Thig 6.6 — Maha Pajapati (Gotami) Theri: A Mother's Blessing

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: UNKNOWN. Entire protected source unit, including notes and verses, preserved; canonical completeness has not been independently established.

Text

Translator's note

The woman who is said to have composed this poem was Pajapati, the Buddha's stepmother and a Queen of the Sakyas. Her younger sister was Maya, married to King Suddhodana only after Pajapati herself was unable to conceive an heir. Queen Maya died in childbirth, and it was Pajapati who raised Gotama as her own son. After his enlightenment, Pajapati also left the palace and became the first of the bhikkhunis, the order of nuns.

The third stanza suggests that her attainments included the recollection of past lives, by which she was able to verify empirically the truth of continual rebirth —the "flowing on" (samsara) from one life to another. This process, as she mentions in her poem, is fueled by craving and by "not understanding." In the second and fourth stanzas Pajapati declares her attainment of nibbana, of final and complete liberation in this very life.

It is remarkable to think that when Maya is remembered in the last stanza, the author has in mind not the icon of motherhood and sacrifice that Maya became in the Buddhist tradition, but a dearly-loved younger sister who died tragically young —without ever seeing what her son had become.

Buddha! Hero! Praise be to you! You foremost among all beings! You who have released me from pain, And so many other beings too. All suffering has been understood. The source of craving has withered. Cessation has been touched by me On the noble eight-fold path. I've been mother and son before; And father, brother — grandmother too. Not understanding what was real, I flowed-on without finding [peace]. But now I've seen the Blessed One! This is my last compounded form. The on-flowing of birth has expired. There's no more re-becoming now. See the gathering of followers: Putting forth effort, self controlled, Always with strong resolution —This is how to honor the Buddhas! Surely for the good of so many Did Maya give birth to Gotama, Who bursts asunder the mass of pain Of those stricken by sickness and death.