

Dipavamsa ~ Bhikkhuni Highlights

selected excerpts with summaries and comments from
The Dipavamsa: An Ancient Buddhist Historical Record,
Translated by Hermann Oldenberg.
First published in Berlin, 1879

Compiled by Ayya Tathaaloka Bhikkhuni at Lake Anna, August 2004

[the history of Emperor Asoka]

VI.

15. This grandson of Candagutta (Candragupta), the son of Bindusara, whilst a mere prince, was subking of Ujjeni, charged with collecting the revenue (of that province). During his progress he came to the town Vedissa.

16. There the daughter of a Setthi, known by the name of Devi, having cohabited with him, gave birth to a most noble son.

17. Mahinda and Samghamitta chose to receive the Pabbajja ordination; having obtained Pabbajja, the both destroyed the fetter of (individual) existence.

18. Asoka ruled in Pataliputta, best of towns; three years after his coronation he was converted to Buddha's faith.

19. How great is the number of years between the time when the Sambuddha attained Parinibbana in the Upavattana (at Kusinara), and when Mahinda, the issue of the Moriya family, was born?

20. Two hundred years and four years more had elapsed: just at that time Mahinda, the son of Asoka was born. (Sanghamitra was born 206 years after the Parinirvana)

[King Asoka's conversion to the Buddhadharma follows]

98. At that time there were in Jambudvipa eighty-four (thousand) towns; near each town he built one monastery.

99. And having completed the monasteries in three year's time, (the construction of) the Aramas being finished, the prince (Asoka) held during seven days a festival of offerings.

VII

1. There was a great assemblage, from all parts of Jambudvipa, eighty kotis of Bhikkhus, ninety-six thousand Bhikkhunis, the greater part of the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis possessing the six (supernatural) faculties.

6.7. Delighted, glad, looking at the festivals which were being celebrated, at the

assembled fraternities of Bhikkhus and the assembled Bhikkhunis and the (here the text says "beggars", perhaps "almspersons" is meant?) receiving rich alms which were prepared for them, seeing all the eighty-four thousand Viharas, which were honored (by festivals of consecration).

[King Asoka pronounces his faith]

13. "I cannot find any other greater act of liberality. My faith is most firm; I am, therefore, a relation of the Faith."

14-16. After having heard the word spoken by king Asokadhamma, learned Moggaliputta who was well versed in the Scriptures, a clever decider of cases, answered the question of Asokadhamma, in order to secure a comfortable existence to the Fraternity (Sangha), for the sake of the propagation of the Doctrine, and because the wise one had learnt the future destiny (of the Faith):

"The donor of the requisites (to the Sangha) remains a stranger to the Faith, --
17. but that man who gives up his son or daughter, the issue of his body, and causes them to receive the Pabbajja ordination, becomes really a relation of the Faith."

18.19. King Asokadhamma, the ruler of the earth, having heard this speech, addressed both prince Mahinda, his son, and his daughter Sanghamitta: "I presently shall be a relation of the Faith." Both children hearing what their father had said, agreed, (saying:) --

20. Well, Sire, we agree, we will do what you have said; make us quickly receive the Pabbajja ordination, become a relative of the Faith."

21. Mahinda, Asoka's son, had completed twenty years, and Samghamitta might be eighteen years of age.

22. When Asoka had completed six years, both his children received the Pabbajja ordination, and Mahinda, the enlightener of the Island (of Lanka), received at once the Upasampada ordination; --

23. at the same time Samghamitta began to exercise herself in the Sikkha precepts.

[the history of the Asokan missions, then the history of the Island of Lanka, the lineage of the family of Lankan king Devampiyatissa, and his relationship with Asoka who sends a message to him to take refuge in the Triple Treasure]

[Mahinda is requested by the Thera, the bhikkhus and Sakra to go and convert the Island; flies there with four fellow bhikkhus, one novice and one layman; converts the king on the top of Mt. Missaka and descends the mountain, where the king seves them food with his own hands]

XII

81. and served to them with his own hands a most excellent meal. When the Thera had finished his meal and removed his hand from the bowl, --

82. (the king) addressed Queen Anula together with the women of the interior apartments: "You know the opportunity, queen; it is time to pay respects to them (the Theras)."

83. Queen Anula, surrounded by five hundred girls, bowed to the Theras and honored them to her heart's content.

84. Having approached the Theras and saluted them, she sat down. (Mahinda) preached to them the Dhamma; the great teacher exposed the fearful Peta stories, --

85.86. the Vimana stories, the Saccasamyutta. When they had heard that most excellent (portion of the) Doctrine, princess Anula and her five hundred attendants, like a wise man in whose mind faith has arisen, attained the reward of Sotapatti; this was the first case of the attainment (of a stage of sanctification which occurred in Lanka).

[the populace surges to see Mahinda, they go to the Mahanandana royal pleasure garden to spend the night, the Mahameghavana garden is offered as the first monastery the next day and Mahinda sojourns there, then returns to Mt. Missaka, where the King offers the rock-cut cells as a monastery in which to spend the Vassa; Maharittha, the son of the King's sister and fifty-five nobles request the Pabbajja ordination to which the King consents; after five months Sumana is sent to India for the Buddha's relics to make the first stupa on Lanka]

[Mahinda relates to the king the story of the relics of the three former Buddhas and their visits to the Island]

74. The queen called Anula was a believer in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Fraternity; she confessed the true doctrine, and put away the desire of existence. (She expressed to the king her desire of being admitted into the Order.)

75. After having heard what the Queen said, the king addressed the Thera thus: ("Queen Anula) believes in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Fraternity; she confesses the true doctrine, --

76. and puts away the desire of existence. Confer the Pabbajja ordination on Anula." (Mahinda replied:) "It is not permitted to Bhikkhus, o great king, to confer the Pabbajja ordination on women; --

77. my sister Samghamitta, o king, shall come hither. She will confer the Pabbajja ordination on Anula and will release her from her fetters.

78. Wise Samghamitta and clever Uttara, Hema and Masagalla, Aggimitta, chary of speech, Tappa and Pabbatacchinna, Malla and Dhammadasiya, --

79. these Bhikkhunis who are free from desire and firm, whose thoughts and wishes are pure, who are firmly established in the true Dhamma and Vinaya, --

80. who have subdued their passions, who have their senses under control and have attained (perfection), who possess the three-fold science and know well the (magical) powers, who are well grounded in the highest bliss, will also come hither.

81. (Devanampiya) sat down, surrounded by his ministers, and deliberated (about inviting princess Samghamitta). Having sat down to hold a council (about this matter), he thus addressed the ministers...

82. Prince Arittha, having heard what the king said, --
83. and having heard the speech of the Thera and received his commission,
respectfully saluted his uncle and departed in the Northern direction.

84.85. Having established their residence in a certain quarter of the town, the noble ladies, five hundred virgins, queen Anula at their head, all high-born and illustrious, having undertaken to observe the ten moral precepts, all this multitudes late and early surrounded Anula.

[Arittha crosses the see and presents himself to Asoka]

88. "Your son, Sire, your offspring, o great king Piyadassana, Thera Mahinda has sent me in your presence.

89. King Devanampiya, your ally, o Piyadassana, who is converted to Buddha, has sent me in your presence."

90. (Then) the great Sage (went to Samghamitta and) communicated to her the message of her brother: "The royal virgins, o Samghamitta, and princess Anula, --
91. all look to you for the Pabbajja ordination." Wise Samghamitta, when she had heard the message of her brother, --

92. quickly went to the king and thus addresses him: "Give your consent, great king; I shall go to the island of Lanka; --

93. the great Sage has communicated to me the message of my brother." (Asoka replied:) "Your sister's son Sumana and my son, your elder brother, --

94. being gone, prevent, dear, that you, my daughter, should go also."

(Samghamitta replied:) "Weighty, o great king, is my brother's command.

95. The royal virgins, o great king, and princess Anula, they all look to me for their Pabbajja ordination."

XVI

1. The prince (Asoka) fitted out a great army consisting of the four parts, and then went forth, taking with him a branch of the Bo tree of the Tathagata.

2. Having passed through three kingdoms and the Vinjha range, having passed through the great forest, the prince came to the ocean.

3. The great four-fold army with the Bhikkhuni congregation at its head, proceeded to the great sea, carrying the excellent Bo tree.

4. When (the Bo branch) was carried to the sea, on high the musical instruments of the gods (where heard,) and below those of men, the instruments of men from all four quarters.

6. "Learned, possessed of (magical) power, virtuous, most firm..."

7. The prince then wept, shed tears, and looked (on the parting vessel).

[nagas and devas delight and joyfully escort the vessel to Lanka doing homage and showering flowers]

30. Great crowds, the prince with the queens, left the delightful Anuradhapura,

and went to meet the Sambodhi tree.

31. The prince together with his sons surrounded the Sambodhi tree; they offered scented garlands and most excellent perfumes.

32. The streets were well swept, and offerings were prepared. When the Bodhi was established, the earth quaked.

[further honors]

38. The five hundred high-born, illustrious virgins of the royal court who were free from passion and steadfast, all received the Pabbajja ordination.

39. The five hundred virgins who surrounded Anula, who were free from passion and steadfast, all received the Pabbajja ordination.

40. Prince Arittha, released from the chain of fear, received the Pabbajja ordination according to the doctrine of the Jina, together with five hundred companions. All these persons attained Arahatsip and full perfection in the doctrine of the Jina.

41. In the first month of the winter season, when the tree was full of blossoms, the great Bo branch was brought and established in Tambapanni.

XVII

[the names of the island, the capitals, the kings, the afflictions, the relics, stupas, bodhi trees, bhikkhunis, bhikkhus and the Buddhas are enumerated]

16. The Bodhi tree of holy Kakusandha was the most excellent Sirisa; (Bhikkhuni) Rucananda who possessed the great faculties, took its southern branch and planted it in Ojandipa, in the Mahatitha garden.

17. The Bodhi tree of the holy Konagamana was the most excellent Udambara; (Bhikkhuni) Kanakadatta who possessed the great faculties, took its southern branch --

18. and planted it in Varadipa, in the Mahanama garden. The Bodhi tree of holy Kassapa was the most excellent Nigrodha; --

19. (the Theri) called Sudhamma who possessed the great faculties, took its southern branch and planted the sacred tree in the garden called Sagara.

20. The Bodhi tree of holy Gotama was the most excellent Assattha; Samghamitta who possessed the great faculties, took its southern branch --

21. and planted it on the Island of Lanka, in the delightful Mahameghavana.

Rucananda, Kanakadatta, Sudhamma who possessed the great (magical) powers, --

22. and learned, wise Samghamitta who was endowed with the six (supernatural faculties), these were the four Bhikkhunis who brought each a Bo branch (to this island).

[details of the four Buddhas visits to the Island]

50. Kakusandha (Kakucanda), the ruler of the world, accepted the (Mahatitha) garden (from the king). At that moment the earth quaked; this was the first resting-place (of the Samgha in Lanka).

51. The highest leader of the world stood there, causing the immovable earth to quake. (He then formed the following wish:) "Oh that Rucananda might take the Bo branch and come hither."

52. The Bhikkhuni who possessed the high powers, understanding the thought of holy Kakusandha, went to the great Sirisa Bodhi, and standing at its foot (she thought:)

53. "The Buddha desires that the Bodhi tree shall grow in Ojadipa." Thither she went in order to fetch the Bodhi tree, (the majesty of) which is beyond human reason.

54. (She then expressed the following resolution:) "May, with the consent of the most excellent Buddha, out of compassion for mankind, the southern branch sever itself through my magical power.

55. When Rucananda had pronounced this demand with clasped hands, the right branch severed itself (from the tree) and fixed itself in the vase.

56. Rucananda who possessed the high powers, took the Bo branch in the golden vase, and ordered five hundred Bhikkhunis to surround it.

57. At that moment the earth quaked together with oceans and mountains; it was a grand sight, wonderful and astonishing.

[homage of the kings and gods]

62. The delighted crowds of gods, raising their clasped hands, together with Rucananda, paid reverence to the most excellent Bo branch.

63. Rucananda who possessed the high powers, carrying the Sirisa Bo branch, went to the excellent Ojadipa, accompanied by the sisterhood of Bhikkhunis.

64. The gods danced, laughed, and snapped their fingers of both hands, when the most excellent Sirisa Bo branch was carried to the excellent Ojadipa.

65. Rucananda who possessed the high powers, accompanied by a host of Devas, approached Kakusandha carrying the Sirisa Bo branch.

66. At that moment the great hero Kakusandha, the ruler of the world, repaired to the spot in the Mahatittha garden destined for the reception of the Bo tree.

67. Rucananda herself did not plant the resplendent Bo branch; Kakusandha, perceiving that, himself stretched out his right hand.

68. Rucananda who possessed the high (magical) powers, placed the southern branch of the Bo tree in the Buddha's right hand, and respectfully saluted him.

69. Kakusandha, the chief of the world, the highest among men, took it and gave it to King Abhaya (saying:) "Plant it on this spot."

[the children of the kings and the generations]

89. (King Devanampiya) erected the most excellent monastery called Tissarama. He also planted the great Bo tree in the Mahameghavana garden.

[the reign of Devanampiya and his princes]

94. Eight years after the coronation (of Uttiya), the enlightener of the island attained (final) Nibbana. (The king) caused the funeral ceremonies to be performed to the east of the Tissarama.

95. When the twelfth year (after his Upasampada) had been completed, Mahinda came hither; at the end of his sixtieth year he attained Nibbana on the Cetiya mountain.

106. The great crown, leaving the Arama by the eastern gate, performed the fural ceremonies at a place close by it.

108. The great teacher having thus been burnt entirely, they erected a most excellent stupa which contained his relics, and Aramas at the distance of one yojanan from each other.

XVIII

[in praise of the lineage of the bhikkhus]

7. The younger twin-sister of Queen Maya, born from the same mother, kind like a mother, suckled the Bhagavat.

8. (She was) called Mahapajapati, known by the name of Gotami, renowned, an original depository (of the Faith), possessing the six (supernatural) faculties and the high (magical) powers.

9. The two chief female pupils (disciples) were Khema and Uppalavana; (besides, there was) Patacara, Dhammadina, Sobhita, Isidasika, --

10. Visakha, Sona and Sabala, wise Samghadasi, and Nanda, a guardian of the Dhamma and well versed in the Vinaya. These (Bhikkhunis) who well knew the Vinaya and the paths (of sanctification), (lived) in Jambudvipa.

11. The Theri Samghamitta, and wise Uttara, Hema and Pasadapala, and Aggimitta, Dasika, --

12. Pheggu, Pabbata, and Matta, Malla, and Dhammadasiya, the young (or is the word "eleven") Bhikkhunis came hither from Jambudvipa.

13. They taught the Vinaya Pitaka in Anuradhapura. They also taught the five Collections (of the Sutta Pitaka) and the seven Treatises (of the Abhidhamma).

14. Sadhammanandi, and Soma, and also Giriddhi, Dasiya, and Dhamma, a guardian of the Dhamma and well-versed in the Vinaya, --

15. and Mahila who kept the Dhutanga precepts, and Sobhana, Dhammatapasa, highly wise Naramitta who was well-versed in the Vinaya, --

16. Sata, versed in the exhortations of the Theris, Kali and Uttara, these Bhikkhunis received the Upasampada ordination in the island of Lanka.

17.18. ...and the renowned Sumana who well understood the true religion and (its) history, these Bhikkhunis who were passionless and tranquil, the resolutions of whose minds were pure, who were firmly grounded in the true Faith and in the Vinaya, came together with twenty thousand Bhikkhunis..., honored by illustrious, noble Abhaya.

19. They taught the Vinayapitaka in Anuradhapura; they (also) taught the five Collections (of the Sutta Pitaka) and the seven Treatises (of the Abhidhamma).

20. Renowned Mahila who well understood the true religion and (its) history, and Samanta, the daughters of king Kakavanna, --

21. and learned Girikali, the daughter of his Purohita, Dasi and Kali, the

daughters of a rogue, well versed in the whole of the sacred Scriptures, --
22. these Bhikkhunis, well versed in the whole of the sacred scriptures, unconquerable, the resolutions of whose minds were pure, who were firmly grounded in the true Faith and the Vinaya, --
23. came from Rohana together with twenty thousand Bhikkhunis, honored by the illustrious king Abhaya. They taught the Vinayapitaka in Anuradhapura.

24. Mahadevi and Paduma, illustrious Hemasa, Unala, Anjali, Suma, --
25. these Bhikkhunis who possessed the six (supernatural) faculties and the great (magical) powers, came... together with sixteen thousand Bhikkhunis.
26. Honored by illustrious king Tissa Devanampiya, they taught the Vinayapitaka in Anuradhapura.

27. Mahasona and Datta, wise Sivala, zealous Rupasobhini, venerated Devamanusa, --
28. Naga and Nagamitta, Dhammagutta, and Dasiya and Samudda gifted with (supernatural) vision, who well understood the true Religion and (its) history, --
29. Sapatta, Channa, and Upali, excellent Revata, these were the highest among the Vinaya studying Bhikkhunis, the daughters of Somanadeva, --
30. Mala and Khema and Tissa, the highest among the preachers of the Dhamma, these taught the Vinaya first after the death of Abhaya.

31.32. Sivala and Maharula who well understood the true Religion and (its) history, and had converted to the Faith many people in Jambudvipa, came hither from Jambudvipa together with twenty thousand, invited by illustrious King Abhaya.

33. They taught the Vinaya Pitaka in Anuradhapura; they (also) taught the five Collections of the (Suttapitaka) and the seven Treatises (of the) Abhidhamma).

[?What has happened that bhikkhunis are brought from India to give the Upasampada to Lankan women?]

34. Sivala together with Queen Samuddananva, daughters of a king, wise Nagapali, and clever Nagamitta, --
35. Mahila, a guardian of the Bhikkhunis and well-versed in the Vinaya, Naga, and Nagamitta who well knew the true Religion and its history, these Bhikkhunis then received the Upasampada ordination in the island of Lanka.
36. All these were high-born and renowned in the Doctrine, the most excellent ones among sixteen thousand bhikkhunis, acknowledged to be leaders.
37. Honored by Kutikanna (and by his son) illustrious Abhaya, they taught the Vinayapitaka in Anuradhapura.

38. Culanaga and Dhamma, venerated Sona, and renowned Sanha who well knew the true Religion and (its) history, --
39. highly learned and wise Mahatissa, the daughter of Gamika, Culasumana,

Mahasumana, and clever Mahakali, --

40. illustrious Lakkhadhamma, honored and high-born, wise Dipanaya who was venerated in Rohana,

41. renowned Samudda who well knew the true Religion and (its) history, holders of the Vibhajja doctrine and of the Vinaya, who both were ornaments of the Sisterhood, --

42. these and other Bhikkhunis received the Upasampada ordination in the island of Lanka. (These Bhikkhunis), the resolutions of whose minds were pure, who were firmly grounded in the true Faith and in the Vinaya, --

43. learned, versed in the Tradition, free from evil passions, and illustrious, went out (attained Nibbana) after having spread radiance, like fire-brands.

44. At the present time there are other aged, middle-aged and young (in ordination age) Bhikkhunis, holders of the Vibhajja doctrine and of the Vinaya, preservers of the tradition of the Faith. Learned and virtuous they illuminate the earth.

[The reign of the kings through Abhaya follows]

XIX

[the invitation of 14 Theras, 12 monks and 3 laypersons from Jambudvipa by King Dutthagamani for establishing the Mahathupa]

11. (King Lajjitissa,) having heard the precepts for the conduct of itinerant Bhikkhus, which were propounded by the Fraternity, gave medicaments for the itinerant Bhikkhus, for the sake of their comfort,...

12. Having heard the well-spoken speech of the Bhikkhunis, which had been delivered at the ... time (at Harikala?), the royal lord gave to the Bhikkhunis whatever they desired.

13. He constructed the Silathupa, a Vihara on the Cetiya mountain, and the most excellent assembly hall which is called Jalaka.

[the establishment of the Abhayagiri monastery by the next king, Vattagamani, and the construction of the five Aramas by the seven champions; the reigns of the following kings, the recording of the Tripitaka and Atthakatha]

31. The son of Mahaculi, called Kutikannatissa, constructed and Uposatha hall near the Cetiypabbata monastery.

32. In front of the building he erected a beautiful stone Thupa; there he planted a Bo branch and constructed a great structure.

33. He built a bath... for the Bhikkhunis. He also made a fence round the Padumassara garden.

[the reigns and donations of following kings through Mahasena]

-end-

