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Garland of the
Buddha's Past Lives

Volume Two

by *Arya·shura*



Translated by
JUSTIN MEILAND

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS & JJC FOUNDATION

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Artwork by Robert Beer.
Typeset in Adobe Garamond at 10.25 : 12.3 pt.
Editorial input from Dániel Balogh, Ridi Faruque,
Chris Gibbons, Tomoyuki Kono,
Andrew Skilton & Eszter Somogyi.
Printed and Bound in Great Britain by
TJ International, Cornwall on acid free paper

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2009

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First Edition 2009

The Clay Sanskrit Library is co-published by
New York University Press
and the JJC Foundation.

Further information about this volume
and the rest of the Clay Sanskrit Library
is available at the end of this book and
on the following websites:

www.claysanskritlibrary.org
www.nyupress.org

ISBN 978-0-8147-9583-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Āryaśūra.

[Jātakamālā. English & Sanskrit]

Garland of the Buddha's past lives / by Ārya Śūra ;
translated by Justin Meiland. -- 1st ed.

p. cm.

Miracle stories of the Buddha's past lives.

In English and Sanskrit (romanized) on facing pages;
includes translation from Sanskrit.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8147-9583-5

1. Buddhist stories, Sanskrit--Translations into English.

2. Aryasura--Translations into English.

I. Meiland, Justin, 1937- II. Title.

BQ1462.E5M47 2009

294.3'82325--dc22

2008046726

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MAHIṢAJĀTAKAM

STORY 33

THE BIRTH-STORY OF THE BUFFALO

33.1

SATI KṢANTAVYE kṣamā syān n' â|sat' îty apakāriṇam api
sādhavo lābham iva bahu manyante.

tad|yath" ânuśrūyate.

Bodhisattvaḥ kil' ânyatamasminn araṇya|vana|pradeśe†
pañka|saṃparka|paruṣa|vapur† megha|viccheda† iva pāda|
cārī vana|mahiṣa|vṛṣo babhūva. sa tasyāṃ dur|labha|dhar-
ma|saṃjñāyāṃ saṃmoha|bahulāyāṃ api tiryag|gatau varta-
mānaḥ paṭu|vijñānatvān na dharmā|caryā|nirudyoga|matir
babhūva.

cir'ânuvṛtṭy" ēva nibaddha|bhāvā

na taṃ kadā cit karuṇā mumoca.

ko 'pi prabhāvaḥ sa tu karmaṇāṃ† vā

tasy' âiva vā, yat sa tathā babhūva. [1]

33.5

ataś ca nūnaṃ Bhagavān avocad

a|cintyatāṃ karma|vipāka|yukteḥ

kṛp"âtmakaḥ sann api yat sa bheje

tiryag|gatim tatra ca dharmā|saṃjñām. [2]

vinā na karm' âsti gati|prabandhaḥ,

śubhaṃ na c' ân|iṣṭa|vipākam asti.

sa dharmā|saṃjño† 'pi tu karma|leśāṃs

tāṃs tān samāsādya tathā tath" âsīt. [3]

ath' ânyatamo duṣṭa|vānaras tasya kāl'ântar'âbhiviyaktāṃ
prakṛti|bhadratāṃ day"ânuvṛtṭyā ca vigata|krodha|saṃram-
bhatām avetya, «n' âsmād bhayam ast'» îti taṃ Mahā|sat-
tvam tena tena vihiṃsā|krameṇa bhṛṣam† abādhata.

FORGIVENESS ONLY EXISTS if there is something to forgive, not otherwise. For this reason the virtuous esteem even those who wrong them as a gain. 33.1

Tradition has handed down the following story.

The Bodhi-sattva is said to have once been a wild buffalo who lived in a wild area of the forest. The mud that covered his body made him look fierce and he resembled a chunk of cloud as he walked along. Since their existence abounds with ignorance, it is difficult for animals to attain moral awareness. But despite this, the Bodhi-sattva's sharp acumen meant he was far from inactive in practicing virtue.

As though bound to him by long service,
compassion never left his side.
Some power had made him what he was,
deriving from past actions or his own nature.

For this reason the Lord said that the results
and methods of karma are incomprehensible. 33.5
For though compassionate, he was born an animal.
And despite that, he still had moral awareness.

Without karma there can be no connected births.
Good actions can also not have bad results.
But though morally aware, some trace of karma
must have affected him to be reborn this way.

The buffalo's innate goodness revealed itself over time and happened to be noticed by a wicked monkey. Observing that compassion made the buffalo devoid of anger and rage, the monkey concluded that there was nothing to fear from him. So he brutally began to torment the Great Being with various forms of injury.

dayā|mṛduṣu dur|janaḥ paṭutar'|âvalep'|ôddhavaḥ
 parāṃ vrajati vikriyāṃ, na hi bhayaṃ tataḥ paśyati.
 yatas tu bhaya|śaṅkayā sul|kṛśay" âpi saṃsprīyate
 vinīta iva nīcakaiś carati tatra śānt'|ôddhavaḥ. [4]

sa kadā cit tasya Mahā | sattvasya visrabdha | suptasya†
 nidrā|vaśād vā pracalāyataḥ sahas" âiv' ôpari nipatati sma.
 drumam iva kadā cid enam abhiruhya† bhṛśaṃ saṃcālayām
 āsa. kṣudhitas' âpi ca† kadā cid asya mārgam āvṛtya vyati-
 ṣṭhata. kāṣṭheṇ' âpy enam kadā cic chravaṇayoś c' āghaṭ-
 ṭayām† āsa. salil'|âvagāha†|samutsukasy' âpy asya kadā cic
 chiraḥ samadhiruhya† pāṇibhyāṃ nayane samāvavre. apy
 enam adhiruhya samudyata|daṇḍaḥ prasahy' âiva vāhayan
 Yamasya lilām anucakāra. Bodhisattvo 'pi tu† Mahā|sattvaḥ
 sarvaṃ tad asy' â|vinaya|viceṣṭitam† upakāram iva† niḥ|
 saṃkṣobha|saṃrambha|manyur marṣayām āsa.

33.10 sva|bhāva eva pāpānāṃ vinay'|ônmārga|saṃśrayaḥ
 abhyāsāt tatra tu† satām upakāra iva kṣamā. [5]

ath'† ânyatamo yakṣas tam asya paribhavam a|mṛṣya-
 māno bhāvaṃ vā jijñāsamānas† tasya Mahā|sattvasya tena
 duṣṭa|kapinā vāhyamānaṃ taṃ mahiṣa|vṛṣaṃ sthitv" ânu-
 mārgam† uvāca:

A villain shows special gleeful insolence
 toward those soft with compassion.
 Seeing no danger in them,
 he injures them greatly.
 But if he suspects someone
 even slightly of danger,
 he will be servile and feign modesty,
 his exuberance quelled.

Sometimes the monkey would suddenly leap onto the Great Being as he slumbered soundly and twitched his body under a spell of sleep. Sometimes he would clamber up the buffalo like a tree and shake him violently. Sometimes he would stand in front of him and block his path, just when he was hungry. Sometimes he rubbed the buffalo's ears with a stick. Sometimes he climbed onto the buffalo's head and covered his eyes with his hands, just as he yearned to plunge into water. Or otherwise he would mount him and playfully imitate Yama by wielding a stick and driving him forward by force.* But the Bodhi-sattva, that Great Being, endured all these indecent pranks without agitation, as if they were a service, and felt neither anger nor rage.

The wicked naturally follow
 a path straying from decency.
 But the good naturally tolerate this as a service,
 so practiced are they in forbearance.*

33.10

Now a certain yaksha* who was unable to bear the insults suffered by the Great Being, or who perhaps wanted to test his character, blocked the path of the buffalo as the wicked monkey rode him and said:

«mā tāvad bhoḥ! kiṃ parikrīto 'sy anena duṣṭa | kap-
inā? atha dyūte parājitaḥ? ut' āho bhayam asmāt kiṃ cid
āśānkase? ut' āho balam ātma | gataṃ n' āveṣi yad evam
anena paribhūya vāhyase? nanu ca† bhoḥ,

veg' | āviddhaṃ tvad | viṣāṇ' | āgra | vajraṃ
bhindyād vajraṃ vajravat† vā nag' | êndrān.
pādās c' ême roṣa | samrambha | mukta
majjeyus te paṅkavac chaila | pṛṣṭhe. [6]

idaṃ ca śail' | ôpama | samhataṃ sthiraṃ†
samagra | śobhaṃ bala | sampadā vapuḥ
svabhāva | saujaśa | nirīkṣit' | ôrjitaṃ
dur | āsadaṃ kesariṇo 'pi te bhavet! [7]

33.15 mathāna dhṛtvā tad imaṃ khureṇa† vā!
viṣāṇa | koṭyā madam asya v" ôddhara!
kim asya jālmasya kaper a | śaktavat
prabādhanā | duḥkham idaṃ titikṣase? [8]

a | saj | janaḥ kutra yathā cikitsyate
guṇ' | ānuvṛṭtyā sukha | śīta† | saumyayā,
kaṭ' | ūṣṇa | rūkṣāṇi hi yatra siddhaye
kaph' | ātmake† roga iva prasarpati.» [9]

atha Bodhisattvas taṃ yakṣam avekṣamāṇaḥ kṣamā | pakṣa |
patitam a | rūkṣ' | ākṣaram ity uvāca:

«avaimy enaṃ bala | nyūnaṃ† sadā c' â | vinaye ratam.
ata eva mayā tv asya yuktaṃ marṣayituṃ nanu? [10]

“Stop this, good fellow! Are you the hireling of this wicked monkey? Have you lost at dice? Do you fear some danger from him? Do you not know your own strength that you let him ride you in this humiliating way? Surely, good sir,

Wielded with force, the thunderbolt-tips of your horns
could pierce a bolt or cleave mountains like a bolt.
Kicked with furious rage, your hooves
could sink into a slab of rock like mud.

Your body is solid and as firm as a rock.
Its superb strength makes it entirely beautiful.
Beings powerful by nature gaze at your might.
Maned lions would find it hard to assail you!

So seize and crush him with your hoof!
Rip out his impudence with the tip of your horn!
Why do you act as if you were powerless,
enduring the torment inflicted by this rogue?

33.15

When is a criminal cured by being treated
with gentle, cool and soothing deeds of virtue?
Only bitter, hot, harsh herbs give a result,
as with the spread of a phlegmatic disease.”

Looking at the yaksha, the Bodhi-sattva addressed him
with gentle words that promoted forbearance:

“I know that he lacks strength
and always delights in indecency.
But is that not the reason
why I should put up with him?

pratikartum a|śaktasya kṣamā kā hi baliyasi?
vinay'ācāra|dhīreṣu kṣantavyaṃ kiṃ ca sādhuṣu? [11]

33.20 śakta eva titikṣate dur|bala|skhalitaṃ yataḥ
varam paribhavas tasmān na guṇānāṃ parābhavaḥ. [12]

a|sat|kriyā hīna|balāc ca nāma
nirveśa†|kālaḥ paramo guṇānām.
guṇa|prijas tatra kim ity avekṣya†
sva|dhairya|bhedāya parākrameta? [13]

nityaṃ kṣamāyās ca nanu kṣamāyāḥ
kālaḥ par'āyattatayā dur|āpaḥ.
pareṇa tasminn upapādite ca
tatr' āiva kopa|praṇaya|kramaḥ kaḥ? [14]

svāṃ dharmā|pīḍām a|vicintya yo 'yaṃ
mat|pāpa|śuddhy|artham iva pravṛttaḥ,
na cet kṣamām apy aham atra kuryām
anyaḥ kṛta|ghno bata kīdrśaḥ syāt?» [15]

yakṣa uvāca: «tena hi na tvam asya prabāadhanāyāḥ kadā
cin† mokṣyase.

33.25 guṇeṣv a|bahu|mānasya
dur|janasy' ā|vinītatām
kṣamā|naibhrītyam a|tyaktvā
kaḥ saṃkocayituṃ prabhuḥ?» [16]

What forbearance is it if one is powerless
to retaliate against those who are mightier?
And what is there to endure in good people
who are steadfast in decency and virtue?

Though one has the power to retaliate,
one should endure the wrongs of weaker beings.
For it is better to be insulted by them
than to ruin one's own virtues.

33.20

The best time to apply virtue is
when dishonored by someone weaker.
Why would a lover of virtue use violence,
only to destroy his own steadfastness?

There is never a wrong time for forbearance.
But the occasion is rare as it depends on others.
So if another person produces an opportunity,
why would one resort to anger?

If I did not show forbearance toward those
who disregard their violation of morality,
acting almost to purify my own bad karma,
would anyone exist less grateful than I?"

"In that case you will never escape from his torment," the
yaksha replied.

"If you continue your passive tolerance,
who will be able to curb
the unruly conduct of this villain
who has no respect for virtue?"

33.25

Bodhisattva uvāca:

«parasya pīḍā|praṇayena yat sukhaṃ
 nivāraṇaṃ syād a|sukh'ôdayasya vā,
 sukh'ârthinas tan na niṣevituṃ kṣamaṃ.
 na tad|vipāko hi sukha|prasiddhaye. [17]

kṣam"âśrayād evam asau may" ârthataḥ
 prabodhyamāno yadi n' âvagacchati,
 nivārayiṣyanti ta enam utpathād
 a|marṣiṇo yān ayam abhyupaiṣyati. [18]

a|sat|kriyāṃ prāpya ca tad|vidhāj janān
 na mādrśe 'py evam asau kariṣyati.
 na drṣṭa†|doṣo hi punas tathā cared,
 ataś ca muktir mama sā bhaviṣyati.» [19]

33.30 atha sa† yakṣas taṃ Mahā|sattvaṃ prasāda|vismaya|ba-
 humān'|āvarjita|matih «sādhu! sādhu!» iti sa|śiraḥ|prakam-
 p'|ânguli|vikṣepam abhisamṛādhyā tat tat priyam uvāca:

«kutas tiraścām iyam idrṣī sthitir?
 guṇeṣv ayaṃ† c' ādara|vistaraḥ kutah?
 kay" âpi buddhyā tv idam āsthito vapus.
 tapo|vane ko 'pi bhavāṃs tapasyati!» [20]

ity enam abhipraśasya taṃ c' âsya duṣṭa|vānaraṃ pṛṣṭhād
 avadhūya samādiśya c' âsya rakṣā|vidhānaṃ tatr' âiv' ântar|
 dadhe.

The Bodhi-sattva answered:

“Those who seek happiness
should not pursue pleasure or avert pain
by injuring another person.
For this will not result in happiness.

I practice patience to make him aware.
If he still does not understand,
he will meet people intolerant of him.
They will make him cease his wicked ways.

When he is maltreated by these people,
he will stop tormenting those like me.
Seeing his crime, he will stop acting this way.
And that will then be my release.”

“Excellent! Excellent!” the yaksha exclaimed, filled with 33.30
devotion, wonder and reverence. Rocking his head and
making flourishing gestures with his fingers, he applauded
the Great Being with the following kind words:

“How can animals possess such conduct?
How can they have such wide regard for virtue?
Some design must lie behind your appearance.
You must practice asceticism in an ascetic grove!”

With these words of praise, the yaksha threw the wicked
monkey off the buffalo's back and, after teaching the buffalo
a protective spell, he disappeared there and then.

tad evaṃ, sati kṣantavye kṣamā syān n' â|sat' îty apakāri-
ṇam api sādhaso lābham iva bahu|manyante.

iti kṣānti|kathāyāṃ vācyam. «evaṃ tiryag|gatānāṃ api†
pratisaṃkhyāna | sauṣṭhavaṃ dṛṣṭam. ko nāma manuṣya |
bhūtaḥ pravrajita|pratijño vā tad|vikalaḥ śobheta?» ity evam
api vācyam. Tathāgata|varṇe sat|kṛtya dharma|śravaṇe c' êti.

STORY 33: BIRTH-STORY OF THE BUFFALO

In this way, forgiveness only exists if there is something to forgive, not otherwise. For this reason the virtuous esteem even those who wrong them as a gain.

One should tell this story when preaching forbearance. And one should also say: "In this way, even animals are shown to be capable of excellent mental strength. Who that is human or that has taken the vow of renunciation would wish to appear deficient in this regard?" One should also tell this story when praising the Tatha-gata or when listening to the Teaching with respect.