

## A MOTHER'S BLESSING

Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī

*Therīgāthā 157-162*

*buddha vīra namo ty atthu  
sabbasattānam uttama  
yo maṃ dukkhā pamocesi  
aññañ ca bahukaṃ janam*

Buddha! Hero! Praise be to you!  
You foremost among all beings!  
You who have released me from pain,  
And so many other beings too.

*sabbadukkham pariññātam  
hetutanhā visositā  
ariyatthaṅgiko maggo  
nirodho phusito mayā*

All suffering has been understood.  
The source of craving has withered.  
Cessation has been touched by me  
On the noble eight-fold path.

*mātā putto pitā bhātā  
ayyikā ca pure ahuṃ  
yathābhuccam ajānantī  
samsari 'ham anibbisam*

I've been mother and son before;  
And father, brother—grandmother too.  
Not understanding what was real,  
I flowed-on without finding [peace].

*dittho hi me so bhagavā  
antimo 'yaṃ samussayo  
vikkhīṇo jātisamsāro  
n' atthi dāni punabbhavo*

But now I've seen the Blessed One!  
This is my last compounded form.  
The on-flowing of birth has expired.  
There's no more re-becoming now.

*āraddhaviriye pahitatte  
niccam dalhaparakkame  
samagge sāvake passa  
esā buddhāna vandanā*

See the gathering of followers:  
Putting forth effort, self controlled,  
Always with strong resolution  
—This is how to honor the Buddhas!

*bahūnam vata atthāya  
Māyā janayi Gotamam  
byādhimaranatunnānam  
dukkhakkhandham byapānudi*

Surely for the good of so many  
Did Māyā give birth to Gotama,  
Who bursts asunder the mass of pain  
Of those stricken by sickness and death.

*The woman who is said to have composed this poem was Pajāpatī, the Buddha's step-mother and a Queen of the Sākyas. Her younger sister was Māyā, married to King Suddhodana only after Pajāpatī herself was unable to conceive an heir. Queen Māyā died in childbirth, and it was Pajāpatī who raised Gotama as her own son. After his enlightenment, Pajāpatī also left the palace and became the first of the bhikkhunis, the order of nuns.*

*The third stanza suggests that her attainments included the recollection of past lives, by which she was able to verify empirically the truth of continual rebirth—the "flowing on" (samsāra) from one life to another. This process, as she mentions in her poem, is fueled by craving and by "not understanding." In the second and fourth stanzas Pajāpatī declares her attainment of nibbāna, of final and complete liberation in this very life.*

*It is remarkable to think that when Māyā is remembered in the last stanza, the author has in mind not the icon of motherhood and sacrifice that Māyā became in the Buddhist tradition, but a dearly-loved younger sister who died tragically young.*