

# Migajāla Thera,gāthā

## The Elder Migajāla's Verses

[True solitude]

(Thera,gāthā 423-428/45 f)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2007

### Introduction

Migajāla is the son of the lady Visākhā,<sup>1</sup> the chief lay woman supporter of the Sangha, and the wisest and most famous of the early Buddhist laywomen. His frequent visits to the monastery, listening to the Buddha's teachings, result in his joining the order, and in due course becoming an arhat (Tha 423-425; ThaA 1:452 f). The Saṃyutta Nikāya contains a whole chapter to his name, **the Migajāla Vagga**, that is, the second chapter of the Salāyatana Saṃyutta (S 35).<sup>2</sup>

Actually, only the first two suttas of the Migajāla Vagga are connected with Migajāla. In **Migajāla Sutta 1** (S 35.63), Migajāla asks the Buddha about the definition of a lone dweller (*eka,vihārī*), that is, the practice of spiritual solitude. The Buddha defines it in terms of a mind that is free from sensual attachment.<sup>3</sup>

In **Migajāla Sutta 2** (S 35.64), Migajāla asks the Buddha for a brief teaching before going into his solitary forest training. The Buddha instructs him on the nature of the various sense-objects of the senses, and how not delighting in them leads to ending of suffering. Migajāla practises as instructed and becomes an arhat.<sup>4</sup>

From the textual records of Migajāla, his story is rather undramatically straightforward, he hears the teachings and becomes a monk, receives meditation instructions from the Buddha, goes into a solitary forest life, and gains his goal. The point here is that he is born with spiritual silver spoon in his mouth. Born as the son of the most spiritual of Buddhist laywomen, he easily cultivates wise faith in the Three Jewels. Having the Buddha himself as his teacher, after only two interviews, he goes into retreat and becomes an arhat. It is like a beautiful vignette showing a radiant sunrise, a great day, and a gentle but glorious sunset.

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<sup>1</sup> On Visākhā, see **Jaṭila S** (3.11/1:77-79) = SD 14.11 Intro (1). Comy only says that Migajāla has done various meritorious deeds in various births to past Buddhas resulting in his birth as Visākhā's son (ThaA 2:177). Buddhaghosa says that Visākhā has another son whom she names after her father-in-law, Migāra (DhA 1:406 f).

<sup>2</sup> S 35.63-73/4:35-45, dealing with the senses.

<sup>3</sup> S 35.63/4:35-37 = SD 44.6.

<sup>4</sup> S 35.64/4:37 f = SD 44.7.

## The Elder Migajāla's Verses

(Tha 417-422/45 f)

- 1 Well taught by the one with the eyes,<sup>5</sup> the Buddha, the kinsman of the sun,<sup>6</sup>  
the one who has crossed beyond all fetters, the destroyer of all cyclic lives, 417
- 2 the noble eightfold path,<sup>7</sup> leading onward, crossing over, drying up craving's root,  
destroying the poisoned root,<sup>8</sup> the shambles, it brings you to quenching. 418
- 3 By destroying ignorance's root, karma's machine is destroyed.<sup>9</sup>  
it brings the lightning of wisdom down upon the heaping of consciousnesses. 419
- 4 Through knowing feelings, you are freed from grasping,  
Through insightful knowledge, the fiery coal-pit<sup>10</sup> of existence is seen. 420
- 5 Of great taste, very deep, the hinderer of decay and death,  
is the noble eightfold path, the stilling of pain, happy. 421
- 6 Knowing karma as karma, and fruit as fruit,  
seeing the world just as it is by way of dependent arising,  
it leads you to the great shelter, peace, that ends in good fortune. 422

— evaṃ —

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<sup>5</sup> “The one with eyes” (*cakkhumā*), ie, the one who see true reality. Later texts and Comy attr “**five eyes**” to the Buddha: (1) the physical eye (*maṃsa.cakkhu*), (2) the divine eye (*dibba.cakkhu*), the knowledge of karma and rebirth; the wisdom eye (*paññā.cakkhu*), ie the understanding of the 4 noble truths; (4) The Buddha eye (*Buddha.cakkhu*), ie the Buddha's skill in understanding personality and dispositions especially in giving suitable and effective teachings; (5) The universal eye (*samanta.cakkhu*), omniscience, the full knowledge of reality (VvA 60; Nc 235). See SD 9 Intro (7e)(ii).

<sup>6</sup> *Ādicca,bandhuno*. Comy says that this refers to the “clan of the sun” (*ādicca,gotta*), and that the kshatriya race (*khattiya,vam̐sa*) is twofold in the world, viz, the sun race (*ādicca,vam̐sa*) and the moon race (*soma,vam̐sa*). Here, it refers to the sun lineage of the rajah Okkāka, and therefrom by descent there is the sun lineage of the Sakyas, as which the Blessed One is the kinsman of the sun. (ThaA 2:177). Comy is clearly using *gotta* as “lineage,” rather than in its usual brahminical sense of “clan.” See Tha:N 127 n26.

<sup>7</sup> This key subject is from **421c**: *Ariyo aṭṭh'aṅgiko maggo dukkhūpasamano sivo*.

<sup>8</sup> “The root of the poisons,” *visa,mūlam*, an expression also found at S 1:41, 47, 161; the last is qu at Nett 145; Uv 20,3; Dh:G 289. Here throughout it qualifies *kodha*. Comy explains it as “the root of suffering” (*dukkha,vipākassa*, SA 1:97).

<sup>9</sup> *Aññaṇa,mūla,bhedāya | kamma,yanta,vighāṭano*. Norman tr **419b** here as “it is a destroyer of the compulsion of action,” taking *yanta* here as “most likely to mean ‘restraint, compulsion’” (Tha:N 193 n419). SED def *yantra* as (n) “any instrument for holding or restraining or fastening a prop, support, barrier;...any instrument or apparatus, mechanical contrivance, engine, machine, implement, appliance...” and *yantrita* (mf), “restrained, curbed, bound, fettered, confined...subject to, compelled by, depending on.” *Kamma,yanta,yantita* occurs at MA 2:310.

<sup>10</sup> “The fiery coal-pit,” *aṅgāra,kāsum̐*. This popular imagery is found at: **Mahā Siha,nāda S** (M 12), as an imagery for hell (M 12.37/1:74); **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36), pains from strenuous meditation (M 36.25/1:244) = **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 85.23/2:93) = **Saṅgārava S** (M 100.22/2:212); **Potaliya S** (M 54), on the dangers of sensual pleasures (M 54.18/1:365); **Māgandiya S** (M 75), on the painfulness of sensual pleasures (M 75.15/-1:506-508); **Anātha,piṇḍik'ovāda S** (M 143), on his bodily pains (M 143.4/3:259) = **Chann'ovāda S** (M 144.5/3:264 = **Channa S S** 35.87/4:57); **Putta,maṃsa S** (S 12.63) on the pains of mental volitions (S 12.63.16/-2:99 f); **Dukkha,dhamma S** (S 35.244) on how to regard sensual pleasures (S 35.244.5/4:188 f); **Phagguna S** (A 6.56) on his bodily pains (A 6.56.1/3:380); **Dhammika S**: *abrahmacariyaṃ parivaḷḷayeyya, aṅgāra,kāsum̐ jalitam eva viññū*, “Let the wise avoid celibacy like a fiery coal-pit” (Sn 396). Cf **Sumedhā Thī**: *aṅgāra,kāsu,-sadisā, agha,mūlam bhayaṃ vadho*, “(sensual pleasures are) like a fiery coal-pit, fearful, murderous roots of evil” (Thī 491) & *aṅgāra,karṣūpamā* (Mvst 3.149); both of which are used in connection with women.