvā pañcasatakuṭī* (“having made [them] five hundred huts” for PTS *pūgā bhavitvā sabbāyo*

<sup>81</sup>BJTS reads *pasannāmha sasāmikā*, “we were pleased with our husbands”

my father, Añjana<sup>82</sup> Śākya,<sup>83</sup>  
 my mother was Sulakhanā.<sup>84</sup>  
 We left for Suddhodana's house,  
 in Kapilavastu [City]. (115) [341]

The other women born Śākyan<sup>85</sup>  
 [also] came to the Śākyan's house.  
 Distinguished among all of them,  
 I was wet-nurse of the Victor. (116) [342]

After having gone forth, my son  
 became the Buddha, the [World's] Guide.  
 Afterwards I renounced the world,<sup>86</sup>  
 together with the five hundred. (117) [343]

Along with the Śākyan heroes,  
 I witnessed the comfort of peace.  
 They were [the men] who formerly  
 had been born as our [own] husbands. (118) [344]

Makers of merit together,<sup>87</sup>  
 they've [now] seized the crucial moment.  
 Pitied by the Well-Gone-One, they  
 experienced arahantship. (119) [345]

The rest of the Buddhist nuns [there]  
 [then all] rose up into the air.  
 Come together like [bright] stars  
 those women with great powers shined. (120) [346]

They displayed [their] diverse powers  
 like [different]<sup>88</sup> types of ornaments  
 [might be displayed] by a goldsmith,  
 who is well-trained in<sup>89</sup> workmanship. (121) [347]

After displaying miracles,  
 variegated and many,  
 having pleased the Fine Debater,<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>"Jet Black"

<sup>83</sup>i.e., Śākyan, of the Buddha's clan

<sup>84</sup>"Well-Marked"

<sup>85</sup>lit., "the other women born in the Śākyan clan"

<sup>86</sup>lit., "having gone forth"

<sup>87</sup>*saha*. I follow the BJTS Sinhala gloss (*ek vā*) in giving this sociokarmically more-determined translation.

<sup>88</sup>pronounce as two syllables when chanting, "diff'rent"

<sup>89</sup>lit., "of"

<sup>90</sup>*vādipavaraṇ*

the Sage, and his retinue then,  
 having descended from the sky,  
 having worshipped the Seventh Sage,  
 permitted by the Chief of Men,  
 they sat down in that place [again]. (122-123) [348-349]

“Hey, Hero, it was Gotamī  
 who showed pity to all of us.  
 Perfumed by your good karma,<sup>91</sup> [we]  
 reached destruction of our constraints.<sup>92</sup> (124) [350]

Our defilements are [now] burnt up;  
 all [new] existence is destroyed.  
 Like elephants with broken chains,  
 we are living without constraint. (125) [351]

Being in Best Buddha’s presence  
 was a very good thing for us.  
 The three knowledges are attained;  
 [We have] done what the Buddha taught! (126) [352]

The four analytical modes,  
 and these eight deliverances,  
 six special knowledges mastered,  
 [We have] done what the Buddha taught! (127) [353]

We are masters of miracles,  
 O Sage So Great, we are masters  
 of the “divine ear” faculty,  
 [and] knowing what’s in others’ hearts. (128) [354]

We know [all of] our former lives;  
 “divine eye” [now] is purified.  
 All the constraints have been destroyed;  
 there now will be no more rebirth. (129) [355]

It was in your presence, Great Sage,  
 that our [own] knowledge came to be,  
 knowing meaning and the Teaching,  
 etymology and preaching. (130) [356]

Leader, you’re surrounded by us,  
 [Buddhist nuns] with hearts full of love;  
 O Great Sage, give your permission  
 to [us] to all reach nirvana.” (131) [357]

<sup>91</sup>or “merit,” *puññehi*. “Good deeds” would preserve the plural.

<sup>92</sup>*āsavakkhayaṃ*

The Victor said, “What [can] I say  
to women who are telling [me],  
‘we are going to reach nirvana’?  
Know that now is your time for it.” (132) [358]

At that time [all] those Buddhist nuns,  
starting with [the nun] Gotamī,  
worshipping the Victor [then] rose  
up from [their] seats and went [away].<sup>93</sup> (133) [359]

The World’s Chief Leader, the Wise One,<sup>94</sup>  
with a large body of people,  
followed [his own] maternal aunt  
until [she got up to] the gate. (134) [360]

Then Gotamī fell [to the ground]  
at the feet of the World’s Kinsman,  
and with all of the other [nuns]  
performed a final foot-worship. (135) [361]

“This [will be] my final vision  
of [you,] the Lord of the [Whole] World.  
Never again will I see your  
face, the fountain of ambrosia. (136) [362]

No more homage to your soft feet;  
I won’t [ever] touch [them] again.  
O Hero, Chief of the [Whole] World,  
today I’ll go to nirvana! (137) [363]

What’s your physical form [or] face,  
with things being such as they are?  
All conditioned things are like that,  
providing no comfort, trifling. (138) [364]

She, having gone along with them  
back to [her] own refuge for nuns,  
sat in half-lotus<sup>95</sup> position  
in her [own] superior seat. (139) [365]

At that time the laywomen there,  
fond of Buddha’s dispensation,  
hearing her proceeding ahead,  
those foot-worshippers approached [her,] (140) [366]

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<sup>93</sup>reading *agamāṇsu* with BJTS (cf. PTS alt. *agamīṃsu*) for PTS *agamīsu* (“among non-villages”?)

<sup>94</sup>BJTS here reads *vīro*, “the Hero” for PTS *dhīro*, “the Wise One”

<sup>95</sup>*addhapallaṅkam ābhujya* (BJTS read *aḍḍhapallaṅkam ābhujja*), with one leg crossed and one bent hookwise.

pounding on [their] chests with [their] fists,  
 [loudly] howling piteous cries.  
 Grieving they fell down on the earth  
 like creepers cut off at the root. (141) [367]

“Refuge-Bestower, Lord, do not  
 leave us to go to nirvana.  
 Bowing down [our] heads, all of us  
 are begging [you, O Gotamī].” (142) [368]

One laywoman, faithful and wise,  
 was striving the most among them.  
 While gently stroking that one’s head,  
 [Gotamī] spoke these words [to her:]<sup>96</sup> (143) [369]

“Enough with [this] depression, child,  
 twisted up in the snares of Death;<sup>97</sup>  
 impermanent is all that is,  
 ever-shaking, ending in loss.” (144) [370]

Then having sent them [all] away,  
 she entered the first<sup>98</sup> altered state,  
 the second and also the third,  
 and then she attained the fourth one. (145) [371]

In order, moving [higher still:]  
 the plane of space-infinity,  
 the plane in which perception’s pure,  
 and that where nothingness is seen. (146) [372]

In reverse order, Gotamī  
 entered [all of] those altered states,  
 [from the last] back down to the first,  
 and then back up to the fourth one. (147) [373]

Rising up, she reached nirvana,  
 like the flame of a fuel-less lamp.  
 There was an enormous earthquake;  
 bolts of lightening fell from the sky. (148) [374]

The thunder was rumbling loudly;  
 the deities [gathered there] wailed.  
 A flower-shower from the sky  
 was raining down upon the earth. (149) [375]

<sup>96</sup>reading the final verb *abravi* (“she spoke”) with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *abraviṇ* (“I spoke”).

<sup>97</sup>*mārapāsānuvattinā*

<sup>98</sup>lit., “ultimate first altered state”

Even regal Mount Meru shook,  
just like a dancer on the stage;  
the [great] ocean was greatly grieved,  
and he was weeping in distress. (150) [376]

The gods, snake-gods and titans too,  
even Brahmā, awed at that time,<sup>99</sup>  
[said,] “this one has now been dissolved;  
in flux indeed is all that is.” (151) [377]

The [other nuns] surrounding her,  
who practiced the Buddha’s teachings,<sup>100</sup>  
they too attained nirvana [then,]  
like the flames of lamps without fuel. (152) [378]

“Alas! Attachments end up cut!  
Alas! Conditioned things all change!  
Alas! Life ends in destruction.”  
In this way [people] were wailing. (153) [379]

Then Brahmā and the deities  
went up to [him,] the Seventh Sage,  
doing what is appropriate,  
according to worldly custom. (154) [380]

Then the Teacher told Ānanda,  
whose knowledge was [deep as] the sea,  
“Go [now,] Ānanda, tell the monks,  
[my] mother has reached nirvana.” (155) [381]

Then Ānanda, who’d lost his joy,<sup>101</sup>  
whose eyes were filling up with tears,  
announced, while choking on [his] words,<sup>102</sup>  
“Come together, O Buddhist monks,  
who are residing in the North,  
[or] in the east [or] south [or] west.  
Let them [all] listen to my words,  
monks who are the Well-Gone-One’s heirs. (156-157) [382-383]

This Gotamī, who carefully  
reared up the body of the Sage,  
has gone to peace, [no longer seen,]  
just like stars when the sun rises. (158) [384]

<sup>99</sup>PTS reads *tavade*, BJTS (and PTS alt.) reads *tañkhaṇe* (“in that moment”)

<sup>100</sup>lit., “dispensation”

<sup>101</sup>a play on the meaning of his name: *tadā ‘nando nirānando*

<sup>102</sup>lit., “with a gurgling sound”

She's gone home,<sup>103</sup> leaving behind [her]  
 designation "Buddha's Mother,"  
 where even [he,] the Five-Eyed One,  
 the Leader, cannot see one gone. (159) [385]

Each with faith in the Well-Gone-One,  
 and each of the Sage's pupils,  
 ought [now] to come, that Buddha's son,<sup>104</sup>  
 to honor the Buddha's mother." (160) [386]

Hearing that, the monks came with speed,  
 even those living far away.  
 Some [came] by Buddha's majesty,  
 some were skilled in superpowers. (161) [387]

[Folks there] raised a funeral bier  
 where Gotamī was [now] laid out,<sup>105</sup>  
 in a good, lovely gabled hut,  
 excellent [and] made out of gold. (162) [388]

The four [gods called] "World-Protectors"  
 hoisted [the bier] on their shoulders;  
 other gods starting with Śakra,  
 gathered inside the gabled hut. (163) [389]

There were five hundred gabled huts,  
 the color of autumnal suns,  
 which were built by Vissakamma,  
 [for] all [of those great Buddhist nuns]. (164) [390]

All those [five hundred] Buddhist nuns  
 were laid out on funeral biers,  
 hoisted up on shoulders of gods,  
 lined up in the proper order. (165) [391]

A canopy up in the sky  
 was stretched out over everything.  
 The sun [and] moon [and all] the stars  
 were drawn on it in [liquid] gold. (166) [392]

Flags of various types were raised,  
 a floral covering stretched out;  
 flowers rose up out of the earth,

<sup>103</sup>accepting PTS reading *gatāsayaṇ*. BJTS (and PTS alt.) reads *gatāsamaṇ*, "gone to the incomparable [state?]"

<sup>104</sup>lit., "well-Gone-One's heir"

<sup>105</sup>PTS *suttā 'pi Gotamī*, BJTS *suttāsi Gotamī* (*suttā-āsi Gotamī*)

like incense<sup>106</sup> rising in the sky. (167) [393]

[Both] the sun and the moon were seen,  
and [all] the stars were twinkling,<sup>107</sup>  
and even when it was high noon,  
the sun did not burn, like the moon. (168) [394]

Gods made offerings<sup>108</sup> of garlands,  
perfumed with divine fragrances  
and [honored Gotamī] with songs,  
with dances and with discourses. (169) [395]

The snake-gods, titans and Brahmās  
according to powers and strengths,  
made offerings to the laid-out  
mother who was in nirvana. (170) [396]

In front were led off all of the  
Well-Gone-One's heirs in nirvana,  
Gotamī was led off after,  
honored wet-nurse of the Buddha. (171) [397]

With the gods [and] people out front,  
the snake-gods, titans and Brahmās,  
[and] next, with followers, Buddha,  
processed to worship [his] mother.<sup>109</sup> (172) [398]

The Buddha's final nirvana  
was not of such a kind as this.  
Gotamī's final nirvana  
was extremely miraculous. (173) [399]

The Buddha [and] monks won't be seen  
at Buddha's [final] nirvana.  
The Buddha is at Gotamī's;<sup>110</sup>  
so's Sāriputta and so on. (174) [400]

[Then] they built the funeral pyres,  
made with all [sorts of] fragrant [wood],  
and sprinkled with perfumed powder.  
Those [great nuns] were cremated there. (175) [401]

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<sup>106</sup>BJTS reads *ogatākāsapadumā* ("lotuses rising in the sky")

<sup>107</sup>pronounce "twinkling" as full three syllables when chanting, to keep meter, or amend to "and [all of] the stars were twinkling" if contracting it to two syllables.

<sup>108</sup>lit., "did *pūjā*"

<sup>109</sup>lit., "is going in order to worship [his] mother"

<sup>110</sup>lit., "at Gotamī's [final] nirvana"



The remaining portions [and] bones<sup>111</sup>  
 were completely consumed by fire.  
 And at that time Ānanda spoke  
 this speech, [which was] very moving.<sup>112</sup> (176) [402]

“Gotamī’s gone without a trace<sup>113</sup>  
 and her corpse has been cremated,  
 intimating that the Buddha’s  
 nirvana [too] will soon occur.” (177) [403]

Ānanda, urged by the Buddha,  
 [placed] Gotamī’s [sacred] relics  
 in her begging bowl at that time,  
 [and] presented them to the Lord. (178) [404]

Taking them up with [both his] hands,  
 the Seventh Sage, [the Buddha,] said:  
 “Just as the trunk of a standing,  
 gigantic timber-bearing tree,  
 impermanent, breaks into bits,  
 however massive it may be,  
 so Gotamī, who was a nun,<sup>114</sup>  
 has reached [her] final nirvana. (179-180) [405-406]

O! it is a marvelous thing!  
 My mother who’s reached nirvana,  
 leaving only relics behind<sup>115</sup>  
 did not grieve [and was not] wailing. (181) [407]

Grieving not for others [left,]  
 she’s crossed the sea of existence.  
 She’s cooled, she’s in nirvana.  
 [her] torment [is now] avoided. (182) [408]

Know this about her, O [you] monks,  
 she was a very wise woman,<sup>116</sup>

<sup>111</sup>lit., “the remaining portions, the remaining bones.” I formerly translated “only her bones remained,” but now believe that was incorrect; the fleshy parts (etc.) as well as the bones were thoroughly burned; the “relics” referred to below would be tiny gem-like fragments remaining in the crematory ash, not bones as such.

<sup>112</sup>*saṃvega*janakaṃ vāco, lit., “emotion-producing word.” *Saṃvega* is a profoundly emotional insight into the nature of reality, often the spur to religious action, to be juxtaposed with *ubbega*, ordinary emotional responses to death, ordinary grief, sorrow, etc.

<sup>113</sup>*nidhanaṃ*, lit., “without wealth [of karma],” or more literally, “possessionless”

<sup>114</sup>lit., “of the nuns’ Assembly:” *bhikkhunisaṅghassa*

<sup>115</sup>*saṅgāmatte*saṅgāya, lit., “with [only] a measure of relics remaining”

<sup>116</sup>*paṇḍitā’ si*

with wisdom which was vast and wide,<sup>117</sup>  
distinguished among Buddhist nuns. (183) [409]

She'd mastered the superpower  
[called] the "divine ear" element.  
Gotamī was a master of  
the knowledge stored in others' hearts. (184) [410]

She remembered [her] former lives;  
[her] "divine eye" was purified.  
All the defilements were destroyed;  
she will not be reborn again. (185) [411]

She had purified [her] knowledge  
of meaning and of the Teaching,  
etymology and preaching:  
because of that she did not grieve. (186) [412]

A rod of iron that's beaten  
when it is glowing due to fire  
slowly cools off, [leaving no ash:]  
like that it's not known [where she] went.<sup>118</sup> (187) [413]

No rebirth place can be discerned  
of the truly liberated,  
who cross the flood of lustful bonds,  
who've reached unshaking happiness.<sup>119</sup> (188) [414]

Therefore be lamps unto yourselves;  
graze in [the field of] mindfulness.  
With wisdom's seven parts attained,  
you all should end [your] suffering.<sup>120</sup> (189) [415]

Thus indeed Bhikkhunī Mahāpajāpatīgotamī spoke these verses.

The legend of Mahāpajāpatīgotamī Therī is finished.

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<sup>117</sup>lit., "with vast wisdom, with wide wisdom"

<sup>118</sup>lit., "[her] state of rebirth (*gati*) is not known". The metaphor is that Gotamī, like the flame that used to be in the iron rod on the forge, has disappeared without a trace, "cooled off".

<sup>119</sup>*acalaṇ sukhaṇ*. BJTS reads, more consistently with *Apadāna* as a whole, *acalaṇ padaṇ* ("unshaking state")

<sup>120</sup>or "make an end of dis-ease:" *dukkhass' antaṇ karissathā ti*.