

THE JOURNEY FROM URUVILVĀ TO R̥ṢIPATANA

FROM MAHĀVASTU PP. 322-329

TRANSLATED BY ĀNANDAJOTI BHIKKHU
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INTRODUCTION

The translation that follows is from a section of the Mahāvastu (Great Story) dealing with the period after Lord Buddha left the area where he had attained Awakening until he arrives at the place where he will give his first official teachings. I made the translation while working on a part of the Mahākhandhakaṃ of the Vinaya, which describes the whole period from just after the Awakening up and till the conversion of Sāriputta and Mahāmoggallāna.

The section provides interest in the variations it provides on the one hand, and the extra information it gives about this journey on the other. As regards the variations they are numerous and complex. In this version of events the Buddha first thinks of teaching Udraka Rāmaputra, not Ārāḍa Kālāma as in the Pāḷi; the interview with the grumbling brāhmaṇa is placed on the journey, whereas in the Pāḷi it is said to have happened while still in the vicinity of Uruvilvā; the meeting with the Abstainer Upaka is more elaborated here.

As to the additions they are many, but none so very significant: including the preparation of the road by the Pure Land gods; a description of the journey; the meeting with the Dragon-King Sudarśana; many more incidental meetings that are mentioned along the way; and the problem with crossing the Ganges on the final part of the journey. Perhaps one significant thing is that all the days seem to have been accounted for and we can tell from the text that the Buddha spent at least one week on the journey and who entertained him during that time is mentioned in the story.

These differences and variations make for interest both for the casual reader and for the scholar, and what the work stands in need of is a thorough examination of its historical and linguistic materials which would further deepen our understanding of the earliest tradition.

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THE JOURNEY FROM URUVILVĀ TO R̥ṢIPATANA¹

1. DECIDING WHO TO TEACH²

... then this occurred ... to the Gracious One: “Now what if I were to set rolling the unsurpassed and Noble Dharma-Wheel? Who would be able to understand my first Dharma-teaching, and would not become annoyed at this Dharma-teaching? Then this occurred to the Gracious One: “Udraka Rāmaputra³ is pure, having little dust, an open-minded person,⁴ he has gone far along the path, has gone a long way, he preaches the Dharma concerning the duty of attaining the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, but Udraka Rāmaputra died⁵ seven days ago, Udraka Rāmaputra has suffered a great loss.⁶

Now what other being is pure, having little dust, an open-minded person, who would be able to understand my first Dharma-teaching, and would not become annoyed at hearing this Dharma? Ārāḍa Kālāma is pure, having little dust, with little dust on his eyes, he would be able to understand my first Dharma-teaching, and would not become annoyed at hearing this Dharma-teaching, but for Ārāḍa there is great loss, for Ārāḍa Kālāma died three days ago.

Now what other being is pure, with little dust on his eyes, who would be able to understand my first Dharma-teaching, and would not become annoyed at hearing this Dharma-teaching?” Then this occurred to the Gracious One: “The good group-of-five⁷ are pure, having little dust, with little dust on their eyes, they would be able to understand my first Dharma-teaching, they would not become annoyed with me at hearing this Dharma-teaching, they followed me during my life of austerity.

They are now living near Vārāṇasī, in the Deer Park at R̥ṣipatana. Now what if I, having gone to Vārāṇasī, to the Deer Park at R̥ṣipatana, near Vārāṇasī, were to preach the first Dharma-teaching to the good group-of-five?

2. PREPARING THE ROAD

Then a great many very powerful gods from the Hosts in the Pure Lands,⁸ after approaching the Gracious One, and worshipping the Gracious One’s feet with their heads, stood at one side. While standing on one side they said this to the Gracious One: “The Gracious One’s pupils understand and

¹ This title is given by the present editor based on the contents.

² Cf. the Pāḷi version of this story (Mahākhandhaka I.6). These subdivisions have been added by the present editor to help outline the story.

³ The Pāḷi version of his name is Uddaka Rāmaputta; in the Pāḷi texts he is thought of secondly, after Āḷāma Kālāma who is mentioned below.

⁴ It is not clear whether *aparokṣajātīyo* is a mistake in the transmission of the text for *alparajaskajātīyo*, which occurs in the section about Ārāḍa Kālāma below, but something similar also occurs in Lalitavistara. If it is correct then I think we have to take it as Edgerton suggests in BHSD (s.v.), perhaps it means that he would be open to accepting the new teaching, the fact that here it says that the Buddha was looking for someone who would *not become annoyed* would support this interpretation.

⁵ Lit: *gone to (or fulfilled his) time*; the Pāḷi equivalent of this term is *kālakatam*, *made time*.

⁶ I take it to mean that he has suffered a great loss because he was unable to hear a Teaching he would so greatly have benefited from, cf. the section about Ārāḍa below.

⁷ Called *bhikkhū*, *monks*, in the Pāḷi, but prematurely as they are not ordained in the Śāsana yet.

⁸ The five Pure Lands are the highest of the worlds in the Form Worlds (*Rūpaloka*).

know very well that for the Gracious One we are able to do various and diverse miracles, and along the path the Gracious One will go from the Bodhi Tree to the Deer Park at R̥ṣipatana, near Vārāṇasī, to set rolling the unsurpassed Dharma-Wheel, we will attend on the Gracious One along the path from the Bodhi Tree to Vārāṇasī, making it even, level like the palm of a hand, covered with a canopy, surrounded with beautiful cloth, bound round with bunches of silken cloth, sprinkled and swept, perfumed with incense, bestrewn with flowers, covered with beautifully coloured sand, covered with divine powdered pearls, covered with divine powdered crystal, covered with divine powdered coral, covered with divine powdered rubies.

There, Gracious One, along the path from the Bodhi Tree to Vārāṇasī we will create divine rows of palm trees, pleasant, beautiful, good-looking, made of seven forms: of gold, silver, pearl, beryl, crystal, coral, and of ruby. There, Gracious One, along the path, on the left and the right we will create divine streams, transparent, even, sandy, pleasant, covered with beautifully coloured sand, with a pond full of water-lilies, lotuses, white lotuses, and shaded completely with sweet smelling mangoes, rose-apples, bread-fruit, jack-fruit, coconuts, ebony, star-fruit, and pomegranite.

There, Gracious One, along the path between the Bodhi Tree and Vārāṇasī after creating divine sunshades, we will create divine banners, we will create divine peaked halls, beautiful, good-looking, made of the seven treasures: of gold, silver, pearl, beryl, crystal, coral, and of ruby. When the Gracious One goes they will go, when he stops they will stop, and the Rain Cloud gods will scatter divine flowers, and slowly slowly the gods will advance.

3. THE ENTOURAGE SETS OFF

On the Gracious One's journey from the Bodhi Tree to the Deer Park at R̥ṣipatana, near Vārāṇasī to set rolling the unsurpassed Dharma-Wheel the path had been prepared by the Pure Land gods, and after creating a great four-fold army consisting of a great body of elephants, a great body of horses, a body of chariots, and a body of foot-soldiers, they placed the Gracious One in front as he was going to Vārāṇasī.

Many of the lords of the Suvarṇas⁹ and Kings of the Suvarṇas, whether born of eggs, born from a womb, born of moisture, or (born) spontaneously,¹⁰ after creating with their psychic power a great four-fold army placed the Gracious One in front as he was going; many of the lords of the Nāgas and Kings of the Nāgas, whether born of eggs, born from a womb, born of moisture, or (born) spontaneously, after creating with their psychic power a great four-fold army placed the Gracious One in front as he was going to Vārāṇasī; also the gods called the Four Great Kings, the Trayastrīṃsa, Yāma, Tuṣita, Nirmāṇarati, Paranirmitavaśavarti, and Brahmakāyikā gods, after creating with their psychic power a great four-fold army, placed the Gracious One in front as he was going to Kāśī.¹¹

⁹ Pāḷi: *Supaṇṇa*.

¹⁰ The *Suvarṇas* are a type of supernatural bird and the *Nāgas*, who are mentioned below, are a type of supernatural snake, presumably that is why they may have the different types of birth that are mentioned here.

¹¹ Kāśī is the State of which Vārāṇasī was the capital.

4. THE DRAGON-KING

Then the Gracious One, surrounded and placed at the front of a great assembly, with countless hundreds, countless thousands, countless hundreds of thousands, went from Uruvilvā to Gayā, and from Gayā to Aparagayā. At Aparagayā the Dragon-King called Sudarśana invited the Gracious One to dwell and eat with him at Aparagayā, and the Gracious One, after dwelling in the domicile of the Dragon-King Sudarśana, ate and went on to Vaśālā.

5. THE GRUMBLING BRĀHMAṆA¹²

At the river Vaśālā there was a brāhmaṇa said to be a grumbler by nature, and as the Gracious One was going he showed disrespect and uttered “huhum”. The Gracious One, with that as the basis, as the cause, as the reason, on that occasion uttered this exalted utterance:¹³

“That brāhmaṇa who has barred wickedness,
Not grumbling, free from blemish, self-restrained,
With pollutants destroyed, bearing his last body,
Righteously that brāhmaṇa might speak a word about the Brahman.”

6. THE ABSTAINER UPAKA¹⁴

At Vaśālā a certain householder invited the Gracious One to dwell and eat with him and when the Gracious One had dwelt and eaten in that place, from Vaśālā he made an approach to Cundadvīlā. The Abstainer Upaka saw the Gracious One coming from afar, and after seeing the Gracious One, approaching and exchanging polite talk with the Gracious One and courteous greetings, he stood at one side, and while stood on one side Upaka the Abstainer said this to the Gracious One:

“Purified is the Gracious Gautama’s skin, purified and bright, and his face is clear, just as when a palm nut has fallen from the stalk the stalk it hung from is purified, bright and golden, just so the Gracious Gautama’s skin is purified and bright, and his face is clear: today the Deathless has been attained by the Gracious Gautama, and the Path that leads to the Deathless.”

After that was said, the Gracious One said this to the Abstainer Upaka: “The Deathless has been attained by me, and the Path that leads to the Deathless.”

After that was said, Upaka said this to the Gracious One: “Under whom, dear Gautama, do you live the spiritual life?” After that was said, the Gracious One addressed the Abstainer Upaka with verses:

¹² Cf. the Pāḷi version of this story (Mahākhandhaka I.2).

¹³ The verse recorded in the Pāḷi differs in the 3rd line and adds a fifth: *That brāhmaṇa who has barred wickedness, Not grumbling, free from blemish, self-restrained, With perfect understanding, (and) the spiritual life accomplished, Righteously he might speak a word about the Brahman, For him there is no arrogance anywhere in the world.*

¹⁴ Cf. the Pāḷi version of this story (Mahākhandhaka I.7).

“All-Conquering, All-Wise am I,
Undefined in regard to all things,
Having given up everything, liberated through the destruction of craving,
I have deep knowledge, who should I point to as Teacher?”

After that was said, the Abstainer Upaka said this to the Gracious One: “Is the Gracious Gautama claiming to be without a Teacher?” Then the Gracious One addressed the Abstainer Upaka with verses:

“There is no Teacher for me, no one whosoever like me is found,
I am the One Sambuddha in the world, who has attained supreme Awakening.”

After that was said, the Abstainer Upaka said this to the Gracious One: “Is the Gracious Gautama claiming to be a Worthy One?” Then the Gracious One addressed the Abstainer Upaka with verses:

“I am Worthy in the world, I am unsurpassed in the world,
There is no person the same as me found in the world with its gods.”

After that was said, the Abstainer Upaka said this to the Gracious One: “Is the Gracious Gautama claiming to be a Victor?” Then the Gracious One addressed the Abstainer Upaka with verses:

“There are surely Victors like me, who have attained the destruction of the pollutants.
I have been victorious over all wicked things, therefore, Upaka, I am a Victor.
Just as a white lotus’ beauty is not defiled by the mud,
Even so I am not defiled in the world, therefore Upaka I am a Victor.
What was to be known deeply has been known deeply, and what is to be well-spoken is spoken,
What was to be abandoned has been abandoned by me, therefore, Upaka, I am a Victor.”

After that was said, the Abstainer Upaka said this to the Gracious One: “Where will the Gracious Gautama go?” Then the Gracious One addressed the Abstainer Upaka with verses:

“I will go to Vārāṇasī, I will beat the drum of the Deathless,
I will set rolling the Dharma-Wheel that cannot be rolled back in the world.
That thing attained by me is passionless, tranquil and auspicious,
I will set it rolling for the benefit of all living beings,
Those who were Sambuddhas in the past, and those who will be Buddhas in the future,
Those who are Sambuddhas now, who are destroyers of many griefs,
They teach the Dharma to all beings, this is the nature of the Buddhas.”

The gods in the firmament spoke this verse:

“Having seen him who is such a guide for those people who need taming,
They should gather round the Great Seer.
One should worship such great good fortune
With open hands and feet.”

7. MEETINGS ALONG THE WAY

At Cundadvīlā the Yakṣa Cunda invited the Gracious One to dwell and eat at his domicile. The Gracious One, after he had dwelt and eaten at the Yakṣa Cunda's domicile for one night went to Lohitavastu near Sārathipura.

At Lohitavastu the Dragon-King Kamaṇḍaluka invited the Gracious One to dwell and eat at his domicile. The Gracious One, after he had dwelt and eaten there for one night went from Lohitaka to Gandhapura.

At Gandhapura dwelt the Yakṣa Kandha and he invited the Gracious One to dwell and eat at his domicile. The Gracious One, after he had dwelt and eaten there for one night went back to Sārathipura.

At Sārathipura another householder invited the Gracious One to dwell and eat at his domicile. The Gracious One, after he had dwelt and eaten there for one night from Sārathipura arrived at the bank of the Ganges.

8. THE BOATMAN

Now the boatman said: "Give the fare for crossing," the Gracious One said: "How can I, when money is the same to me as a clod of earth, and I am without gold and silver, give the fare for crossing?"

The boatman said: "If you give me the fare for crossing you will cross, but if you don't give you won't cross." The Gracious One said:

"The goose does not beg the boatman to cross the Narmadā,
The goose crosses the Narmadā with his own great energy."
Having said this the Sambuddha, like the Goose King, crossed over,
Having crossed the ocean the great Sage stood on the other bank of the Ganges.¹⁵

Having crossed the Ganges the Gracious One arrived at Vārāṇasī and stopped at Saṁkhamedī, and when the right time had come the Gracious One went into Vārāṇasī for alms.

The Buddhas do not sojourn at the wrong time,
They go to the village for alms at the right time;
Attachments are found in those who go at the wrong time,
Therefore the Buddhas do not go at the wrong time.

The good group-of-five were living at R̥ṣipatana: Ājñāta-Kauṇḍinya, Aśvakī, Bhadraka, Vāṣpa, Mahānāma¹⁶ ...

¹⁵ This incident was apparently the occasion for King Bimbisāra making an allowance throughout the Kingdom of Magadhā that ascetics need not give the fare for crossing a river but were to be taken for free.

¹⁶ In the Pāli texts they are named as: *Aññā(ta) Koṇḍañña, Assajī, Bhaddaka, Vappa and Mahānāma*. Kauṇḍinya actually acquired the name Ājñāta-Kauṇḍinya only later, after attaining the Vision-of-the-Dharma.