Justin Meiland is Lecturer in Buddhist Studies at Mahidol University, Bangkok. He has also translated Maha Bhárata Book Nine: “Shalya” (two volumes).

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GARLAND OF THE BUDDHA’S PAST LIVES
VOLUME ONE
by ĀRYAŚŪRA
TRANSLATED BY
Justin Meiland

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**Notes**

**Emendations to the Sanskrit Text**

**Glossary of Common Names, Terms, and Epithets**
STORY 9

THE BIRTH-STORY OF VISHVAN·TARA
9.1 N a Bodhisattva|caritam sukham anumoditum apy alpa|sattvaiḥ prāg ev’ ācaritum.
   tad|yath” ānuśrūyaṃ.
   s’|ātmī|bhūt’|ēndriya|jayaḥ parākrama|naya|vinaya|saṁ-
   padā samadhigata|vijaya|śrīr vrddhā|ōpāsana|niyamāt trayy|
   ānvikṣikyor upalabdha|ārtha|tattvaḥ sva|dharma|karm’|ānu-
   raktābhir an|udvigna|sukh’|ōcitābhir anuraktābhīḥ prakṛti-
   bhiḥ prakāśyamāna|daṇḍa|nīti|śobhaḥ samyak|pravṛttā|vārttā|vidhiḥ Saṁjayo nāma Śibīnāṃ rājā babhūva.

   guṇ’|ōdayair yasya nibaddha|bhāvā
   kul’|āṅgaṃ ” ev’ āsa nar’|ādhīpa|śrīḥ
   a|tarkaṇīy” ānya|mahiḥ|patināṃ
   sinḥ’|ābhigupt” ēva guhā mrgāṇām. [1]

9.5 tapaḥsu vidyāsu kalāsu c’ āiva
   kṛtā|śramā yasya sad” ābhuyetāḥ
   viśeṣalyuktaṃ bahu|mānam īyuḥ
   pūjābhir āvīṣ|kriyamāṇaḥ|sārāḥ. [2]

   tasya rājño rājya|pratipatty|an|antarāḥ prathita|guṇa|
   gaṇa|nirantar Viśvaṃtaro nāma putro yuva|rājo babhūva.
   ayam eva sa Bhagavaṇ Śākyamunis tena samayena.
Those of mean spirit find it difficult even to take pleasure in the Bodhisattva’s deeds, let alone emulate them.*

Tradition has handed down the following story.

There was once a king called Sánjaya who ruled over the Shibis. It had become Sánjaya’s very nature to control his senses, and his accomplishment in bravery, prudence, and decency invested him with victory and prosperity. Through his rigorous service to his elders, he had grasped the essence of the Vedas and Logic, and his fine administration of justice was displayed by the devotion of his people, who were used to lives of untroubled happiness and were content in their hereditary professions. He was a king of perfect conduct and behavior.

Like a noble lady, Royal Fortune was loyal to him because of his abundant virtues. To other kings she was beyond conception, just as a cave guarded by a lion is to other beasts.

Men strenuous in austerities, sciences, and arts constantly visited his palace. They acquired his special esteem by showing their worth through acts of honor.

This king had a son, an heir apparent, called Vishvanantar. Although next to his father in royal status, he matched him in possessing a host of celebrated virtues. It was this prince who was the Lord Shakya-muni at that time.*
yuv” āpi vrddh’ōpaśam’abhirāmas
tejasvy api kṣānti|sukha|svabhāvaḥ
vidvān api jñāna|mad’|ān|abhijñāḥ
śriyā samṛddho ’py avalepa|śūnyaḥ. [3]

dṛṣṭa|prayāmāsu ca dīkṣu tasya
vyāpte ca loka|tritaye yaśobhiḥ
babhūva n’ āiv’ ān|yaśo|lavānāṁ
prasartum utsāha iv’ āvakāśaḥ. [4]

a|mṛṣyamāṇaḥ sa jagad|gatānāṁ
duḥkhḥ’|ōdayānāṁ prabhuṭ’|āvalepam
dān’|ēsu|varṣi karuṇ”|ōru|cāpas
tair yuddha|saṃrambham iv’ ājagāma. [5]

9.10  sa pratyaham abhigatam arthījanam abhilaṣit’|ādhikair
a|kliśtair artha|visargaiḥ priya|vacan’|ōpacāra|mano|harair
atīva prahlādayām āsa.

parva|divaseṣu ca poṣadha|niyama|praśama|vibhūṣaṇaḥ
śiraḥ|snātaḥ śukla|kṣauma|vāsā Himagiri|śikhara|saṃnikā-
saṃ mada|lekh”|ābhyaḷaṃkṛta|mukhaṃ lakṣaṇa|vinaya|
java|sattva|saṃpannaṃ gandha|hastinaṃ samājñātam aupā-
vāhyam dvi | rada | varam abhiruhya samantato nagarasy’
Although a youth, he had the charming serenity of the elderly. Although mighty, he took a natural pleasure in forbearance. Although wise, he knew nothing of intellectual pride. Although rich in fortune, he was devoid of arrogance.

His fame permeated the threefold world in every direction as far as the eye can see. Others had no opportunity for their own petty glories, seeming to have lost the will to pursue them.

Unable to endure the haughtiness of the surging sufferings that beset the world, he seemed to wage a furious war against such foes, spraying arrows of gifts from his broad bow of compassion.

Every day he greatly gladdened the petitioners who came to him by offering them limitless gifts that exceeded their expectations and that delighted them by being given with pleasing words and deference.

On the days that marked the phases of the moon, Vishvan·tara would become adorned by the tranquil discipline of the póshadha vow. Bathing his head and wearing white linen garments, he would mount a fine scent-elephant that resembled a peak on snowy Mount Hímavat.* The face of the renowned elephant was decorated with streaks of ichor. Speedy and courageous, it was well-trained.
abhiniṣṭāny arthijanaṇipānaḥbhūtāni svāni satṛ’āgārāṇi pratyavekṣate sma. tathā ca prītiḥviśeṣam abhijagāma.

na hi tṝṃ kurute prītiṃ
vibhūtir bhavan’āśritā
saṃkrāmyamāṇ’ārthijane
ś” āiva dānaḥpriyasya yām. [6]

atha kadā cit tasy’ āivaṃvidhaṃ dānaḥprasaṅgaḥ pramuditaḥhrdayair arthibhiḥ samantato vikīryamāṇam upalabhyḥ ānyatamo bhūmyaḥantarasaṭya ṛājāḥ sakyo ’yam atiḥsaṃdhātum dāṃ’ānurāgavasaṅgatvādḥ iti pratarkya dvi|rada|var’āpaharaṇ’ārthaṃ brāhmaṇāṁs tatra praṇidadhē.

atha te brāhmaṇā Viśvaṁtarasya svāni satṛ’āgārāṇi pratyavekṣamāṇasya pramodād adhikataraṇayanaḥvadanaḥśo-bhasya jaṭyāśīrvaḍamukharāḥ samucchirit’abhīprāśaritā|dakṣin’āgra|pāṇayah purastāt samatiṣṭhanta. sa tṝṃ vini-grhyā dvi|rada|varam upacāraṇuparaḥsaram abhigamanā|pra-yojanam enān paryaprccchad, ‘ājñāpyatāṃ ken’ ārthaḥ iti.

brāhmaṇāḥ ṛcuḥ:

«āmuṣya tava nāgasya gati̊lilā|vilambināḥ
guṇair arthitvam āyātā dānaḥśauryāc ca te vayam. [7]
and bore auspicious marks. Mounting this tusker, Vishvan-tara went to inspect his alms houses, which were situated in every part of the city and had become refuges for suppliants. He derived particular joy from this.

For the joy a generous man feels at wealth stored indoors cannot compare with the joy felt at wealth given to a petitioner.

In every direction the gladdened suppliants spread the news of Vishvan-tara’s addiction to giving and, one day, a neighboring king came to hear of it. Speculating that he could take advantage of the young king because of his passion for generosity, he sent some brahmins to Vishvan-tara in order to rob him of his fine elephant.

Vishvan-tara was inspecting his alms houses, his eyes and face gleaming greatly with joy, when the brahmins came and stood in front of him. With their right hands raised and stretched out, they greeted him loudly with benedictions of victory. Vishvan-tara stopped his fine elephant and, after politely greeting the brahmins, he asked them why they had come, telling them to instruct him as to their needs.

The brahmins replied:

“Inspired by your heroic giving and the virtues of this elephant, swaying with so graceful a gait, we have become suppliants.”
Kailāsa|śikhar’|ābhasya pradānād asya dantinaḥ
kurūṣya tāval lokānāṃ vismay’|āika|rasam manah!» [8]

ity ukte Bodhisattvah prītyā samāpūryamāṇaḥ | hṛdayayaś
cintām āpede:
«cirasya khaḷ’ údāra | praṇaya | su | mukham arthi | janaṃ
paśyāmi. kaḥ punar artha evaṃ | vidhena dvi | rada | patin”
āiśāṃ brāhmaṇānām? vyaktam ayaṃ lobb’ | ērṣyā | dveṣa |
paryākula | manasaḥ kasy’ āpi rājñāḥ kārpaṇya|prayogaḥ.

9.20 āśā|vighāta|dīnatvaṃ
tan mā bhūd asya bhū|pateḥ,
an|ādṛtya yaśo|dharmau
yo ’smaddin|hita iv’ ṥodyataḥ.» [9]

iti viniścitya sa Mah”|ātmā tvaritam avatīrya dvi|rada|
varāt, «pratigṛhyatām» iti samudyata | kāṅcana | bhṛṅgāras
tēsāṃ purato ’vastasthe.

tataḥ sa vidvān api rāja|śāstram
arth’|ānuvṛttyā gata|dharma|mārgam
dharm’|ānurāgeṇa dadau gaj’|ēndraṃ
nīti|vyalikena na saṃcakampe. [10]
Fill the worlds
full of wonder
by giving us this tusker
resembling Kailása’s peak!”

Addressed this way, the Bodhi-sattva’s heart filled with joy and he had this thought:

“It has been a long time since I have seen a supplicant who is willing to make weighty requests. But what do these brahmins want with a lordly elephant of such stature? This is clearly the pitiful ploy of some king whose mind is turbulent with the flaws of greed and envy.

But this king should not suffer
the misery of having his hopes dashed.
For without heed to reputation or morality,
he seems intent on benefiting me.”

Thinking this, the Great One quickly got down from the fine tusker and, standing in front of the brahmins with a raised golden pitcher, he asked them to accept the elephant as a gift.

Though he knew that in the science of kingship
the path of morality involves pursuing benefit,
in his passion for virtue he gave away the king
of elephants,
unswayed by the falsehood of politics.
tam hemajala rucir’abharaṇam gaj’ēndram
vidyut pinaddham iva sāradam abhra rāsim
dattvā parāṃ mudam avāpa nar’ēndra sūnuḥ
saṃcukṣubhe tu nagaraṇa naya pakṣa pātāt. [11]

atha dvi rada pati pradāna śravaṇat samudīrṇa krodha
saṃrambhāḥ Śibayo brāhmaṇa vṛddhā mantriṇo yodhāḥ
pura mukhyāś ca kolāhalam samupajanayantāḥ Saṃjayaṇa
rājānam abhigamya sa saṃbhram’ āṃ marṣa saṃrambhāt
parisīthil’ōpacāra yantraṇam ūcuḥ:

9.25 «kim iyaṃ, deva, rājyaśrīr vilupyamān’ āivam apy upekṣyate? n’ arhati devaḥ sva rājy’ōpapлавam evam abhivardhamānam marṣayitum.»

«kim etad?» iti ca s’āvegam uktā rājāṇā punar enam ūcuḥ:
«kasmād devo na jānīte?

niṣevya matta bhramar’ōpagitaṃ
yasy ānanaṃ dāna sulgandhi vāyuḥ
mad’āvalepaṃ para vāraṇānām
āyāsa duḥkhena vinā pramārṣṭi; [12]

yat tejas’ ākrānta balal prabhāvāḥ
saṃsupta darpā iva vidviṣas te;
Viśvaṁtareṇ’ āiṣa gajaḥ sa datto
rūpī jayas te hriyate ’nya deśam. [13]
Adorned by a glistening mesh of gold, the lordly elephant
resembled a mass of autumn clouds draped with lightning.
The prince felt the highest joy at giving his gift.
But the city shuddered, choosing the side of pragmatics.

The Shibis were furiously angry when they heard the king of elephants had been given away. Making a great stir, brahmin elders, counselors, soldiers, and eminent citizens all approached King Sánjaya. In their fury and intolerant rage, they addressed him with words that stretched the bounds of courtesy:

“Why does Your Majesty ignore the way his royal fortune is being plundered? Your Majesty should not tolerate this escalating disaster that afflicts his kingdom.”

“What is that you say?” Sánjaya replied in distress.

“How can Your Majesty not know?” they answered.

“This elephant, whose face, fragrant with ichor, buzzes with the hum of intoxicated bees, and is served by a breeze that deftly and gently wipes away the proud rut-scent of other tuskers;

This elephant, whose power destroys the might of your enemies’ armies, as if putting their pride to sleep;
this is the elephant given by Vishvan·tara.
The embodiment of your victory, it’s being taken to a foreign land.
9.30 gāvah suvarṇam vasanaṁ bhojyam  
   iti dviljebhyo, nṛ|pa, deya|rūpam  
   yasmiṁ jaya|śrīr niyatā dvip’|êndre  
   deyaha sa nām’ ēty ati|dāna|śauryam. [14]

nay’|ôtpathen’ āinam iti vrajantaṁ  
   kathamā samanvesyati rāja|lakṣmīḥ?  
   n’ òpekṣaṇaṁ, deva, tav’ ātra yuktam  
   pur” āyam ānandayati dviṣas te.” [15]

tac chrutvā sa rājā putra|priyatvāt kimś cit tān eva prayt a|prīta|manāḥ kāry’|ānurodhāt śāvegavad evam ity uktvā samanunēṣyañ Chibīn uvāca:

«jāne dāna|prasaṅga|vyasanitāṁ nīti|kram’|ān|apekṣaṁ Viśvaṁtarasya. na c’ āiṣa kramo rājya|dhuri saṃniyuktasya.  
   dattaṁ tv anena svaṁ hastinaṁ vānta|kalpaṁ kaḥ pratyāhārīsyati? api tu tath’ āham ēnaṁ kariṣye yathā dāne mātrāṁ  
   jñāsyati. tad alam atra vah saṃrambheñ’ ēti.»

Śibaya ūcuḥ: «na khalu, mahā|rāja, paribhāṣaṇā|mātra|  
   sādhyo ’śminn arthe Viśvaṁtara iti.»

9.35 Saṃjaya uvāca, «atha kim anyad atra mayā śakyaṁ kartum?

doṣa|pravṛtter vimukhasya yasya  
   guṇa|prasaṅgā vyasanī|kriyante  
   bandho vadho v” ātma|sutasya tasya  
   kimś nīṣkrayaḥ syād dvi|radasya tasya? [16]
Cows, gold, clothes, and food; these are gifts suitable for brahmins, Your Majesty. But this king of elephants, our source of victory and prosperity; surely this is too excessive a gift.

How can royal fortune ever follow this prince if he treads a path that strays from prudence? It is not right to ignore this matter, Your Majesty. For he will soon bring your enemies joy.”

When he heard this, the king, who loved his son dearly, felt some displeasure toward these men. But following his sense of duty, he put on an appearance of shock and agreed they were right. He then tried to conciliate the Shibis, saying:

“I know Vishvan·tara has a passionate addiction for giving and disregards the procedures of politics. This is not the right way for someone to behave when they have been assigned the yoke of kingship. But who would take back this elephant after Vishvan·tara has rejected it like vomit? I will make Vishvan·tara understand that there is a limit to giving. Now stop being angry about this.”

“A mere scolding will not influence Vishvan·tara on the matter, Your Majesty,” the Shibis replied.

“What else can I do about it?” Sánjaya responded.

“He turns his back on wicked behavior. His only vice is attachment to virtue. Would imprisoning or slaughtering my son really be compensation for this elephant?
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