

Asian Buddhist Women, Lecture 1:

The Karma of Female Rebirth

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Lecture topics 2016:

The Karma of Female Birth

Mothers and Motherhood in Indian Buddhist Literature

Children in Indian Buddhist Literature

Bhikkhunī Sangha in North-east Thailand

Womanhood as Imaged in Myanmar

Buddhist Women in Sri Lanka

Women in Japanese Buddhism

Imperial Nunneries in Japan

Women and Buddhism in Communist China

Chinese Buddhist Nuns and Laywomen

Women in Tibetan Buddhism

Gender Relations from a Tibetan Buddhist Perspective

Women's Soteriological Agency

previous course 2014: Perspectives on Bhikkhunī Ordination

previous course 2015: Women in Indian Buddhism

New publication related to 2014 course

Anālayo 2016 *The Foundation History of the Nuns' Order*, Bochum:
Projektverlag,

Martin Seeger movie

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21936656>

New publication related to 2015 course

Collett, Alice 2015: *Lives of Early Buddhist Nuns: Biographies as History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press

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Rebirth as a Male

14th century inscription from Sukhotai,
by the Queen mother who has just founded a monastery:

“By the power of my merit, may I be reborn as a male in the future ... may I retain this woman’s accumulated merit.”

Griswold and Prasert (1969: 55 note 90) comment:

“‘this woman’ is of course the donor herself in her present existence ... she is here speaking as if she had already been reborn as a male and were viewing the present events in retrospect”

(Griswold, A.B. and Prasert na Nagara 1969: "The Asokārāma Inscription of 1399 A.D., Epigraphic and Historical Studies, No. 2", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 57.1: 29–56.)

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Paramatthajotikā Pj II 77:

*jigucchanīyo mātuḡāmo, cakkavattidhītā pi paravasam gacchati,
tasmā ahaṃ itthibhāvaṃ anupagamma puriso bhaveyyan ti*

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Dhammapada-atthakathā Dh-p-a I 327

(Story of Soreyya):

“Men who have transgressed with the wives of others will after death be tormented for many hundreds of thousands of years in hell; on coming back to human existence they will for a hundred rebirths undergo birth as a woman.”

“Women who have made merits by giving, etc., and who have discarded the wish for birth as a woman with the mental resolve: ‘May this merit of ours lead to the obtaining of rebirth as a man,’ will after death obtain rebirth as a man.”

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Change of Sex

Doniger 1999/2000: 281 on India in general:

“where men are usually cursed to become women, women often choose to be men — a not surprising asymmetry, since the culture regards male status as higher than female.”

(Doniger, Wendy 1999/2000: *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.)

Commentary on Pāli Vinaya, Sp I 274:

Loss of male characteristic: due to strong unwholesome deed
replacement by female characteristic: due to weak wholesome deed.

and

Loss of female characteristic: due to weak unwholesome deed,
replacement by male characteristic: due to strong wholesome deed

but

Pāli Vinaya, Vin III 35:

No explicit evaluation of change,
just dealt with matter of fact

Abhidharmakośabhāṣya 4.55

Transformation of a *bhikṣu* into a female because of
calling the [male] Saṅgha [members] females

but

Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya

No explicit evaluation of change,

(according to Finnegan 2009: 136)

(Finnegan, Damchö Diana 2009: *'For the Sake of Women Too': Ethics and Gender in the Narratives of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison.)

Karma

Cūlakammavibhaṅga-sutta (MN 135) and parallels

killing others — one will become short lived

hurting others — one will become sick

being angry — one will become ugly

being envious — one will become uninfluential

being stingy — one will become poor

being arrogant — one will be of low birth

not asking questions — one will become stupid

(no refernce to karma of becoming a woman)

Mallikā Gives Birth to Daughter (SN 3.16)

“A woman may be
 Better than a man, ruler of the people,
 She may be wise and virtuous,
 A good wife who reveres her mother-in-law.

“A man, born from her,
 May be a hero and a king.

The son of such a fortunate woman,
May well govern the kingdom.”

Bhaddā Kapilānī in EĀ 52.2

“None of the people look at me. All of these people together are looking at this woman. I should now devise a means to make people look at me.”

(holds parasol over Buddha Vipassin for seven days and then):

“May I, endowed with this merit, in a future life have a female body, such that on seeing it there will be no one who will not be thrilled with joy.”

(offering robes to the Buddha Vessabhū) :

“May I have a female body in a future life.”

(offering food to Paccekabuddha):

“Endowed with this merit, wherever I am reborn, may I not fall into the three evil destinies and may I in a future life have a female body of the utmost beauty.”

(worshipping Buddha Konāgamana with golden flowers):

“Endowed with this merit, wherever I am reborn, may I not fall into the three evil destinies, and may the body I take hereafter be a female body.”

(worshipping Buddha Kassapa for seven days):

“May I obtain a female body in the future.”

(conclusion)

“Sisters, you should know, because of the merits of former events I became the wife of Pippali Māṇava, that is, of Mahākassapa. The venerable Mahākassapa first went forth himself, at a later day I went forth on my part.”

“I was recollecting my lives in former days with a female body; for this reason I smiled to myself just now. I had been covered [in ignorance] by not knowing that I worshipped six Tathāgatas, seeking to get a female body. This is the reason I smiled, because of my experiences in former days.”

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Buddha’s Past Life as a Princess

EĀ 43.2

Then the princess said to the Buddha: “I am now the chief donor of the oil that was required, constantly supporting and assisting [the monk]. Yet, the Blessed One has now given a prediction to that monk, only [for me] he has not manifested a prediction.”

The Tathāgata Ratnaśikhi said: “The merit of the arousal of the mind with an aspiration [for Buddhahood] is difficult to measure. What to say about the bestowal of a material gift?”

The girl Munī replied: “If the Tathāgata will not give me a prediction, I shall myself cut off my life faculty.”

The Tathāgata Ratnaśikhi replied: “Now occupying a woman’s body and seeking to be a wheel-turning king one will never gain it, seeking to be Śakra one will also be unable to gain it, seeking to be king Brahmā one will also be unable to attain it, seeking to be king Māra one will also be unable to attain it, seeking to be a Tathāgata one will also be unable to attain it.”

The girl said: “Is it certain that I will be unable to attain supreme awakening?”

The Buddha Ratnaśikhi replied: “You will be able, girl Munī, to accomplish supreme and true awakening. Thus, princess, you should know that in the future, after innumerable aeons, a Buddha

will emerge in the world. He is your good friend [from nowadays]. That Buddha will give you a prediction.”

5 impossibilities in the *Bahudhātuka-sutta*

Main Topics:

- 1) elements
- 2) sense-spheres
- 3) dependent arising
- 4) impossibilities

Main Themes in the Exposition on Impossibilities (4):

- simultaneous arising of two wheel-turning kings or Tathāgatas
- bad conduct leads to good results/rebirth; good conduct leads to bad results/rebirth
- a stream-enterer commits five heinous crimes

impossibilities for women are not mentioned at all in MĀ 181

(Anālayo 2009: "The Bahudhātuka-sutta and its Parallels on Women's Inabilities", *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 16 pp. 137–190)

Padīpadāna-jātaka

Having heard it, the Blessed One said to the Elder: “Monk, it is not possible for me now to give a prediction to that princess, who stays in the condition of a woman.”

Having heard it, the Elder asked the Blessed One again: “Venerable sir, why is it not possible for you now to give a prediction to her, being in the condition of a woman?”

Then the Blessed One said this to the Elder: “Monk, it is not possible for me now to give a prediction to her, being in the condition of a woman, because that woman has not fulfilled the

combination of eight conditions [for receiving a prediction].”

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The Buddha said to the woman: “With a female body one cannot be a Buddha, a Pratyekabuddha, Brahmā, Śakra, Māra or a wheel-turning king; these dignities are very lofty and cannot be attained with a female body. If it is your wish to attain these, you should relinquish your dirty embodiment and acquire a pure body.”

The woman paid respect with her head [at the Buddha’s feet] and said: “I shall now relinquish it.” She returned to her house and cleaned herself by taking a bath. From afar she bowed down and said: “This body is made of the four elements, it is [anyway] not to be kept forever by me.”

She climbed up a building and formulated the aspiration: “May my filthy body now be for the benefit of hungry and thirsty living beings. I seek to become a male myself and receive a prediction of Buddhahood. Whatever living beings in this troubled world who are blind and have turned their back on what is right, who are inclined towards what is wrong and do not know a Buddha, I shall rescue them.”

She threw herself down from up high. Those who saw it were chilled and shivered. Knowing her intention, the Buddha magically transformed the ground so that it became soft as if [receiving her with] a celestial net. Her body was visibly unharmed and had been transformed into a male one. [The widow-become-male] became dizzy with infinite joy, quickly approached the Buddha and said full of enthusiasm:

“Receiving the kindness of the Blessed One, I already gained a pure body. Out of compassion, may I receive a prediction.”

The Buddha expressed his praise: “Your courage is extraordinary

in the world. You will certainly become a Buddha, do not harbour any doubt about it. When the one who keeps the lamps burning [Dīpaṃkara] has become a Buddha, he will predict your name.”

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Princess Munī heard that her noble monk friend had been given a prediction of becoming a Buddha. She thought in her mind: “The material for the lamps for the Buddha are all my possessions. Putting them up, the monk has now received a prediction. Only I did not receive one.”

Having thought this, she approached the Buddha and personally told him what was on her mind.

The Buddha in turn gave her a prediction, saying to Munī: “In the future, after two incalculable aeons and ninety-one [regular] aeons you will become a Buddha, called Śākyamuni, endowed with the ten epithets.”

Then, hearing the Buddha give this prediction, the princess was thrilled within and was transformed into a male who paid respect at the Buddha's feet and requested to become a recluse. The Buddha in turn gave his permission.

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- 1) Rebirth as Male
- 2) Change of Sex
- 3) Karma
- 4) Mallikā Gives Birth to Daughter
- 5) Bhaddā Kapilānī
- 6) Buddha's Past Life as a Princess