

Dharmetta: Nun's Poems (2 of 5) Dantika and Patacara

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So it seems that the IMC website is down. It took me a while to realize that because it might have happened just before we all started here. I have a number of laptops open, and one of them is on just fine. But the other one, the one I use here to see you with the chats, I couldn't get it to get on. But then I went directly through YouTube, and that got me on.

So I suppose that those of you who are now listening know that, or might know that if you went directly through YouTube. And there are some people who maybe didn't and haven't found their way.

So today I'm going to continue reading some of the poems from the *Therīgāthā*, the verses or the poems of the early nuns, Buddhist nuns. And sometimes they're understood to be poems that they've written. Sometimes they're in a third person, or they're in the first person talking to her. Someone is speaking to her, and sometimes there's a conversation back and forth.

So exactly the genesis of these poems, how they were composed, and whose voices are being spoken is not always so clear. But they represent the earliest nuns and female teachers of ancient times. And I've translated the whole text and am working on completing it and making it available.

So, this poem here is by a nun whose name is Dantikā. And many of these poems, the name of the nun kind of comes into play and is related to the poem itself. So her name, Dantikā, means the tamed, the tamed one. And what's being referred to is an elephant that's been tamed. And somehow seeing the tamed elephant has an effect on her. And maybe it helps her tame herself.

So she writes that she's meditating on Vulture Peak. Vulture Peak was a little mountaintop, a mountain nook, that's still there. People visit and do pilgrimages there because the Buddha

taught at Vulture Peak. Many of the discourses he taught were to the gathering of monks there, and he would teach vulture. And so it's quite significant that this nun is sitting in the same place. But it's not that far from a river, so maybe it's more like a hill.

Leaving my day's meditation on Vulture Peak, I saw at the river's edge an elephant emerge from its plunge. A man holding a pole with a hook said to the elephant, "Give me your foot." The elephant stretched out its foot, and the man climbed up on the elephant. Seeing the untamed tamed and under human control, my mind entered *samādhi*. What I had gone to the woods to do.

Yeah, so my mind entered *samādhi*. What I had gone to the woods to do. So here we have someone who was meditating, trying to enter *samādhi*, to be deep, immersed in her experience, just being really fully, fully present.

In *samādhi*, it's this way of being really present, that we're kind of absorbed or immersed in whatever it is we're doing. We might be immersed in playing music, cooking, having a conversation with someone, or meditating. We're absorbed in it, so we're completely involved in that experience without being fragmented or distracted. But it is in such a way that it feels really good for us. It feels harmonious and centered and collected.

And so she'd been meditating probably for some time, and maybe she hadn't attained any kind of *samādhi*. But then she saw that an elephant could come under control, a wild elephant could get tamed. And somehow, probably it was kind of an amazing sight to see. Probably she got a little bit absorbed and in awe of seeing the sight of a man telling an elephant to stretch out his foot or help him get up.

And he stands on the stretched-out arm of the elephant. And I don't know if it's stretched out or it's bent back. I don't know how it works. But the elephant arranges its foot so the man can climb up on the back of the elephant.

Leaving my day's meditation on Vulture Peak, I saw at the river's edge an elephant emerge from its plunge. A man holding a pole with a hook said, "Give me your foot." The elephant stretched out its foot, and the man climbed up. Seeing the untamed tamed and under human control, my mind entered *samādhi*. What I'd gone to the woods to do.

So the poem is kind of celebrating. It's a little bit unusual for this poem, because often these poems have to do with the nun becoming awakened, and here there's no awakening. But she's celebrating, appreciating that you attain *samādhi*.

There's another one that's somewhat like this. And it is the poem of Paṭācārā. On the IMC website, there are different photographs that come along on the homepage that rotate through. And one of them is a statue of, mostly the head of the face of the statue of Paṭācārā that we have at IRC. Beautiful, beautiful statue.

And Paṭācārā was one of the early Buddhist nuns. And she was also famous for being a teacher. And there's more poems in the *Therīgāthā* referring to her as a teacher of other nuns than any other woman, any other nuns. And so, a very important person. And her poem goes this way.

I considered, I thought, I considered plowing fields with plows, sowing seeds in the ground, caring for children and wife. Young men gain wealth. Why is it that I, thorough in virtuous conduct, doing the Buddha's instruction, not lazy or proud, have not attained release, have not attained freedom? With feet washed, I watched the water, the foot-washing water, flow from high ground to low. With this, the mind concentrated like a thoroughbred horse. Taking an oil lamp, I entered my hut. Looking over my bed, I sat down on the bed. Taking a needle, I pulled out the wick. As the flames went out, my mind was freed.

So here, she's been practicing for some time. She's a nun. And she's wondering, why haven't I been released? Why haven't I been freed? Why haven't I been awakened?

And she's wondering: people who work hard at their craft, like farmers, they build wealth. They build an ability to take care of their family and have success. But here, her work, her craft, is meditation, Buddhist practice. It hasn't led her anywhere. So what's going on here?

But then she does something which in ancient India was a common thing. And that is, they washed their feet. Mostly back then, people walked around barefoot, and it was dusty. And so washing their feet was a frequent thing people did. Often there would be a foot-washing basin.

And when I was in Burma, a monk in Burma, we would walk sometimes for alms in the morning and go to someone's home. They'd have a basin of water for us to wash our feet before we went into their house. And so, you know, washing her feet, maybe she was getting ready to go into her hut. Maybe it was getting late, end of the day.

And I can imagine she was sitting down, pouring water over her feet. And that water was running down the hillside where she was sitting, and she was watching. And kind of nothing much had to happen. She wasn't distracted. She wasn't thinking about other things.

And often watching water flow can be captivating, absorbing, just kind of following it. And so she did that, and her mind settled. And sometimes paying unselfconscious attention to something and giving ourselves over to it in a very simple and innocent way is the best way to get concentrated in meditation.

It's this being self-conscious, doing it self-consciously, making self-conscious effort, that often interferes with our ability to be immersed, absorbed in our experience, and to get this kind of wonderful feeling of harmony or subtleness or peace that can come when there's *samādhi*.

And her concentration, you know, she described herself being concentrated as a thoroughbred horse. And a thoroughbred horse is as strong, as powerful. There's a certain nobility to it, a strength to it. And so to describe her *samādhi* is not describing it in kind of idyllic, pastoral ideas of being peaceful or calm or settled. But she's definitely, all those things are there. But also there's a strength to it.

And she feels really strong, a strong sense of... And when there's really good *samādhi*, sometimes you carry it with you after coming out of meditation. And there feels like a sense of strength or clarity that you carry with you, that's carrying you along.

And she went into her hut. She had an oil lamp. Maybe it was dark in there. She was going to maybe go to sleep or sit down or do something. And so she found her way there, found her way to her bed, and maybe she was going to lay down.

And the way that the oil lamps in the old world worked, it's just a wick that was kind of sticking up. If you want to turn off the light, you pull the wick out, and so there's no more oil. And then the flame just kind of—the oil gets used up in the flame from the wick, and the flame goes out.

Plowing fields with plows, sowing seeds in the ground, caring for children and wife, young men gain wealth. Why is it that I, thorough in virtuous conduct, doing the Buddha's instruction, not lazy or proud, have not attained release? With feet washed, I watched the water, the foot-washing water, flow from high ground to low. With this, the mind concentrated like a thoroughbred horse. Taking an oil lamp, I entered my hut. Looking over the bed, I sat down on the bed. Taking a needle, I pulled out the wick. As the flame went out, the mind was freed.

Again, this unselfconscious absorption, presence, and probably her mind was absorbed very nicely in a flame. Another thing that people can look at for a long time, be absorbed in, a

flame that's burning. So she got concentrated with the water flowing, step by step, came in and saw the bed and sat down, and then watched the flame of her little lamp. Pulled the wick out and watched as the flame went out.

And when it goes out, there's nothing anymore. When it gets dark, there's nothing more for the mind to see or be absorbed in. And rather than going to the next thing, the next thought, the next distraction, and being busy, the mind for a moment had nothing it had to do, nothing it had to see, feel, think, be with. The mind had the space to be free, and something deep let go.

And she says, "The mind was freed." And this is a description of her awakening, of Paṭācārā.

So thank you for today. And I'll continue reading some of these poems this week. And I trust that tomorrow, or soon, the IMC website will be up again. Thank you.