

Yasodharā

Copyright © 2018 Jonathan S. Walters.

PUBLISHED BY JONATHAN S. WALTERS AND WHITMAN COLLEGE

<http://www.apadanatranslation.org>

Licensed under the Attribution, Non-Commercial, Share Alike (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).

Printed December 2018

[28. Yasodharā]

At one time the Leader of Men
was staying in a mountain cave
in the city, Rajagaha,
[which was] lovely and prosperous. [952]¹

This is what was reasoned out [then]
by the nun [named] Yasodharā,
who was dwelling in that city,
inside a lovely convent [there]: [953]

“Nanda, Rahula and Bhadda;
likewise the two chief followers;
Suddhodana Maharaja,
and Gotamī Pajāpati; [954]

the great theras of great renown;
and the therīs with great powers:²
they’ve gone to peaceful [nirvana],
traceless like the flame of a lamp. [955]

While the World’s Lord still is living,
I’ll travel that peaceful path too.”
And having reasoned [all] that out,
she foresaw the end of her life. [956]

Foreseeing that life’s aggregates
would be destroyed that very day,
she set out from her own ashram,
carrying her robe and her bowl. [957]

Honored by one hundred thousand³
nuns, [the nun named Yasodharā,]
greatly powerful, greatly wise,
[then] went up to the Sambuddha. (1) [958]

Having worshipped the Sambuddha,
at the wheel-marked [soles of his feet],
sitting off to one side [of him,]
she spoke these words to the Teacher: (2) [959]

¹these first six verses appear in BJTS, but not PTS.

²*mahiddhikā* = possessing great magical powers.

³reading *satehi satassehi sā* (BJTS) for *satehi saha pañcahi* (“by five hundred,” PTS). As the subsequent three *apadānas* make clear, these authors believed that Yasodharā approached the Buddha accompanied by considerably more than 500 nuns.

“I’m seventy-eight years old now,
the last of old age has arrived;
I’m reporting to the Great Sage:
I’ve attained [sainthood] in a cave. (3) [960]

Old age has ripened for me [now];
verily my life’s a trifle.
Giving all you up I will go:
my refuge is made in myself. (4) [961]

In the final days of old age,
death breaks [the body into bits];
today at nighttime, Great Hero,
I shall achieve my nirvana. (5) [962]

Where there’s no birth, no growing old,
nor sickness and death, O Great Sage,
I’m going to the [great] city
[which,] unconditioned, has no death. (6) [963]

Throughout [this vast] multitude here,⁴
[all these] revering⁵ the Teacher,⁶
know that [every] imperfection
is forgiven face-to-face, Sage. (7) [964]

Transmigrating in existence,
if I have [ever] disturbed you,⁷
I’m announcing it, Great Hero;
please forgive my imperfection. (8) [965]

After hearing [that] speech of hers,
the Lord of Sages⁸ [then] said this:
“What better can I say to you,
when you’re going to nirvana? [966]

Now⁹ display [your] superpowers,
doer of my dispensation;
let doubt in the dispensation
be cut off for all assemblies.”¹⁰ (9) [967]

⁴reading *ettha* with BJTS for PTS *nāma* (“indeed”)

⁵reading *samupāsanti* (“attend upon together” “honor jointly”)

⁶lit., “to/of the Teacher,” “give reverence to the Teacher”

⁷PTS *khalitaṃ ce tavaṃ mayi*, BJTS *khalitaṃ ce mamaṃ tayi*, both to be construed the same way

⁸*munindo*

⁹*cāpi*, lit., “and also”

¹⁰“in the dispensation” may be governed by “all the assemblies” or, as I have it here, “doubt;” the grammar is ambiguous; the alternate reading would be “let doubt be cut off for all the/assemblies in th’ dispensation”

Having heard the words of the Sage,
the Buddhist nun, Yasodharā,
worshipping the King of Sages,
[then] spoke this speech to the [Buddha:] [968]

“I am Yasodharā, Hero;
in the home I was your chief queen,¹¹
born in the clan of the Śākya,
established among the women.¹² (10) [969]

In your household, O Hero, I
was the leader, the lord of all
of the [women there, who numbered]
one hundred thousand ninety six. (11) [970]

All of those women, endowed with
the virtues of beauty and grace,
youthful and well-spoken, revere
me, like people [revere] the gods.¹³ (12) [971]

Leader of a thousand maidens
in the home of the Śākya Son,
they’re the same in pleasure and pain,¹⁴
like gods in [the garden named] “Joy.” (13) [972]

Beyond the essence of desire,
fixed as the essence of beauty,
[they’re] unmatched in terms of beauty,
other than [by] the World’s Leader.” (14) [973]

Speaking [words] beginning with these,
having risen into the sky,
Yasodharā displayed diverse
powers,¹⁵ with Buddha’s permission. [974]¹⁶

Worshipping¹⁷ the Sambuddha, she

¹¹*te pajāpati*

¹²reading *itthi-y-aṅge* (lit., “in the body of women”) with BJTS for PTS *itthi atho* (“and a woman who is established”)

¹³*devatā*, or “deities” “supernaturals” “fairies” “spirits”

¹⁴*samānasukhadukkhā tā*.

¹⁵*iddhi anekā*, lit., “superpowers”

¹⁶this verse does not appear in PTS, whereas PTS supplies (15) which does not appear in BJTS. The two verses are sufficiently different to warrant inclusion of both, though it creates some unevenness in the flow of the narrative here. The Pāli is: *evamādīni vatvāna uppatitvāna ambaram/iddhi anekā dassesi buddhānuññā yasodharā*

¹⁷*abhivādetvā*, or “after saluting”

showed the Teacher superpowers.¹⁸
 She displayed great superpowers,
 diverse, having various forms. (15)¹⁹

Body big as the universe,²⁰
 she [made] the continent²¹ up north
 her head; eastern, western [her] wings;
 [and made] India her torso; (16) [975]

tail feathers: the southern ocean;
 [other] feathers: varied rivers;
 [her] eyes were the moon and the sun,
 [her] crest was cosmic Mount Meru. (17) [976]

[In her] beak, mountain at world's end,²²
 [she carried] a tree²³ with its roots.
 Coming up to [him,] fanning [him,]
 she's worshipping the World's Leader. (18) [977]

She made herself²⁴ an elephant,
 likewise a horse, mountain, ocean,
 the moon and the sun, Mount Meru,
 and Śakra, [the king of the gods]. (19) [978]

She covered the thousand-fold world
 with blooming lotus,²⁵ [and then said,]
 "I am Yasodharā, Hero;
 I worship [your feet], Eyeful One." (20) [979]

And making Brahma's form appear,
 she preached the doctrine of merit;²⁶
 "I am Yasodharā, Hero;
 I worship your feet, Eyeful One." (21) [980]

¹⁸*iddhiṃ*

¹⁹this verse does not appear here in BJTS, whereas BJTS supplies [974] which does not appear here in PTS. The two verses are sufficiently different to warrant inclusion of both, though it creates some unevenness in the flow of the narrative here. This verse does appear in BJTS below [1054], as in PTS, in the reduplication of Yasodharā's *apadāna* as the *apadāna* of Eighteen Thousand Buddhist Nuns Headed Up by Yasodharā.

²⁰*cakkavālaṃ samaṃ* (BJTS *cakkavālasamaṃ*) *kāyaṃ*, lit., "body the same as the ring surrounding the universe"

²¹or *Uttarakuru* "island" (*dīpa*). This verse presumes knowledge of the ancient Indian understanding of India (here *jambudīpaṃ* [BJTS °*dīpo*], "the Island of Rose-Apples") as one of the four great islands or continents making up the whole world. It lies to the south, with the other three being north, east and west of India.

²²lit., "in the ring surrounding the universe" (*cakkavālagiri*°; BJTS *cakkavālagiri*°)

²³*jamburukkha*°, lit., "a rose-apple tree"

²⁴*vaṇṇaṃ...dassayi*

²⁵reading *phullapadmena* with BJTS for PTS *phullapaccena* (?)

²⁶*dhammaṃ...puññataṃ*, alt. *suññataṃ* ("emptiness"!)

I've mastered the superpowers
[like] the “divine ear” element.
I'm also a master, Great Sage,
of the knowledge in others' hearts. (22) [981]

I remember [my] former lives;
[my] “divine eye” is purified.
All the defilements are destroyed;
[I] will not be reborn again. (23) [982]

In meaning and in the Teaching,
etymology and preaching,
[this] knowledge of mine was produced
in your presence, O Great Hero. (24) [983]

[My] meeting with [all] the Buddhas,²⁷
the World-Lords, was well-seen by you;²⁸
my extensive service [to them]
was for the sake of you, Great Sage. (25) [984]

O Sage, recall the good karma,
which formerly [was done] by me;
[that] merit was heaped up by me
for the sake of you, Great Hero. (26) [985]

I kept from misconduct, hindered²⁹
the [nine] impossible places;³⁰
I have sacrificed³¹ life [itself]
for the sake of you, Great Hero. (27) [986]

I gave myself to be a wife,
several tens of billions [of times].
I was not distressed about that,
for the sake of you, O Great Sage. (28) [987]

I gave myself to do service,

²⁷reading *buddhānaṃ* with BJTS (or PTS alt. *Buddhāna*) for PTS *pubbānaṃ* (former)

²⁸*saṅgaman te su-dassitaṃ* allows for a wide range of meanings; here I follow the BJTS in a fairly modest one. The half-verse could be taken more provocatively to mean, e.g., “when the Buddhas were World-Lords (or “during the time of the former World-Lords”) meeting (or “intercourse”) with you was well seen [by me]”

²⁹reading *vārayitvā anācaram* with BJTS for PTS *pācayantī anāvaram* (“burning/tormenting ?)

³⁰*abhabba-ṭṭhāne*, the nine moral states or spheres of activity into which an arahant will not/cannot fall, D.iii.133 (and cf. D.iii.235 where only the first five appear as a set). This is *Pāsādika Sutta*, #29 of *Dīghanikāya*, section 26. The nine are: (1) cannot deliberately take the life of a living being (2) cannot steal (3) cannot have sexual intercourse (4) cannot deliberately lie (5) cannot hoard anything for his own indulgence (6) cannot act wrongly through attachments (7) cannot act wrongly through hatred (8) cannot act wrongly through folly (9) cannot act wrongly through fear

³¹reading *sañcattaṃ* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *samattaṃ* (“fulfilled” “completed”)

several tens of billions [of times].
I was not distressed about that,
for the sake of you, O Great Sage. (29) [988]

I gave myself to [provide] food,
several tens of billions [of times].
I was not distressed about that,
for the sake of you, O Great Sage. (30) [989]

I have given you [all my] lives,
several tens of billions [of times].
I'll liberate [myself] from fear,
giving up my life [once more]. (31) [990]

Great Sage, for your sake I do not³²
conceal the things of a woman,
numerous clothes of varied types,
ornaments affixed to³³ [my] limbs. (32) [991]

Wealth and grain have been given up,
villages and also small towns,
fields and sons and daughters [as well]
have been given up, O Great Sage. (33) [992]

Elephants, horses, also cows,
slaves [as well as] servant-women
are given up beyond all count
for the sake of you, O Great Sage. (34) [993]

Whatever I am told [to give]
as alms to beggars, I give [that];
I don't witness³⁴ any distress
from giving the ultimate gift. (35) [994]

I have experienced³⁵ dis-ease
of diverse types, beyond all count,
in [this] much-varied existence³⁶
for the sake of you, Great Hero. (36) [995]

Attaining comfort[s,] I don't thrill;
[I do]n't get distressed by³⁷ troubles.

³²reading °*bhaṇḍe na gūhāmi* with BJTS for PTS *bhaṇḍena gūhāmi* ("I conceal with a thing")

³³lit., "gone to"

³⁴lit., "see," fig. "know"

³⁵reading *anubhuttaṃ* with BJTS for PTS *pariccattaṃ* ("are sacrificed," cf. PTS alt. *anubhontaṃ*)

³⁶*saṃsāre*, or "wheel of life"

³⁷lit., "in"

Everywhere I remain balanced
for the sake of you, O Great Sage. (37) [996]

After experiencing [both]
pleasure [and] pain along the way,
the Great Sage reached Awakening,
the Teaching for which³⁸ Buddha³⁹ strived. (38) [997]

By you [and] by me there was much
meeting with the other World-Lords,
[whether you're] the god Brahmā or⁴⁰
Gotama Buddha,⁴¹ World's Leader. (39) [998]

I performed a lot of service,
for the sake of you, O Great Sage;
while you sought the Buddha's Teaching,⁴²
I was [always] your attendant. (40) [999]

One hundred thousand aeons [and]
four incalculable [aeons]
hence, Dīpaṅkara, Great Hero,
the Leader of the World was born. (41) [1000]

[Some]place in a nearby country,
inviting [him,] the Thus-Gone-One,
happy-minded folks are cleaning
the road [on which] he is coming. (42) [1001]

At that time there was a brahmin
[known by] the name of Sumedha.
He was making the road ready
for the All-Seer who was coming. (43) [1002]

At that time I was a maiden,
born in a brahmin [family],
known by the name of Sumittā.
I went up to that gathering. (44) [1003]

With eight handfuls of blue lotus
for offering⁴³ to the Teacher,

³⁸yaṅ dhammaṅ

³⁹lit., "Sambuddha"

⁴⁰lit., "and"

⁴¹lit., "Sambuddha," paralleling the usage in the previous verse

⁴²reading *gavesato buddhadhamme* with BJTS for PTS *gavesantā buddhadhammaṅ* ("I, searching for the Buddha's Teaching")

⁴³lit., "doing *pūjā*"

in the midst of [all] the people
I saw that fierce [ascetic] sage.⁴⁴ (45) [1004]

Seeing [him,] seated atop bark,⁴⁵
surpassing⁴⁶ [and] captivating,⁴⁷
then I thought [like this to myself:]
“[this] life of mine is bearing fruit.” (46) [1005]

At that time I saw [that] sage’s
effort [which was then] bearing fruit;
due to previous karma, my
heart was pleased in the Sambuddha. (47) [1006]

Making [my] heart even more pleased,
I said, “O lofty-minded sage,
seeing no other gift [to give,]
I’m giving flowers to you, sage.”⁴⁸ (48) [1007]

There are five handfuls for you, sage;
the [remaining] three⁴⁹ are for me.
Let there be success through⁵⁰ this [gift]
for your Awakening,⁵¹ O sage.” (49) [1008]

The Fourth Recitation Portion
[Then that] sage, taking the flowers,
for the sake of Awakening,⁵²
worshipped amidst the people the
Famed One, Great Sage⁵³ who was coming. (50) [1009]

The Great Sage [named] Dīpaṅkara,
seeing [him] amidst the people,
prophesied⁵⁴ [future Buddhahood]
[for that] sage with a lofty mind. (51) [1010]

The Great Sage [named] Dīpaṅkara
[then] prophesied that my karma

⁴⁴i.e., Sumedha

⁴⁵reading *cīrānupari āsīnaṃ* with BJTS for PTS *cīrānugataṃ dassitaṃ* (“associated for a long time, seen”)

⁴⁶*patikantaṃ*, BJTS *atikantaṃ*

⁴⁷*manoharaṃ*

⁴⁸reading *ise* (voc.) with BJTS for PTS *isiṃ* (acc.)

⁴⁹reading *tayo* with BJTS for PTS *tato*

⁵⁰BJTS and PTS alt. read *samā* (“equal to”) for *saha* here,

⁵¹*bodhanatthāya tavaṃ* (PTS alt. *tava*); the phrase can also be translated, “for the sake of your knowing [me]”

⁵²or, as above, “for the sake of knowing [me]”

⁵³reading *mahā-isiṃ* (acc.) with BJTS for PTS *mahā-isi* (nom.)

⁵⁴lit., “the Great Hero prophesied”

would for numberless aeons hence
be exalted, that Sage So Great: (52)⁵⁵

“She will be a like-minded [wife],
with karma and conduct like [yours];
through this karma she’ll be loving
for the sake of you, O great sage.⁵⁶ (53) [1011]

Nice looking and much beloved,
desirable,⁵⁷ speaking sweet words,
she will be a loving woman,
[and] an heir among [your] doctrines. (54) [1012]

Just as masters are protecting⁵⁸
the goods that [they] accumulate,
so this one likewise will protect
[all] of the things that are wholesome. (55) [1013]

Compassionate for [future] you,
she will fulfill the perfections.
Like a lion [freed] from a cage,
she will achieve Awakening.” (56) [1014]

Rejoicing about [Buddha’s] speech,
I lived behaving in that way
the Buddha prophesied for me
numberless aeons ago. (57) [1015]

I brought pleasure to [my] mind when
that karma was well done [by me];
I experienced countless wombs,
divine [as well as] human [ones]. (58) [1016]

Undergoing pleasure [and] pain,
among gods [and] human beings,
when [my] last rebirth was attained,
I was born in the Śākya clan. (59) [1017]

Beautiful and very wealthy,
famous and likewise virtuous;

⁵⁵BJTS consigns this verse to an asterisked footnote, recognizing that it occurs in a number of its alternate recensions.

⁵⁶BJTS agrees with PTS in presenting this as *mahā-ise* (voc.) but reference alternate readings *mahā-isi* (nom.), presumably troubled by the Buddha addressing Sumedha as “Great Sage”

⁵⁷reading *manāpā* with BJTS for PTS *manasā*

⁵⁸reading *yathā...anurakkhanti sāmīno* with BJTS for PTS *yathā...anurakkhati sāmī no* (“as our master protects”)

endowed with every attainment,
I'm much-honored among the clans. (60) [1018]

Riches, fame, hospitality,
[and] indulgence in worldly things –
[they] do not agitate [my] mind;⁵⁹
I have no fear from anything. (61) [1019]

I was appointed to attend
on what the Blessed One had said
within the harem of the king
in the kṣatriyan city then. (62)⁶⁰

[I'm] a woman who's a servant,
and [one] who feels pleasure and pain,
a woman⁶¹ who declares the facts,
a woman⁶² who's compassionate. (63)
Buddhas [numbering] five billion,
and [another] nine billion [more] –
I provided vast alms to [them,]
those [Buddhas,] Gods Over the Gods.⁶³ (64)

Listen to my [words,] O great king:
I'm constantly doing service⁶⁴
to eleven billion [others,]
and fifty billion [Buddhas more]. (65)

I provided vast alms to [them,]
those [Buddhas,] Gods Over the Gods;
listen to my [words,] O great king:
I'm constantly doing service. (66)

Twenty billion [other] Buddhas
and [another] thirty billion –
I provided vast alms to [them,]
those [Buddhas,] Gods Over the Gods. (67)

Listen to my [words,] O great king:
I'm constantly doing service
to forty billion [Buddhas more,]
and [another] fifty billion. (68)

⁵⁹lit., “there is no agitation [to my mind]”

⁶⁰This and the following 19 verses (20 verses total) are not included here in BJTS. vv. (62) and (63) do appear at BJTS [1092]-[1093]

⁶¹lit., “and a woman”

⁶²lit., “and a woman”

⁶³*etesaṅ devadevānaṅ*

⁶⁴*adhikāraṅ sadā mayhaṅ*, lit., “my service is constant” “my service is daily”

I provided vast alms to [them,]
 those [Buddhas,] Gods Over the Gods;
 listen to my words, O great king:
 I'm constantly doing service. (69)

Sixty billion [other] Buddhas,
 [another] seventy billion -
 I provided vast alms to [them,]
 those [Buddhas,] Gods Over the Gods. (70)

Listen to my [words,] O great king:
 I'm constantly doing service
 to eighty billion [Buddhas more,]
 and [another] ninety billion. (71)

I provided vast alms to [them,]
 those [Buddhas,] Gods Over the Gods;
 listen to my [words,] O great king:
 I'm constantly doing service. (72)

There have been a million million
 who were Chief Leaders of the World;
 I provided vast alms to [them,]
 those [Buddhas,] Gods Over the Gods. (73)

Listen to my [words,] O great king:
 I'm constantly doing service
 to another ninety trillion
 who were Leaders of the World [too.] (74)

I provided vast alms to [them,]
 those [Buddhas,] Gods Over the Gods;
 listen to my [words,] O great king:
 I'm constantly doing service (75)

to Great Sages [whose number was]
 eight hundred and fifty trillion,
 and seven hundred eighty-five
 billion [additional Buddhas]. (76)

I provided vast alms to [them,]
 those [Buddhas,] Gods Over the Gods;
 listen to my [words,] O great king:
 I'm constantly doing service. (77)

Lonely Buddhas, passion removed,
 six hundred and forty million;
 listen to my [words,] O great king:

I'm constantly doing service. (78)

Countless followers of Buddhas,
free of defilements, [and] stainless;
listen to my [words,] O great king:
I'm constantly doing service. (79)

I always practice⁶⁵ the Teaching⁶⁶
of those practiced in the teachings,⁶⁷
at ease practicing the Teaching,
in this world and in the other. (80)

Well-practiced, the Teaching-practice;
that practice is not ill-practiced.
[I'm] at ease practicing Teaching,
in this world and in the other. (81)

Disgusted with transmigration,
I went forth into homelessness,
surrounded by thousands [of nuns,]
after renouncing with nothing. (82) [1020]

After abandoning [my] home,
I went forth into homelessness.
When eight months⁶⁸ had not yet elapsed
I attained the Four [Noble] Truths. (83) [1021]

Like the waves upon the ocean,
[folks] are bringing many varied⁶⁹
monastic robes and alms to eat,
requisites [as well as] lodgings. (84) [1022]

My defilements are [now] burnt up;
all [new] existence is destroyed.
Like elephants with broken chains,
I am living without constraint. (85) [1023]

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! (86) [1024]

The four analytical modes,

⁶⁵or do: from *carati*

⁶⁶*saddhamma*°, lit "good Teaching"

⁶⁷*dhammesu ciṅṅānaṃ sadā saddhamma-carino*

⁶⁸*aṭṭhamāse*, BJTS reads *addhamāse* ("half a month")

⁶⁹reading *bahu 'neke* with BJTS for PTS *buhun eke*

and these eight deliverances,
 six special knowledges mastered,
 [I have] done what the Buddha taught! (87) [1025]

Thus many sorts of suffering
 and many types of happiness;
 the pure life [now] has been achieved,
 I have obtained all achievements. [1026]⁷⁰

The woman who's giving herself
 for the merit of the Great Sage
 attains companionship [with him],
 [and] unconditioned nirvana. [1027]

The past is thoroughly destroyed,
 and the present [and] the future;
 all of my karma is destroyed:
 I worship your feet, Eyeful One." [1028]

Thus indeed Bhikkhunī Yasodharā spoke these verses.

The legend of *Yasodharā Therī*⁷¹ is finished

⁷⁰this and the following concluding verses do not appear here in PTS, and are unusual (though not unique) for *Apadāna* in which individual poems usually conclude with what I've dubbed the "concluding refrain" (vv. 85-87) [1023-1025]. Interestingly they (plus one more, also duplicated elsewhere) do appear, in the same unusual post-refrain position, below, as vv. 57-59 (plus 60) of *apadāna* #30, Eighteen Thousand Nuns with Yasodharā, and are also in this position in the BJTS version of that *apadāna* (vv. [1100-1102] plus [1103]).

⁷¹PTS omits *Therī*, which I supply from BJTS.