



Therigatha Verses of the Elder Nuns Retreat

Spirit Rock Insight Meditation Center

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Mahaprajapati

Homage to you, hero among buddhas, best of all beings,
You freed me from suffering,
just as you did so many other people.

All suffering is known,
the craving that is suffering's cause has been destroyed
The eightfold path of the noble ones has been travelled
And cessation reached:
The four noble truths
each one done.
All done by me.

I had already been a mother, as son,
A father, a brother and a grandmother.
But not knowing things as they really are,
I was reborn and reborn,
never having enough.

As soon as I saw the Bhagavan
I knew that this is my last body,
that the realm of birth is finished,
That now there is no rebirth for me.

When I look at the disciples assembled together,
energetic, resolute, always making an effort,
I see that this is how Buddhas are rightly worshipped.

Mahamaya gave birth to Gautama for the sake of many,
to drive away the mass of suffering
of all those struck down by sickness and death.

Sundari Nanda

(Spoken by Buddha:)

Look at this body, Nanda, it's sick, it's dirty, it's foul.
Use what is unpleasant to cultivate the mind,
make it focused and attentive.

*(Buddha conjures up vision of a beautiful woman & aged it
before Nanda's eyes. He continues:)*

Your body is like this,
and this is like your body.
It stinks of decay
and only a fool would delight in it.

When you look at it this way,
day and night, always intently,
someday you will see –
breaking through with your own wisdom.

(Spoken by Sundarinanda:)

This body was seen as it really is, inside and out,
as I examined it carefully and thoroughly.

I became tired of the body, inwardly disinterested.
Diligent, released, at peace, free.

Subha

I first heard the Buddha's dharma when I was still young.
It was on a day when I was wearing clean clothes,
and by my own effort
there was comprehension of the four noble truths.

Right then I found that I had
a great dislike for all that my senses find pleasing.
I was afraid of my own body,
and I longed for freedom from it all.

I left my relatives, slaves and workers,
the rich villages and their fields,
everything pleasing and delightful.

I left more than a little wealth, I went forth,
I went forward, with my faith like that,
into the dharma that has been so well-taught.

So it is not right for me now,
when I desire nothing at all,
to come back again
to the silver and gold I have thrown away.

Silver and gold don't lead
to awakening and peace.
They are not fit for an ascetic,
they are a wealth that is not noble.

Wealth comes with greediness, makes your head spin.

It deludes and increases defilements.
It brings many sorrows and is dangerous -
there is nothing you can count on in wealth.

Men get excited near wealth and they get careless too.
Their minds become dirty and
wealth makes them ever at odds with each other
and they endlessly fight among themselves.

Death and bondage, calamity and robbery,
grief and lamentation – there are so many miseries
for those who get caught among what pleases the senses.

My relatives, you know that I have gone forth,
that I have seen what is fearful in what pleases the senses.
So why are you trying to get me to go back to those pleasures
as if you were my enemies?

Gold and money do not lessen
the depravities that ooze from within,
urges that come from our senses are enemies,
butchers, foes who bind us with ropes.

My relatives, you know that I have gone forth,
that my head is shaven and I wear a nun's robe.
So why are you trying to get me to go back to those pleasures
as if you were my enemies?

Picking up as alms what others discard
and wearing rags as a robe,
that is what suits me.
It is all that is needed for someone homeless.

Great sages have given up all pleasures of the senses,
divine and human pleasures.
They are free, in the place of peace,
they have attained constant happiness.
Let me not even find something that pleases the senses,
no place of safety exists among them.
They are enemies, butchers,
the sufferings they bring do what large fires do.

Greed is dangerous, fearful,
destructive, it has thorns,
it is so very wrong, harmful too –
it makes one stupid.

The urges that comes from the senses are trouble,
they are frightening, like a snake's head.
Yet ordinary people, always blind, ever fools,
are still delighted by them.

Many people in the world are really fools.
Because of the mud of what pleases the senses,
they have no idea where the bounds of birth and death are.

On account of the urges of the senses,
humans happily follow the road
to lives of misery (lower realms)
they bring sickness on themselves.

That's how the urges of the senses give us enemies,
they are burning and defiling,
the bait in the snare of the world

fetters, shackles to our actions.

The urges of the senses are maddening, enticing,
they trouble the mind, they are
a net laid out as a trap by Mara
to defile beings.

The urges of the senses are endless dangers,
they bring many kinds of suffering and are a great poison.
They give little satisfaction and instead bring grief,
they dry up the good opportunities that come.

On account of the urges of the senses,
I have ruined so much.
I will not go back to that again,
now I will always take my delight in nirvana.

Longing to become cool,
I did battle with the urges of the senses.
I will live diligent
while the shackles of those urges pass away.

I will go on that path
by which the great sages have reached nirvana.
It is griefless, faultless, full of peace, straight –
the noble eightfold path.

(Spoken by the Buddha to praise Subha:)

Look at Subha, the goldsmith's daughter,
she has become calm,
she meditates at the foot of a tree.

Today is the eighth day since she went forth, faithful,
she is beautiful because she has realised dharma,
taught by Uppalavanna, she knows
the Triple Knowledge
and she has left death behind.

Subha is a slave who has been freed,
she now has no debt.
A nun who knows how to know well,
free from everything that held her back.
She has done what needs to be done
and is free from the depravities that ooze from within.

(Those who compiled the text said:)
Indra, the lord of beings, used his powers
to come with a host of gods,
and he worshipped Subha, the goldsmith's daughter.

Sangha

I gave up my house
and set forth into homelessness.
I gave up my child, my cattle
and all that I loved.
I gave up desire and hate.
My ignorance was thrown out.
I pulled out craving along with its root.
Now I am quenched and still.

Patachara

Furrowing fields with ploughs,
sowing seeds in the ground,
taking care of wives and children,
young men find wealth.

So why have I not experienced freedom,
when I am virtuous and I do what the Teacher taught,
when I am not lazy and I am calm?

While washing my feet I made the water useful in another
way,
by concentrating on it moving from higher ground down.

Then I held back my mind,
as one would do with a thoroughbred horse,
and I took a lamp and went into the hut.

First I looked at the bed, then I sat on the couch,
I used a needle to pull out the lamp's wick.
Just as the lamp went out, my mind was free.

(Patachara's words to a group of nuns)
Young men find wealth
taking sticks and threshing grain,
taking care of wives and children.

Do what the Buddha taught,
there's nothing to be sorry for after doing it.
Quick, wash the feet, sit down off to one side.
Intent on calming the mind, do what the Buddha taught.

(Spoken by Patachara's students about themselves:)

They heard her words, what Patachara taught,
they washed their feet, sat down off to one side,
intent on calming the mind, they did what the Buddha
taught.

In the first watch of the night, they remembered their
previous lives,
in the middle watch, they cleansed the eye that sees the
invisible.

In the last watch of the night,
they split open the mass of mental darkness.

Standing up, they worshipped Patachara's feet,
and they said, "Your advice has been done,
We will live honouring you, like the thirty deities
honouring Indra, who is unconquered by others in battle.
We know the three things that most don't know,
nothing fouls our hearts."

Kisagotami

The Sage commended having good friends
for anyone anywhere in the universe.
By keeping company with good friends
even a fool becomes wise.

Keep company with good people,
wisdom increases for those who do.
By keeping company with good people
one is freed from every suffering.

One should know suffering,
the origin of suffering and its cessation,
the eightfold path.

Being a woman is suffering,
that has been shown by the Buddha,
the tamer of those to be tamed.

Sharing a husband with another wife
is suffering for some,
while for others, having a baby just once
is more than enough suffering.

Some women cut their throats,
others take poison,
some die in pregnancy
and then both mother and child experience miseries.

(Kisagotami herself tells the story of Patachara)

'About to deliver
while still on the way,
I found my husband dead
right there on the road.
I gave birth
before I reached home.'

The two sons of this wretched woman soon dead,
her husband dead too
right there on the road,
even while her mother, father and brother
were burned on one funeral pyre.

(Kisagotami continues about herself)

Wretched woman, your family is dead too,
suffering without end has been yours,
your tears have flowed
for thousands of births.

After living in the midst of a cemetery
the bodies of her sons now only something eaten,
family destroyed, despised by all, husband dead,
she reached what is without death.

I followed the noble eightfold path
that goes to that which is without death.
Nirvana is known at first hand,
I have seen myself in the mirror of the dharma.

Now I am someone
with depravities' darts cut out,
with burden laid down,
who has done what needs to be done.

The nun Kisagotami
her mind freed,
said this.

Sumedha

When I was Sumedha,
the daughter of King Konca of Mantavati and his chief
queen,
I was converted by those who live what the Buddha taught.

Through them, I became virtuous, eloquent, learned,
disciplined in the teaching of the Buddha,
and I came to my parents and said,
“May you both listen carefully.

“I delight in nirvana,
everything about life is uncertain
even if it is the life of a god,
why would I delight in things not worth desiring,
things with so little pleasure and so much annoyance.

“ Everything that the senses desire is bitter,
but fools swoon over such poisonous things
only to end up in hell for a long time,
there they suffer and in the end they are destroyed.

“Such fools cannot control what they do
with their body, speech or mind,
weeping wherever they are punished
for their own evil actions,
always increasing evil for themselves.

“They are fools, unwise, heedless,
locked up in their own suffering as it arises,

even when someone tries to teach them,
they are oblivious, not realizing
that they are living out the noble truths.

“Mother, most people cannot understand
these truths taught by the Buddha,
they take pleasure in everything about life
and they long to be born among gods.

“Even birth among gods is uncertain,
it is only birth in another place just as impermanent,
but somehow fools are not terrified
of being born again and again,

“There are four places of punishment
and two other ones where we are somehow reborn.
There is no going forth from hell
once you are there to be punished.

“Give me permission, both of you, to go forth now
in the teachings of the Buddha, the one with ten powers,
I do not have other responsibilities and I will exert myself
to make an end of birth and death.

“I am finished with delighting in just being alive,
I am finished too with the misfortune of having a body.
Give me permission and I will go forth
for the sake of ending the craving for existence.

“When Buddhas appear
bad luck can be avoided and good luck can be had;
for as long as I live, I will keep my moral precepts,

I will not defame the holy life.”

The Sumedha said to her mother and father,
“I will not eat any more food as a householder,
if I do not receive permission to go forth,
I will be in your home, but I might as well be dead.”

Her mother suffered and cried
and her father’s face was covered with tears,
they tried to reason with Sumedha
who had fallen to the palace floor.

“Get up, child, what are these tears for?
You are already promised in marriage,
you have been given to handsome King Anikadatta
who is in Varanavati.

“You will be the wife of King Anikadatta,
his chief queen, and remember, child,
keeping moral precepts, living the holy life,
going forth, all that is hard to do.

“In kingship, there is authority, wealth, power,
things to enjoy and happiness.
You are a young girl, enjoy the pleasures of the body
and enjoy wealth. Let your wedding take place, child.”

Sumedha answered them,
“It’s not like that at all, existence is worthless,
I will either go forth or I will die,
but I won’t get married.

“Why should I cling, like a worm,
to a body that will only turn into a corpse,
a sack always oozing, frightening, stinking
foul and putrid, filled with foul things?

“I certainly know what the body is like.
It is repulsive, a corpse, food for birds and worms,
covered with flesh and blood,
so why is it to be given in marriage?

“This body will soon be carried,
without consciousness, to the cemetery,
it will be discarded like a log
by disgusted relatives.

“After they have thrown it away as food for others,
even one’s own mother and father, disgusted, wash themselves
and it has to be even more disgusting for everyone.

“People cling to this body,
even though it has no essence,
and is only a tangle of bones and sinews,
a foul body filled with spit, tears, faeces, and urine.

“If one’s own mother were to open it up
and pull what is inside of it outside,
even she would not be able to stand the stench
and would be disgusted by it.

“If I consider carefully what makes a person,
the senses and their objects, the basic elements
that make up everything,” I see that all of it is constructed,

it is all rooted in birth and is the condition for suffering,
so why would I want to get married?

“Even if three hundred new swords were to cut my body
day after day for a hundred years,
it would be worth it
if it brought an end to suffering.

“Anyone would put this carnage to themselves
once they understood the instruction of the teacher,
samsara is long for those
who are born again and again
only to be killed again and again.

“There is no end
to the carnage that occurs in samsara,
among gods and humans,
among animals, asuras and hungry ghosts, and also in hell.

“There is so much carnage
for those who are in hells for punishment,
but even for gods there is no safe place.
There is nothing better than the happiness of nirvana.

“Those who have reached nirvana
are the ones who are disciplined
by the teaching of the one with ten powers
living at ease, they strive to end birth and death.

“Today, Father, I will go renounce,
what good are insubstantial pleasures?

I am fed up with what pleases the senses,
all of it is like vomit,
like a palm-tree with its top cut off.

While she was speaking in this way to her father,
Anikadatta, to whom she was promised in marriage,
arrived in the city of Varanavati at the time set for the
wedding.

Right at that moment, Sumedha cut her hair,
black, thick, and soft, with a knife,
she went inside the palace and closed herself inside it
and closed herself inside herself into the first jhana.

Anikadatta had reached the city
at the same time that she went into that happy state,
inside the palace, Sumedha developed
her perceptions of impermanence.

While she was focusing her attention on meditation,
Anikadatta entered the palace in a hurry,
his body even more beautiful with jewels and gold,
and he entreated Sumedha respectfully.

“In kingship, there is authority, wealth, power,
things to enjoy and happiness.
You are a young girl,
enjoy the pleasures of the body,
happiness for the body is rare in this world.

“The kingdom is bestowed on you,
enjoy what is meant to be enjoyed, and be generous,

do not be sad yourself, you are making your parents suffer.”

But Sumedha knew that the urges of the senses lead nowhere
and her delusions about the world were gone.
She began to speak, “You should not delight
in the pleasures of the senses, look at the dangers in them.

“Mandhata was a king of the known world,
no one had more wealth or pleasure than him,
but even he died unsatisfied,
his wants unfulfilled.

“Even if it were to rain every kind of jewel,
enough to fill the ten directions,
still there would be no satisfying the desires of the senses.
Humans always die unsatisfied.

“The pleasures of the senses are like a slaughterhouse,
they are like a snake’s head, they burn like a torch,
they give as much pleasure as a skeleton.

“The pleasures of the senses are impermanent
inconstant, they come with sufferings,
they are strong poisons, a hot iron ball down the throat,
they are the root of pain, and suffering is their fruit.

“The pleasures of the senses are like the fruits of a tree,
like pieces of meat, pain is what they are,
the pleasures of the senses deceive like a dream,
they are like borrowed goods.

“The pleasures of the senses are like swords and stakes,

like disease, like an abscess, painful and hurtful
they are like a pit of burning coals,
the root of pain, fearful and fatal.

The pleasures of the senses bring many sufferings,
those who know call them hindrances,
you should go,
I myself don't trust existence.

“What can another do for me
when his own head is on fire?
When old age and death are right behind one,
one must try to end them.”

At that point, Sumedha opened the door
and saw her mother and father, and also Anikadatta
all seated on the floor, crying,
and she said this to them:

“Samsara is long for fools
and for those who cry over and over
over the death of a father
or the killing of a brother or their own death.

“When you remember samsara
as it really is for beings,
remember the tears, the mothers' milk, the blood,
the mountain of bones of those born again and again.

“Think of the oceans when remembering the tears,
the mothers' milk, and the blood,
think of Mt. Vipula

when counting the bones that just one being has had.

“If the whole continent of Jambudvipa
were broken up into little balls
the size of small fruits,
the number of them would still be less
than the number of mothers and grandmothers you have
had.

“Think about all the grass, sticks, and leaves there are,
even if they were broken into smaller pieces
they would still be less than the fathers and grandfathers you
have had.

“Remember the blind turtle in the eastern sea
and the hole in the yoke floating in another ocean
remember how the turtle put his head through the yoke,
that is our chances of having a human birth.

“Remember the body, it has no essence inside,
a misfortune in itself, no more than a ball of foam,
look at what makes a person, it is all impermanent,
think of the hells filled with carnage.

“Remember all those who keep on filling cemeteries,
remember to fear becoming a 'crocodile'
remember the four noble truths.

“When you could taste sweet ambrosia,
why would you want to taste the five bitter things?
And the pleasures of the senses
are actually more bitter than the five bitter things.

“When the sweet ambrosia of the deathless exists,
why would you want the pleasures of the senses that are
painful?
All the delights of the senses burn, are rotten,
troubled, and are seething.

“When friends exist,
why would you want the pleasures of the senses
that are only so many enemies?
They are like kings, thieves, floods, and disliked people
in how harmful they are to you.

“When freedom exists, why would anyone want
imprisonment and execution?
In the pleasures of the sense, people experience
the sufferings of bondage and beatings against their will.

“A bundle of grass, when set on fire,
burns the one who holds it and does not let go,
the pleasures of the senses are like torches
that will not let go of anyone who held them.

“Why abandon a big happiness
because of the little happiness that the urges of the senses
promise?
Do not suffer later like the puthulomafish
who swallows the hook just to eat the bait.

“When among those things that please the senses,
control what the senses urge, just as a dog is held by a chain,
otherwise the urges of the senses will kick you about

like a low-caste person does to a dog.

“If you get yoked to the pleasures of the senses,
you will experience no end of suffering,
so many sadnesses of the mind,
so give up such unreliable pleasures.

“When there can be no aging,
why would anyone want the pleasures of the senses,
since aging itself is in their midst,
just as sickness and death always come together with birth?

“This is something that has no old age, it has no death,
this is the sorrow-less state,
without old age and death,
without enmity, without crowding,
without failure, without fear, without trouble.

“This state without death has been attained by many,
it should be attained today by us,
the one who applies himself easily can,
but it is not possible for one who does not strive.”

As Sumedha spoke, she took no delight
in the constructed appearances of the world,
but finally to convince Anikadatta,
she threw the hair she had cut off on the floor.

Anikadatta stood up and joined his hands respectfully,
he asked her father to allow Sumedha to go forth
so she could see nirvana and the four noble truths.

Allowed to go by her mother and father,
she went forth, frightened as she was by the sorrows that
otherwise had to come
and she realized the six higher powers and the highest fruit
while she was still being trained.

The attainment of nirvana for that king's daughter
was marvellous and unusual
but equally so was what she said about her previous
existences:

“When the Lord Buddha Konagamana was
in a new residence in a monastery,
I was one of three woman friends
who gave a vihara to him

“As a result of that, we were born among gods
ten times, one hundred times,
one thousand times, ten thousand times,
who can say how many times
we were born among humans just from that gift.

“When we were born among gods, we had great powers,
and it was the same when we were born among humans,
I was even the chief queen, the gem of a woman,
for a king who was a lord of the whole world.

“That gift was the root cause for my sense of peace
in the teachings of the Buddha,
that first encounter with that previous Buddha
led to nirvana for me who delighted in his dharma.

“Those who trust the teaching
of the one who has perfect wisdom
and do what he teaches,
they become disgusted with existence,
and turning away from it,
they set themselves free.”

Dhammadinna

She who has given rise to the wish for freedom
and is set on it, shall be clear in mind.
One whose heart is not caught in the pleasures of the senses,
one who is bound upstream, will be freed.

Khema

(Spoken by Mara to Khema)

You are young and beautiful and so am I,
come, Khema, let's enjoy each other, make music together.

Khema replied:

This foul body, sick, so easily broken,
vexes and shames me.
My craving for sex has been rooted out.

The pleasures of sex are like swords and stakes.
The body, senses and the mind
Just the chopping block on which they cut.
what you call the delights of sexual pleasure

are no delights for me now.

What you take as pleasure are not for me,
the mass of mental darkness is split open.
Know this, evil one, you are defeated, you are finished.
You honour the stars,
look to them for guidance.
You tend the fire in the forest.
Fools, you thought all that could be relied on,
while all the while not knowing what really is.

But I honour the Buddha, best of all men,
By doing what the Buddha taught
I am freed from all sufferings.

Subha of the Jivakamba Grove

As the nun Subha entered the beautiful Jivakamba Grove, a rake grabbed her and Subha said this to him:

Subha:

Friend, it is not right for a man
to touch a woman who has gone forth,
why do you keep me from my way?

I am in a pure state, without blemish,
it is the disciple taught by the Sugata
my teacher's instruction,
instruction that I revere,
why do you keep me from my way?

Your mind is disturbed, mine is not,
you are impure, I am not,
my mind is free wherever I am.
Why do you keep me from my way?

The rake:

You are young and innocent,
how can going forth be right for you?
Come on, get rid of that yellow robe.
let's enjoy each other in this forest,
its flowers all in bloom.

The air is sweet,
the trees are erect, their pollen is everywhere,
come on, the beginning of spring is the season for happiness,
let's enjoy each other in this forest,
its flowers all in bloom.

The trees are covered in flowers
like body-hairs standing on end,
they seem to moan in pleasure when the breeze blows,
what delights of love will there be for you
if you go into the forest all by yourself?

You want to go into the vast forest without a girlfriend,
it is frightening and lonely,
filled with herds of wild beasts,
it echoes with the choruses of female elephants excited by a male.

You will stand out , wandering about in the forest,
like a doll of gleaming gold
or like a beautiful nymph in Chittaratha.

What should I call you, when nothing compares to you,
you are exquisite, so lovely in those good clothes
and with your fine Kasi shawl.

I would be at your command
if we were to live together in the forest,
no one is more dear to me than you,
lady with the bashful eyes of a kinnari.

If you do what I suggest, you will be happy.
Come, make a home with me,
you will live in the safety of a palace
let women wait on you.

Wrap yourself in these Kasi shawls,
put on some make-up and perfume,
while I get all sorts of adornments,
gold, gems, and pearls, for you.

Climb into this new bed, it's so luxurious,
it's sweet-smelling from sandalwood,
beautiful, it has spreads, throws and covers,
and above it is a pure-white canopy.

Or, holy one, would you rather go to old age
with your body untouched,
like a blue lotus that rises from the water
but is untouched by human hands?

Subha:

You really are out of your mind.
What is it that you see

when you look at this body,
filled as it is with things that have already died,
destined as it is to fall apart only to fill a cemetery?

The rake:

I see your eyes! They are like the eyes of a fawn,
they are like the eyes of a kinnari in a mountain cave.
Seeing your eyes only increases my delight
in getting ready to make love to you.

Those eyes! Seeing them
like blue lotus buds on your golden face
only increases my desire
in getting ready to make love to you.

Even after you have gone far away,
I will remember you and your eyes,
your long eyelashes, your pure gaze,
lady with the bashful eyes of a kinnari,
there is nothing better than your eyes.

Subha:

You lust after a daughter of the Buddha.
You must want to go where no one else has gone,
want the moon as a toy,
and want to jump over Mt. Meru too.

In this world with its gods
there is nothing that I desire;
If something I would desire exist,
I do not know what it is,
whatever it may be, the path of my teacher

has destroyed the urge for it down to the root.

I do not see that there could be anything worth desiring,
the path has destroyed the urge for things down to the root;
if something does exist that I might feel an urge for,
the urge for it is like an ember that jumps from a fire pit only
to go out,
like a bowl of poison that evaporates untouched.

There may be people who have not thought things through,
maybe there are others who have not seen the teacher,
you should lust after one of them,
but to try to seduce someone who knows and you will suffer.

My mindfulness stands firm
in the middle of scolding and praising,
happiness and suffering,
knowing that what is constructed is foul,
my mind does not get stuck anywhere.

I am a disciple of the Sugata,
traveling in the vehicle that can only go on the eightfold path.
The dart is pulled out,
the depravities that ooze out from within are wasted away,
I am happy that I have gone to a deserted place.

I have seen painted dolls and puppets dancing about,
held up and held together by sticks and strings.

When the sticks and strings are cut,
let go of, thrown away, and scattered,
broken into bits that can't be seen –

what would you fix your mind on there?

My body parts are like that,
they don't exist without smaller bits,
and the body itself doesn't exist without those parts –
what would you fix your mind on there?

You saw some figures painted on a wall,
coloured with yellow that makes their bodies seem lifelike,
but what you saw is the opposite of what you think,
you thought you saw humans when none are there.

Blind one, you run after things that are not there,
things that are like a magician's illusion
or a tree of gold seen in a dream.

Eyes are just little balls in various shapes.
With its tears, an eye is a bubble of water between the
eyelids,
like a little ball of lac in the hollow of a tree,
and milky mucus comes out of it.

Spoken by those who compiled the Scriptures:

Then the one who was so pleasing to look at,
her mind unattached and with no regard for her eyes,
gouged it out and gave it to that man, saying,
“Here, take the eye, it's yours.”

His sexual passion ended right there forever
and he begged her forgiveness saying,
“Holy one, be whole again, this won't happen again.

“Wronging a person is like embracing fire,
it’s as if I handled a poisonous snake,
be whole again, forgive me.”

That nun who was freed went to where the Buddha was,
and when she saw the beautiful signs of his excellence on his
body,
her eye became as it was before.

Bhadda Kapilani

Kassapa is the Buddha’s son and heir,
well-settled in heart.
He knows his previous lives,
he sees heaven and hell.

He has ended rebirth, perfected higher knowledge,
he is a sage, he has become a real Brahman
because he possesses the three knowledges.

In this same way, Bhadda Kapilani
possesses the three knowledges,
she has left death behind.
She bears this body, knowing it is her last.

Once we were husband and wife,
but seeing the danger in the world, we both went forth.
We removed our defiling compulsions,
we became cool, free.

Chapa

*(Repeating at the time of her enlightenment a dialogue with her
husband:)*

Husband:

In the past
wasn’t it me who carried the ascetic’s staff?
Now I am a deer-hunter,
unable to get out of this foul mud
and reach the other shore
because of desire.

Confident that I would remain infatuated,
my wife gave all her attention to our son, to make him happy.
But once I cut my tie to her
I will renounce again.

Chapa:

Please don’t be angry with me, big man.
Great sage, don’t get mad.
There is no purity of mind
for one overcome with anger.
From where will self-control come?

Husband:

I will leave Nala.
Who can live here in Nala?
Virtuous ascetics get trapped
by the physical beauties of women.

Chapa:

Come here, good-looking, just stay,
enjoy whatever you want
like you used to do with me.
I will be at your command,
and so will my relatives.

Husband:

Chapa, if there were only one-quarter
of what you just said
that would be more than enough
for any man in love with you.

Chapa:

If you go, leaving me behind,
who will physically enjoy this body of mine
adorned with sandalwood,
covered with the best cloths from Kasi.

Husband:

You want to catch me,
like the fowler with his snare for birds.
You will not trap me
with your fetching body.

Chapa:

And what about this child,
born because of you?
Who are you leaving
when you leave me,
the one who has this child?

Husband:

Those who are wise

leave behind children,
relatives and wealth.
Great ascetics renounce the world
like an elephant breaking its tether.

Chapa:

I shall knock this son of yours
flat to the ground,
use a stick or knife on him,
and then from grief for the child
you won't go.

Husband:

Even if you give that child
to jackals or dogs,
you will not make me turn around,
you wretched baby-maker.

Chapa:

Good luck to you then good-looking,
but where will you go,
to what village or town,
to what city or capital?

Husband:

Once I was a leader of others,
all proud that we were ascetics
even when we really weren't.
We went from town to town,
to cities and the capital.

The Lord, the Buddha, is near

right by the Neranjara River,
where he is teaching the dharma
that leads to the ending of all suffering
for all beings.

I will go to where he is
and he will be my teacher.
You too should speak praise
about the supreme lord of the world.

And you too should honour him by circling around him,
and give him the gift that he is due.
This is what is possible for us –
say it is so, for both you and me.

Chapa:

I too shall speak praise
about the supreme lord of the world,
and having honoured him by circumambulating,
I will give him the gift that is due.

Those who compiled the Scriptures said:
And so her handsome husband left
for the Neranjara River,
where he saw the Buddha teaching
about the deathless place that is sweet as nectar.

About suffering and its arising,
about the overcoming of suffering,
and the noble eightfold path
that ends with suffering ended.

Having worshipped his feet
and circumambulated,
he dedicated the merit to Chapa
and went forth to the homeless state....

Ambapali

The hairs on my head were once curly,
black like the colour of bees.
Now that I am old
it is like the hemp of trees.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

The hair on my head was once scented
like a perfumed box filled with flowers.
Now because of old age
it smells like rabbit fur.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

It was beautiful, held up in bunches by pins
like a thick and well-planted forest grove.
Now because of old age
it is sparse and thin.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

My head was beautiful, decorated with braids,
adorned with gold amidst the masses of black.
Now because of old age
It has become bald.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once my eyebrows were beautiful
like the contour lines drawn by a good artist.
Now because of old age
they are bent out of shape by wrinkles.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

My eyes were black and innocent
like jewels that are beautiful and brilliant.
Now struck by old age, they do not shine.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

When I was young, my nose was beautiful,
it was delicate, high, and was perfect for my face.
Now because of old age
it is like a trip of wet leather.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

My earlobes were beautiful
like well-crafted bracelets, finished to perfection.
Now because of old age
they are bent out of shape by wrinkles.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once my teeth were beautiful,
they looked like plantain buds.
Now because of old age
they are broken and yellow.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once I could sing sweetly
like a cuckoo moving in a dense forest.
Now because of old age

at times my voice cracks.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once my neck was beautiful
like a polished and smooth conch shell.
Now because of old age
it is bent and misshapen.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once my arms were beautiful
like the round iron crossbars for holding doors shut.
Now because of old age
they are grey like the bark of the patali tree.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once my hands were both beautiful
decorated with smooth rings made of gold.
Now because of old age,
they are like tree-roots and root-vegetables.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once my breasts were beautiful,
full, round, close together, high.
Now they sag down
like empty water-bags made of leather.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once my body was beautiful,
like a polished slab of gold.
Now it is covered
with very fine wrinkles.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once my thighs were beautiful
like the trunk of an elephant.
Now because of old age
they are like bamboo sticks.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once my calves were beautiful
decorated with smooth anklets made of gold.
Now because of old age,
they are like sesame switches.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Once my feet were beautiful,
so soft they seemed filled with cotton.
Now because of old age
they are wrinkled, callused and cracked.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

This body was once like that,
now feeble with age and fallen from its pride.
It is the home of many sufferings,
like an old house, the plaster falling down.
This is the teaching of one who speaks the truth.

Vimala

Intoxicated by my good looks,
by my body, my beauty and my reputation.
Haughty because of my youth,
I looked down on other women.

I decorated this body -
decked out it made fools mutter.
A prostitute at the door,
like a hunter spreading out the snare.

I flashed my ornaments
as if I was showing my hidden parts.
I created illusion for people,
all the while sneering at them.

Today I collected alms,
head shaved, covered with outer robe,
now seated at the foot of the tree.
What I get has nothing to do with schemes.

All ties are cut, whether human or divine.
I have thrown away all that fouls the heart.
I have become cool, free.

Anopama

I was born in a good family
with great wealth and many possessions.
Good looking, I was Megha's very own daughter.
I lived up to my name 'without compare'.

I was sought after by princes,
coveted by sons of millionaires,
until one sent my father a message:
"Give me Anopama.

“I will give eight what your daughter Anopama weighs in gold and silver as bride price.”

I saw the Buddha, supreme in the world, unsurpassed.
I worshipped his feet, then I came near on one side.

Gautama taught me the dharma out of kindness toward me,
and sitting there, I became one who would not return again.

I cut my hair and went forth to homelessness.
Today is the seventh night since craving was destroyed for me.

Isidasi

Spoken by those who compiled the Scriptures:

In Pataliputta, the city named after a flower
and which is in the finest part of the earth,
there were two nuns, each with excellent qualities,
each from good families in the Sakya clan.

Isidasi was one and the nun Bodhi was the other,
each virtuous and learned,
they delighted in meditation and study,
all defiling compulsions destroyed.

After they ate their alms and washed their bowls,
while sitting happily in a secluded place,
they sang out these important words.

Spoken by Bodhi:

You are so lovely, lady Isidasi, none of your youth is lost,
what did you see that was so wrong
that it made you intent on renunciation?

Spoken by those who compiled the Scriptures:

When in that secluded place she was called to account,
Isidasi, who was skilled as a preacher, said,
“Listen, Bodhi, to how I went forth.”

Isidasi:

My father was an eminent man of wealth in Ujjeni,
he was virtuous too.
I was his only daughter, dear to him,
a pleasure to him, the focus of his kindness.

Then suitors came from Saketa to ask for me,
all from a noble family,
among them was another eminent man of great wealth.
Father gave me as a daughter-in-law to him.

I waited on my mother-in-law and my father-in-law,
morning and night, I placed my head on their feet,
I honoured them just as I had been taught.

I would get flustered if I saw
the sisters of my husband,
his brothers, or his servants,
even if I saw my husband himself,
and I would give up my seat.

I tried to please them with all sorts of food and drinks,
I brought in whatever delicacy was available

and gave each whatever was preferred.

Up and about at an early hour,
I would come to the house and pause at the door,
after washing my hands and feet
I would come to my husband with my hands folded.

I brought a comb and an ornament,
a box of eye ointment, and a mirror,
and I groomed my own husband well,
as a servant would.

I cooked rice in milk for him, then washed his bowl myself,
I looked after my husband, like a mother would for her only
son.

My husband only did me wrong,
while I was virtuous, not lazy and submissive,
he only humiliated me when I waited on him lovingly.

He would say to his mother and father,
“ I want to leave, I don't need your permission to go,
I will not live with Isidasi,
I don't want to live in the same house as her.”

“Don't speak like that, son,
Isidasi is wise and beautiful,
she gets up early and is not lazy,
what don't you like, son?”

“It's not that she hurts me, it's just that I can't stand her,
I hate her and I have had enough,

I want to leave, I don't need your permission to go.”

After they heard that, my parents-in-law asked me,
“What have you been up to?
Open up, tell what really happened.”

“I didn't do anything wrong, I never hurt him,
I never even said an untoward word,
what should I do when my husband hates me so much?”

They took me back to my father's house unhappily,
not understanding what had happened, they said,
“While watching over our son, we lost Lakshmi incarnate”

Then Father gave me to a rich man from a second family.
That eminent man of wealth got me but with only half the
dowry.

I lived in his house for just a month,
virtuous, innocent, attending to his wants,
but he treated me more like a slave than a wife.

My father then spoke to an ascetic wandering for alms,
a man who had tamed himself and could tame others.
“Be my daughter's husband in my house,
throw away the rags you are wearing and your bowls.”

He lived with us for two weeks before he said to Father,
“Give me back the rags and the bowl, I will wander for alms
again.”

Father said to him, and then my mother and all my relatives,

“What hasn’t been done for you? Just say it and she will do it.”

He replied, “Whatever I can do for myself is enough for me, I don’t want to live in the same house as Isidasi.”

No one stopped him when he went off and I was left alone, I thought, “Either I sneak off to die or I will go forth.”

The Jinadatta, wandering for food, came to Father’s house, it was obvious that she was disciplined, learned and virtuous.

As soon as I saw her, I got up from my seat and gave it to her;
when she had sat, I bowed to her feet and gave her food.

I tried to please her with all sorts of foods and drinks,
I brought in whatever delicacy was available,
and then I said, “Madam, I wish to go forth.”

Father immediately said to me, “Child, you can practice the Buddha’s teaching here at home, be satisfied with giving food and drink to ascetics and the twice-born.”

I started to cry and showing my respect with my hands joined together,
I said to Father, “I have done evil
and I must destroy that karma.”

Father relented and said, “May you attain awakening, the highest dhamma and freedom as well,
may you attain everything that has the best of humans

experience.”

I honored my parents and then all of my relatives,
I went forth and seven days later
I knew the three things that most don’t know.

I know my last seven births and what caused
all that has happened to me in this life,
I will tell that to you, listen carefully to it.

I was once a wealthy goldsmith in Erakaccha city,
but my youth made my head spin,
and I had sex with the wife of another.

When I died, I cooked in hell for a long time,
and then rising from there, I entered the womb of a monkey.

A great monkey, the leader of the troop,
castrated me when I was seven days old,
this was the karmic fruit for adultery.

It was in the Sindhava forest where I died,
and then I entered the womb of a one-eyed, lame goat.

As a goat, I was castrated,
and I was always afflicted by vermin,
children rode me for twelve years,
all for my adultery.

After my death as a goat, I was given birth by a cow
belonging to a cattle-trader, a calf with the red color of lac,
I was castrated when I was twelve months old.

I had to draw carts, plows, and wagons,
I was blind, always afflicted, and unhealthy, all for my
adultery.

After my death as a bullock, I was born on the street,
in the household of a slave,
I was neither male or female,
I was the third sex, all for my adultery.

I died when I was thirty and was reborn a carter's daughter,
in a family that was miserable and poor, always
under attack from many creditors.

When the interest that was owed had accumulated and was
large,
a caravan-leader took me from the house by force,
and dragged me away crying.

His son Giridasa noticed that I had reached puberty
in my sixteenth year and he claimed me as his own.

He already had another wife,
someone virtuous, of good qualities, with a good reputation,
she loved her husband, but I made her hate me.

So it was all the fruit of my karma,
when they all threw me away and left,
even when I waited on them like a slave,
but now I have put an end to all that.

Dhamma

Wandering about for alms,
but weak, leaning on a stick with limbs shaking,
I fell to the ground right there,
and seeing the danger [misery] in the body,
my heart was freed.

Translated by Charles Hallisey
Therigatha: Poems of the First Buddhist Women
Murty Classical Library of India

