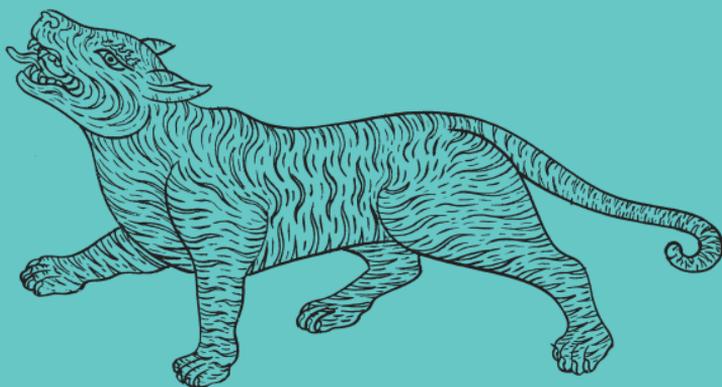


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# Garland of the Buddha's Past Lives

Volume One

by Arya·shura



Translated by  
**JUSTIN MEILAND**

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS & JJC FOUNDATION

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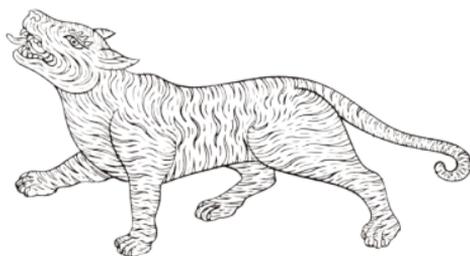
GARLAND OF  
THE BUDDHA'S  
PAST LIVES

VOLUME ONE

by ĀRYAŚŪRA

TRANSLATED BY

Justin Meiland



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2009

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STORY 9

THE BIRTH-STORY OF VISHVAN·TARA

9.1 **N**A BODHISATVA|CARITAṂ sukham anumoditum apy  
alpa|sattvaiḥ prāg ev' ācaritum.  
tad|yath" ānuśrūyate.

s'|ātmī|bhūt'|ēndriya|jayaḥ parākrama|naya|vinaya|saṃ-  
padā samadhigata|vijaya|śrīr vṛddh'|ōpāsana|niyamāt trayy|  
ānvikṣikyor upalabdh'|ārtha|tattvaḥ sva|dharma|karm'|ānu-  
raktābhir an|udvigna|sukh'|ōcitābhir anuraktābhiḥ prakṛti-  
bhiḥ prakāśyamāna|daṇḍa|nīti|śobhaḥ samyak|pravṛtta|  
vārttā|vidhiḥ Saṃjayo nāma Śibīnāṃ rājā babhūva.

guṇ'|ōdayair yasya nibaddha|bhāvā  
kul'|āṅgan" ev' āsa nar'|ādhipa|śrīḥ  
a|tarkaṇīy" ānya|mahī|patīnām  
siṃh'|ābhigupt" ēva guhā mṛgāṇām. [1]

9.5 tapaḥsu vidyāsu kalāsu c' āiva  
kṛta|śramā yasya sad" ābhyupetāḥ  
viśeṣa|yuktaṃ bahu|mānam iyuḥ  
pūjābhir āviṣ|kriyamāṇa|sārāḥ. [2]

tasya rājño rājya|pratipatty|an|antaraḥ prathita|guṇa|  
gaṇa|nirantaro Viśvaṃtaro nāma putro yuva|rājo babhūva.  
ayam eva sa Bhagavañ Chākyamunis tena samayena.

**T**HOSE OF MEAN SPIRIT find it difficult even to take 9.1  
pleasure in the Bodhi·sattva'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, 9.5  
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 Vishvan-  
tara. 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" âpi vṛddh'ôpaśam'âbhirāmas  
 tejasvy api kṣānti|sukha|svabhāvaḥ  
 vidvān api jñāna|mad'ân|abhijñāḥ  
 śriyā samṛddho 'py avalepa|śūnyaḥ. [3]

dr̥ṣṭa|prayāmāsu ca dikṣu tasya  
 vyāpte ca loka|tritaye yaśobhiḥ  
 babhūva n' âiv' ânya|yaśo|lavānāḥ  
 prasartum utsāha iv' âvakāśaḥ. [4]

a|mṛṣyamāṇaḥ sa jagad|gatānāḥ  
 duḥkh'ôdayānāḥ prabhut"âvalemam  
 dān'êṣu|varṣi karuṇ"ôru|cāpas  
 tair yuddha|saṃrambham iv' ājagāma. [5]

9.10 sa pratyaham abhigatam arthi|janam abhilaṣit'âdhikair  
 a|kliṣṭair artha|visargaiḥ priya|vacan'ôpacāra|mano|harair  
 atīva prahlādayām āsa.

parva|divaseṣu ca poṣadha|niyama|praśama|vibhūṣaṇaḥ  
 śiraḥ|snātaḥ śukla|kṣauma|vāsā Himagiri|śikhara|saṃnikā-  
 śaṃ mada|lekh"âbhya|lakṣṇa|lakṣaṇa|vinaya|  
 java|sattva|saṃpannaḥ gandha|hastinaḥ samājñātam aupa-  
 vāhyaḥ dvi | rada | varam abhiruhya samantato nagaras'y'

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. 9.10

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 Hínavat.\* The face of the renowned elephant was decorated with streaks of ichor. Speedy and courageous, it was well-trained

âbhiniviṣṭāny arthi|jana|nipāna|bhūtāni svāni satr'|âgārāṇi  
pratyavekṣate sma. tathā ca prīti|viśeṣam abhijagāma.

na hi tām kurute prītiṃ  
vibhūtir bhavan'|āsritā  
saṃkrāmyamāṇ'|ârthi|jane  
s" âiva dāna|priyasya yām. [6]

atha kadā cit tasy' âivaṃ|vidhaṃ dāna|prasaṅgaṃ pra-  
mudita|hṛdayair arthibhiḥ samantato vikīryamāṇam upa-  
labhy' ânyatamo bhūmy|an|antaras tasya rājā «śakyo 'yam  
ati|saṃdhātuṃ dān'|ânurāga|vaśagatvād» iti pratarkya dvi|  
rada|var'|âpaharaṇ'|ârthaṃ brāhmaṇāṃs tatra praṇidadhe.

atha te brāhmaṇā Viśvaṃtarasya svāni satr'|âgārāṇi pra-  
tyavekṣamāṇasya pramodād adhikatara|nayana|vadana|śo-  
bhasya jay'|āsīr|vāda|mukharāḥ samucchrit'|âbhiprasārīta|  
dakṣiṇ'|âgra|pāṇayah purastāt samatiṣṭhanta. sa taṃ† vini-  
gṛhya dvi|rada|varam upacāra|puraḥsaram abhigamana|pra-  
yojanam enān paryapṛcchad, «ājñāpyatām ken' ârtha» iti.

9.15 brāhmaṇā ūcuḥ:

«amuṣya tava nāgasya gati|lilā|vilambinaḥ  
guṇair arthitvam āyātā dāna|śauryāc 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 supplicants. 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 supplicants 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:

9.15

“Inspired by your heroic giving  
and the virtues of this elephant,  
swaying with so graceful a gait,  
we have become supplicants.

Kailāsa|śikhar'ābhasya pradānād asya dantinaḥ  
kuruṣva tāva|lokānām vismay'āika|rasaṃ manah!» [8]

ity ukte Bodhisattvaḥ prītyā samāpūryamāṇa | hṛdayaś  
cintām āpede:

«cirasya khal' ūdāra | praṇaya | su | mukham arthi | janam  
paśyāmi. kaḥ punar artha evaṃ | vidhena dvi | rada | patin”  
āiṣaṃ brāhmaṇānām? vyaktam ayaṃ lobh' | ērṣyā | dveṣa |  
paryākula|manasaḥ kasy' āpi rājñah kārpaṇya|prayogaḥ.

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

iti viniścitya sa Mah”|ātmā tvaritam avatīrya dvi|rada|  
varāt, «pratigr̥hyatām» iti samudyata | kāñcana | bhṛṅgāras  
teṣāṃ purato 'vatasthe.

tataḥ sa vidvān api rāja|śāstram  
arth'|ānuvṛtṭyā gata|dharma|mārgam  
dharm'|ānurāgeṇa dadau gaj'|ēndram  
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."

9.20

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.

taṃ hema|jāla|rucir'|ābharaṇaṃ gaj'|ēndraṃ  
 vidyut|pinaddham iva śāradam abhra|rāsīm  
 dattvā parāṃ mudam avāpa nar'|ēndra|sūnuḥ  
 saṃcukṣubhe tu nagaraṃ naya|pakṣa|pātāt. [11]

atha dvi|rada|pati|pradāna|śravaṇāt samudīrṇa|krodha|  
 saṃrambhāḥ Śibayo brāhmaṇa|vṛddhā mantriṇo yodhāḥ  
 paura|mukhyās ca kolāhalam samupajanayantaḥ Saṃjayaṃ  
 rājānam abhigamya sa | saṃbhram'|â | marṣa | saṃrambhāt  
 pariśithil'|ôpacāra|yantraṇam ūcuḥ:

9.25 «kim iyaṃ, deva, rājya|śrīr vilupyamān” âivam apy upek-  
 syate? n' ârhati devaḥ sva|rājy'|ôpaplavam evam abhivardha-  
 mānam marṣayitum.»

«kim etad?» iti ca s'|āvegam uktā rājñā punar enam ūcuḥ:  
 «kasmād devo na jānīte?»

niṣevya matta|bhramar'|ôpagītaṃ  
 yasy' ānanaṃ dāna|su|gandhi vāyuḥ  
 mad'|āvalepaṃ para|vāraṇānām  
 āyāsa|duḥkhena vinā pramārṣti; [12]

yat|tejas” ākrānta|bala|prabhāvāḥ  
 saṃsupta|darpā iva vidviṣas te;  
 Viśvaṃtaren' âiṣa 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 9.25  
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 gāvaḥ suvarṇaṃ vasaṇāni bhojyam  
 iti dvi|jebhyo, nṛ|pa, deya|rūpaṃ  
 yasmiñ jaya|śrīr niyatā dvi|p'éndre  
 deyaḥ sa nām' êty ati|dāna|śauryam. [14]

nay'|ôtpathen' âinam iti vrajantaṃ  
 kathaṃ samanveṣyati rāja|lakṣmīḥ?  
 n' ôpekṣaṇaṃ, deva, tav' âtra yuktaṃ  
 pur" âyam ānandayati dviṣas te.» [15]

tac chrutvā sa rājā putra|priyatvāt kiṃ cit tān eva praty  
 a|pṛita|manāḥ kāry'|ânurodhāt sāvegavad evam ity uktvā  
 samanuneṣyañ Chibīn uvāca:

«jāne dāna|prasaṅga|vyasanitāṃ nīti|kram'|ân|apekṣāṃ  
 Viśvaṃtaraṣya. na c' âiṣa kramo rājya|dhuri saṃniyuktasya.  
 dattaṃ tv anena svaṃ hastinaṃ vānta|kalpaṃ kaḥ pratyāha-  
 riṣyati? api tu tath" âham enaṃ kariṣye yathā dāne mātrāṃ  
 jñāsyati. tad alam atra vaḥ saṃrambheṇ' êti.»

Śibaya ūcuḥ: «na khalu, mahā|rāja, paribhāṣaṇā|mātra|  
 sādhyo 'sminn arthe Viśvaṃtara iti.»

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

doṣa|pravṛtter vimukhasya yasya  
 guṇa|prasaṅgā vyasani|kriyante  
 bandho vadho v" ātma|sutasya tasya  
 kiṃ niṣkrayaḥ 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.

9.30

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.

9.35

“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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The GARLAND OF THE BUDDHA'S PAST LIVES is one of the most famous collections in the hugely popular "birth-story" genre sprung from the Buddha's enlightened ability to see his own and others' past lives. Buddhist narrative is at its most captivating here in these vibrant portrayals of deeds performed by the future Buddha in a variety of different previous births, including as animals, deities, ascetics, kings, brahmins, and more.

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