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Buddhist Studies
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PALI POETRY

Crossing the Rohiṇi

Kāḷudāyin Thera

Therāgāthā 527-9

aṅgārino dāni dumā bhadante
phalesino chadanam vippahāya
te accimanto va pabhāsayanti,
samayo mahāvīra bhagī rasānam.

Crimson now, Sir, are the trees of the forest,
Having shed their foliage, they're eager to fruit,
(Their flowers are) blazing forth like brilliant flames,
—It is a luscious time of year, Great Hero.

dumāni phullāni manoramāni
samantato sabbadisā pavanti
pattam pahāya phalam āsasānā;
kālo ito pakkamanāya vīra.

The blossoming trees, so pleasing to the mind,
Spread their fragrance in every direction,
Surrendering their leaves and longing for fruit;
—The time has come to depart from here, Hero.

n' evāṭisitam na panātiuḥham
sukhā utu addhaniyā bhadante;
passantu tam Sākiyā Koḷiyā ca
pacchāmukham Rohiṇiyam tarantam.

It is neither too cold, nor again too hot,
The season is pleasant, suited for travel.
My Lord, let the Sākyas and Koḷiyas see you
—Facing westward and crossing the Rohiṇi.

These verses are said to have been uttered by Udāyin (nick-named Kāla Udāyin or "Dark Udāyin"). He was the son of king Suddhodhana's chief minister, and is said to have been the childhood companion of prince Siddhartha. Soon after Gotama's awakening, the king sent several messengers to ask his son to return home. Each one, upon hearing the Buddha's teaching, apparently joined his movement and gave up the king's mission. Finally Suddhodhana sends Kaludāyin, who agrees on condition that he can become a follower of the Buddha upon getting him to return home for a visit.

The Rohiṇi river runs through the heart of the Buddha's homeland, marking the border between the lands of the Sākyas and the Koḷiyas (his father's and mother's families, respectively). Since the verses are uttered in Rājagaha, well to the southeast, a returning journey would face the traveller westward. One commentary says that Kaludāyin went on for sixty stanzas of this beautiful nature poetry before asking the Buddha to return, but we only have the first few of these. The language is rich and evocative of spring sights and smells. It is composed in a meter of eleven syllables per line.

The Buddha does indeed go home soon after his awakening, where he picks up a number of family members to join his order. These include his half brother (Nanda), several cousins (Ananda, Anuruddha, and Devadatta), and his son (Rāhula). Eventually his wife (Yosodharā), step-mother (Mahāpajāpatī) and many other Sākyas will also become nuns and monks.