

Khemā

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[18. Khemā¹]

The Victor, Padumuttara,
the One with Eyes for everything,
the Leader [of the World,] arose
a hundred thousand aeons hence. (1) [416]

I was born in Hamsavatī,
in a clan of millionaires then,
glistening with various gems,
endowed with supreme happiness. (2) [417]

Having approached that Great Hero,
I heard [him] preaching [his] *Dhamma*.
Afterward, becoming pleased, I
approached the Victor for refuge. (3) [418]

Having begged mother and father,
after inviting [him,] the Guide,
I fed [the Buddha] for a week,
together with his followers. (4) [419]

At the end of [those] seven days,
the Charioteer of Men placed
a great nun² in the foremost place
among those who have great wisdom. (5) [420]

Hearing that, being overjoyed,
doing further good works for [him,]
the Great Sage, after bowing down,
I aspired [to attain] that place. (6) [421]

Then the Victor said this to me:
“Let your aspiration succeed!
Deeds done for me with Assembly
[will bear] measureless fruit for you. (7) [422]

In one hundred thousand aeons,
arising in Okkāka’s clan,
the one whose name is Gotama
will be the Teacher in the world. (8) [423]

Worthy heir to that one’s *Dhamma*,
Dhamma’s legitimate offspring,

¹“Peace,” a historical nun, famous as foremost among those with great wisdom. She had been the chief queen of the Buddha’s friend and supporter King Bimbisāra prior to attaining arahantship, ordaining, and distinguishing herself as a *Dhamma*-preacher.

²*uttamaṃ bhikkhuniṃ*

you'll³ be she whose name is Khemā,
[and will] attain that foremost place.” (9) [424]

Due to that karma done very well,
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvatiṃsa [then]. (10) [425]

Fallen thence, I went to Yāma,⁴
[and] then I went to Tusita,
and then to Nimmānarati,⁵
and then Vāsavatti City. (11) [426]

In whichever place I'm reborn,
in accordance with that karma,
everyplace I was made chief queen
of [the gods who were] the kings [there]. (12) [427]

Fallen thence, in the human state,
[everyplace] I was made chief queen
of kings who turn the wheel [of law,]
and [powerful] regional kings. (13) [428]

Having experienced success,
among gods as well as humans,
becoming happy everywhere,
I transmigrated for aeons.⁶ (14) [429]

[Then] ninety-one aeons ago,
the World-Leader [named] Vipassi
arose, the One with Lovely Eyes,⁷
with Insight into Everything.⁸ (15) [430]

I went up to that World-Leader,
the Charioteer Among Men.
Hearing [his] exalted Teaching,
I went forth into homelessness. (16) [431]

After living the holy life⁹
[during fully] ten thousand years,

³reading *bhāvissasi* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *bhāvissati*, “she will be.”

⁴Yāma, Tusita, Nimmānarati and Vāsavatti are all heavens in the Buddhist cosmology.

⁵BJTS reads *nimmānaratiṃ*

⁶*anekakappesu*, lit., “during various aeons”

⁷*cārunayano*, or “lovely to the eyes” (?) xxx

⁸*sabbadhamnavipassaka*, a play on that Buddha's name

⁹*brahmacariyaṃ caritvāna*, lit., “conducting [myself] in the conduct of {God} Brahmā;’ or else, “having preserved celibacy”

in that Wise One's dispensation,
bent on effort, very learned, (17) [432]

skillful in the heaps of causes,¹⁰
expert in the Four [Noble] Truths,
clever, varied speaker, [I was]
one who's done what the Teacher taught. (18) [433]

Fallen thence I was reborn in
Tusita, with fame and splendor.
I surpassed the other [gods] there,
as the fruit of the holy life.¹¹ (19) [434]

In whichever place I'm reborn,
I'm very rich and prosperous,
intelligent and beautiful,
[and] my retinue is well-trained. (20) [435]

Due to [my] karma, through effort
in the Victor's dispensation,
I enjoy every attainment,
obtained with ease, pleasing the mind. (21) [436]

Through the fruit of my good conduct,
nobody treats me with contempt,
even he who was my husband
in whichever place I'm reborn.¹² (22) [437]

In this [present] lucky aeon
Brahmā's Kinsman, Greatly Famed One,
whose name was Koṇāgamana,
Best Debater, [Buddha,] arose. (23) [438]

[We were] born in a very rich
clan at that time, in Benares:
Dhanañjānī, Sumedhā too,
along with me, the women three. (24) [439]

[We] lay-donors gave a thousand
to the Sage, and a hermitage
for the Assembly, donating¹³

¹⁰*paccayākāra*°, or “modes of causes,” i.e., Abhidhammic analysis of the causes of the continuity between the links in the twelve-fold chain of causation (*paṭiccasamuppāda*)

¹¹or “due to loving celibately”

¹²lit., “I was gone” The grammar of the Pāli, as in my translation, leaves ambiguous whether the place of rebirth qualifies “nobody” or “husband”: “nobody wherever I was reborn” or “even he who was my husband, whenever I was reborn”

¹³*uddissa*, lit., “assigned to” “appointed to” “allotted”

that place¹⁴ to Him with Assembly. (25) [440]

Fallen thence, all we [three women]
were reborn¹⁵ in Tāvatiṃsa
[where] we attained the foremost fame,
and just the same among people. (26) [441]

In this [present] lucky aeon,
Brahma's Kinsman, Greatly Famed One,
[the Buddha] known as Kassapa¹⁶
was born, the Best of Debaters. (27) [442]

The attendant of the Great Sage
was the ruler of men back then,
the king of Kāsi, named Kiki,
in Benares, greatest city. (28) [443]

I was that [king's] eldest daughter,
well-known [by the name] "Samaṇī."¹⁷
Hearing the Best Victor's Teaching,
I chose [to seek] ordination. (29) [444]

Our father did not permit it;
we [stayed] at home during that time,
comfortable¹⁸ royal maidens
doing [our] practice with vigor
in virginal celibacy,
for twenty times a thousand years,
fond of waiting on the Buddha,
[the king's] seven joyful daughters. (30-31) [445-446]

Samaṇī, and Samaṇaguttā,¹⁹
Bhikkhunī, Bhikkhadāyikā,
Dhammā, and also Sudhammā,
and seventh Saṅghadāyikā, (32) [447]

[now] I, and Uppalavaṇṇā,

¹⁴*vihāram hi* lit., "that very monastery"

¹⁵*upagā*, lit., reached, went to, obtained, came into, belonged to

¹⁶BJTS reads "Named Kassapa according to his Lineage (*gottena*)"

¹⁷"Female renouncer" "nun" "renunciate woman"

¹⁸*sukhe ʰhitā*, lit., "remaining in comfort." Pronounce all four syllables when chanting to keep the meter or, to chant as a three-syllable word, read "comfortable royal princesses"

¹⁹I follow the original (in both recensions) in making this first foot a nine-syllable foot through the addition of the (superfluous) "and" (*ca*). The comma amplifies its effect, to syncopate the verse such that the (respective, exact) parallelism of the following verse (in which, however, all four feet contain the expected eight syllables) becomes apparent.

Paṭācārā and Kuṇḍalā,²⁰
Kisāgotamī, Dhammadinnā,²¹
and Visākhā is the seventh. (33) [448]

Once when the Sun Among People
was preaching the marvelous Truth,²²
having heard it, I memorized
Mahānidānasuttanta.²³ (34) [449]

Due to those karmas²⁴ done very well,
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvatiṃsa [then]. (35) [450]

And now, in [my] final rebirth,
in Sāgalā, best of cities,
I am²⁵ the Madda king's daughter,
well-liked, held dear [and] beloved. (36) [451]

[All] was peaceful²⁶ in that city
when I was coming into birth.
After that, due to that virtue,²⁷
they gave²⁸ the name “Khemā” to me. (37) [452]

When I attained the prime of youth,
I was adorned with beauty and grace.²⁹
At that time my father gave me
to [the great] king, Bimbisāra. (38) [453]

I was his best-beloved [queen,]
taking great³⁰ pride in³¹ [my] beauty.

²⁰ = Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesī

²¹ given the long names, this foot is unavoidably nine-syllables long, both in Pli and in English

²² or “Teaching,” *dhammaṃ deseti abbhutaṃ*

²³ the fifteenth *sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, containing a detailed analysis of the twelve-fold chain of causation

²⁴ here the text (in both PTS and BJTS editions) substitutes *tehi kammehi* (plural instrumental) for the ordinary *tena kammaṇa* (singular instrumental) in this *Apadāna* stock phrase. Perhaps “good deeds” would be the more natural plural term here.

²⁵ reading °*amhi* with BJTS for PTS °*āsiṃ* (“I was”)

²⁶ *khemaṃ*

²⁷ reading *guṇato* with BJTS for PTS *guṇikaṃ* (“small chain”)

²⁸ *udapajjatha*, lit., “produced”

²⁹ reading *rūpavilāsabhūsitā* with PTS alt. for PTS *rūpavant’ āvibhūsitā* (“beautiful [and] extremely ornamented”) and BJTS *rūpalavaññabhūsitā* (“adorned with beauty and gorgeousness”), though all the readings make the same basic point

³⁰ *ratā*, lit., “delighting in” “intent upon”

³¹ *keḷāyane* fr. *keḷāyati*, to play, sport, amuse; to take pride in. Could tr. here: “intently sporting in beauty”

[Thinking,] “He speaks ill of beauty,
I dodged³² the Compassionate One.³³ (39) [454]

At that time, King Bimbisāra,
with knowledge and great love for me,
after praising the Bamboo Grove,³⁴
brought singers [to praise it] for me: (40) [455]

“We think that one who has not seen
the Bamboo Grove, so delightful,
nor the lair of the Well-Gone-One,
has not seen [the garden named] ‘Joy.’³⁵ (41) [456]

[But] one who’s seen the Bamboo Grove,
the ‘Joy’ that’s enjoyed by people,³⁶
that one’s seen [the garden named] ‘Joy,’
much enjoyed by the king of gods.³⁷ (42) [457]

Giving up [the garden named] ‘Joy,’
descending to the earth’s surface,
gods are satisfied, astonished,
seeing the lovely Bamboo Grove. (43) [458]

What speaker can fully exclaim
its³⁸ accumulated virtue,
produced by the merit of kings,
beautified by Buddha’s merit?” (44) [459]

Hearing of its³⁹ magnificence
which was delightful to my ears,
desiring to see that garden,
I then announced [this] to the king. (45) [460]

Then [the king,] the lord of the earth,
along with a large retinue,
led me [by procession] to that
garden I was longing to see. (46) [461]

“Go [and] look at the great riches

³²*na upesiṅ*, lit., “I did not approach”.

³³*mahādayaṅ*, lit., “Great Compassionate One”

³⁴*veluvanaṅ* (BJTS *veḷuvanaṅ*), a pleasure grove near Rajgir where the Buddha stayed when visiting King Bimbisāra

³⁵*nandanaṅ*, “Joy” the divine pleasure grove of Śakra/Indra, the king of the gods

³⁶*naranandanandanaṅ*, lit., “the Nandana [“Joy”] Garden that is the joy [*nandana*] of people”. My translation attempts to convey both the meaning and the delightful alliteration of the Pāli here.

³⁷*amarinda-sunandanaṅ*

³⁸*tassa...vanassa*, lit., “of that grove”

³⁹lit., “of the grove’s”

[of] that grove, pleasing to the eyes;
it always glows with radiance,
colored by the Buddha's aura." (47) [462]

And when the Sage, [out begging] alms,
had entered Rajgir, best city,⁴⁰
at that very time⁴¹ I went out,
[desiring] to look at that grove. (48) [463]

Then [I entered] that grove in bloom,
[alive] with varied bees buzzing,
full of Indian cuckoo songs,
[and] dances by a peacock-troupe, (49) [464]

free of [excess] noise, uncluttered,
embellished with varied walkways,
with scattered huts and pavilions,
resplendent with diverse yogis. (50) [465]

Wandering about [there,] I thought,
"my eyes are now proving their worth."⁴²
Having seen in that very place
a youthful monk, I thought of him: (51) [466]

"Staying in a delightful grove
like this, in early youth as though
it is the springtime, well-endowed
with a body which is pleasing, (52) [467]

bald-headed, wrapped in saffron robes,⁴³
seated at the foot of a tree
he meditates, a Buddhist monk,
discarding sensual delight.⁴⁴ (53) [468]

Shouldn't this auspicious Teaching
be practiced by old folks,⁴⁵ after
[they have lived] the domestic life,
enjoying pleasure as they like?" (54) [469]

Discerning that it was empty,
I approached the perfumed house, the

⁴⁰*giribbajapuruttamaṅ* (a.k.a. *rajaḡaha* = Rajgir), the capital of King Bimbisāra near where the Bamboo Groove was (and is) located.

⁴¹she plans to be there when he is absent, still trying to evade him

⁴²lit., "bearing fruit"

⁴³lit., "surrounded by a *saṅghāti* (monastic robe)

⁴⁴*visayaḡaṅ ratīḡ*, lit., "delight produced by/in the spheres of the senses"

⁴⁵lit., "by an elderly person" "by a decrepit person"

Victor's home, [but] spied the Victor,
like the sun when it is rising, (55) [470]

sitting happily by himself,⁴⁶
being fanned by a fine woman.
Seeing [that scene,] I thought like this:
“isn't this Bull of Men wretched?⁴⁷ (56) [471]

The woman [though], shining like gold,
eyes and face like pink lotuses,
with red lips, looking like jasmine,⁴⁸
pleasing to the mind and the eyes, (57) [472]

with ears that are like golden swings,
firm⁴⁹ breasts that look like water-jugs,
thin-waisted, a shapely behind,⁵⁰
fine thighs with charming ornaments, (58) [473]

dressed in clothing of fine blue silk,
furnished with a border of red,
with unsatisfiable looks,⁵¹
she has a smiling demeanor.” (59) [474]

After seeing her, I thought this:
“Wow! This is a super-beauty!
Not ever in the past was seen
by my own⁵² eye [such a beauty]!” (60) [475]

Then she was ravished by old age,
discolored, [her] face disfigured.
Her teeth fell out, her hair turned white,
her mouth was fouled with saliva, (61) [476]

ears shriveled up, eyes formed cataracts,⁵³
breasts sagged [and became] repulsive;
wrinkles spread on all of [her] parts,
[and] veins popped out [on that] body, (62) [477]

crooked-limbed, leaning on a cane,

⁴⁶or “alone”

⁴⁷or a little less forcefully, “is this not the wretched Bull of Men?” “Is this wretched one not the Bull of Men?” “this wretched one is not the Bull of Men”

⁴⁸which has delicate, white flowers

⁴⁹or otherwise “good,” *su*°

⁵⁰PTS *varassonī* (“excellent buttocks”), BJTS *sussonī*, (“good buttocks”)

⁵¹or “form/shape/beauty which is not to be satisfied” (or “not troubling”?)

⁵²lit., “this,” perhaps a deictic?

⁵³lit., “white-eyed”

jutting-ribbed, emaciated,
trembling, fallen [onto] the ground,
gasping for every breath she took.⁵⁴ (63) [478]

And then I was profoundly moved.⁵⁵
Marveled, [my] hair standing on end,
[I said,] “Woe on filthy beauty!
It is where [only] fools delight!” (64) [479]

Then the Great Compassionate One,
discerning⁵⁶ that [my] mind was moved,
happy, with a heart that was thrilled,
he spoke [to me in] these verses: (65) [480]

“Khemā, see this complex heap⁵⁷ as
diseased, disgusting [and] putrid.
It is oozing and it’s dripping,
the delight of foolish people. (66) [481]

With one-pointed focus, steadfast,
fix your mind on impurity.
Remain mindful of the body;
be intent on disenchantment. (67) [482]

Just as is this, so too is that;
just as is that, so too is this:
on the inside and the outside,
be detached from body-delight. (68) [483]

Cultivate emancipation
and abandon latent conceit.⁵⁸
Then, through understanding conceit,
you’ll wander in tranquility. (69) [484]

Those following the stream, excited with lust,
[are] making webs for themselves, like a spider;
[others,] cutting that away, are going forth,
indifferent, giving up the pleasures of lust.” (70-71) [485].⁵⁹

⁵⁴lit., “gasping for breath (or “panting” or “sighing” or “exhaling”): *nissasantī*) moment by moment”

⁵⁵*me āsi samvego*

⁵⁶lit., seeing

⁵⁷*samussayaṇ*, “conglomeration,” i.e., the body

⁵⁸*mānānusayaṇ ujjaha*, pride located in the subconscious, “sleepful” (but not) pride in one’s existence, etc

⁵⁹PTS and BJTS agree on the text here, in a complex/atypical meter, but whereas PTS presents it as two 6-5-6-6 verses, BJTS presents it as one 11-11-11-12 verse, as indicated in the varied numbering here.

Then the Charioteer of Men,
knowing my mental readiness,
in order to instruct me preached
Mahānidānasuttanta.⁶⁰ (72) [486]

Hearing that best *suttanta*, I
recalled [my] former memory.
Just standing there I was at peace;
I purified my “*Dhamma eye*”. (73) [487]

Immediately falling down
before the feet of the Great Sage,
I spoke these words [at that moment,]
to confess offenses [to him]. (74) [488]

“Praise to you, O Seer of All!
Praise to you, Home of Compassion!
Praise to you, Existence-Crosser!
Praise to you, Path to Deathlessness!⁶¹ (75) [489]

Plunged into⁶² the thicket of views,
I was doped by passionate lust.
[I now] delight in discipline,
disciplined by your righteous trick.⁶³ (76) [490]

Without enjoyment because they
do not see Great Sages like you,
beings in the sea of being,⁶⁴
are undergoing much dis-ease. (77) [491]

Though close⁶⁵ I did not [go to] see
the World’s-Help,⁶⁶ Non-Hostility,⁶⁷
the One who Made an End to Death;⁶⁸
I am confessing that offense. (78) [492]

Beauty-obsessed, I did not go

⁶⁰see above, v. 34 [449]

⁶¹BJTS reads *amataṃ dadaṃ* (“Deathless-Giver”?)

⁶²°*pakkhannā*, lit., “fallen into” “jumped into” fr. *pakkhandati*

⁶³*tayā sammā upāyena*

⁶⁴*sattā saṃsārasāgare*

⁶⁵*adūraṭṭhaṇ*, lit., “not because of far-away-ness”

⁶⁶*loka-saraṇaṇ*

⁶⁷*araṇaṇ*, lit., “having no battle,” “not adversarial,” echoed in *lokasaraṇaṇ* and *maraṇantaṅgaṇ*

⁶⁸*maraṇantaṅgaṇ* (correct to °*antakaṃ* read °*antaṅgaṃ* with BJTS)

to the Goodness-Giver,⁶⁹ Great Friend,⁷⁰
suspecting he'd be unfriendly;
I am confessing that offense." (79) [493]

And then the One with Honeyed Speech,⁷¹
the Great Compassionate Victor
sprinkling⁷² me with ambrosia said,
"Khemā, you should stay [here with us]." (80) [494]

Then after bowing down [my] head,
having circumambulated,
having gone, having seen the king,
I spoke these words [to him just then]. (81) [495]

"O conqueror of enemies,
the righteous trick⁷³ that you thought up!
Wishing to see the grove, I saw⁷⁴
the Sage, the One Free of Craving.⁷⁵ (82) [496]

If it's pleasing to you, O king,
I'll go forth in the Neutral One's
dispensation, tired of beauty,
because of what the Sage told [me]." (83) [497]

Then pressing [his] hands together
[the king,] the lord of the earth, said,
"I permit you, O lucky one.
Let your going forth have success!" (84) [498]

And then after my going forth,
when I had served for seven months,
watching lamp [flames] rising, falling,
my mind being profoundly moved, (85) [499]

fed up with all conditioned things,
skillful in the heaps of causes,⁷⁶
passing over the four-fold flood,
I attained [my] arahantship. (86) [500]

⁶⁹or "Giver of Boons" "Wish-Granter". Reading *varadaḍaṃ* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *varadaṇ* (which could be taken, however, as the same thing)

⁷⁰*mahāhitaṇ*

⁷¹*madhuranigghoso*

⁷²pronounce as two syllables when chanting, to keep the meter

⁷³*sammā upāyo*

⁷⁴lit., "was seen by me"

⁷⁵*nibbanatho*, Skt. *nivanathaḥ*

⁷⁶*paccayākāra*°, or "modes of causes," i.e., Abhidhammic analysis of the causes of the continuity between the links in the twelve-fold chain of causation (*paṭiccasamuppāda*)

I'd mastered the superpower
[called] the "divine ear" element.
I also was a master of
the knowledge stored in others' hearts. (87) [501]⁷⁷

I remember [my] former lives;
[my] "divine eye" is purified.
All the defilements are destroyed;
[I] will not be reborn again. (88) [502]

In the Buddha's dispensation,
[I] have purified [my] knowledge
of meaning and of the Teaching,
etymology and preaching. (89) [503]

Skilled in the purifications,⁷⁸
confident in *Kathāvatthu*,⁷⁹
and in the dispensation I've
mastered Abhidhammic method.⁸⁰ (90) [504]

Then, being asked subtle questions
in *Toraṇavatthu*,⁸¹ by the
queen, wife of the Kosala [king,]
I explained according to truth.⁸² (91) [505]

At that time the king, approaching
the Well-Gone-One asked [him as well].
Then the Buddha explained just as
[those questions] were explained by me. (92) [506]

The Victor, thrilled at that virtue,
[then] placed me in the foremost place;

⁷⁷this and the next two verses almost exactly parallel *Gotamī-apadāna*, vv. 184-186 [410-412], above, and *Uppalavaṇṇā* vv. 17-19 [527-529], below. That *Gotamī-apadāna* was composed earlier, and *Khemā-apadāna* later, is perhaps evident in the slippage within this verse, where the past tense verbs (appropriate to the context in *Gotamī-apadāna*, but not here) have not been corrected, even though the pronouns have been corrected from third to first person. Pronouns and verb tenses are corrected in the next two verses and more tellingly, in the corresponding verse of *Uppalavaṇṇā-apadāna*, v. 17 [527], which reads *homi* for *āsiṃ*

⁷⁸*kusalāhaṇ visuddhisu*, lit., "I am skilled in the purifications"

⁷⁹one of the books of the Abhidhamma, believed in tradition to have been uttered by Moggaliputtatissa in refutation of heretical views expressed at the Third Great Recitation during the time of Aśoka Maurya, an important piece of evidence that *Apadāna* is a post-Aśokan text.

⁸⁰*abhidhammanayaṇṇū ca vasī*, lit., "[I am a] master of the knowledge of Abhidhammic method"

⁸¹see DPPN I:1039, a locality in Kosala, between Śrāvasti and Sāketa. King Pasenadi once stopped there to visit Khemā, who lived there (S. iv. 374)

⁸²reading *yathātathaṃ* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *yathākathaṃ*, "according to what was said"

the Ultimate Man [then dubbed] me
“chief of the nuns with great wisdom.” (93) [507]

My defilements are [now] burnt up;
all [new] existence is destroyed.
Like elephants with broken chains,
I am living without constraint. (94) [508]

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! (95) [509]

The four analytical modes,
and these eight deliverances,
six special knowledges mastered,
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (96) [510]

Thus indeed Bhikkhunī Khemā spoke these verses.

The legend of Khemā Therī is finished.