Cp 9 — Vessantara’s Conduct

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Text

The Conduct Leading to Buddhahood

The Chapter With Akitti

The Perfection of Giving (9th)

Vessantara’s Conduct

“She who was my mother,

the aristocrat lady named Phussatī,

was Sakka’s beloved queen

in past lives.

Knowing that she was at the end of life,

the lord of gods said this:

‘I grant you ten favors,

my dear, whatever favor you wish.’

When he said this the queen

replied to Sakka:

‘In what way am I deficient?

How am I displeasing to you?

You send me from this lovely place,

like the wind a feeble tree.’

When she said this Sakka

replied to her:

‘You have done nothing wrong,

nor are you not beloved to me.

But your life lasts only so long,

your time of death will come.
Accept the ten supreme favors
I offer to you.’
She accepted the offerings of Sakka,
full of joy and happiness.
Having conceived me,
Phussatī was blessed with the ten favors.
Then Phussatī, having passed from there,
was reborn as an aristocrat
in the city of Jetuttara,
where she married Sañjaya.
Once I was conceived in the womb
of my dear mother Phussatī,
because of my power,
my mother always delighted in giving.
She gave to the destitute, the ailing and aging,
to beggars, travelers, and folk,
to ascetics and brahmins, and the dispossessed,
and to those who had nothing.
Having carried me for ten months,
she was proceeding around the city
when Phussatī gave birth to me
in the middle of the peasant’s street.
My name was not from my mother’s side,
nor from my father’s.
I was born there in the peasant’s street,
and that’s why I’m called Vessantara.
When I was a boy
of only eight years old,

sitting in the stilt longhouse,
I thought of giving gifts.
‘I would give my heart and my eyes,
my flesh and blood too.’
I announced that I would give my body,
if anyone asked me.
Reflecting on my state of mind,
so undisturbed and steadfast,
the earth quaked there,
and Mount Sineru, wreathed in forests.
Every fortnight, the fifteenth,
and the sabbath when the moon was full,
I mounted the tusker Paccaya
and went to give gifts.
From the country of Kaliṅga,
the brahmins came to me,
requesting the royal elephant,
that was lucky and deemed as auspicious.
‘Our nation is suffering from drought,
food is scarce and famine abounds,
please give the noble elephant
the all-white supreme elephant.’
‘I give without hesitation
what you ask of me, brahmins.
I do not hide what I have,
for my heart is happy to give.
When supplicants come to me
it is unbefitting to refuse.
Let not my vow be broken,

I shall give the mighty elephant.’
Taking the elephant by the trunk,
and a bejeweled ceremonial vessel,
I sprinkled water on the hand,
and gave the elephant to the brahmins.
Then again when I was giving
the all-white supreme elephant,
the earth quaked again,
and Mount Sineru, wreathed in forests.
At the gift of the tusker,
angry Sivian folk gathered
and banished me from my kingdom, saying:
‘Go to Crooked Mountain.’
While they were ejecting me,
I was undisturbed and steadfast,
I asked one favor:
to perform a great offering.
When I asked, all the Sivian folk
granted me that one favor.
Sounding the drums,
I gave a great offering.
And as the sound went forth,
there was a great tumult and upset.
They drove me out because of giving,
but I just gave again.
Elephants, horses, chariots,
male and female slaves, cattle, and riches:
after giving this great gift
I then left the city.

After leaving the city,
I turned back to look,
at which the earth quaked,
and Mount Sineru, wreathed in forests.
Having given away my four-horse chariot,
I was standing at the crossroads
alone with no partner,
and I said to Queen Maddī:
‘Maddī, you take Kaṇhā,
for she, as the younger sister, is the lighter.
I shall take Jāli,
for he, as the brother, is heavier.’
Like a pink or white lotus,
Maddī picked up Kaṇhājinā.
Like a golden statue,
I picked up Jāli, the aristocrat.
High-born and delicate,
four aristocrat folk
traveled ground even and uneven,
going to Crooked Mountain.
Whenever men would come along,
coming the other way along the road,
we asked them in the middle of the street,
‘Where is Crooked Mountain?’
Seeing us there,
they spoke to us kindly,
‘It will be hard for you,’ they explained,
‘for Crooked Mountain is far.’
If the children saw fruit

on a tree in the forest,
then for the sake of that fruit,
the children cried.
Seeing the children cry,
the tall, massive trees
bent down of their own accord,
within reach of the children.
Seeing this marvel,
so astonishing and hair-raising,
Maddī, beautiful in every limb,
exclaimed in celebration:
‘Such a marvel in the world,
so astonishing and hair-raising,
due to the power of Vessantara,
the trees bent down of their own accord.’
Native spirits, out of compassion,
shortened the path,
so that on the very day they set out,
they arrived at the kingdom of Ceta.
Sixty thousand kings
were living at Mātula then.
All raised their cupped palms,
and approached, weeping.
There they held conversation
with the folks of Ceta and their children.
Then, leaving that place,
they arrived at Crooked Mountain.
The lord of gods addressed
Vissakamma of great psychic power:

‘Build a hermitage, well-made and delightful,
with a hall of leaves.’
After hearing Sakka’s words,
Vissakamma of great psychic power
built a hermitage, well-made and delightful,
with a hall of leaves.
Having plunged into the forest,
quiet and undisturbed,
we four persons
lived there in the mountains.
Myself and Queen Maddī,
with both Jāli and Kaṇhājinā,
dispelling each other’s sorrow
lived then in that hermitage.
While caring for the children,
I was not idle in the hermitage.
Maddī gathered fruit,
and provided for three people.
While I was living in the forest,
a traveler came to me
and asked for my children,
both Jāli and Kaṇhājinā.
When I saw the supplicant approaching,
I felt so full of joy.
Taking both my children,
I gave them to the brahmin then.
When I gave away my own children,
to the brahmin Jūjaka,
the earth quaked again,

and Mount Sineru, wreathed in forests.
And then Sakka descended
in the guise of a brahmin.
He asked me for Queen Maddī,
virtuous, and devoted.
Taking Maddī by the hand,
filling clasped hands with water,
with a confident heart,
I gave Maddī to him.
As Maddī was being given,
gods applauded in the welkin,
and the earth quaked again,
and Mount Sineru, wreathed in forests.
Jāli and Kaṇhājinā my daughter,
and Queen Maddī my devoted wife:
I gave them up without a second thought,
because it was solely for awakening.
I had no dislike of my children,
nor for Queen Maddī.
But because omniscience is precious to me,
I gave my loved ones away.
Later on in the mighty forest,
we were reunited by my mother and father.
Crying pitifully,
they spoke of my happiness and sadness.
With deep conscience and prudence,
I approached them,
at which the earth quaked,
and Mount Sineru, wreathed in forests.

Later on in the mighty forest,
having left the forest with my family,
I entered the delightful city
Jetuttara, the capital city.
The seven gems rained down,
raining forth from a mighty cloud,
and the earth quaked again,
and Mount Sineru, wreathed in forests.
Even this insentient earth,
with no knowledge of happiness or sadness,
quaked seven times
at the power of my giving.”