Thi Ap 18 — 18. Khemā

English translation by Jonathan S. Walters.

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Text

Therīpadāna

The Legends of the Therīs

18. Khemā

Walt 416 The Victor, Padumuttara,

the One with Eyes for everything,

the Leader of the World, arose

a hundred thousand aeons hence. Verse 1

Walt 417 I was born in Haṁsavatī,

in a clan of millionaires then,

glistening with various gems,

endowed with supreme happiness. Verse 2

Walt 418 Having approached that Great Hero,

I heard him preaching his Dhamma.

Afterward, becoming pleased, I

approached the Victor for refuge. Verse 3

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

Walt 420 At the end of those seven days,
the Charioteer of Men placed
a great nun in the foremost place
among those who have great wisdom. Verse 5

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

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

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

Walt 424 Worthy heir to that one’s Dhamma,
Dhamma’s legitimate offspring,
you’ll be she whose name is Khemā,
and will attain that foremost place.” Verse 9

Walt 425 Due to that karma done very well,
with intention and firm resolve,
discarding my human body,
I went to Tāvatiṁsa then. Verse 10

Walt 426 Fallen thence, I went to Yāma,
and then I went to Tusita,
and then to Nimmānarati,
and then Vāsavatti City. Verse 11

Walt 427 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. Verse 12

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

Walt 429 Having experienced success,
among gods as well as humans,
becoming happy everywhere,
I transmigrated for aeons. Verse 14

Walt 430 Then ninety-one aeons ago,
the World-Leader named Vipassi
arose, the One with Lovely Eyes,
with Insight into Everything. Verse 15

Walt 431 I went up to that World-Leader,
the Charioteer Among Men.
Hearing his exalted Teaching,
I went forth into homelessness. Verse 16

Walt 432 After living the holy life
during fully ten thousand years,
in that Wise One’s dispensation,
bent on effort, very learned, Verse 17

Walt 433 skillful in the heaps of causes,
expert in the Four Noble Truths,
clever, varied speaker, I was
one who’s done what the Teacher taught. Verse 18

Walt 434 Fallen thence I was reborn in
Tusita, with fame and splendor.
I surpassed the other gods there,
as the fruit of the holy life. Verse 19

Walt 435 In whichever place I’m reborn,
I’m very rich and prosperous,
intelligent and beautiful,
and my retinue is well-trained. Verse 20

Walt 436 Due to my karma, through effort
in the Victor’s dispensation,
I enjoy every attainment,
obtained with ease, pleasing the mind. Verse 21

Walt 437 Through the fruit of my good conduct,
nobody treats me with contempt,
even he who was my husband
in whichever place I’m reborn. Verse 22

Walt 438 In this present lucky aeon
Brahmā’s Kinsman, Greatly Famed One,
whose name was Koṇāgamana,
Best Debater, Buddha, arose. Verse 23

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

Walt 440 We lay-donors gave a thousand
to the Sage, and a hermitage
for the Assembly, donating
that place to Him with Assembly. Verse 25

Walt 441 Fallen thence, all we three women
were reborn in Tāvatiṁsa
where we attained the foremost fame,
and just the same among people. Verse 26

Walt 442 In this present lucky aeon,
Brahma's Kinsman, Greatly Famed One,
the Buddha known as Kassapa
was born, the Best of Debaters. Verse 27

Walt 443 The attendant of the Great Sage
was the ruler of men back then,
the king of Kāsi, named Kiki,
in Benares, greatest city. Verse 28

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

Walt 445-446 Our father did not permit it;
we stayed at home during that time,
comfortable 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. Verse 30-31

Walt 447 Samaṇī, and Samaṇaguttā,
Bhikkhunī, Bhikkhadāyikā,
Dhammā, and also Sudhammā,
and seventh Saṅghadāyikā, Verse 32

Walt 448 now I, and Uppalavaṇṇā,
Paṭācārā and Kuṇḍalā,
Kisāgotamī, Dhammadinnā,
and Visākhā is the seventh. Verse 33

Walt 449 Once when the Sun Among People
was preaching the marvelous Truth,
having heard it, I memorized
Mahānidānasuttanta. Verse 34

Walt 450 Due to those karmas done very well,
with intention and firm resolve,
discarding my human body,
I went to Tāvatiṁsa then. Verse 35

Walt 451 And now, in my final rebirth,
in Sāgalā, best of cities,
I am the Madda king’s daughter,
well-liked, held dear and beloved. Verse 36

Walt 452 All was peaceful in that city
when I was coming into birth.
After that, due to that virtue,
they gave the name “Khemā” to me. Verse 37

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

Walt 454 I was his best-beloved queen,
taking great pride in my beauty.
Thinking, “He speaks ill of beauty,”
I dodged the Compassionate One. Verse 39

Walt 455 At that time, King Bimbisāra,
with knowledge and great love for me,
after praising the Bamboo Grove,
brought singers to praise it for me: Verse 40

Walt 456 “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.’ Verse 41

Walt 457 But one who’s seen the Bamboo Grove,
the ‘Joy’ that’s enjoyed by people,
that one’s seen the garden named ‘Joy,’
much enjoyed by the king of gods. Verse 42

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

Walt 459 What speaker can fully exclaim
its accumulated virtue,
produced by the merit of kings,
beautified by Buddha’s merit?” Verse 44

Walt 460 Hearing of its magnificence
which was delightful to my ears,
desiring to see that garden,
I then announced this to the king. Verse 45

Walt 461 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. Verse 46

Walt 462 “Go and look at the great riches
of that grove, pleasing to the eyes;
it always glows with radiance,
colored by the Buddha’s aura.” Verse 47

Walt 463 And when the Sage, out begging alms,
had entered Rajgir, best city,
at that very time I went out,
desiring to look at that grove. Verse 48

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

Walt 465 free of excess noise, uncluttered,
embellished with varied walkways,
with scattered huts and pavilions,
resplendent with diverse yogis. Verse 50

Walt 466 Wandering about there, I thought,
“my eyes are now proving their worth.”
Having seen in that very place
a youthful monk, I thought of him: Verse 51

Walt 467 “Staying in a delightful grove
like this, in early youth as though
it is the springtime, well-endowed
with a body which is pleasing, Verse 52

Walt 468 bald-headed, wrapped in saffron robes,
seated at the foot of a tree
he meditates, a Buddhist monk,
discarding sensual delight. Verse 53

Walt 469 Shouldn’t this auspicious Teaching
be practiced by old folks, after
they have lived the domestic life,
enjoying pleasure as they like?” Verse 54

Walt 470 Discerning that it was empty,
I approached the perfumed house, the
Victor’s home, but spied the Victor,
like the sun when it is rising, Verse 55

Walt 471 sitting happily by himself,
being fanned by a fine woman.
Seeing that scene, I thought like this:
“isn’t this Bull of Men wretched? Verse 56

Walt 472 The woman though, shining like gold,
eyes and face like pink lotuses,
with red lips, looking like jasmine,
pleasing to the mind and the eyes, Verse 57

Walt 473 with ears that are like golden swings,
firm breasts that look like water-jugs,
thin-waisted, a shapely behind,
fine thighs with charming ornaments, Verse 58

Walt 474 dressed in clothing of fine blue silk,
furnished with a border of red,
with unsatisfiable looks,
she has a smiling demeanor.” Verse 59

Walt 475 After seeing her, I thought this:
“Wow! This is a super-beauty!
Not ever in the past was seen
by my own eye such a beauty!” Verse 60

Walt 476 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, Verse 61

Walt 477 ears shriveled up, eyes formed cataracts,
breasts sagged and became repulsive;
wrinkles spread on all of her parts,
and veins popped out on that body, Verse 62

Walt 478 crooked-limbed, leaning on a cane,
jutting-ribbed, emaciated,
trembling, fallen onto the ground,
gasping for every breath she took. Verse 63

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

Walt 480 Then the Great Compassionate One,
discerning that my mind was moved,
happy, with a heart that was thrilled,
he spoke to me in these verses: Verse 65

Walt 481 “Khemā, see this complex heap as
diseased, disgusting and putrid.
It is oozing and it’s dripping,
the delight of foolish people. Verse 66

Walt 482 With one-pointed focus, steadfast,

fix your mind on impurity.

Remain mindful of the body;

be intent on disenchantment. Verse 67

Walt 483 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. Verse 68

Walt 484 Cultivate emancipation

and abandon latent conceit.

Then, through understanding conceit,

you'll wander in tranquility. Verse 69

Walt 485 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." Verse 70-71

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Walt 486 Then the Charioteer of Men,

knowing my mental readiness,

in order to instruct me preached

Mahānidānasuttanta. Verse 72

Walt 487 Hearing that best suttanta, I

recalled my former memory.

Just standing there I was at peace;

I purified my "Dhamma eye". Verse 73

Walt 488 Immediately falling down

before the feet of the Great Sage,

I spoke these words at that moment,
to confess offenses to him. Verse 74

Walt 489 “Praise to you, O Seer of All!
Praise to you, Home of Compassion!
Praise to you, Existence-Crosser!
Praise to you, Path to Deathlessness! Verse 75

Walt 490 Plunged into the thicket of views,
I was doped by passionate lust.
I now delight in discipline,
disciplined by your righteous trick. Verse 76

Walt 491 Without enjoyment because they
do not see Great Sages like you,
beings in the sea of being,
are undergoing much dis-ease. Verse 77

Walt 492 Though close I did not go to see
the World’s-Help, Non-Hostility,
the One who Made an End to Death;
I am confessing that offense. Verse 78

Walt 493 Beauty-obsessed, I did not go
to the Goodness-Giver, Great Friend,
suspecting he’d be unfriendly;
I am confessing that offense.” Verse 79

Walt 494 And then the One with Honeyed Speech,
the Great Compassionate Victor
sprinkling me with ambrosia said,
“Khemā, you should stay here with us.” Verse 80

Walt 495 Then after bowing down my head,
having circumambulated,

having gone, having seen the king,
I spoke these words to him just then. Verse 81

Walt 496 “O conqueror of enemies,
the righteous trick that you thought up!
Wishing to see the grove, I saw
the Sage, the One Free of Craving. Verse 82

Walt 497 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.” Verse 83

Walt 498 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!” Verse 84

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

Walt 500 fed up with all conditioned things,
skillful in the heaps of causes,
passing over the four-fold flood,
I attained my arahantship. Verse 86

Walt 501 I’d mastered the superpower
called the “divine ear” element.
I also was a master of
the knowledge stored in others’ hearts. Verse 87

Walt 502 I remember my former lives;
my “divine eye” is purified.

All the defilements are destroyed;
I will not be reborn again. Verse 88

Walt 503 In the Buddha's dispensation,
I have purified my knowledge
of meaning and of the Teaching,
etymology and preaching. Verse 89

Walt 504 Skilled in the purifications,
confident in Kathāvatthu,
and in the dispensation I've
mastered Abhidhammic method. Verse 90

Walt 505 Then, being asked subtle questions
in Toraṇavatthu, by the
queen, wife of the Kosala king,
I explained according to truth. Verse 91

Walt 506 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. Verse 92

Walt 507 The Victor, thrilled at that virtue,
then placed me in the foremost place;
the Ultimate Man then dubbed me
"chief of the nuns with great wisdom." Verse 93

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

Walt 509 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! Verse 95

Walt 510 The four analytical modes,

and these eight deliverances,

six special knowledges mastered,

I have done what the Buddha taught! Verse 96

Thus indeed Bhikkhunī Khemā spoke these verses.

The legend of Khemā Therī is finished.

Translated by Jonathan S. Walters.

Whitman College, 2017

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