

An Exposition of the Jayamaᅇgala Gāthā

Translated by



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A Commentary by
Bhikkhu Pesala

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Association for Insight Meditation

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The Jayamaṅgala Gāthā

The Jayamaṅgala Gāthā are not found in the Tipiṭaka.¹ It is a composition of verses in praise of the Buddha's victories over those who opposed him. They are asseverations of truth like in the famous Ratana Sutta or the Dhajagga Sutta, where the statement of truth with confidence dispels doubt or fear. They are often recited at Sri Lankan weddings as a blessing.

The Pāli Text

1. *Bāhuṃ saḥassamabhinimmita sāyudhantaṃ,
Girimekhalaṃ udita ghora sasena māraṃ.
Dānādi dhamma vidhinā jitavā Munindo,
Taṃ tejasā bhavatu te jayamaṅgalāni.*
2. *Mārātirekaṃ abhiyujjhita sabbarattiṃ,
Ghorampan'ālavakam akkhamathaddhayakkhaṃ.
Khantisudantavidhinā jitavā Munindo,
Taṃ tejasā bhavatu te jayamaṅgalāni.*
3. *Nālāgiriṃ gajavaraṃ atimattabhūtaṃ.
Dāvaggicakkaṃ asanīva sudāruṇantaṃ.
Mettambusekavidhinā jitavā Munindo,
Taṃ tejasā bhavatu te jayamaṅgalāni.*
4. *Ukkhittakhaggaṃ atihatta sudāruṇantaṃ,
Dhāvanti Yojanapath'angulimālavantaṃ.
Iddhi'bhisankhatamano jitavā Munindo,
Taṃ tejasā bhavatu te jayamaṅgalāni.*
5. *Katvāna kaṭṭhaṃ udaraṃ iva gabbhiniyā,
Ciñcāya duṭṭhavadanaṃ janakāya majjhe.
Santena somavidhinā jitavā Munindo,
Taṃ tejasā bhavatu te jayamaṅgalāni.*

¹ While the origin of these stanzas is shrouded in mystery, it can be stated with certainty that they were composed in Sri Lanka by a devoted Buddhist poet. The earliest available reference to them is during the Kandyan period when they are given in a list of subjects that a monk should study. This shows that they had become well established during the 16th and 17th centuries; hence they must have been composed at least a century earlier. (Buddhist Ceremonies and Rituals of Sri Lanka, A.G.S. Kariyawasam, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka).

6. *Saccam vihāya matisaccaka vādaketuṃ,
Vādābhiropitamanaṃ ati andhabhūtaṃ.
Paññāpadīpajalito jitavā Munindo,
Taṃ tejasā bhavatu te jayamaṅgalāni.*
7. *Nandopānanda bhujagaṃ ibhudhaṃ mahiddhiṃ,
Puttena therabhujagena damapayanto.
Iddh'ūpadesa vidhinā jitavā Munindo,
Taṃ tejasā bhavatu te jayamaṅgalāni.*
8. *Duggāhadiṭṭhibhujagena sudaṭṭha hatthaṃ
Brahmaṃ visuddhi jutimiddhi Bakābhidhānaṃ.
Ñāṇāgadena vidhinā jitavā Munindo,
Taṃ tejasā bhavatu te jayamaṅgalāni.*
9. *Etāpi Buddha jayamaṅgala aṭṭhagāthā,
Yo vācako dine dine sarate matandī,
Hitvāna nekavividhāni c'upaddavāni,
Mokkhaṃ sukhaṃ adhigameyya naro sapañño.*

Translation

1. Māra, the Evil One, assuming a fierce form with a thousand arms each brandishing a deadly weapon, stormed forward roaring, accompanied by his formidable hosts and riding on his elephant, Girimekhalā. Him the Sovereign Sage conquered by evoking the might of his exalted perfection of giving, among others. By this mighty triumph may joyous victory be yours!
2. Even more fiendish than Māra was Ālavaka, the impetuous and haughty yakkha who fought a night long battle with the Lord. Him the sovereign Sage conquered through enduring patience flowing out of his unequalled self-mastery. By this mighty triumph may joyous victory be yours!

3. Provoked to run amok, Nālāgiri, the king tusker, like a raging forest fire murderously assailed all in his path, and struck such terror as would Indra's thunderbolt, the irresistible destroyer. Him the Sovereign Sage tamed by sprinkling over him the cooling water of all-embracing love. By this mighty triumph may joyous victory be yours!
4. With sword upraised in expert hands did the savage robber, Aṅgulimāla, pursue the Lord for a full three leagues. Him the Sovereign Sage conquered by his supernatural powers. By this mighty triumph may joyous victory be yours!
5. Posing as a pregnant woman by tying a piece of wood on her belly, Ciñcā falsely accused with lewd words in the midst of a devout congregation. Her the Sovereign Sage subdued through his imperturbable serenity. By this mighty triumph may joyous victory be yours!
6. With his perverted intelligence the wandering mendicant, Saccaka, invariably distorted the truth. Pretending to be the very banner of learning, he only blinded his own mental vision as he went about indulging in intellectual disputation. Him the sovereign Sage conquered by his illuminating lamp of wisdom. By this mighty triumph may joyous victory be yours!
7. The gifted but perverted king of the Nāgas, Nandopānanda by name, possessed great psychic power and was hostile. By instructing the Elder Moggallāna, his spiritual son, mighty in supernatural attainments, the Sovereign Sage rendered the Nāga king powerless and transformed him. Thus, through a supernormal

mode of spiritual instruction intelligible to his kind, did the Master conquer the Nāga. By this mighty triumph may joyous victory be yours!

8. Though a deity of great purity, radiance and power, Baka, the Brahma god, was nevertheless in the grip of pernicious views, like an arm tightly held by a snake's coils. Him the Sovereign Sage cured by means of wisdom. By this mighty triumph may joyous victory be yours!
9. Whoso, day after day, without lethargy, recites and recollects these eight hymns of the Exalted One's glorious triumphs — that wise man, having overcome many and diverse obstacles, would attain to the bliss of deliverance.

Explanation of the Verses

By Bhikkhu Pesala

Although the Jayamaṅgala Gāthā, or Verses of Joyous Victory, are not found in the Pāli Tipiṭaka, one can use them as a reflection on the Buddha's qualities (Buddhānussati). [A recital](#) for the Mahābodhi Society of India can be found online.

1. Māra Defeated by the Buddha

On the eve of his Enlightenment, as the Bodhisatta sat with the resolute determination to attain his goal or die in the effort, [Māra](#) appeared as a thousand-armed warrior seated on his war elephant, [Girimekhalā](#), surrounded by his huge army. The Bodhisatta defeated him by stating that he had fulfilled the ten perfections (*pāramī*):—

1. Generosity (*dāna-pāramī*),
2. Morality (*sīla-pāramī*),
3. Renunciation (*nekkhamma-pāramī*),
4. Wisdom (*paññā-pāramī*),
5. Energy (*virīya-pāramī*),
6. Patience (*khanti-pāramī*),

7. Truthfulness (*sacca-pāramī*),
8. Determination (*adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī*),
9. Loving-kindness (*mettā-pāramī*), and
10. Equanimity (*upekkhā-pāramī*).

2. Ālavaka Converted by the Buddha

The demon (*yakkha*) named Ālavaka terrorised the people of Ālavī with demands for human sacrifices. The Buddha visited Ālavaka's abode while he was absent, sat on his throne. When ordered to get out, the Buddha left. Then Ālavaka ordered him to come in, and the Buddha again complied, and again he left on being told to go out again. However, on being ordered to come in again, the Buddha refused. Ālavaka then proposed to ask some questions, and threatened to pervert his mind, tear out his heart, and throw his body across the river if he could not answer. The Buddha replied that he saw no one who could do that, but nevertheless agreed to answer the questions.

The questions and this dialogue are found in the Ālavaka Sutta, Uragavagga, of the Suttanipāta, verses 183-194. The questions are:

1. What is the best wealth to a man in this world?
2. What is the good practice that brings happiness?
3. What is the sweetest of all tastes?
4. What manner of living is the noblest?
5. How does one cross the flood of rebirth (*saṃsāra*)?
6. How does one cross the ocean of existence?
7. How does one transcend unhappiness?
8. How does one get purified?
9. How does one acquire knowledge?
10. How does one obtain wealth?
11. How does one win fame?
12. How does one gain friends?
13. How does one not repent passing from this world to the next?

The Buddha replied to these questions as follows:

1. Confidence (*saddhā*) is the best wealth for a man in this world.
2. Well-practised Dhamma brings the most happiness.
3. Truth is the sweetest of all tastes.
4. Living with wisdom is the noblest.
5. By confidence one crosses the flood of rebirth.
6. By heedfulness (*appamāda*) one crosses the ocean of existence.
7. One transcends unhappiness by strenuous effort (*vīriya*).
8. One purifies oneself by wisdom (*paññā*).
9. One acquires knowledge by reposing faith in the Arahants, listening to their teaching on the attainment of nibbāna with attentiveness (*vicakkhaṇa*) and care (*appamatta*).
10. By suitable work, resolutely performed with industry, one acquires wealth.
11. One obtains fame by truthfulness.
12. One who gives gains friends.
13. In one who has four virtues — truthfulness (*saccaṃ*), righteousness (*dhamma*), steadfastness (*dhiti*), and liberality (*cāgo*) — will not repent after death.

The Buddha then challenges him to ask other ascetics if there are any virtues superior to truthfulness, self-control (*damā*), generosity, and patience.

Āḷavaka praises the Buddha's answers, and says that he will henceforth wander from village to village proclaiming his well-taught Dhamma.

3. Pacifying of Nāḷagiri by Loving-Kindness

Nāḷagiri was a ferocious elephant in King Ajātasattu's stables. After several failed attempts to kill the Buddha, Devadatta obtained the king's permission to have Nāḷagiri released onto the streets of Rājagaha as the Buddha was walking for alms. He arranged for the elephant to be given intoxicating liquor to make him even more dangerous, and the streets were cleared.

When Venerable Ānanda saw the elephant charging towards the Buddha at the head of the Saṅgha, he stood in front. The Buddha used his loving-kindness to subdue the elephant, which knelt at his feet in homage. Amazed at this spectacle, the people of Rājagaha adorned the elephant with precious things, thus it became known as *Dhanapālaka* — bearer of wealth.

The Buddha taught the *Cūlahamṣa Jātaka* to show the great loyalty of Ānanda in a previous life. The Buddha suffered this threat to his life because in a former existence as a king, while riding his elephant, being intoxicated with power, he made it charge at a Solitary Buddha.

4. Conversion of *Aṅgulimāla*

A young man of low-caste named *Ahiṃsaka* went to Taxila to study with a famous teacher. He always excelled the other high-caste students, who were jealous of the praise heaped on him by the teacher. They conspired together to convince the teacher that *Ahiṃsaka* was having an affair with the teacher's wife. Finally, he became convinced that it was true, and thought how to kill the student without tarnishing his reputation. On the conclusion of the course of study, the students had to pay a fee. For his fee, the teacher demanded that *Ahiṃsaka* kill a thousand people to demonstrate the skills that he had learnt. He thought that in this way *Ahiṃsaka* would soon be killed or imprisoned, and thus he would get his revenge without tarnishing his own reputation.

Ahiṃsaka set about his assigned task and quickly become greatly feared by the populace. To keep count and evidence of the people he had killed, he wore a garland of fingers around his neck, and thus became known as *Aṅgulimāla* — finger-garland. Due to his great athleticism and hunting skills, no one could escape from him. Any of the king's men sent to catch him became his victims too. Finally, the king of Kosala sent a large patrol to capture him alive or dead. Hearing of this news, *Ahiṃsaka's* mother set off to warn her son about the danger.

The Buddha, knowing that Aṅgulimāla would kill his own mother and thus be condemned to hell in the next existence, decided that it was now the ripe time to intervene, so he went there to where he was dwelling. When Aṅgulimāla saw the Buddha coming he determined to kill him, and ran after him, sword in hand. However, the Buddha used his psychic powers to walk away, always keeping ahead of Aṅgulimāla who was running at full speed. Unable to catch him, Aṅgulimāla shouted out, "Stop, recluse, stop!" The Buddha turned around and said, "I have stopped. You have not stopped!" Puzzled by this, and thinking that recluses do not usually tell lies, Aṅgulimāla asked the Buddha what he meant by this. The Buddha replied that he had stopped the cycle of rebirth, but Aṅgulimāla had not.

Aṅgulimāla took refuge in the Buddha and requested the going-forth. Due to his excellent accumulated perfections the Buddha ordained him with the "*Ehi bhikkhu* (come monk)" formula.

When King Pasenadi visited the Buddha at Jetavana, he told him about the trouble caused in his kingdom by a notorious murderer known as Aṅgulimāla, who had so far escaped capture. The Buddha asked the king what he would do if Aṅgulimāla had become a monk. The king replied that he thought that that would be impossible, but if so he would pay homage to him and provide him with the four requisites. The Buddha then pointed out Aṅgulimāla who was sitting nearby.

Aṅgulimāla soon became an Arahant, and thus destroyed any future rebirth. However, the residue of his evil kamma of killing so many human beings followed him. Every time he went for alms he would get injured by stones and brick-bats.

On one occasion, on returning from alms he passed by a house where a woman who was enduring a painful labour was crying out in great distress. Moved with compassion, he asked the Buddha if anything could be done to help her. The Buddha taught him the Aṅgulimāla Sutta, and told him to recite it for the woman's benefit.

*“Yatohaṃ bhagini ariyāya jātiyā jāto,
Nābhijānāmi sañciccaṇaṃ jīvītā voropetā,
Tena saccena sotthi te hotu sotthi gabbhassa.”*

“Sister, since I was born with the noble birth, I have not knowingly and deliberately taken the life of any living being, by this truth may you be well and may your child be well.”

The householders arranged a screen, provided a seat, and he sat to recite the discourse, which is an oath of truth. The woman's labour pains eased, and the baby was born safely.

The story of Aṅgulimāla's previous life is told in the story of [Porisāda](#), in his former encounter with the Bodhisatta who, as King Sutasoma, then fulfilled the perfection of truthfulness.

5. Exposure of Ciñcā-māṇavikā's Lies by Serenity

[Ciñcā-māṇavikā](#) was a female wanderer (*paribbājikā*) among a group of heretics who lost much of their support due to the Buddha's growing influence. They conspired to discredit the Buddha with the help of their beautiful young follower. Each evening, when the people were returning from Jetavana after listening to the Buddha's teachings, she would head in the opposite direction, dressed in fine clothes. She would stay nearby in a dwelling of the heretics, and return in the early morning when the people were taking alms to Jetavana, dropping hints that she had spent a wonderful night. After some months of doing this, she feigned pregnancy by tying a bundle of wood under her dress. Some people began to entertain doubts about the Buddha's moral purity. Finally, Ciñcā made a public accusation demanding that the Buddha provide proper support for his child that she was expecting.

The Buddha said nothing, remaining perfectly serene and composed. Sakka's throne heated up, so he sent some devas in the form of mice to cut the ropes holding up the wood under Ciñcā's dress. The logs fell down, cutting off her toes.

The crowd chased her out of the monastery, and as she left the gate, the earth opened up, and she fell into hell.

6. Saccaka Humbled by Wisdom

Saccaka was the younger brother of three sisters, of Licchavi parents who were both skilled debaters, and a disciple of the Naked Ascetics (**Nigaṅṭhā**). He was skilled in debate, and few dared to tangle with him. One day, he met the Venerable Assaji and asked him what the Buddha taught. Assaji replied that the Buddha taught that all of the five aggregates are impermanent, suffering, and not-self. Saccaka expressed his displeasure, and expresses a wish to meet and debate this with him.

He boasted to a large assembly of Licchavi that today he would defeat the recluse Gotama in debate, and make him sweat under the armpits.

The story and debate is found in the **Cūḷasaccaka Sutta**. The Buddha defeats Saccaka, who is forced to admit defeat, and is bathed in sweat, being unable to answer any of the points made by the Buddha. Dummukha, a Licchavi who, from his name, seems to be a satirist, makes fun of Saccaka comparing him to a crab pulled out of a pond by youths, and lying helpless with his claws smash by stones.

Saccaka silences him, and goes on to question the Buddha further, and apologises for his former rudeness, then invites him with the Saṅgha for the meal the next day. He asks the Licchavi to donate to him whatever they think suitable, and the next days personally serves the monks with the food.

After the meal, Saccaka asks that all of the merits may accrue to the donors of the food. However, the Buddha says that the merits of giving to Saccaka (who is not free from defilements) will accrue to the donors, while the merits of giving to one who is free from passion, aversion, and delusion will accrue to Saccaka himself. This is a noteworthy point that donation should, whenever possible, be done with one's own hand, rather than by a proxy. Even left-overs, if useful to the

recipient, when offered with due respect, at the proper time, to one who is free from defilements, or to one who is practising for the removal of defilements, will be meritorious for the donors, although they did not buy or cook the food themselves.

7. Nandopānanda Tamed by Mahā-Moggallāna

A Nāga king, tamed by Mahā-Moggallāna. The Buddha and five hundred monks, on their way to Tāvatiṃsa one morning, travelled over the Nāga king's abode as he was having a meal. In anger, the Nāga coiled round Mount Sineru and blocked the road to Tāvatiṃsa.

Thereupon several members of the Buddha's retinue, including Raṭṭhapāla, Bhaddiya, and Rāhula, offered to quell the Nāga's power, but the Buddha would not agree until Moggallāna sought permission to do so. It is said that no other monk had the power to face all the dangers created by the Nāga and remain unscathed. Moggallāna and Nandopānanda vied with one another in the exhibition of their psychic power, and, in the end, Nandopānanda had to acknowledge defeat. He was thereupon conducted to the Buddha, whose follower he became. When Anāthapiṇḍika heard of Moggallāna's victory, he celebrated it by holding a great alms festival, lasting for seven days, for the Buddha and his monks. ThagA.ii.188f; J.v.126.

8. Baka Brahma Cured of Conceit by Wisdom

When the Buddha was once staying at Ukkaṭṭhā in the Subhaga forest, he read the thoughts of Baka, who had conceived the idea that this world was permanent and free from decay and death; and the Buddha visited him in order to point out his error. The story is told in the [Brahmanimantanika Sutta](#) of the Majjhimanikāya.

