Thig 6.1 — Pañcasata Patacara: The Soothing of Grief

English translation by Andrew Olendzki.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved; source ellipsis or repetition-omission statement retained. Canonical repetitions were not reconstructed.

Text

Translator's note

This tender poem of loss and recovery was (probably) composed by Patacara, one of the leading women of the Buddha's order of nuns. Born the daughter of a wealthy banker, Patacara fell in love with one of her father's servants and ran off to live happily with him in a forest hamlet. Then, through a series of tragic accidents, she lost first her husband, then two sons, and finally her parents and brother.

Wandering destitute, naked and mad with grief, she in time met the Buddha face to face, who showed her kindness when others would scorn her. She heard his teaching, joined the order of nuns, and went on to become one of the arahants, or worthy ones. Patacara helped many other women who were overcome by grief regain their sanity and quench the pain of their loss.

The meter of the verse is based on eight syllables per line, and there is an interesting wordplay in the fourth stanza. The latter part of the phrase "As he has come, so has he gone" corresponds to the word Tathagata — a favorite epithet of the Buddha.

"My son!" you weep, for one whose path You do not really comprehend —Whether he's coming or going. From where has that son of yours come? And yet for one whose path you know... For him you do not grieve at all — Whether he's coming or going. Such is the nature of creatures. Uninvited, he came from there; Unpermitted, he's gone from here. And having come from who knows where, He lived for but a few short days. But though gone from here by one (path), He goes from there by another. Departed, with a human form, He will go flowing on and on. As he has come, so has he gone. What is there here to grieve about? My thorn, indeed, has been removed! Buried in the heart, so hard to see. That grief which had overcome me — Grief for my son — has been dispelled. Today the thorn has been removed. Without hunger, I've become quenched. To Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, I go to the sage for refuge.