



Saṅkhakathā or Saṅkha's Story

Pacceka-buddhas Teach Awakening
from the Commentary to Dhammapada 290

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Preface

The following story is extracted from the Dhammapada Commentary to verse 290. The commentarial story tells how Vesālī, the capital of the Vajjian country, at one point suffered from famine, ghosts and disease. After trying other teachers who were unable to solve the crisis, they decided to request the Buddha to help. The Buddha, who was residing at Rājagaha, knowing that by reciting the Ratanasuttaṃ¹ all problems will be resolved, agreed.

Bimbisāra, the King of Magadhā, on the southern side of the Ganges, and the Licchavī princes of the Vajjīs on the northern side, clear the road for him and establish a great festival, which Sakka, the King of the Gods, also joins.

The Buddha instructs his faithful disciple Ānanda in the discourse, and he recites it while walking round the city. Not only are the inhabitants saved, but thousands attain Path and Fruit. After these successes the monks gather and talk about the parade from Rājagaha to Vesālī, and the Buddha explains how such a magnificent festival came about as a result of a previous deed he had performed, and relates a previous life-story.²

The main interest in the story is that it shows Paccekabuddhas teaching, and even to the point where their pupil attains Awakening, which goes against the oft-heard statement that Paccekabuddhas do not teach. The situation, however, is that they do not set up a Dispensation (*Sāsana*), which is something very different.

The story is retold in the Khuddhapāṭha Commentary, with much elaboration and some variations;³ and also compare Mahāvastu,⁴ where the setting is the same, but a somewhat different story is told: there the pupil becomes a Buddha, and his (unnamed) Father erects parasols over him, the outcome of which is glory in many future lives, and eventually he becomes the Buddha having the parasols raised up to Heaven at Vaiśālī.

¹ The Discourse on the Treasures, Khp. 6.

² This is one of many previous life stories not found in the Jātaka collection.

³ An important one is noted at the relevant place below.

⁴ Mahāvastu 1. pp. 267-270.

[The Occasion]

...bhikkhū piṇḍapātapaṭikkantā,

...(amongst) the monks, after returning from the alms-round,

sāyanhasamaye Dhammasabhāyaṃ sannisinnā,

in the evening time, while sitting in the Dhamma Hall,

kathaṃ samuṭṭhāpesuṃ:

this conversion arose:

“Aho Buddhānaṃ mahānubhāvo!

“Indeed, the Buddhas are very powerful!

Aho Satthari devamanussānaṃ pasādo!

Indeed gods and men have faith in the Teacher!

Gaṅgāya nāma orato ca pārato ca aṭṭhayaḷane magge,

Both on this side and the other side of the Ganges along a pathway for eight leagues,

Buddhagatena pasādena,

because of gaining faith in the Awakened One,

Rājūhi samatalaṃ bhūmiṃ katvā,

after the ground was made smooth by the Kings,

vālukā okiṇṇā, jaṇṇumattena odhinā nānāvaṇṇāni pupphāni santhatāni,

sand was scattered, and various coloured flowers were strewn about knee-deep,

Gaṅgāya udakaṃ Nāgānubhāvena pañcavaṇṇehi padumehi sañchannaṃ,

through the power of the Nāgas the waters of the Ganges were covered with lotuses of five colours,

yāva Akaniṭṭhabhavanā chattātichattāni ussāpitāni,

as far as the dwelling place of the Highest of the High Divinities⁵ parasols upon parasols were raised on high,

sakalacakkavāḷagabbhaṃ ekālaṅkāraṃ ekussavaṃ viya jātan”-ti.

the inside of the whole universe became like one great ornament and festival.”

Satthā āgantvā: “Kāyanuttha, bhikkhave, etarahi kathāya sannisinnā?” ti pucchitvā,

After the Teacher came and asked: “What is the talk about, monks, amongst those who have assembled together at present?”

⁵ That is, in the highest Brahmā realms.

“Imāya nāmā,” ti vutte.

They said: “It is just so.”

“Na, bhikkhave, esa pūjāsakkāro mayham Buddhānubhāvena nibbatto,
“Monks, this worship and respect didn't arise through the power of my being an Awakened One,

na Nāgadevabrahmānubhāvena.

nor through the powers of the Nāgas, Gods and High Divinities.

Atīte pana appamattakapariccāgānubhāvena nibbatto.” ti

It arose through the power of trifling donations (I made) in the past.”

Vatvā, bhikkhūhi yācito atītaṃ āhari.

After hearing that, he was begged by the monks to show them the past.

[The Past Deeds]

Atīte Takkasilāyaṃ Saṅkho nāma brāhmaṇo ahosi.

In the past, in Takkasilā, there was a brāhmaṇa called Saṅkha.

Tassa putto Susīmo nāma māṇavo soḷasavassuddesiko

His son, a sixteen year old student called Susīma,

ekadivasam Pitaraṃ upasaṅkamitvā āha:

after approaching his Father one day said:

“Icchāmaḥ, Tāta, Bārāṇasim gantvā mante ajjhāyitun.”-ti

“After going to Bārāṇasī, Dear, I wish to learn the scriptures.”⁶

Atha naṃ Pitā āha:

Then his Father said to him:

“Tena hi, Tāta, asuko nāma brāhmaṇo mama sahāyako,

“Alright, Dear, a brāhmaṇa called so-and-so is my friend,

tassa santikaṃ gantvā adhīyassū.” ti

after going into his presence, you could learn (them).”

So: “Sādhū!” ti paṭissuṇitvā, anupubbena Bārāṇasim gantvā,

After agreeing by saying: “Good!” he gradually went to Bārāṇasī,

taṃ brāhmaṇaṃ upasaṅkamitvā Pitarā pahitabhāvam-ācikkhi.

and after approaching the brāhmaṇa he explained he had been sent by his Father.

⁶ Lit: the mantras; the verses of the Vedas, or ancient Hindu texts, is what it means.

Atha naṃ so: “Sahāyakassa me putto,” ti sampañicchitvā,
Then after accepting him, saying: “He is my friend's son,”

paṭipassaddhadaratham,
and relieving his anxiety,

bhaddakena divasena, mante vācetum-ārabhi.
on an auspicious day, he began to recite the scriptures.

So lahuṇ-ca gaṇhanto bahuṇ-ca gaṇhanto attano uggahituggahitam,
Quickly learning (it) and learning a great deal he retained it (all) himself,

suvaṇṇabhājane pakkhittasīhatelam-iva avinassamānam dhārento,
just like precious oil⁷ placed in a golden vessel is borne without loss,

na cirasseva ācariyassa sammukhato uggaṇhitabbam,
in no long time he learned (it) from his teacher's lips,

sabbam uggaṇhitvā, sajjhāyam karonto attano uggahitasippassa,
and having learned all, he became skilled in making recitation of the teaching,

ādimajjham-eva passati, no pariyosānam.
and he could understand the beginning and middle of (it), but not the end.

So ācariyam upasaṅkamitvā:
After approaching his teacher, he said:

“Aham imassa sippassa ādimajjham-eva passāmi, no pariyosānan.”-ti
“I see the beginning and the middle of this teaching, but not the end.”

Vatvā, ācariyena: “Aham-pi, Tāta, na passāmī.” ti
Having heard (that), the teacher said: “I also do not see (it), Dear.”

Vutte: “Atha ko, ācariya, pariyosānam jānātī?” ti
When this was said, he said: “Then who knows the end, teacher?”

Pucchitvā: “Ime, Tāta, isayo Isipatane viharanti, te jāneyyūṃ,
After being asked, he said: “There are seers living in Isipatana,⁸ Dear, they know,

tesam santikaṃ upasaṅkamitvā pucchassū.” ti
after approaching you could ask them.”

⁷ Lit: *Lion's oil*, but it is unclear whether this means the oil was taken from Lions, or whether it just indicated its preciousity.

⁸ The name means the Seer's Park, it is just outside Bārāṇasī, where the Buddha gave his first teaching.

Ācariyena vutte, Paccekabuddhe upasaṅkamtivā pucchi:

When this was said by the teacher, after approaching the Paccekabuddhas, he asked:

“Tumhe kira pariyosānaṃ jānāthā?” ti

“Do you know the end (of the teaching)?”

“Āma, jānāmā.” ti

“Yes, we know.”

“Tena hi me ācikkhathā?” ti

“Will you teach it to me?”

“Na mayaṃ apabbajitassa ācikkhāma,

“We will not teach one who has not gone-forth,

sace te pariyosānen' attho, pabbajassū.” ti

if you want (to know) the meaning of the end, you should go forth.”⁹

So: “Sādhū!” ti sampāṭicchitvā tesaṃ santike pabbaji.

After replying: “Good!” he went forth in their presence.

Athassa te: “Idaṃ tāva sikkhassū,” ti

They said to him: “You should learn this,”

vatvā: “Evaṃ te nivāsetabbaṃ, evaṃ pārupitabban”-ti-ādinā,

and saying: “You should dress thus, and you should cover yourself thus,” and so on,

nayena ābhisamācārikaṃ ācikkhimsu.

they methodically taught him good conduct.

So tattha sikkhanto, upanissayasampannattā,

Training right there, and having the supporting conditions,

na cirasseva, Paccekasambodhiṃ abhisambujjhivā,

in no long time, after attaining the Pacceka Awakening,

sakala-Bārāṇasinagare, gaganatale puṇṇacando viya,

throughout the whole of the city of Bārāṇasī, like a full-moon in the sky,

pākaṭo lābhaggayasaggappatto ahosi.

he attained the highest gains and the highest fame.

⁹ In the Commentary to the Khuddakapāṭha, which is based on earlier accounts (and is therefore itself later), it is at pains to mention that the Paccekabuddhas only taught minor things like wearing the robes; but the strong implication here is that they were able to teach not just the beginning (like wearing of robes), but also the end, which was the condition for Sūśīma's Awakening.

So appāyukasaṃvattanikassa kammaṣa katattā,

As the deeds he had performed (in past lives) led only to a short lifespan,

na cirasseva Parinibbāyi.

in no long time he was Finally Emancipated.

Athassa Paccekabuddhā ca mahājano ca, sarīrakiccaṃ katvā,

Then the Paccekabuddhas and the populace, after performing the funeral ceremonies,

dhātuyo ca gahetvā, nagaradvāre Thūpaṃ kāresuṃ.

and gathering the relics, had a Shrine built at the gate to the city.

Saṅkho pi brāhmaṇo: ‘Putto me ciraṃ gato, pavattimassa jānissāmī,’ ti

The brāhmaṇa Saṅkha, thinking: ‘My son has been gone a long time, I would (like to) know what happened,’

taṃ daṭṭhukāmo, Takkaṣilāto nikkhamitvā,

and desiring to see him, after leaving from Takkaṣilā,

anupubbena Bārāṇasīṃ patvā,

gradually reaching Bārāṇasī,

mahājanakāyaṃ sannipatitaṃ disvā,

and seeing the populace gathered round,

‘Addhā imesu eko pi me puttassa pavattiṃ jānissatī,’ ti

thinking: ‘Surely one of these will know what happened to my son,’

upasaṅkhamitvā pucchi:

after approaching, asked:

“Susīmo nāma māṇavo idhāgami,

“A student called Susīma came here,

api nu kho tassa pavattiṃ jānāthā?” ti

does anyone know what happened to him?”

“Āma, brāhmaṇa, jānāma:

“Yes, brāhmaṇa, we know:

asukassa brāhmaṇassa santike Tayo Vede sajjhāyitvā, pabbajitvā,

after learning the Three Vedas from a certain brāhmaṇa, and going-forth

Paccekasambodhiṃ sacchikatvā Parinibbuto,

and attaining Pacceka Awakening, he was Finally Emancipated,

ayamassa thūpo paṭiṭṭhāpito.” ti

and this is the Shrine we established.”

So bhūmiṃ hatthena paharitvā roditvā kanditvā,

After beating the ground with his hand, crying and weeping,

taṃ Cetiyaṅgaṇaṃ gantvā tiṇāni uddharitvā,

going to the courtyard of the Shrine and removing the grass,

uttarasāṭakena vālukāṃ āharitvā, cetiyaṅgaṇe ākiritvā,

carrying sand in his outer robe, and sprinkling it in the courtyard of the Shrine,

kamaṇḍaluto udakena paripphosivā,

and sprinkling water all round from his water pitcher,

vanapupphehi pūjaṃ katvā,

worshipping with wild flowers,

sāṭakena paṭākāṃ āropetvā,

erecting his robe as a flag,

Thūpassa upari attano chattakāṃ bandhitvā, pakkāmi.

and binding his own parasol over the Shrine, he departed.

[The Result of the Deeds]

Satthā idaṃ atītaṃ āharitvā:

The Teacher, after showing them the past, said:

“Tadā, bhikkhave, ahaṃ Saṅkho brāhmaṇo ahoṣiṃ.

“Then, monks, I was the brāhmaṇa Saṅkha.

Mayā Susīmassa Paccekabuddhassa cetiyaṅgaṇe tiṇāni uddhaṭāni.

I removed the grass in the courtyard of the Paccekabuddha Susīma's Shrine.

Tassa me kammaṃ nissandena

Because of that deed of mine

aṭṭhayaḥjanamaggaṃ vihatakhāṇukakaṇṭakāṃ katvā,

after clearing the road for eight leagues around of thorns and stumps,

suddhaṃ samatalaṃ karīmsu.

the (Kings) made the ground clean and even.

Mayā tattha vālukā okiṇṇā.

I sprinkled sand there.

Tassa me nissandena

Because of that (deed) of mine

aṭṭhajojanamagge vālukaṃ okirimsu.

sand was sprinkled on the road for eight leagues.

Mayā tattha vanakusumehi pūjā katā.

I worshiped there with wild flowers.

Tassa me nissandena

Because of that (deed) of mine

aṭṭhajojanamagge nānāvaṇṇāni pupphāni okiṇṇāni,

various coloured flowers were sprinkled round the road for eight leagues,

ekayojanatṭhāne Gaṅgāya udakaṃ pañcavaṇṇehi padumehi sañchannaṃ.

and five-coloured lotuses covered the top of the waters of the Ganges for one league.

Mayā tattha kamaṇḍalūdakena bhūmi paripphositā.

I sprinkled the ground all round with water from my water pitcher.

Tassa me nissandena

Because of that (deed) of mine

Vesāliyaṃ pokkharavassaṃ vassi.

it rained flowers down on Vesālī.

Mayā tattha paṭākā āropitā chattakaṇ-ca baddhaṃ.

There I erected my robe, and bound the parasol.

Tassa me nissandena

Because of that (deed) of mine

yāva Akaniṭṭhabhavanā dhajapaṭākachattātichattādīhi

as far as the dwelling place of the Highest of the High Divinities there were flags, robes and parasols upon parasols and so on raised on high,

sakalacakkavāḷagabbhaṃ ekussavaṃ viya jātaṃ.

and the inside of the whole universe became like one great ornament and festival.

Iti kho, bhikkhave, esa pūjāsakkāro

Thus, monks, this worship and honour

mayhaṃ neva Buddhānubhāvena nibbatto,

did not arise for me because of the power of being an Awakened One,

na Nāgadevabrahmānubhāvena,

nor through the powers of the Nāgas, Gods and High Divinities,

atīte pana appamattakapariccāgānubhāvenā.” ti

but because of the power of trifling donations (I made) in the past.”

Vatvā, Dhammaṃ desento imaṃ gātham-āha:

After saying that, teaching the Dhamma he recited this verse:

“Mattāsukhapariccāgā passe ce vipulaṃ sukhaṃ,

“If he could see a great happiness by abandoning a limited happiness,

Caje mattāsukhaṃ dhīro, sampassaṃ vipulaṃ sukhaṃ.”-ti

A wise man should give up that limited happiness, considering the greater happiness.”¹⁰

¹⁰ As many times happens the story hardly fits in with the verse; the story tells of someone who did a small deed and got a great reward, whereas the verse is about someone who gave up a little in order to gain a greater good.