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Life of the Buddha
by Ashva·ghoṣa



Translated by
PATRICK OLIVELLE

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LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

BY AŚVAGHOṢA

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CANTO 5
THE DEPARTURE

5.1

SA TATHĀ VIṢAYAIR vilobhyamānaḥ
param'ārhair api Śākya|rāja|sūnuḥ
na jagāma dhṛtiṃ na śarma lebhe,
hr̥daye siṃha iv' āti|digdha|viddhaḥ.

atha mantri|sutaiḥ kṣamaiḥ kadā cit
sakhibhiś citra|kathaiḥ kṛt'ānuyātraḥ
vana|bhūmi|didṛkṣayā śam'ēpsur
nara|dev'ānumato bahiḥ pratasthe.

nava|rukma|khalīna|kiṅkiṇīkaṃ
pracalac|cāmara|cāru|hema|bhāṇḍam
abhiruhya sa Kanthakaṃ sad|śvaṃ
prayayau ketum iva drum'ābja|ketuḥ.

sa vikṛṣṭatarāṃ van'ānta|bhūmiṃ
vana|lobhāc ca yayau mahī|guṇāc ca;
salil'ōrmi|vikāra|sīra|mārgāṃ
vasu|dhām c' āiva dadarśa kṛṣyamāṇām.

5.5

hala|bhinna|vikīrṇa|śaṣpa|darbhām
hata|sūkṣma|krimi|kīṭa|jantu|kīrṇām
samavekṣya rasām tathā|vidhām tām
sva|janasy' ēva vadhe bhṛṣaṃ śuśoca.

ALTHOUGH, IN this way, the Shakya king's son
was enticed with priceless objects of sense,
yet he got no content, found no relief,
like a lion shot in the heart
with a poison-tipped arrow.

5.1

Then one day, with the consent of the king,
he went outside to see the wooded groves,
along with able sons of ministers
and friends good at narrating vivid tales,
yearning to find peace.

He set out mounted on the good horse Kánthaka—
the bells hanging from its bit were made of new gold,
its gold trappings made charming with
 flowing chowries—
like the glint of *drumábja* mounted on a flag.*

Love of the woods and the exquisite land
drew him deep into the distant forest;
there he saw the earth being plowed, with furrows
resembling the rippling waves on water.

Clumps of grass dug up by the plow littered the earth,
covered with tiny dead creatures, insects and worms;
as he beheld the earth with all these strewn about,
he grieved greatly, as if a kinsman had been killed.

5.5

kṛṣataḥ puruṣāṃś ca vīkṣamāṇaḥ
pavan'ârk'âṃśu|rajo|vibhinna|varṇān
vahana|klama|viklavāṃś ca dhuryān
param'āryaḥ paramāṃ kṛpāṃ cakāra.

avatīrya tatas turaṅga|pṛṣṭāc
chanakair gāṃ vyacarac chucā parītaḥ
jagato janana|vyayaṃ vicinvan
«kṛpaṇaṃ khalv idam» ity uvāca c' ārtaḥ.

manasā ca viviktatām abhīpsuḥ
su|hṛdas tān anuyāyino nivārya
abhitaś cala|cāru|parṇavatyā
vijane mūlam upeyivān sa jambvāḥ.

niṣasāda sa yatra śaucavatyāṃ
bhuvi vaidūrya|nikāśa|śādvalāyām
jagataḥ prabhava|vyayau vicinvan
manasaś ca sthiti|mārgam ālalambe.

5.10 samavāpta|manaḥ|sthitiś ca sadyo
viṣay'êcch"ādibhir ādhibhiś ca muktaḥ
sa|vitarka|vicāram āpa śāntaṃ
prathamam dhyānam an|āsrava|prakāram.

THE DEPARTURE

Seeing the men plowing the fields,
their bodies discolored
by the wind, the dust, the scorching
rays of the sun,
oxen wearied by the toil of pulling the plows,
great compassion overwhelmed that great noble man.

Getting down from the horse, then, he began to pace
slowly across that land, deeply engulfed by grief,
reflecting on the birth and death of all creatures;
and deeply anguished, he cried out:

“How wretched, indeed, is this world!”

Getting rid of those friends who accompanied him,
wishing to reach some clarity in his own mind,
he reached the foot of a rose apple tree in a
lonely spot with charming leaves rustling all around.

On that pure ground with grass the color of beryl,
he sat down, and as he began to contemplate
the origin and destruction of all creatures,
he embarked upon the path of mental stillness.

Achieving at once the state of mental stillness, 5.10
and freedom from worries, such as sensual desire,
he attained the first trance—
with thought and reflection,
tranquil, uninfluenced by the evil inflows.*

adhigamya tato viveka|jaṃ tu
parama|prīti|sukhaṃ manah|samādhim
idam eva tataḥ paraṃ pradadhyau
manasā loka|gatiṃ niśāmya samyak:

«kṛpaṇaṃ, bata, yaj|janaḥ svayaṃ sann
a|vaśo vyādhi|jarā|vināśa|dharmā
jaray” ārditam āturaṃ mṛtaṃ vā
param a|jño vijugupsate mad’|āndhaḥ.

iha ced aham īdṛśaḥ svayaṃ san
vijugupseya paraṃ tathā|svabhāvam,
na bhavet sa|dṛśaṃ hi tat kṣamaṃ vā
paramaṃ dharmam imaṃ vijānato me.»

iti tasya vipaśyato yathāvaj
jagato vyādhi|jarā|vipatti|doṣān
bala|yauvana|jīvita|pravṛtto
vijagām’ ātma|gato madaḥ kṣaṇena.

- 5.15 na jaharṣa na c’ āpi c’ ānutepe;
vicikitsāṃ na yayau na tandri|nidre;
na ca kāma|guṇeṣu saṃrarañje;
na vididveṣa paraṃ na c’ āvamene.

THE DEPARTURE

Thereupon, he attained absorption of the mind,
born of discernment, with the joy of supreme bliss;
knowing rightly in his mind the course of the world,
thereafter he pondered over this very thing:

“How wretched that ignorant man,
blinded by pride,
who, though himself powerless
and subject to the law
Of disease, old age, and death,
should treat with contempt*
another who’s sick, dead, or oppressed by old age!

If I, being myself like that,
should treat with contempt*
another man here with a nature just like that,
It would not befit me, and it would not be right,
I who have come to fathom
this supreme dharma.”

As he thus saw rightly the evils of the world,
the evils of disease, old age, and death,
pride of self in an instant departed from him,
pride resulting from his strength, youth, and life.

He did not give in to dejection or delight;
he did not give in to doubt, or to sloth or sleep;
he felt no attachment to sensual delights;
he did not hate others or treat them with contempt.

5.15

iti buddhir iyam ca nī|rajaskā
vavṛdhe tasya mah”|ātmano viśuddhā
puruṣair a|parair a|dr̥ṣyamānaḥ
puruṣas c’ ôpasasarpa bhikṣu|veṣaḥ.

nara|deva|sutas tam abhyapṛcchad:
«vada, ko ’s’ îti?» śaśamaṣa so ’tha tasmai:
«nara|puṁgava, janma|mṛtyu|bhītaḥ
śramaṇaḥ pravrajito ’smi mokṣa|hetoḥ.

jagati kṣaya|dharmake mumukṣur
mṛgaye ’ham śivam a|kṣayaṁ padaṁ tat
sva|jane ’nya|jane ca tulya|buddhir
viṣayebhyo vinivṛtta|rāga|doṣaḥ.

nivasan kva cid eva vṛkṣa|mūle
vijane v” āyatane girau vane vā
vicarāmy a|parigraho nir|āśaḥ
param’|ārthāya yath”|ôpapanna|bhaikṣaḥ.»

5.20 iti paśyata eva rāja|sūnor
idam ukvā sa nabhaḥ samutpapāta;
sa hi tad|vapur anya|buddha|darśī
smṛtaye tasya sameyivān div’|âukāḥ.

THE DEPARTURE

As this awareness, stainless and free of passion,
began to wax strong in that noble man,
a man approached him wearing a mendicant's garb,
unseen by any of the other men.

The son of the king then questioned that man:

“Tell me. Who are you?”

And the man gave him this reply:

“Frightened by birth and death, bull among men,
I have gone forth as a recluse,
for the sake of release.

I seek release within this perishable world,
I seek that holy and imperishable state,
I regard my own people and others alike,
love and hate of sensual things
have been extinguished in me.

Dwelling anywhere at all—under trees,
a deserted temple, forest or hill—
I wander without possessions or wants,
living on almsfood I happen to get,
in search of the supreme goal.”

Having said this, he flew into the sky,
even as the son of the king looked on;
for he was a deity who in that form
had seen other Buddhas and had come down
to arouse the attention of the prince.

5.20

gaganam kha|gavad gate ca tasmin
 nṛ|varaḥ saṃjahr̥ṣe visismiye ca;
 upalabhya tataś ca dharmā|saṃjñām*
 abhiniryāṇa|vidhau matiṃ cakāra.

tata Indra|samo jit'êndriy'âśvaḥ
 pravivikṣuḥ puram aśvam āruroha;
 parivāra|janaṃ tv avekṣamāṇas
 tata ev' âbhimataṃ vanaṃ na bheje.

sa jarā|maraṇa|kṣayaṃ cikīrṣur
 vana|vāsāya matiṃ smṛtau nidhāya
 praviveśa punaḥ puraṃ na kāmād
 vana|bhūmer iva maṇḍalaṃ dvip'êndraḥ.

«sukhitā, bata, nirvṛtā ca sâ strī
 patir īdr̥kṣa ih' āyat'âkṣa yasyāḥ!»
 iti taṃ samudīkṣya rāja|kanyā
 praviśantaṃ pathi s'âñjalir jagāda.

5.25 atha ghoṣam imaṃ mah"âbhra|ghoṣaḥ
 pariśuśrāva śamaṃ paraṃ ca lebhe;
 śrutavān sa hi «nirvṛt" êti» śabdaṃ
 parinirvāṇa|vidhau matiṃ cakāra.

THE DEPARTURE

When he had flown to the sky like a bird,
that foremost of men was thrilled and amazed;
then, perceiving that emblem of dharma,*
he set his mind on how he might leave home.

Then, that Indra's equal,
who had controlled the horses of senses,
 mounted his horse to enter the city;
out of concern for his men he did not
go directly to the forest he loved.

Intending to destroy old age and death,
his mind set on living the forest life,
 he entered the city again
unwillingly, like an elephant king
from the forest entering a corral.

On seeing him entering along the road,
a royal maiden, her palms joined, exclaimed:

 “Happy, indeed, and fulfilled is the wife,
 O Long-eyed One,
 Who has for her husband here such a man!”

Then, as he heard this voice,
 he obtained supreme calm,
he whose voice was like that of a great thunder cloud;
for, as he heard the word “fulfilled,” he set his mind
on the means to final Nirvanic fulfillment.

5.25

atha kāñcana|śaila|śṛṅga|varṣmā
gaja|megha|rṣabha|bāhu|nisvan'|ākṣaḥ
kṣayam a|kṣaya|dharma|jāta|rāgaḥ
śaśi|siṃh'|ānana|vikramaḥ prapede.

mṛga|rāja|gatis tato 'bhyagacchan
nṛ|patiṃ mantri|gaṇair upāsyamānam
samitau Marutām iva jvalantaṃ
Maghavantaṃ tri|dive Sanatkumāraḥ.

praṇipatya ca s'|āñjalir babhāṣe:
«diśa mahyaṃ, nara|deva, sādhu anujñām;
parivivrajiṣāmi mokṣa|hetor,
niyato hy asya janasya viprayogaḥ.»

iti tasya vaco niśamya rājā
kariṇ' év' ābhīhato drumaś cacāla
kamala|pratime 'ñjalau grhītvā
vacanaṃ c' édam uvāca bāṣpa|kaṇṭhaḥ:

5.30 «pratisaṃhara, tāta, buddhim etāṃ,
na hi kālas tava dharmā|saṃśrayasya;
vayasi prathame matau calāyāṃ
bahu|doṣāṃ hi vadanti dharmā|caryām.

THE DEPARTURE

Then, in stature like the peak of the golden mount,
arms of an elephant, voice of a thunder cloud,
eyes of a bull, gait of a lion, face like the moon,
he reached the dwelling place
 with his yearning aroused
for the dharma that's imperishable.

Then he, with the gait of the king of beasts, approached
the king attended by the group of ministers,
as Sanat-kumára in the third heaven approached
Indra shining in the council of the Maruts.

He prostrated himself with his palms joined and said:

“Kindly grant me permission, O god among men;
 to gain release, I desire the wandering life,
For separation is appointed for this man.”

Hearing his words, the king began to shake,
like a tree struck down by an elephant;
grasping his hands that looked like lotus buds,
the king uttered these words, choking with tears:

“Turn back, my son, from this resolution,
 for it's not the time for you
 to give yourself to dharma;
For, when you're young and your mind is fickle,
 there're many dangers, they say,
 in the practice of dharma.

5.30

viṣayeṣu kutūhal'ēndriyasya
vrata|kheḍeṣv a|samartha|niścayasya
taruṇasya manaś calaty araṇyād
an|abhijñasya viśeṣato viveke.

mama tu, priya|dharma, dharma|kālas
tvayi lakṣmīm avasṛjya lakṣma|bhūte;
sthira|vikrama, vikrameṇa dharmas
tava hitvā tu guruṃ bhaved a|dharmaḥ.

tad imaṃ vyavasāyam utsṛja tvam,
bhava tāvan nirato gṛha|stha|dharme;
puruṣasya vayah|sukhāni bhuktvā
ramaṇīyo hi tapo|vana|praveśaḥ.»

iti vākyam idaṃ niśamya rājñāḥ
kalaviṅka|svara uttaraṃ babhāṣe:
«yadi me pratibhūś caturṣu rājan
bhavasi tvam na tapo|vanaṃ śrayiṣye.

5.35 na bhaven maraṇāya jīvitam me,
viharet svāsthyam idam ca me na rogaḥ,
na ca yauvanam ākṣipej jarā me,
na ca saṃpattim imāṃ hared vipattiḥ.»

THE DEPARTURE

As objects of sense tend to excite his senses,
as he can't be firm facing the hardships of vows,
A young man's mind turns away
from the wilderness,
above all as he is not used to solitude.

But for me it is the time for dharma,
after conferring on you sovereignty,
you who possess the marks of sovereignty
O lover of dharma;

But if you leave your father by violating
the right order, you whose courage is firm,*
your dharma will turn into *adhárma*.

So, give up this resolution of yours,
give yourself for now to household dharma;
For, when one goes to the ascetic grove
after he has enjoyed the joys of youth,
it's truly a wonderful sight!"

Hearing these words of the king, he gave this reply,
in a voice like that of a *kalavinka* bird:

"If you will become a surety for me
in four things, O King,
I will not go to the ascetic grove.

My life shall never be subject to death,
disease shall not steal this good health of mine,
Old age shall never overtake my youth,
no mishap shall rob this fortune of mine."

5-35

iti dur|labham artham ūcivāṃsam
 tanayaṃ vākyaṃ uvāca Śākya|rājah:
 «tyaja buddhim imām ati|pravṛttām
 avahāsyo 'ti|mano|ratho 'kramaś ca.»

atha Meru|gurur gurum babhāṣe:
 «yadi n' āsti krama eṣa, n' āsmi vāryaḥ;
 śaraṇāj jvalanena dahyamānān
 na hi niścikramiṣuḥ kṣamaṃ grahītum.

jagataś ca yadā dhruvo viyogo,
 nanu dharmāya varaṃ svayaṃ|vivyogaḥ;
 a|vaśaṃ nanu viprayojayen mām
 a|kṛta|sv'ārtham a|triptam eva mṛtyuḥ.»

iti bhūmi|patir niśamya tasya
 vyavasāyaṃ tanayasya nirmumukṣoḥ
 abhidhāya «na yāsyat' īti» bhūyo
 vidadhe rakṣaṇam uttamāṃś ca kāmān.

5.40 sacivais tu nidarśito yathāvad
 bahu|mānāt praṇayāc ca śāstra|pūrvam
 guruṇā ca nivārito 'śru|pātaiḥ
 praviveś' āvasathaṃ tataḥ sa śocan—

THE DEPARTURE

To his son making such a hard request,
the king of the Shakyas made this response:

“Withdraw this your request, it is inordinate;
An extravagant wish is improper and extreme.”*

Then that one, mighty as Meru, told his father:

“If that’s not possible, don’t hold me back;
for it is not right to obstruct a man,
Who’s trying to escape from a burning house.

When separation is the fixed rule for this world,
is it not far better for dharma’s sake
to make that separation on my own?
Will death not separate me as I stand
helpless and unfulfilled,
without reaching my goal?”

When the king thus ascertained the resolve
of his son in search of final release,
he exclaimed, “He shall not leave!”
and made arrangements for security,
and provided him with choicest pleasures.

But when the ministers had duly counseled him,
according to scriptures, with deep respect and love;
and his father had stopped him,
shedding copious tears,
sorrowfully, then, he entered his residence—

5.40

cala|kuṇḍala|cumbit' |ânanābhir
 ghana|niśvāsa|vikampita|stanībhiḥ
 vanitābhir a|dhīra|locanābhir
 mṛga|śāvābhir iv' âbhyudīkṣyamāṇaḥ.

sa hi kāñcana|parvat' |âvadāto
 hṛday' |ônmāda|karo var' |ânganānām
 śravaṇ' |ânga|vilocan' |âtma|bhāvān
 vacana|sparśa|vapur|guṇair jahāra.

vigate divase tato vimānaṃ
 vapuṣā sūrya iva pradīpyamāṇaḥ
 timiraṃ vijighāṃsur ātma|bhāsā
 ravir udyann iva Merum āuroha.

kanak' |ôjjvala|dīpta|dīpa|vṛkṣaṃ
 vara|kāl' |âguru|dhūpa|pūrṇa|garbham
 adhiruhya sa vajra|bhakti|citraṃ
 pravaraṃ kāñcanam āsanaṃ siṣeve.

5.45 tata uttamam uttam' |ânganās taṃ
 niśi tūryair upatasthur Indra|kalpam
 Himavac|chiras' |îva candra|gaure
 Draviṇ' |êndr' |âtmajam apsaro|gaṇ' |âughāḥ.

THE DEPARTURE

while young women, their faces kissed by their
dangling earrings, their breasts throbbing with deep
and constant sighs, their eyes darting hither
and thither, gazed up at him like young does.

For he, as bright as the golden mountain
bewitching the hearts of those peerless girls,
enthralled their ears and limbs, their eyes and selves,
with his speech and touch, beauty and virtues.

Then, as the day came to an end,
his body shining like the sun,
he climbed up to the high palace,
like the rising sun Mount Meru,
so as to dispel the darkness
with the light of his self.

Going up to his inner chamber
filled with incense of the best black aloe,
lit by candelabra glistening with gold,
he sat on a splendid seat made of gold
and bespeckled with streaks of diamonds.

Then, during that night, splendid girls
playing their musical instruments
entertained that equal of Indra, that splendid man,
as on the Himalayan peak as white as the moon,
large throngs of *ápsarases* entertained
the son of the Lord of Wealth.*

5.45

paramair api divya|tūrya|kalpaiḥ
 sa tu tair n' âiva ratiṃ yayau na harṣam;
 param'ârtha|sukhāya tasya sādhor
 abhiniścikramiṣā yato na reme.

atha tatra surais tapo|variṣṭhair
 Akaniṣṭhair vyavasāyam asya buddhvā
 yugapat pramadā|janasya nidrā
 vihīt" āsīd vikṛtās ca gātra|ceṣṭāḥ—

abhavac chayitā hi tatra kā cid
 viniveśya pracale kare kapolam
 dayitām api rukma|pattra|citrām
 kupit" êv' âṅka|gatām vihāya vīṇām;

vibabhau kara|lagna|veṇur anyā
 stana|visrasta|sit'âṃśukā śayānā
 rju|ṣaṭ|pada|pañkti|juṣṭa|padmā
 jala|phena|prahasat|taṭā nad" îva;

5.50 nava|puṣkara|garbha|komalābhyām
 tapanīy'|ôj|jvala|saṃgat'|âṅgadābhyām
 svapiti sma tath" â|parā bhujābhyām
 parirabhya priyavan mṛdaṅgam eva;

THE DEPARTURE

But even that music of the finest instruments,
rivaling those of heaven,
 did not bring him mirth or joy;
the sole desire of that good man was to leave his home
in search of ultimate joy;
therefore, he did not rejoice.

Then, Akaníshtha deities, who
practiced the best austerities,
became aware of his resolve;
at once they made those young women succumb
 to sleep,
and in unsightly postures positioned their limbs—

 one was reclining there resting her cheek
 on her unsteady hand, tossing her lute
 adorned with gold leaf resting on her lap
 as if in anger, though she loved it much;

 another sparkled, a flute in her hand,
 lying down, her white gown slipping
 from her breasts,
 looking like a river, its banks laughing with foam,
 its lotuses relished by a straight row of bees;*

 another slept embracing her tambour,
 as if it were her lover, with her hands
 tender as the hearts of new lotuses,
 glistening gold armllets linked to each other;

5.50



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