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Teaching’:  
A translation of Aśvaghoṣa’s  
Buddhacarita Canto 15 from a recently  
rediscovered Sanskrit manuscript**

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# ‘Turning the Wheel of the Teaching’: A translation of Aśvaghōṣa’s *Buddhacarita* Canto 15 from a recently rediscovered Sanskrit manuscript

## Introduction

The *Buddhacarita*, or ‘Life of the Buddha’, is a long poem (*mahākāvya*) written in about the 2nd c. CE by Aśvaghōṣa, a Brahman convert to Buddhism, who came from Sāketa in north-west India.<sup>1</sup> It was thought that only the first fourteen cantos of the *Buddhacarita* had survived in the original Sanskrit, amounting to half of the complete work. E.H Johnston (1936) published an edition of those first fourteen cantos of the *Buddhacarita* that remains the standard today.<sup>2</sup> It is based on a Nepalese manuscript from which some palm leaves were missing, leaving gaps in cantos 1 and 14. Johnston went on, however, to translate not only the extant Sanskrit of the *Buddhacarita*, but also the missing stanzas from cantos 1 and 14 from the surviving 13th c. Tibetan translation, which had been edited by Friedrich Weller (1926). He also made a translation, from the Tibetan translation together with a translation into Chinese, of cantos 15–28. More recently, Patrick Olivelle (2008) has made a new, more literary, translation of Johnston’s Sanskrit edition and additions, ending with stanza 31 of Canto 14, describing the night of the Buddha’s Awakening. Olivelle then gives a summary of the remaining fourteen cantos, based on Johnston’s translation. But, as Johnston explains, the Chinese translation is a very free paraphrase, while the Tibetan translation is often corrupt and ambiguous.<sup>3</sup> The poetry is lost.

The rediscovery, therefore, of the Sanskrit stanzas of Canto 15 of the *Buddhacarita* is a cause for celebration among lovers of Sanskrit literature. The Japanese scholar Kazunobu Matsuda (2020), working with Jens-Üwe Hartmann, has recently identified the whole canto embedded in a Sanskrit manuscript of the *Tridaṇḍamālā*, attributed to Aśvaghōṣa. This manuscript was preserved in sPos khang monastery in Tibet (200 kms southwest of Lhasa), copied from an original which was brought there from India by Atīśa. The manuscript was photographed by Giuseppe Tucci and Rāhula Sāṅkrtyāyana in the 1930s, and, despite parts of the photographs being out of focus, Matsuda has managed to identify almost all of the Sanskrit characters with more or less certainty. While Matsuda has made a translation into Japanese, I offer below a translation of the Sanskrit text of *Buddhacarita* Canto 15 into English.

Scholars have shown how Aśvaghōṣa drew on a range of canonical materials for his biography, while re-imagining character and dialogue for the sake of art.<sup>4</sup> While Canto 15 appears to draw on materials preserved in the Pāli *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* and *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, further research would be needed to identify his precise sources. A summary of Canto 15 is

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<sup>1</sup> Aśvaghōṣa’s other surviving work is *Saundarananda*, ed. & trans. Johnston (1932), and trans. Covill (2007) as *Handsome Nanda*.

<sup>2</sup> Replacing a previous edition by Cowell (1893).

<sup>3</sup> Johnston (1936: 6); the Chinese translation has recently been translated into English by Willemen (2009); and for a more positive account of Sanskrit-Chinese translation strategies in relation to the *Buddhacarita* see Lettere (2015).

<sup>4</sup> See Johnston (1936), Eltschinger (2012; 2013; 2014; 2020), Li (2019), and the bibliography by Eltschinger and Yamabe (2018).

as follows. The newly-awakened Buddha is on the road to Vārāṇasī (1). He meets Upaga, who asks about his teacher (2–3). The Buddha replies (4–12) that he has no teacher, that he is Awakened, that he is going to teach the Dharma, as he vowed to do many lifetimes previously, as an expression of altruistic concern. Upaga is impressed and sceptical at the same time (13). The Buddha reaches Vārāṇasī (also called Kāśī) and enters the Deer Park (14–15). His former companions see him and decide to be friendly despite his abandoning the life of austerity (16–18). As he approaches they cannot help but respond with respect (19–21). The Buddha, however, reprimands them for using his old family name (Gautama), for now that he is Awakened it is no longer appropriate (22–3). The ascetics are baffled, since to them the Buddha has given up the ascetic life (24–6). The Buddha explains how neither an ordinary life of sensual desire, nor the ascetic life of austerity, can possibly lead to insight (27–33). He has discovered a middle way (34), and the eightfold path (35–6). The Buddha teaches them the four noble truths (37–8), the nature of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*) (39–40), and the role of the conception of self (*ātman*), of the root faults (*doṣas*) and of past actions (*karma*) in maintaining conditioned existence (41–3). He describes *nirvāṇa* (44–5) and his attainment of Awakening (46–50), and Kauṇḍinya gains insight (51). The concluding stanzas praise Kauṇḍinya and then describe how news of the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma travels through the universe (52–8).

My translation consists in two parallel translations, the first in verse and the second in prose, corresponding to two different translation strategies. The prose is a literal word-by-word translation which intends to convey the syntactic texture and wide-ranging vocabulary of Aśvaghōṣa's Sanskrit in a readable English version. However, such a translation is at the cost of the poetic qualities of the *kāvya*. Hence, the verse translation renders Aśvaghōṣa's *gāthās* a *pāda* at a time. Sanskrit poetry relies on metre, that is, on patterns of long and short syllables. Stanzas 1–51 of Canto 15 are in a *triṣṭubh* metre called *upajāti*, which Aśvaghōṣa handles with consummate skill. In English poetry since the time of Milton, blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) has been used to convey philosophical narrative in a dignified register not too removed from ordinary speech. Hence I have rendered Aśvaghōṣa's *upajāti* into a loose blank verse. The closing stanzas of Canto 15 are in a more elaborate metre called *praharṣiṇī*, which I have put into an unrhymed ballad metre.

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### Translation: *Buddhacarita* Canto 15: ‘Turning the Wheel of the Teaching’

The Sanskrit text below is reproduced with the kind permission of Kazunobu Matsuda. The (round) and [square] brackets indicate increasing uncertainty in his readings. I have accessed Matsuda’s notes in Japanese with the help of online translation tools. In the two stanzas (37 and 42) where some *akṣaras* (letters) are illegible, I have made conjectures, given in footnotes. I am grateful to an anonymous *ALT* reviewer for helpful suggestions that have improved the translation.

<p><i>taṃ śāntaṃ ojasvinam āptakāryaṃ</i>  <i>prayāntam ekaṃ bahuneva sārdham  </i>  <i>kaścīn niśāmyādhvani bhikṣudharmā</i>  <i>savismayaḥ prāñjalir ity uvāca    1   </i><sup>5</sup></p>	<p>Tranquil yet vigorous, his task fulfilled,  alone yet moving as if with many –  observing this monk-like traveller, Upaga,  amazed, spoke as follows, with folded hands:</p>
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1. Observing on the road that peaceful one who was vigorous, whose task had been achieved, who was moving forward alone as if together with many, resembling a monk, someone [i.e. Upaga] spoke the following, amazed, with hands pressed together:

<p><i>sattveṣu sakteṣu yathāsy asaktaḥ</i>  <i>calendriyāśveṣu jitendriyāśvaḥ  </i></p>	<p>“Among compulsive beings you are uncompelled,  like a tamed horse among nervous wild beasts.</p>
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<sup>5</sup> The first 51 *gāthās* are in *upajāti* metre (consisting in 11 syllables per *pāda*, ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘). In the verse translation I respond with blank verse (consisting of unrhymed iambic pentameters).

*śaṅke namasyo 'si śaśāṅkakalpa  
prajñārasasyātirasasya tṛptaḥ || 2 ||*

I think that, like the moon, you deserve respect,  
full up with wisdom's pleasing, juicy taste.

2. "You are unattached among living beings who are attached, like a horse whose faculties have been won over among horses whose faculties are trembling. I think you are like the moon in being deserving of respect, in being satisfied with the very tasty taste of wisdom.

*vaktrasya te dhīra yathā prasādaḥ  
karoṣi caiśvaryam ihendriyāṅām /  
nūnaṃ kṛtārtho 'si maharṣibhāḥṣa  
kas te gurur brūhi yato 'si siddhaḥ || 3 ||*

"The way your face is radiant, brave sir, and how  
you exercise control over your senses,  
you must have reached your goal, great bull-eyed one.  
But who's your teacher? Tell me, how did you succeed?"

3. "Brave sir, according to the radiance of your face, and how you make control of your senses here, certainly you are one whose aim is achieved, great bull-eyed one. Who is your teacher, tell me, how have you succeeded?"

*taṃ so 'bravīn nāsti mamānuśāstā  
mānyo na me kaścana nāvamānyaḥ /  
svayaṃbhavaṃ mām avagaccha dharme  
nīrvāṇam āpannam atulyam anyaiḥ || 4 ||*

"I have no instructor," the Buddha said,  
"and no-one do I venerate nor despise.  
Know me to be independent in the Dharma,  
attained to an incomparable nirvāṇa.

4. He said this: "I have no instructor. I do not esteem nor despise anyone. Know me to be independent in respect of the Dharma. The quenching I have attained is not equalled by others.

*yataś ca boddhavyam abuddham anyair  
buddhaṃ mayā kṛtsnam ato 'smi buddhaḥ /  
kleśās ca yasmād abhinirjītā me  
tasmā jinaṃ mām upagāvagaccha || 5 ||*

"What others could awaken to but have not,  
I have wholly understood, so I am Buddha.  
And I have mastered the afflictions, so  
you should know me as the Master, Upaga.

5. "Because others have not awakened to what is to be awakened to, but I have completely awakened to it, therefore I am the Awakened One. And because I am completely victorious over the afflictions, therefore, Upaga, you should know me as the victor.

*vārāṇasīm [eṣa ca] saumya yāmi  
tatrāhaniṣye 'mṛtadharmabherīm /  
ārtasya duḥkhair jagato hitāya  
na mānāhetor na yaśaḥsukhāya || 6 ||*

"My friend, I go to Varanasi, there  
to beat the Dharma-drum of deathlessness,  
for the well-being of the suffering world,  
not because of pride, nor for the bliss of fame.

6. "And, friend, I am going to Vārāṇasī. There I will beat the kettle-drum of the Dharma of the deathless state, for the well-being of the world oppressed by sufferings, not because of pride nor for the enjoyment of fame.

*tīrṇo jagattārayitā bhavyaṃ  
sattvāni muktaḥ parimocayeyam /  
ity ārtam ālokya hi jīvalokaṃ  
mamābhavat pūrvam iyaṃ pratijñā || 7 ||*

"For this was my vow, many ages past,  
having seen the suffering of the living world:  
'Once crossed over, I will help the world cross too,  
and I will free living beings, once freed.'

7. “For this was my vow in the past, having seen the oppression which is the world of life: ‘Crossed over, I will be the one who makes the world cross over; liberated, I will liberate living beings.’

*kiṃ citram ātmānam ihaikam eva  
yad vārayed artham [avāpya] kaścit /  
mahājanam yas tv animīlitākṣam  
viśeṣam āsādyā vibharti so ’rthyah || 8 ||*

“How strange that people in this world gain wealth then hide themselves away! The truly rich, obtaining what is special, distribute it to all and sundry who have unclosed eyes.

8. “How strange that someone in this world, having obtained wealth, should hide themselves away on their own; but the truly wealthy person is [someone] who, having found the distinctive state, distributes [it to] the population whose eyes are not closed.

*yo hi sthalastho naram uhyamānam  
noddhartum icchen na sa sādthurūpaḥ /  
labdhvā nidhiṃ yaś ca janam daridram  
nārthena yuñjyād avicakṣaṇaḥ saḥ || 9 ||*

“That person is not good, who, stood on dry ground, does not want to rescue someone carried off; and short-sighted is the one who gains wealth, but does not share their riches with the poor.

9. “For the one who, stood on dry ground, would not want to rescue a person being carried along [by a flood] is not a good person; and the one who gets rich but does not provide poor people with wealth is not a clear-sighted person.

*svasthena rogābhihato hi yuktam  
cikitsitum hastagatauśadhena /  
nistīrṇamārgeṇa tatho[papannam  
ājñā]tum unmārgagatāya mārgaḥ || 10 ||*

“It’s only right for one returned to health to heal the sick with herbs that come to hand. The right course for those on the wrong road is to learn who’s made the journey, knows the way.

10. “For it is appropriate for one who has beaten disease with health to treat [others] using herbal medicines that are to hand. Likewise, it is the right course for one gone on the wrong road to notice one who has achieved the completion of the journey.

*tathā hi dīpaḥ kurute prakāśam  
na caiva taddhetukam eti rāgam /  
buddhas tathā jñānamayaṃ prakāśam  
karoti tasmāc ca na rāgam eti || 11 ||*

“For just as a lamp creates illumination but not the colours that the light throws up, likewise a Buddha’s radiance, made of knowledge, shows up a passion-tinged world it did not make.

11. “For just as a lamp creates illumination and does not spread colouration because of that, likewise an Awakened One makes a radiance composed of knowledge and from that does not spread the colouring of passion.

*dhruvaṃ hi kāṣṭhe yathā hutāśanaḥ  
samīraṇaḥ khe salilaṃ pṛthivyām /  
tadvan munīnām niyato ’vabodho  
gayeṣu vai kāśiṣu dharmavādaḥ || 12 ||*

“As surely as the wind dwells in the sky, as fire lives in the wood, and water flows on earth, likewise at Gaya the sages must awaken, then at Kāśi teach the Dharma.”

12. “For just as it is certain that there is fire in wood, wind in the sky, and water in the earth, likewise it is destined that the Awakening of the sages occurs at Gaya, and the teaching of the Dharma at Kāśī [i.e., Vārāṇasī].”

*aho hi nāmety upago ’bhi[vādya  
yatheccham u](tsṛjya) [tato jagāma] |  
muhur muhur vismayaphulladrṣṭir  
jātaspr̥ho buddham avekṣyamāṇaḥ || 13 ||* “Incredible!” said Upaga. With words of thanks,  
he begged to take his leave, and went his way,  
his eyes wide with amazement, delightedly  
gazing at the Buddha again and again.

13. “Well, well,” said Upaga, and with words of thanks he took his leave agreeably and went from that place, again and again looking at the Buddha with appreciation, his eyes wide with amazement.

*tato munih kāśipurīm krameṇa  
vasvokasārapratimām dadarśa |  
sakhīm ivāliṅgya samāgatām tām  
bhāgīrathīm caiva vārāṇasīm ca || 14 ||* Then, gradually, the sage saw Kāśī ahead,  
resembling the city of Indra himself,  
and saw the Ganges, Varāṇā and Asī  
converging, embracing it like friends.

14. Then, gradually, the sage saw the city of Kāśī, resembling Vasvokasāra [the city of Indra] and the [rivers] Bhāgīrathī [= Ganges] as well as the Varāṇā and Asī which converged and embraced [the city] like friends.

*sa kokilonnāditavr̥kṣaṣaṇḍam  
maharṣijuṣṭam mṛgadāvam eva |  
jvalan prabhāve[na ca tejasā] ca  
vai [kāśan ā]ditya iva prapede || 15 ||* Shining with brilliance and burning with power,  
he went into the deer-park like the sun,  
an old grove of trees filled with cuckoos’ calls,  
where yogis and seers liked to meditate.

15. He entered the deer-park, a grove of trees full of cuckoos’ calls frequented by great seers, like the sun, shining with brilliance and burning with power.

*kaunḍinya[gotro] ’tha mahāhvayaś ca  
bāspāśvajitbhadrajitas tathaiva |  
taṃ bhikṣavaḥ pañca nirikṣya dūrāt  
parasparam vākyam idam jajalpuḥ || 16 ||* The five renunciates – Kauṇḍinya with  
Mahānāma, Aśvajit, Bhadrajit  
and Vāśpa – seeing him coming from afar  
discussed together just what they would say:

16. Then the five renunciates – he of the Kauṇḍinya clan, and the one called ‘Great’ [i.e. Mahānāma], with Bāspa [i.e. Vāśpa], Aśvajit and Bhadrajit – having observed him from afar, discussed together this statement:

*sukhātmako gautama eṣa bhikṣur  
abhyeti tasmāt tapaso nivṛttaḥ |  
naivābhigamyah khalu nābhivādyo  
bhagnapratijño hi na mānanārhaḥ || 17 ||* “Here comes the renunciate Gautama,  
a hedonist, who quit his austerities.  
We’ll neither welcome nor address him, for  
a vow-breaker does not deserve respect.

17. “This renunciate Gautama is approaching, one whose life consists in pleasure, who has given up this life of austerity. We certainly should neither welcome nor address him, for a vow-breaker does not deserve respect.

*sa[ced bhaved āsisīṣuḥ kadāci]t  
prajñāpyatām āsanam etad asmai /  
yasmai hi kasmaicid upāgatāya  
nātithyam arhanti na kartum āryāḥ || 18 ||*

“But if he were to want to sit with us,  
a place should be made ready for him here.  
We holy men are not above the need  
to offer hospitality to guests.”

18. “But if he were at any time to want to sit down, a seat should be prepared for him here. For noble beings [like us] are not allowed to not offer hospitality to whomever has arrived.”

*kṛtvā kriyākāram athopaviṣṭās  
te bhikṣavaś copayayau ca buddhaḥ /  
yathā yathā copasarpa tāṃs tu  
tathā tathā te bibhiduḥ pratijñām || 19 ||*

Decisions now made, those renunciates  
stayed seated while the Buddha walked across.  
But then, the closer that he drew to them,  
the more they started breaking their own pledge –

19. Having made an agreement, those renunciates remained seated, and the Buddha then approached, but the closer that he drew near to them, the more they broke their promise.

*kaścit tu jagrāha tato 'sya vāsaḥ  
pātraṃ tathānyaḥ praṇipatya dadhre /  
kaści[d babhājāsanam arghyam a]smai  
pādyam tathānyāv upaninyatuś ca || 20 ||*

Someone reached out to take his outer robe,  
another bowed down low, then took his bowl;  
someone showed him to the very best place,  
and the others brought water to wash his feet.

20. Someone took from him his outer robe, another having bowed respectfully carried his bowl. Someone presented to him the seat reserved for special guests, and the other two brought water to wash his feet.

*evaṃ prakārāṃ bahumānayuktāṃ  
sarvāṃ pracakrur guruvṛttim asmai /  
gotrābhīdhānaṃ tu na tatyajus te  
tān sānukampo bhagavān uvāca || 21 ||*

Like this, they did him every kind of honour  
as for a guru, filled with deep respect.  
But still they used his old family name.  
The Blessed One told them, in a kindly way:

21. In this way, filled with great esteem they rendered to him every kind of conduct suitable for a religious teacher.<sup>6</sup> But they did not disregard his clan-name [i.e. Gautama]. The compassionate Blessed One spoke to them:

*mā bhikṣavo vocata pūrvavṛtṭyā  
mānārham arhantam agauraveṇa /  
mānāpamānau khalu me samānau  
yuṣmāṃs tv apuṇyād vinivartayāmi || 22 ||*

“Renunciates, don’t irreverently call  
an Arhat, owed respect, by their old name.  
Respect and disrespect are the same to me,  
but I would dissuade you from doing wrong,

<sup>6</sup> In a footnote, Matsuda (2020: 34 n.16) suggests the alternative reading *prakārān... bahumānayuktān*, which would require the translation: ‘In this way, they rendered to him all kinds [of actions] filled with great esteem and the conduct suitable for a religious teacher [the guru].’

22. “Renunciates, do not address one who is deserving respect, who is a Worthy One, in a way that was previously suitable, through lack of reverence. It is true that both respect and disrespect are alike to me, but I turn you away from unmeritorious [actions].

*evam hi lokasya hitāya buddham  
sarveṣu bhūteṣu samapravṛttam /  
nāmnā vaded yas sa gurūpamardād  
ucchedadharmā pitarīva duṣṭaḥ || 23 ||*

“for the wretch who calls the Buddha by name –  
who helps all beings, for the welfare of the world –  
injures the guru who is like his father,  
and cuts off the source of his own support.”

23. “For in this way, the wretch who would address by name an Awakened One, who, for the welfare of the world, is active for the sake of all living beings equally, has his support cut off because of the injury to the religious teacher, as if to his father.”

*ity evam uktā vadatām vareṇa  
maharṣiṇā te karuṇātmakena /  
pratyūcur īṣatsmayamānavaktrā  
mohād asaṃbhāvanayā ca bhraṣṭāḥ || 24 ||*

Like this, the best of teachers addressed them,  
the great seer, with a compassionate heart.  
Confused and incompetent, those reprobates  
replied with proud faces and scornful smiles:

24. In this way the best of teachers, the great seer whose nature is compassion, spoke to them. With proud faces, slightly smiling, the reprobates replied from confusion and with a lack of competence:

*nābudhyathā gautama tena tāvat  
tapaḥprakarṣeṇa pareṇa tattvam /  
sukhe sthito duṣkarasādhyam arthaṃ  
tvam nāma paśyer iti ko 'tra hetuḥ || 25 ||*

“You told us, Gautama, that no insight came  
from your intense former austerities.  
Devoted to pleasure, why then do you say  
you understand a goal so hard to achieve?”

25. “Gautama, you admit that you did not awaken to reality through that previous intense austerity. What is the reason therefore that you, who are devoted to pleasure, say that you can understand a goal that is to be accomplished with difficulty?”

*evam yadā naiva tathāgatasya  
te bhikṣavaḥ śraddadhur arthatattvam /  
bodheś ca mārgaṃ vividus tato 'nyam  
mārgaṃ tato mārgavid ity uvāca || 26 ||*

Since those renunciates just disbelieved in  
the Realised One’s actual state, and thought  
a different way led to Awakening,  
the knower of the way explained it to them thus:

26. Since those renunciates in this way simply disbelieved in the *tathāgata*’s actual state, but considered that the way to Awakening was other than that, then the knower of the way explained the way thus:

*ātmaklamaṃ bālaḥjanābhipannaṃ  
saṅgaṃ tathā cendriyagocareṣu /  
etāv ubhau paśyata doṣavantau  
pakṣāv amārgāv amṛtāgamasya || 27 ||*

“Consider thus the weary fugitive,  
the fool embracing the sensual world:  
see this and yours as faulty alternatives,  
and not as ways of nearing the deathless state.

27. “Please consider thus the foolish person, who is weary and overwhelmed, being in association with the domains of the senses – [please consider] both these alternatives [i.e. austerity and indulgence] as having faults and as not being ways of approaching the deathless state.

*śarīrakhedai[r hi tapo ’bhi](dhā)naiḥ*      “For when the heart is tortured and disturbed  
*paryākule cetasi bādhyamāne |*      by the bodily pain called ‘austerities’,  
*na jātu vinded api lokasaṃjñām*      one can barely know the ordinary world,  
*aṅdriyaṃ kiṃ bata tattvamārgam || 28 ||*      let alone the way to the transcendent truth.

28. “For, when a disturbed mind is being tormented with the physical fatigue which is called ‘austerity’, one will never gain a clear awareness even of ordinary experience, let alone the way to a reality beyond the senses.

*yathā hi dīpena na vārisekair*      “Just as nocturnal darkness starts to fade,  
*naiśan tamo nāśam ihābhyupaiti |*      not through sprinkled water, but with coming light,  
*jñānāgninājñānatamas tathaiva*      likewise the darkness of ignorance ends,  
*prañāśam abhyeti na kāyakhedaiḥ || 29 ||*      not through bodily pain, but with insight’s fire.

29. “For just as the nightly darkness begins to end here on earth with [the arrival of] the light, not through the [ritual] sprinkling of water, likewise the darkness of ignorance comes to an end with the fire of knowledge, not through physical fatigue.

*kāṣṭhaṃ vibhindaṃś ca vipāṭayaṃś ca*      “Hacking and chopping at wood is no way  
*naivāgnim āpnoti [yathāgnikāmaḥ] |*      to make fire, but whirling a firestick is.  
*tad eva [mathnan labhate] (’bhyupāyād)*      Likewise, one gains the deathless state by means  
*[yo]gāt tathāpnoty amṛtaṃ na khedāt || 30 ||*      of meditation, not through bodily pain.

30. “Just as one who, wanting fire, cuts up and splits open firewood does not in fact obtain fire, [but] only one who whirls [the firestick] gains possession of it, likewise one obtains the deathless state due to meditation as a means, not due to [physical] fatigue [as a means].

*kāmeṣv anartheṣu na cāpi saktō*      “Someone attached to meaningless desires,  
*rajastamobhyām abhibhūtacetāḥ*      whose heart is overcome by dust and dark,  
*śaktō ’rthanūtāv api siddhim āptuṃ*      cannot succeed even in business life,  
*prāg eva vairāgyavidhau viruddhe || 31 ||*      much less in the converse life of dispassion.

31. “One devoted to meaningless sensual pleasures and with a heart that is overcome by both passion and darkness is not capable of obtaining success even in managing their affairs – how much less [capable of obtaining success] in the opposite, which is a dispassionate way of life.

*yathā hi rogābhihataṣya jantor*      “A person unwell, afflicted and sick,  
*naivāsty apathyānnabhujāś cikitsā |*      who eats the wrong food will never be cured,  
*ajñānarogābhihataṣya tadvat*      likewise those unwell with sick ignorance,  
*kāmeṣu saktasya kutaḥ praśāntiḥ || 32 ||*      yet hooked on desire – how will they find peace?

32. “For just as there is no medical treatment for a person who is struck down with sickness [but] who eats unwholesome food, likewise for one struck down with the sickness of ignorance [but] who is devoted to sensual pleasures, how [can there be] restful peace?

[yathā] (ca vahne)[h pa]vaneritasya  
śuṣkāśayasthasya na śāntir asti /  
cittasya rāgānugatasya tadvat  
kā māśayasthasya na śāntir asti || 33 ||

“As there is no peace while a wind-borne fire lies low and stays in waiting where it’s dry, so there is no peace while the heart pursued by passion lies low but stays among desires.

33. “And just as there is no peace while a fire that has been spread by the wind remains in a place which is dry, likewise there is no peace while the mind which is attended by passions remains in a place of sensual pleasures.

antāv imau tena vivarjayitvā  
madhyena mārgo ’dhigato mayānyaḥ /  
atyantaduḥkhopaśamasya netā  
kṣemaḥ śivaś caiva nirāmayaś ca || 34 ||

“I turned away from both of these extremes and found a different path, the middle way, a safe, secure, benign and healthy way, which brings the relaxation of endless stress.

34. “Abandoning these two extremes, I have discovered another way, through the middle, which leads to the pacification of perpetual suffering, which gives security, and is both benevolent and wholesome.

saṃdarśa[nāditya](ruci)prakāśo  
viśuddhasaṃkalpa[rathopanīta]ḥ /  
[samyaksamāvādi]tavāgvihāraḥ  
śubhakriyārāmasabhābhīrāmaḥ || 35 ||

“It shines with the sun of perfect vision, and is drawn by the chariot of pure intention. Dwelling in the utterance of perfect speech, it delights in the garden of lovely acts.

35. “[The way] is the radiant splendour of the sun of [perfect] vision; it is drawn by the chariot of purified [perfect] intention; it has its dwelling in perfect, clearly uttered speech; [and] it is the delightful garden lodgings of beautiful action.

agarhitājīvamahāsubhikṣaḥ  
samyakprayogaprabalānuyātraḥ /  
sarvatra samyaksmṛtiguṇtiguṇtaḥ  
samādhiśayyāsanavāsabhūmiḥ || 36 ||

“Abundant alms are its blameless livelihood, perfect application its powerful chaperone. Its wall and guard are perfect mindfulness, its land, house, seat and bed are meditation.

36. “Its magnificent, excellent means of subsistence is a blameless livelihood; its very powerful retinue is perfect application; at all times and places it is protected by the fortification of perfect mindfulness; [and] its ground, its house, its posture [and] its bed is meditative integration.

ity uttamo ’ṣṭāṅga ihaiṣa panthā  
nirvāhako mṛtyujarāmayebhyaḥ /  
saṃ – – – kṛtasarvakāryo <sup>7</sup>

“The eightfold path is thus the best in the world for saving us from sickness, age and death. Completing it, with what there is to do all done,

<sup>7</sup> I have replaced the missing akṣaras so that the pāda reads: saṃsādhitas taṃ kṛtasarvakāryo, with the aid of the Tibetan translation (gañ las draṅs nas) via Johnston and Matsuda p.38 n.23.

*nāmutra caiveha punaḥ [prayāti] || 37 ||* one does not go from this world to the next.

37. “Thus in this world this supreme eightfold path is what conveys [us] from death, old age and disease. One who has completed it [and] has done everything that is to be done does not journey onward in this world and in the other world again.

*[kṛtsnam i]daṃ duḥkham idaṃ nimittam  
ayaṃ nirodho 'sya ca mārga eva /  
ity aśrute dharmavidhāv apūrvam  
cakṣur vimokṣāya mamodapādi || 38 ||* “In sum, ‘This is pain, and this is its cause,  
this is its ending, and the way to it.’  
Thus, in a form of truths not heard before,  
vision arose that led to liberation.

37. “In sum, ‘This is unsatisfactoriness, this is the cause, this is the cessation, and finally [this is] the way to that [cessation]’: in this way, as regards a framework of teachings which no-one had previously heard, vision arose for my liberation.

*jātir jarā vyādhir atho vipattiḥ  
priyātyayo vipriyasamprayogaḥ /  
aprāptir arthasya ca kāmṣitasya  
nānāvidham duḥkham idaṃ paraiti || 39 ||* “Birth, ageing, illness and adversity,  
the absence of the loved, relying on the unloved,  
and not getting those good things that we want:  
these are the varied kinds of pain we endure.

39. “The state of being born, old age, sickness and adversity; the absence of what is loved, the relationship with the unloved, and the non-attainment of the aim that one wished for – these are the various kinds of unsatisfactory things one encounters.

*kāmātmano vā(pi jit)ātmano vā  
śarīriṇo vā(py a)śarīriṇo vā /  
yā nirguṇā ca kvacana pravṛttiḥ  
[samāsa]tas tat samavaita duḥkham || 40 ||* “Whether seeking pleasure or self-controlled,  
whether your body is earthly or divine,  
lacking virtue, thrown into life somewhere:  
you should know that this, in short, is pain.

40. “Whether one is given to desire, or has a controlled character, whether one has a body or does not have a body, you must completely understand that being thrown into existence somewhere, without good qualities, in short, is unsatisfying.

*śāntārccir alpo 'pi yathā hi vahnir  
naivoṣṇabhāvaṃ sahaṃ jahāti /  
śāntāpi sūkṣmāpi tathātmasaṃjñā  
duḥkhātmikety eva suniścitaṃ me || 41 ||* “Just as a fire, though small and burning low,  
does not give up innately being hot,  
likewise the sense of self, though subtle and calm,  
is at the core of pain – of this I’m sure.

41. “For just as fire, though small [and] with peaceful flames, does not give up being innately hot, likewise the conception of the [core] self, though peaceful and subtle, is – I am very certain about this – the core of unsatisfactoriness.

*doṣāms tu rāgaprabhṛtīn vicitrān  
karmāṇi doṣaprabhavāni caiva /  
duḥkhasya hetuṃ niyataṃ ~ – ×,* “Know that the many kinds of faults cause pain,  
including passion, hate, confusion, and  
those faults produced by karma, just as seed

ॐ – ॐ – ॐ – *mbu yathāṅkurasya* || 42 || <sup>8</sup>

and season, earth and rain bring forth new growth.

42. “But you should know that the diverse faults beginning with passion, as well as the faults that are produced by actions, are the invariable cause of unsatisfactoriness, just as seed [and] season, soil [and] water [are the invariable cause] of new growth.

*bhavaprabandhe divi vāpy adho vā  
rāgādayo doṣagaṇā hi hetuḥ |  
nikṛṣṭamadhyottamacitratāyāḥ  
karmāṇi citrāny api tatra tatra* || 43 || <sup>9</sup>

“Existence in heaven or hell has its cause  
in passion, hatred and confusion; and  
karma is the root of rebecoming in base  
or mid or best realms, here and there.

43. “The group of faults starting with passion is the cause [of unsatisfactoriness] in the continuity of states of existence either in heaven or in hell, and actions are the roots of the variedness of vile, middling and supreme [states of existence] here and there.

*doṣakṣayān nāsti bhavaprabandhaḥ  
karmakṣayaś cen na ca duḥkham asti |  
sato hi yasmāt samudeti yo ’rtho  
nodeti tasmād asataḥ sa [bhūyaḥ]* || 44 ||

“Becoming’s wheel stops with the ending of the faults,  
and if karma ceases then pain is no more.  
A thing arises due to what exists,  
but from that not existing, does not arise.

44. “Due to the ending of faults there is no [more] continuity of states of existence, and if there is the ending of actions then there is no [more] unsatisfactoriness. For, that thing which is a process of becoming arises from that which already exists, and does not arise from that which does not exist.

*[yasmīn na jātir na jarā na mṛtyu]r  
nāgnir na bhūr nāmbu na khaṁ na vāyuḥ |  
anādimadhyāntam ahāryam āryam  
tam akṣaram citta śivaṁ nirodham* || 45 ||

“In which there is no birth, old age or death,  
no earth or water, fire or wind or space –  
know this as cessation, the noble state,  
the deathless, without start, middle or end.

45. “You should know cessation to be that in which there is no birth, no ageing, no death, no fire, no earth, no water, no space, no wind, which is without beginning, middle or end, unaltering, noble, imperishable [and] peaceful.

*aṣṭāṅgiko yo vihitāḥ sa mārگاḥ  
so ’syābhyupāyo ’dhigamāya nānyaḥ |  
adarśanād asya pathasya lokās  
tathaiva bhrātraiva paribhramanti* || 46 ||

“There is no other means to attain it than  
the way with its eight distinct parts. The world  
walks in circles from not seeing this path,  
as people do when meeting with their friends.

<sup>8</sup> I replace the missing *akṣaras* to make the following *pādas*: *duḥkhasya hetuṁ niyataṁ avaita |  
bījartubhūmembu yathāṅkurasya*, again based on the Tibetan translation (*ji ltar sa chu sa bon dus rnams  
myu gu ’i bzhin*) via Johnston and Matsuda p.39 n.26.

<sup>9</sup> I have translated according to a reading of pada d as *karmāṇi mūlāny api tatra tatra*, as this appears to be what the Tibetan translators saw (according to Johnston’s translation and Matsuda p.39 n.27) and provides a better sense.

46. “There is no other means for its attainment than the way which is divided into eight parts. Because of not seeing this path, people walk in circles just as [they do] with a group of friends.

*duḥkhaṃ parijñeyam idaṃ praheyo  
hetur nirodha[s tv api] sāksikāryaḥ /  
mārgas tathaivaīṣa ca bhāvanīya  
iti pravṛttā mama buddhir atra || 47 ||*

“About this, I came to the following thought:  
‘This pain is to be fully known, its cause  
to be abandoned, its cessation must  
be realised, and the way to it matured.’

47. “A thought occurred to me about this matter like this: ‘Unsatisfactoriness here is to be fully understood; the cause is to be given up; the cessation is to be personally experienced; and likewise this way is to be developed.’

*duḥkhaṃ parijñātam idaṃ prahīṇo  
hetus tathā sāksikṛto nirodhaḥ /  
mārgas tathaivāsyā ca bhāvito ’yam  
iti pravṛttaṃ mama cakṣur atra || 48 ||*

“About this, insight and vision came to me:  
‘This pain has now been fully known, its cause  
has been abandoned, its cessation thus  
experienced, and the way to it mature.’

48. “Vision occurred to me about this matter like this: ‘Unsatisfactoriness here has been fully understood; the cause has been given up; the cessation has been personally experienced; and likewise the way to it has been developed.’

*yāvac ca nādrākṣam imāni tathyāny  
āryāṇi catvāri padāni samyak /  
tāvan na mukto ’ham ihety avocaṃ  
kṛtārthatāṃ cātmani nāpy apaśyam || 49 ||*

“So long as I had not seen perfectly  
these four noble truths, I could not claim  
to yet be liberated here, nor did  
I see within myself my aim achieved.

49. “To the extent that I had not completely investigated these four true [and] noble topics, I did not say, ‘I am now released’, and neither did I perceive in myself the accomplishment of my aim.

*imāni satyāni yadā tv abudhye  
buddhvā ca kartavyam akārṣam artham /  
tadā vimukto ’ham ihety avocaṃ  
kṛtārthatāṃ ātmani cāpy apaśyam || 50 ||*

“But when I’d woken to these noble truths,  
and having done so, done what was to be done,  
I then claimed to be liberated, and  
within myself I saw my aim achieved.”

50. “But when I had awakened to these [four] truths, and having awakened to them, I had accomplished the goal to be accomplished, then I said ‘I am liberated in this world’, and I also perceived in myself the accomplishment of my aim.”

*ity evam asminn abhidhīyamāne  
maharṣiṇā kāruṇikena dharme /  
avāpa cakṣuḥ śuci nīrajaskaṃ  
kaunḍinyagotraḥ śataśaś ca devāḥ || 51 ||*

And as the great compassionate seer gave  
his teaching to his five friends in this way,  
Kaunḍinya as well as a hundred deities  
obtained the pure, passionless eye of truth.

51. While this teaching was being given in this way by the great seer who was full of compassion, he of the Kaunḍinya clan and hundreds of deities attained the pure and passion-free vision [of the truth].



<i>śīlāraṃ śamadamanemi dhīviśālaṃ</i>	“Its spokes and rim are virtue and calm, with wisdom in the gaps.
<i>hrīkīlaṃ smṛtimativairyavīryanābhi /</i>	Its hub is mindful energy, with shame its axle-pin.
<i>gāmbhīryād avitathataḥ sudeśitatvāt</i>	Because of its profundity and well-directness,
<i>trailokye sthiram avivartyam anyaśāstraiḥ    55   </i>	it holds firm in the threefold world, not to be turned aside.”

55. “Its spokes are virtuous conduct, its rim is [meditative] tranquility and self-control, the spaces [between spokes and rim] are wisdom.<sup>11</sup> Its axle-pin is ethical sensitivity [and] its hub is mindfulness, intention, strength and energy. Because of its profundity, because of its lack of falsehood, [and] because of its being well-directed [or, well-taught], it holds steady in the three worlds [and] is not to be turned aside by the teachings of others.”

<i>yakṣebhyo dhvanim upalabhya bhūdharebhyaḥ</i>	From earth, and where the <i>yakṣas</i> live, that sound went on its way
<i>khe cakrur vibudhagaṇās tam eva ghoṣam /</i>	to gods in groups that thronged the sky, who shouted it again.
<i>śrutvaivaṃ tridivaparaṃparābhir uccair</i>	Like this, the sound was heard and said through each and every heaven,
<i>ābrahmaṃ bhavanam upāruroha śabdaḥ    56   </i>	rising up until it reached the dwelling of Brahmā.

56. Having heard the sound from the earth-dwelling nature-spirits, groups of deities in the sky made the same announcement. Having gone in the same way through the successions of lofty heavens, the shout went up to the dwelling of Brahmā.

<i>śrutvā ca tridivanivāsino maharṣeṣ</i>	Some self-possessed heaven-dwellers, hearing from the sage
<i>trailokyaṃ calam iti kecid ātmavantaḥ /</i>	about this shaking triple world, its transitoriness,
<i>citreṣu na ca viṣayeṣu rāgam īyuh</i>	no longer sought fulfilment in the objects of the sense,
<i>saṃvegāt tribhuvana eva śāntim īyuh    57   </i>	but from a sense of urgency found peace in the universe.

57. And some of the self-possessed beings living in the heavens, hearing from the great seer that the triple world was transitory, did not resort to passion among the manifold sense-objects, but rather from urgency obtained peace in regard to the three worlds.

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<sup>11</sup> The word *viśāla* would appear to be an adjective meaning ‘breadth’. But, as Matsuda’s note (p.42 n.31) on this stanza suggests (via online translation), we should expect a noun representing part of a wheel. I hence take *viśāla*, in the sense of ‘spacious’, to refer to the spaces between the spokes and the rim of the wheel.

*ity evaṃ divi bhuvī ca pravṛttamātre  
lokānāṃ parama[śivā]ya dharmacakre |  
khād vyabhrāj jalam apatat sapuṣpavarṣaṃ  
bherīś ca tridivanivāsino 'bhijaghnuḥ || 58 ||*

And as the Dharma Wheel was turned,  
in heaven and on earth,  
for the welfare and the happiness  
of beings in the worlds,  
the rain fell from a cloudless sky  
with a shower of flowers,  
and heaven's blessed residents  
struck up on kettle-drums.

58. Thus, in this way, right after the Wheel of the Teaching had been set turning in heaven and on earth for the highest happiness of the worlds, rain fell from a cloudless sky, together with a shower of flowers, and the inhabitants of heaven beat kettle-drums.