



BIRTH STORIES of the BUDDHA

DHAMMAKAYA FOUNDATION

10

BIRTH STORIES
OF THE
BUDDHA

Compiled and Translated
by **Surin C. Jung**

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Vessantara Jataka is a literary classic that is popular in Southeast Asia and many other Buddhist countries. It chronicles the final birth of the Bodhisatta before he became enlightened and attained Buddhahood in the subsequent birth as Prince Siddhartha Gautama.

JATAKA TALES

The Jataka Tales are narratives about the previous lives of the Buddha before he was born for the last time as the Enlightened One. There are more than five hundred stories of the Buddha's previous lifetimes, of which the final ten are regarded as the most important. These are called Dasajati Jataka, which means Ten Birth Stories of the Buddha.

In all the Jataka Tales, the Bodhisatta (Buddha-To-Be) practiced one or more of the ten virtues, all of which must be perfected in order to become a Buddha. The final ten birth stories show the culmination of his countless lives in which all ten virtues are brought to the state of perfection. Each story depicts one of the Ten Perfected Virtues.

Buddhists believe in the cycle of birth and death. According to Buddhist worldview, the life each person is currently living represents merely one stage in an infinite series of births. Any person's present life has been preceded by countless other lives; at death, the process continues. The state of one's existence is determined by the Law of Kamma, whereby the good deeds performed in this life will result in rebirth in a happy realm in the next life, and conversely, evil deeds will result in rebirth in an unhappy realm in the next life. The happy realm includes heaven and the state of being human. An unhappy realm consists of hell, the state of being a demon, and the state of being an animal. The destination and quality of rebirth is based on the quality of deeds. The only way to end the rebirth cycle is for a person to tenaciously perform good deeds and build perfect virtues (*Parami*, see page 19) until he reaches Nibbana. This is the ultimate state to which all Bodhisattas aspire.

The Jataka Tales are stories from a time and place different from our own. The people in this time and place are different from us in terms of their overall conditions, lifespan, and physical and mental abilities. Buddhists believe in merit-power, a transcendental energy that makes wondrous things happen for those who have accumulated abundant virtues, such as the Bodhisattas. This explains the reasons for many supernatural phenomena and miracles that happen throughout the Jataka stories. We hope the reader will find these stories interesting as well as inspiring.



In Bhuridatta Jataka, the Bodhisatta was born in the realm of the nagas as the son of a naga king. Nagas are celestial serpents that inhabit the hidden depths below the ocean, far below the fields and woodlands of the world of men.

Jataka Tales – Fact or Fiction?

The world seen in the Jataka tales may appear fanciful and magical, but to many Buddhists, especially those who have reached a higher degree of mental development and meditation skill, they do not perceive these tales as totally unrealistic or illogical. In their view, incredible things do happen on earth from time to time. What is considered incredible in one time period may be common place in another.

For example, people in the last century would have thought that the ability to talk to one another across town, or to see images of actual events in another part of the world in the palm of one’s hand, a fantasy or miracle, yet we can do so today through the use of smart phones. In the same manner, we may consider the ability to recall one’s past life or communicate with angels a fairy tale. But the only difference is the advancement of science while the other is the advancement of mind.

According to Buddhist worldview, life has existed for eons, even before the current age we live in today. We cannot say that the humans who lived in the ages before our own shared the same physical and mental attributes as humans today. There were times when earth was closer to heaven and men were closer to gods¹. For us, it sounds incredible that people in past eons could communicate with angels. Likewise, it may seem incredible for them to think that people of the modern day can travel through space or video-talk to one another across the world.

It may be close-minded for us to take the position that what we cannot see, prove or perceive has to be unreal. But remember, people used to be imprisoned for believing that the earth was round!

¹ In some Jataka Tales humans and celestial beings were able to interact with one another, and men were able to traverse to some lower celestial realms such as the Himavanta Forest.

Buddhist Worldview

When reading the Jatakas it is important to note that the Buddha's previous rebirths took place in different world eras long before our time. The environment, cultures, lifespan, physical and mental faculties and abilities, and the way of thinking of the people during those eras do not resemble our own. It is beneficial for a reader to familiarize himself or herself with the Buddhist cosmology and worldview to fully appreciate what took place in these stories.

Buddhists accept the view of the Universe that time is not linear but circular. Consequently, the Universe is not created out of nothing at a particular point, nor will it be completely destroyed at another. It has always existed and will always exist. In the meantime, however, it goes through endless cycles of creation and destruction, creation and destruction over and over and over.

All beings born into this cyclic universe is the result of a preceding cause or willed action (kamma). This is the doctrine of creation by causes. In turn, when any being dies, he, she or it creates the conditions for the birth of a new being. This is not precisely reincarnation or transmigration, for it is not exactly the same being that commutes from body to body down through the procession of the ages. The appropriate word to describe this process is 'rebirth'.

Rebirth, therefore, is a process of endless and uncontrollable circulation through a variety of mostly unpleasant situations.

The Law of Kamma

Buddhism discusses the Law of Kamma² (in Sanskrit, Karma), also known as the Law of Cause and Effect. According to this law no one can salvage us from our sins, nor can anyone pass his sins to us. An action, good or bad, produces a result. Good actions produce good results, and bad actions produce bad results. A person is directly responsible for his or her own deeds and is also the direct recipient of their kamma.

Samsara - Cycle of Rebirths

Another aspect of Buddhism is samsara, the cycle of rebirths. The term samsara has been translated as 'eternal wandering,' 'cyclic existence,' and 'ocean of suffering.' According to the Buddha, the beginning point of samsara is not evident, just as there is no beginning point to a circle. All beings have been suffering in samsara for an unimaginable length of time, and they continue to do so until the attainment of Nibbana. The only way to escape the cycle of rebirths is through Enlightenment.

Nibbana

Nibbana (in Sanskrit, Nirvana) is the transcendental state of ultimate happiness, the highest spiritual attainment. This is not the sense-based happiness of everyday life; nor is it the concept of heaven as interpreted by Western culture. It is an enduring, transcendental happiness integral to the calmness attained through Enlightenment. Once a person has attained Nibbana, he has reached the end of the cycle of rebirths.

²**Kamma:** willed action; the consequence of one's actions of body, speech and mind; an intentional action that has future consequences, including future rebirths; the consequences of past deeds largely determine one's general life situation.

Happy Realms

Happy realms consist of heavens and the state of being human. A person who lives a life of good conduct will be reborn in a happy realm. There are altogether sixteen levels of heaven.

Unhappy Realms

Unhappy realms consist of hells, the state of being a demon, a the state of being a hungry ghost, and the state of being an animal. A person who lives an evil life will be reborn in an unhappy realm.

Buddhist Cosmology

Buddhist cosmology is the description of the shape and evolution of the universe according to the Buddhist scriptures and commentaries. The picture of the world presented in Buddhist cosmological descriptions cannot be taken as a literal description of the shape of the universe. It is not intended to be a description of how ordinary humans perceive their world. Rather, it is the universe as seen through the divine eye by which a Buddha or an Arahant who has cultivated this transcendental faculty can perceive.

In the vertical cosmology described by Buddhist scriptures, the universe is comprised of many worlds stacked one upon the next in layers. Each world corresponds to a mental state or a state of being. A world is not a location; rather it is composed of and sustained by the beings that inhabit that world through their kamma. Humans and animals, for example, though they partially share the same physical environments, still belong to different worlds because their minds perceive and react to those environments differently.

Our earthly realm (as well as other realms) undergoes many cycles of creation and destruction. Each earth cycle lasts billions of years (eons). Humans also undergo cycles of their own evolution. During the beginning of the human race, when humanity was pure and perfect, a human could live as long as 80,000 years or more. But as humans are overtaken by greed, hatred and delusion, which give rise to crimes, corruption and total disregard for the welfare of others, their lifespan declines. During the age of decline, which includes our present era, human lifespan decreases at the rate of one year for every one hundred years³. When lifespan declines to 10 years, a new cycle evolves, and humans begin to live progressively longer lives again.

Our human world is a part of the ‘Realm of Desire,’ symbolized by the celestial mountain of Sumeru. Sumeru and its surrounding oceans and mountains are the home of many supernatural beings.

On top of Mount Sumeru is Tavatimsa Heaven, also known as Realm of the Thirty-three Gods, a wide flat space filled with the gardens and palaces of the devas. Its ruler is Sakka, lord of the devas, who often comes to the Bodhisatta’s aid in a time of distress. The celestial beings inhabiting this world are 1,500 feet tall and live for 36,000,000 years.

On the lower slopes of Mount Sumeru is Catumaharajika Heaven. Its inhabitants include devas (angels), gandhabas (celestial musicians), nagas (serpent-like beings), yakkhas (ogres, earth sprites), and other celestial creatures.

At the foot of Mount Sumeru is the realm of the asuras (demonic titans), former devas that have been cast away due to wrongdoings while in heaven.

The mountains that encircle Mount Sumeru are surrounded by a vast ocean. In this ocean there are four continents⁴ inhabited by humans and human-like beings. One of these continents is Jambudvipa, which is the dwelling of ordinary human beings. All Buddhas appear in Jambudvipa. The people here are five to six feet tall and their length of life varies between 10 and 80,000 years.

The other three continents are: Purvavideha, where the human inhabitants are about 12 feet tall and have a lifespan of 250 years; Aparagodaniya, where the human inhabitants are about 24 feet tall and have a lifespan of 500 years; and Uttarakuru, where the inhabitants are about 48 feet tall and live for 1,000 years. Because of the vast expanse of the celestial ocean, the inhabitants cannot travel between the four continents (think of inter-planetary travel as a comparison).

Then there is the world of the animals. This world comprises all members of the animal kingdom that are capable of feeling pain and suffering.

Amongst the dwellers of earth, there is the world of hungry ghosts (peta). These are beings that cannot be seen by humans. They live in wastelands.

Below Jambudvipa are the hellish realms, or purgatory. Inhabitants here are beings that have committed various degrees of wrongdoings while they were humans and were sent here for punishment for a finite length of time. This is the realm of intense suffering.

There are more levels of higher heavens not mentioned here, the highest of which are the Brahma heavens. Brahmas have the longest lifespan of any celestial beings, but they are still subject to rebirth.

³This is not an unreasonable theory if we consider how our environment has been damaged by toxic substances, air pollution, deforestation, chemicals in our food, etc., and the stressful lifestyle that we live.

⁴**Continents:** cosmological continents or worlds; the earth that we live in is considered a continent

Who is the Buddha?



The name Buddha is a title, not a proper name, meaning “Awakened,” thus “Enlightened.”

Gotama was the Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism whose teachings, the Dhamma (Skt., Dharma), form its core. The historical Buddha was born in 623 B.C. as Prince Siddhattha Gotama in Lumbini Park at Kapilavatthu, near the present day border of India and Nepal. He was the son of King Suddhodana and Queen Maya of the kingdom of the Sakyans, a tribe of the Aryan race that lived in the northern region of present day India.

At age 16 Siddhattha married Yashodhara who gave birth to their only son, Rahula. At the age of 29 Siddhattha renounced worldly life and left the palace to find an answer to the problem of suffering and a path to liberation from cyclic existence. Siddhattha attained Enlightenment and became a Buddha at the age of 35. He spent forty five years wandering up and down the Ganges Valley expounding the doctrine that he has found and establishing the Sangha, the Order of Buddhist monks and nuns, which still exists today. The Buddha died at age 80 in the year 543 B.C. in Kushinagara, not far from his birthplace at Lumbini.

Besides the fully-enlightened Buddha who teaches Dhamma to the world (Samma-Sambuddha) there is the ‘Private Buddha’ (Pacceka-Buddha), who is enlightened but does not teach. Buddhas appear between vast intervals of time. There are countless number of past, present and future Buddhas. Anyone can become a Buddha if he or she pursues all the virtues to perfection, although this may take many lifetimes to accomplish.

Bodhisatta

A Bodhisatta is someone on the path towards Enlightenment, a being who is bound to become a Buddha. A Bodhisatta is motivated by a great compassion and the wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Due to abundant virtues (paramis) cultivated over many lifetimes, a Bodhisatta is endowed with a transcendental merit-power which makes him more advanced physically and mentally beyond an ordinary human. A Bodhisatta possesses a perfect physical appearance and strength, as well as wisdom, and is often protected by heavenly beings.

Brahma



Brahma is the most superior form of celestial being with the longest lifespan than any other deities. Brahmas are a class of supra-celestial beings who abide purely by the pleasure derived from meditation rather than the sensual pleasure enjoyed by beings of lower realms. There are two types of Brahmas, the lower type is called Rupa Brahmas (Form Brahmas), and the higher type Arupa Brahmas (Non-Form Brahmas). Brahma heavens are the highest level of heavens in Buddhist cosmology.

Sakka



Sakka (sometime referred to as Indra) is the ruler of the Tavatimsa heaven, the second celestial realm which is in direct contact with the human world. Like the other deities of this heaven, a Sakka is long-lived but mortal. When one Sakka dies, his place is taken by another deity who becomes the new Sakka. Deities of the Tavatimsa heaven, including Sakka, often interact with humans. Sakka often comes to the Bodhisatta’s aid at the time of need.

Celestial Beings



Celestial beings are former human beings, who have accumulated abundant merit through good deeds. After death they are reborn into heavenly realms to enjoy the fruits of their merit. The length of their existence in heaven and the magnitude of their celestial wealth depend upon the magnitude of their merit. They are forever young and do not experience any illnesses, although they are still subject to rebirth.

Brahmins



Brahmins are individuals belonging to the priestly caste of ancient India who practiced Brahmanism, a predecessor of modern Hinduism. The religious practices centered on a clergy administering rites and sacrifices. The mode of worship was worship of the elements (e.g., fire and rivers), numerous gods, chanting of hymns, and performance of sacrifices. In some cases, certain persons were born into other castes but dedicated themselves to such an austere life that they were also recognized as Brahmins in ancient India.

Nagas



Nagas are serpent-like beings that live in the lower celestial realm known as Catumaharajika. They possess great supernatural powers and can change their physical forms at will. Although nagas are known for their powers and supernatural abilities, they are no match for garudas, who are their arch enemies.

Yakkhas, Yakkhinees



Yakkhas (male), yakkhinees (female), are earth sprites (ogres) with gigantic bodies and fearsome appearances. They live in the lower celestial realm of Catumaharajika, and are often projected as bad characters in Buddhist cosmology.

Garudas



Garudas are a type of celestial being that appears half-bird, half-human, with the face and lower body of a bird and the upper body of a human. They live in the celestial forest of Himavanta and feed on nagas. They possess supernatural powers and can change their physical forms at will.

Kinaris and Kinaras



Kinaris (female) and kinaras (male) are a type of celestial being that appear half-bird, half-human, with a face and upper body of a human and a the lower body of a bird. They are gentle creatures that live in the celestial forest of Himavanta.

Himavanta



Himavanta is a celestial forest which surrounds the base of Mount Sumeru. It is the home of an assortment of supernatural creatures, such as the nagas, the kinaris and the garudas.



Jambudvipa is one of the four continents that surround the celestial mountain Sumeru. It is the region where the humans live, and is the only place where a being may become enlightened and attain Buddhahood. Jambudvipa is shaped like a triangle with a blunted point facing south. In its center is a gigantic Jambu tree (rose apple) from which the continent takes its name. It is in Jambudvipa that one may receive the gift of Dhamma and come to understand the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path and ultimately realize the liberation from the cycle of life and death.



Mount Sumeru is a celestial mountain considered to be the center of all the physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes. Sumeru and its surrounding oceans and mountains are the home of many extraordinary beings. On top of Mount Sumeru is Tavatimsa Heaven. On the lower slopes is Catumaharajika Heaven. At the foot of Mount Sumeru is the realm of the Asuras (demonic titans). The mountain range that encircles Mount Sumeru is surrounded by a vast ocean. In this ocean there are four continents (or worlds) inhabited by humans and human-like beings. One of these continents is Jambudvipa, which is the dwelling of ordinary human beings.



Parami is a spiritual perfection achieved by a Bodhisatta on his path to Buddhahood, or by those who are determined to attain Enlightenment. Parami is a Pali⁵ word meaning transcendental virtues, perfected virtues, or Perfections. These virtues are cultivated as a way of self purification, purifying kamma and helping the aspirant to live an unobstructed life, while reaching the goal of Enlightenment. What distinguishes the Bodhisatta from other aspirants is the degree to which virtues must be cultivated and the length of time they must be pursued.

The following are Ten Perfected Virtues exemplified by each of the Bodhisattas whose names appear on the right. They form the basis for the stories of this book.

- | | |
|--------------------|------------|
| 1. Renunciation | Temiya |
| 2. Perseverance | Mahajanaka |
| 3. Loving-kindness | Sama |
| 4. Resolution | Nimi |
| 5. Wisdom | Mahosatha |
| 6. Morality | Bhuridatta |
| 7. Forbearance | Canda |
| 8. Equanimity | Narada |
| 9. Truthfulness | Vidhura |
| 10. Charity | Vessantara |

⁵**Pali:** an ancient language used in India, now no longer an active language; the original Buddhist scriptures were written in Pali; Pali texts are used by the Theravada school of Buddhism.

Temiya Jataka

PERFECTING THE VIRTUE OF RENUNCIATION

01

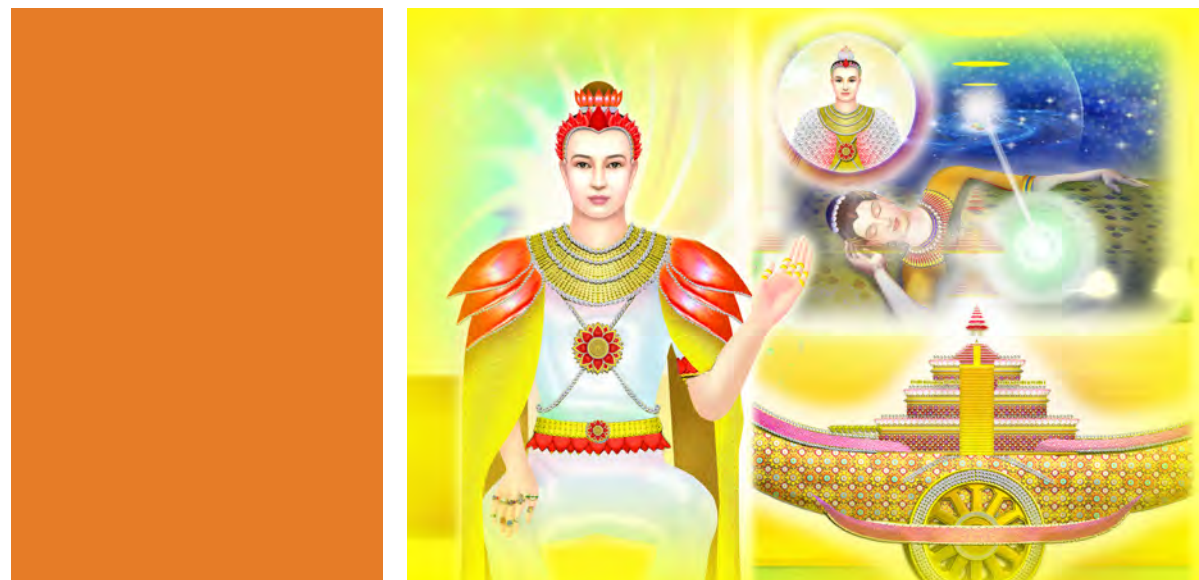


One day, in the Hall of Truth, in the Jetavana Grove, the Buddha's disciples were discussing their Master's great renunciation and praising his great sacrifice for leaving the pomp and vanity of palace life to assume the simple life of an ascetic. On hearing the discussion, the Buddha said, "O monks, this renunciation of mine was not so wonderful when I had fully exercised the Perfections, for before, even when my wisdom was still immature, I left my kingdom and renounced the world."

At the disciples' insistence, the Buddha then told them stories of his past lives.

Temiya Jataka is the first of the final ten birth stories of the Buddha. This is the story of a Bodhisatta prince who pretended to be crippled, deaf and dumb. He did this to avoid inheriting the throne so he could be free to live the pure meditative life of an ascetic. For sixteen years he endured great suffering with unwavering determination to achieve his goal of renunciation.

This is the story of one who would rather perish than live in an environment that was filled with temptation to wrongdoings.



A Prince is Born

Once there reigned a king called Kasikraja in the city of Benares, in the kingdom of Kasi, who ruled his people righteously. Despite having great wealth and numerous wives, the king had neither son nor daughter. The people of Banares were concerned about the future of the kingdom should the king pass away without leaving an heir to continue his line. They assembled in front of the king's palace and begged the king to pray for a son.

The king, unable to bear offspring, commanded his wives to ask their gods for help. All the royal ladies made supplications and offerings to their various deities, but no son or daughter was born to any one of them. His chief queen, Candadevi, known for her virtues, prayed to the great god Sakka, ruler of the Tavatimsa Heaven,⁶ "O glorious Lord, by the virtue of my merit, if through my life I have never broken any moral precepts, please let a son be born to me."

Thereupon, through the power of the queen's merit, Sakka's throne became warm, a sign of distress in the human world requiring his intervention. Sakka, realizing that he had overlooked the good virtues of Queen Candadevi, proceeded to fulfill her prayer. Among all the angelic entities in heaven he chose the Bodhisatta as the worthy one, and sent him down to earth to be conceived in the womb of Queen Candadevi.

Now the Bodhisatta, in a lifetime before he became a deva⁷ in Tavatimsa, had reigned in Benares for twenty years, and owing to some bad actions imposed upon him as king, had suffered in hell for eighty thousand years. The suffering in hell was so intense and severe that the Bodhisatta vowed to never again go back there at any cost. At this moment the Bodhisatta's time in Tavatimsa was about to expire and he was due to be reborn to a higher existence.

However, seeing the opportunity to build up additional virtues, the Bodhisatta consented to Sakka's wish, whereupon, he passed from Tavatimsa to take birth in the womb of Queen Candadevi. On the day of his birth, an auspicious rain fell upon the city, a sign of fertility and great happiness. At the same time, five hundred nobles gave birth to infants who were to grow up with the Bodhisatta and serve him. The infant Bodhisatta was given sweet milk from sixty-four wet nurses selected for their flawless beauty and good health.

⁶ **Tavatimsa:** Realm of the Thirty-three Gods; name of the second heavenly abode, of which Sakka is the ruler

⁷ **Deva:** celestial being



The Prince Who was Terrified of Hell

On the occasion of the naming of the infant prince the Brahmins, who were skilled in omens, proclaimed that the royal son possessed signs of future greatness and ought to be a universal ruler. The king named him “Temiya-Kumaro”, meaning “Prince Drenched with Water,” because at the time of his birth he brought auspicious rain to the entire city.

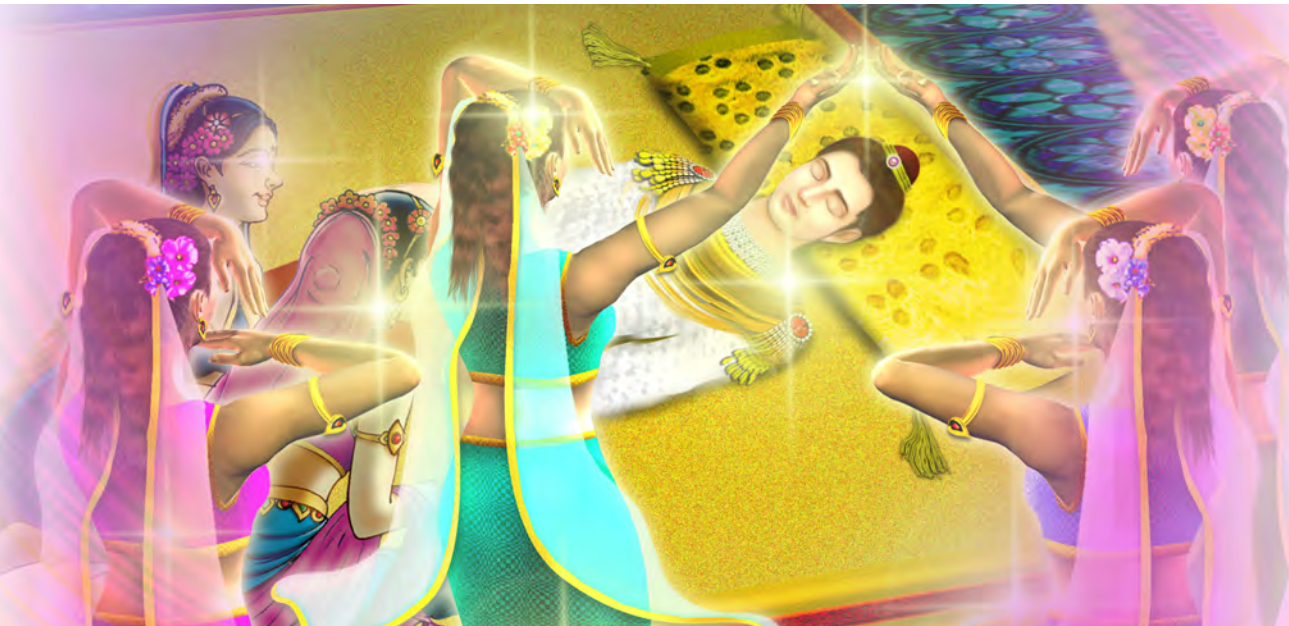
When Temiya was one month old, the nurses dressed him up and brought him to the king to sit on his knee. Just then, four thieves who had been arrested were brought before the king. The king sentenced one robber to a thousand strokes from thorn-laced whips, another to imprisonment in chains, a third to be put to death by spears, and a fourth to be impaled.

Though still an infant, the prince understood and was terrified at his father’s apparent cruelty and thought to himself, “Ah, a king, and so my father must perform cruel actions every day. By condemning men to death or torture, he will himself be condemned to hell. If, through enjoying my father’s royal estate I fall into hell by committing bad acts, the burden will be too heavy for me.”⁸

The next day, the infant began to think of what it would mean to be king. He recalled a previous existence, in which he himself had reigned as king of Benares, and due to bad actions committed by him as king, was condemned to hell for eighty thousand years. His suffering in hell was so intense that the mere thought of it terrified him. Now he was destined to become king again, and would likely suffer the same fate, again.



⁸ Unlike ordinary infants, who naturally lack the ability at this young age to be perceptive, Temiya was different because he was a Bodhisatta, one who had achieved spiritual maturity. Due to higher virtues cultivated over many lifetimes a Bodhisatta has developed transcendental characteristics such as superior wisdom, strength, and abilities, far beyond an ordinary person.



Sixteen Years of Misery

The following day, while lying half awake under a royal umbrella, still tormented by the troublesome thought and wondering how he could escape his fate, a deity who had been his mother in a former life appeared and said to him, “Temiya my child, if you really desire to escape from this pomp and vanity, do not disclose your abilities, but simulate feebleness. Though you are not weak, appear to be weak; though not deaf, feign deafness; and though your mouth is perfect, pretend to be dumb. Keep up these appearances with determination. Then the people will refuse to crown you, and you shall be free.”

Temiya vowed to heed the deity’s advice.

From then on, he pretended to be a crippled deaf-mute, never uttering a sound, never moving nor listening. His mother and the wet nurses tried to force a sound from him by withholding milk for the whole day hoping that he would cry, but to no avail. They tempted him with various cakes and sweets, all kinds of foods and fruit, and toys, but he remained silent.

By the time he was five, court ministers began to apply harsher methods to test him. From that time on, until age sixteen, they devised various tricks to terrify him into speaking. They would set fire around him, let a fierce elephant loose at him, allow serpents to coil about him, smear him with molasses and allow flies to cover and bite him, and let fearsome men put a sword at his neck as if to cut him, but he did not flinch. Pans of fire were placed under his bed, causing blisters to break out on his body, but he endured, muttering to himself, “Hell was a hundred thousand times worse.”

His parents refused to believe Temiya was disabled. They pleaded, “Dear son, we know that you are not any way crippled by birth, for cripples have not such perfect feet, face, or ears as you have.” They implored him to speak, but he lay still, motionless, as if he heard nothing.

At sixteen, the age when he would have been named heir apparent, the ministers thought, at this age of puberty, surely the boy would give in to sensual desires. So they sent some of the most sumptuous and beautiful maidens to seduce him. But he held his breath and remained rigid. The maidens left in disgust.

At last, the king summoned his Brahmins and asked them why at his son’s birth did they not mention any threatening signs of this affliction. Not understanding why and unwilling to admit their ignorance, they explained that they had not dared cast a shadow on the king’s joy of finally having a son after so many years of trying.

The king bemoaned, “What will it be best to do?” The Brahmins advised, “O King, if this ill-omened one should be allowed to remain in the palace, some terrible sickness or calamity will come upon you and the queen, or maybe even the whole country. Therefore, let him remain in the palace no longer, but be put into an ill-omened chariot drawn by ill-omened horses toward the west gate to a charnel ground outside the city and have him buried there.”

The king, frightened by these words and fearing for the safety of his country, sadly complied.



Path of Freedom

The king ordered Sunanda the charioteer to take Temiya to a charnel-ground far from the city, where he would be killed and buried. As the charioteer worked at digging a grave, Temiya thought, at last he was freed. Whereupon he arose, walked back and forth and exercised his limbs, testing whether his strength remained after sixteen years of not using it. By the virtue of his merit, not only did his strength not leave him, but, miraculously, he had so much power that he could even lift the chariot as if it were a toy cart. He put on the royal attire which had been removed from him and laid aside by Sunanda. The jeweled attire and his golden complexion made him look like a demigod.

Temiya walked over to Sunanda to call his attention. Looking up from the grave he was digging, Sunanda saw the Bodhisatta with all the glory of an angel, not knowing whether it was a man or deity. After an exchange of dialogue, Temiya finally convinced the charioteer that he was not crippled, deaf or dumb, but was acting in this way to avoid inheriting the throne so that he could be free to lead a pure meditative life of an ascetic. He relayed to Sunanda the time he spent in hell, and of his father's acts of cruelty he had witnessed when he was one month old, which prompted him to take up the life of an ascetic.

After hearing the Bodhisatta's story, the charioteer was profoundly touched. He knelt at the Bodhisatta's feet and asked that he be allowed to join him as a hermit. Temiya advised Sunanda to clear up his obligations before renouncing the world and instructed him to return to the palace and tell his royal parents the truth about their son.

Now, as soon as Sunanda had gone, Temiya determined that it would be better for his parents to find him in the garb of a recluse, and by the power of his merit Sakka had a hermitage built for him.⁹

Upon hearing the news from Sunanda the king and queen were so overcome with joy that the king said, "I will myself go forth to the forest and bring him back, and I will relinquish my sovereignty to my son." So he ordered all the chariots, elephants, and men-at-arms to be prepared, along with his nobles, courtiers and musicians, and set out for the forest.

⁹**Sakka**, ruler of Tavatimsa heaven, often watches over the welfare of a Bodhisatta and comes to his assistance at the time of need.





A Conversation with the King

When the king and his entourage arrived at Temiya's hermitage they found him garbed as a hermit and living on a diet of leaves. The king exclaimed, "Dear son, I am filled with wonder that you should dwell in this forest alone, and eat only these leaves without even salt to flavor them and yet have so handsome an appearance, even more beautiful than you were before." To which, the Bodhisatta replied:

"Father, that which is called beauty belongs to those who have peace of mind. The beauty of those who are discontented is destroyed. Those who care for what has passed or what is about to be, are like those who throw straws into the air. I, who sleep on this rough bed of grass, find it softer than a couch. I do not care or fear for these simple articles. I need no guards with swords or spears. Though I have lived like an ascetic for sixteen years, I look healthy, and I have no dread on account of what I may have done. The food one eats always tastes good if his mind is beautiful. This day I have eaten and have no thoughts as to what I shall eat or what I shall put on the next day. I am content with what I have today and with what I may obtain hereafter."

"All things that exist must also expire. Riches must one day come to an end. If loss must be the end, why take up the royal estate? Women and beauty, like wealth, also come to an end; why does my father offer this to me? As the fruit that is ripe falls to the earth from its stalk, so do all beings decay and perish.

If beauty will be destroyed by old age, why should one be attached to beauty? All beings are born to perish, where, then, is the advantage of youth, beauty and wealth, which are existing but for a moment?"

Then he added: "We ought therefore to seek with all diligence for the release from hell and to overcome all spiritual enemies. And we should strive to be full of that merit which is the result of charity properly directed."

The king tried to persuade Temiya to come back to the city. He pleaded: "Dear son, with a great company of elephants and chariots I have come to take you back to the inheritance of your ancestors, and now hand them to you with sixteen thousand virgins as your handmaids, and bring you back to the city as its ruler." To which the Bodhisatta replied:



Path of Liberation

Profoundly impressed by these enlightening words, the royal family and all of those who came with them determined to embrace the ascetic life.

The king ordered his palace be open to the public and his treasures be made available to any one that wanted them. He relinquished all his possessions and renounced his kingdom. Then he sent for the city magistrates and said, “Return to the city of Benares, and let it be proclaimed that the King of Kasi, who has overcome all his enemies, makes known to all his subjects that he, having overcome all his spiritual enemies at the feet of his son, Temiya, has renounced his wealth and his kingdom to live a holy life of an ascetic. The King desires that all who wish to partake of this holy path should renounce all their worldly possessions and come out and do so.”

So the magistrates did as they were ordered. The people of Kasi saw what the king did with his treasures and possessions, but no one desired to take advantage of them. In fact they were so impressed with the king’s spiritual pursuit that they, too, came to the realization that spiritual wealth was more important than worldly possessions. So, with one accord, they threw open all their belongings and concealed treasures, left them and came out into the forest. A few drunkards and incompetents, however, remained behind.

Thus they dwelt, living on fruit that fell from the trees, meditating and listening to the preaching of moral law, following the moral precepts, and living a life of purity. In due time, all of them achieved spiritual attainment. Upon their deaths, they were all reborn unto the Brahma heavens.



Mahajanaka

PERFECTING THE VIRTUE OF PERSEVERANCE

02



Mahajanaka Jataka is the second of the final ten birth stories of the Buddha before he became the Enlightened One.

This is the story of a Bodhisatta prince whose father was killed in battle and lost his kingdom before he was born. Upon discovering the truth of his birth the prince vowed to regain his father's kingdom. He set out on a seafaring voyage to build a fortune in a distant land so he could use the wealth to build an army. The ship sank and all on board were killed except him. He drifted in the ocean for seven days without food, but survived through the sheer strength of his determination and perseverance. He finally regained his kingdom in the most unusual way. Thereafter, he discovered the truth of life and left his kingdom to pursue spiritual attainment.

This is the story of one who would rather perish than give up.



Brothers at War

There once was a king, Mahajanaka of Mithila, in the kingdom of Videha. He had two sons, Aritthajanaka and Polajanaka. When the king died, Aritthajanaka became the new king and the younger brother became his viceroy.

One day a close attendant of the king, jealous of the viceroy's popularity with the people, informed the king that the viceroy was scheming to take the throne away from him. At first the king did not believe him, but after hearing the same story repeatedly he began to believe and had Polajanaka chained and put in prison.

From his prison cell Polajanaka implored to the deities, "If throughout my life I have never thought of betraying my brother, let the chains come loose and let me be free." Miraculously his chains fell off and he escaped to a frontier village. The people of the village knew him and gave him help. Because of his charisma and leadership skill, soon he attracted many followers.

The village people quietly formed an army and trained themselves in weapons and warfare. Impressed with their newly developed martial skills, a radical unit of the village army, unbeknownst to their commanders, raided the king's troops who were encamped in the forest nearby. They killed many of the king's soldiers. The commanders were alarmed after this incident was reported to them, for they knew the king would come after them and punish them. They went to Polajanaka to seek his counsel.

"My Lord," said the commanders, "Our people have committed a terrible mistake by killing the king's soldiers. It is inevitable that the king will come after us and raid our village. Many of us will be slaughtered."

The head commander said, "War with the king cannot be avoided, but we are outnumbered. A wise general once told me, 'The best defense is a good offense.' Why not attack them first and catch them off guard before they have a chance to mobilize? This may be the only chance we can defeat them. Because our army is small, we should get help from other clans as well. You have many soldiers who are still loyal to you; perhaps we can persuade them to join us."

After some deliberation, Polajanaka agreed with the plan. He proclaimed, "I have never done anything against my brother. Now I am forced to declare war upon him."

They sent emissaries to several towns and villages to persuade them to join in the campaign. Many of them participated. As they marched toward the city of Mithila, some of the inhabitants of Mithila also came out to join them. Polajanaka's army now grew to a formidable size.

From his encampment on the outskirts of Mithila, Polajanaka sent a message to his brother: "I was not your enemy before, but because of what you have done to me, I am your enemy now. Either give up the kingdom or give battle."



The King is Killed

By now the king had realized the wrong he had done to Polajanaka. He was unhappy with the situation, for he knew that his chance of winning the war was dim. Having been the king's own commander-in-chief before he was exiled, Polajanaka knew all the generals and their strategies. The king was reluctant to go to battle, but if he chose not to do so his people would not think of him as a brave man.

As if knowing his fate, the king bade farewell to his pregnant queen and said to her, "My beloved, the outcome of war is unpredictable. If anything happens to me I want you to leave Mithila and take refuge in the city of Kalacampa so you can protect our unborn child." He gave her instructions on how to do so and then went off to the battle field.

On the first day of the battle the king was shot with arrows from Polajanaka's archers and died on his elephant's back. Without their leader, the king's army went into disarray. Seeing no hope of winning and to prevent more bloodshed, the king's ministers opened the city gate and let Polajanaka's army enter.

Queen on the Run

Upon hearing news of the king's death, the queen gathered her most precious valuables into a basket, spread a cloth on top and covered them with rice grains. She put on some worn and ragged garments and soiled her face with soot so that she would not be recognized. Then, lifting the basket onto her head, she went unnoticed out of the city by the northern gate.

Now, in the queen's womb was no ordinary child, but a Bodhisatta. The merit-power of the unborn child drew the attention of Sakka, god of Tavatimsa Heaven, who came to protect the queen. Sakka disguised himself as an old man driving a covered wagon. Meeting the queen upon the road, he asked her where she was headed. The queen said she wanted to go to the city of Kalacampa but did not know the way. The old man offered to take her there.

In Kalacampa, the unrecognized queen was met by a wise and compassionate Brahmin teacher who had five hundred students. Upon finding out who she was and what she had been through the Brahmin said, "Do not be miserable. I am a Brahmin of a good family and a teacher of great fame. I will watch over you as if you were my sister."

So the good Brahmin and his wife took her into their family and looked after her. A short time later the queen gave birth to a son whose skin was as radiant as gold. She called him Mahajanaka, after his grandfather's name. The boy grew up to be handsome and strong. The queen withheld the secret of his birth for many years, until one day she was forced to reveal to him his real birthright.



Who is My Father?

“My child,” she said, “you are the son of King Ariththajanaka of Mithila. Your father was killed in battle by his brother and I fled to this city to save the both of us. The good Brahmin has treated me as his sister and taken care of me.”

Upon learning the truth of his birth, Mahajanaka’s outlook on life changed. He behaved maturely and became more mindful of his purpose in life. By the time he was sixteen he had mastered all the arts and sciences of his time. The thought of regaining his father’s kingdom was always on his mind. One day he announced to his mother, “It is now time that I must regain my father’s kingdom.” His mother understood and gave him her blessing.

“Mother,” he said, “I have been thinking of a plan. To regain my father’s kingdom I must have an army. To build an army I must have good financial resources. With some help from you I will build my fortune through trade. How many valuables have you put aside?”

His mother said, “I have put away some gold and jewels of great value knowing that one day they will be needed. These valuables are more than enough to build an army with. There is no need for you to seek fortune through other means.”

“Mother,” he said, “I will only take half of your valuables and I will go to Suvannabhumi where I will make my fortune in trade, then I will use that fortune to build an army and go to Mithila to seize the kingdom.”

After purchasing some goods for trading using his mother’s precious jewels, he boarded a vessel bound for Suvannabhumi, the golden land of the east. The ship was loaded to full capacity with seven caravans of goods along with seven hundred merchants.

His mother pleaded for him not to go. “My son,” she said, “the sea is full of dangers. I have seen many ships that left and never returned. Please do not go. The valuables I have are more than enough for you to build an army.” But Mahajanaka had made up his mind. He bade farewell to his mother and promised to return to get her. Then he embarked onboard the ship.

That same day his uncle Polajanaka, the new king of Mithila, fell ill.





Shipwreck

The ship sailed over the ocean at full speed. After seven days of plunging through heavy seas, the overloaded ship began to founder. Its planks gave way. The water leaked into the ship and rose higher and higher and the ship began to sink. All on board panicked except Mahajanaka. Some wept and wailed, and some prayed for their different gods to save them.

Mahajanaka stayed composed. He did not implore any deities for help. Knowing that the vessel was doomed he prepared himself for the ordeal by eating a full meal and covered himself with sugar and ghee to protect his body from the water, and smeared his two clean garments with oil and put them tightly on him. Then he stood leaning against the mast.

When the ship went down, men and animals were devoured by sharks and other sea creatures that infested the area. Mahajanaka managed to get himself on the top of the mast and, facing the direction of Mithila, gathered all his strength and threw himself a far distance from the ship, away from the feasting sharks and swirling water caused by the sinking ship.

That very day King Polajanaka was at his deathbed surrounded by his ministers and priests.

Mahajanaka drifted in the ocean for seven days without food and fresh water. Exhausted and pale but with great determination, he kept swimming toward the direction of Mithila. His body was worn out but his mind remained strong. Many times he thought of giving up, but each time he reminded himself that his mission had not yet been accomplished. This gave him strength and he strove on.



Conversation with a Goddess

Now at that time the goddess Manimekhala, guardian of the seas, took notice of the Bodhisatta. She flew over to him and asked, “Here in this deep and boundless water where no shore is in sight, why do you keep swimming?”

Looking into the air, Mahajanaka replied, “Knowing my duty, I must strive while I can. Here in mid ocean far from land I do my utmost like a brave man.”

“Your strivings are in vain,” said Manimekhala. “Here in mid ocean you are bound to die.”

The Bodhisatta replied, “He who thinks there is no more hope to win, so he gives up, is not a man of courage. He who does everything that a man can do is free from guilt. If I perish while I strive to do my best, I shall not be blamed but shall be admired.”

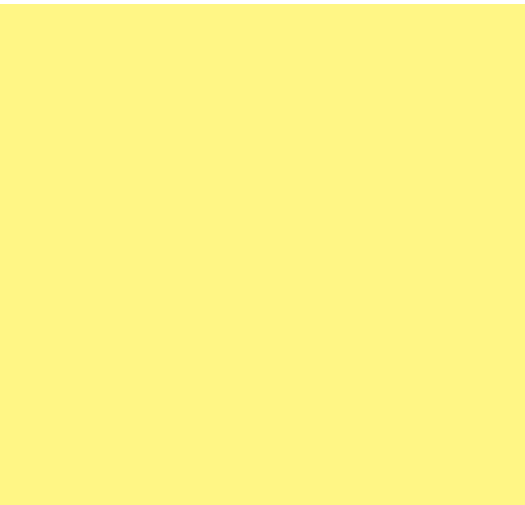
“But if you know that the effort is bound to yield no good results, it is an effort fully wasted.”

“It is my unyielding efforts that got me to this day. Do you not see that all the others have perished and I am still alive? As long as there is breath in me and my strength still holds, I will persevere. I will not yield until I reach shore,” he responded.

She commended him, “You are truly a man of courage. Your bravery is remarkable, your sense of duty admirable, and your efforts unparalleled. You are indeed an example for all to follow. I will help you.”

Then she asked him where he was headed, to which he replied, “To the city of Mithila.”

She lifted him from the water, laid him in her arms as if he were her dear child, and sprang up in the air. Delighted with the heavenly contact, Mahajanaka fell into a trance. The goddess flew with him until they reached a mango grove in the royal park of Mithila. She laid him on the ceremonial stone in the middle of the park and wished him well.



Find Me the Worthy One

Back in the court of Mithila, King Polajanaka was at his death-bed surrounded by his ministers and royal priests. The ministers appealed to him, “O king, to whom shall we give the kingdom when you have departed?”

In his dying breath the king said, “Find a worthy one who can win my daughter Princess Sivali’s heart; or an intelligent one who can tell the head of the mysterious square bed; or a powerful one who can string the bow which requires the strength of a thousand men; or a wise one who can solve the riddles leading to the sixteen treasures.” And the king gave the riddles and the clues to the chief minister.

Many ambitious men, from generals to courtiers to commoners, were desirous of winning the princess’ hand and the king’s throne. They went out of their way to compete for her affection. Each one, in an effort to win Sivali, obeyed her every whim. The more they tried to please her the more she scorned them and sent them away ridiculed.

The ministers declared, “No one is able to please the princess. Give the throne to him who is able to string the bow which requires the strength of a thousand men.” But no one could string it.

“Give the throne to him who knows which is the head of the mysterious square bed.” But no one knew it.

“Then give the throne to him who is able to draw out the sixteen great treasures.” But no one could draw them out.

Feeling hopeless the ministers bemoaned, “This is bad news for Mithila. The kingdom cannot be preserved without a king. What should we do?”

Whereupon, the head of the royal priests came forth and said to them, “Do not lose hope; there is one more way. We now must leave this to the gods to lead us to the worthy one who has enough merit to become a good and righteous king. We must send out the festive carriage drawn by four auspicious horses, adorned with auspicious decorations, and pray to the deities to lead us to the ‘chosen one’.”

And so they decorated the city, harnessed four glorious white steeds to the handsomely decorated royal carriage, and called for a band of musicians to stand ready. After performing the ceremonial rites and rituals, they invoked the carriage to begin the quest.



The Chosen King

Followed by a great crowd, the carriage went solemnly around the palace and proceeded up the road. It went around the city, left the city by the eastern gate, then picked up speed and headed toward the royal park. The carriage entered the park and went straight to the ceremonial stone where the Bodhisatta lay sleeping. After circling the stone three times, the carriage came to a stop as if ready to be mounted by its master.

The head priest saw the Bodhisatta lying on the ceremonial stone and wondered if this indeed was the worthy one. He inspected the Bodhisatta and uncovered his feet to look for auspicious signs. To his delight he saw the marks that confirmed the signs of greatness according to celestial knowledge. He declared, “This is indeed a day of happiness for our kingdom. Not only is this Great One worthy of ruling our nation, he is worthy of ruling the Four Continents.”

The head priest then joined his palms together in a gesture of reverence, bent down and said to the Bodhisatta, “Rise, my Lord, the kingdom of Mithila belongs to thee.”

Mahajanaka rose. “Where is the king?” he asked.

“He is dead.”

“Has he left no son or brother?”

“None, my Lord.”

With everything clear to his satisfaction, Mahajanaka accepted the kingdom.

During the course of the event, Mahajanaka was able to solve all the riddles and drew out the locations of all sixteen hidden treasures; and through his extraordinary physical strength he was able to string the great bow with ease. His charms and intellect captivated Princess Sivali, who fell in love with him more and more each day. So Mahajanaka fulfilled all the conditions to become king. The people also came to find out that he was the son of their previous monarch, King Ariththajanaka. This made them even more overjoyed.

King Mahajanaka married Princess Sivali and made her his queen. He sent his senior ministers in a grand procession to invite his mother and the good Brahmin and his wife to take residence at his palace. Festivities were held in their honor.

Soon Queen Sivali bore him a son endowed with auspicious marks, and they called him Dighavu-Kumara. This was a time of happiness for everyone.

¹⁰ **Ten Royal Duties:** Ten Virtues of the Sovereign, consisting of charity, morality, self-sacrifice, honesty, kindness, austerity, non-violence, forbearance, and righteousness.

Power of Perseverance

King Mahajanaka was cognizant of the fact that his prosperity was due to merit-results from charitable deeds performed by him during his previous lifetimes. He was also aware of the fact that previously accumulated merit could be exhausted if new merit was not cultivated. So he had six alms halls built throughout the city to feed the hungry and to help the poor. He performed charitable giving without missing a day. His kindness and generosity was known throughout the land. For seven thousand years he ruled his kingdom righteously according to the Ten Royal Duties¹⁰ required of a righteous monarch. The people of Mithila enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity throughout his reign.

One day he was on top of his palace looking out at the vast expanse of his kingdom and its wealth. He reflected on his good fortune and recalled the time he spent struggling in the ocean:

“My success is truly due to my perseverance, without which I would have perished along with the other seven hundred men in the ocean.

To succeed in any endeavor, one must pursue his goal with courage, determination and perseverance. These are the ingredients for success, the absence of which no task can be accomplished.”

A wise person should have hope and aspiration. He should strive to fulfill his hope with diligence and perseverance.”





Lesson from the Mango Trees

One day King Mahajanaka was riding on his elephant to tour the royal garden, followed by his ministers and a large entourage. Upon entering the garden he noticed two great mango trees, one full of mangoes and the other without any fruit. The mangos looked ripe and inviting. His attendants were tempted to pick them but no one dared to do so before the king.

From the back of his elephant the king picked one mango and tasted it. The flavor was so divine that the king thought to himself, “Um... this mango is truly delicious. On my way back I will eat some more.” Then he continued on.

Seeing that the king had eaten his fruit and moved on, the ministers and courtiers proceeded to help themselves to the mangoes that were hanging low. After the low-hanging mangoes were all taken, the people who followed behind climbed up the tree in a hurry to wrangle for the rest of the fruits. In the commotion they broke the limbs and ravaged the leaves until that tree stood all broken and battered.

As for the tree without fruit, it stood glorious and green and unblemished, and its leaves were flowing with the breeze as if it were smiling.

On his way back the king was startled at what he saw. He asked his ministers what had happened.

“The crowd saw that Your Majesty had eaten the first fruit, so they plundered and ravaged the tree,” they replied.

“But this other tree stands strong and has not lost a leaf.”

“It has not lost a leave because it had no fruit. No one bothered it.”

The king was amazed. He thought to himself, “This tree stands green and whole because it has no fruit; this other tree is broken and battered because of its fruit.”

This served as an awakening for him as he realized the following truths:

“A tree is plundered for its fruits; an elephant is slain for his ivory, a leopard for his skin, a rich man for his money. It is possessions that cause fears and worries.

One who possesses nothing of his own has no cause for worries. One without possession is like the tree without fruit; no danger will come to him. Life of an ascetic, one who possesses nothing, is a life free of worries.

We kings are like that fruitful tree, constantly exposed to dangers. His heart, his mind, is never free. Why should I be like the fruitful tree? These two mango trees are my teachers; from them I learn a lesson of life.”

Spiritual Pursuit

With this awakening, the Bodhisatta resolved to put aside his kingdom and take up the life of an ascetic. He returned to his palace, summoned his chief minister and said to him, “My good minister, from this day on no one should see me except the servants who bring me meals. I ask you, with the help and counsel of all who are wise and capable, assume the duty of governing my kingdom on my behalf. I will henceforth live the life of a recluse in the private quarters of my palace.”

For four months King Mahajanaka lived like an ascetic on the top floor of his palace, not allowing even his queen to see him. He contemplated spiritual attainment. The more he contemplated the more it became clear to him that the worldly life was a life full of suffering. To gain spiritual freedom he must relinquish everything and live a holy life of an ascetic, in the forest. Arriving at this conclusion, he shaved his head, put on the robes of an ascetic and left the palace.

Queen Sivali was distraught when she learned that King Mahajanaka had left her. She, accompanied by court ladies and soldiers, set out to find him. They caught up with him in a forest path and followed him, pleading for him to return. Despite the king's pleas to leave him alone, they kept following him for several days. Until one day, the king finally managed to leave them without a trace. Queen Sivali accepted her husband's decision and found peace with herself, and she rejoiced in his merit.

Mahajanaka found his way to the Himavanta forest and was never again seen in the world of men. He found his peace and tranquility and was able to settle his mind. In the course of seven days he was able to perfect his faculties and spiritual attainments. Upon death he was reborn unto the Brahma heaven.



Sama Jataka

PERFECTING THE VIRTUE OF LOVING-KINDNESS

03



During the time of the Buddha, a young man from a wealthy family wished to be ordained as a monk but his parents would not let him. They told him that, as their only son, it was his responsibility to carry on the family lineage and to look after them during their old age. Having made up his mind to follow the path of purity by becoming a monk, the young man told his parents he would fast to death unless they agreed to let him ordain. Still, they would not let him. So he fasted for several days until he became weak and pale. Fearing that their son would die they finally gave in.

So the young man became a monk and lived a life of austerity for several years. One day he received news that his parents had fallen into hard times and had lost all of their wealth and possessions. They became homeless, clothed in rags and wandered around begging for food. Saddened by the news he went to see them. The sight of his parents made him miserable. He felt responsible for what had happened to them. Thereafter, he stayed close to his parents to watch over them and would give them the food from his alms gathering. He would not eat his alms food unless there was leftover from his parents. Some days there was not enough food to go around and he had to starve.

This went on for a while until he became so thin and pale that his fellow monks thought he was suffering an illness. After learning the real reason from the young monk they told him that it was wrong to give offerings from faithful donors to laypeople. They brought the matter up to the Buddha. Upon hearing the reason behind what the young monk had done, the Buddha complimented him for being a good son.

He said to the monks, “It is an immemorial custom with the wise to cherish and support their parents. Parents are worthy of respect and gratitude from their sons and daughters above all things.” Then the Buddha went on to tell them a story of his past lives, now known as Sama Jataka.



Families of Hunters

Once there were two villages of hunters on the opposite banks of a river not far from the city of Benares. Their village chiefs were the best of friends who had made a pact with one another, if one of them had a son and the other had a daughter, that they would marry them. One chief had a boy and named him Dukulaka; the other had a girl and named her Parika.

Though Dukulaka and Parika grew up with hunters they refused to harm any living creature. When they reached the age of sixteen their parents married them against their will, but secretly they determined to live as brother and sister. They felt obliged to abstain from any intimacy and deny themselves all pleasures of the senses. In the course of time the two decided to leave their villages and lived like hermits in the forest. They headed for the forest of Himavanta, where they hoped to find peace, tranquility and solitude.

Upon reaching Himavanta they settled down in a hermitage. There, they led a pure and meditative life of ascetics. They meditated regularly and extended loving-kindness to all living beings. The effect of their loving-kindness was felt by all the birds and beasts. No danger ever came upon them from any of the animals ... until one fateful day.

One day, Sakka, ruler of Tavatimsa Heaven and protector of virtuous people, foresaw that a grave misfortune was about to come upon them. Sakka came down to earth and warned them of the danger. He tried to convince them that they should bear a son so there will be someone to care for them when affliction strikes. They refused to go along saying that this was not the way of asceticism. Then Sakka advised them that an immaculate conception would be possible if, during Parika's period of fertility, Dukulaka would place his hand on her belly and rub on it. To this, Dukulaka and Parika agreed.



A Bodhisatta is Born

Nine months later, a great being, the Bodhisatta, was born unto them. His skin was as radiant as gold. They named him Suvana-Sama (Sama the Golden).

Sama grew up in the Himavanta Forest populated by ordinary and supernatural creatures. Graceful kinaris¹¹ who lived in a secret part of the forest came to nurse him and look after him while his parents were away looking for fruits and berries in the forest. They cherished him as he grew up year after year.

Sama, was a kind and compassionate young boy. His character and mannerism was gentle and refined. He moved about gently, radiating loving-kindness around him. Even animals, timid of other men, felt at ease around him. They played with him and followed him wherever he went.

¹¹ **kinaris** (female) and **kinaras** (male) are a type of celestial being that are half-bird, half-human, with a face and upper body of a human and a the lower body of a bird. They live in the forest of Himavanta.



Retribution from a Bad Kamma

When Sama was sixteen, as predicted, a misfortune befell his parents. As they were making their way home after a day of gathering fruits, it suddenly began to rain. They took shelter under a big tree and unwittingly stood on an anthill under which a poisonous snake lived. As they huddled there, the rain washed their sweat down onto the snake's nostrils which made it angry. It puffed out its deadly breath at them and blinded them instantly. Unable to see anything, Dukulaka and Parika were horrified. They cried out at their misfortune.

In a former existence, Dukulaka and Parika had been born as husband and wife who practiced medicine. The husband had treated a wealthy patient with an eye disease that blinded him. The patient had promised to pay the doctor handsomely if he was able to cure his blindness. The doctor did cure him from blindness, but instead of paying the doctor as promised the rich patient made all sorts of excuses to avoid paying. This greatly upset the doctor. He asked his wife what he should do. The wife, overcome by anger, told the doctor to put poison in the patient's eyes as a way to teach him a lesson. When the patient showed up for a subsequent visit he mixed the medicine with poison and dropped it in the patient's eyes which blinded him. This grievous deed gave rise to a bad kamma that followed Dukulaka and Parika to the present lifetime.

The Law of Kamma is a universal law that applies to everyone with no exceptions. An action, good or bad, produces results. Actions that bring goodness to oneself and others produce good karmic consequences, while actions that cause suffering to oneself or others, whether justified or not, bear negative karmic consequences.

Karmic retributions, both positive and negative, can follow the doers through many lifetimes. It is unpredictable when these retributions will take effect, but they never go away, and will bear fruit in their own time.

For Dukulaka and Parika, their negative karmic retributions had now caught up with them and made them suffer the consequences.

A Perfect Son

When Sama noticed his parents failed to return at the normal time, he went out to look for them. When he finally found them they were in a distressed state, unable to see anything. He cried bitterly at his parents' suffering but soon regained his mindfulness and told himself that this was a chance for him to fulfill his gratitude towards his parents and to look after them. He led them back to the hermitage before nightfall.

From this time onward Sama looked after his parents with the utmost dedication. He bathed them, washed their feet, collected food for them, fed them succulent fruits, swept their dwelling clean, comforted them, and went everyday to a pond to fill a water pot for them. He tied ropes and bamboo poles in all directions for them to navigate their whereabouts. Sama's gentle loving care made the lives of his blind parents more bearable.

A King with a Cruel Heart

At that time in Benares reigned a young king named Piliyakkha. He was a heartless king who took great pleasure in hunting and killing wild animals for their flesh. His craving for eating the flesh of wild animals was insatiable. Over the years he and his hunting mates had hunted and killed so many animals in his area that the animals all migrated away into other forests.

One day his royal chef came to him and informed him that they could no longer find any large animals in the area. The king was annoyed as his craving for the flesh of wild animals grew stronger by the day. Finally, he decided to take time off from his kingdom to go hunting by himself on an extended journey. He asked his mother to look after the kingdom on his behalf, then equipped himself with all kinds of weapons, and rode off into the forests. He would hunt and kill animals everywhere he went. This turned out to be a fulfilling adventure for him.

Soon he wandered into the region of Himavanta forest. Venturing deeper and deeper he came upon a river that was crystal clear and surrounded by lush green trees and vegetation. He finally reached the glade where Sama came to fetch water every day. There he saw a great number of animal footprints. He was excited. "This is going to be a good day; here is where I will take my trophy," he exclaimed joyfully. He looked around for a strategic spot to conceal himself in ambush. He found a perfect spot and put up a hidden shelter there. Then he got his bow and arrows ready and he waited.





Poisoned Arrow

That afternoon, after taking care of his parents for the day, Sama made his trip to the river to fetch water. As usual, many animals followed him.

The king hiding in his secret place saw Sama and was fascinated by the sight of what appeared to be some divine being by his golden complexion and the ability to tame the animals of the forest. He thought to himself, “All the time that I have been wandering here I have never seen a human; is he a deity or a naga? Now if I go up and ask him, he will fly up into heaven if he is a deity; and if he is a naga he will sink into the earth and disappear. If he is indeed a non-human I will capture him and take him home to show my people. They will be fascinated by my accomplishment.”

Having been so used to killing as a habit, he thought nothing of causing suffering to others. King Piliyakka drew back his bow and shot a poisoned arrow at Sama. The arrow went into the right side of Sama and came out the other side, inflicting terrible pain. The animals fled in terror. The water pot tumbled over and Sama fell onto the sand. Blood poured out of his body and his mouth as he spoke these words:

“I have no enemies in this forest and I have no enmity against anyone; my dear friend, why do you wish to kill me. My flesh cannot be eaten; my skin is of no use to anyone; what is there to gain for killing me? Who are you? Please tell me your name. Why did you shoot me and why are you hiding in the bush?”

When the king heard this, he thought to himself, “Though he has been gravely wounded by my poisoned arrow, yet he neither scorned nor blamed me, but spoke to me in such a kind tone. I must go up and face him.” So he went up and stood near him. Even while Sama was writhing in pain, the king felt no remorse. He said proudly, “I am King Piliyakka of Benares. I am well-trained in the art of weapons and I am a skilled archer. Even a large elephant could not escape death from my arrows. I took time off from my royal duties to hunt for wild animals.”

Then he lied to Sama that he was aiming for a deer, but Sama approached and scared the deer away; so he was angry and shot at him. To which the Bodhisatta said, “Why are you speaking thus? In all of Himavanta, there is not a deer or any other animal that will run away when they see me. They are all my friends.”

The king thought to himself, “I have wounded this innocent being and told a lie. This is not the way of a brave man.” So he admitted the truth. Still the Bodhisatta did not scold him. Instead, he grieved aloud for his parents.



Who Will Look After My Parents?

“Both of my parents are blind. Who will look after them now? Who will find food for them? Who will bring them water each day? Who will bathe them? They will die without me.”

On hearing Sama’s lamentation the king’s conscience began to trouble him. He came to an awakening: “This is a man who cherishes his parents. He is a virtuous son. Even amidst all his pain he does not think of himself but only of his parents. By harming such a man I have committed a grave sin. Hell will no doubt await me. What good will my kingdom do me if I end up in hell? What must I do to correct my sin?”

There upon a celestial being by the name of Suntaree, who had been Sama’s mother in a previous life, witnessed the incident and came out to intervene. She spoke to the king, “O King, you have committed a grievous act. An innocent family has been ruined by your cruel deed. You will suffer a heavy guilt because of your selfish heart. Do some good deed; go and look after his blind parents. Let the good deed compensate for your sin. Have a charitable heart and you will reach heaven.”

The king looked around to see who was speaking, but he saw no one. He surmised that the voice must have come from a god or an angel. He solemnly obeyed.

Sama was bleeding badly; his hands and feet became stiffened and his breathing had stopped. The king lamented loudly: “I have murdered an innocent soul; hell is where I will be doomed.”

After a burst of bitter tears the king slowly got up, lifted the water pot and started walking toward the hermitage. There he confessed his crime to Sama’s parents.

At first, Dukulaka and Parika refused to believe what they heard as it was too terrible to bear, and then they broke down in tears. Their hearts were shattered with grief. Dukulaka tried to comfort his wife with these words: “Hatred leads to more hatred. My dear wife, we must be strong. We have been practicing loving-kindness for so long; don’t allow our grief to take away our kindness. We must not allow the cycle of bad kamma to continue.” They suppressed their ill feelings and harbored no hatred toward the king. They asked merely that the king lead them to their son’s body. The king complied.

Power of Loving-Kindness

Upon reaching their son, the two ascetics knelt down and wept loudly, unable to control their agony. After their grief had subsided they regained their composure, recalled the merit of Sama, and prayed: “If it was true that throughout his times Sama always lived a virtuous life, spoke only the truth, and looked after his parents night and day, then may the power of his good deeds overcome the poison in his veins and make it harmless.”

At the same moment, the celestial being Suntaree, who was watching over Sama’s body the whole time, asserted the virtue of Sama and prayed for his restoration.

Through the strength of their prayers and the merit power of Sama’s virtues, something wonderful happened: Sama began to regain his consciousness and began to move his body. His wound disappeared, and his limbs were no longer stiffened. It was also a wondrous day for Dukulaka and Parika, for they have regained their eyesight. Their blindness has ended along with their penance from a previous life.

As the sun began to rise they could see with their own eyes their son’s restoration. The morning air was filled with bliss. Dukulaka, Parika and Sama embraced each other heartily as tears of joy flooded their eyes.

Sama appeared as radiant and beautiful as he ever was. He paid homage to his parents and expressed words of kindness to the king.

The king exclaimed, “This is a miracle! How is such a thing possible?”

The Bodhisatta said to him, “Miracles do happen. For mortals who obey the law of righteousness and nurse their parents in distress, the angels praise their deed and come to heal their sickness. The power of merit is transcendental and profound.”

The king said to Sama, “You are a man of virtue; please be my refuge. Teach me how to reach heaven.”

The Bodhisatta gave him the following teaching:

“If you wish to reach the world of heaven and enjoy divine happiness, you must practice the Ten Virtues of the Ruler and rule your kingdom with generosity, morality, self-sacrifice and integrity; and you must treat your subjects with kindness and non-violence.

Further, you must fulfill your duty towards your parents, your family and your friends, your towns and villages, and also your duty to nature and to birds and beasts.

In addition, you must practice the Five Moral Precepts by not killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, lying or involving in any form of intoxicants.

By so doing, you will elevate your human quality and will be assured of a happy afterlife destination.”

The king listened attentively and accepted the Bodhisatta’s teaching whole-heartedly. He expressed his sincere appreciation and thanked him gratefully for showing him the right path. With tears in his eyes he knelt before the three and asked for their forgiveness. Then he bade farewell to them and began his journey to return to his kingdom. From that day onward, King Piliyakkha was a changed man. He gave up killing completely and was no longer cruel to anyone. He ruled his kingdom righteously and performed charitable acts regularly until his last day. Upon his death he was reborn in a heavenly realm.

Sama and his parents continued to live peacefully in the Himavanta forest. They meditated regularly and extended loving-kindness to all living beings. In the course of time all of them perfected their faculties and achieved spiritual attainment. Upon their death they were reborn unto the Brahma world.

Nimi Jataka

PERFECTING THE VIRTUE OF RESOLUTION

04



In this story, the Bodhisatta was born as a king in an era where people lived as long as 400,000 years. By enjoying such a long lifespan, many people tended to lose touch with reality and allowed their time to pass without doing something worthwhile spiritually. The Bodhisatta was different. Even though he could live a very long life, he was aware of the fact that nothing was permanent and that one day old age and death would be upon him. So he was determined to seek spiritual fulfillment before he became too old. He made the resolution that, as soon as a strand of gray hair appeared on his head, he would renounce the world and take on the life of an ascetic. He also resolved that all of his descendents would follow this same tradition.

Here, the Bodhisatta displayed the Virtue of Resolution more firmly than in any of his other previous lives.

In this story, we are given a glimpse of the various afterlife realms where bad people are punished and good people are rewarded after they die.



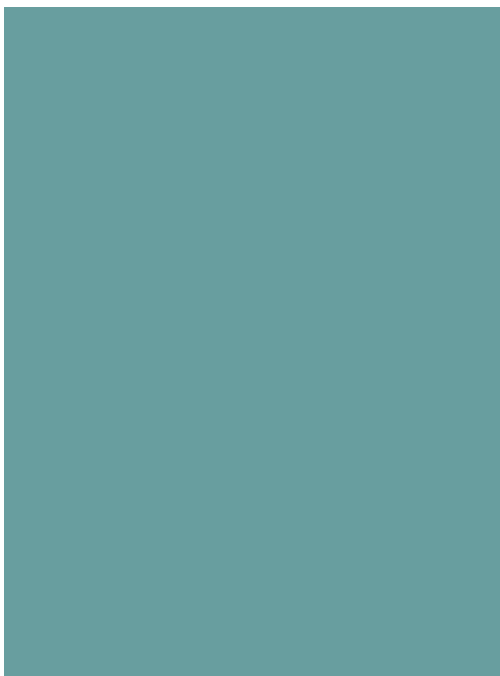
Tale of the First Gray Hair

Once, a Bodhisatta from the Brahma’s world was reborn into the human realm to become King Makhadeva of Mithila. This took place in the time when people could live as long as 400,000 years. Makhadeva spent his first 84,000 years as a young prince, living a carefree lifestyle. He became king, ruling for the next 168,000 years. Although life was good for him, something inside him told him that he should not be reckless and should make room for spiritual development and to cultivate his virtues before he became too old. So he made a resolution that as soon as a strand of his hair turned gray, he would renounce his kingship and become an ascetic. For him, this first strand of gray hair would be a messenger from heaven to tell him that old age was just around the corner and that death would soon find him.

He told his barber to watch for the first gray hair and to inform him the moment he spotted it. A few hundred years had passed and finally the barber spotted the first strand of gray hair on King Makhadeva’s head. He plucked it and placed it on King Makhadeva’s palm.

Upon seeing his first gray hair, King Makhadeva realized the time had come for him to renounce the world and to live the life of an ascetic. He passed his kingdom over to his son and advised his son to live a virtuous life and to rule his kingdom righteously. He told his son to follow the family tradition established by him that upon noticing his son’s first gray hair that he should abdicate and assume the life of an ascetic just like his father has done. He also told his son to tell his descendants to uphold this tradition for all their future

generations. He made the resolution: “May my family line carry on the tradition of asceticism from generation to generation until reaching Nibbana.” Then he left the kingdom to become an ascetic. He lived on for another 84,000 years. After death, he was reborn in the Brahma’s heaven.



Reborn from the Brahma's World

From his place in Brahma's heaven he saw that 84,000 of his descendants had followed his example and had preserved their tradition of asceticism after their first gray hairs appeared. "Will any of us attain Nibbana?" he pondered. Through his insight he saw that the state of Nibbana was not within the reach of any of his line. This being the case, he decided to descend to earth one more time in order to be reborn as the son of his descendant¹², the present king of Mithila, so that he would become the one who would round off his family line without letting the tradition of asceticism break.

He was conceived in the womb of the chief queen of Mithila. At the time of naming the infant, the king summoned his soothsayers to inspect the infant for auspicious signs. After examining, the soothsayers declared that the infant prince would eventually become an ascetic and would be the one to round off the family line. The king was pleased. He named him Nimi-Kumara (Prince Hoop), meaning "the Prince Who is the Wheel That Keeps Turning and Repeating its Cycles."

Upon noticing his first gray hair, true to family tradition, Nimi's father renounced the throne to become an ascetic and passed the kingdom to Nimi. As king, Nimi was righteous and without fault. He ruled by example, giving alms, caring for the poor, and upholding moral precepts. This was a time for peace and prosperity in the kingdom. King Nimi's reputation spread far and wide. His name was synonymous with that of goodness. Indeed, he inspired his subjects to lead such virtuous lives that upon death most of them reached the realms of heaven.

Almsgiving vs. Holy Life

One day, after coming out of a deep meditation, King Nimi yearned to know the answer to one great question: which is more fruitful, the holy life or faithful almsgiving? So strong was his desire to learn the truth that Sakka, king of Tavatimsa Heaven, felt compelled to come down in person to King Nimi's chamber and gave him the answer. "Good King Nimi," said Sakka, "the holy life, in which a man lives as an ascetic, is by far the more fruitful. By embracing the meditative life of an ascetic, one can go to higher heavens and the Brahma's world, and sometimes beyond, to Nibbana. Nevertheless, almsgiving is right and befits a great man and a king such as you."

Upon his return to Tavatimsa Heaven, Sakka spoke of King Nimi's goodness to the deities there. Many of the deities at Tavatimsa were former subjects of Nimi, who, through his good example and teachings, were able to attain heaven. They were overjoyed to hear of him and wished to see him again. They persuaded Sakka to bring him to Tavatimsa so they could see him and listen to his discourse. Sakka consented. He summoned Matali, his charioteer, to take the celestial chariot for a journey to earth to invite Nimi to visit his heaven.

Matali guided the chariot to the eastern window of the palace, where King Nimi was seated. "King Nimi," said Matali, "the celestial beings of Tavatimsa Heaven are well pleased with you and are longing to see you. I am sent by the King Sakka himself to invite you and to escort you to his realm. Please come with me."

¹² Only a divine being who is a Bodhisatta in Tusita Heaven, and in the Great Brahma's world, has the power to choose when and where he is to be reborn on earth.

Witnessing the Hell Realms

King Nimi accepted graciously. On the way to Tavatimsa Heaven, Matali asked if Nimi would like to tour the different realms of heaven and hell, and if so, which one he would like to be shown first. Nimi suggested that he be shown the realms of hell first as he knew he would eventually see the realms of heaven anyway.

Matali plunged the chariot into the blackness of the various worlds of hell. Nimi shook and shuddered at the horrific sights of these hells where hell creatures were mercilessly punished and tortured. The sufferings of these hell creatures were so horrific that it made Nimi weep. He cried out to Matali, “What have these creatures done to be cast into such fearsome places?” Matali told Nimi what wrongdoing each had done that lead them to each one of these hells and the punishment that befitted each offense. Some hells were for those who were mean and selfish, some for tormenting the weak, some for harming the virtuous, some for lying, some for cheating, some for stealing, some for slaying animals, some for killing people, some for committing adultery, some for acting and behaving according to wrong belief, some for practicing false religions, and so on. Each hell was horrifying beyond words. Nimi was deeply distraught by the sights he witnessed.

Visiting the Heavenly Realms

In the meantime, the celestial beings at Tavatimsa became anxious that Nimi had taken too long to arrive. So Sakka sent a fast messenger to rush Matali there. Matali quickly rounded up the tour of the hell realms and turned the chariot heavenward. On the way to Tavatimsa Nimi saw several spectacular celestial mansions and crystal palaces that sparkled like gems floating in the air. He also saw magnificent gardens with beautiful trees and flowers. Heavenly fragrances and cool celestial music filled the air. Nimi caught sight of many celestial beings, all of them so beautiful, radiant and happy.

Each heavenly abode seemed more beautiful than the last. Nimi wondered, what good deeds had these heavenly beings performed as humans to have gained such a happy, celestial state? Matali explained, “While human, some of these angels gave alms to the needy, some gave shelter to ascetics, some gave food to holy men, some practiced moral precepts, some observed abstinence during holy days, some provided parks and wells to the cities; all of them have been kind and generous.”

The carriage rose upward, past the seven celestial mountains surrounding the great Mount Sumeru¹³, past the heaven of the Four Great Kings (Catumaharajika¹⁴), until at last arriving at the gateway to Tavatimsa heaven. Matali pointed out the magnificent, eight-sided columns made of rare gems that supported the palace and announced to Nimi, “This is Tavatimsa, the heaven of the Thirty-three; here the gods assemble, with their master Sakka. It is a most beautiful and magnificent place.”

The celestial beings came happily to greet Nimi. Sakka invited him to stay in his heaven but Nimi politely declined, explaining that he still had to complete certain worldly duties and that his people needed him. For seven days Nimi charmed the company of heaven with his discourse. Nimi was profoundly impressed with all the beauty and magnificence of life in the heavens. Finally, the time had come for him to depart.

Once again, the chariot was prepared and Matali was summoned to take Nimi home. Nimi bade a friendly farewell to all of them and began his journey back to Mithila.

¹³**Sumeru** is the name of the central world-mountain in Buddhist cosmology.

¹⁴**The Four Great Kings** live in the Catumaharajika heaven on the lower slopes of Mount Sumeru, which is the lowest of the six worlds of the devas. They are the protectors of the world and fighters of evil.

Do Good, Avoid Bad

Upon his arrival back to earth, his subjects spotted their celestial chariot which came ablaze with brightness from the sky. They were overjoyed to see their king after having been gone for a long time. They surrounded him and anxiously waited to hear of his adventure.

Nimi told them of the wonders he had seen and of the magnificent existence of all who dwell in heaven. He also told them the horrors he had witnessed in the underworld. He gave them the following insight:

“Every action that you do brings about retribution, pleasant and unpleasant.

Merit, the fruit of good deeds, and demerit, the fruit of bad deeds, do exist and are real.

Do good, be charitable, have a kind heart; one day you will be reborn into such a wonderful place of heaven.

Beware of evildoing, for I have seen in the worlds of hell more suffering and torture than my tongue can describe.”

The people of Mithila expressed their gratitude for Nimi’s advice and promised to do good and avoid evil.

Years later, when the king’s barber showed Nimi his first gray hair, Nimi knew it was time to give his kingdom to his son. From then on, he lived as an ascetic in a mango grove at Mithila. Upon his death he was, again, reborn in the Brahman realm, surpassing Sakka’s heaven.

Thus, Nimi, the Bodhisatta, rounded off King Makhadeva’s line. And with the death of his son, he ended the cycle in the 84,000th generation.



Mahosatha Jataka

PERFECTING THE VIRTUE OF WISDOM

05



Mahosatha Jataka is the story of the Bodhisatta who applied wisdom in everything he did. His great wisdom did not result from luck or from a miraculous gift, but was due to his having pursued the Virtue of Wisdom for many lifetimes.

Through the power of his wisdom the Bodhisatta was able to solve difficult problems, settle disputes for others, outsmart his enemies, and defend his state from invading armies. In the process, he managed to win the love and respect of everyone including his enemies, and brought peace and prosperity to the entire continent.

This story teaches us that wisdom is indeed more important than wealth and power, that the wise always studies ahead and prepares ahead, that gratitude is a virtue of the wise, and that wealth gained through immoral means leads to eventual misfortune.

It is beneficial for us to employ wisdom in everything we do. We gain wisdom by associating with the wise and avoid ignorance by staying away from fools – those who are morally underdeveloped.



Kingdom of Vedeha

In a land that was great and vast and abundant with produce and grains, laid the great kingdom of Vedeha. This was a region populated with a large number of people and merchants who came from surrounding states to engage in trade. Its capital city was called Mithila. Mithila was a wealthy city teeming with people. Its houses, buildings and palaces were as beautiful and grand as those in the celestial realm.

The ruling monarch of this kingdom was King Vedeha. He was revered by his people. In his court were four royal sages who advised him in the affairs of the land. The most senior of these sages was Venaka. From the time the king ascended the throne, the kingdom of Vedeha had been peaceful and prosperous. Its virtues were well known throughout the land.

A Fantastic Dream

At dawn one morning, the king woke up from a fantastic dream. In his dream he saw the four corners of his royal courtyard ablaze with fire that rose as high as the city walls. Amidst the four fireballs emerged a fifth fire. At first it appeared as little as a firefly, then grew in height and glory until it consumed all the other four fireballs. Its brightness pervaded the whole universe and spread all the way to the Brahma world. Yet this great fireball gave a cool, soothing light, and multitudes of people passed through it without harm. They brought garlands and fragrant blooms to pay homage to the huge fireball.

Frightened by this dream, the king summoned his four sages to interpret the meaning of it. The four sages considered the content of the dream, then checked the astrology of the king and the fortune of the city. After having done so, Senaka, the chief advisor, said to the king, “Fear not, Your Majesty. The dream is indeed a good omen. There is no harm that will come to you and your kingdom.”

The king implored anxiously, “Check again carefully and explain to me in detail why such a horrific dream is a good omen.”

Senaka and the other three, after checking again carefully according to their training of the art of prediction, turned to the king and said, “Indeed, Your Majesty, this is a good omen. It is signifying that not too far in the future there will be a sage blessed with great wisdom far wiser than the four of us. He will come into Your Majesty’s services in his youth. Once he is here he will be widely respected by the masses. His wisdom and glory will be incomparable.”

After hearing this revelation, the king’s heart was filled with joy. From that time on, he often spoke of the coming of this new sage with anticipation.



A Genius is Born

At the four gates of Mithila there were four market towns, and in the East Market town there dwelt a rich man named Sirivaddhaka and his wife, Lady Sumana.

Indeed, on the same day of the king’s dream, the Bodhisatta was conceived in the womb of Lady Sumana. In his hand he clasped a medicinal herb¹⁵ which, when ground, could cure all kinds of illnesses. The medicinal herb had caused a painless birth for his mother and cured his father’s chronic headache which had lasted for seven years. The story of this magical herb went far and wide. People with sicknesses came from all places looking to be cured by this magical herb, and indeed all of them were cured. His father named him Mahosatha, which meant “One Who Possesses a Medicine That Benefits All Men.”

Sirivaddhaka perceived that his son must have been a blessed being to have been born with such virtuous power. According to tradition, someone so blessed would not come into being alone, but would be accompanied by a retinue of attendants. So he had his people search around to find out whether there were any infants born on the same day as his child. Indeed, his people reported that there were a total of one thousand infant boys born to wealthy families on the same day. Well pleased, Sirivaddhaka sent gifts and other amenities to these families and saw to it that they grew up with good health. These boys became Mahosatha’s playmates and loyal friends until their adult days.

¹⁵ Divine medicine given to the Bodhisatta by Sakka, king of Tavatimsa Heaven, at the time of his birth



The Pavilion

Mahosatha’s wisdom grew as he got older. At age seven¹⁶, he saw that the area he and his friends were playing in and where the travelers were passing through was often disturbed by wild animals and exposed to rain and harsh sun. He proposed to his friends that they should build a pavilion to provide resting areas and shelters for the people and part of it to be used as playgrounds. His friends agreed with the idea. They also agreed to each come up with one thousand gold pieces to build the facility; any shortages would be made up by Mahosatha. All of their parents supported their idea and helped come up with their shares accordingly.

Mahosatha hired a contractor and his crew to construct the building but ended up having to supervise the project himself as the crew failed to do it in the right way. The pavilion and its various buildings that Mahosatha designed and supervised were remarkable. The building was a multi-purpose facility that served to provide shelters for travelers, merchants, holy men and needy people. It also served as a venue for community meetings and religious assemblies, a court of justice, and a sporting area. It was surrounded by beautiful gardens, ponds and streams. And near this pavilion he established a public place for the distribution of alms to holy men and needy people.

The pavilion became a popular resting place for travelers and merchants and a good meeting place for the people. Crowds gathered there daily to participate in Dhamma discussions and other civic activities.

Even at this young age, Mahosatha’s wits and wisdom were so well known that people came to him for advice on both spiritual and mundane matters, and also to present their cases of dispute to him for judgment.

¹⁶Due to Virtue of Wisdom accumulated by the Bodhisatta over many past lifetimes, he was blessed with superior intelligence and maturity even at a very young age.

Go Find That Young Sage

Back at the city of Mithila, for seven years King Vedeha remembered how the four sages had said that a fifth sage would be born, who would surpass them in wisdom. “Where is he now?” he wondered, “It’s time I send someone out to look for him.”

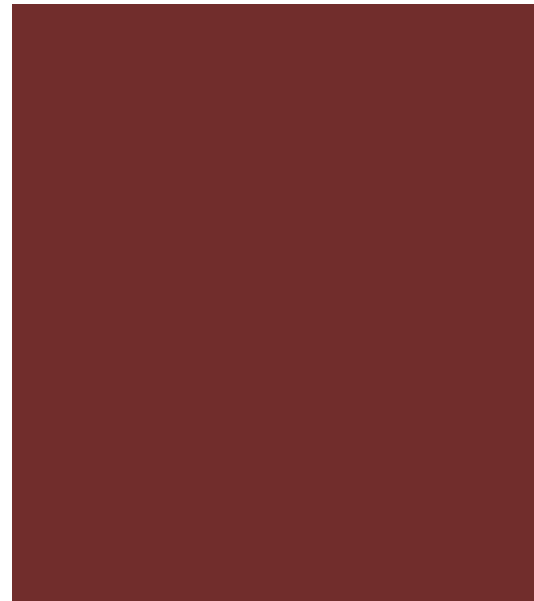
He sent out his ministers by the four gates of the city, ordering them to find the young sage. When they went out by the first three gates they saw no sign of the Bodhisatta, but when they went out by the fourth gate they came upon the pavilion and its various buildings, they knew at once that only someone with a superior intellect could have built such a remarkable place. After inquiring, they found out that this place was conceived of and built at the direction of a seven-year-old genius by the name of Mahosatha, son of the wealthy merchant of Mithila. They reported their findings to the king.

The king was elated. He consulted Senaka, his chief adviser, whether he should send for the boy to his court.

Venaka, remembering his own prediction of the king’s dream, knew that the presence of the boy would do him and the other three sages no good as their glory would be dimmed by the boy’s. So he plotted to delay the king’s actions in every way he could. He told the king that the task of building a nice pavilion was not something special and did not require someone with extraordinary wisdom to do it. He suggested that the king should send his ministers to observe Mahosatha’s behavior and report their findings back to him on a regular basis.

Following Senaka’s advice, the king sent three ministers out to secretly observe Mahosatha. Through their observations they witnessed Mahosatha’s various activities that exhibited his unusual intelligence and wisdom. The following are a few examples:





An Ox Thief

A man purchased an ox in a neighboring village and was walking it back home when he became tired and fell asleep. As he was sleeping, he allowed the ox to graze. Another man saw the opportunity to steal this ox and he walked away with it. The owner woke up, saw the thief in the distance with his ox and chased after him. When he caught up, the thief refused to let go of the ox claiming that it belonged to him. The two men wrangled until they came upon the location of the pavilion.

A great crowd collected after hearing the dispute. When Mahosatha heard the noise, he sent for them both. Each man accused the other of being a thief. Mahosatha offered to settle the dispute if they would abide by his verdict. They agreed to do so.

When he saw their behavior he knew right away which one was the thief and which one was the real owner, but thought to himself that he needed to show how he reached his conclusion so that his verdict would be accepted by the crowd.

He asked both men how they took possession of the ox, what they fed the ox with, and what they gave the ox to drink.

The thief replied, “This ox was born in my home. I fed him with sesame flour and kidney beans and let him drink rice gruel.”

Then he asked the same question to the real owner, who said, “I purchased this ox from another town. I fed him on grass.”

So Mahosatha let the people bring the food that the thief described and also the grass. The ox refused to eat the other food, only the grass. With this finding, the thief had no choice but to confess to his crime. The crowd was angry at the thief and started to beat him. Mahosatha stopped them from beating the thief and gave the thief a moral lesson:

“Your misdeed not only will bring misfortune to you in this present life, but in the future life you will suffer great torment in the various hells. Therefore, from now on, you must abandon such practices.

There are five basic offenses that a decent man should not engage in: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication. These are called the Five Precepts. They are the basics of human quality. Do good, avoid bad. Live a virtuous life and you will find peace and happiness.” The thief repented. From then on, he went about his life in an honest way.

The Mother and the Baby

After travelling a long journey, a woman with a newborn baby went to rest at Mahosatha's pavilion. She went to the stream to wash her baby. After she finished washing the baby, she placed the baby on the bank. A yakkhinee (ogress with supernatural power) saw the baby and desired to eat him. The yakkhinee transformed itself into the shape of a young woman and came to befriend the mother of the baby. She talked the mother into letting her hold the baby, then ran off with him. The mother ran after her and seized her.

As they wrangled they passed by the door of the pavilion. Mahosatha heard the commotion and asked them what the argument was about. Each of the women declared that the baby belonged to her. When he heard their story, he asked them whether they would let him be the judge and that they would abide by his verdict. On their promising to do so, he drew a line on the ground and placed the baby in the middle of the line, feet on one side of the line and hands on the other side. Then he said to them, "Grab hold of the baby and pull. The child is yours who can pull him over the line."

The two women pulled hard causing the baby to cry in pain. The mother's heart was torn apart each time the baby cried. She could no longer stand the baby's suffering and decided to let go of him. She stood there and wept pitifully.

Mahosatha turned to the crowd and asked, "Is it the heart of the mother which is tender towards the child, or the heart of her who is not the mother?" They answered, "The mother's heart." "Is she the mother who kept hold of the child or she who let it go?" They replied, "She who let it go." The crowd pointed to the woman who let go of the baby and declared, "She is the real mother."

Mahosatha noticed the other woman looked less than human, for her eyes were red and did not blink, and she cast no shadows. After his questioning, the woman confessed that she was indeed a yakkhinee disguised as a woman.

Mahosatha gave her a lesson:

"How foolish you are. Don't you realize that the reason you were born a non-human was because of your bad kamma? If you continue to commit more evil deeds you will suffer worse retribution and be reborn in a more miserable state.

To overcome your bad kamma you must do more good deeds and avoid the bad ones. You must no longer kill, or steal, or lie, or cause harm to anyone. By doing good deeds regularly you will have a better rebirth in your next life."

The yakkhinee reflected on Mahosatha's words and realized that everything he said was true. She began to feel remorse and shame. Then she said, "I want to free myself from this unfortunate condition. From now on, I will heed your advice, uphold the moral precepts and redeem myself." And she solemnly walked away.



An Ugly Man with a Beautiful Wife

A short and ugly man fell in love with a beautiful girl. His passion for the girl was so great that he was willing to labor hard for her father in order to win her love. He served her father diligently for seven full years. The father was impressed with the man’s dedication and agreed to give his daughter to him as his wife. The girl, however, found it hard to love someone so ugly.

One day the man planned to visit his parents in a nearby village with his wife. He asked his wife to cook him some sweetmeats and other food to take on their trip. After having taken some provisions and a present, he set out on a journey with her. On the way to their destination, they came upon a river but were afraid to cross it because neither of them could swim.

Another man was walking along the bank and came upon them. The husband asked the man whether the river was deep. The man, dishonest by nature, said that the river was deep and dangerous and full of crocodiles, but that he knew his way around and was an expert at crossing it. The husband asked if the man would agree to carry them across in exchange for some food. The man agreed. After eating the food, the man asked who he should carry first, and the husband said to carry his wife first.

The man carried the wife, who took the food with her, on his shoulder and went into the river. Having bodily contact with such a beautiful woman he immediately felt a desire for her and began to court her. The woman easily gave in to the man. She agreed to go with him and leave her husband behind. A little way into the river the man crouched down and pretended to sink deep into the water

as if the water was very deep to scare off the husband so he would not dare follow them. After they reached the opposite bank they lay down on the bank, ate the food, and courted each other.

Seeing what had happened, the husband was beside himself. He ran forward and backward on the bank like a mad man, running a little into the water and drawing back again in fear. Then, in his desperation, he thought, “I have given up my life and worked hard for seven years to gain this woman. I am not about to lose her this easily. What good is my life without her? I would rather die than accept such disgrace.” So he made a desperate leap into the water. Once there, he found out how shallow the water was. So he crossed it and hurried after them. He finally caught up with them near Mahosatha’s pavilion. The two men fought and struggled while the woman looked on.

A great crowd gathered. Mahosatha heard the commotion and asked them what happened. Each man claimed he was the husband of the woman. Mahosatha offered to settle their case for them. He asked if they would abide by his decision once the judgment was made. They all agreed.

More Tests

Mahosatha spoke to each of them privately. He asked for their names, the names of their parents, and the names of their in-laws. He asked the stranger what the name of the woman was. Since the man never found out the name of the woman, he made up a random name. The same thing happened to the woman. Since she never found out the name of the other man, she made up his name. Their statements were clearly contradictory.

Then Mahosatha asked the husband the same questions, and the husband was able to answer the correct names of the woman, her parents, and everyone else. Thus, it was clear who the real husband was.

The crowd was furious at the dishonest man and wanted to punish him. Mahosatha did not let this happen, but instead taught the man some lessons about ethics and virtues. The man repented and promised not to do wrong again.

The husband was very happy with the final outcome. He expressed sincere thanks and gratitude to the Bodhisatta. His wife realized what she had done wrong and apologized to the husband. Thus, the man regained his wife and the wife learned a lesson about virtue.

Stories like these, plus many more, which demonstrated Mahosatha’s extraordinary intelligence, were noted by the ministers and reported back to the king. The king had no doubt in his mind that Mahosatha was the sage that was foretold in his dream. He told Senaka that it was time to invite Mahosatha into his court.

Again, due to jealousy, Venaka discouraged the king from doing so stating that these examples were not enough to use as a norm to measure someone’s wisdom, and that a man’s true wisdom must be proven by his accomplishments. He suggested to the king that he come up with various trials and riddles for Mahosatha to solve. The king agreed. He sent a messenger to Mahosatha’s East Market town and ordered the people there to solve one puzzle after another, and threatened to impose a big fine should they fail to solve each of these puzzles.

The following are some examples of the puzzles presented by the king:



Which End is Up

The king ordered a stem of arcadia wood to be cut into a short stick, fully rounded and polished so that it looked even, smooth and equal at both ends, and then sent the short stick to the East Market town with a message: “The people of the East Market town are known for their wisdom. Tell us which end of this stick is the top and which end is the root. Failure to give the right answer will result in a fine of one thousand gold pieces.”

No one in the town could tell the difference between which end was the top and which end was the root. The head of the townsfolk suggested that they take the problem to Mahosatha.

Mahosatha looked at the stick and hinted to the people that a tree grew from the bottom up, so the bottom section would have been denser and heavier than the upper section. He asked for a large bowl of water and placed the stick onto the water. One end of the stick sank deeper than the other end. With this demonstration, it was clear which end was the bottom and which end was the top. The people declared, “The end that sinks deeper is the bottom and the other end that floats higher is the top.”

The answer was then brought to the king, who was impressed with their quick solution. When he found out who was behind this clever answer he was delighted.

A Bull with Horns on His Legs

The king sent a message to the East Market town and presented the people there with another puzzle: “Send us a white bull with horns on his legs, and a hump on the head, which utters his voice three times each day unfailingly. Otherwise you must pay a fine of one thousand gold pieces.”

The townsfolk were perplexed with this silly request. A man exclaimed, “How on earth do we find such a strange animal? It does not exist.” Another man said, “Let us bring this problem to Mahosatha, our genius. If he cannot solve it, no one else can.”

After hearing the puzzle Mahosatha said to them, “There is no such animal. The king means for you to send him a white rooster. This creature has horns on his feet, the spurs; a hump on his head, the crest; and utters his voice, crows, three times each day unfailingly. Then send him a white rooster such as he described.” So they sent the king a white rooster.

Again, the king was duly impressed when he found out Mahosatha was the one behind the solution.

Let the Ants Solve the Problem

The king had a precious gem that was passed on to him from his forefathers. The gem was octagonal. In the center was a tiny hole with twisting grooves. Inside the hole was a broken thread that no one could remove to put in a new thread.

The king sent this gem to the people of the East Market and told them to take out the old thread and to put in a new one. Failure to accomplish this would subject them to a fine of one thousand gold pieces.

The towns people tried every which way to remove the old thread but were unable to do so because the thread was rotten and trapped inside the twisted hole. Before they lost their hope someone suggested that the problem be brought to their resident genius, Mahosatha.

Mahosatha inspected the gem, then asked for some honey. He smeared the honey on both ends of the hole, and a little of it at the tip of the new thread and placed the end of the new thread as far as it could go inside the hole. Then he placed the gem in a place where tiny red ants were passing. Attracted by the honey the red ants ate away the rotten thread, then pulled the honey-smeared end of the thread through the hole. Mahosatha tied knots on both ends of the thread and had the gem brought to the king.

The king was astonished at what he saw. He asked the people who came up with such a quick solution. They told him it was their young genius, Mahosatha. The king uttered, “Oh, Mahosatha, you are indeed a sage!”

A Pregnant Bull

Next, the king had a bull fed until its stomach became as big as a pregnant cow. He had his horns polished and his body painted yellow, turning him into a strange-looking creature. It was difficult to tell whether it was a bull or a cow. Then he sent the bull to the East Market town and ordered the people to tend to this “pregnant” bull until it gave birth to a calf. Failing to do so would cost them one thousand gold pieces. The people knew full well that the animal was a bull and that it was impossible to make him give birth to a calf.

Again, the townsfolk turned to Mahosatha and asked him for help. This time Mahosatha knew that the problem could not be solved using a practical method. The only way to deal with this problem was to come up with a scheme to outsmart the king.

He asked for someone courageous to volunteer for a difficult task. A tough-looking man volunteered. Mahosatha coached the man thoroughly on what to do and then sent him to the king’s court. Once arriving at the king’s court, the man made a big commotion. He cried and wailed so loudly that his voice irritated the king. So the king sent for him and asked why he was wailing so loudly. The man, his face full of anguish, lamented that his father was suffering with great pain trying to give birth to a baby but was not able to deliver.

The king laughed out loud, “How can a man give birth to a baby? You must be insane!” The man looked at the king with a sad face and said, “If a man cannot give birth to a baby, then how can a bull

give birth to a calf?” The king stopped laughing suddenly, looked at the man, and asked, “Are you from the East Market town?” The man said yes. The king realized he had been outsmarted. At first he was angry at the man’s trick, but after finding out who was behind it, he exclaimed, “Oh, it is my little genius again, Mahosatha!”



The Ultimate Sage

Over the course of time, many more trials and riddles were put upon Mahosatha. Each of the four sages tried to come up with difficult problems designed to prevent Mahosatha from reaching the king's presence. However, one after another, the boy was able to solve whatever was set before him with great cleverness.

Finally, the king decided this was enough. He stopped listening to the four sages' oppositions and sent an invitation to Mahosatha and his father, Sirivaddhaka, to meet him in his throne hall. When there he asked Sirivaddhaka's permission to let Mahosatha stay at his court and become his royal sage. He promised to treat Mahosatha as if he was his own son. Mahosatha's father consented to the king's request. So, Mahosatha, the Bodhisatta, was formally appointed by the king as his Royal Sage.

Senaka and his three sages were unhappy at what had transpired but knew that they could no longer do anything about it. The only thing for them to do was bide their time and wait for the right opportunity to take action. They plotted and schemed quietly.

Over time, Mahosatha became the favorite to both the king and his queen. They both treated him as if he were their own son. For many years Mahosatha advised the king in all matters both spiritual and civic. At the same time, he had to be on guard constantly against the devious tricks of the other four sages.

Wisdom vs. Wealth

One day, when Mahosatha and the four wise men had come to wait upon the king, he asked them, “Which is better: a wise man without wealth, or wealthy man without wisdom?”

Senaka replied at once: “O King, wealth is certainly better than wisdom. A wise man is useless without money. He will end up working for a wealthy man. A rich man without wisdom can always hire a wise man to advise him. There is no question, money is more important than wisdom. A fool with money is better than a wise without money.”

The king listened to this answer, then turned to Mahosatha and asked the same question.

Mahosatha replied:

“A man without wisdom is ignorant of the truth of life. He looks at this world and not at the next, and he commits sinful acts.

The wise, although not wealthy in the material sense, is rich in the spiritual sense, for he knows that this life is not the end of his existence.

The wise knows that spiritual wealth is more lasting than material wealth, and he prepares himself for the future. He will stay clear from actions that cause him to suffer in the afterlife.

Therefore, it is better to be a wise man without wealth than a wealthy man without wisdom.”

Senaka said, “Your majesty, Mahosatha is only a child. What can he know about the truths of life?”

Then, he continued his argument.

“In the forest, birds gather from all directions to the tree which has sweet fruit. In the world of men, crowds flock to the rich man who has treasure and wealth.

Even if one is with great wisdom, but without rice or grain or money, his word has no weight amongst his kinfolk. Prosperity does not come to a man for his knowledge.”

A wealthy man in high position may lack knowledge or good demeanor, but if he says anything to others, his word has weight amongst his kinsfolk. Wisdom is useless without wealth.

Elephants, horses, jewels, women, and servants are found in rich families. These are for the enjoyment of the rich man.

All the various streams pour themselves into the Ganges; they lose their names and kind. The Ganges falling into the sea is no longer to be distinguished. The world is devoted to wealth.

As you see, my Lord, we are five wise men all waiting upon you with gestures of respect; and you are our lord and master. This is the living proof that wisdom is inferior, wealth is superior.”

For which, Mahosatha responded:

“When a fool receives his wealth, he is carried away by his good fortune. He exposes himself to temptations. Wealth without wisdom can cause one to misstep into the wrong path leading to disaster. When struck by misfortune he becomes stupefied and helpless.

Lacking wisdom, a fool gains his wealth through immoral means. Upon death, he pays for it in hell.

No matter how mighty, the ocean that keeps beating the shore can never pass over it. So is the boasting of the wealthy fool; his prosperity cannot surpass the wise.

A rich man who speaks without wisdom, his words bring shame amongst his company.

A poor man who speaks with wisdom, his words bring honor and respect amongst his company.

The wealthy fool, who does thoughtless acts and speaks foolish words, is devoid of a happy afterlife.

The wealthy fool who cannot act on his own, who is dependent on the advice of the wise, is enslaved to the wise.”

With these words from the Bodhisatta, Senaka became quiet, his face looking down. The king was profoundly impressed with Mahosatha’s answers.

Find Him a Wife

When Mahosatha turned sixteen, Queen Udumbara said to the king that it was time they found him a wife. The king agreed and she told Mahosatha so. Mahosatha said to the queen “Give me a few days, and I will go seek a wife that will suit my taste.”

“Do so, my young brother,” the queen replied.

He took leave of the queen and went to his house. Disguised as a tailor, he went out by the northern gate and headed toward the North Town. On the way, he came upon a beautiful girl who was carrying rice gruel to her father who was working in the field nearby. When Mahosatha saw her coming near he thought, “Such a graceful lady; if she is unwed, I sure would like to marry her.” The girl saw Mahosatha and thought, “Such a handsome man, if I marry him I would restore my family.”

They introduced themselves to each other and began a friendly conversation. She told him her name was Amara. Judging from her refinement and grace, Mahosatha assumed that she must have come from a well-to-do family that might have fallen into difficult times. During their conversation they observed each other’s intellect and demeanor, and were impressed by each other. Mahosatha asked her permission to visit her home. She gladly gave him the directions to it.

When he got to her house, Mahosatha met with Amara’s mother, who invited him to come in and also offered him some rice gruel. He saw the inside of the house and noticed how poor her family was. He told her he was a tailor and offered to mend her old clothes. The woman said she had nothing to pay him with, but

Mahosatha said she did not have to pay him anything. She brought him some old clothes and Mahosatha mended them with the skills of a master tailor. He asked the woman to announce to the villagers that a skilled tailor has come to town and to bring their clothes for him to fix. Many villagers quickly became his customers. Within a short time Mahosatha earned himself a good sum of money for his services.

Amara’s parents invited Mahosatha to stay at their house, which he accepted. During this time Mahosatha tested Amara for her intelligence and her morality. At times he purposely treated her rudely to find out how she would react, but she responded only with kindness and never showed resentment. She recognized that there were four types of wives worthy of a husband’s love; namely:

A wife like a mother: Such a wife is loving and compassionate. She looks after the husband with the same care as a mother would look after her own child. She will forgive the husband for anything he does wrong, just like a mother who would forgive her child for his mistakes. When the husband suffers a misfortune, or becomes sick or disabled, this wife will stay faithful and look after him until his last breath. If the husband dies when she is still young, she will not think of remarrying.

A wife like a little sister: Such a wife may be playful, moody or emotional at times, but she is truthful and loyal to the husband. She gives respect to the husband. Her love for the husband is long-lasting. Such a wife tends to look up to the husband like an older brother.

A wife like a friend: Such a wife has the same taste and liking as the husband. She will get along well with the husband. She may think of herself as an equal to the husband. She is earnest, and she will stand by the husband during good times and bad, just like a true friend would. Their level of morality will be similar and they can live quite happily together.

A wife like a servant: Such a wife tends to behave like a servant to the husband. She is honest and loyal, and she will do her utmost to satisfy the husband. Such a wife tends to be content even when she is dominated or abused by the husband.

Mahosatha was convinced that Amara was the right woman for him. He proposed to marry her and she accepted. He asked her parents for their permission to marry their daughter and they gave their permission, and so the two became husband and wife. When it came time to leave, Mahosatha gave them all the money he had brought and earned, and comforted them. Then Mahosatha and Amara bade farewell and set out for the journey to Mithila.

Throughout this time, Mahosatha never revealed his true identity to Amara. Upon their arrival at Mithila he let her stay at the gatekeeper’s house. He told her he had something to do and would come back to fetch her in a day or two. Then he sent some of his friends to seduce her in order to test her chastity. None of his friends succeeded, for Amara was genuinely faithful to Mahosatha. Mahosatha was very pleased with her. His love for her increased day after day.

The following morning, Mahosatha went to see the queen and introduced Amara to her. Amara was perplexed at what unfolded.

She realized for the first time that she had married someone very special. Mahosatha told her the truth of his identity. This was the happiest day of her life!

The king and queen gave Mahosatha and Amara a magnificent wedding reception. A grand procession consisting of decorated elephants, horse-drawn chariots, musicians and dancers, and a retinue of colorfully costumed attendants marched through the city showing off the bride. The people of Mithila all came out to celebrate. Those who laid eyes on Amara were captivated by her beauty. They brought flowers and gifts to give to the bride. Amara divided these gifts and distributed them among the people. Her generosity won their hearts.

From that time Mahosatha lived with Amara in happiness.



Sage on the Run

Mahosatha continued to serve the king with great wisdom and ability. But his life was not completely free of obstacles. As he grew in greatness, the four sages grew in jealousy.

One day, Senaka said to the other three, “Before now we only had one Mahosatha to contend with who we could not even shine his shoes. Now that he has married a woman even cleverer, we have to contend with two of them. Before, the king used to treat us like celebrities, now he doesn’t even know we exist. We must find a way to separate this rascal from the king.”

“What do we do now?” asked the other three. “There is a way. We will portray Mahosatha as a traitor. I will steal the king’s jewel from the royal crest; you each will steal the golden necklace, the royal robe, and his golden slippers, and we will get them into Mahosatha’s house without him knowing. Then we will let the king know that Mahosatha has stolen these items from him, and we will convince the king that Mahosatha is scheming against him.” After working out all the details, the four went to work with their respective assignments. They managed to steal these items from the king’s quarters, and, one by one, got them into Mahosatha’s house with the help of their servants.

Their devious schemes did not escape Amara’s knowledge. She found out their moves through her keen instincts. She took note of their every move and kept records of them as evidence, and then devised a counterattack.

When the king found out that his personal valuables were missing from his private quarters, the four sages made up stories to convince the king that Mahosatha had stolen them. The king, being insecure by nature and vulnerable to manipulation, believed them without

bothering to investigate the facts. He imagined that Mahosatha’s growing popularity and power must have corrupted his sense of equity.

When the news of the king’s accusations was heard by Mahosatha, he asked for an audience with King Vedeha, but the king refused to see him. Instead, he gave the order to have him arrested. Mahosatha figured the king’s rationality had been clouded by his anger, much so that it would do him no good to try to reason with him under the circumstances. He knew that if he put up a fight in defense it would result in chaos, and if the king punished him unjustly, it would cause an uprising. For the sake of maintaining harmony, he resolved that it would be better if he left the city.

He bade farewell to Amara, put on a simple garb and then escaped through the south gate. When he arrived at the South Town, he took shelter in the house of a local potter and soon ended up working for him as an assistant potter.

Upon seeing that Mahosatha was gone, the four sages began to set their eyes on Amara, whose beauty had captivated them. Without the knowledge of the other, each devised a way to seduce her. Amara took advantage of their desire and lured them into her traps. She made each of them fall into a feces-filled pit that she prepared for them in an area of her house. There, she made them confess their crimes, tied them up, and shaved their heads to disgrace them. Then she asked for an audience with the king, and she presented her evidence along with the four disgraced sages wrapped in sacks. The king listened to her testimony. He appeared to believe her, but showed no interest in reprimanding the four sages. Instead, he let them go free.

Divine Intervention

Several months went by, whereupon, a guardian deity residing at the king’s court saw the injustice that was done to Mahosatha and decided to intervene. One night, the deity appeared in the king’s bedroom and ordered him to solve four riddles. It gave the king two days to come up with the correct answers, or he would be severely punished.

The king was frightened and feared for his life. He asked the four sages for help, but none of them was able to solve the riddles. The king begged the deity to give him more time. It told him there was only one person in his kingdom that had the intelligence to solve these riddles, and if he wished to live, he had better find this person in time. The king knew right away to whom the deity was referring. He summoned four capable courtiers and ordered them to look for Mahosatha in all the four directions.

The courtiers went out through each of the four city gates. The one who went out through the southern gate finally came upon the South Town. He stopped and asked the people of the South Town if they knew of any newcomer who came to their town in the past four months. They told him indeed they knew of one such newcomer, a young man who worked for the local potter. The courtier went to the potter’s house and saw a young man; his entire body was soiled with potting mud. The courtier could not recognize him at first, but upon looking closer he realized this was indeed Mahosatha.

Surprised by his dirty appearance, the courtier asked Mahosatha, “You preached that it is wisdom that overpowers everything. With

so much wisdom, how come you ended up in such dire conditions?”

Mahosatha replied, “The king suspected me of treason. I chose a lowly lifestyle to show that I have no undue ambition.”

The courtier: “If you were honest, why then did you run away?”

Mahosatha: “I ran away to avoid conflict and unrest. The king’s anger clouded his good judgment. If I made audience with the king, the king would not have a clear mind to give justice. So I preferred to avoid injustice.”

The courtier: “If you ran away, don’t you think the king would be suspicious?”

Mahosatha: “I am confident that in the end the king will side with wisdom. Dhamma protects those who practice it.”

Having established the truth, the courtier handed him one thousand gold pieces from the king and asked him to come back to Mithila with him. After learning who Mahosatha really was, the potter was alarmed, for fear that he might have offended him. Mahosatha comforted him and thanked him for his courtesy. He gave him all his money and bade him farewell.

A Lesson for the King

The king was pleased to receive Mahosatha. He asked Mahosatha, why with all his intelligence and wisdom, he ended up working as a lowly potter. Mahosatha explained that he did so to exhibit his innocence. The king then asked, “With all your capability and with the love and respect that the people have shown you, why did you not usurp my throne? You have all the power and means to do so, if you chose.”

For which Mahosatha replied:

“A wise does not seek his gains through evil means.

When suffering misfortune, a wise does not abandon his morals.

A man who receives shade from a tree should not ravage it, because a person who harms his friend is a villain.

The wise will not betray those from whom he has learned something.”

After having reestablished the king’s trust, he proceeded to give the king a moral lesson:

“A householder who is lazy cannot be successful.

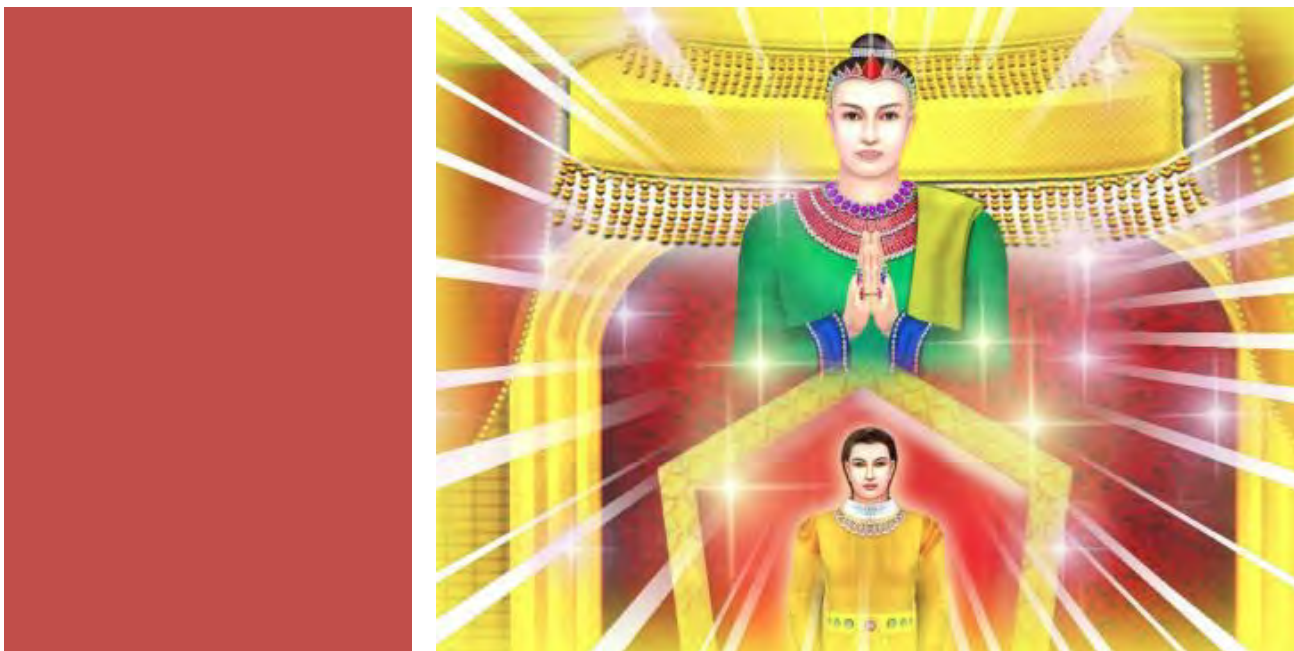
It is not fitting for an ordained person to lack composure.

It is not fitting for the wise to be quick to anger.

It is not fitting for a king to be imprudent.

A prudent king who considers everything before executing his decision will be honored and renowned beyond his kingdom.”

The king listened attentively to Mahosatha’s words. His eyes were mild and yielding.



Four Riddles from a Deity

Then the king presented the four riddles to Mahosatha and said, “My life is in jeopardy unless these riddles are solved today. You are the only one who can do it.”

Then he recited the first riddle: “He strikes her with hands and feet, he beats her face, yet he is dear to her.”

The Bodhisatta knew the answer right away. “Listen, O King!” he said, “It indicates a baby who is loved by his mother. When a child on the mother’s lap is happy and playfully beats his mother with hands and feet; he pulls her hair, beats her face with his fist, and then she says, ‘Little rascal, why do you beat me?’ And then she presses him close to her breast and kisses him. He is dear to her.”

The second riddle: “She abuses him harshly, yet wishes him to be near.”

The Bodhisatta said, “Sire, it signifies a mother’s child who disobeys when told what to do; she curses at him with angry words, but she does not mean them, and she loves him dearly.”

The third riddle: “He reviles her without cause, and reproaches her without reason, yet he is dear to her.”

The Bodhisatta said, “Sire, it signifies lovers teasing one another: ‘You don’t care for me, Your heart is elsewhere, etc.’ They know it is untrue and they love each other dearly. That is the meaning of this question.”

The fourth riddle: “One takes food and drink, clothes and lodging, and then carries them off, yet he is dear to her.”

He replied, “Sire, this question refers to a mendicant holy man. Pious families that believe in this world and the next give alms to them and delight in their giving.”

After hearing these answers, the guardian deity was well pleased. She praised the Bodhisatta and gave him blessings. The king was happy and relieved. He rewarded Mahosatha handsomely.

Henceforth, the Bodhisatta continued to gain glory and recognition.

Forgive Thy Enemy

As time went on, Senaka and the other three sages cooked up more scandalous stories that caused the king to mistrust Mahosatha. But, repeatedly, Mahosatha was able to clear his name with the king and successfully thwarted the four sages' jealous maneuvering. At one point, the four sages convinced the king to believe that Mahosatha was plotting against him. Again, the insecure king believed in their accusations without seeking the facts. This time the king became angry enough to order Mahosatha's execution. He gave the royal sword to Senaka and told him to use it to kill Mahosatha that next morning.

That night the king was restless, unable to sleep. He reflected on Mahosatha's goodness and thought to himself, "Mahosatha has worked for me since he was seven years old. Throughout this time he has served me marvelously and has never done anything wrong nor caused me any harm." It pained him to think that Mahosatha was about to be killed. Lying next to him, the queen noticed her husband's anguish and asked him what happened. The king told her.

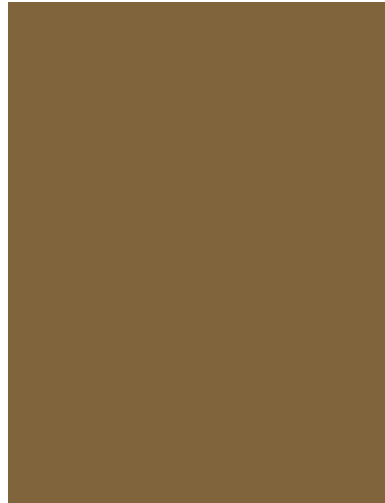
The queen was alarmed and saddened. She hid her tears, waited until the king fell asleep then slipped out to see Mahosatha at his house, then broke the news to him. With this information, Mahosatha went to spy on the four sages to find out what secrets they were hiding from the king. After learning their hidden secrets he went to the king and told him all of them.

The king was outraged, for these secrets had to do with their dishonesty and disloyalty toward him. The king summoned the four to see him and got them to confess their respective secrets. After learning the truth, the king was so enraged that he ordered them beheaded. Mahosatha pleaded for the king's mercy. Seeing the kindness and generosity of Mahosatha, the king calmed himself. But in view of their wickedness, the king felt that they should be banished from his kingdom. Again, Mahosatha pleaded for the king to pardon them. Looking at Mahosatha, he thought to himself, "Here is a man, repeatedly victimized by his ferocious enemies to the point of almost losing his life, yet he still has the strength to forgive his enemies. Such a man is rare. For his sake, I will pardon the four fools." Thus, the king ordered his executioner to free them.

The four sages realized that it was Mahosatha who saved their lives. For the first time, they began to feel some remorse. They knelt before Mahosatha with tears in their eyes and asked for his forgiveness. From that time on, they went about their duties obediently and never raised a finger against the Bodhisatta again.

Mahosatha continued to serve the king to the best of his abilities. In due time, the king made him a Regent, with the complete authority to rule the kingdom on his behalf.





Continent at War

As Regent of Vedeha, Mahosatha worked to improve the security and welfare of the state and its people. He renovated the entire city of Mithila, built irrigation systems to bring water supply from the rivers into the city, improved their agricultural systems to increase crop output, and fortified the defense systems of the capital. He ordered higher and stronger city walls to be constructed around the outer perimeters of Mithila in addition to the existing ones. His instincts told him that one day a war would come.

At that time, Jambudvipa was inhabited by one hundred and one kingdoms in addition to the Kingdom of Vedeha. Mahosatha, aware of the existence of these other kingdoms, sought to establish a good relationship with all of them. He asked the traders from these various states what their kings were like and what gifts they favored. After learning each of the various kings' favorite objects, he had these gifts crafted with the best material and workmanship and had all of them inscribed with his insignias on them.

He handpicked one hundred and one of his most capable and trusted attendants, who were born on the same day as him, and said to them, "My men, take these gifts to the hundred and one royal cities and offer them to their kings as tokens of friendship. Offer your services to them; gain their trust. Live there, listen to their actions and plans, and send me your words. I will care for your wives and children."

And he sent with them his various gifts according to each of the king's fancy: earrings for some, rings for others, bracelets for some, golden necklaces for others, and golden slippers for others. Each of these items bore his insignia. The men went on their ways to each of these other kingdoms and paid homage to their kings. They presented them their gifts and offered their services. They told the kings they had come from various places other than Vedeha. The kings were delighted to receive their favorite gifts and accepted each of the men's offers to be in their service. They remained there and made themselves trustworthy.

King Culani of Kampilla

In the kingdom of Kampilla, there reigned an ambitious king named Culani in his capital city of Panacea. He was advised in affairs of the state by a wise and learned Brahmin named Kevatta. Although wise and learned, Kevatta was a wicked man.

Kevatta woke up in his chamber one morning and said to himself, “What a magnificent environment I have here. With all the glory and splendors that king Culani has given me, I ought to repay his kindness by finding a way to make him the king of all kings in Jambudvipa.” He considered all the possibilities and concluded that this ambition could be realized without much difficulty. Pleased with his ideas, he went to the king and told him his plans.

“My Lord” he said, “We have eighteen great armies in our command. We will attack and surround all the other regions one by one. We will first besiege a small city. Then I will enter the city and will say to their king, ‘We have no desire for your throne but to share some of your wealth. There is no use in your fighting; join us and your kingdom will be spared. But if you fight with our mighty force, your city will be ravaged and your people will be destroyed. It is best that you surrender in order to avoid the loss of life.’ After the first city surrenders we will detain its king and use its army. With the combined armies we then go to take another city, and another. After victory we will invite these kings to drink a cup of victory at our city and poison them. Thus we will get the hundred and one royal capitals into our hands and you will become the emperor of all of Jambudvipa.”

The king asked, “What if they don’t surrender?”

Kevatta replied, “Then we will kill every one of them.”

Eyes widened with excitement, the ambitious King Culani exclaimed, “Brilliant, my teacher. I see no flaws in your plans.”

King Culani did as Kevatta had proposed. He went with his army and laid siege to a small city. Kevatta, as he had suggested, went into the city and explained matters to their king and won him over. Then joining the two armies, Culani went on to another city, and then another.

In seven years, seven months and seven days Culani waged war and conquered all the other states, except Vedehe.

Mahosatha had not been idle. He had rebuilt Mithila’s defenses and had sent spies to live among Kevatta’s men. These spies reported Culani’s every move to Mahosatha.

Culani said to Kevatta, “We have conquered all of Jambudvipa except Vedehe. Now let us lay siege upon Mithila.”

Kevatta said, “Mithila has a wise and capable sage famed for his wisdom and cleverness. With him as a leader, it would not be easy for any army to overcome Mithila. There will be too many casualties if we face an outright war. The exchange would not be worth it, now that we have won great fortune. I advise Your Majesty that we now return to our city to drink a cup of victory and we proceed with our other plans.” Culani saw the merit of Kevatta’s wisdom and he concurred. Thus, the great armies of Culani left Mithila alone and returned home to Kampilla.

As they settled back in the city of Pancala, Kevatta and Culani proceeded with their next move to assassinate the other kings. They announced a date of celebration to drink their cups of victory and invited all the kings to attend. They adorned the park and told the servants to prepare food of all sorts and to set out thousands of jars of wine and liquor, and they put poison in them.

This news got to Mahosatha through his spy. He thought to himself, “It is not right that so many kings should be killed while a wise man like myself lives. I will help them.” He sent for ten thousand warriors and his birth-fellows and instructed them to go to Kampilla to thwart Culani’s plan. They disguised themselves as King Videha’s entourage who came to pay homage to Culani, then they went to the park where the ceremony was to be held, destroyed all the wines and liquors and ravaged everything in the party.



Time for War

Culani's plan was thwarted. He was angry beyond control. The other kings were angry because they had been deprived of their cups of victory; and their soldiers were also angry for having lost the chance to a free feast. Culani said to the other kings "Come, friends, let us go to Mithila and cut off King Vedeha's head and trample it under our feet, and then come back and drink the cup of victory! Go tell your armies to get them ready."

Kevatta said to Culani, "Sire, Mahosatha is very powerful. Guarded by him, as a lion guards his den, Mithila can be taken by no one." But the king, mad with a soldier's pride, no longer listened to him.

Back at Mithila, Mahosatha was well prepared. All storehouses were stockpiled with foodstuff, corn and grain, fuel and supplies, and seeds for planting. He had three layers of moats dug outside surrounding the city walls. He set up a barricade and fortification in all the strategic points within and around the city. And he brought all the people inside the city walls and sheltered them in areas which he provided and in the various compounds of wealthy citizens. Large banks were dug up and were made reservoirs for water. Soldiers were deployed in all the strategic positions. Battle plans and war strategies were perfected. With all these provisions and preparations, Mithila was impenetrable, and its people could subsist within the walls without provisions from the outside for years to come.

Finally, the mighty armies of Culani arrived. They surrounded Mithila from all sides. King Vedeha and the four sages trembled at the sight of such mighty armies. But Mahosatha and his soldiers were unmoved.

In the months that followed, battles of wits between Culani, Kevatta and Mahosatha ensued. Kevatta masterminded various moves to overtake Mithila, but their every move was foiled by Mahosatha and his men. They attempted to cut off food supply and starve the inhabitants inside the walls, deprived them of water and fuels, and attacked them with all their might, but none of their efforts yielded any results. Mahosatha's spies informed him of every move they planned to make and Mahosatha outsmarted them in every one of those moves.

King Culani became more and more frustrated. He said to Kevatta, "None of your strategies is working. Our soldiers are discouraged. Their morale is low. There is no hope of victory. Mithila is impenetrable. To keep fighting is no use. We should return to our city."

Kevatta said, "My Lord, this would not be a good idea. If we do this we will become a laughing stock. People will say, 'The great king Culani, with his eighteen great armies and the armies of the hundred and one kings could not take Mithila.' We shall be disgraced. Mahosatha is not the only wise man, for I am another. I have another plan."



“Battle of the Law”

Kevatta explained, “I will challenge Mahosatha to come out and engage with me in the Battle of the Law.”

“What do you mean by that?” the king asked.

“The Battle of the Law is the battle of wits between the wise. It was practiced in the olden days to avoid bloodshed. No army shall fight. The two sages of the two kings shall appear in one place, and of these men, whichever shall make a salute to the other, shall mean admittance of defeat, and shall be conquered. This is the way of the war which is respected by honorable kings. Mahosatha is aware of this way of war, but he does not yet know my trick. It is a custom that when a younger sage meets an older sage he is to salute the older sage. I am older and he is younger, and when he sees me he will salute me. Thus we shall conquer Vedehe, and, with this done, we shall return home. So we shall not be disgraced. That is what is meant by a Battle of the Law.”

“A stroke of genius, my teacher,” Culani exclaimed.

Again this tactic was reported to Mahosatha by his spy.

Culani wrote a letter and sent it to Vedehe by a messenger to this effect: “Tomorrow there shall be a Battle of the Law between the two sages, and he who refuses to fight shall be declared vanquished.” Upon the receipt of this, Vedehe sent for Mahosatha and told him of this challenge. “Good, my Lord,” he answered, “Send word to prepare a place for the Battle of the Law by the western gate and to assemble there.” Vedehe did so and sent his letter with the messenger to Culani.

Mahosatha chose the site for the Battle of the Law outside the western gate so that Culani’s armies would be facing the afternoon sun which would blur their vision. He asked king Vedehe to let him borrow his precious octagonal gem which he would use to defeat Kevatta. Then he set off to the battle site with a thousand warriors.

At the other side, Kevatta, surrounded by his guards, saw Mahosatha coming and advanced to meet him. He said, “Sage Mahosatha, we are both sages and I am a guest of your city. How come you never showed the courtesy from one sage to another and never sent me even a small gift?”

Mahosatha replied, “Wise sir, I was looking for a gift which should not be unworthy of you and today I have found such a gift. This is a priceless gem given to King Vedehe by his grandfather. It is the pride of Mithila. There is not one like it in this world.” Kevatta saw the gem ablaze in Mahosatha’s hand, his eyes wide open, and he could not restrain his excitement.

“Oh, such glorious gem! Give it to me then.” He held out his hand.

“Here, take it,” said Mahosatha, and dropped the heavy gem upon the tips of the fingers of Kevatta’s outstretched hand. But the gem was too heavy and Kevatta could not support its weight with the tips of his fingers. It slipped down and rolled toward Mahosatha’s feet. In his greed for the gem, Kevatta stooped down to Mahosatha’s feet. Mahosatha seized his shoulder blade with one hand and his neck with another and pressed him down towards the floor and said out loud, “Rise teacher, rise; I am much younger than you, young enough to be your grandson; please do not bow to me.”





He said this again and again, as he rubbed Kevatta's face and forehead against the ground until it was all bloody. Then with these words, "Old fool, you think you can outsmart me?" he threw Kevatta away from him. Thinking Mahosatha would kill him, Kevatta got up and ran off.

With the sun upon their faces, Culani's soldiers could not see what actually took place, but they saw Kevatta bowed at Mahosatha's feet then got up and ran away. Mahosatha's words, "Rise up, rise, do not bow to me!" echoed in their ears. They exclaimed aloud with one voice, "Brahmin Kevatta bowed to Mahosatha's feet!" Culani and all the kings saw Kevatta bowed before the feet of Mahosatha. "Our sage has bowed to Mahosatha. Now we are defeated!" they exclaimed. Fearing for their lives all the kings mounted their horses and began to flee.

Mahosatha's men yelled, "King Culani and all the other kings are running away. Let's capture them and kill them all!" Hearing this, the hundred and one kings became even more frightened. They hurried away without looking back. Kevatta mounted upon a horse, galloped fast and caught up with the fleeing soldiers. He cried, "Do not run, do not run! I did not bow to the rascal! Stop, stop!" But the soldiers would not stop. They yelled back at Kevatta in disgust. Some of them even wanted to give him a beating for the disgrace he gave to all of them. Kevatta rushed away from them to avoid being mobbed by the angry soldiers. He left them in frustration and went looking for Culani.

After catching up with King Culani, Kevatta explained to him what really happened and begged for him to regroup and to reattack the city. The king was equally angry for having been out-

smarted in such a ridiculous way. He swore revenge and ordered the army to turn around and surround Mithila.

The battle went on. Culani and his generals were determined to fight them to the end.

Send Them a Spy

Mahosatha strived to come up with a way to put an end to this war once and for all. After some deliberation he came up with a plan. He asked his people to look for someone with good distinction who had the wit and the courage to carry out a difficult assignment. They found a wise Brahmin that fit such a description and brought him to Mahosatha. After having established the Brahmin's intelligence and courage, Mahosatha gave him the assignment to feign a defection, telling him that if he accepted the assignment he would have to subject himself to a great deal of pain and suffering in order to convince the enemy. The Brahmin willingly accepted the assignment. He said, "It would be my honor. For the sake of the livelihood of the people of Mithila, there is nothing that I would not do. I am willing to lay down my life for this worthy cause."

Mahosatha had the Brahmin whipped until he was covered with blood. Then he had him banished out of the city. Culani's soldiers found the mutilated Brahmin and brought him to their king. The Brahmin expressed his deep hatred against Mahosatha and swore revenge. Culani examined the Brahmin's sincerity and determined that his bitterness was genuine and that he could trust him. The Brahmin made it known to Culani that he was familiar with the internal affairs of Mithila, the logistics of the city and the knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses, which Culani could take advantage of in order to defeat Mithila.

Culani was convinced of the Brahmin's story. To take advantage of the Brahmin's inside knowledge of the enemy, he had him

appointed as his army commander. The Brahmin deliberately led Culani's army to several treacherous places where they were slaughtered by vicious animals and crocodiles and the arrows and spears of Mahosatha's soldiers. After several repeating casualties, Culani's men lost their will to fight. They refused to follow the Brahmin into further disasters.

The Brahmin then reported to Culani that his kings had been bribed by Mahosatha and that was the reason why they would not fight for him. At first Culani did not believe it. But the Brahmin then revealed that each of the hundred and one kings owned valuable gifts bearing Mahosatha's insignia. King Culani was shaken by this revelation. He asked the Brahmin what to do next. The Brahmin told him that he could be assassinated by his traitors at any given moment and that the only smart thing for him to do was to escape without the knowledge of the others. Culani saw no other way out but to take the Brahmin's advice and so he fled with him in the darkness of the night.

After they were a good distance away from their camp, the Brahmin turned around and went back to Culani's men. Upon arrival he shouted at the top of his voice, "King Culani has fled, King Culani has fled!" Adding to the momentum, Mahosatha's spies all cried out in unison, "King Culani has run away! He has deserted us! The enemies are routing us. We have to run." Mahosatha's soldiers on the towers and at the gate beat their drums and banged their armor as loud as they could while shouting

a fierce battle cry. The whole city was roaring with angry sounds to further terrorize them.

Hearing the thundering, angry noises of their enemies, all the hundred and one kings fled in terror. Seeing their leaders fleeing in cowardice, all the soldiers followed suit and fled in such a hurry that they left their valuables, weapons, armors and all their provisions behind. Within hours the whole camp was empty.

The next morning, the Mithila soldiers opened the city gates, went forth and saw the great booty, which they reported to Mahosatha. It took them four months to remove all the valuables, weapons, armor, articles and provisions from the field.

King Vedeha was overjoyed with their success. Mahosatha and all the soldiers were well rewarded. The enemy spoils were distributed among the soldiers and the people of Mithila. Mahosatha's fame went far and wide. Mithila was free from the siege and the kingdom of Vedeha became even more prosperous.

Use the Princess as Bait

Now, one year had passed, and Culani and the hundred and one kings were settling down in their respective kingdoms. One day, while Kevatta was looking upon his face in a mirror, he saw the scar on his forehead and it reminded him, “This is the doing of that miserable merchant’s son. He made me the laughingstock before all those kings! I must have my revenge.”

Days and nights he dreamed of his revenge. Then one night an idea came to him: “A fisherman catches his fish with his bait. No fish in the world will refuse an easy meal. I will draw Vedeha to Pancala with a sensual desire. My great king Culani has a daughter whose beauty is second to none. I will use her as bait to get King Vedeha.”

After having perfected his plan, Kevatta went to see King Culani and said to him, “Your Majesty, I have devised a perfect way to dispose of King Vedeha and his sage.”

The king was skeptical, “Teacher, the last time you had a good idea, I did not have even as much as a rag to cover me. What is it this time?”

“Your Majesty, none of those ideas can match this one. It cannot fail,” Kevatta replied.

“Go on, I’m listening,” said the king.

Kevatta continued, “Your Majesty, a fisherman catches his fish with his bait; a hunter catches his prey with his trap. We will lure King Vedeha to Pancala by using a sensual desire as bait. Your Majesty has a daughter whose beauty is beyond compare. We will use her as bait to get the king to come to Pancala. We will have the Princess’ charms and accomplishments celebrated in verses by poets and singers, and have those poems sung throughout Mithila and beyond. King Vedeha will hear them, be enchanted by them, and will not be able to help himself but fall in love with the Princess.

“We will then spread the word that Princess Pancalacandi’s beauty is beyond compare and no one is worthy of her hand except for King Vedeha, and that King Culani intends to give the Princess to him to forge a bond of friendship. When the king hears about it he will not be able to resist his desire for the beautiful princess.

“Then I will go to Mithila as Your Majesty’s emissary and present a friendly message from Your Majesty offering the hand of the Princess to him in matrimony to forge a bond of friendship between our two kingdoms. King Vedeha, like a fish that has swallowed the hook, will come forth to Pancala City. As a close royal adviser, it is natural that Mahosatha would accompany the king. When they are here, they will be like little sheep in our lion’s den. We will capture them and kill them both, and we will have our cup of victory.”

King Culani thought for a minute and said, “It sounds reasonable, but have you forgotten the fact that the king already has a queen who is also beautiful and clever?”

To which Kevatta replied, “His queen may be beautiful but she is an old dish that can hardly compare with a delicious new dish. Besides his current queen is someone he has picked up from nowhere. By birth she is only a commoner, and up until now she still could not bear him an heir. On the contrary, Princess Pancalacandi is royalty through and through. King Vedeha will no doubt be like a foolish fish that is pursuing a juicy bait.”

Culani’s own vengeful anger was still fresh in his heart. He was ready to listen to any scheme that would help him to avenge himself. After hearing Kevatta’s elaboration, King Culani agreed to go along with his evil scheme.

Marry My Daughter

And so the king sent for the most celebrated poets, singers and musicians in the land, showed them his daughter, and asked them to compose poems and songs about her beauty; and they made exceedingly beautiful verses and sweet songs and then recited them to the king. The king was thoroughly captivated by the beauty of their verses and the sweetness of their song and music. He told them to go to Mithila and to sing and perform in the same way. They went to Mithila, singing and performing all along the way, and they sang and performed in all public places of Mithila. Crowds of people heard the songs, and amidst loud applause, they paid them well.

News of these celebrated poets and musicians caught the attention of the gullible King Vedeha. He summoned them to his palace. After hearing the verses and the songs the king was spellbound. Befuddled with passion, soon King Vedeha was determined to have the princess for his bride.

The musicians returned to Pancala and reported the news to King Culani. Kevatta told the king, “The time is now ripe for me to go to Mithila. I will complete the rest of the plan.” And the king let him go.

Taking several precious gifts with him, Kevatta set out to the city of Mithila followed by a large entourage. Upon his arrival, he asked to see King Vedeha to pay him homage. “Your Majesty,” said Kevatta, “My great King Culani wishes to restore the friendship between our two kingdoms. He sends you his best wishes along with these gifts as tokens of his friendship. He wishes for Your Majesty to become united with him as one family and for the people of Pancala and Vedeha to be like brothers and sisters. To

show his sincerity, he offers the hand of his beautiful daughter Princess Pancalacandi, to be joined in matrimony with your Majesty. This marriage between our two royalties will foster peace and prosperity throughout the entire continent. The king extends his invitation for Your Majesty to come to Pancala City and marry his daughter.”





Fish on the Hook

Happy beyond words, King Vedeha accepted King Culani’s invitation right away and sent his affirmation of acceptance to King Culani.

Mahosatha had a strange feeling about the whole thing. He thought to himself, “There must be a hidden agenda. The wise always think and prepare ahead. I must send a spy to Pancala to find out what is behind all this.” And so he did. After some smart maneuvering, the spy was able to find out the truth behind the scheme and came back to report to the Bodhisatta.

The Bodhisatta warned the king of this trickery, but the king was blinded with lust and dismissed Mahosatha’s warning. He then told him he had made up his mind and no one could stop him from going.

Seeing the king’s foolishness, Mahosatha spoke strongly to him with these words: “A hunter uses a doe to lure a deer to his trap; a fisherman puts bait on his hook to lure a fish to come up from deep water; Culani uses his daughter to lure you to your death. The deer anxious for mating does not recognize the trap; the fish greedy for food does not recognize the hook hidden in the bait; and you, O King, blinded by desire, do not recognize Culani’s daughter as your deathtrap. Go to Pancala, and in a little time you will destroy yourself just like a deer caught on the hunter’s trap and a fish that swallowed the hook.”

The king, unaccustomed to such a heavy reproach by anyone, was furious. He spoke angrily, “How dare you speak to me this way. The great King Culani has offered me his daughter to restore our

relationship. Instead of giving me a few words of good wishes, you portend that I shall be caught and killed like a silly deer or a dumb fish! Nothing is going to change my mind. I will have you banished from my kingdom!”

The king spoke out of anger, not meaning what he said. After having calmed down he told Mahosatha that he should support his decision and come to Pancala with him.

Seeing that the king was determined to go, Mahosatha thought to himself, “The king won’t listen to me. He will perish unless I do something to prevent it. A man should always work for the best interests of his benefactor. I must do all that I can for him. I will get him what he wants and also protect him from harm.”

He spent some time thinking about what he could do for the king. After having formulated a plan he went to see the king and told him, “I would like to make the trip before you so I can have a small palace built within Pancala City to accommodate Your Majesty, and also to see to it that everything is in order for your visit. After all the buildings are completed then Your Majesty can make the trip.”

The king was pleased that Mahosatha did not abandon him. He asked the Bodhisatta what he would need to complete his task. The Bodhisatta told him that he needed workers, means of transportation, building materials, tools and equipment. He asked the king to give pardons to prisoners in the four prisons and release them so he could use them to do construction projects for him. The king granted every one of his requests.

The Bodhisatta ordered the prisoners to be released from the four prisons. All of them were pardoned. They were so happy to have their freedom once again. They all were grateful to Mahosatha and would do anything he asked them to do. He selected artisans to head the work in their respective fields. He engaged engineers, carpenters, builders, stone workers, blacksmiths, bricklayers, painters, etc., all strong and healthy and who were experts in their respective fields. He selected those that were strong and courageous and had combative skills to become soldiers. Construction equipment, building materials, and tools were gathered together. After everything was ready, the convoy consisting of troops, artisans and workers began its journey to Pancala City.

They built several resting points and camps along the path between Mithila and Pancala to provide accommodation and protection for the king and his entourage. A unit of soldiers and their captains were provided at each of these camps. When the convoy arrived at the great river Ganges, Mahosatha ordered three hundred large boats to be built and filled the boats with timber to take across the river into enemy lands.

After they arrived at the border of Pancala City, Mahosatha and his crew surveyed the land and the terrain, measured the distance between each point, and observed the weather patterns and everything that was deemed to be important. A camp was built nearby to shelter his soldiers, elephants, horses and chariots.

The Tunnel

At a strategic location across the river within the enemy's land, Mahosatha ordered his men to build a mile-long tunnel system that would take them from the bank of the river Ganges to the center of Pancala City.

When King Culani heard of the Bodhisatta's coming, he was excited and said to himself, "Now the time has come for me to finish my old business. Mahosatha is coming, and soon Vedeha will follow. I will kill them both and complete my dominion over the whole of Jumbudvipa."

King Culani welcomed Mahosatha and his entourage as they arrived at his palace. He asked Mahosatha where King Vedeha was and when he would be arriving. Mahosatha told him he came first to build a suitable dwelling place for the king and as soon as the building was completed, he would send word for the king to come. King Culani gave him a house to stay in and ordered his people to give him whatever he needed so he could finish his assignment quickly. He also allowed Mahosatha to pick any land he wanted on which to build King Vedeha's dwelling place. Culani figured the quicker Mahosatha could finish his job, the sooner Vedeha would come, and the sooner he could have them killed.

Mahosatha and his men surveyed the entire city of Pancala in detail. He chose a site outside the city to construct the dwelling. While at King Culani's palace he found a perfect spot under the staircase at the entrance of King Culani's private quarters to make a hidden exit for his tunnel.

Mahosatha's men worked day and night to build the tunnel. The dirt they removed was dropped in the river and elsewhere. The tunnel was built with mechanical doors that could be made to open and close simultaneously. On either side of the tunnel walls there were hundreds of lamp-cells also mechanically fitted so that when one was opened all opened, and when one was shut all were shut. The tunnel was beautifully constructed and decorated. The main tunnel path was large enough for an elephant to walk through.

With thousands of men assigned to the task working day and night, both the palace and the tunnel were completed in four months. Then Mahosatha sent word to his king to begin his journey. Several days later, King Vedeha arrived. The following day, he sent a message to King Culani informing him of his arrival and requesting to see his future bride. Culani sent back a message telling him that he would deliver the princess soon. Instead, he sent signals to the hundred and one kings and their soldiers to start mobilizing for an attack. Then he had his mother, his queen, his son and daughter escorted to a safe place inside his private quarters protected by palace guards.

Abduction

King Culani, the hundred and one kings, and their soldiers moved quietly to surround King Vedeha's newly constructed stronghold in the middle of the night, ready to take it at dawn. Mahosatha had already anticipated Culani's move. His men were fully prepared. He sent three hundred of his top soldiers to use the tunnel. Stealthily, they entered Culani's private quarters, subdued the guards, tied them up and gagged them. Then they went to the room where the royal family was hiding. They pretended to be Culani's soldiers and talked them into coming out, then escorted them through the tunnel. The royal family went with them willingly, for they were completely fooled by the ruse. The soldiers took them to one of the most beautiful chambers and asked them to wait there. Other soldiers stayed behind and ransacked the palace and plundered the treasury. Then they sent word to Mahosatha.

King Vedeha and the four sages were terrified when they learned that they had been surrounded by their enemy's soldiers. Mahosatha calmed them and took them through a secret path to the main tunnel. He opened the gate and let them come inside the lit halls of the tunnel. Then he reached for a hidden handle in a wall and turned it, and all the doors inside the tunnel were opened. He reached for a hidden pin nearby and pushed it, and all the lamps were lighted throughout the tunnel. The king and the four sages were in awe at everything they saw. They moved quickly through the tunnel until they reached the main exit, which was near the bank of the river Ganges.

As they emerged from the tunnel's exit they were greeted by Mahosatha's soldiers. The soldiers took them to a nearby courtyard and then brought out King Culani's royal family to meet them. The royal family members were all frightened when they saw King Vedeha and Mahosatha. They realized they had been abducted by the enemy. Mahosatha calmed them down, then placed Princess Pancalacandi upon a heap of treasure and presented her to King Vedeha. With the king and the princess side by side, Mahosatha administered the matrimonial ceremony and proclaimed them husband and wife. Then he had the soldiers brought out the three hundred boats they had hidden. He led the king and the royal family to the boats and embarked.

Before bidding farewell, Mahosatha pointed to the royal family and said to the king, "My Lord, this is the king's Mother, please treat her like your own mother; this is Queen Nanda, your mother-in-law, please treat her the same; this is Prince Pancalacanda, your brother-in-law, please look after him like your own younger brother; and this is Princess Pancalacandi, your wife and queen, please love her with all your heart."

The king vowed to do so.

He asked Mahosatha to come along, but the Bodhisatta said he could not desert his men, that he must stay with them and protect

them. With these words, the Bodhisatta saluted the king and sent him away.

The king and his attendants sailed at a great speed until they reached the first camp that Mahosatha had prepared for them. There, they disembarked and continued their journey on land by elephants, horses and chariots. When they arrived at the next relay point, they exchanged their transportation for fresh elephants and horses and soldiers. They continued on this way until they arrived at the City of Mithila without delay.

Cut off His Hands and Feet

Back at Pancala, the mighty Culani watched all night and at sunrise he mounted his noble elephant and addressed his army, “Today, we will capture our enemy and drink the cup of victory.”

Mahosatha was on the top story of the building watching as Culani approached. He spoke loudly, “Your cry of victory is for naught. Your plan is thwarted. Our king has left. And he has your mother, your wife, your daughter and your son with him. They left through a secret tunnel I have built for them and crossed the Ganges yesterday. You will never catch them.”

Culani shouted to his soldiers, “Cut off his hands and feet, ears and nose, and his flesh and cook it on skewers.”

Mahosatha spoke back at him, “If you cut off my hands and feet, my ears and nose, so, likewise, will Vedeha cut off your son’s, your daughter’s, and your queen’s and your mother’s. If you cut off my flesh and cook it on skewers, so will Vedeha cook that of your son, your daughter, your wife and your mother.”

Culani did not believe what Mahosatha said about his family, for he knew he had them securely safeguarded inside his own private quarters. Mahosatha told him to go see for himself. Culani had Mahosatha seized, then sent his minister and guards to his private quarters to seek out the truth. A while later, the minister returned. He informed King Culani that his family was nowhere to be found and his treasury had been plundered.

The king, trembling with grief at the loss of his four dear ones, said, “This sorrow has come upon me through this miserable villain!”

He looked at Mahosatha with deep contempt and said, “You shall die a slow death!” His eyes were red with anger. Mahosatha thought, “I had better do something before the king goes mad and has me killed.”

He said to the king, “If you kill me now, you will never see your family again. I will bring your family back to you if you promise you will not harm me and my men.” Culani thought for a moment and knew he was in no position to bargain if he wished to see his family again. Reluctantly, he agreed. Then he said, “Show me the tunnel.” The hundred and one kings were also curious to see the tunnel.

Power of Wisdom

So the Bodhisatta took them to the gate of the tunnel and led them in. They were all amazed at what they saw. He pushed on a hidden pin in the wall and the tunnel walls were illuminated throughout. He pushed a hidden handle and all the doors were opened. He showed them the various bedchambers, all beautifully decorated. Then he let the king go in front of him and the rest of his entourage followed after him. But when he saw that the king had emerged from the tunnel, he kept the rest of the men from coming out by pulling another handle which shut all the tunnel doors and extinguished all the lights, turning the whole tunnel as dark as the deepest, darkest hell. All that were trapped inside the tunnel shrieked in terror.

Now the Bodhisatta took the sword which he had hidden away and came upon the king. He seized his arm, brandished the sword, and frightened him; “Tell me, King, who is the conqueror of all of Jambudvipa?” The king, fearing for his life, said in his trembling voice, “You are, Sage, you are! Please spare my life. I will do what you say.”

The Bodhisatta replied, “Fear not, Sire. I did not take up my sword from any wish to kill you, but to show you what the power of wisdom can do.” Then he handed his sword to the king and said, “If you wish to kill me, kill me now with that sword; and if you wish to spare me, spare me.”

“Great Sage,” he said, “I will not harm you.” So as he held the sword, they both struck up a friendship in all sincerity. Then the king said to the Bodhisatta, “Dear Sage, with such powerful wisdom of yours and all the kings at your mercy today, why did you not seize the kingdom?”

“Sire, if I wished it, this day I could slay all the kings and take all the kingdoms of Jambudvipa. But it is not the way of the wise to gain glory by slaying others.”

Let the Truth Be Told

After saying so, he opened the tunnel doors. All the lights came ablaze. The people inside gave out sighs of relief and all the kings with their retinues came out. They saw the Bodhisatta standing in the wide courtyard with the king, both showing gestures of friendship. Then those kings said, “Dear Sage, if the door had remained shut for a little while longer the air would have run out and all of us would have perished. You have given us our lives.”

“My Lords, you should know that this is not the first time I have saved your lives,” said the Bodhisatta. “Do you remember when all the kingdoms of Jambudvipa had been conquered except our city and you went to the park of Pancala ready to drink the cup of victory?” Then he told them how King Culani had planned to poison them and how he saved them from being poisoned. They turned to Culani and asked him, “Is this true?”

“It is true,” Culani admitted. “I acted on the advice of a bad man. Mahosatha speaks the truth. I do regret what I have done.” They look at King Culani with reprimand, then they all embraced the Bodhisatta, and said, “Dear Sage, you have been the salvation of us all. We owe you our gratitude for having saved our lives.”

The Bodhisatta said to Culani, “Fear not, Sire, fault lies here in association with a false friend. Ask pardon from the kings.” The king then said, “I believed in a bad man. It was my fault. Please pardon me. Never will I do such a thing again.” He received their pardon. They confessed their faults to each other and became friends. They remained in the tunnel for several days to celebrate their friendship and they gave great honor to the Bodhisatta.

Mahosatha’s wisdom and goodness made such a profound impact

on King Culani that he invited him to remain in his court: “I will give you anything you want but please do not return to Vedehe. What can he do for you?”

But the sage declined with these words: “When one deserts a patron for the sake of gain, it is a disgrace to both oneself and the other. As long as King Vedehe is still alive I shall not leave him.”

Then the king said to him, “Promise me then, when your king passes away you will come to me.”

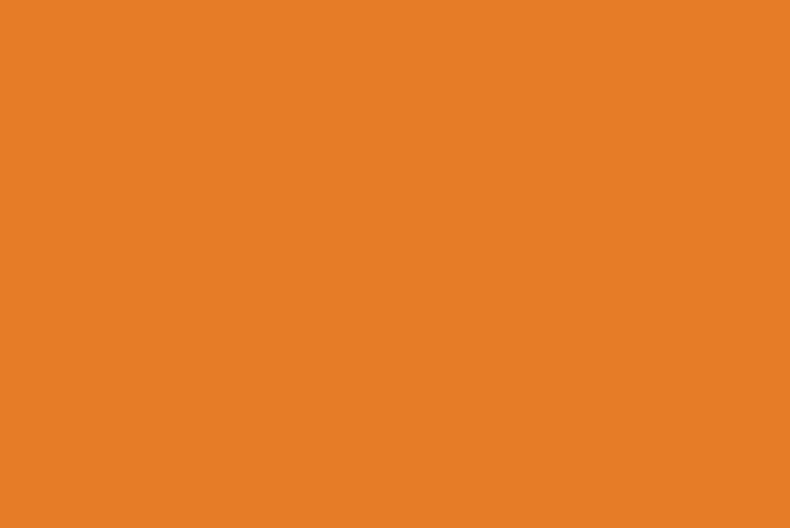
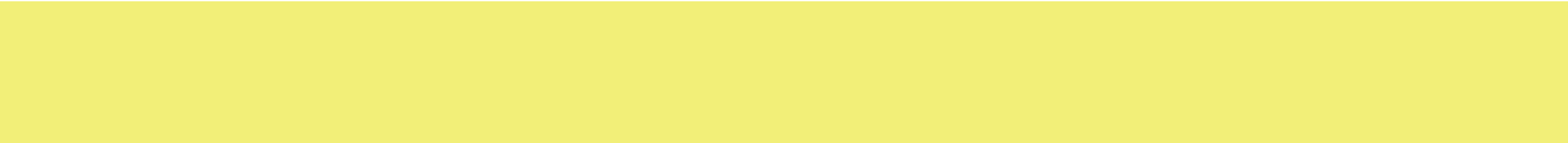
“If I still live then, I promise I will come.”

For days, King Culani treated him with great honor. As for Kevatta, he had nothing else to say, for he knew he had lost the love and respect of his king. At the time of parting, the Bodhisatta said to Culani, “Dear King, please do not worry about your family. Before my king went back to his kingdom, he made a pledge to me to treat your mother as his own mother, your wife as his mother-in-law, and your son as his younger brother. I married your daughter to him with the proper matrimonial ceremony. I will soon send back your mother, your wife, and your son.”

The king thanked him and presented him with a dowry for his daughter. He gave him three hundred servants and slaves, precious gifts, and decorated elephants and horses and chariots.

“Go, my dear Sage, let King Vedehe see you back in Mithila. And send my regards to Vedehe, my son-in-law.”





Welcome Home My Sage

So the Bodhisatta left Pancala and headed for Mithila. As he approached, King Vedeha ordered his citizens to decorate the city and to welcome him, and the citizens did so. The Bodhisatta entered the city and reached the king’s palace; the king rose and embraced him, and returned to his throne. He gave him great compliments. Then the king set the drums of festival beating around the city: “Let there be a festival for seven days in honor of our great sage.”

At the end of the festival, the Bodhisatta went to the palace and said to the king, “Sire, King Culani’s mother and wife and son should be sent back at once.”

“Very good, my son, let us send them back.” King Vedeha paid respect to the three and sent them back to King Culani with the three hundred servants and slaves and the entourage that came with Mahosatha from Pancala. When this great company reached the city of Pancala, the king asked his mother, wife and son how they were treated. They all replied that they were treated with the kindness and respect as if they were Vedeha’s own family. This pleased the king so and he sent a rich gift to King Vedeha.

From that time forward, King Culani and King Vedeha both lived in friendship and harmony.

Virtue of Wisdom

Back at the palace of Mithila, Princess Pancalacandi became very dear and precious to the king. In the second year after their marriage, she bore him a son. When the boy reached ten years old, King Vedeha passed away. Mahosatha, the Regent, gave the boy a grand coronation and made him the new king.

Remembering the promise he made to King Culani, he asked the young king to let him go to Pancala and serve his grandfather. The boy and his mother, Queen Pancalacandi, both pleaded him not to go, but the Bodhisatta told them, “My promise has been given to the great king; I have to honor my promise.” So amidst the lamentations of the queen, the young king, and the multitude, he departed with his servants, and came to Pancala City. King Culani, hearing of his arrival, came to meet him and led him into the city with great pomp. He gave him great wealth and power.

Mahosatha served King Culani with great wisdom. He brought prosperity to the kingdom and peace throughout the continent. He was loved by all. In due time, King Culani made him Prime Minister of Pancala with the full authority to administer affairs of the Kingdom. Mahosatha enjoyed a life of happiness in Pancala until his last breath.

Bhuridatta Jataka

PERFECTING THE VIRTUE OF MORALITY

06



In this Jataka, the Bodhisatta was born in the realm of the nagas as the son of a naga king. Nagas are celestial serpents that inhabit the hidden depths below the ocean, far below the fields and woodlands of the world of men. Their kingdom glitters with rare jewels and precious minerals. Nagas possess magical powers and can assume human form. From time to time, they leave their realm and mingle with human beings who inhabit the surface of the earth. The archenemy of the naga is the garuda, the powerful celestial bird that feeds on them.

¹⁷ The moral precepts that Bhuridatta observed consisted of abstention from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, intoxication and improper form of entertainment; as well as avoidance of anger, hatred and ill-will, and not causing harm to any living beings.

When Bhuridatta, the naga prince, visited the Tavatimsa Heaven, he saw Sakka's opulent estate and the exceedingly delightful splendor of heaven. It inspired him to increase his store of merit by observing moral precepts¹⁷ as a way to free himself from the physical form of the naga and to fulfill his wish to be reborn among the angels. Henceforth, he dedicated himself to the pursuit of the Virtue of Morality.

Morality is a virtue that can be developed through learning how to control one's thought, speech, and action, to do only good deeds and to avoid bad ones. Good deeds are defined as acts of kindness and generosity. Bad deeds can be avoided through observation of moral precepts, the most basic of which include abstention from killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication. Those who cultivate the Virtue of Morality will be blessed with a peaceful and happy life, free from illnesses. At the time of their death, they will be reborn into a happy destination.



A Jealous King

There once ruled a king in Benares who had a son named Brahmadata-Kumara (Prince Brahmadata). When the son grew up the king appointed him regent. The regent was wise and capable and was loved by the people of Benares. His reputation grew far and wide. The king was very proud to have such a talented son.

One day, the king went to the royal park accompanied by his close attendants and concubines. As he was sitting alone enjoying himself, he overheard two ladies-in-waiting talking about the prince. One of them said, “The prince is so incredibly handsome. Not only is he an expert in the art of warfare, but he is also incomparable as a judge. No one in this kingdom, even the king, can match his intelligence and glory. Once he ascends to the throne, our kingdom will be much greater than it is now.”

Hearing this, the king felt slighted.

As time went on, the king saw an increasing number of his subjects grow more and more loyal to his son. His admiration for his son gradually turned into jealousy. As his jealousy grew more intense, he began to feel paranoid, fearing that his son would overthrow him. One day, the king summoned his son to the throne hall and said to him, “Son, I begin to have questions about your loyalty. It is best that you leave Benares, and return only after my death to assume the kingdom.”

The prince had no idea why his father doubted him. He was saddened by it, but as a good son he obeyed the king without defiance. After saluting his father, he went out alone into the forest. He trekked through the various forests, and upon reaching the shore of the Yamuna River next to the sea, he exclaimed, “Oh, this is such a beautiful place, I will settle down here and make a home for myself.” He found an appropriate spot and built a hut of leaves on it. Then he put on a garb made of tree bark and lived on roots and fruits like a hermit.

A Naga Woman

In the hidden depths below the ocean, far below the fields and woodlands of the world of men, dwell the nagas. At that time, a young female naga had lost her husband. The life of a naga woman without a husband was quite lonely. Wherever she went she saw happy naga couples cuddling one another. She yearned to find a husband for herself and decided to go to the human realm to look for one. As she was wandering by the seashore, she found human foot-prints and followed the tracks which led her to the hut of leaves.

Meanwhile, Brahmadata-Kumara was away looking for food. She entered into the hut, and as she saw a wooden bed and the empty interior. She thought to herself, “This is the dwelling place of some ascetic. I will find out whether this ascetic is from faith or not. I will adorn his bed with flowers and perfume and if he is a lover at heart and not a true ascetic, he will be drawn to the fragrance bed and indulge in it. Then I will take him and make him my husband.”

So she went back to the naga world and collected divine flowers and perfume and came back to the hut to prepare a bed of flowers and adorned the hut with garlands. Then she departed to her abode at the naga realm.

When the prince returned and entered the hut he was surprised by what he saw. He wondered, “Who has adorned my bed and my hut with these beautiful flowers and garlands?” Attracted by the sweet scent of perfume, he laid down on the bed of flowers and fell asleep.

The next day he rose at sunrise and went off to collect fruits, leaving the hut untidy. The female naga came up, and upon seeing

the withered flowers, she knew at once that this was a man of desire and not a religious ascetic. She smiled and said, “I shall be able to capture him and make him my husband.” She took away the old flowers and brought new ones to spread on a fresh bed and adorned the hut with garlands and perfume, and she scattered flowers on the pathway as well. Then she returned to the naga world.

That night the prince slept soundly on the bed of flowers dreaming sweet dreams. Upon waking up he said to himself, “I must find out who adorns this hut?” So instead of going out for food, he stayed concealed in a place not far from the hut. Then he noticed a woman of great beauty coming along the path to the hermitage, her hands carrying flowers and garlands. Captivated by her beauty the prince fell in love with her at once. He quietly entered the hut as the naga woman was preparing the bed.

“Who are you, dear lady?” asked the prince.

“My lord, I am a naga woman,” she answered.

“Why are you here and why do you adorn my hut with flowers and garlands?”

“I am a widow without a husband. As I saw the happiness of those naga women who had husbands, I longed to find myself a husband to fulfill my own happiness. I saw your hut and I came in to find out who was in it.”



The prince told her he was Brahmadatta-Kumara, the son of the King of Benares, who came here in exile because his father drove him away. He looked at her with loving eyes and told her, “I will be happy to be your husband.” She looked at him and fell in love with him and said, “I will be happy to be your wife.”

From that time on they lived together harmoniously in the hermitage. By her naga power, she made the hermitage beautiful and extravagant. Thenceforth, he feasted on divine food and drink instead of roots and fruits from the forest. After a while she conceived and brought forth a son whom they called Sagara-Brahmadatta. Soon after, she brought forth a daughter and they called her Samuddaja.

Return of the Prince

One day, a forester from Benares came upon their hermitage and saw the prince and recognized him. The prince gave him water and fed him. Meanwhile, the king of Benares had just passed away. After the king’s burial the ministers got together and deliberated; they said, “A kingdom without a king cannot survive, we must find out whether the prince is still alive, and if so, where to find him.” When the forester arrived back to the city and heard the news of the king’s death, he went to the ministers and told them that he had met the prince in the forest on the shore of the Yamuna River.

The ministers rewarded the forester and asked him to take them to the prince. They found him and invited him to come back in order to assume the throne. The prince spoke to his naga wife and asked her to come along with him and be his queen. The naga woman told him it would not be appropriate because she was of a naga breed, and as such, possessed deadly poison and would be unfit to live among humans. The prince pleaded but the naga woman would not change her mind. She then said to him, “You must go for the sake of your people. I myself cannot go. But our children are of the race of men and you should take them with you. But because they are of a watery nature and therefore delicate, they would not survive a long journey if they are exposed to the harsh weather. Have a tank built and fill it with water and let them play in the water. When you get them to the city, build a lake for them near the palace. In this way they will not suffer.”

With tears in their eyes, the prince and his wife embraced one another and bade farewell. The prince had a tank built and put it on a cart and filled it with water so the two children could refresh themselves during the long trip. Upon their arrival at Benares the prince was crowned as the new king. He had a lake built for his two children for them to play in.



A Tortoise Story

One day when the water was let into the lake, a large tortoise entered and could not find his way out. While the prince and the princess were playing about in the lake, the tortoise put his head out of the water and looked at them. When the two saw him, they were frightened. They rushed out of the water screaming that a water demon was scaring them. The king ordered his men to find the creature and capture it. After he was captured the king ordered the tortoise to be thrown into the whirlpool of the Yamuna as a way of punishment. The whirlpool sucked the tortoise deep down until he was drawn to the dwelling of the nagas where he was recaptured by some young sons of Dhatarattha, the naga king.

Fearing for his life the tortoise devised a plan to get away from the nagas. He said to them he was a messenger from the king of Benares who sent him there to offer his daughter to the naga king. The naga king was skeptical when he saw his ugly appearance. The tortoise said the naga king should not be fooled by his mean appearance and explained that his king has many messengers; that men did his business on the dry land, birds in the air, and he in the water.

The tortoise made up the story that the King of Benares had established friendship with all the kings of Jambudvipa; he now wished to make friendship with the naga king and had offered his daughter Princess Samuddaja to be his wife as a way to bond their friendship. The clever tortoise was so convincing in his manner of speech that the naga king believed his story. He appointed four naga youths as his emissaries to escort the tortoise back to Benares, pay tribute to the king, and fix a date for the marriage with his daughter.

On the way, the tortoise saw a lotus-pond, and wishing to escape, he tricked the naga youths into letting him in the pond to gather some lotus flowers for the royal family. The naga youths let the tortoise in the pond and transformed themselves into four hand-some young men before arriving at Benares.

King Brahmadatta of Benares received the naga youths with honor and upon finding out the purpose of their visit, the king remarked, “Never has a man been known to wed his daughter to a naga. We humans are of purer blood and a higher race. Such a match is utterly unfit. How could anyone think of such a thing?” The naga youths were offended by the king’s scornful remark. They were tempted to kill him on the spot with their poison breath, but controlled their anger and departed back to the naga realm.

Dhatarattha was enraged when he heard the report from the naga youths. In his wrath, he ordered his naga army to assemble and be ready to attack Benares. He told the naga army to scare off its population until their king agreed to hand off his daughter to him, but to harm no one. The nagas invaded every corner of Benares. The population of Benares saw snakes coming out on the streets, in the rivers and lakes, on the roofs, in their homes, their bedrooms, and every corner of the city. The snakes flared their hoods and threatened the trembling crowds, saying that unless their king gave his daughter to the naga king, they would all die.

In terror, King Brahmadatta gave in to the naga king’s demand. The naga king retired his army and through his magical power, made a glorious city of jewels to appear a good distance away as the place to receive the king’s daughter. He dispatched a complimentary tribute to King Brahmadatta and set a date for him to deliver his daughter.



The Naga Bodhisatta

Princess Samuddaja was taken up into the newly created palace and led to a divinely adorned bed surrounded by naga women who assumed human form. As soon as she had laid down on the divine bed she fell into a deep sleep and the palace disappeared.

Samuddaja woke up in the naga kingdom and found herself in the rich city glittered with jewels and precious stones. It was a sight so beautiful and unlike anything she had seen in the human world. She had no idea this was not the realm of men. The naga king wanted to conceal this fact from her. He ordered all of his naga subjects to assume human form; anyone who betrayed this and showed any signs of his or her snake-nature to Samuddaja would be severely punished. Therefore, not one naga dared to appear as a snake before her. So she lived affectionately and harmoniously with him, not knowing that he was a naga.

In the course of time Samuddaja conceived and brought forth a son, and they named him Sudassana. Soon after, she bore a second son, whom they called Datta. Datta was a blessed being, for he was a Bodhisatta born into the world of naga in that lifetime. Then Samuddaja bore another son whom they called Subhoga, and a fourth whom they called Arittha. Yet though she had given birth to these four sons, she still did not know it was the world of the nagas that she lived in.

But one day the infant Arittha was told by some playful naga youths that his mother was a human, not a naga. To prove this, Arittha assumed a serpent's form while being nursed by his mother. When she saw his serpent form she uttered a great cry in terror and threw

him on the ground injuring one of his eyes. When the king learned what Arittha had done he ordered him to be executed. Because she loved her son, Samuddaja pleaded to the king to let him live. Softened by her plea, the king consented. It was that day that Samuddaja found out she had been living in the realm of the nagas all this time. But by then, she was used to the happiness that everyone had provided her and she found no reason to be resentful.

As the four naga princes grew up, their father gave them each a kingdom. Once a month, the three sons went to pay respect to their parents. But Datta, the Bodhisatta, went every fortnight.

In his previous lifetimes, Datta had accumulated abundant wisdom and merit. So when he was born into the naga world, his wisdom and knowledge of Dhamma and the truth of nature exceeded everyone else's. His fame went far and wide. Sakka, king of Tavatimsa Heaven, heard of his reputation and invited him to visit his heaven. During his visit one day Sakka asked his angels a difficult question about Dhamma and none could answer it. Datta, was the only one who was able to enlighten them with the answer. Sakka was impressed with this and paid him great honor. He addressed to him, "O Datta, you are endowed with a wisdom as broad as the earth. Henceforth, you shall be called Bhuridatta (meaning Datta the Wise One." From then on, this was his name.

From that time forth he went to pay homage to Sakka regularly. Upon seeing Sakka's opulent estate and the exceedingly delightful splendor of the angelic world, he thought to himself, "The world



of heaven is marvelous indeed. These divine treasures had been brought about by the virtue of merit. What am I to do with this frog-eating snake-nature? I must find a way to free myself from the physical form of the naga and be reborn in the realm of the angels. To achieve this, I must increase my store of merit by observing high moral precepts.”

He made the following resolution:

“I resolve to keep my precepts pure. I will avoid all wrongdoings. I will not kill, steal, engage in sexual misconduct, lie, or become intoxicated. I will cause harm to no one. I will not give in to anger and hatred. I will uphold the moral precepts even if it means giving up my life to do so.”

After so vowing, he returned to the naga realm and told his parents of his intention. His father advised him to observe his precepts within the naga realm and not to venture outside, lest harm may come to him. He took his father’s advice and began to practice abstinence in the quiet places of the naga realm. But his naga maidens kept seducing him and disrupting his concentration. So he decided to leave the naga realm to find a peaceful place in the realm of men to complete his mission. He emerged from the naga world and came to the shore of the Yamuna River near the ocean. There, he found a peaceful spot under a banyan tree and settled down on an anthill to meditate. He made the following resolution:

“I will fulfill my precepts here. Should anyone have need for my skin, or muscles, or bones, or blood, let him take them at will. I will not react with anger or hatred.”

And he lay down and observed his precepts until dawn. The Bodhisatta was thus able to successfully keep his precepts for a long, long time.

A Vicious Brahmin

At that time there lived a Brahmin hunter by the name of Nesada. He lived in a village not far from the city gates of Benares. Every day he would go out into the forest with his son to hunt for animals. One day they failed to find even the smallest animal, so they went deeper and deeper into the forest until they reached a landing at the bank of the Yamuna River. There, they saw footprints of animals that went down to the river to drink. So they set themselves up in a hiding place to wait for the animals to come by. By twilight, a deer came to the river to drink and the Brahmin hunter shot an arrow at it. The arrowed pierced through its leg and it fled in terror, leaving a stream of blood on the ground. They pursued the deer and caught up with it by nightfall and they killed it. By that time it was too dark to travel. So they went back to the river bank, stopped at a banyan tree and climbed up the tree to spend the night there.

When morning came, the Brahmin hunter woke early to hunt more animals while his son still slept. Meanwhile Bhuridatta had just completed his hibernation and left his naga form to assume the form of a young man wearing jeweled attire. He came to the river bank for a wash. The Brahmin hunter saw him and was captivated by his glorious appearance. He asked him, “Who are you, my lord? You look too magnificent to be a human. Are you a god, a yakkha, or a naga?”

Bhuridatta's first instinct was not to tell the Brahmin hunter the truth for fear that the Brahmin hunter might bring danger to him. But he thought, “I have taken my vow of precepts; I must speak only the truth.” So he told the Brahmin hunter that he was a naga.

After having said so, he sensed the Brahmin hunter's cruel nature and worried that the Brahmin hunter would betray him to a snake charmer and so hindered his practice of the precepts. He anticipated that it would be wise if he talked the Brahmin hunter into staying away from that area and leaving him alone to contemplate his precepts.

So he told the Brahmin hunter of the glory and splendors of his naga world, and invited him to come to the naga kingdom with him and enrich himself with the wealth there. The Brahmin hunter accepted his invitation with enthusiasm and he took his son along. Bhuridatta led them to the naga kingdom and indulged them with great luxury and pleasure. Bhuridatta was thus able to continue his contemplation without interruption. Every fortnight he would go to pay respect to his parents in the naga realm.

One year went by and the Brahmin hunter began to feel discontent with his new lifestyle and longed to return to the world of men. He talked his son into leaving the naga world with him. The Brahmin hunter went to Bhuridatta and asked for his permission to leave. He lied to Bhuridatta that he was leaving to pursue a holy life so that he, too, would end up in the heavenly realm after he died. Bhuridatta let him go and offered to give a divine jewel to the Brahmin hunter as a gift. But the Brahmin hunter turned it down to convince the Bodhisatta that his intent to become an ascetic was genuine. So the father and son returned home and continued their former way of life.





The Garuda

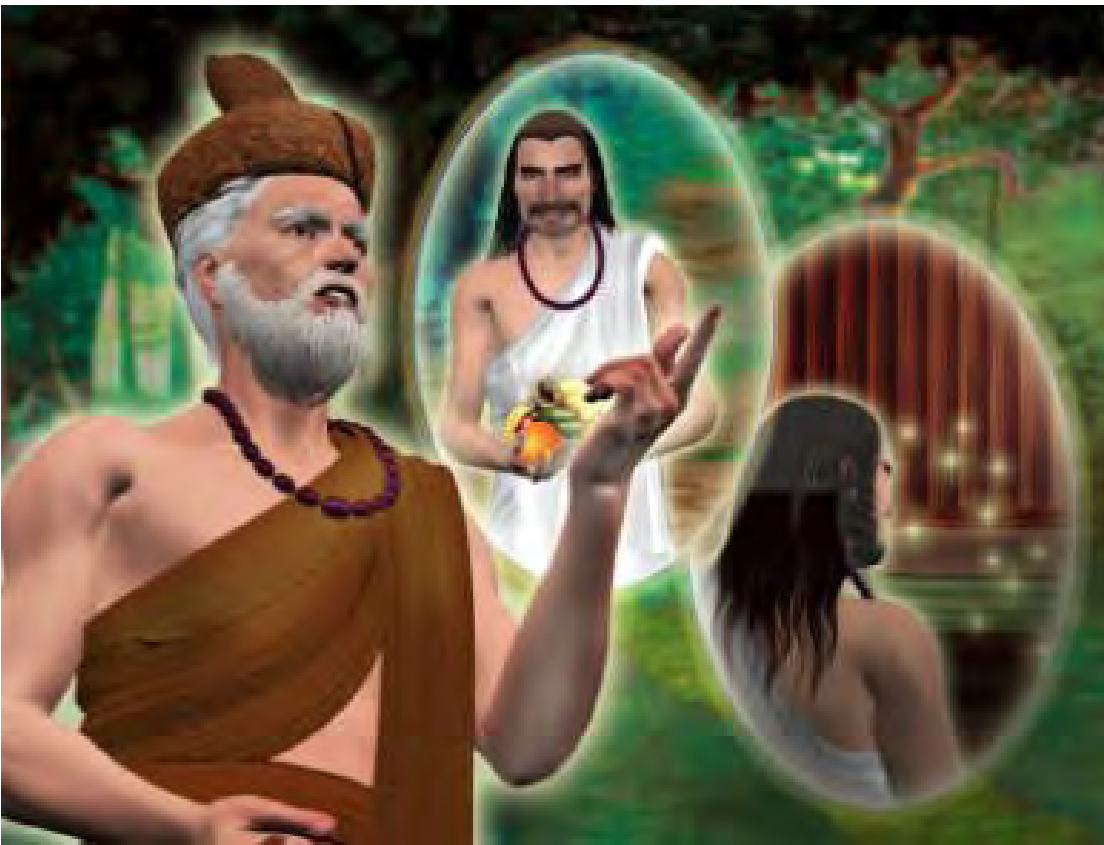
Although known for their powers and magical abilities, nagas are no match for garudas, a type of celestial being that is half-bird, half-human, with the face and lower body of a bird and the upper body of a human. Garudas live in the celestial forest of Himavanta and feed on nagas. Like nagas, garudas possess supernatural powers and can change their physical form at will.

At that time a powerful garuda was flying over the naga region hunting nagas for food. He saw a naga swimming in the ocean, swooped down and seized it by the head. He then carried it into the Himavanta forest. Nearby, a hermit was dwelling in a hut of leaves. Not far from the hut stood a great banyan tree. The hermit relied on the shade of the banyan tree during the day to meditate.

As the garuda flew closely over the banyan tree, the naga twined its tail around the tree to try to escape. The garuda flew up to heaven with its great strength and carried the naga with him and also uprooted the banyan tree along with it. After having eaten the naga, the garuda recognized the tree and was troubled by it, thinking, “This tree was of a great service to the hermit who relies on its shade for meditation. By destroying the tree would an evil consequence follow me? I better go ask him.”

So he transformed himself into a young man and went to the hermitage. There, he saw the hermit frantically smoothing down the earth where the banyan tree used to stand. The garuda asked him what had once grown in that spot. The hermit told him that a banyan tree used to stand on that spot and was uprooted by a garuda who was carrying off a naga that had twined its tail around the tree.

The garuda asked him what bad kamma would follow the garuda. The hermit told him that if the garuda did it without intention it would not cause any demerit; and if the naga did not seize the tree with an intent to hurt it, he also would not attract demerit. The garuda was pleased to hear this. He disclosed to the hermit that he was in fact that garuda. To express his appreciation, he taught the hermit a powerful spell for subduing nagas and snakes and for making medicine to cure snakebites.



The Snake Charmer

At that time there lived in Benares a Brahmin by the name of Alam-bayana who got himself deeply into debt. To flee from his creditors, he left the city of Benares and went into the forest. After traveling successive days and nights, he arrived at the region of Himavanta and came upon the hermitage where the banyan tree was uprooted. He met the hermit and asked to stay with him and served him. The hermit let him stay and treated him kindly. The Brahmin served the hermit diligently and the hermit rewarded him with the knowledge of the garuda’s magic spell.

Soon after, the Brahmin left the hermitage and arrived at the bank of the Yamuna River after a long journey. He sat down to take a rest and began to practice his magical spell. At that very moment several naga youths who came to wait on Bhuridatta were playing in the water nearby. They carried with them the divine jewel that Bhuridatta had offered to the Brahmin hunter earlier, the same one that the Brahmin hunter declined to accept, and left the jewel on the bank. Upon hearing the spell, the naga trembled with fear thinking that a garuda was coming to attack them. They plunged into the earth and fled in terror, forgetting to take the divine jewel with them. Seeing what had happened, Alambayana exclaimed, “This spell is truly wondrous!” Delighted with his good fortune, he picked up the jewel and continued into the forest.

Nearby, the Brahmin hunter and his son were hunting near the river bank. They saw Alambayana holding the jewel in his hands. The father said to his son, “Is this not the jewel that Bhuridatta gave to us?” The son observed the divine jewel and confirmed, “Yes, this is the same one.”

The Brahmin hunter became jealous. He wanted to get the jewel for himself. “After all, this jewel was supposed to be mine,” he

exclaimed and scolded himself for having turned it down when the jewel was offered to him by Bhuridatta. Then he devised a scheme to cheat Alambayana out of his jewel. He approached Alambayana and told him that the jewel was cursed and would bring bad luck to the one who possessed it, unless the owner knew how to take care of it in certain ways. He said he knew how to do so and he offered to buy the jewel from Alambayana, but Alambayana refused to sell it. After further conversations Alambayana said, “I will not sell this jewel to anyone, but I will give it to the one who can show me where to find a naga.” In his mind, a naga was much more valuable than the jewel now that he had a spell to subdue it.

Greed struck the Brahmin hunter. He told Alambayana to follow him for he knew where to find such a naga. When the son learned of his father’s disgraceful motive he was ashamed by it. He reminded his father, “Bhuridatta has done you nothing but good. How can you betray a friend who has treated you so well? Your actions will bring you retribution in hell.”

To which the Brahmin replied, “Don’t worry, my son. We are Brahmins and Brahmins are the blessed ones. A Brahmin’s sin can be forgiven if he makes sacrifices to the gods. I will make sacrifices and my sin will be washed away.”

The son knew that this was wrong to do and kept pleading for his father to give up the vicious deed, but the Brahmin would not listen. Feeling disgusted, he said to his father, “I will not be a part of such an evil deed and I will not associate with such an evildoer.” Upon saying this, he left his father and never returned to see him again from that day onward.



The Naga is Captured

Unaffected by his son's protest, the Brahmin hunter took Alambayana to where Bhuridatta was fasting and said, "Here is your naga. Now give me the jewel."

The Bodhisatta heard the voice and opened his eyes. Upon seeing the Brahmin hunter, he thought sadly, "I took this fellow to my naga home and gave him all the good things; he would not accept my jewel and now he comes here with a snake charmer. I could kill him with a blast of my poisoned breath, but if I become angry with him my moral character would be jeopardized. My utmost duty is to fulfill moral precepts until perfection. This must remain inviolate. So whether this snake charmer cuts me into pieces or cooks me or mutilates me, I must not be angry with him." So, closing his eyes and letting go of his emotion, he lay perfectly motionless.

Alambayana, being delighted at seeing the naga and caring not for the jewel, threw the jewel into the Brahmin hunter's hands. But the jewel slipped out of his hands and as soon as it hit the ground it disappeared back into the naga world. And so the Brahmin hunter found himself dispossessed of three things: the priceless jewel, Bhuridatta's friendship, and his son. He was desolate and went off to his home lamenting like a broken man.

As if preparing for war, Alambayana anointed his body with divine drugs to protect himself from poison and ate some of it to fortify himself within. Then he chanted the divine spell, went up to the Bodhisatta and seized him by the tail, opened his mouth and spat the drug into it. After drugging the naga with his magic potion, Alambayana crushed his bones, seized him by his tail and pounded him against the earth. The Bodhisatta suffered unbearable pain but did not allow himself to feel anger.

Having thus made the naga prince helpless, the cruel Alambayana made a basket out of vine and threw him into it. He then traveled to village after village exhibiting the great serpent and making him perform for the crowd. Forced to follow every command, the naga danced, assumed various colors, shapes and forms, spitted forth water and smoke, and caused a great wonder among the villagers. Although he could easily kill his captor, he did not do it so he would not violate the precept. The people were impressed with the astonishing performances and they gave the snake charmer abundant money.

When he reached the city of Benares, Alambayana announced to King Sagara-Brahmadatta¹⁸ of Benares that he would arrange a special exhibit of the naga's magical performance before him. Having already heard of the snake charmer's reputation, the king allowed his royal courtyard to be cleared for the occasion and enthusiastically awaited for the day of the performance.

¹⁸ Son of Brahmadatta-Kumara, the new king of Benares

The Queen's Bad Dream

On the day the Bodhisatta was seized by Alambayana, Queen Samuddaja had a dream that a dark man with red eyes had cut off her arm with a sword and carried it away, leaving a great stream of blood. She woke up in terror. She surmised that some misfortune must have come either to her sons or her husband. She was particularly worried about Bhuridatta as the other three sons remained safe in the naga world but Bhuridatta had ventured into the unfriendly world of humans. At the end of the fortnight when the Bodhisatta was due for his visit with her, he failed to show up. This worried her even more. After one month had passed she could no longer bear her anxiety. Noticing what was wrong, her eldest son Sudassana asked her what it was that made her so distressed. She told him that danger must have come upon his younger brother, for he had failed to show up two fortnights in a row.

Sudassana comforted her and promised to find his brother and bring him back. He assembled the other two brothers and discussed the strategy for the search. “If all three of us go in one direction there will be much delay,” said Sudassana, “We must separate and go to three different territories: one to the world of the angels, one to Himavanta, and one to the world of men.” And they assigned themselves each to a separate territory.

Sudassana chose to go to the world of men. He disguised himself as an ascetic and put on the garb of a yogi.

The Bodhisatta had a sister, Accimukhi, born of another mother. She had great love for the Bodhisatta. When she saw Sudassana getting ready for the trip she asked to go with him. “Sister,” he told

her, “you cannot go with me, for it is inappropriate for a yogi to have a female companion.” “In that case, I will become a little frog and I will hide inside your matted hair,” she said. On his consenting, she transformed herself into a young frog and hid inside his matted hair.

Sudassana figured the most logical place to begin his search would be in the place where the Bodhisatta was observing his precepts. So he went there first. When he saw traces of blood in the area, he felt certain that Bhuridatta had been captured by a snake charmer. He followed the track, which led him to the village where Alambayana had his first show performed. When the villagers told him that a snake charmer had come to their village and performed a naga show, he asked them where the snake charmer was headed afterwards, and they told him the direction. He followed the trail until he finally came to the city of Benares.



The Duel

Meanwhile, the people of Benares were buzzing about the event that was about to take place in the king's royal courtyard that day. Sudassana followed the crowd to the king's courtyard. At that very moment Alambayana was arriving with his attendants who were carrying a large ornamented basket. Inside the basket was the naga prince. A great crowd collected and a seat was placed for the king. Sudassana found his way to the edge of the crowd. When the king was properly seated, Alambayana ordered Bhuridatta to come out. The naga put out his head to survey the crowd. As he looked, he saw his brother so he came out of the basket and went toward him. The crowd, seeing the naga approach, retreated in fear. Sudassana was left there alone. The naga went up to him and laid his head on his foot and wept, and Sudassana also wept. The naga then went back into the basket. Alambayana, looking from the distance, thought the naga must have bitten the yogi. He went up to the yogi and consoled him, "Fear not, dear yogi; as long as I am here no naga or snake can harm you, for I possess the divine potion that can cure all snakebites." Sudassana insulted him with these words, "This lame snake of yours can never harm me. I am no match for him. I am the most powerful snake tamer in the land."

Alambayana was offended when he heard this. He turned to the crowd and said, "This arrogant recluse claims he can beat my naga. Let him duel with my king of snakes and see who is more powerful."

Sudassana responded, "Your challenge is accepted. Let your big, clumsy snake fight with my little frog." He asked the frog to come out from his matted hair and spit three drops of venom onto his

hand. Then he threatened Alambayana with these words, "This little frog is my half sister, daughter of a naga king. She possesses immense power. One drop of this celestial venom would blow up this city. Shall I show you?" On hearing this, Alambayana shrank back and the people cried out in fear.

King Sagara-Brahmadatta appealed to the yogi, "O reverend, please do not let the venom harm my city and my people. Can you please destroy it?"

The yogi replied, "It is too late, now that the frog has let out her ferocious venom. If I let this venom touch the ground it will spread the poison throughout the land and kill all the trees and crops. If I throw it in the air, it will spread and cause a great drought. And if I throw it into the water it will kill all the creatures in the river."

Alambayana was listening to the conversation with open ears and watchful eyes. He did not believe a word the yogi was saying. He turned to the king and said, "Your Majesty, please don't listen to these silly lies. How can three drops of venom from a little puny frog be that powerful? Ask him to prove it to you."

Sudassana warned the king to be careful, for this was not just any ordinary poison found in the world of men. He told the king the only way to neutralize the venom was to dig three large pits side by side and to fill one pit with herbs, one with cow dung, and one with the celestial medicine that he would provide, and to drop the venom in the pits. The king ordered his men to do so and when this was done, the yogi threw the three drops of venom into the first pit. It caused a big burst of fire burning out all of the herbs. Then the

flame caught the second and the third pits, burning away everything inside them before it gradually extinguished itself.

Alambayana put his face over the third pit to look inside. The noxious fume from the pit immediately burned away his facial skin and part of his body making him look like a leper and causing him intense pain. The terrified Brahmin screamed out these words, "I surrender, I surrender, I surrender! I will release the naga immediately." Then he crept away in disgrace never to be seen again.

Bhuridatta emerged from the basket, and assuming a radiant form of a young man, stood before the multitude in all his glory. The little frog also transformed herself into a woman. The three of them stood side by side, looking like celestial beings.

The two naga brothers revealed themselves to King Sagara-Brahmadatta as his nephews, for their mother, Princess Samuddaja, was his younger sister. The king embraced them and kissed them. He brought them up into the palace and paid them great honor and requested them to bring their mother to visit him soon. After having spent some time together, the three bade farewell to the king and returned to their naga kingdom.

False Doctrine

When the Brahmin hunter saw Alambayana's downfall, he thought to himself, "This cruel man has become a wretch because of his mistreatment of an innocent soul. I, too, have committed a grave sin for betraying the one who had been kind to me. I am sure that soon a bad retribution will fall upon me. Before it comes, I will go to the sacred bathing place in the river and wash away my sin."

So he went to the Yamuna River, to a landing where Brahmins went to wash away their sins. He walked to the landing, put his palms together, and uttered his confession out loud, "I have committed a misdeed because I have betrayed Prince Bhuridatta in spite of his kindness to me and to my son. He gave me everything, yet I led a snake charmer to him and caused him great suffering. I wish now to wash away this sin." Then he slowly walked into the river in order to bathe himself.

At that time Prince Subhoga, Bhuridatta's younger brother had come to that spot. He overheard the Brahmin's confession and it infuriated him. He seized the Brahmin and dragged him under the water threatening to drown him. The Brahmin cried out for mercy, and in his desperation, said these words to him, "O naga prince, please do not kill me. Do you not know that there are three kinds of people you are not allowed to kill: Brahmins, beggars and worshippers of fire? If you kill them the Great Brahma will punish you in hell." Subhoga hesitated and thought, "This outcast is trying to fool me. I will find out the truth from my wise brother." So Subhoga dragged the Brahmin to the naga realm.

When Arittha, the youngest brother, saw the Brahmin being dragged and beaten by Subhoga, he was alarmed and said to his brother: "Brother, do not hurt the Brahmin. Brahmins are descendants of

the Great Brahma, creator of the world. Anyone who hurts them will soon be punished in hell." Kanaritha acted in this manner and said these words because, in many of his past lifetimes, he was born as a dedicated Brahmin who believed in the doctrine which taught the world was created by the Great Brahma. This belief system was so deeply ingrained in him that he carried it with him still into this present lifetime.

Arittha addressed the naga crowds that gathered around: "Come, all nagas, let me extol for you the virtues of Brahmins. Brahmins are descendants of the Great Brahma, who created the world. Not only did the Great Brahma create the world, but he also decrees the four classes of human beings and assigns duties to them. The sublime Brahmins occupy the highest caste. They study the Vedas and perform rituals and make sacrifices to the gods. Kings and warriors (Kshatriyas) occupy the second caste, and they rule the land. Merchants (Vaishyas) occupy the third caste. They farm the fields, raise cattle and do business. And servants (Shudras) occupy the lowest class and serve them all. Individuals must remain in their own caste and are not allowed to marry people of a different caste. Those who revere the Brahmins and give them gifts will be rewarded in the world of the gods, and those who cause harm to them will be punished in hell."

Then he went on to describe the virtue of the Vedas, the worship of fire, the sacrificial offerings, etc., etc. When the nagas heard these words, they said, "He is telling a legend of the past, we should seek out the truth," and they took the topic to the Bodhisatta for his clarification.





Right Understanding

The Bodhisatta worried that his brother's propagation of this false view would lead the nagas down the wrong path and cause them misfortune. He gathered all the nagas together and gave them the following discourse:

“The belief that the Great Brahma is the creator of the world is false. The Vedas, the sacrificial offerings, and the worship of fire do not lead one to the celestial realm.

The Vedas are the clever man's tool designed to deceive the ignorant for their own gains. The Vedas have no hidden power. The fire, though tended well for long years, leaves nothing but ashes. Fire can be created by man; how can man worship what he has himself created? There is no merit in worshipping fire.

If the Great Brahma indeed created the world and has such mighty power, why does he not give happiness to his creatures but instead allows them to be condemned to pain? Why does he allow fraud, lies, and ignorance to prevail, and truth and justice to fail? Why does he create the world in which to shelter the wrong? Why does he allow the innocents to be killed and the wrongdoers to go free? Why does he allow humans to be born crippled instead of with perfect health? Why does he not create a world that is full of happiness and harmony, instead of one full of conflict and war?

The Brahmin's Vedas are delusive. Studying the Vedas does not prevent a Brahmin to kill, to steal, to cheat, or to lie.

Sacrificial offerings are designed for a Brahmin's gain so he can eat the meat of the animal and take the objects of offering. Only fools should believe in such things.

The caste systems, claimed to have been decreed by the Great Brahma, are unfit and destructive. They create disharmony, promote prejudice, and hinder progress. Loss, gain, glory and shame touch everyone regardless of what caste they occupy. A servant has the same human rights as his master, his priest, or his king. To gain livelihood, regardless of class or caste, all must follow the right pursuits and legitimate means. It is foolish to believe in such a system.

The wise does not believe in false doctrines. He follows the Right View, the view in accordance with the Truth. Only the Right View can lead one to a happy destination.”

The above explanation enlightened all the nagas. They thanked the Bodhisatta for his knowledge and wisdom and saluted him.

Pointing to the Brahmin, Subhoga asked his brother, “What about this ingrate? He caused you so much suffering even though you have been kind to him. Should we kill him?”

“Killing binds one with the bondage of vengeance. Killing begets killing. The cycle never ends. A sage should avoid killing at all costs. We shall let him go free,” answered the Bodhisatta.

And the Bodhisatta ordered his nagas to take the Brahmin back to the world of men. He told them not to harm him in any way. Nesada the Brahmin hunter was profoundly touched by the Bodhisatta's kindness. Tears flowed from his eyes as he paid his final homage to the Bodhisatta.

Happy Reunion

When everything settled down, the Bodhisatta along with his mother (Samuddaja) and brothers went to visit his maternal uncle (Sagara-Brahmadatta) and grandfather (Brahmadatta-Kumara, former king of Benares) across the Yamuna River. His grandfather, after giving up his daughter Samuddaja to the naga king, had retired to become an ascetic. Queen Samuddaja and her four sons came to his hermitage to pay him respect. King Sagara-Brahmadatta also joined them there and they all paid him respect. There was great joy and happiness at the family reunion. Afterwards, they took King Sagara-Brahmadatta to visit the naga world. He stayed there for a few days before returning to Benares. Queen Samuddaja spent the remainder of her life in the naga world.

The Bodhisatta continued to keep the precepts and performed moral duties throughout his life. His wish had come true for him, for upon death, he was reborn in the realm of heaven.



Canda Jataka

PERFECTING THE VIRTUE OF FORBEARANCE

07

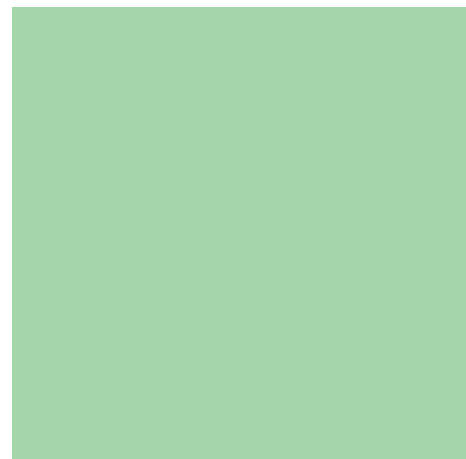


During the time of the Buddha, his cousin and disciple, Devadatta, was a misguided monk who schemed to murder the Buddha and take control of the Order of Monks. He hired an expert archer to kill the Buddha, then hired two other archers to kill the killer, who would in turn be killed by four other archers. Finally the four men would be killed by eight other men. This way, no one could trace the killing back to Devadatta. But when the first man came close to the Buddha and was ready to shoot his poisonous arrow at him, he found himself unable to move any of his limbs. The Buddha approached him and gave him a discourse which touched his heart and converted him. Eventually, all the men who were hired to kill one another also were converted and became disciples of the Buddha and the assassination plan failed.

One day, at the Hall of Wisdom, the topic of Devadatta's attempt on the Buddha's life was brought up by a group of monks. The Buddha heard the discussion and said to them, "Dear monks, this is not the first time that Devadatta tried to deprive many people of their lives in his enmity against me." And he told them a story of the past: Canda Jataka.

Canda Jataka is the story of Prince Canda, the Bodhisatta, the son of a weak-minded and ignorant king named Ekaraja. In that lifetime Devadatta was born as a wicked Brahmin priest who devised a human sacrificial rite for the king to perform which involved Prince Canda and several others as victims. Although facing death at the hands of his own father, Prince Canda maintained great fortitude and forbearance¹⁹, not allowing himself to give way to hatred and vengefulness against his father and the wicked priest.

¹⁹ **Forbearance** is synonymous with patience and endurance. It is the virtue that sustains one's ability to withstand the ups and downs of life without losing one's sense of morality. Forbearance is one of the ten virtues that all aspirants for Buddhahood seek to perfect.



A Vengeful Brahmin

In the olden days, the kingdom of Benares was called Pupphavati. This kingdom was ruled by King Ekaraja, a feeble-minded king who was spiritually ignorant. The king had a son named Prince Canda who he appointed regent. Prince Canda, the Bodhisatta, was a man of high integrity and wisdom. He was just and fair to all people and was loved by all.

King Ekaraja was advised in the ways of the world by Khandahala, his chief Brahmin priest and teacher. This was unfortunate for the kingdom, for Khandahala was a corrupt man.

Khandahala contrived to have himself appointed by the king as judge, though he was in no way fair or honest. He often took bribes and turned cases against the innocents.

One day, a man, the true owner of a property in dispute, had lost his property in a court case because Khandahala, the judge, had taken bribes. Grief-stricken by the injustice, the man went out of the judgment hall complaining loudly to passersby. When the man saw Prince Canda he came to his feet and pleaded him for justice. Prince Canda summoned both parties back to the courtroom and had the case reheard. After considering all the presented facts, Canda reversed the judgment and restored the unjustly seized property to its rightful owner.

The news of this good deed spread to the people and they began to sing the praises of Prince Canda. From then on, they called on him regularly to act as their mediator. The news of his competence as mediator became known to the king, and the king eventually gave him the office of judge and removed Khandahala from the position.

This infuriated Khandahala. Not only had it made him lose face, but it also deprived him of his means of income from bribes. From that time on he developed a deep hatred against the prince and plotted to get rid of him. He constantly schemed and planned for his revenge. Finally, an opportunity presented itself.



An Ignorant King

One morning, right before dawn, the king had a fantastic dream. His dream appeared so vivid and real. In his dream, he was standing in the celestial realm of Tavatimsa witnessing the great expanse of heaven. He saw celestial streets paved with sands of gold extending as far as the eyes can see. Celestial palaces and buildings glittered with jewels and precious stones rose high up into the sky. The sight was so magnificent, unlike anything he had seen in the human world. Celestial beings were singing and playing divine music, and female celestial beings were astoundingly beautiful. The whole experience was spellbinding for the king.

When he awoke, he was seized by an overpowering desire to enter this celestial world. He said to himself, “The world of the gods is so magnificent indeed; nothing in the human realm can compare to it. My palace, which was said to be the most beautiful in the land, looks like a poor man’s hut when compared to Sakka’s celestial palace. The most beautiful ladies in my court look like monkeys when compared to the female celestial beings. Oh, how I crave to belong to this celestial realm! I am willing to do anything to get there. I must find a way to go to this heaven. I will ask Khandahala, my wise teacher, to tell me how to get there. No one else knows the answer except my good teacher.”

Later that morning, still dazzled by his vision, the king told Khandahala, “Dear teacher, you are a seer to whom all sacred learning has been given, tell me what sort of merit must one make to be able to go to Tavatimsa Heaven?”

Khandahala’s eyes brightened up. He saw this as his moment for revenge. He immediately took advantage of the king’s ignorance and manipulated him. He said to the king, “O King, it will not be easy for you to find this realm and it will cost you dearly. If you wish to go to the celestial realm of your dream you must offer a splendid sacrifice to the gods.”

A ‘Splendid’ Sacrifice

"What do you mean by a ‘splendid sacrifice?’" asked the king.

"It means a sacrifice that is most difficult to perform," answered Khandahala. Then he continued, "Your Majesty, the common practice of giving away food and clothing to recluses and monks and to poor people is not considered splendid. For an offering to be splendid it must be something that is most difficult to do. The most splendid sacrifice is to take the lives of ones who do not deserve to die and offer them as gifts to the gods. This has to be done in a proper way. The sacrifice must be made in units of four: four sons, four wives, four wealthy merchants, four noble animals consisting of the finest elephants, the finest steeds and the finest oxen. These four kinds, sacrificed with proper ritual, will gain you entrance into this heaven. Only such an offering can win the attention of the gods."

Khandahala's motive was aimed at Prince Canda, but to conceal his real motive he cooked up the scheme that included the murdering of the others. This way, the people would not know that he did it through his hostility towards the prince.

"What you suggested is indeed a very difficult thing to do," exclaimed the king.

"But if Your Majesty really wishes to go to Tavatimsa Heaven, this is the only way to get there," emphasized Khandahala.

So greatly had the king's dream affected him that his mind was no longer sound, and he succumbed to Khandahala's dreadful advice. He ordered all four of his sons, four of his chief consorts, four

wealthy merchants, four royal elephants, four noble steeds, and four of his finest oxen to be captured and slain.

Khandahala suggested to the king that the sacrificial site be located outside the city walls and he and his men be the ones to prepare the site and perform the rite, as the others might not have the strength or the courage to complete it. The king agreed and gave him permission to do so. Khandahala took several of his men and went out of the city and ordered a sacrificial pit to be dug. He surrounded it with fences to prevent possible interference from others.

Prince Canda thought, "Even animals love their young; why then would a human being not love his own sons? There is something fishy about this whole thing." When Prince Canda found out that it was Khandahala who talked his father into committing such a hideous act, he knew right away that Khandahala did this to exact his revenge on him. He thought to himself, "This cruel man will have so many people killed just so he can get to me. I must find a way to help the others."

He went to his father and pleaded him to give up the idea of the sacrifice, not to save himself, but for the sake of the other innocent victims. He said to the king, "Father, human sacrifice is not a way to reach heaven. To gain proper merit in order to reach heaven, one should give alms, avoid killing humans and animals, be kind and compassionate, and not cause suffering to anyone."

One by one, those close to the king came and told him to abandon the idea, but the king stood firm on his decision. He told them, "Khandahala has been my teacher since I was very young. He taught



me everything. He is a seer well versed in all spiritual matters. He assured me that the only way to get to the celestial realm is by doing something that is difficult for ordinary people to do, to offer the lives of those who do not deserve to die as gifts to the gods. I must follow the advice of my great teacher if I wish to go to the celestial realm.”

The king’s mother was terrified at his son’s delusional behavior and rushed to see him. She said to him, “My son, what causes you to commit such a monstrous deed? How could you think of such cruel offering, putting your own sons to death?”

The king answered, “This costly sacrifice is the only vehicle that will take me to the heavenly world.”

His mother pleaded, “To kill your own sons and wives can never lead you to the heavenly world. Don’t believe in such nonsense. It is the road to hell. If you wish to go to heaven, you must do what is right: give alms, hurt no living beings, be kind, be compassionate, be righteous; then you will be assured of heaven.”

The king replied, “Mother, I did not think up such thing on my own, but I have been advised by Khandahala who has been my teacher since I was young. I know that sacrificing those whom I love is a very difficult thing to do, in the same way that it is very difficult to get to the celestial ream. Therefore it is fitting that if anyone wants to go to heaven, he must be willing to give up those he loves the dearest as sacrifice. This is indeed a hard thing to do, but heaven is the prize that I must gain.”

With tears pouring from her eyes, the mother begged her son to give up such a monstrous act, but to no avail. It broke her heart that her son had turned out this way. She cried and lamented, but the king stayed unaffected. The king’s father also came to plead his son to give up the idea. But the king stood firm in his decision.

Canda felt miserable that so many people had to suffer on his account. He went again to his father and made a plea to him, “Father, let us be Khandahala’s slaves, but spare our lives. We shall tend his horses and his elephants; we shall sweep his stables and haul the manures; we shall do whatever he wants us to do, and work in chains, but spare our lives.”

To give up one’s dignity to become a slave of one’s own enemy and endure any insults that should follow was a terrible humiliation. Prince Canda was willing to do this, not due to cowardice or the love for his own life, but to save others from being slaughtered. With his power and popularity, he could have chosen to revolt against his father and put the evil Brahmin in his proper place, but he chose to resolve it in a non-violent way. This reflected in him the virtue of forbearance that he had cultivated over many lifetimes, and the courage to uphold good moral principle even at the cost of his life.

Prince Canda’s lamentations began to soften the king’s heart. His eyes began to fill with tears as he said, “Let no one kill any of my children. I no longer wish to go to the celestial realm. I will let everyone go.” He ordered everyone to be set free.

Khandahala was busy preparing the sacrificial pit when he heard

the news that the king had released all the princes. He rushed to see the king and said to him, “I warned Your Majesty that this sacrifice would prove difficult. If it was so easy, anyone could have done it. Only those who have the courage to give offerings such as these will go straight to heaven. Bear in mind, those who are a part of the sacrifice will all go to the heaven along with you. Their pain will be only for a little while, but their enjoyment in heaven will be ever-lasting. It is a worthwhile course for everyone. Why put a stop to the rite now when it has begun so well? ” Hearing these words from the Brahmin priest, the feeble-minded king faltered. Blinded by illusion of grandeur and the desire for a life in heaven he changed his mind once again and ordered his sons to be recaptured.

The king’s ministers, his sons’ wives, and even his little grandchildren, begged him to change his mind. Family members of the four wealthy merchants all begged the king to spare their lives. They offered themselves to become his slaves if the king would let their loved ones live. But each time the king appeared to falter in his resolve, Khandahala would rush in to remind him that this was the only way to heaven.

More than once, the king weakened and released the hapless victims, only to call them back into custody under renewed pressure from the evil priest.

At last, everything at the sacrificial site was ready. The ground was cleared, a platform was raised, the pyre was draped, and the banners were hung. Multi-tiered ceremonial umbrellas were brought

in and erected at the site. Finally Khandahala said to the king, “The sacrifice and the offerings have been prepared and ready. Go forth, Oh king, to offer them, and claim your journey to heaven.”



Sakka to the Rescue

Khandahala's men escorted Prince Canda to the sacrificial site amidst great lamentations of the multitude. They placed him on the platform with his neck bent forward to be decapitated. Below it was a large golden bowl to receive his blood. Khandahala took the ceremonial sword and stood up, getting ready to behead him.

In her desperation, Queen Candadevi, Canda's mother, clasped her hands and walking amidst the assembly proclaimed solemnly "May all the gods and the spirits that dwell in this place please hear me in mercy. May the virtue of my good deed and my truthfulness protect my son Canda and free him from harm."

Sakka, sovereign of Tavatimsa Heaven, heard her desperate cry, and through his divine eyes saw what was taking place in the world of men and the injustice being done. Suddenly, like a thunderbolt, mighty Sakka appeared floating in the sky over the great crowd. Surrounded by a flaming halo, he wielded a blazing steel mallet in one hand and a flaming diamond dagger in the other and struck at the ceremonial umbrellas. As they fell under the blows the sacrifice was halted, for without the ceremonial umbrellas the ceremony was no longer sacred.

"You tyrant!" Sakka shouted in a commanding voice which frightened the king, "Stop your heinous act right now. Nowhere has this earth seen such an atrocious crime committed by anyone. You think killing the virtuous and the innocents will earn you a place in my heaven? Hell is where you belong! Release the people and the animals now before I strike you dead and smash your wicked Brahmin to pieces."

Startled by the miraculous sight and the flaming glory of mighty Sakka, the terrified king immediately set free all the people and animals. After everyone was released the crowd turned to Khandahala and looked at him with angry eyes. They each grabbed a stone and hurled it at the wicked Brahmin mercilessly until his whole body was mutilated and fell into the pit that he had dug. He died in agony. His soul went straight to hell.

After having put the Brahmin to death, the crowd turned to the king and prepared to kill him too, but Prince Canda stopped them. The crowd spared the king's life but stripped him of his royal attire, chased him out of the city, and forced him to live in the colony of the outcasts. They forbade him to enter the city ever again.

All of the victims were released and a vast assembly gathered together and anointed Prince Canda to be their new king. Despite what his father had done to him, the new king Canda harbored no resentment and hatred toward his father. He made sure his father was well provided for and he tended to his every need.

All those who had helped in any way in the sacrifice, or approved of it, went to hell after they passed away.

Thence, a new and happy reign of prosperity and peace followed. Comfort and happiness filled every home.

Narada Jataka

PERFECTING THE VIRTUE OF EQUANIMITY

08



Throughout time, men have invented various belief systems and religious doctrines that did not coincide with Truth. These misguided beliefs, or false doctrines, often led a person to the wrong paths and caused him or her to fail in his or her spiritual development. To avoid these wrongful paths, one must know how to choose the right teachers and the right teachings. One grave danger while on the path of spiritual development is to expose oneself to fools. A fool is someone wicked, weak, or feeble in the moral sense. One cannot tell a fool by his or her looks. A fool can be well-educated and be from a good family. Education, intelligence, career success, or social position do not prevent a person from being bad.

A fool's mind is defective because of the 'wrong view' he or she assumes – the wrong view consists of the following misguided beliefs: that generosity is not virtuous and should not be practiced; it is unnecessary to honor people worthy of honor; it is unnecessary to show hospitality to others; good and bad actions have no consequences; children have no debt of gratitude toward their parents; there are no heaven or hell or afterlife; and that enlightened beings do not exist.

Equanimity is about the quality of mind that is stable and neutral, not affected by emotion or outside influences, positive or negative, desirable or non-desirable. In the development of equanimity it is helpful for one to be aware of the truth of nature, the Law of Kamma, and the impermanent nature of all things. This helps one to understand the reality of life and to be able to make sound judgments based on wisdom and not emotion.

This Jataka exhibits to us how a false doctrine can destroy one's life and affect the lives of others. It also teaches us to associate ourselves with the wise and avoid the fools.



King Angati

In the kingdom of Videha, there lived King Angati, who possessed great wealth and power and ruled his kingdom righteously. He worked hard for the welfare of his people and taught them how to live a virtuous life and to be generous. His kindness and generosity were well known throughout the land and he was admired by all his subjects.

Although the king possessed great wealth and power, he had only one child, Ruja, the daughter of his chief queen. Ruja was blessed, for not only was she born into a family of high standing, but she was as beautiful as a celestial being and as wise as a sage. It was no wonder that she was the king's greatest joy. Every day, the king sent her baskets of flowers and exquisite gifts. Every two weeks, he provided her with one thousand gold pieces to give alms on his behalf to the poor and the needy. This almsgiving won him the love of his people and also the admiration of his daughter.

One day, on the eve of the great festival of the full moon, King Angati stood with his three chief ministers on his palace terrace admiring the beauty of the city beneath him. As the moon rose up the sky, the entire city and its festive decorations gleamed with its magnificent rays, making it appear as beautiful and surreal as a heaven on earth. In his happy spirits the king said to his ministers, "Pleasant indeed is this clear and beautiful night, a night so perfect for festivity. How shall we best amuse ourselves on this festive eve?"

The first minister, Alata, the general in charge of the kingdom's warfare, suggested, "On an auspicious occasion like this, Your Majesty, let us gather a gallant army together and go forth in battle. Let us bring under your power those who have not yet been conquered."

The second, Sunama, the minister in charge of the king's diversions, said, "Today should be the day of festival, not war. Let us make this day a great day of festivity and entertainment. Let the people bring their best meats, drinks, and food, and let Your Majesty enjoy his pleasure in dance, song, and music."

The third minister, Vijaya, the chief court Brahmin, spoke up, "On a special night like this, we should do something to enrich our soul. It is more fulfilling to seek out a holy man learned in sacred lore, one who is wise in the ways of the world, who can remove our doubts and show us the path of liberation. Such is an appropriate activity for a king who practices the Ten Virtues of the Sovereign.²⁰"

Since King Angati had always enjoyed listening to ascetics, he agreed to Vijaya's suggestion. He said to the three, "This suggestion of Vijaya pleases me. Let us find a worthy teacher and go wait on him. Do you know of such a worthy one?"

Alata said right away, "Yes, Your Majesty, there is a famous ascetic in the deer park who is learned and wise. He has renounced the world and given up all forms of possessions. He is content with what little he has and sees no necessity in wearing any clothes. This ascetic who wears no clothes has a large following of disciples. His name is Guna, of the Kassapa family. Wait on him, O King; he will remove our doubts."

²⁰ **Ten Virtues of the Sovereign** consists of charity, morality, self-sacrifice, honesty, kindness, austerity, non-violence, forbearance, and righteousness.

Naked Ascetic

The king was curious.

“A naked ascetic?” he said amusingly, “This sounds like a good idea. Let us go then to seek out advice from him.” After having said this, he ordered his charioteer to prepare the royal carriage and to get his entourage ready to accompany him to the deer park. As he and his entourage approached the center of the forest, they saw a crowd surrounding a naked man with scruffy long hair and beard. Not wanting to disturb the gathering, the king came down from his chariot and greeted Guna Kassapa, the naked ascetic, on foot. After exchanging proper salutations and greetings, the king seated himself to one side and told Guna the purpose of his visit.

The king looked at Guna’s peculiar appearance: his body completely naked, his hair and beard unkempt, his skins looked dirty, and his body put out smelly odor. He could not help but ask the naked ascetic the reason for his lack of embarrassment.

“Honorable Kassapa, it is common practice that men should wear clothes, cut his hair, and shave his mustache and beard so that they look decent and acceptable in public. Why then do you and your disciples practice the opposite by appearing naked in public and letting your hair and beard grow long and untidy? What advantage can such practices bring you?”

The king’s questions did not annoy Guna. He had been asked these questions numerous times and had come up with perfect answers for them. In fact, he welcomed these questions, for it gave him the opportunity to extol the virtues of his practices in a way that had won the veneration of many followers.

He said to King Angati, “Dear King, I do not wear any clothes because I have discovered the truth that human beings are a part of nature, and, as such, should live naturally. When humans and animals are born, they are not born with any clothes on them. Animals are born with hair and fur, yet they do not cut off their hair or fur. They live the way nature wants them to live. All living beings come from nature and should live according to nature. Nature has a way of balancing everything. If we live naturally and use what nature has provided for us, we will see no need to put on clothes, cut our hair, or shave our beard. It serves no purpose to wear clothes and it is a wasteful way of living.”

On the surface, Guna’s explanation sounded logical but the king was not convinced. He argued, “Honorable Teacher, clothes may incur an expense but they protect us from the heat of the sun and from the cold. They conceal what should be concealed and they give beauty to the wearer.”

Guna responded, “Great king, you said that human beings must wear clothes to protect them from the heat of the sun and the cold and for concealing what should be concealed. Such belief comes from the lack of understanding about the way of nature. Nature has already provided us with hair to protect us from the heat of the sun and to keep us warm, just like it has done so for other animals. Every hair in our body has its own specific function. Brows prevent the sweat from the forehead to enter the eyes; eyelashes keep dirt from the eyes; and hair in our nose prevents dirt from entering our lungs. Beards keep the neck warm; hair on the head shields us from the sun. When hair is allowed to grow naturally, it keeps our body warm and it covers our private

parts. With all these benefits, why then should we cut our hair and wear clothes? Why should we complicate our lives and take us further away from nature?”

He added, “The desire for clothing makes people drift away from nature. The more distant we are from nature, the more difficult and complicated our lives will become. Clothing is a form of material possession which leads to craving, and craving leads to possessiveness and competition, which in turn leads to unrest and unhappiness.”

²¹ **Arahat:** a noble being who is enlightened.

²² **Right View:** View and wisdom in accordance with the Truths, consisting of the following beliefs: generosity is virtuous; it is necessary to honor those worthy of honor; it is good to be hospitable; actions produce consequences (Law of Kamma); a child has debt of gratitude to his parents; this world and the next exist; there will be afterlife and rebirths; there are heavenly and hell beings; monastics are able to purify themselves of all defilements (to become enlightened).

False Doctrines

The king listened to Guna’s peculiar concept, but he was not completely comfortable with it. Then he asked Guna questions regarding the right conduct towards others.

“How, Honorable Kassapa, should a mortal fulfill the law of right conduct toward his parents, how towards his teacher, and how towards his wife and children? How should he behave towards the aged, how towards holy men and Brahmins, how should he deal with his army, how with the people in the country? And most important, how should he practice the law and so eventually attain the path to heaven? And how do some on account of unrighteousness fall down into hell?”

These questions should have been asked to a true sage such as a Buddha or an Arahat²¹, ones who have attained insight and wisdom through a mind that is enlightened. Unfortunately, at that time and in that land there was no true sage to whom men could turn to for advice, and Guna, an ascetic blind to the truth of life and of nature, had gained a reputation for wisdom in spite of his ignorance. It was the case of a blind leading other blind. This was unfortunate for the king, for he was about to be influenced by a misguided mind that swayed him away from the Right View²².

Guna did not know the true answers to the king’s questions, but he acted as if he was the authority on the subject. He spoke with a clear and confident voice as he described his misguided views:

“O King, there is no right or wrong way to behave. Merit and demerit do not exist. Heaven and hell do not exist. There is no afterlife. There is no such thing as rebirth. There is only destiny. Every living being is born out of destiny and no one can change it.

Grandparents and parents have no special virtues; teachers have no special virtues; holy men and Brahmins have no special virtues. All humans and animals are born equal. Paying reverence to the worthy brings no consequence.

There is no benefit in giving alms, in observing the precepts, and in practicing kindness and generosity. Whatever you do, whether it be virtuous or evil, has no effect on your future. Whether you kill a man, or help the poor, or give alms, is inconsequential, for there is no merit or demerit in whatever you do.

Animals must hunt for food and have to kill other animals in order to survive. If they had the same belief as humans, that taking a life is an evil act, they would all starve to death.

A butcher slaughters animals everyday of his life. He kills by the hundreds, by the thousands, but look at him, he only grows richer and richer. He can eat any meat he wants and buy anything he desires. His every wish is fulfilled. If evil deeds have consequences, then these butchers should have suffered terribly, but instead, they prosper.



On the contrary, the do-gooders, those who are kind at heart, those who refuse to kill or hurt animals, those who are generous and give alms, those who help others, find themselves hungry and deprived of the good things in life. This further proves that merit and demerit do not exist, and actions, good or bad, have no consequences.

Everything happens according to nature. Some animals eat only grass; some eat only meat. They do it instinctively and do not have to be taught to do so. This is the way of nature and nature maintains its own balance.”

And he continued:

“Heaven and hell do not exist; they only exist in one’s imagination. There is no other world than this one. Suffering in this world is hell and happiness in this world is heaven. So follow your own will and seek your own pleasure. Do things that please you and do not do things that displease you. Do not worry about consequences; for there are no consequences for your future. Fortunate and unfortunate things happen on their own; we do not cause them to happen and we cannot influence the outcomes.

All beings are predestined. Every mortal gets what he is going to get, what then is the use of giving? Almsgiving is a waste of money. It is the practice of foolish people. Foolish people believe in giving, but clever people believe in receiving. Almsgiving causes people to be lazy and poor. It encourages receivers to not have to work for a living. How then can almsgiving be considered a good thing?

Some people believe in keeping moral precepts and fasting at certain times of the day. Refraining from taking certain meals at a certain time or day is totally fruitless and is against nature. The practice of controlling one’s thought, action and speech, and not to allow them to behave badly is impractical. Why fight against things that come to us naturally?”

Guna’s eccentric views fascinated the king. They were contrary to what he used to be taught by his father, but their logic seemed to make sense to him. Little by little, the king’s way of thinking began to sway toward Guna’s theory of beliefs.

Having thus described the uselessness of giving, Guna went on to describe the inconsequence of action:

“Actions, virtuous or evil, produce no karmic effect. As you can see for yourself, some people live a good life surrounded by wealth and riches even though throughout their lives they have done nothing but evil; while others who have done nothing but good throughout their lives find themselves in hardship and misery. If good actions produce good consequences and bad actions produce negative retributions, why then do evil doers go unpunished and good people go unrewarded? The truth is there is no law of cause and consequence, no Law of Kamma. Everything happens on its own. There is nothing we can do to change it.”

Alata, the general, listened to Guna attentively. He had no difficulty agreeing with everything Guna said. In fact, he proceeded

to reinforce Guna’s views by stating his own personal experience as testimony in support of Guna’s theory. He said, “Honorable Kassapa, what you said is quite true. I happen to be one who is able to recall a past existence in which I was a huntsman named Pingala. I committed a countless number of sins by killing all kinds of living creatures. Passing from that birth, I was born into the prosperous family of a general. Today, I live a healthy and wealthy life, holding an important position for my king. I did not have to go to hell. This is living proof that there are no evil consequences for doing bad actions.”

As Alata finished speaking, someone in the crowd wept loudly. It was a slave clothed in rags who had come to listen to Guna. When he heard Guna’s dissertation and Alata’s affirmation, he sighed sadly and burst into tears. King Angati asked him, “Dear friend, what had made you so upset?”

The man replied, “O King, my name is Bijaka; I too remember my former birth. I was one Bhavatthi in the city of Saketa, devoted to virtue, given to alms, and conducted my life in the most virtuous way. I remember no single evil deed that I committed. But when I passed from that life, I was conceived in the womb of a poor prostitute, and was born to a miserable life of a slave as you see here. But as miserable as I am I keep my tranquil mind, and I give half of my food to whosoever desires it. I uphold moral precepts, fast every fourteenth and fifteenth day, never hurt living creatures, and I abstain from theft. But all the good deeds which I do produce no fruit. As I heard honorable Kassapa’s words and General Alata’s

comment, I began to realize that virtue is indeed useless. I see no door by which I may go to heaven. It is for this that my heart is tormented and I could not hold my grief.”Having heard the slave’s words, King Angati said, “Indeed, there is no door to heaven; only destiny. I devote my life to virtue and the welfare of my people. I teach my subjects to do good, to avoid bad, and to give alms. I attend to my business diligently, administering the laws and fulfilling my Ten Royal Virtues of the Sovereign, but I myself have found no enjoyment.”

He turned to Kassapa and said, “Honorable Kassapa, all this time I have been uninformed of the truth, but now at last I have found a teacher. From now on I will follow your teaching. I will take my delight only in pleasure. I will no longer give importance to virtue and will pay no more attention to the laws of righteousness. Please stop your teaching now. There is no reason for me to continue listening, as there is no merit or consequence in so doing. As you have taught, I should do only things that I find pleasure in. In this same regard, there is no reason for me to see you again.”

When the king first visited Guna he gave him proper salutations and greetings, but when he departed he left without any salutation, and left him no alms or gifts. In the king’s mind now, he saw these good behaviors to be no longer of any consequence.

From Now On I Will Pursue Only Pleasure

The next day the king said to his ministers, “Henceforth, I will pursue only pleasure. No other business, public or private, is to be mentioned before me. Let the three of you carry on the day-to-day administration of my affair.” And he indulged himself only in activities that brought him pleasure.

From then on, he resolved to make no further efforts to do good. He relinquished all cares and unpleasant kingly duties to his ministers. He no longer made decisions. Since nothing he did was to have any consequence, he would have no more to do with the business of life. And he stopped giving alms.

A month passed and his subjects lamented the loss of their king’s interest in them. Ruja wept for her father, for she heard the mourning of his unhappy people and saw him harden his heart and close his ears to reason.

On the next festival of the full moon, Ruja dressed herself in her finest garments and entered her father’s court. Despite the change of the king’s outlook on life, he continued to show great love and care for his daughter. He asked her how she was enjoying life and whether there was anything that she needed. Ruja told her father that everything was going well for her, but reminded him that the following day was the sacred fifteenth day, the day to give alms.

“Father,” she said, “tomorrow is the sacred fifteenth day, our traditional day of almsgiving. Could you kindly tell your courtiers to bring the thousand pieces of gold to be used for almsgiving as has been your custom?”

Her father replied indifferently, “Alms? Give away our gold? I no longer have the desire to carry on such a foolish custom. Much wealth has already been wasted without bearing any fruit. My child, there is no such thing as merit or benefit from giving. We are governed by destiny; nothing we do can change our predetermined fate. I have no reason to waste any more of my wealth on something that creates no consequence.”

“Also, my dear child, your practice of fasting is another useless devotion. It is unhealthy not to eat. Why allow yourself to be hungry. There is no merit to gain from fasting. You should discontinue this silly practice as well.”

Ruja realized that her father had truly strayed from the holy precepts. She tried to reason with him, “Dear father, I have heard that he who listens to fools himself becomes a fool; he who surrounds himself with children acts like a child. If one wishes to be wise one must associate with the wise. Associating with fools is like wrapping a leaf around a rotten fish; the fresh leaf will end up smelling like a rotten fish. Associating with the wise is like wrapping a leaf around a fragrant flower; the leaf will smell sweet and pleasant. Guna, the naked ascetic, is but a fool; an ignorant who misconceived the Truth and preaches false doctrines. Associating with such fools will only close the door of heaven for you.”

The king responded, “It was not only the words of Guna that changed my way of thinking, but Alata, the general, and Bijaka, the slave, both bore testimony to the truth of Guna’s teaching. Both of them were able to recall their past existences. In his former existence,

Alata was a cruel man who killed animals all his life and committed all kinds of sins, yet he was born into prosperity and holds a vital role in my kingdom. As for Bijaka, in his former life, he did nothing but good, yet he was born into the womb of a prostitute and lives in total misery. This proves that there is no such thing as the Law of Kamma. Alata and Bijaka are the living proof that actions, good or bad, bear no consequence.”

Ruja explained to her father, “The Law of Kamma is a complex phenomenon. It is not something that can be easily understood. Only those with proper knowledge and understanding can fully grasp the significance of the Law. Every action, good or bad, has an effect, but the effect of that action may not bear fruit immediately. Some actions bear fruit in the same lifetime that it is committed; some in the following lifetime; but some in a distant future lifetime. Each living being has gone through countless cycles of rebirth. Unless one has the ability to recall many past rebirths, one may not fully comprehend the reason of one’s present life condition.”

She continued, “In the case of your prosperous General Alata, the reason he is doing well in this lifetime in spite of his misconduct in the former life is because he is reaping the fruit of merit from good deeds performed by him in other past lifetimes. But merit can be used up and Alata will find himself in an unfortunate afterlife if he continues to live recklessly like he does now. One must always accumulate new merits to replenish the old merits that have run out.

“As for Bijaka, the slave who ranted to you of his sufferings, it is due to the retribution from grave misdeeds committed by him in his distant past, which is now taking effect. The good deeds he performed in his recent former life did not yet have a chance to bear fruit. After he has paid for his former sins his misery will end, and the good he is doing now along with the good he had done in his recent former life will bring him the reward of heaven.

Unfortunately, both Alata and Bijaka were able to recount only one former birth. They failed to see what they had done in other past lifetimes. So, with their limited insight, they jumped to the conclusion that their actions in the past had no bearing in the present.”

Ruja's Past Lives

Then Ruja went on to relate her own experience:

“I myself have the ability to recall several of my past lifetimes. Seven lifetimes ago, I was born as a blacksmith's son who, by associating with wicked friends, used to indulge in drinking and corrupting other men's wives. As a result, I passed from that life into hell and I endured the torment in hell for a great length of time. It grieves me every time I think of it.

After getting out of hell I was born as a donkey. I was castrated by my owner and put to work as a beast of burden and I suffered abuse from the owner and his sons throughout my life. This was the fated consequences of my going after other men's wives.

After that, I was born in the womb of a monkey in a forest; on the day of my birth, the leader of the herd violently seized my testicles with his teeth and bit them off. The pain was so excruciating that I almost died on the spot. This was the fated consequence of my going after other men's wives.

Next, I was born as an ox and was castrated by my owner because he wanted me only to work and not to be distracted by other cows. I drew carriages for a long time and endured immense hardships. This was the fated consequence of my going after other men's wives.

When I passed from that birth, my karmic retribution had been reduced and I no longer was born as an animal. I was born as a male person in the family of a rich man. But my manhood was not complete; my body was that of a man but my temperament was that of a woman. I grew up suffering insults and abuse from everyone for being a half-man half-woman. As such, my life was miserable. This

was the fated consequence of my going after other men's wives. As you can see, dear Father, a wrongdoing committed in one lifetime can bear bad consequences for many lifetimes. I committed such grave sins because I chose to associate with fools and not with the wise.

Father, in the lifetime where I was born human I began to do good deeds and accumulate merits. After that, the fruit of my merit began to take effect and I was born in the Tavatimsa heaven as a female celestial being in the court of King Sakka. It was during my celestial state of being that I was able to recall seven of my past lives and seven of my future lives.

After passing from Tavatimsa Heaven, I was born as your daughter here in this lifetime. These sixteen years of my present life are but one short moment in heaven. A hundred years in the human world is equal to only one single day in Tavatimsa Heaven. Life in this world is very short, but life in the afterworld is long. Because of this, we must take every opportunity we can to accumulate as much merit while we are still alive in this world. Merit and demerit are the only things we can take with us after we leave this world.”

She made a plea to her father, “Father, seek out the wise and avoid the fools. Please do not follow the false doctrines of the misguided ascetic, one who lacks decency of his own body as well as mind. He is a fool who will lead you to misfortune. Please listen to what I said, for it contains the truth.”

The king listened to his daughter patiently, but nothing she said seemed to have an effect on him. Though the king still loved his daughter, he was unmoved by her arguments.



Ruja did not give up. She went on to tell her father of the reality of life:

“Father, the Law of Kamma does exist and is real. All beings are subject to this Law. All beings have Kamma of their own. They are heirs to their Kamma. They are born of their Kamma. Kamma makes them the way they are, fortunate or unfortunate. Every action, good or bad, produces a result. A person is directly responsible for his or her own deeds. The consequences of our deeds can never be avoided. It stays with us and follows us like shadows, waiting for the right time to take effect.

Father, the fortune or misfortune of a person is the direct result of the deeds the person has done. Everything that you possess now is the result of merits from the good deeds you have accumulated in the past. It is wise that you continue to perform good deeds and accumulate more merits.”

The king responded, “My daughter, there are no such things as the Law of Kamma, merit and demerit, heaven and hell. As you can see for yourself, many evil doers find themselves living a good life surrounded by wealth and riches, while many virtuous people find themselves in hardship and misery. If good actions produce good consequences and bad actions produce negative retributions, why then are evil doers not punished and good doers rewarded? The truth is, there is no Law of Kamma. Everything happens on its own. There is nothing we can do to change it.”

Ruja was disappointed at her father’s stubborn view, but she did not lose hope. She resolved that by some means or another she would save her father from the false view and restore him to his former virtuous self. She realized her rationality alone would not be enough to change her father’s mind. She thought, by the virtue of her father’s goodness, there must be some higher power out there that could come to his rescue. With this thought, she stepped to one side of the court, knelt down, and with her hands held together above her head, made reverences in ten directions to the highest deities, begging them to give some sign which would awaken her father from his delusions.

Narada, the Great Brahma

In that era the Bodhisatta was born as a Great Brahma named Narada. From time to time, the Great Brahmās in their compassion cast their eyes over the world to watch over the righteous. Narada was looking over the world that day, he saw the princess praying for her father. He thought to himself, “There is none other than I who can drive away false doctrines. I must come and show kindness to the princess and bring happiness to the king and his people. I shall go to the king in some unusual garb, so that at first my appearance and then my words will arrest his attention. King Angati values ascetics. I will dress like the most striking one of them and when he sees me, he will listen well.”

So he assumed a pleasing human form with the complexion of gold and put on the garb of a yogi in a red-mottled garment with a black antelope skin over one shoulder. He carried a golden pole on his shoulders from which hung two golden begging bowls suspended by strings of pearls. His hair was matted as is the custom of ascetics, but with a golden needle tucked inside. Then he sped through the sky and stood suspended in the air before the king and his court.

Ruja, who had returned to the king’s side, saw the yogi appearing in this miraculous way and perceived right away that this was the Brahma. She was overjoyed knowing that her prayers had come true. She bowed down to pay reverence to the yogi. But the king, alarmed by this miraculous presence, came down from his throne and cried, “Who are you? Why do you come to my court in this fashion? What gives you the power to do miracles and to fly?”

Narada answered: “They know me as Narada. I am the Great Brahma from the Brahma heavens. I come here for your benefit, to open your eyes, to deliver you from false doctrines and to enlighten you with the Truth. Loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic-joy and equanimity are my virtues. I followed these virtues diligently while I was a human and I practiced truthfulness, morality, self-control, and generosity. These virtues enabled me to become a Brahma, the highest celestial being. I have the power to go wherever I want and to be as swift as my thought.”

The king remarked, “You claimed that the virtue of good deeds gives you this power. Tell me, are there really heaven and hell?”

Narada answered: “There are indeed heaven and hell. But men blinded by greed, hatred and delusion, fail to see them. Just like a blind man who cannot see the sun and says there is no sun, a man blinded by defilements cannot see life after death and he says there is no heaven, there is no hell, and there is no afterlife.”

The king laughed when he heard this. He spoke sarcastically, “If you really believe there are heaven and hell, then lend me five hundred pieces of money and I will give you a thousand in the next world.”

Narada warned him: “If you were a virtuous man, I would gladly lend you the money, for it is not hard to collect a debt from a man in heaven. But men like you, denying the precepts and following false doctrines, are bound for hell. If you know how bad hell is, you will see that no one would dare will see that no



one would dare collect a debt from a man in such a place. There is not just one hell, but a thousand hells. Animals of all sizes will chew on your skin and bite at your bones. Flocks of ravens, crows, and vultures will prey upon you. Dogs with iron teeth will tear at your insides. Hot winds, razor-edged mountains, burning coals, and sword-leafed trees will torture you.”

Then the Bodhisatta went on to elaborate the details of each hell, the misdeeds that a person had done that made him or her belong there, and the horrific punishments that each hell imposed upon the sinners. He then exhibited the hells and punishments that King Angati himself would have to go through and endure if he did not give up his bad practice. Imagining himself going through these hells and suffering indescribable agonies, the king trembled with fear. Finally, he came around and asked the Bodhisatta for forgiveness and advice.

“I am tormented with terror, trembling like a fallen tree. I am confused in my mind, knowing not which way to turn. You are my lamp in the darkness and my refuge. O Sage, teach me the sacred text and its meaning; teach me the path of purity so that I may not fall into hell.”

Narada, the Bodhisatta, gave him the following advice:

“Follow the good examples of your ancestors. Be generous, be moral and be wise. Observe moral precepts. Avoid killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication. Be righteous. Provide for the poor, the hungry, the aged, and the monastics.

Cultivate your mind. Let a wholesome mind guide your thoughts, your actions and your speech. Be humble, be gentle, and have self restraint. Stay away from fools. Associate with the wise.

Do these, and heaven will be yours.”

Then he added: “Your daughter Ruja is wise and virtuous. She is your most true and virtuous friend. You should listen to her and clean your mind of false doctrines. It is dangerous to associate with fools, for associating with fools turns you into a fool.”

King Angati thanked the Bodhisatta gratefully and vowed to follow his advice. The king and Ruja knelt down to pay homage to the Bodhisatta before he departed back to the Brahma World in a flash of light.

From then on, King Angati ruled his kingdom dutifully and righteously as he had done before. He resumed his almsgiving and practice of moral precepts. Ruja was very happy with her father and the population of Vedeha regained their good king. After death, King Angati was reborn in a celestial realm.

Vidhura Jataka

PERFECTING THE VIRTUE OF TRUTHFULNESS

09



Vidhura Jataka is the story of the Bodhisatta who valued truthfulness above his own life. Truthfulness is synonymous with honesty, integrity, sincerity, forthrightness, straightforwardness, trustworthiness and reliability. It is one of the ten virtues that must be perfected before an aspirant can become a Buddha.

This Jataka contains valuable insight to help a person to become a good householder, live a righteous life, and be successful in one's career.

Although the teachings in this Jataka are more than two thousand five hundred years old, the principles are still practical and applicable in modern times. It is said that a sound principle should be able to stand the test of time. The teachings in this Jataka certainly do fall in this category.

Rebirths of Four Young Men

Once there were four wealthy Brahmins in the city of Benares. These Brahmins had been friends since they were young. As old age came upon them, they began to realize that nothing was permanent and whatever wealth they possessed would no longer be theirs after they passed away. With this realization they decided to give all their wealth to their sons and went into the forest of Himavanta to spend their old age in peace and tranquility. They adopted the holy life of yogis and sustained themselves with fruits and the roots of plants from the forest. As time went on, all of them achieved high meditative attainments and perfected their faculties.

One day, the four yogis felt an urge to eat some flavorful dishes that they had not had in a very long time. So they went to the city of Kalacampa, in the kingdom of Anga, for alms-receiving.

In the city of Kalacampa there dwelled four rich young men who had been good friends since childhood. When they saw the yogis, they were struck by their sense of calm. The young men invited the yogis to their respective homes and fed them their best food. The presence of the yogis made the young men feel fulfilled spiritually.

After having spent some time in the young men's gardens, the yogis thought of diverting themselves to otherworldly realms to continue their meditations. One yogi chose to visit the Tavatimsa Heaven, another the realm of the nagas, another the realm of the garudas, and another the city of Indapatta in the kingdom of Kuru. By means of their supernatural powers, each yogi traversed to each different realm they had chosen. They witnessed the incredible beauty and glamour of these realms and upon their return, they told the four young men of their amazing journeys and the magnificent wealth of the realms they had visited.

The first yogi spoke of the magnificently beautiful celestial realm of Tavatimsa and the glorious palace of Sakka, its ruler. The second spoke of the undersea kingdom of the nagas gleaming with all kinds of precious jewels and treasures. The third spoke of the fantastic wealth and beauty of the kingdom of the powerful garudas. The fourth described the beautiful, rich city of Indapatta where its human king possessed every kind of material wealth that existed.

The accounts of the yogis' fascinating journeys captivated the four young men's imagination and greatly inspired them to wish to go there. They realized that, only through the power of merit generated through acts of good deeds, could they have a chance for their wishes to be fulfilled. Hence, they dedicated themselves to practicing moral precepts and giving alms. Every time they performed good deeds, they made resolute wishes to be reborn as a ruler in each of the realms that they have chosen.

On the account of their great merits and the resolutions that they had made, at the end of their lives, each man was reborn in his desired realm. One was born as Sakka, ruler of Tavatimsa Heaven; another as Varuna, king of the nagas; another as Supanna, king of the garudas; and another as Dhananjaya, king of Indapatta in the kingdom of Kuru. As for the four yogis, the virtues from their renunciations and the mental cultivation that they had developed had led them to be reborn in the Brahma world.

Dhananjaya was a king of good moral character. He ruled his kingdom righteously and was loved by all his subjects. The king was fortunate, for he had a wise and trustworthy sage who advised him in all matters temporal and spiritual. The name of this sage was Vidhura-pandita²³. Vidhura was no ordinary man of wisdom, for he

was a Bodhisatta. Among his many good virtues, he was dedicated to speaking the truth and did so in such a way that men would become spellbound by his voice and his words. Vidhura's wisdom and eloquence charmed all the kings of Jambudvipa, who came from all directions to listen to his teachings and moral discourses. They were enthralled by his voice and his wisdom that they wanted to remain in Indapatta and did not want to return to their kingdoms. King Dhananjaya treasured Vidhura so much that he had him protected day and night so that other kings could not steal him away.

²³ **pandita**: sage; the wise; one full of wisdom; a well-learned person age; the wise; one full of wisdom; a well-learned person



Whose Virtue is Most Superior?

On one holy day, King Dhananjaya went to his royal park to seek a quiet place to observe the holy precepts and calm his mind through meditation. At that same moment, Sakka, king of Tavatimsa; Varuna, king of the nagas; and Supanna, king of the garudas, all left their respective realms to seek a peaceful place in the world of men in order to meditate and observe moral precepts. Although they did not know it, they all chose to go to the royal park of King Dhananjaya, their old friend from their previous existence, and they found a peaceful spot there to meditate. As evening came, they rose from their places and came to stand on the bank of the royal lake, where they discovered one another. Pleasantly surprised and filled with their old kindly affection, they rekindled their former friendships and greeted each other with great joy.

King Sakka said to the other three, “All four of us have come here to observe the holy precepts, but have you wondered whose moral conduct is the most exemplary?”

Varuna, the naga king, spoke first, “I believe my moral conduct is the most exemplary because I am able to hold no hatred or enmity against my enemy. This Supanna, king of the garudas, is the arch enemy of the nagas, yet even when I see him, such a destructive enemy of our race, I never feel any anger.” Then he went on to say, “The good man who feels no anger towards one who deserves it, and who never lets anger arise within him or allows it to be seen, his moral conduct is indeed exemplary. Because of this, my virtue is superior.”

Supanna, the garuda king, spoke next, “This naga, Varuna, is my principle food. But even though I see such delectable food at hand, I endure my appetite and do not commit evil for the sake of food.

My ability to bear my hunger and commit no evil for the sake of food earns me an exemplary moral conduct. Because of this, my virtue is superior.”

Sakka expressed himself next, “In my kingdom of Tavatimsa, I am surrounded by incomparably beautiful celestial beings and all kinds of heavenly pleasure; yet, I have left them behind and came to the world of mankind to observe the holy precepts. Because of this, my virtue is superior.”

King Dhananjaya then said, “I have torn myself away from my worldly possessions and sensual pleasures in order to observe the holy precepts alone in this park. I have come to realize that material wealth is the cause of worry and unhappiness. I left it all for the sake of solitude. He who is self-restrained, resolute, unselfish, and free from desire, is indeed exemplary in moral conduct. His virtue is superior.”

Thus they each declared their own virtue as superior and could not come to any accord. Then the three celestial kings asked Dhananjaya, “Good fellow, in your esteemed kingdom, is there a wise and just sage who can resolve this doubt for us?”

“Indeed there is such a sage here,” King Dhananjaya answered proudly. “His name is Vidhura-pandita. He fills a post of unequalled responsibility in my kingdom and declares civil and moral law. He is well respected by all the kings in the entire continent of Jambudvipa. He is one who can solve our doubt.”

“Well then, let’s go to see this sage,” said the other three.

The Incomparable Sage

So they left the park and went to the Hall of Truth in King Dhananjaya's court, a meeting place where secular and spiritual matters were discussed. They invited Vidhura to sit on a high seat, and after exchanging words of greeting, the four kings presented the Bodhisatta with this query: "Honorable Sage, the four of us had a discussion about moral conduct and debated among us as to whose conduct was the most exemplary. We would like you to help clear our doubts."

The sage asked them to give him the detail of their discussion and their debates. After hearing them, he said:

"All of your viewpoints are well-founded. These sayings are well spoken.

Restraining one's anger, abstention from killing, abstention from sensual pleasures, and renouncing the world in favor of spiritual development, all are equally worthy.

Each virtue is as important as the next. They are like the spokes of the hub. He who is endowed with all the four virtues is indeed noble."

Well pleased with what they heard, the four kings remarked, "You are wise indeed. Your wisdom is incomparable. You cut away our doubts as smoothly as a skilled craftsman cut away the ivory with his saw."

Each of the kings rewarded the sage to show their appreciation. Sakka gave him a robe of heavenly silk, the garuda king with a garland of gold, the naga king with the precious jewel that he wore on his neck, and King Dhananjaya with a thousand cows, a noble bull, and tributes from sixteen villages.

Then Sakka and the rest, after having paid due honor to the sage, departed to their own kingdoms.



Get Me Vidhura’s Heart

Varuna, the naga king returned to his undersea kingdom. His naga queen, Vimala, noticed the precious jewel missing from his neck and asked him what happened to it. Varuna replied, “I was pleased at hearing the enlightening discourse of Vidhura-pandita, the sage of Indapatta, so I presented the jewel to him as token of my appreciation. Not only was I the only one who did this, King Sakka, King Supanna, and King Dhananjaya all did the same.”

“He is, I suppose, eloquent in the law,” said Queen Vimala.

“Lady, that is an understatement. It is as if a Buddha had appeared in Jambudvipa! A hundred and one kings in Jambudvipa who heard him speak were all captivated by his enchanting voice and his brilliance and they did not want to return to their own kingdoms. They remain like wild elephants mesmerized by the sound of a celestial lute.”

When Queen Vimala heard the alluring description of Vidhura’s preeminence she longed to hear his voice. As a female, it would have been unbecoming for her to ask her husband to bring Vidhura to her. She thought up an idea: “I will pretend to be ill and complain of a sick woman’s longing.” With that idea, she lay in bed and told her attendants to tend to her as if she was gravely ill. When Varuna failed to see her for days, he asked the attendants where the queen was. They told him that she was sick and bed-stricken. With great concern, he went to see her and asked her, “Dear wife, what made you ill? Is there anything I can do to make you feel better?”

Answered the queen, “My lord, in the human realm, it’s normal for an expectant mother to crave a certain food. I too am suffering from a certain craving.”

“What is it that you crave? I will bring it to you,” said Varuna.

“My lord, I wish to have a taste of Vidhura’s heart. Please fetch it for me and please make sure that the sage is not bruised in any way. As soon as I can have a taste of his heart, I will be able to recover quite quickly. Otherwise, I’m afraid I won’t be able to be with you much longer.”

Queen Vimala’s request startled Varuna. He misinterpreted her request thinking that she wanted the flesh of Vidhura’s heart although that was not what she meant. He said to her in a dejected manner, “My love, your craving for Vidhura’s heart is like the craving for the sun or the moon. It is not possible to fulfill. Vidhura is cherished by all the kings of Jambudvipa and he is well guarded. There is no way to get close to him. It will not be possible to bring him here.”

Queen Vimala said disappointedly, “Since my craving cannot be satisfied, I might as well say my farewell to you now.” She pretended to become sicker and turned her back to him. She pulled the cover over her face and lay very still. Although Varuna wished to save the life of his queen, he was distraught at the thought of causing harm to the noble sage. Who would have the mind and heart to carry out such a low deed? His face became old and withered.

The next morning, Princess Irandati, Varuna’s beautiful daughter, went to pay respect to her father in his bed chamber. She noticed her father was looking sad and pale.

She asked him, “What is troubling you, father? You look so worried and pale, like a lotus mauled by a human hand.”

To which he answered, “It is your mother, my child. She has suddenly fallen ill and her condition is quickly deteriorating. She craves for Vidhura’s heart and would die unless her craving is satisfied. There is no one in my court who can bring Vidhura here. There is no way to save her.”

Then he said, “My daughter, there is one hope, if you are willing to do one thing to save your mother’s life. Go outside the naga realm and look for a husband, someone with a supernatural power who could wrest the heart from Vidhura.”

It was not characteristic of Varuna, who was righteous by nature, to be making such an unethical request of his daughter, but the concern for his wife’s life had clouded his sense of decency. Princess Irandati, being an obedient child, obeyed her father’s request without questioning. She adorned herself with a sumptuous dress and went forth in the night to Mount Kalagiri near Himavanta, a place where deities and supernatural beings dwelled, and looked for a husband. She gathered fragrant flowers of all colors and made a bed with the most beautiful ones. Then she began a

seductive dance and sang a song with an inviting tone: “What deity or human, what demon or sage, what naga or yakkha, that is able to make all wishes come true, will marry me this very night?” Her passionate voice echoed throughout the atmosphere and was heard by all the divine beings.



Punnaka the Yakkha

At that time there was a high-ranking yakkha, named Punnaka, riding on his magic horse over the red arsenic surface of the Black Mountain to a gathering of the yakkhas, and he heard Irandati’s love call. Irandati’s voice pierced his skin and nerves and penetrated his every bone; he fell in love with her immediately. Irandati’s love call had such a strong and immediate impact on Punnaka because, in several of his previous lifetimes, he and Irandati used to be husband and wife. Their love relationship in the past was a powerful force that pulled Punnaka to her. Punnaka stopped short, listened to her voice, and changed his direction towards her immediately. When the two met, they were completely enamored with each other and fell in love, and they agreed to become husband and wife. But, for them to join in matrimony, Irandati told the yakkha that she had to gain her father’s permission. So, together, they rode to her father’s palace to ask for his blessing. When King Varuna saw Punnaka he approved of him, but declared that he would only give his daughter to him on one condition, that Punnaka first obtain the flesh of the heart of Vidhura and bring it to his queen.

Pleased at the chance to prove his extraordinary powers, Punnaka readily accepted the challenge. He ordered his servant to bring his horse and decorated it with gold and jewels from ear to hoof. He trimmed his hair and beard, dressed in his most extravagant attire, and rode off into the sky to Indapatta where Vidhura dwelled.

As he went through the air he pondered, “Vidhura is well protected; he cannot be taken by force. I must come up with a clever way to capture him. King Dhananjaya is renowned for his skill in dice and loves to gamble. I will challenge him in a game of dice and win the

game using my supernatural powers. But the king will surely not play for any common bet; I will have to bring something of great value to entice him. Now, there is one legendary gem belonging to the Universal Monarch²⁴ known for its magical power. This gem is located on the Vepulla Mountain and is guarded by yakkhas of lesser ranks. I will wrestle it from these yakkhas and use it to entice the king to a game.”

So Punnaka went to Mount Vepulla searching for the legendary gem. Through his supernatural vision, he saw a mysterious light radiating through a crevice on top of the mountain. He went to it, but was stopped by a group of young yakkhas who were guarding the gem. Punnaka overpowered these young yakkhas and caused them to flee. He seized the gem, then mounted his noble steed and rushed through the sky to Indapatta.

²⁴ **Universal Monarch:** Monarch of the four great continents, of which Jambudvipa is one

Play Me a Game of Dice

Punnaka, disguised as a young man, entered the gate of King Dhananjaya's court. There, he was stopped by the guards who asked him to explain the purpose of his visit. He told them he had heard of King Dhananjaya's reputation with his skills in dice and had travelled a long way to challenge the king to play a game of dice with him. The guards informed the king of this young man who dared to challenge him. The king was curious and went out to meet Punnaka.

Punnaka saluted the king and said, "Mighty king, your reputation for mastery of dice is known throughout the land and no one in the whole of Jambudvipa has been able to beat you. Accept a game of dice with me. If you win, this wondrous horse of mine and this magic gem will be yours."

The king said, "For what good reason do you think I should be interested in this ordinary-looking horse and this ordinary-looking gem of yours?"

"O, King, this is no ordinary horse and this is no ordinary gem," said Punnaka. "They are the most wondrous possessions in the world. Let me exhibit to you their extraordinary features."

Punnaka proceeded to demonstrate the supernatural power of his horse. It walked on water without getting its hooves wet, trotted on lotus leaves without damaging the leaves, flew through the air, stood on the palm of his hand, and other incredible feats. Then he commanded the magic gem to perform miracles, showing inside it images of the various realms of heavens, nagas, garudas, and their respective cities and treasures. Then he

commanded it to create various living creatures, the sun, the moon, and the constellations. He told the king that the gem had the power to attract wealth and other auspicious things to its owner.

The king was so dazzled by Punnaka's magic possessions that he enthusiastically accepted the game. He thought to himself, "I am the best dice player in all of Jambudvipa. I have yet to lose to anyone and I will not lose today." He said to the young Punnaka, "I will take your bet. If I win I will own your magic horse and your magic gem."

"What if you lose?" asked Punnaka.

"If I lose, you can take everything I own except myself, my queen and my throne," the king replied.

Punnaka accepted the bet. The king gave orders to his ministers to get the hall ready for the match. A platform was set up in the middle of the hall and a game table and two well-appointed chairs were placed upon it. Seats surrounded them prepared for the hundred and one kings and senior courtiers. Then the king entered the hall with Punnaka followed by the hundred and one kings and the courtiers. After everyone had been seated, the official placed the golden dice on the silver board and signaled for the game to begin. Punnaka asked the hundred and one kings to witness the outcome of the game and hold the players to it. The king and the others agreed to the arrangement.



King Dhananjaya had a guardian angel, who used to be his mother in a previous existence. This angel watched over the king and made sure that he always won in his dice games. This was the reason why the king had never lost.

Punnaka let the king be the first to throw the dice. For the first two throws the king sensed that the dice was not going to fall in his favor and he caught them in mid air before they touched the board. Punnaka noticed something strange was happening that the king was able to foretell the outcome of the dice. So he looked around the hall with his supernatural eyes and he saw a female angel floating behind the king watching over his game. He made a threatening gaze at her and scared her away.

With the guardian angel gone, the king could no longer control his luck. On the third throw, his dice fell against him. Punnaka, on the other hand, was a high-ranking yakkha who possessed supernatural powers. He used his powers to control the dice in his favor and made the king lose his game. After the game was over, Punnaka declared, “I won, I won, I won!”

The king was agitated at his loss but had to accept his defeat in front of the hundred and one kings who witnessed it. He said to Punnaka in an unhappy tone of voice, “Take my elephants, horses, oxen, and my jewels as your prize and leave.”

“Elephants, horses, oxen and jewels?” Punnaka smiled cunningly, “These are not what I am after. There is one prize which is the best of them all. This prize is your good sage, Vidhura-pandita. I have

won this prize. Give him to me.”

The king replied: “This is not possible. Vidhura is a part of me. He is my life, my shadow and my refuge, and as such he is myself. As I said from the beginning, if I lose you can take everything I own except myself, my queen and my throne. Vidhura is a part of me; not a part of my possessions. You cannot have him.”

Punnaka said to the king, “I see that we are having a difference of opinion, and I do not see that we can come to this accord easily. Instead of engaging in a dispute between us which could be lengthy, let us go to Vidhura-pandita and ask him to decide this matter for us.” The king went along with Punnaka thinking that the sage would take his side instead of the stranger’s. They left the game hall and went to the Hall of Truth, followed by the hundred and one kings and the courtiers. The king sent for Vidhura and invited him to sit on a high seat.

After having paid due respect to Vidhura, Punnaka said to him, “Dear Sage, you are a just man, one who values truthfulness above your own life. This fact is known throughout the land. I will find out today whether this fact is true or not. The king and I have a different opinion about whether he has the right to give you away as a gambling debt. I ask you to clarify to me are you in a position superior to the king or are you his equal; are you his kinsman or are you his slave, his possession?”

Vidhura knew he could avoid being taken by Punnaka if he told Punnaka that he was not the king’s slave or possession and so the

king would have no right to give him away as a gambling debt. But the Bodhisatta chose to be truthful. He said to Punnaka, “There are four types of slaves in this world. The first is a slave by birth, because he has slaves as parents; the second is a slave by trade, because he is sold into slavery; the third is a slave by his own free will; and the fourth is a slave by being a prisoner of war. I myself am a slave by birth to the king and thus I am his possession.”

Punnaka said, “If you are the king’s possession, then the king has the right to give you away as a gambling debt.”

Vidhura replied, “I am a possession of the king; if the king wishes to give me away as a gambling debt he has the right to do so.”

Punnaka was overjoyed when he heard this. He declared, “Honorable Sage, your truthfulness is indeed as it is reputed. I have won you as my prize, witnessed by all the hundred and one kings. You now belong to me and I will take you with me as my possession.”

The king was gravely annoyed that Vidhura did not take his side and save himself from being taken by Punnaka. In frustration, he turned to Punnaka and said to him, “If he thinks he is my slave, not my kinsman, then take him and go.”

Dhamma for Householders

The king had deeply regretted losing Vidhura. Realizing that he might never see the Bodhisatta again, the king asked him to give one final discourse to his assembly before he left.

He said to Vidhura: “Dear Sage, we may never see each other again. After you are gone I will have no one to give me proper wisdom and insight, to tell me the higher knowledge, and to show me the way to a happy afterlife. Before you leave, I ask that you enlighten me and my assembly with the knowledge of the right conduct for a householder. Tell me what good conduct a householder has to perform that will give him safety in this world and the next; how he should help others and not cause suffering to others; how he should speak only the truth; and what he has to do so that he would not fall into an unfortunate state after he leaves this world.”

With penetrating wisdom the Bodhisatta knew the answers right away. He began his discourse as follows:

“O King, there are twenty ways in which a householder should conduct himself in order to gain a prosperous life, to be loved among his own people, and to be free from suffering in this world and the next.

A good householder should not commit adultery.

He should share a good meal with others.

He should not engage in quarrels and arguments.

He should observe the Five Precepts by not killing, not stealing, not committing sexual misconduct, not lying and not engaging in any form of intoxication.

He should respect good tradition and the law, abstain from un-wholesome deeds, carry out his duties wisely and efficiently, and be humble, kind, and generous.

He should practice patience and forbearance, speak only the truth, use endearing words, and not be rude to anyone.

He should be a virtuous friend to others by helping and supporting others, and he should give alms regularly.

He should be wise in planning and managing his affairs, support monastics and monks, and preserve and practice good traditions.

He should accumulate knowledge through learning and listening, seek guidance from monks and teachers who are righteous, and he should associate with the wise and the virtuous.

These are practices that bring success and prosperity to a householder. They protect him from harm in this life and the next.”

Having thus expounded the Dhamma for Householders, the Bodhisatta came down from his seat and made his salutation to the king. King Dhananjaya and the other hundred and one kings paid him their final respects and bade him farewell.



Discourse on Good Conduct for State Officials

Punnaka urged the Bodhisatta to leave with him right away for fear that King Dhananjaya might change his mind and prevent them from going, but the Bodhisatta asked that he be given three days to relinquish his personal affairs and to give his final teachings to his children. Punnaka consented.

Vidhura invited Punnaka to stay at his home during these three days. Punnaka accepted his invitation. He was very well taken care of. He was given the best accommodation, the best food and drink, the best entertainment, and the best services from a host of Vidhura’s servants who catered to his every need.

The Bodhisatta gathered his wife, children and attendants and bade farewell to them. He embraced his wife and children, and with tears in his eyes, said this to them:

“My dearest, let me embrace you for the last time, for I may never see you again. I have been given by the king to this young man, Punnaka, who will take me away. I only have three days to remain with you. Come, dear ones, sit down and listen to me. I want to share with you knowledge and wisdom that will help you be successful in life, both for your careers and for getting along in life.

Dear children, one day you may choose to enter the services of the king and perform duties for your country. Listen well, and pay good attention. It is a good way of practice that was observed by appointees of the king since the olden days. Following this practice will ensure a bright and prosperous career for you.”

Then the Bodhisatta began a lesson, which became known as the Discourse of Good Conduct for State Officials:

“A state official should be recognized and promoted only after he has done something useful for the state.

He should not be so brash as to have no concern for the consequences of his actions; neither should he be so cowardly that he submits himself to injustice and partiality as a result of fear and in an attempt to save his own skin.

He should safeguard his king from danger; keep his secrets, not to betray his confidence, and to check his own egotism should the king neglect or slight him in any way.

He should perform every task to the best of his talent and abilities, with consistency, reliability and fairness, and serve his king with intelligence and bravery.

He should be watchful of his behavior, not to walk on the path prepared for the king and not to do anything that would offend the king.

He should not put himself on an equal status with the king, seat on the same level as the king, adorn himself with garments and ornaments or use things of equal quality or status as the king’s. He should not abuse his privileges thinking that he is the king’s favorite, and should not talk in the same tone or act in the same way as the king, and not to mimic him.

In attending to the king, he should not position himself too close or too far from the king; he should not show intimacy with the king’s consorts or be playful with them in private, or act pompously in the presence of the king.

He should not be extravagant or greedy, indulge in too much sleep or too much eating, over-engage in sexual activities, be intoxicated, or let his conduct become blemished in any way.

He should be gentle and polite, friendly and truthful, not be arrogant, not speak falsely or offensively in the presence of royalties, not be contrary to the king or displease him, or irritate him with his words; and he should be wise in knowing the temperament of the king.

He should not mistake the king for his friend, be carried away with the king’s praises, or voice an opinion quickly or pose an objection when the king grants favors or rewards to his relatives or employees.

He should be useful and loyal, diligent and conscientious in his work and duties, exercise morality and self-restraint, not pilfer or steal from the treasury, kill or harm animals in protected areas, or cause work to be disrupted.

He should speak only the truth, speak with kindness, not be divisive in his speech, not engage in useless chatter, not be too talkative or too quiet, or be quick to anger.

He should be well learned in the arts, experienced in business,

trained in aristocratic manners, be well-mannered, value cleanliness, and be able to get along with others.

He should be prudent and brave, and keep up with good traditions. He should be steadfast in doing good deeds, care for his parents, associate with monastics and monks, respect them, support and take care of them, study and get advice from them, learn from them insight on merit, demerit, benefits and harm, and practice their advice. He should be respectful to elders and seniors, give alms, be helpful to those who come to seek help, and not to deprive them of their well-earned gifts.

He should watch out for the assets, treasury and interests of the king, and make sure that his resources do not run short.

He will not appoint anyone who is short on morals, or practice nepotism, or hire relatives who are not qualified to do the job, for they are the dead weight that will pull him down.

He should keep away from spies and serve no other kings.

The wise man will keep his belly lithe like the bow, but will bend easily like the bamboo.

One who wishes to be prosperous in the king’s service should revere the king, for the king provides him with a good livelihood like clouds that give rains to the fields.

Following this practice will gain you favor and respect from the king

and the esteem of everyone around you.”

In closing, the Bodhisatta said to his family:

“Take care of yourselves and practice what I have taught you and you will not meet with difficulty in life.

Do not despair. What is happening to me is due to my own bad kamma. It is the retribution from my past misdeed which is now taking effect. But I am sure, all the good deeds I have earnestly accumulated shall one day bear fruit, and I shall become victorious. Be strong, be courageous, and be hopeful. Most important of all, be truthful, for truthfulness is the virtue that will protect you from harm.”

Farewell My Sage

The next morning, he went to the king and bade his final farewell.

“Your Majesty, I am here to bid you farewell. I ask that Your Majesty continues to be kind to my loved ones. Please protect them and their properties. I realize that I have done you wrong by not taking your side and I deserve to be punished. I ask that my loved ones do not have to suffer the consequences of my action.”

The king listened to the sage in silence, then he said, “Vidhura, I have no desire to see you leave. I shall have the young man cut into pieces and bury him in a secret place. No one will know about it. This way, you will not have to go with him.”

When the Bodhisatta heard this he said to the king, “O King, such an intention is unwholesome and not worthy of Your Majesty. Unwholesome deeds will lead you to the unfortunate realm. Please maintain your righteousness and do not compromise your integrity.”

The king said, “My dear sage, please do not worry; I will look after your family as I have done in the past. I wish you all the best and I hope that one day we will be with each other again. Farewell, my sage.”

After Vidhura had finished tending to his affairs, he went to Punnaka and told him he was ready to go. Punnaka looked upon his victim and declared, “You are about to cross from life to death. A long journey awaits you. Take hold of the tail of my magic steed. You shall not see the world of men again.”

The Bodhisatta answered resolutely, “I fear nothing and no one, for I have no ill-will toward anyone and I have harmed no one. My virtues will protect me from harm.”

Then he made a resolute wish, “Let my virtues and the good deeds I have accumulated throughout my life protect me from all dangers.” After having made his resolution, he tightened his robe around him and gripped the tail of the horse.

No Harm Comes to One Who is Virtuous

Punnaka galloped his magic steed across the sky to the Black Mountain while Vidhura hung on to its tail. When the king and the people of Indapatta saw Punnaka and his horse take off into the sky with Vidhura, they reckoned that the young stranger must not have been a human but a yakkha in disguise that came to capture the sage and take him away from them. They were angry and grieved at losing the Bodhisatta. The king comforted them and assured them that the virtue of goodness of the sage will protect him from harm and will return him to them in due time.

Punnaka thought, “There is no good reason why I should keep this Vidhura alive and let him be my burden. I will kill him and take his heart’s flesh, then I will go to the naga world and give it to the queen and marry her daughter.”

So Punnaka decided to kill the sage. As his horse traversed in great speed, he tried to crash Vidhura’s body into some big trees hoping to kill him. But every time Vidhura’s body got close to the trees, the branches would bend or part in time for the Bodhisatta to pass. Then Punnaka tried to crash him against the rocks on the side of the mountain, but the rocks would fall away before they could harm Vidhura. Each time Punnaka turned back to look at the Bodhisatta and noticed that he was still alive, he came up with different ways to kill him. But no matter what methods Punnaka used, the Bodhisatta could not be killed. People who have practiced the Perfections to a high degree like the Bodhisatta are protected by divine forces. For this reason Vidhura was shielded from physical danger.

Punnaka did not give up. He tried to frighten Vidhura to death by turning himself into demons and other fearful creatures which

would have made the most courageous of men die of fear. Yet all of these terrifying forms failed to ruffle the calm of the Bodhisatta. Punnaka realized that he could no longer resort to those means to kill his captive and would have to use his own hand. With the gigantic body of his yakkha form, he seized the sage violently and whirled him around, dangling him upside down to the earth and tried to beat him to death.

Still the Bodhisatta was unscathed. He calmly addressed his executioner. “Young Punnaka, you assumed the noble form of a gentle young man, but your true nature is depraved. You are doing a cruel and monstrous deed. Who are you? What is your reason for trying so hard to kill me?”

Punnaka answered, “I am a high-ranking yakkha named Punnaka, nephew of the yakkha ruler. I am charged with the duty of taking your heart to a naga queen, wife of mighty Varuna, ruler of the naga kingdom. His queen, Vimala, is dying and desires your heart to save her from death. King Varuna offers his daughter, Princess Irandati, to be my wife if I can bring your heart to his queen. I have set my mind on marrying his daughter and I must kill you to get your heart so I can win the hand of my beloved Irandati.”

The Bodhisatta reflected and through his penetrative insight he immediately perceived that everyone concerned here had misinterpreted the naga queen’s request for his heart. She had not meant his physical heart, but it was the heart of his wisdom that she desired, for the heart of a sage was his wisdom.



Virtues of the Righteous

“What use will my insights be if I were to be killed by Punnaka?” thought the Bodhisatta. “I must persuade him from killing me.” Vidhura said to Punnaka, “My dear Punnaka, before you kill me, I wish to present you with a Dhamma discourse that has not been heard by anyone, men or deities. I will present it to you in its entirety. After you have heard this discourse you can go ahead and complete your task of killing me.”

Punnaka thought, “Vidhura is a renowned sage, revered by all of Jambudvipa for his knowledge and wisdom of the truth of nature and the world. It would be a good benefit for me to hear his discourse.”

Punnaka might have appeared ferocious, but this was not his true nature. He was a yakkha of high standing and, as such, has been exposed to a degree of righteous practice. His beastly action was caused by his lust for Irandati which blinded his sense of righteousness. The thought of hearing a Dhamma discourse softened his heart. He understood that it was a tradition for a Dhamma teacher before presenting a discourse to his audience to clean his body and mind and for the audience to place the teacher on an elevated seat. So Punnaka brought the Bodhisatta bathwater to clean his body. He then brought him fresh attire and some food, and adorned the area with flowers. He placed the Bodhisatta on a stone slab and waited for him to begin his discourse.

After the Bodhisatta was seated, he began the discourse, now called The Virtues of the Righteous, with the following words:

“O youth, follow the path already traversed; do not burn the wet and innocent hand; do not be treacherous to good friends; do not submit to unchaste women.”

The Yakkha, unable to comprehend these four rules expressed so concisely, asked the Bodhisatta to explain them in detail and the Bodhisatta expounded as follows:

“In whosoever house a man dwells, even for one night, and receives food and drink there, let him not conceive an evil thought against the host in his mind. The one who prepares food and drink is known as one who has his hands wet; he who is treacherous to his friend burns the wet and innocent hand.

Let not a man break a bough of that tree under whose shadow he sits or lies. Such a wretch is treacherous to his friend. He is known as one who is ungrateful. Reciprocate kindness with kindness, and travel the path already traversed by your benefactor.

A man gives his wealth and riches to the woman whom he has chosen, yet she despises him and slanders him at every opportunity; this is an unchaste woman. Let him not submit to unchaste women.

Thus does a man follow the path already traversed; thus does he not burn the wet and innocent hand; thus does he not fall into the power of unchaste women.

Such a man is righteous.

O Punnaka, you should adopt the Virtues of the Righteous and abandon unrighteousness for this is the practice that will shelter you from hell and open doors to heaven.”

Thus did the Bodhisatta reveal to the yakkha with a Buddha’s deep and simple truth of the four duties of a good man.

Punnaka listened to the Bodhisatta’s discourse attentively. He became aware that he practiced none of these virtues. His conscience told him, “Vidhura-pandita welcomed me, a total stranger, to his home; he extended gracious hospitality to me, made sure that I was well accommodated, and looked after me like his own best friend. Not only have I not followed the path already traversed by repaying him in kind, but I have been intent on killing him. I have both tried to burn a wet and innocent hand and harmed a virtuous friend. I drove myself to commit such heinous acts because of my lust over Irandati. I have violated all four duties of a good man, the Virtues of the Righteous.”

Punnaka saw with clarity the evidence of his wrongdoing and he became deeply regretful. He resolved to change his way of behavior and to turn himself to the practice of the Virtues of the Righteous. His resolve unshackled his mind and made him feel like a new person. He made his apologies to the Bodhisatta for his vicious acts and offered to take him back to Indapatta. But the Bodhisatta asked that he be taken to the naga kingdom in order to resolve the misunderstanding. Together, they rode on Punnaka’s horse toward the naga kingdom.

I Feel No Fear, For I Have Done Nothing Wrong

They arrived at the splendid palace of the naga king and met with Varuna. Varuna greeted the Bodhisatta and said to him, “You seem to have no fear of danger coming to this fearsome naga kingdom of mine and you refused to pay homage to a king. This is not considered an act of a wise man.”

The sage responded, “Great King of the naga world, I feel no fear, for I have done nothing wrong and I have harmed no one. I did not pay homage to you because it is not a practice for a prisoner to pay homage to his executioner who is about to kill him, and it is not reasonable for an executioner to expect his prisoner of death to pay homage to him. There is no benefit in paying such homage. And since you have commanded Punnaka to kill me, what good reason is there for me to pay you homage?”

Instead of being cross at the Bodhisatta for making such a bold statement to him, the naga king saw wisdom in the Bodhisatta’s words, and was impressed with him.

Then Vidhura asked him, “You are the mighty ruler of this distinguished kingdom and your abode is magnificent, how did you come into the possession of such immense wealth and power?”

The naga king replied, “Honorable Sage, these possessions are the results of acts of good deeds I accumulated in a previous existence. In that existence, my wife and I were born in the city of Kalacampa in the kingdom of Anga. We were a charitable couple who enjoyed doing good deeds and helping others. My home was like a well where ascetics and mendicants could come and drink from. We gave

alms and food to ascetics and we gave shelters, blankets, candles, clothes, and other necessities to the needy. We practiced good deeds and accumulated merits throughout our lives. The riches and glory that I enjoy today are the fruits of merit from the good deeds that I have done in my past existence.”

Vidhura said, “Great king, if you know that all of your wealth and greatness happened because of the good deeds you have performed in the past, why then do you become reckless and not continue to perform good deeds in your present lifetime so that you can continue to enjoy their fruits?”

“Honorable Sage, in the realm of the nagas, there are no ascetics to whom I can offer food and water and alms. How then can I accumulate merits?”

“Dear King, you can accumulate merit by being kind to your kinsmen and your subjects; do not cause harm and suffering to others; and practice loving-kindness and generosity. Doing so will ensure your success and happiness hereafter.”

The naga king was pleased with the Bodhisatta’s enlightening words, and said to him, “Dear sage, I wish you to see my wife, Queen Vimala, who longs to meet you and to hear your endearing words. Please come with me.” He took the sage’s hand and led him to Queen Vimala’s quarters.

The king said to his wife, “Dearest, this is Vidhura-pandita. He’s the reason that you have not had any appetite and gotten so thin and

pale. This is the sage whose heart you have longed for. Pay attention to his saying and you will find peace and happiness.”

Queen Vimala was delighted to see the sage. She asked him the same questions from which the naga king had asked him before. The sage gave her the same answers as he gave the naga king which satisfied her as it had satisfied Varuna. Then the sage encouraged her to accumulate merits by treating her subjects with generosity and loving-kindness, as the virtues from such good deeds will lead her to be reborn in a higher realm. The queen was pleased to hear this revelation. She rewarded him graciously and asked him to deliver Dhamma discourses for the benefits of all the nagas.

So Vidhura honored her request. After having heard the discourses, the naga king said, “Honorable Sage, wisdom is the heart of every sage. What we meant by wanting your heart is to have the opportunity to listen to your profound teachings. I told Punnaka to bring your heart by a righteous means, not to blemish you in anyway physically. Today we are delighted to have heard the most profound Dhamma discourses from you. I shall honor my promise to Punnaka by allowing him to marry my daughter and I shall let you go back to Indapatta City safely.”

Punnaka was elated to hear the king’s intention. He said to Vidhura, “Honorable sage, you have made it possible for me to have the princess for my wife. I’m deeply grateful to you. I wish to express my appreciation for you by giving to you this magical gem that once belonged to the Universal Monarch. It will please me greatly if you would take it.”

Vidhura accepted the gem from Punnaka and thanked him. Then he said, “Young Punnaka, congratulations for having your wish fulfilled. May you and Irandati cherish each other and live in harmony. May you both find happiness and peace, and be in good health. I shall accept this magical gem as token of our friendship.” Punnaka thanked him for his blessings. After Vidhura said his farewell to the naga king and queen, Punnaka mounted him on his noble steed and he climbed up to sit behind him. They rode up into the sky and in a short time arrived at the city of Indapatta. Punnaka paid his final respect to the Bodhisatta and in lightning speed, went back to the realm of the nagas where he later married Irandati with the blessings of the king and queen.

The night before Vidhura arrived at Indapatta, King Dhananjaya had a dream. In his dream, he saw a great tree of wisdom standing in front of his palace and a multitude of people worshipping it. Then a dark man wearing a red cloth and bearing weapons in his hand came up and cut the tree down by its roots amidst the cries of disapproval from the multitude. He dragged the tree off and went away, and then came back and planted it again in its old place, and departed. The king interpreted the tree of wisdom in his dream to represent Vidhura the sage and the dark man to represent the yakkha that carried off the sage into the sky. And because the dark man brought the tree back and replanted it, he interpreted that the yakkha was to bring back the sage.

Confident that this dream of his was soon to be realized, the king told his attendants and the people of Indapatta to look forward to the sage’s return. On that same day, Punnaka arrived with the sage

and returned him to the people of Indapatta amidst the great cheers of joy from the king and everyone.

Vidhura told the king everything that had happened; the reason behind Punnaka's action and how he turned the hearts of Punnaka and the naga king and queen.

He then brought out the celestial gem and said to the king, "Your Majesty, this is an auspicious gem that once belonged to the Universal Monarch. It has a supernatural power and can attract wealth and prosperity to its owner. Punnaka gave it to me as token of his friendship. I would like to offer it to you as a symbol of my high regards for you."

The king was overjoyed when he heard this. After all, this was the celestial gem that he had wanted so badly to the point of willing to bet his fortune away. The king accepted the gem from Vidhura with excitement and expressed his deepest thanks to the sage. The gem eventually became the grand jewel of Indapatta City. To express his appreciation for the sage and to symbolize the sage's freedom from captivity, the king ordered all animals in captivity to be released and set free. There was a great festivity in the kingdom to celebrate this auspicious occasion, and all ascetics and monks and mendicants were given food and alms.

After a month, the festival came to an end. The Bodhisatta, as if fulfilling a Buddha's duties, continued to teach the great assembly the moral law and also counsel the king in all matters civic and spiritual. Abiding in his teachings and following their king, all

the inhabitants of the Kuru kingdom gave alms and performed good deeds. At the end of their lives they went to the various heavenly realms.

Vidhura's pursuit of the Virtue of Truthfulness bore fruits for him in his lifetime and the next. After he passed away he was reborn in the heavenly realm.



Vessantara Jataka

PERFECTING THE VIRTUE OF CHARITY

10



When Siddhattha, the Gautama Buddha, visited his father's kingdom for the first time after he achieved the supreme Enlightenment, arrogant elders of the ruling dynasty did not pay him respect because the Buddha was younger than them. To subdue their arrogance, the Buddha performed a miracle by rising up in the air above his relatives. His father, the king, having witnessed his son's superiority over others in the past was the first to bow down paying respect to his own son. Seeing the king himself bowing down to pay respect to Siddhattha, all the elders of the clan followed suit and bowed down to pay respect as well.

At that moment, rain clouds gathered and wondrous red raindrops appeared, refreshing all and falling only on those who so wished it. The Buddha explained that this rain had appeared once before during his last existence before his present life. Then he told them the story of his previous life as King Vessantara.

Vessantara Jataka is a literary classic that is popular in Southeast Asia and many other Buddhist countries. It chronicles the final birth of the Bodhisatta before he became enlightened and attained Buddhahood in the subsequent birth as Prince Siddhattha Gautama.

Phusati's Wish

Once upon a time, in the city of Jetuttara of the Sivi kingdom reigned a king named Sivi who had a son named Sanjaya. When Prince Sanjaya came of age, the king handed over the kingdom to him and chose a beautiful princess named Phusati to be his queen.

Phusati was a lady of extraordinary birth. In one of her past lifetimes, ninety-one eons ago, a Buddha named Vipassi took birth into this world. Phusati in that lifetime was a kind and charitable princess. On one occasion, she had the opportunity to pay respect to Vipassi Buddha and had made an offering of sandal wood powder to him. The extraordinary attributes and greatness of Vipassi Buddha had made a lasting impression on her. Her admiration for the Buddha was so great that she made a resolute wish to become the birth mother of a future Buddha.

Merit gained from making offerings to a Buddha is remarkable indeed. After Phusati passed away in that lifetime, she ascended to the celestial realm and, thereafter, went through a series of rebirths, passing to and from between the worlds of men and of angels. Eventually she became the celestial queen of Sakka, sovereign of the Tavatimsa heaven. She spent her celestial life in Tavatimsa happily until the day she had to be reborn again as a human. Before her departure from Tavatimsa, Sakka granted her ten wishes, one of which was to become the mother of a future Buddha. She descended to the human world and was born to the court of a king and later married to King Sanjaya.



Birth of a Future Buddha

At that time the Bodhisatta was a celestial being in the Tavatimsa Heaven. His time in the celestial realm was about to expire and he was due for rebirth. Sakka, foreseeing that the Bodhisatta was to become enlightened in the life immediately following the next rebirth, suggested that he be conceived in the womb of Queen Phusati. The Bodhisatta agreed. Whereupon, he descended to earth and took birth in Phusati's womb.

When Phusati became aware that she was carrying a child, she had six alms halls built from which she distributed alms daily. King Sanjaya, upon noticing her new aspiration for charity, consulted the fortune tellers and asked them to explain the reason behind her munificence. The fortune tellers said to the king, "Great King, in your wife's womb is conceived a being devoted to almsgiving, whose generosity knows no bounds." Hearing this, the king was pleased and he, too, made a practice of giving.

From the time of the Bodhisatta's conception, the kingdom of Sivi enjoyed a remarkable increase in wealth and revenue. By the virtue of the Bodhisatta, and the renown of his father and mother's goodness and charity, gifts and presents poured in from all the kings and rulers of Jambudvipa.

As the birth of her child grew imminent, Queen Phusati expressed the wish to visit every part of her husband's capital city. The king granted her request and had a lying-in shelter made ready to follow her along with a procession of attendants. As they approached the merchant sector of the city known as Vessa, her labor began. Behind

the shelter she gave birth to a son. Having taken his first breath of air from the Vessa Street in the commercial quarter, the newborn child was named Vessantara, which meant "One Who was Born in the Merchants' Quarter."

The Bodhisatta came from his mother's womb free from impurities. As soon as the infant opened his eyes, he extended his little hand to his mother and said, "Mother, I wish to give alms. Do you have anything for me to give?" The queen was astonished at her son's ability to speak at the moment of birth, but she was not frightened. She said to him, "Yes, my son, give as you will," and she handed a purse of a thousand pieces of coin to the infant. And so, the Bodhisatta infant, his mother, and the attendants began to give out money and other gifts to all the people around.

On the same day of Vessantara's birth, an extraordinary event took place in Sivi. A female celestial elephant flew in with her newborn calf and left the calf in the royal stable of the palace. The calf was white all over and endowed with auspiciousness. At the time of its appearance, Sivi was showered with rains that refreshed the entire city. This signified a good omen for the kingdom. The white elephant came to be the companion of the Bodhisatta as they grew up together. It was called Paccaya. It was on Paccaya, that Vessantara visited his mother's alms halls six times each month to distribute alms. Indeed, many of his subjects had attributed the prosperity of the kingdom and the helpful rains that regularly watered the fields to the virtue of the white elephant.





Born to Give

As a youth, Vessantara contented himself with giving away readily and frequently the things he had acquired. When he was four years old, King Sanjaya gave him a set of precious ornaments made with a hundred thousand pieces of money, but he turned around and gave them to his nursemaids. The nursemaids were reluctant to receive these expensive gifts and went to see the king about it. The king did not find fault with the prince, but instead, was pleased at his generosity. The king then had new ornaments made for him, but again, the prince gave them all away. This happened nine times in a row.

When he was eight years old, the boy expressed his desire to give away something of his very own, something that had not been given to him by another. He thought to himself, “Everything that I have given so far has been of outside possessions. Such alms are not the ultimate kind of giving that would lead me to Buddhahood.” Then he declared, “If someone should ask for my flesh, or my limbs, or my eyes, or my heart, I will give it to him. I am willing to give up anything in order to perfect my Virtue of Charity and attain Buddhahood.” This exalted wish attracted the attention of the gods. The earth trembled and thunder rumbled in the clouds, and rains fell throughout the kingdom. Celestial beings in every realm rejoiced.

By the age of sixteen, the Bodhisatta had attained a mastery of all the arts and sciences, and he possessed great wisdom and leadership qualities. The time was ripe for his father to hand over the kingdom to him. And so King Sanjaya consulted with his queen to find him a worthy wife.

Queen Phusati said to the king, “My brother, King Madda, has a beautiful daughter the same age as Vessantara. Her name is Maddi. She is a woman of high intellect and her conduct is impeccable. It would be ideal that she become Vessantara’s queen.²⁵”

The king was pleased to hear this and said to her, “This is good news indeed. I will go to see King Madda and ask for the hand of his daughter for our son.”

So a marriage was arranged between Vessantara and Maddi. After the marriage, King Sanjaya ceded his kingdom to Vessantara and Maddi became his queen.

From the time of his coronation, King Vessantara distributed alms daily, giving six hundred thousand pieces of money to the poor each day. Six times each month, the Bodhisatta would mount upon his magnificent white elephant and visit the six alms halls. News of his generosity spread far and wide. All kinds of people -- the poor and deprived, the homeless, mendicants and holy men, and the needy -- came from all around to the kingdom of Sivi to receive alms from Vessantara.

The kingdom prospered and their marriage was happy. Soon, Queen Maddi brought forth a son and they named him Jali. By the time Jali learned how to walk, the queen had birthed a daughter and they named her Kanhajina.

²⁵ In the olden days monarchs often marry among their own family members to preserve royal bloodlines.

Famine in Kalinga

In the north of the kingdom of Sivi laid a neighboring kingdom called Kalinga. It was a bad time for that kingdom, for a prolonged drought had plagued the land and killed all the crops. Food which was once abundant became scarce. All the prayers of its people, all the supplications and offerings of its king were to no avail. Men being unable to grow crops and facing starvation turned to robbery. Some decided to move away to other kingdoms. Tormented by the lack of food and other hardships that followed, the people gathered in the king's courtyard and pleaded for help.

Kalinga-raja, the king, summoned his ministers to come up with ways and means of overcoming the famine but none of them were able to do anything. The king pleaded, "We have done everything we could, but we have no power over the rain and cannot cause it to fall. Tell me what else we should do to alleviate this dilemma."

One minister said, "Your Majesty, perhaps we should prepare another sacrificial rite. This time we will make it a grand ritual involving all the people. Let them bring their offerings and, together, we will implore to the gods. If we collectively and earnestly offer up the sacrifice, perhaps the gods will take pity on us and bring forth the rain."

The chief minister expressed his disagreement, "What use is there in arranging another sacrificial rite when all the grand rituals in the past have not produced anything?"

The king also disagreed. He said, "I agree with the Chief Minister. There will be no more sacrificial rites. These rites have done no one any good. Besides, the people are already

deprived of their food and supplies. We cannot impose any more hardship onto them by asking them to give away what they have so little of."

The third minister, well versed in the area of astrology, said to the king, "Your Majesty, I've been checking the fate of our city and found that misfortune is indeed upon us. Performing an ordinary ritual will not help in this case. There's only one way left: to change the name of the city to something more auspicious."

On hearing this, the king said, "Over the years, you have suggested many astrological rituals and we've allowed you to carry on even though they produced nothing. Now you want us to change the name of our city. What can that accomplish? If a mere change of name could bring luck, then there would not be any poor person or poor country in this world because all they have to do is to change their names. Besides, the name of our city had been established by our forefathers and this name has been ours since time immemorial. I will not allow the name of our city which has been given by our forebears to be changed during my reign. Does anyone else have other more practical suggestions?"

The chief minister suggested, "Your Majesty, every year on the day of your coronation anniversary, you have followed the practice of your forefathers by keeping the Holy Precepts for one week. Although now is not yet the time of your coronation anniversary, but because the people are experiencing so much hardship, now could be a good time for you to begin the observance of the Holy Precepts. Merit gained from this practice could bring us rain, Sire."





King Kalinga-raja thought for a moment and said, “What Chief Minister said is quite true. I have followed this fine tradition every year; so had my father and his father before him. I have yet to keep the Holy Precepts this year. It will be another two to three months before our coronation anniversary. This is too long for us to wait. By then there may be nothing left of our kingdom. Indeed, I should observe the Holy Precepts starting tomorrow and I will maintain them immaculately for the entire seven days. Let us see if this will make a difference.”

The next morning, King Kalinga-raja took off his regalia and put on the white robe, a symbol of purity. He went up to the top of his palace and prepared to observe his Holy Precepts with strict compliance. Unfortunately, when the week was over, there was still no sign of rain.

In desperation, the king called a city-wide meeting of all of his subjects. As the people gathered together in his courtyard, the king announced to them, “My dear citizens, this persistent drought has brought a great hardship to all of us. My ministers, counselors and I have done everything we could to remedy the situation, but to no avail. I feel personally responsible for your suffering. I think it would be to the best interest of the citizens of Kalinga that I abdicate from the position of your king to make room for someone more worthy to rule this kingdom. Perhaps someone with a higher virtue and merit than me could bring forth a better future for our kingdom.”

There was a great silence and an atmosphere of sadness within the crowd. After a while, the chief minister said to the king, “Your Maj-

esty has been a great king. You have loved and taken care of your subjects over the years. A king such as you is not easy to come by. Your Majesty should never have to think about abdicating. We must all put our heads together and try to come up with a more viable solution.”

King Kalinga-raja was at a loss for words. He was so overwhelmed by his emotions that he put his face down on his palms and cried. All the ministers could only lower their heads and stay quiet. The people there were filled with hopelessness.



The Auspicious Elephant

At that moment of sadness, a voice from the middle of the crowd broke the silence. “Your Majesty,” said a young man who had just arrived at the gathering, “I believe there is a way which can help save our kingdom.”

These words instantly invigorated the people. Hope returned and the people came to life again. Every eye was on the young man.

King Kalinga-raja said to the man, “You said that there is a way to help us? Your words are like divine water that resurrects our dying souls. Do tell us now what you have in mind.”

The young man said, “Your Majesty, not far from here is a kingdom called Sivi. It is a large and prosperous kingdom and its capital city is called Jetuttara. This kingdom is ruled by Vessantara, a generous king who shares what he has with the people from all walks of life. I used to live here in Kalinga but could no longer find enough food to eat so I left with my family to ask King Vessantara for help. My family and I were fed to our hearts’ content. He also gave me money to help me establish myself in business. With this help from King Vessantara I was able to build a business and become successful. I have just come back here to return to my homeland. As soon as I got here, I heard that the people have been called to a meeting with Your Majesty so I came here to attend the meeting.”

Having told everyone about who he was, the young man added, “King Vessantara owns an auspicious white elephant which possesses great powers. He can cause the rain to fall on whatever path he treads. He can cause any desperate land to become a land of plenty. If your majesty can secure this elephant, our kingdom will surely be saved.”

King Kalinga-raja said excitedly, “Is it true that this white elephant really possesses such great powers?”

The chief minister said, “That is true, Sire. Two years ago, Your Majesty sent out diplomatic emissaries to establish a relationship with neighboring kingdoms. At the time I took the opportunity to send soldiers along with the envoys in order to find out everything that went on in each of the kingdoms. The report which I received from the soldiers about the kingdom of Sivi is the same as what this young man just said. The city of Jetuttara is prosperous because King Vessantara has a companion elephant named Paccaya that attracts fortunes to his kingdom. I ask for Your Majesty’s forgiveness for not having told you earlier about this clandestine activity.”

King Kalinga-raja said, “That does not matter now; I know that you did it for the good of our kingdom. Let us hear more about this elephant. How can we get him?”

The same minister who suggested a sacrificial offering in the past said, “Your Majesty, allow me to get the troops ready so that we can attack Jetuttara and bring the elephant back for Your Majesty.”

The chief minister objected, “Sivi is a great and prosperous kingdom. It is densely populated and its army is strong. Moreover, from my spies, I have found out that the auspicious elephant is especially skilled in combating another elephant. Our kingdom, on the contrary, has been suffering from a food shortage. Many people have left and our soldiers are undernourished. We are no match for Jetuttara.”

The minister paid no attention to the chief minister’s words and said, “Sire, it may be a difficult feat but we have no other alternatives. If we do not go to war, we will starve to death.”

King Kalinga-raja said, “Going to war is out of the question even if our kingdom was powerful. How can we act like a thief and use force to take away another person’s possession?”

The chief minister said, “Sire, there is another way. We should send an able diplomat to ask for the white elephant from King Vessantara directly.”

The king said discouragingly, “Any king who has such an auspicious elephant in his possession will naturally treasure it. He can never give it away.”

The young man spoke up once again. “Begging Your Majesty’s forgiveness, but I agree with the chief minister. An able diplomat should be sent to ask for the elephant from King Vessantara. It can work because King Vessantara is extraordinarily generous. His fondness for alms-giving knows no bounds. I myself used to be in a dire state. Yet, I’m now well off because I was helped by him. Sending an able diplomat to ask for the elephant is the best way, Sire.”

The man’s conviction convinced the king and he said, “If that can really work, then it’s our good fortune indeed.”

The king then turned toward the chief minister and said, “My dear Chief Minister, I assign you to take care of this mission.”

The chief minister put together a team of eight Brahmins, headed by the most senior Brahmin named Rama, to carry out the task. After three days of traveling by horse they finally arrived at the city of Jetuttara. They surveyed the city and strategized on the best way to approach Vessantara. After much deliberation they concluded that their best approach would be to disguise themselves as poor Brahmins (instead of diplomatic emissaries as they first set out to do) to avoid the attention of Vessantara’s officials who might pose an objection to them for taking their most valuable asset away from the kingdom. They tore their clothes and soiled them, and they soiled their bodies with dirt and mud to make themselves look poor and destitute. They then studied the route that Vessantara took to make his alms rounds and decided to wait for him at the eastern gate.

Early that morning, King Vessantara mounted upon the back of his richly adorned white elephant and proceeded to the eastern gate. Great crowds gathered along the paths that he was approaching. The Brahmins found no opportunity to get close to the king as he was surrounded by great crowds of people from all directions. So they hurried to the southern gate which was the Bodhisatta’s next almsgiving stop. There, they found a strategic position on higher ground and waited for King Vessantara to arrive. After Vessantara finished his alms giving at the eastern gate he headed toward the southern gate atop his mighty elephant. The Brahmins watched joyfully as King Vessantara came toward them.

Upon the arrival of King Vessantara and his procession to where the eight Brahmins were waiting, the eight men knelt to the ground and together they hailed, “Long live the king; long live the king; long

live the king!” With the most pitiable of expressions, they stretched out their right hand in a gesture of alms-begging. Vessantara heard the Brahmins and turned toward them. He saw the eight Brahmins make a gesture of alms-begging and thought, “I wonder what it is that they wish to ask me for.”

King Vessantara then rode the elephant near the waiting Brahmins and said to them, “You have dirt on your bodies; you have dust in your hair; and your right hands are outstretched. What is it that you wish?”

Rama, the leader, said, “Your Majesty, we are here to ask for the sublime elephant which brings prosperity to the kingdom of Sivi.”

King Vessantara took a closer look at the Brahmins in their disguises and thought, “They look like ordinary paupers. But paupers generally ask for food to quell their hunger, or they ask for clothing to protect them from the cold, or they ask for money to ease their poverty. But instead these men are asking me for my companion elephant. This is highly unusual. They must be court officials from another kingdom coming here to ask for the jewel of my kingdom. I must find out what this is all about.”

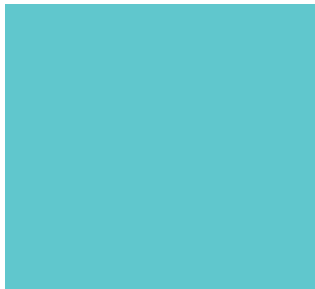
So he said to the Brahmins, “Where are you from and why do you have need of this auspicious elephant?”

Dhaja the brightest Brahmin in the group said, “Lord of the Sivi Kingdom whose compassion knows no bounds, we have traveled here from the kingdom of Kalinga in order to ask for Your Majesty’s

help. The land of Kalinga has been suffering a prolonged drought which killed all the crops and allowed nothing since to grow. There is a severe shortage of food in the land and the people are starving. We have heard that Paccaya, your auspicious elephant, can cause any land to become fertile. We were sent by our king Kalinga-raja to ask for Your Majesty’s help by allowing us to take the elephant back with us so that it can save Kalinga from the famine and allow its people to live as happily as the people of Sivi.”

Upon hearing this, Vessantara thought to himself, “I have once resolved that I was willing to give away things of my own—my flesh, my blood, my life—as alms in order to perfect my Virtue of Charity so I can attain Buddhahood. Here, these men are asking from me something that is an outside possession, something much easier to give than my own body. Why then can I not give it?” He then said in a resolute tone, “If my elephant Paccaya can save Kalinga from famine and restore its land to fertility, then by all means take this elephant with you.”

He dismounted and walked around the auspicious elephant three times to see that all the bejeweled ornaments which the elephant was wearing were in perfect shape. These items were worth a fortune: the jewels in his necklace of pearls, the ornaments on the elephant’s four feet and his two sides, the jewels on the head, the nets of pearls, gold, and jewels on his back, a rug on his back, the small ornaments on his ears and the two tusks, the ornaments for luck on his trunk and on his tail, the ornaments on his body, a ladder to mount, the food vessel, and the jewels great and small upon the canopy. More



valuable beyond all of these was the elephant itself. All these were given to the Brahmins along with five hundred attendants with the grooms and stablemen.

Once King Vessantara was satisfied that everything was in order, he held a golden gourd with his right hand and called the Brahmins to approach. He held the elephant's trunk with his left hand and placed it on the men's palms before he poured water over it to signify that he had given the elaborately decorated elephant to the eight Brahmins of Kalinga.

As soon as the deed was done, the earth trembled and thunders roared, the same way it had happened when he made a resolute wish to give away his own body and flesh when he was eight years old.

The elephant was given to the eight Brahmins along with five hundred elephant caretakers, their families, and mahouts.²⁶ Now that the celebrated elephant was theirs, the Brahmins were ecstatic. Their hearts jumped with excitement as they led the elephant and the entourage away. King Vessantara returned to his palace fully content with his charity.

²⁶ **Mahout** is an elephant rider; he is usually assigned an elephant early in its life and they would be attached to each other throughout the elephant's life.



The King Must Be Banished!

The residents of Sivi saw the auspicious elephant from afar and thought that King Vessantara was passing by so they came to pay him homage, but what they saw instead was a group of paupers walking in front of the magnificent elephant. The people said to the Brahmins, “Wait, you paupers. How dare you walk in front of the royal elephant? He is the personal elephant of our king. Where are you going with it?”

One of the Brahmins told the people, “We are Brahmins who came from the kingdom of Kalinga which lies north of here. Our land has been struck by famine due to a prolonged drought and our people are starving. We came to ask King Vessantara to give us his auspicious elephant so that it will bring us the rainfall and let our land be fertile again. The great king has agreed to give the elephant to us.”

“You mean to tell us that King Vessantara has already given Paccaya our auspicious elephant to you?” The city residents expressed their disbelief.

The Brahmin said, “Indeed, King Vessantara has given us the auspicious elephant. These five hundred elephant caretakers can confirm it.”

The residents of Jetuttara crowded around the elephant caretakers and were told, “Yes, indeed, King Vessantara has given the elephant to these Brahmins.” The residents were shocked when they heard this.

While the people were busily talking, the Brahmins told the mahout to hurry up and drive the elephant forward so as to avoid potential riot from the people. They left the city hastily and headed towards Kalinga.

The news quickly spread throughout the city. All the people, from court officials to soldiers to members of the royal family to merchants and commoners, were distraught at King Vessantara’s act. Criticisms were rife. Some were angry at the loss of the kingdom’s most precious asset; others were fearful that their kingdom would face misfortune now that the auspicious elephant no longer remained with them.

They gathered in front of the palace and demanded to see King Sanjaya²⁷, Vessantara’s father. When King Sanjaya appeared, the people complained loudly, “Your Majesty, our kingdom is doomed! King Vessantara has put our kingdom at risk. He gave away Paccaya to strangers from a foreign land. Without Paccaya, the auspicious elephant, our kingdom will no doubt be plagued with calamities. Your Majesty must punish King Vessantara so that this kind of deed will never happen again in the future.”

King Sanjaya responded, “My son Vessantara is a man of high moral ground. His conduct has been without flaws. He has followed the good royal tradition ever since he assumed the throne. You can’t expect me to have my son harmed in any way.”

The people said, “We have no desire to harm King Vessantara physically or deprive him of freedom. But we want him to be banished from the kingdom of Sivi so that he will no longer be in a position to give away any more valuable possessions from our kingdom.”

²⁷ Although Sanjaya had passed on the kingship to his son, the people of Sivi still addressed him as King.

King Sanjaya did his best to appease the citizens but it was to no avail. They were deeply upset at Vessantara and insisted that he be banished from the kingdom immediately. If King Sanjaya refused to do so, they threatened to take action against both him and Vessantara. King Sanjaya found himself in a dire position. The will of the people had been set and they were unwilling to compromise. To avoid confrontation and a potential uprising, King Sanjaya was left with no choice but to comply with the will of his people. He said sadly, “I wish to maintain harmony in our kingdom. Since you are so adamant in your decision against King Vessantara, I am compelled to go along with your will. But give him one day to say farewell to his family. Let him depart tomorrow.” The people consented. With this settled, the people of Sivi were pacified and they dispersed to return to their homes.

The people of Sivi were set on punishing Vessantara because they misunderstood that the auspicious elephant was the property of the kingdom and no one would have the right to give it away without the consent of the people. But in truth, the elephant was a personal possession that belonged to Vessantara. It was due to his inherent virtue and merit that caused the celestial female elephant to fly into the city and give her white elephant calf to him as a birthday gift. In this regard, it was Vessantara’s right to be able to give away his elephant to anyone he pleased.

After the citizens had been dispersed, King Sanjaya sent an official to inform his son of the bad news and tell him that he had to leave the kingdom by sunrise. Vessantara was dumbfounded by the reaction of the people. Then he rationalized, “I was willing to give

away my own body and my life for the sake of charity, let alone my material wealth. The people of Sivi can expel me from my kingdom or kill me, but they can never stop me from giving alms. I shall feel no attachment to anything. If the people of Sivi wish for me to leave, I will do so without harboring any resentment or ill-will against anyone.”

He asked the official, “Where do they want me to go?” To which the official replied, “They agreed that Your Majesty should go to Mount Vamka. It was said that, since ancient times, any king who left a householder life, or was expelled from his kingdom, or wished to assume a holy life of an ascetic, would go to Mount Vamka to practice asceticism.”

Vessantara liked the idea of giving up worldly possessions and becoming an ascetic. He said to the official, “I will leave Sivi and follow the path of kings who left the householder’s life to pursue spiritual attainments by becoming ascetics. But before I leave I wish to make a great alms-giving tomorrow and will leave the following morning.”

After the official was gone, Vessantara summoned his chief minister and said to him, “Tomorrow I shall give great alms which will consist of seven different types of alms and each type consists of seven hundred in number. Prepare for me seven hundred elephants, seven hundred horses, seven hundred carriages, seven hundred milk cows, seven hundred male slaves, and seven hundred female slaves, and provide every kind of food and drink, everything which is fit to give.”



Then he departed to see Queen Maddi at her quarters. He explained to Maddi what had happened and why the citizens of Sivi wanted him banished from the kingdom. He told her to remain in Sivi with their two children, to perform charity regularly, and to be free to remarry should a worthy person come along who could care for her. Maddi's heart was broken to see her husband leave. She pleaded for her and their two children to come with him but Vessantara discouraged her. He told her how life in the forest would be too dangerous and uncomfortable for her and their two young children.

With a trembling voice, Maddi said to her husband, "You should not talk as if I am a woman without lineage and proper upbringing. I must not let you go alone. I will follow you everywhere to serve you until I die. A virtuous wife should never think of abandoning her husband in times of trouble. If I have to choose between dying alongside you and living without you, I will choose death. What will be the point for my living if it is without you?"

Maddi told her husband how their lives together in the forest would be so blissful for them, how it would be so joyous to be with their two lovely children, to see them play, to hear their laughter, and to be close to them, and enjoy the beauty of nature.

After much pleading and insistence from Maddi, Vessantara finally gave in. King Sanyaja and Queen Phusati, however, did not like the idea of Maddi and the children living in the forest. King Sanjaya tried to scare her with all the frightful things that could happen in the forest, but Maddi told him that there was nothing more miserable than not being with her husband. Queen Phusati also

tried very hard to dissuade her from going, but to no avail. Maddi had made up her mind to be with her husband. It was then that both King Sanjaya and Queen Phusati found out the virtue of a truly good wife in Maddi and her loyalty to her husband. They were deeply touched by the noble quality of their daughter-in-law.





Gift of the Seven Hundreds

The next morning, everything that Vessantara asked of his chief minister to prepare for the great alms offering was carried out perfectly. Included in the great almsgiving were seven hundred elaborately decorated elephants, seven hundred choice steeds, seven hundred elaborately decorated carriages, seven hundred milk cows, seven hundred male slaves, and seven hundred female slaves. A large amount of food and drink were prepared. People of every social class, from the rich to the poor, from Brahmins to sudras,²⁸ from soldiers to merchants, all came to receive his gifts. The entire city of Jetuttara was in a jubilant mood. This offering became known as Gift of the Seven Hundreds.

That day, Vessantara spent sunrise to sunset giving out alms. Throughout the entire day his heart was filled with joy. After the great almsgiving was completed, he put his palms together and raised them to touch his forehead and made a deliberate wish: “May this great almsgiving make it possible for me to become enlightened as a Buddha some time in the future.” At the end of his resolution, the earth trembled as if to acknowledge this wish.

The next morning, the officials brought for them a beautiful carriage drawn by four thoroughbred horses. Vessantara, Maddi, and the two children paid their respects to King Sanjaya and Queen Phusati and bade them farewell. They said goodbye to all the attendants who came to send them off. Then they took their seats in the carriage and departed.

Vessantara drove the carriage slowly as he and Maddi looked at the city of Jetuttara for the last time. As they approached the city gate,

Maddi noticed four Brahmins bickering among themselves and running behind trying to catch up with them. She told her husband and he stopped to wait for them. When the Brahmins finally caught up, they told Vessantara that they came too late for the Gift of the Seven Hundreds and asked if Vessantara had anything to give them. Vessantara told them the only things he had left were the four horses and the carriage. The Brahmins then asked for his horses and he gave them willingly – one horse for each Brahmin.

After the horses were disposed of, the yoke of the chariot remained suspended in the air, but as soon as the Brahmins were gone, four deities in the guise of red deer came and caught it and drew it in place of the horses. The Bodhisatta knew them to be deities and he was delighted. He said to his wife, “See, Maddi, what a wondrous thing; these clever horses in the shape of red deer drawing our carriage!” Maddi was astounded at what she saw. She perceived that it was due to the transcendental virtue that her husband had cultivated over many lifetimes that attracted the celestial beings to look after them. She became more and more cognizant of the fact that merit power was something to be reckoned with and that the Virtue of Charity that her husband was cultivating was something quite worthwhile and she was glad to be a part of it.

They continued their journey in the carriage drawn by the four stags. But after a short way, another Brahmin approached them and asked for the carriage. Vessantara dismounted his wife and children and gave the Brahmin the carriage. He did this with a happy heart and Maddi supported his action for she knew charity was his life mission.

²⁸ **Sudra:** servant class

The Nobles of Ceta

After he gave the carriage away the four stags disappeared and they continued their journey on foot, carrying the two children on their hips – the boy on his father and the girl on her mother. By nightfall, they came upon the land of Ceta, a kingdom ruled by sixty thousand nobles. The people of Ceta took notice of them and informed the nobles of their arrival.

All sixty thousand nobles of Ceta had heard of King Vessantara's reputation as a compassionate and generous king. When the news of his arrival into their city was heard, they quickly went to pay him respect. When they saw the scruffy condition of the royal family they were taken aback and asked what had happened to them. Vessantara told them the whole story, which brought tears to many of them. Some of them expressed their disapproval, "How can anyone find fault in such a benevolent act? This is so unjust. We must help King Vessantara. We will go to Jetuttara and speak to King Sanjaya and ask him to withdraw his decree and reinstate Vessantara as their king. If he refuses, we will take action."

Vessantara thanked them for their good intentions but told them that the king did not have power over this matter and that it would cause conflict between the two kingdoms should they pursue this action, in which case it would make him very unhappy. The nobles then asked him to stay in their city and be their king. They said, "It will be a blessing to have a righteous king like you to be our king. We will be happy to serve you, for we know you will bring greatness to our land."

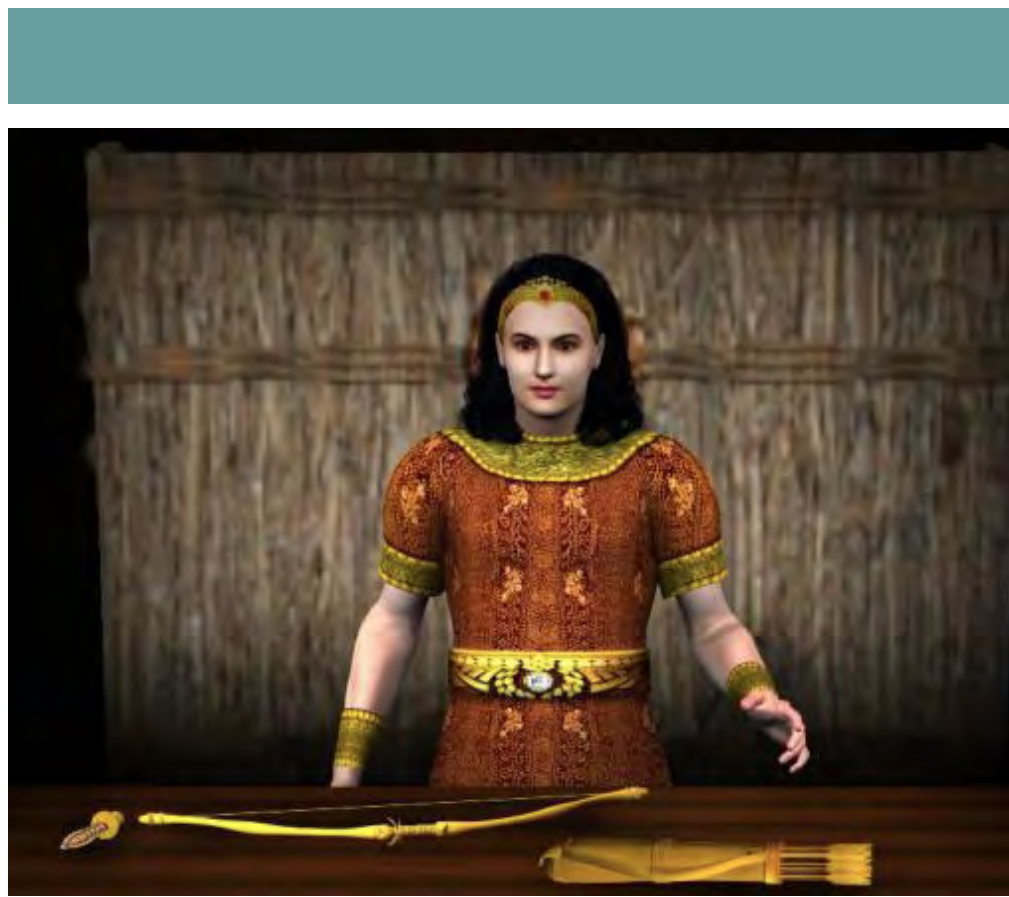
The Bodhisatta expressed his thanks and gratitude to the nobles for their friendship and earnestness but explained to them that it would not be wise for him to accept their offer as it might result in conflict between the two kingdoms.

The nobles of Ceta expressed their views on peace and harmony as follows: "Virtue of people should be based on gratitude. Gratitude is the mark of decency. The people of Ceta have always upheld this virtue and it has made our land harmonious and peaceful. The people of Sivi, on the other hand, lack this virtue. They acted badly against their king without consideration for all the goodness he had done for them. They banished their king from their land in spite of his kindness to them. The lack of gratitude is the characteristic of fools."

The Bodhisatta praised the nobles for their virtue, but explained to them that the people of Sivi are not to be blamed; it was due to some misunderstanding that they had acted harshly and that it was his own fault for failing to make his people appreciate the virtue of charity.

Vessantara and his family spent that night in a shelter at the outskirts of Matula City. The nobles took good care of them and accompanied them on their journey the next day. When they reached the forest that had a pathway leading to Mount Vamka, they paid their final respects to the Bodhisatta and returned to their city. From there, a forester was assigned to guide them and the Bodhisatta continued on with his family. The forester led them through several mountains and rivers. Moving onwards, they passed along the banks of Lake Mucalinda to its northeastern corner and came upon a narrow footpath leading to the foothills of Mount Vamka, at which point the forester left them on their own. From this footpath, they entered into the thick forest, and following the course of the stream inside the forest they came to a magnificent lotus pond at the Himavat region.





The Hermitage

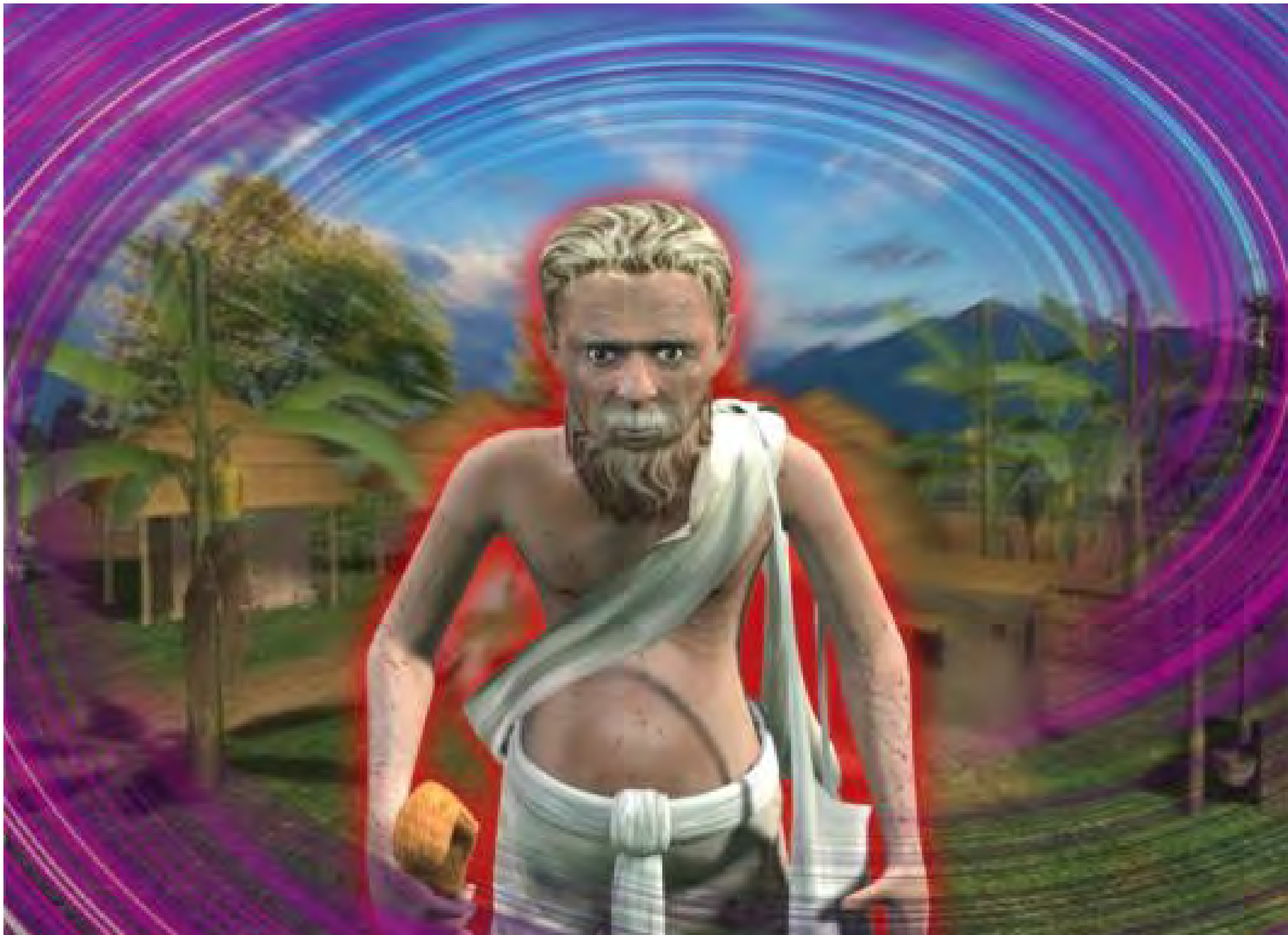
At this moment, Sakka, king of the devas, took notice of what had happened. “The Great Being,” he thought, “has entered Himavat and he must have a place to dwell in.” So he gave orders to Vissakamma, his architect, to go and build a hermitage on a pleasant spot on Mount Vamka. Vissakamma went and made a hermitage with separate huts and a covered walkway and planted rows of flowering trees and a banana grove. Then he proceeded to create the necessary items for the use of ascetics and engraved at the front of the hermitage these words: “Whoever wishes to take up a holy life in this place, feel free to use these articles.” Then he drove away all non-humans and unfriendly creatures from the area and departed.

The Bodhisatta arrived at the walkway and saw the hermitage. He left Maddi and the two children at the entrance to the hermitage and went in. When he saw the inscription, he instinctively knew that Sakka had provided the hermitage for him and his family. He opened the door and entered and put down his bow and sword. He found four sets of ascetic’s robes made of tiger skins neatly folded nearby, next to the robes laid a wooden staff and some useful items. He knew that these were provided by Sakka who was looking after him. He removed his royal garments and put on the ascetic garb of hermit and took the vows of an ascetic. He took up the staff, went to the walkway and paced up and down slowly in the manner of walking meditation. Then he approached his wife and the two children with the quietude of a Pacceka Buddha.²⁹ Maddi could feel the aura of peacefulness emanating from the Bodhisatta. She fell at his feet in tears. Then she entered the hermitage with him and went to her own hut to put on the garb of an ascetic. After this, they took care

of their children and let them change into the garbs of hermits as well. Thus the four royals became hermits and dwelt in the recesses of Mount Vamka.

Life was good for them in the forest of Himavat. By the power of the Bodhisatta’s loving-kindness, even the wild animals around the area had compassion toward one another. Maddi asked her husband to allow her the task of looking for food in the forest. They also vowed to observe celibacy and they slept separately in the different huts. Every day at dawn, Maddi would rise to take care of the children, sweep the hermitage, and with the basket and spade in hand, went out into the forest to collect wild fruits and roots. At the evening she would return with her basket filled with edible foods. Then she would wash the children and the four of them would sit at the door of the hut and eat their fruits and roots. Then Maddi would take her two children and retire to her own hut. In this way, they lived happily for seven months.

²⁹ **Pacceka Buddha:** a Buddha who has gained enlightenment by himself but does not teach others; a private Buddha



Ugliest Man in the World

Back at the kingdom of Kalinga, after the eight Brahmins took Pac-caya, the auspicious elephant, to Kalinga, the drought was broken. As soon as the elephant stepped inside their kingdom, dark clouds formed and rain poured from the sky to cover the entire land of Kalinga. Lightning and thunder filled the skies. The people of Kalinga shouted in ecstasy when they saw the rain and they ran out in it getting wet, singing and dancing all the while. Kalinga, the land that once forgot to smile was now filled with laughter as the land became fertile once more and prosperity returned.

But within this renewed prosperity a problem was brewing for the Bodhisatta....

At the border of Kalinga lay a village called Dunnavittha. In this village lived an old and ugly Brahmin by the name of Jujaka. Jujaka was extremely ugly, for he was short, skinny, and deformed. His eyes were mean and his cheeks hollow; his skin was wrinkled, withered and full of moles; his back was curved and his stomach protruded. He had only two teeth left in his mouth, and his breath was so bad that it smelled like a rotting corpse. He was indeed a sight painful to look at. Everyone who saw him was repelled by his ugliness. People looked down upon him, and because no one wanted to have anything to do with him, Jujaka found himself in poverty and had to beg for a living.

When someone is born ugly or deformed, it is usually due to bad Kamma – something unwholesome that a person has done in his or her past life, such as being cruel to animals, having a bad temper, or making fun of another person's appearance.

But Jujaka was not entirely unlucky. He had a family of Brahmins as old friends. These Brahmins were the only friends Jujaka had in the entire world. For many years, Jujaka had never burdened his friends with anything or asked for their help. It was not until three years earlier that Jujaka had come to his only friends to ask them for a favor. Jujaka was a beggar in Kalinga and life was hard for him. He decided to leave Kalinga to seek a better life in other towns. He had saved up a good sum of money from his lifetime of begging. He felt it was too dangerous for him to take this money with him and thought that it would be safe to leave his money with his Brahmin friends for safekeeping until he returned. Thinking this, he went to see the Brahmin couple.

Upon seeing the couple, he brought out an old pouch and placed it in front of them. He slowly opened it and said, “My old friends, in here there are one hundred pieces of money. It is what I have been able to save since I started out as a beggar. I don't dare keep the money with me, since I must go from place to place. It will be better if I ask you to safeguard it for me, since you are my only friends. Do take good care of it.” Jujaka's voice invoked pity as he knelt down with a sad expression in his face.

The couple looked at each other and they pondered, “He is already quite old. If we keep the money for him and he dies before he asks for it back, this money will become ours.” And so thinking, they said to him, “We may not be rich in material, Jujaka, but we are rich in spirit. So for the sake of our long friendship, we will keep the money for you.”

Jujaka looked at them dubiously and said to them, “You must promise me that you will take good care of my money and will gladly give it back to me when I ask for it later on.”

The Brahmin couple pretended not to care and said, “Now besides the two of us, who else will help you? If you don’t trust us, then go and find someone else.”

After a few more exchanges of words, Jujaka left the money with his friends and proceeded on his journey to another town.

The couple went inside their hut with Jujaka’s money bag. They opened the bag and gawked at the coins closely. There were smiles on their faces as the inherent greed which dwelled deep in human nature reared its ugly head and tempted the couple into stealing the money. Fortunately, their conscience reminded them that the money did not belong to them but had been given to them for safekeeping. So the couple put the coins back into the bag and put it away in a safe place. Days, months, and a year had gone by, but Jujaka never showed his face, neither did he send any news to the couple. The couple continued to keep Jujaka’s money safe as they counted the passing days and thought that it would be nice indeed if Jujaka never came back for the money.

Two years had passed and the couple still had not heard from Jujaka. By then they felt certain that Jujaka must have died. At the time, the prolonged drought in Kalinga also had a bad effect on the couple. It was tough for them to make a living because they could not grow anything. They finally took out Jujaka’s money to spend it so they

could survive. Jujaka’s money lasted them until the drought ended. Life returned to normal and the couple forgot all about what had taken place.

On one fateful morning seven months later, while the Brahmin couple was still in bed, they heard the hoarse voice of an old man outside their hut. It was the voice that they dreaded to hear.

“Is that Jujaka’s voice?” The husband asked, hoping that he had heard wrong. He was hoping that it was the voice of Jujaka’s ghost coming around to visit. “I’m not sure either,” said the wife, “it does sound like him. Why don’t you go and find out?”

Both the husband and wife dreaded to go to the door for fear that it indeed was Jujaka who was still alive. Finally, the wife pushed the husband to the door and he opened it. Standing in front of him was the ugly sight of a hunched-back, wrinkled old man gazing at him. The Brahmin’s heart nearly stopped beating. He felt paralyzed as if he was facing a denizen from hell. He managed to utter out a few husky words, “So you are still alive.”

Jujaka did not care to say a word of greeting. He went straight to the point, “My friend, I’m here for my money. I hope all the money is here.”

The Brahmin did not know what to do, but said instinctively, “Wait here for just a minute, I’ll go get the money.” Then he hurried back to his wife and said frantically, “What a catastrophe! What do we do now? Jujaka is here for his money. He is sure to make a real scene and

everyone will know about this. How can I bear the humiliation?”

“Forget the humiliation,” his wife retorted, “We should be thinking about how to repay him and try to come up with a way out.”

“Oh dear, Jujaka is back for his money.” The wife thought for a minute and said to her husband, “I’ve got the answer. The one person that can help us out is our daughter Amittata.”

The Brahmin asked, “Our daughter Amittata? How can she help us?”

The wife said to her husband, “We could give Amittata to Jujaka as payment for our debt.” Without a second thought, the Brahmin went along with her idea and asked her to go fetch Amittata.

It was unfortunate for Amittata, for her parents’ sense of morality was marred by their fear for Jujaka and their lack of responsibility. The selfish parents decided to unload their responsibility onto their innocent daughter.

The Brahmin returned to face Jujaka. His legs were still shaking as he assumed a sad expression. “Forgive us, dear man. We have not heard from you for such a long time that we thought something bad had happened to you. Also in these past two years, Kalinga had gone through a severe drought. We could not plant anything. We were in such dire shape that we had to use your money in order to survive.”

Jujaka’s face turned white when he heard this. He almost had a heart attack. Then he became uncontrollably enraged and shrieked at the

terrified Brahmin, “How dare you think that I was dead! You are the one who is now facing death. I trekked all the way here two years ago thinking that for the sake of our long friendship you could be trusted and depended upon. But it turned out that you are nothing but a thief. How could you do this to me? It was my lifelong savings! I have wandered all over begging for a living so that I can add a little more to my savings and have enough for my old age. You and your wife are a bad lot. I want my money back right now!”

“Now, now, calm down, dear man. We admit that we have been wrong, but we will make things right for you. We cannot repay you in coins but we will pay you in another way.”

The Old Man and a Young Wife

At that moment, the Brahmin's wife pulled her daughter by the arm out for Jujaka to look at. "Now, old friend, this is our daughter. Her name is Amittata."

The woman then turned toward her daughter and said, "Amittata, today Mr. Jujaka has graciously come to visit us. He is not only a friend but our family is very much indebted to him. Amittata, do pay respect to Mr. Jujaka."

Amittata paid her respect to Jujaka. She felt somewhat confused and said to her mother, "Mother, you told me to come out here because you wanted me to help with something. Does it have anything to do with Mr. Jujaka?"

As soon as Jujaka laid eyes on Amittata, he instantly fell under her spell. She was a dainty-looking girl with a nice complexion. She was very attractive and it was easy for anyone to fall in love with her. Jujaka was melted away by her beauty. He could not keep his eyes off her. He had never been married before because no woman would come near him. They were all repelled by his ugliness. Therefore, he had never dreamt that he would ever have a wife. He spoke up without waiting for the Brahmin couple to speak first, "Are you giving me your daughter as repayment for my money?"

"Indeed, dear Jujaka," the Brahmin woman answered. She turned toward her daughter and said, "Amittata dear, Mr. Jujaka here has been very good to our family. The money which he gave us made it possible for us to survive the famine. We have nothing of value to repay him with. All we have is you. You alone can help us out this time. So go with Mr. Jujaka and serve him well. Repay him the kindness which he has shown us."

Amittata listened to her mother and felt sorry for her parents. She was indeed a good person and a very good child to her parents. She has a deep sense of gratitude toward her parents and felt it was her filial duty to help them. Although she found herself being given away as wife to an ugly old man whom she had just met for the first time, she had the following words to say to her parents, "If it is your wish and if it can help, then I will willingly go and live with Mr. Jujaka."

Jujaka could not have been happier. His desire for Amittata was clearly apparent on his face. He was not about to let this golden opportunity slip away, for fear that the parents might change their minds; so he said, "It is agreed. I will take Amittata with me and consider the debt all paid in full." And he hurried away with Amittata.

Amittata's youth and beauty caused Jujaka's heart, which had long laid dormant, to suddenly become active. He was in ecstasy over his young wife and was jubilant all the way back to his home. After some time, they arrived at his house in the town of Dunnavittha which had been left empty for a long time. He could not wait to show his wife off to the villagers who used to look down upon him. Jujaka got his wish because the villagers came out to admire Amittata's beauty and wondered at old Jujaka's luck.

Having just acquired a young bride, Jujaka hurried to put his shabby house in order. He wanted to make sure that his new bride did not move in with some younger man. Amittata could only resign to her fate by accepting her lot in life. She was so obedient to her parents that she did not complain about having to become an old, ugly man's wife. When she saw Jujaka cleaning she said, "Can I help



with anything, Mr. Jujaka?”

“There’s no need to call me Mr. Jujaka, it sounds much too formal,” said Jujaka, “It’s better to just call me Jujaka. I don’t want you to have to do anything at all, so just sit here and watch me work.” Jujaka was so in love with his bride that he wanted to spoil her.

“I don’t want the villagers to say that I’m lazy. Please let me take care of the housework the way a good wife should,” said Amittata as she got up to sweep the floor.

From then on, Amittata’s conduct was that of a good wife. She got up early to prepare breakfast for her husband before she went down to the stream to do her laundry. She took good care of the old house and planted flowering plants all around it. She also carried out such heavy work as chopping wood, pounding rough rice, and fetching water. She did everything there was to do and she looked after her old husband so well that he regained his youthful energy. She cared for Jujaka the way she used to care for her father before she left home. She was not in the least repelled by her old, ugly husband. She could only blame her own fate. Despite the huge age difference between the two, they managed to live together happily.

The villagers could not help but observe them. Soon, Amittata became the villagers’ favorite subject of conversation. The young men in the village who were jealous of Jujaka ever since he brought Amittata back with him were always talking among themselves about Amittata’s virtues and about what a good wife she was. They compared Amittata’s virtues to those of their own wives and they

complained, “Why, our wives at home are so different. My wife never tends to me or takes care of the house the way Amittata does. We need to tell our wives to start using Amittata for an example and behave like a good housewife.”

And so, they reproached their own wives and talked down at them in the following tone: “Look at that Jujaka’s wife, Amittata. She is hard-working and she takes good care of her husband, unlike you. You are lazy and irresponsible. You don’t keep the house tidy. You don’t serve me dinner when I come home from work but leave me to fend for myself. That old Jujaka never has to lift a finger. Amittata does everything for him; she even chops wood and beats the grains. You must look up to Amittata and follow her good example. Don’t be an embarrassment to me!”

The women were upset at their husbands for comparing them to Amittata. And when some of them argued back, they were beaten by their husbands. They showed their bruises to one another and blamed it on Amittata. They vowed to teach Amittata a lesson and to drive her away from their village.





Why Did You Marry an Old, Ugly Husband?

One morning when Amittata went to the stream to fetch water as she usually did, she greeted the women who gathered there with her usual friendly smile. The women gave her a hateful stare, surrounded her, and began their verbal attacks:

“Hey Amittata, you are pretty enough, so why on earth did you agree to live with a man old enough to be your father?”

“What is the matter with you? There are plenty of young men around. Why did you decide to choose an old, ugly man like Jujaka?”

“Your parents must have really hated you to give you away to a decrepit, sorry old man.”

“You must have reviled a virtuous monk in your past life and now you are paying for it.”

“You are bad luck! Even your parents wouldn’t let you stay with them. You bring bad luck to us. You should take your bad luck with you and leave our village.”

The women laughed raucously at Amittata and made fun of her. Their wicked laughter pierced her heart like a thousand sharp needles. It hurt her so deeply that she ran weeping all the way home. Jujaka was distressed to see his young wife sobbing so badly. The sight of his beautiful wife stained with tears pained him. He asked her what had made her so upset and she told him: “The women mocked me and laughed at me for marrying an ugly, old man. They reviled me and wanted to chase me out of town. From now on, I

will never go to the landing to fetch water or wash your clothes anymore.”

“Poor Amittata, don’t pay any attention to these women. They have foul mouths. From now on you need not go fetch the water anymore; I will do it for you.” Jujaka consoled her.

“This will not do. I was not brought up to have my husband do the housework. You need to find me a servant or buy me a slave to do this kind of work, or I will no longer stay with you,” Amittata demanded.

Jujaka said, “How can I hire a servant or buy a slave? I have no money, no corn, no skill.”

Amittata then said, “Listen up, my husband. I heard that there lives a king named Vessantara in the kingdom of Sivi. He is kind and compassionate and will not turn anyone down who comes to him for help. He gives away everything that he possesses. He has given up all his wealth except his two young children. Go to him and ask him to give us his children to be our slaves. He will not refuse to give you what you ask.”

At first, Jujaka refused to do so, telling his wife that he was too old and too weak to travel such a long distance, but Amittata insisted. She threatened to leave Jujaka if he failed to do so. Fearing the loss of his beautiful, young wife, Jujaka finally agreed. He donned the garb of a Brahmin ascetic, took a walking cane, put his bag of provisions over his shoulder, then bade his wife goodbye.

After several days of traveling, Jujaka finally arrived at the city of Jetuttara. He asked the towns people where to find Vessantara. The people told him Vessantara no longer lived in Jetuttara but had been exiled to Mount Vamka with his wife and two children. Noticing the destitute appearance of the impoverished Brahmin, the town's people questioned Jujaka about his intentions for wanting to see the Bodhisatta. When they found out that Jujaka was there to exploit the Bodhisatta's generosity, they were angry at him and scolded him with these words: "It was mendicants like you that had caused our good king to be banished." Then they grabbed some stones and whatever they could find to hurl at him. Jujaka ran for his life without looking back. In spite of his advanced age, Jujaka was an expert when it came to running for his life. He had a lot of practice as a beggar, who often found himself having to flee from snarling dogs and unfriendly folks.

Unbeknownst to him, as he kept running, he was headed toward the direction of Mount Vamka. Soon, he found himself lost in the forest and tried frantically to find his way out. But the more he tried, the deeper he went inside the forest. He started to feel sorry for himself, moaning and groaning for his misfortune, when he spotted a pack of ferocious dogs ahead of him. The dogs barked at him fiercely and raced toward him as if to tear his flesh into pieces. Their ferocious barking sent chills down his spine. He ran for his life and managed to climb up a tree and sat on one of its limbs, shaking with fright. Then he noticed these were not wild dogs but domestic ones and thought to himself, "These dogs must have an owner. The owner must not be too far away. I will call for him." And he shouted loudly to call for attention.

At that moment, a forester appeared. He had been assigned by the nobles of Ceta to safeguard Vessantara from intruders who came to beg from him. When he saw Jujaka he questioned his purpose for being there. Jujaka lied to him and told him that he had been sent by Vessantara's parents to bring the prince home, adding that the people of Sivi had forgiven Vessantara and wanted him to return to resume the throne. The gullible forester fell for Jujaka's lie. He told his dogs to back away, gave Jujaka food and drink, and sent him on his way. Then he pointed Jujaka towards the direction of Vessantara's hermitage and told him that on the way there he would run into an old yogi named Accata. This yogi would give him the rest of the directions.

Jujaka left the forester and by the late afternoon of the same day he arrived at the yogi's dwelling. Jujaka's dubious demeanor made the yogi feel suspicious, but, again, the cunning Brahmin lied his way out of trouble. The yogi then invited Jujaka to spend the night at his hermitage as it was getting too late to travel. Jujaka spent the night there and befriended the yogi. He found out from the yogi that Vessantara lived not far from there and that Maddi went out to the forest each morning to find food and would not return until late in the afternoon. He figured the best time to approach Vessantara would be when Maddi was away so that she would not pose a problem for him. He also found out the direct route to Vessantara's hermitage as well as an alternate route that bypassed the yogi and the forester, which he thought he would use on the way back to avoid being seen with the two children. The next morning Jujaka left the yogi and headed toward Vessantara's hermitage.

Maddi's Nightmare

That day, Maddi felt a strange and uncomfortable anxiety all day. She had a premonition that something bad was going to happen to her family. That evening she held her two children close to her heart and sang them to sleep. As for herself, she could hardly close her eyes and fall asleep. When she finally fell asleep near dawn, she was haunted by a gruesome dream. In her dream, she saw a fierce-looking, dark-skinned man with a huge sword in his hand, entering her hut. He grabbed her and pushed her down on the floor and gouged out her eyes. Then he sliced off her arms, cut open her chest and took out her heart and carried it away with him. Blood spilled all over the floor. The dream appeared so real that she screamed out in pain and woke herself up. She went to Vessantara and told him about her dream and asked him to interpret it for her.

Vessantara's intuition told him that this was an omen forewarning his wife that their two children were about to be taken away by some unscrupulous person. He sensed that someone was about to come to him and ask for his two children to be given away as alms. For him, this was good news, because it would allow him to complete another vital step toward Buddhahood – by giving away things that are most difficult to give. However, he knew that it would be too upsetting for Maddi if he were to tell her the true interpretation of her dream. So he calmed her and told her not be concerned about it, blaming it on some kind of indigestion that she must have had.



Give Me Your Children

When Jujaka arrived at the lotus pond near Vessantara’s hermitage he thought to himself, “If I go in now and ask for the children it would not work because Maddi would never agree to it. I better wait until the morning and go to see him after Maddi is gone.” So he went up on a nearby knoll to spend the night there and he fantasized about his young wife. The next morning, he waited until Maddi had left for the forest then came down from the knoll and went up the footpath towards the hermitage.

Anticipating the arrival of the Brahmin, the Bodhisatta came out of his hut and seated himself upon a slab of stone looking like a golden statue. Jali and Kanhajina were playing close by. As he looked down the road, he saw a deformed Brahmin coming. He asked Jali to go and welcome the Brahmin. Jali went up to Jujaka and greeted him politely but the Brahmin showed his meanness to him right away. In his wicked ways he thought, “This boy will soon become my slave; I better intimidate him from the start so that he would become submissive to me.”

Jali was startled at Jujaka’s rudeness. He wondered, “Why is this Brahmin so rude? He is not like any Brahmins I know.” As he observed Jujaka closely the way a clever boy would, he saw all the bad features which made Jujaka so ugly: his feet were crooked and turned in; his fingernails rotten and black; his calves floppy; his upper lip covered his lower lip and he salivated all the time; his teeth were like tusks; his nose was totally flat; he had a pot belly and his back was hunched over; one eye was small and the other was big; his skin was wrinkled and coiled; his body was covered with freckles; his eyes were yellow; his body curved in three places: the waist, the back and the neck; he was bow-legged and his body

made noise when he walked; throughout his body he was covered with long, coarse hair. Anyone possessing just one of these features would already make him homely, but when all of these unsightly features were present in one person, it was a painful sight to look at.

“This man does not possess a single good feature,” thought Jali, “I fear he is here for no good reason.” Having made his observation, Jali left the old Brahmin and went to his sister and they both went to hide behind the great rock that their father sat on.

The cunning Jujaka came up to the Bodhisatta and tried to ingratiate himself to him with kind words. The Bodhisatta welcomed Jujaka graciously and offered him some food and water and asked him, “Dear Brahmin, what is your name? What brings you to this deep forest?”

Now Jujaka immediately put Vessantara at ease by flattering him with these words: “I am a Brahmin from Dunnivitttha, a village in the kingdom of Kalinga, and my name is Jujaka. I have heard from the people that you are the refuge of all people in need. You are like a lake full of water that is ready to feed all animals that come to quench their thirst.” Having adequately praised the Bodhisatta, Jujaka stated his purpose for being there: “Your Venerable, I have risked my life and come all the way here to ask for your two children to be given to me and my wife, Amittata, as servants.”

Path of a Great Being

Usually, a person would be perturbed if someone comes to ask him to give away his children. But in the case of the Bodhisatta, whose aspiration was to attain Buddhahood, it was different. By giving something that was flesh and blood to him, something that was a part of him, something that was dearest to him, something that he loved even more than his own life such as his own children and his wife, it signified the willingness to free oneself from attachment in exchange for Enlightenment and Buddhahood. Even though this is extremely difficult to do, it is only a small sacrifice compared to the exalted achievement of Buddhahood and the sublime ability to lead all beings away from the cycle of rebirth and suffering.

Many will argue that such a giving is a cruel and irresponsible act and is unfair to one's own family. But it must be understood that the Bodhisatta must be willing to give up everything, including his own life, in order to ultimately attain Buddhahood and the knowledge to break the endless cycle of misery and suffering for all mankind. The attainment of such an arduous goal requires great and unfathomable sacrifices, which the Bodhisatta must make.

Through countless lifetimes of mental development and the cultivation of Perfections, the Bodhisatta had acquired transcendental wisdom and foresight that led him to the ingrained knowledge of what needed to be accomplished in order to achieve Buddhahood and break the cycle of rebirth. In order to attain Buddhahood, the Bodhisatta had to perfect all faculties, as well as the ten virtues consisting of Renunciation, Perseverance, Loving-kindness, Resolution, Wisdom, Morality, Forbearance, Equanimity, Truthfulness, and Charity.

To perfect the Virtues of Charity, the Bodhisatta must perform five ultimate forms of alms-giving to the benefit of others. These consisted of giving away his worldly possessions, his own body parts, his life, his children, and his wife. The reason for giving away all forms of ownership is to free oneself from every form of attachment that may hinder one's success in mental development leading to Enlightenment.

A Bodhisatta is a being who has progressively cultivated virtue and accumulated merit for a countless number of lifetimes in order to perfect his faculties and mental power. It is this mental power that brings about the awareness and realization that life in samsara is full of endless suffering. The only way to break the bonds of samsara is to rid oneself of all forms of defilements, namely greed, hatred, and ignorance.

The Bodhisatta did not love his children any less than his wife did, but he was cognizant of his great responsibility to find the way out of the cycle of birth and death so that he could lead his family and other living beings out of suffering. Although he knew his action may lead his children to suffer; but their suffering would last for one lifetime while Enlightenment would bring the end of suffering for all lifetimes.

This was his last birth as a Bodhisatta, for in the subsequent birth, he would attain Enlightenment and become a Buddha. It was a long and difficult journey that has taken him several eons and countless earth ages to arrive to. And in the lifetime as Vessantara, he was able to reach the ultimate perfection of Charity through the challenge presented by Jujaka.

For the Sake of Buddhahood

The Bodhisatta said to Jujaka, "Dear Brahmin, my children are my flesh and blood; they mean more to me than my own heart or my own eyes and I will readily give up my life for them. But my love for Buddhahood is greater than my love for anything in this world. For the sake of Buddhahood, I am willing to give my beloved children to you." Then he said, "They are yours now and you have full authority over them. However, Maddi, the children's mother, is presently away in the forest and will not be back until late afternoon. Why don't you rest here for the night and leave in the morning? This way, their mother can bathe them and adorn them with garlands and flowers, and say goodbye to them. We will pack some fruits and honey for you and send you off in the morning."

Jujaka did not like what he heard. He said to the Bodhisatta, "This is not a good idea. Queen Maddi will never let you give her children to me and she will spoil your alms-giving. Please bring in the children and give them to me now so you can reap the full benefits of your ultimate alms-giving that will lead you to Nibbana."

Vessantara was concerned for the welfare of his children. He perceived that if their grandfather had a chance to see them he would want to redeem them by paying Jujaka off. He said to Jujaka, "If you have no wish to let the children see their mother, I suggest that at least you take them to Jetuttara and present them to their grandfather, King Sanjaya. The king will reward you with so much wealth that you would no longer have to beg for a living the rest of your life."

Jujaka said immediately, "There is no way I will do that. King Sanjaya will think that I stole the children from you. Instead of giving

me a reward, he will give me death."

Hiding behind the big rock that their father sat on, Jali and Kanhajina overheard the entire conversation and it frightened them horribly. They slipped away quietly to hide behind the hut, then ran from behind the hut to hide in the bush, and from the bush they came to the lotus pond and plunged into the water and stood under the thick cluster of lotus leaves, perfectly concealed.

Jujaka noticed that there was no sign of the children anywhere in the hermitage so he went to look for them. He became angry when he could not find them and spewed forth sarcastic words at the Bodhisatta accusing him of concealing his children. The Bodhisatta calmed him down and went to look for the children. He followed their tracks and found their footprints on the bank of the lotus pond which disappeared into the water and knew that they were hiding somewhere in it.

He called to Jali with a tender voice: "Jali, my beloved son, please come to your father and consecrate his heart. Help me fulfill my will. Be the ship that ferries me across the river of samsara to the shore of Nibbana."

Upon hearing this, Jali resolved to help his father attain his goal. He thought to himself, "I will help my father attain his goal of Enlightenment. Let the Brahmin do with me what he will." Then he moved out of his hiding place under the lotus leaves and went forward to his father and bowed low at his right foot. He embraced his ankle and wept.

The Bodhisatta called to Kanhajina with the same gentle tone and words. Kanhajina also resolved to help her father. She came out of the water and bowed low at her father’s left foot. She embraced his other ankle and wept.

The Bodhisatta’s heart was in immense pain to see his two children weeping so piteously. He lifted them up, wiped off their tears, and comforted them with these words: “Jali and Kanhajina, my dearest, you are the love of my life. Please know that I love you more than anything in this world. I have spent a countless number of lifetimes cultivating merits and perfecting virtues. It is the practice of all great Bodhisattas who aspire to become a Buddha to abandon all possessions in order to free themselves of attachments. By giving away the two of you as alms, I have done what is most difficult to do, and have fulfilled one important requirement for becoming a Buddha. If I fail to free myself of all attachments, I will not be able to achieve Enlightenment. In making this sacrifice, the two of you not only help your father fulfill his noble goal, but you also help countless beings to escape from suffering. You will be known as the great givers. Be brave and be strong, my loved ones. Do not give in to hardships.”

The Bodhisatta’s words were like a celestial potion that healed the hearts of his two children. It brought them strength and courage. They knew that their sacrifice would serve as a bridge by which all beings could use to cross over to the shores of deliverance.

The Bodhisatta was concerned about the future of his children and thought of ways to protect them from falling into the hands

of unworthy people should the greedy Brahmin decide to sell them as slaves. To protect them from falling into the hands of people of low births he put high monetary values for each one of them. He assigned the price of one thousand units of gold for the prince. For the princess, he thought she would need a much better protection and therefore assigned her with a higher value, which consisted of one hundred male slaves, one hundred female slaves, one hundred elephants, one hundred cattle, plus a hundred units of gold. This was to ensure that only wealthy monarchs could be able to afford them and their future would be in good hands.

Then he took them back to the hermitage, called Jujaka over and poured water from the gourd onto his hand to signify his giving. With an unburdened heart firmly fixed on Buddhahood, he said to Jujaka, “However precious my children are to me, it is incomparable to Buddhahood which is far more precious. I hereby give my beloved children to you as the ultimate alms.”

As soon as he finished saying these words, the earth shook, lightning flashed, and rain fell; lions of the Himavanta forest roared in unison, and celestial beings in every realm rejoiced. The Bodhisatta saw this miraculous phenomenon and knew it was the reaction from all the celestial beings acknowledging his ultimate act of giving. It made Bodhisatta’s heart fill with a great sense of satisfaction.

How Can Anyone Be So Mean?

On the part of Jujaka, the wicked Brahmin was quick to show the true nature of his heart, which was far worse than his physical ugliness. Because of his own evil nature, he believed all people were as evil and tricky as he was. He feared Vessantara would change his mind and try to get his children back. So he went to look for some jungle creepers and wove them into a rope. With the rope in hand, he ruthlessly bounded Jali’s right hand to Kanhajina’s left and dragged them quickly away. His cruelty frightened the two well-loved children. They froze in fear and cried and asked their father for help. The ruthless Brahmin thought, “What stubborn kids! If I don’t break their will today, they will definitely be unruly and disobedient to Amittata and me so I better put them in their right place starting now.”

He raised his cane and beat the children mercilessly right in front of Vessantara. The cane struck their bodies and broke their skin giving them bloody wounds. The children cried in pain. As Jujaka was struggling with the children, he tripped and the rope fell away from his hand. The children ran tearfully toward their father. Jali embraced his father’s feet and cried out, “Father, this Brahmin is so wicked and cruel. He has no pity in his heart. He must not be a human but a yakkha in disguise. Please do not give us away until Mother returns. My sister Kanhajina is so young and innocent and has never seen suffering in her life. She will cry herself to death without her mother. When Mother does not see Kanhajina, she too will cry so hard that her heart will dry up like a river without water.”

Meanwhile Jujaka caught up with the two children, beat them and dragged them away. Again, he stumbled and fell down and the rope

slipped from his hand. The children, trembling like wounded fowls, ran back again to their father. Jujaka caught up with them and brought them back, beating them all the way.

Kanhajina cried out: “Father, this Brahmin thrashes me like slave. I thought Brahmins are moral men. This cruel person cannot be Brahmin. He must be a yakkha in disguise. He is taking us off to eat. Can you bear to see us be eaten by a yakkha?”

As his little daughter lamented, trembling as she went, the Bodhisatta was overcome with grief. Not strong enough to endure it, he went into the hut, tears streaming from his eyes, and wept pitifully. He lamented, “O my precious ones, they must be so frightened and scared. Who will hold their hands to help them walk? Their feet must have hurt so badly without their shoes. They must be crying for their mother. Who will feed them and comfort them?”

He decried, “How could the Brahmin feel no shame to strike my harmless innocents in front of their father’s eyes. No man with any sense of shame would treat another so.” Anger came into his mind and he thought of killing the Brahmin and bringing his children back. He grabbed his sword and took up his bow and set out to pursue Jujaka into the forest. Then he regained his composure and said to himself, “My children are mistreated and are now suffering hardship, but there is nothing I can do because I have already given them away. To regret after having given something as alms is not the way of the righteous. Such unbearable suffering happens because of the love and attachment that I have for my children. I must control my emotions.”

Jali and Kanhajina had endured great suffering due to the cruelty of Jujaka. They wailed pitifully throughout their journey: “Our little feet are all swollen. The pain is terrible and there is still a long way to go. The Brahmin beats us without mercy and does not let us rest. I wish Mother could be here to help us.”

Their lamentations had an effect on all the deities that dwelled in the Himavanta Forest. They felt deep compassion for the two children but worried that when Maddi learned Vessantara had given the children away to Jujaka, she would come after the children and thereby interrupt the ultimate charity of the Bodhisatta. They also feared that if Maddi saw her children suffering so badly it would cause her such an overwhelming grief that she might die as a result. So they resolved to prevent Maddi from arriving at the hermitage that afternoon by letting three deities take the shapes of a lion, a tiger, and a yellow panther and then proceeded to block the only route that led to the hermitage.





Where Are My Children?

That day, several strange things happened to Maddi. First, the spade fell out of her hands as she was working away, then the fruit basket fell from her shoulder and all the fruit scattered all over the ground. As she bent down to put them back inside her basket, all the fruit trees around her disappeared and all the trees which had never borne fruits before were now laden with fruits. Then she noticed that the forest around her which she had known very well had completely changed and had become unfamiliar to her. She anxiously tried to find her way back home but ended up quite lost. After a good while, the forest appeared normal again and she found herself back to where she was before. Then her right eye began to twitch.

She thought to herself, “What is going on here? All these strange things are happening to me today. These must be some kind of signs warning me that something bad is about to happen to me or to my children or my husband.”

As she arrived at the narrow path leading to the hermitage, she found that a lion, a tiger, and a yellow panther were blocking the way. There was no other path that she could use to get to the hermitage. So she stayed out of sight of the three wild beasts and waited for them to leave, but they never did. Only as it began to get dark did the three beasts finally go away.

Maddi hurried her way back to the hermitage. When she finally got there and did not find her children, she asked Vessantara of their whereabouts. But Vessantara kept his silence. She repeated the same question several times, yet Vessantara did not utter a single word. Maddi sensed that something must have gone wrong. So she went back into the forest to look for them until late into the night,

but there was still no sign of them anywhere. That night she could not sleep at all as she worried sick about her children. As soon as morning came, she went back to see her husband but the Bodhisatta continued to remain silent. She was overtaken by grief and collapsed on the floor.

The Bodhisatta was frightened, thinking that she had died. He rose up and laid a hand on her heart to feel her heartbeat. For seven months he had not touched her body, for they both took vows of chastity. In this difficult moment, the Bodhisatta had to put aside his ascetic conduct and tried to save Maddi’s life. With tears in his eyes he raised Maddi’s head and laid it upon his lap, sprinkling it with water, and rubbing her face and chest to revive her. After a little while Maddi regained her consciousness and rising up in confusion, paid respect to the Bodhisatta and asked, “My lord, where have the children gone?”

That was the time he apprised her of what he had done and told her that the children had been given to a Brahmin as alms. By then Maddi had mustered up the courage to endure the trauma. She asked him, “My lord, if you had given the children to a Brahmin, why did you let me go weeping about all night without saying a word?”

“I did not speak at once because I did not want to cause you pain,” the Bodhisatta replied. Then he said, “O Maddi, do not be over-grieved but set your eyes on me. An impoverished Brahmin came to beg for our children and I gave them to him. You know it is the quest for Buddhahood that I should give what is asked of me. Please rejoice with me in this great merit.”

Partners in Merit

Maddi had been a life partner of the Bodhisatta and had pursued Perfections alongside him in several of their past lifetimes. Because of the virtues that she had accumulated, she too was aware of the supreme charity that a Bodhisatta had to perform in order to attain Enlightenment. The thought of giving away her children to some stranger was hard to bear, but understanding that such deed would help her husband achieve Buddhahood, she was able to overcome her deep sorrows and rejoiced with him.

Maddi said to the Bodhisatta, “I do rejoice in your act of charity. Giving away your own children is the hardest thing for any man to do. Amidst a world of selfish men, you have done what no one can.”

The Bodhisatta told Maddi the miraculous phenomenon that took place after he gave their children away to the Brahmin. Maddi responded, “Yes, my husband, I did hear the earth rumble and saw that the lightning flared and heard the thunder echoed through the hills. Your supreme charity was acknowledged and rejoiced by all in the celestial realms. I do praise your action.” Thus Maddi, lady of royal birth, princess of high degree, rejoiced with him.

Now that the Bodhisatta has given his children away, there remained one last and greatest gift for him to give to complete his task — his devoted wife.

Sakka was aware that should someone come to ask for his wife Vessantara would not withhold it. He pondered, “Now suppose a vile man should come and ask him for Maddi herself, he would give her to him. I should not let this happen. I myself will go to him to

beg for Maddi. Thus I will enable him to attain the supreme height of perfection. I shall make it impossible that she should be given to anyone else and then I will give her back.”

Sakka assumed the guise of an old Brahmin and approached the hermitage that morning. After an exchange of greetings and salutations, the Bodhisatta asked him the purpose of his visit, “Dear Brahmin, what brought you this way? What do you seek in this mighty forest?”

Sakka, in the guise of an old Brahmin replied, “O Venerable, I am feeble and old. I need someone to take care of me. I heard that your generosity knows no bounds and would not turn down anyone who comes to you for help. I come here to beg for your wife Maddi.”

Vessantara realized that he must also give away his dear wife to attain his goal. He expressed his willingness to do so. He took Maddi’s hand with his left hand and poured water from his gourd onto the Brahmin’s hand with his right hand and pronounced: “I love my wife dearly, but my love for Buddhahood is a thousand fold. I hereby give Maddi, my beloved wife, to you. May this act of charity help me attain Buddhahood in the future.”

Maddi submitted without showing any signs of disapproval or any unhappiness. She knew that this would fulfill her husband’s ultimate goal. At that moment, the earth rumbled, thunder rumbled, the heavens shook, the oceans roared, and celestial beings rejoiced just as they had when the Bodhisatta gave away his children.

Eight Wishes of the Bodhisatta

Having seen that the Bodhisatta was capable of supreme charity, Sakka said to him, “Dear Vessantara, miserliness is the enemy that prevents one from obtaining celestial and worldly wealth. Though a householder, you have given up your most beloved children and wife in charity. With such detachment, there can be no greater exemplification of magnanimity. Your quest for Buddhahood is soon to be fulfilled.”

Now it was time for Sakka to reveal his identity. He gave Maddi back to Vessantara and said, “I am Sakka, king of the heaven. I hereby give you my blessings and offer to fulfill eight wishes of yours. Tell me what eight wishes you desire.” As Sakka spoke, he rose into the air ablaze like the morning sun.

The Bodhisatta was glad to know that his acts of good deed had been observed by the beings of heaven. He said to Sakka, “Mighty Sakka, thank you kindly for your blessings and for granting me eight wishes. The following are my wishes:

“May my father welcome me back to his kingdom, to return the throne back to me so I will have plenty of resources to give alms. This is my first wish.

May I condemn no man to death and let me have the power to release the condemned from death. This is my second wish.

May I be the refuge for all, young and old, rich or poor; let them rely on me for their welfare. This is my third wish.

May I not seek the wives of my neighbors, be contented with my own, and not to be subject to a woman’s will. This is my fourth wish.

May my children have long lives and conquer the world with righteousness. This is my fifth wish.

At dawning of the day, may celestial food be revealed for me to give in plenty, for alms to never run low. This is my sixth wish.

May means of giving never fail and may I always give with a heart full of joy. This is my seventh wish.

When I pass away, may I go straight to heaven and after passing from heaven to be reborn as human, let it be my last birth and never have to be reborn again. This is my eight wish.”

Sakka recognized that all of Vessantara’s wishes were toward helping others. Through his divine insight he saw that all of his eight wishes were within reach. He said to the Bodhisatta, “Your father will soon come to see you; he will return the throne to you. All of your wishes will be realized. Please be happy, exercise prudence and strive on with awareness.” After having said this, Sakka left and returned to his heavenly abode.



Jujaka Confronted the King

Back at the forest, Jujaka continued on with his journey, dragging the two children along with him. When the sun went down, he would tie the children to the trunk of a tree, but he would climb up the tree to sleep. This way, he thought, should a wild beast come along looking for food it would attack the children and eat them first and not bother him. But the hardship of the two children caught the attention of the angels in the area and they watched over them. At night, they would take the forms of Vessantara and Maddi and came to look after them. They would free them from their bonds, wash them, give them food, and put them to rest. Then at dawn they would lay them down again back in their bonds and disappear. Thus with the help of the angels the children remained safe from harm.

After a few days of travel Jujaka arrived at a cross road with one leading to Kalinga and the other to Sivi. By the doing of the angels, Jujaka was made to choose the road that led to the land of Sivi. After several more days of travel he arrived at the city of Jetuttara not knowing that he had come to a different town. The old Brahmin unconsciously led the two children to the royal courtyard of Jetuttara. His rugged appearance and harsh behavior with the two delicate children attracted the attention of the royal guards who brought him before the king. The king saw the two children from afar and thought they looked quite familiar to him. He sat there admiring their beautiful appearances and elegant disposition and wondered, “These two children look just like Jali and Kanhajina, my grandchildren.”

The king asked Jujaka, “Brahmin, tell me how did you get a hold of these two children.”

Jujaka told the king, “A fortnight ago, King Vessantara gave these two children to me.”

King Sanjaya did not believe what the Brahmin said and insisted on hearing the truth from him. Jujaka maintained that what he said was true and that Vessantara, whose heart was as vast as an ocean, gave his two children to him as alms.

Hearing this, the courtiers reproached Vessantara saying, “This was a wrong thing for King Vessantara to do, giving away his own children. He could have given money, slaves, elephants, horses, carriages, or anything else to the Brahmin, but instead he gave away his own children. This is irresponsible indeed.”

On hearing the courtiers blaming his father without knowing the truth behind his action Jali retorted, “How can my father give any of the things you described? He was alone with his family in the forest without any possessions. He had none of these things: money, slaves, elephants, horses, mules, or carriages. It is the tradition of Bodhisattas to give away their children as alms in order to attain Buddhahood. My father gave me and my sister away so that he could one day become a Buddha and free himself and all beings from suffering. He did this for the benefit of mankind. He did not do this because he was ignorant or superstitious. After he had done this, miracles happened; the earth shook and thunders roared in witness of his great act of charity. My sister and I willingly supported his act of generosity and we rejoice in his merit.”



The king said, “My dear children, I do praise your father’s act of generosity. But tell me, how did his heart feel when he gave the two of you away?”

Jali replied, “His heart was in pain and tears came down from his eyes. When he heard Kanhajina cry and bewailed how cruel the Brahmin had treated her, tying her, dragging and beating her with his cane, he grieved painfully.”

The king was furious at Jujaka and gazed at him with burning eyes. It sent chills down the Brahmin’s spine. He stood there trembling and worried for his life. Jali and Kanhajina were standing at a distance from King Sanjaya and did not come to the king. Seeing this, the king asked them, “My grandchildren, why are you standing over there instead of coming to sit on my lap like you often did before you went away?”

Jali replied, “We are no longer free. We have become the Brahmin’s slaves and no longer your grandchildren. It is not our place to be close to you.”

Jali’s words cut through the king’s heart like a burning knife bathed with acid. The king bemoaned, “My grandchildren, do not speak this way. It torments my heart and depresses my soul. I am so sad to see you in this way. I will redeem you from the Brahmin. Tell me, my boy, when your father gave both of you away did he place any values on you?”

Jali replied, “Yes, Father did put a price on each of us. A thousand units of gold was my price. My sister’s price was one hundred male slaves, one hundred female slaves, one hundred elephants, one hundred cattle, plus a hundred units of gold.”

The king said, “I will pay these prices to set you free.” Then he summoned his courtiers to put together the money and the rest of the payments to pay off Jujaka. In addition, he gave Jujaka a seven-storied mansion to live in. The Brahmin’s fortune had changed overnight. He became a wealthy man surrounded by slaves and attendants with abundant food and drinks.

The courtiers took the two children to wash, dress, and feed them. King Sanjaya had Jali sit on his lap and Kanhajina on Queen Phusati’s. The king then said, “Jali, tell me about your parents. Are they well? Did they have plenty to eat? Are they in good health?”

Jali replied, “Grandpa, everyday Mother goes out to the forest to find wild fruits and roots and lets Father meditate. At night we would come together and eat. Mother has to endure heat and harsh weather in the beast-infested forest. Her hair is ruffled and her body is soiled. She is clothed in animal skin and sleeps upon the ground. Mother works so hard she has become thin and frail.”

Having described his mother’s hardships, he reproached his grandfather: “It is the custom in the world that each man loves his son. But you did not show this love to your son.”

The king acknowledged his fault and said, “It was indeed a grave fault of mine. By following the voice of the people, I drove my son to banishment. I have caused so much suffering to all of you who are innocent. To compensate for my faults, all the wealth which I possess and all my power, I wish to relinquish to your father. Let him return to rule Sivi.”

Jali said, “My father will not return to Sivi on account of my words only. It is better for you to go in person and restore him to the throne.”

The king said, “Yes, you are right. This is the right thing for me to do.”





Return of the Elephant

Back in the kingdom of Kalinga, eight months had passed since Paccaya, the auspicious elephant, had been brought to the kingdom. The drought had ended, the land became fertile once again, and people everywhere rejoiced with their renewed prosperity and happiness. Kalinga-raja was grateful for what Vessantara had done for his kingdom. One day he gathered his ministers together and said to them, “My dear ministers, our kingdom is prosperous again now that the drought has been broken and all the crops are growing abundantly. Our people are happy and prosperous thanks to King Vessantara of Sivi. I think it is now time to consider returning the auspicious elephant back to its original owner. What do you think?”

The reactions from the ministers were not unanimous.

One minister said, “The elephant had been given to us officially by King Vessantara. It rightfully belongs to us. There is no need to return it, Sire.”

Another minister said, “Sire, the reason our kingdom has become prosperous again is solely due to the reason that Paccaya, the auspicious elephant, had been brought to our kingdom. If the elephant is no longer present in Kalinga, I am afraid the drought will return and our people will suffer again. I do not think it is a good idea to let go of the elephant, Sire.”

The third minister spoke up, “I heard that after King Vessantara gave his auspicious elephant to us, the people of Sivi were angry at him and demanded that he be banished from his kingdom. They forced his father, King Sanjaya, to have him abdicated and drove him out of the kingdom more than seven months ago. He took his wife and two children to Mount Vamka and they became hermits there. I heard that they have suffered a great deal.”

On hearing this, King Kalinga-raja became quite sad. He said to his ministers, “This is unfortunate, indeed. King Vessantara got himself in trouble because of his benevolent act toward us. We have brought hardship to him and his family. As righteous people, it is our duty to help him. We must return the auspicious elephant back to the people of Sivi and restore King Vessantara to his kingdom.”

Having made clear his position to the ministers, the king announced his decision to his subjects and asked for their support. He told them the situation of Vessantara and explained to them why it was the right thing to do to return the elephant back to Sivi. The people of Kalinga supported their king’s position and praised him for his virtuous deed. So the king ordered his chief minister to put together a delegation to bring the elephant back to Sivi, accompanied by numerous gifts and a message of appreciation from their king. The delegation comprised of the original eight Brahmins who went to Sivi to ask for the elephant along with a great entourage and attendants.

Return of Vessantara

Back at the royal palace of Sivi, after King Sanjaya had freed his grandchildren from Jujaka, he resolved to return the rule of his kingdom to Vessantara. At that moment, his chief minister came into the court and announced that a huge procession of envoys from Kalinga had brought the auspicious elephant back again to Sivi; they had just arrived at the northern city gate and asked for the king's audience. King Sanjaya was overjoyed to hear this. He ordered his guards to open the city gate and invite the procession from Kalinga to the royal courtyard. He told the chief minister to announce the news to all the courtiers, the army and all the inhabitants of Sivi to come to the royal courtyard to welcome them. The people of Sivi were filled with excitement as they followed the procession to the royal courtyard.

After having paid homage to King Sanjaya, Rama, head of the delegation, brought the royal message and read it out loud:

“Your Majesty the sovereign ruler of Sivi Kingdom:

We are envoys and representatives of King Kalinga-raja of Kalinga. We are here to bring Paccaya, the auspicious elephant, back to Your Majesty's kingdom.

Many months ago, the kingdom of Kalinga was plagued by a prolonged drought which killed all of its crops and prevented anything from growing. There had been a famine in our land and our people were suffering immeasurably. We learned of King Vessantara's boundless generosity and compassion, and came to him for help by asking him to give us Paccaya, the rain-producing elephant. Because

of the kindness and generosity of King Vessantara in giving us the auspicious elephant, the prolonged drought ended and our kingdom has returned to prosperity.

We owe our continued existence to the virtue of King Vessantara. We wish to express our gratitude for the kindness and generosity of King Vessantara by returning the auspicious elephant along with the five hundred care-taking families that he had bestowed us. In addition, we have brought with us magnificent gifts from our king as a token of gratitude to Your Majesty.

Finally King Kalinga-raja wishes to convey to Your Majesty that, in the future, should Your Majesty and King Vessantara wish the people of Kalinga to aid you in any way, all you have to do is send our king the message and we will stand ready to fulfill our debt to you.”

The people of Sivi cheered heartily after Rama finished.

King Sanjaya was overjoyed. He expressed his appreciation to the delegates, “Please convey to King Kalinga-raja my deep appreciation for his friendship. As for Paccaya, King Vessantara has already given this auspicious elephant to you. It rightfully belongs to you. But if you wish to return him to us, on behalf of the people of Sivi, I will graciously accept it.” Then he added, “Please remain with us a while longer for I have an important announcement to make to my people and I wish for you to bear witness to what I am about to say.”

He turned to face all the masses and declared:

“Hear this from your king, citizens of Sivi. The virtue of Vessantara, my son, is beyond doubts. As you have seen for yourselves, his good deed has not gone unnoticed and is now bearing fruit. Unfortunately, it was due to a misunderstanding and our lack of insight that we have wrongfully punished him and banished him from the kingdom. I hereby proclaim that seven days from today, I will lead a grand and elaborate procession worthy of his greatness to invite my son, Vessantara, back to the kingdom of Sivi and let him resume the throne.”

The people of Sivi cheered for the second time.

Then King Sanjaya gave order to his chief general, “Great General, go and get ready our mighty troops and warriors fully armed and adorned. Prepare fourteen thousand elephants, fourteen thousand horses, fourteen thousand chariots, with all their riders and charioteers, fully decorated and armed, along with their banners. Prepare suitable roads and pathways from Jetuttara to Mount Vamka for our travel. Have all the villages and hamlets accommodate us with food and drinks along the way. Arrange for musicians, singers and dancers to give us a festive mood.”

Seven days later, everything that the king had ordered was completed and assembled. A great ceremony was held and the King set out on the journey with Jali as his guide.



Death of Jujaka

After having been paid handsomely by the king, Jujaka's lifestyle changed abruptly overnight. But unfortunately, in his ever-impooverished condition, the Brahmin had never been exposed to such a sumptuous lifestyle and did not know how to handle it. He overindulged himself with so much food and drink that his body could not digest it. In spite of his body's warning, the greedy Brahmin continued to eat unceasingly. As a result, he overate and choked himself to death.

The king arranged for his funeral and announced his death in public, asking his relatives to come and claim his wealth. However, none of his family including his wife and in-laws showed up to claim his possessions. So the king had all the treasures and possessions of Jujaka returned back to the treasury.

Thus ended the story of the greedy Brahmin.



Return of the King

After many days of travel, King Sanjaya and his great troops and entourage arrived at the banks of Lake Mucalinda and they encamped there. The noisy sound of the great army, the elephants and horses filled the forest. Vessantara heard the noise and feared that an enemy army had come to do him harm. He took Maddi with him and climbed up a hill to survey the army. Maddi took a close look at the army and recognized the flags of Sivi and she told her husband that it was the army of King Sanjaya, his father. Vessantara was relieved and came down from the hill with his wife to return to the hermitage.

King Sanjaya left the encampment with his elephant and went forward to seek his son. He arrived at the hermitage and saw Vessantara and Maddi. The king dismounted his elephant and went to greet them with a heart overwhelmed with joy. Vessantara and Maddi paid him respect. He embraced them and stroked them with gentle kindness. Then weeping and feeling sorrow, the king spoke to them, “How are you my son and my daughter-in-law? I hope both of you are well, with plenty of food to eat.”

Vessantara said to his father, “My Lord, we are well, but life in the forest is not easy. We had to live as best as we could and ate whatever we could find. But it is the absence of parents that is most difficult to bear. Jali and Kanhajina, your heirs, have been taken by a cruel, merciless Brahmin who drove them like cattle. Have you any news of them?”

King Sanjaya said, “Both Jali and Kanhajina are safe now. I have bought them from the Brahmin.”

The Bodhisatta was consoled to hear this. He asked about his mother. As they were talking, Queen Phusati arrived with her entourage. Vessantara and Maddi went to greet her and paid respect. Then they saw Jali and Kanhajina approaching from afar. Trembling with great excitement, Maddi ran to hug them. The six royal personages were thus reunited. Their joy was so intense that they all fainted and lay senseless on the ground.

At that moment the hills resounded, the earth quaked, the great ocean rumbled, and celestial beings rejoiced. Sakka saw the six family members laying senseless on the ground and he produced a celestial rain to refresh them. Those who wished to be wet were wet and those who did not were dry. The six were restored to their senses and all the people who witnessed it cried out at the wondrous rain.

Then, in unison, the people called out to Vessantara, “O mighty Vessantara, it is time to wash off the dust and dirt and come back to the land of Sivi and be our king!”

Vessantara, having given all, was willing to resume his kingly role. He put away his hermit’s robes, circled the hut three times saying, “Here in this place, I have attained great merit,” and prostrated himself before it. Then he was bathed, had his hair trimmed, and was dressed in princely garments, and he shone with great splendor. Maddi was similarly arrayed in beautiful cloths and gems. The couple looked magnificent.

Thus they proceeded to the camp of King Sanjaya. After a month of joyful festivities in the forest, they returned to Sivi with great pomp.

The citizens of Sivi were delighted at the return of their prince. They decorated the city in his honor and gave him their warmest welcome. Vessantara resumed the throne. He set free all the captive creatures. By the power of his virtue, he was endowed with boundless treasures as if it poured down from the sky. Throughout his reign, he always had plenty to give and never ran out of alms. After reigning gloriously for many years, the king passed away to heaven. He remains a symbol of generosity for all time.

Upon his next rebirth, he was born as Prince Siddhattha Gautama, the son of King Suddhodana and Queen Maya in the kingdom of Sakya, a tribe of the Aryan race that lived in the North of India. At age thirty five, Prince Siddhattha attained Enlightenment and became the Buddha.

The quest for Perfections of the Bodhisatta has thus been fulfilled.



The Historical Buddha



Siddhattha Gotama

The historical Buddha was born in 623 B.C. His name was Siddhattha (which means “Wish Fulfilled”) and Gotama was his family name. He was born in the Lumbini Gardens³⁰ at Kapilavatthu³¹, on the Indian border of present day Nepal. His father was King Suddhodana, ruler of the Sakya³² clan, in the state of Kosala,³³ a warrior tribe of the Aryan³⁴ race. His mother was Queen Maya, a princess from the neighboring state of Devadaha³⁵ in ancient Nepal. A week after Siddhattha was born, Queen Maya died and her younger sister, Pajapati, who was also married to the King, became his stepmother.

At Siddhattha’s birth, it was predicted that the Prince would either become a Universal Monarch or a Buddha. King Suddhodana wanted his son to become a great ruler rather than a spiritual leader. Reasoning that it would be the experiences of the hardship of life that would turn the young Siddhattha’s mind towards the spiritual path, King Suddhodana created an environment of pleasure and luxury for his son and sheltered him from all knowledge of worldly suffering and unpleasantness of life.



³⁰ **Lumbini Gardens:** in the Buddha’s time, Lumbini was situated between Kapilavatthu, the capital city of the Sakya clan, and Devadaha, an ancient city in Nepal.
³¹ **Kapilavatthu:** capital city of the Sakyans, located in present day Nepal.

³² **Sakya:** an ancient kingdom of Iron Age India, situated at the foothills of the Himalayas in South Nepal and extended over much of modern Oudh. Kapilavatthu was its capital.

³³ **Kosala:** an ancient state situated on the northern border of Ancient India.

³⁴ **Aryan:** Around 1500 B.C., a nomadic people from Eastern Europe, perhaps the steppes of modern Poland & Ukraine, who called themselves Aryans. invaded the subcontinent of India. The Aryans worshiped a number of gods. Their religion was Brahmanism, an early form of Hinduism. When the Aryans arrived in India, they very soon became the dominant civilization.

³⁵ **Devadaha** was a township of the Sakyans in what is now the Rupandehi District of Nepal.

First Meditative Attainment

A remarkable incident took place in Siddhattha's childhood, which later served as a key to his Enlightenment. When he was seven years old, his father took him to an annual Plowing Festival. While watching the proceedings, the young prince noticed a worm that had been unearthed being devoured by a bird. This chance observation led young Siddhattha to contemplate upon the realities of life — to recognize the inescapable fact that all living beings kill one another to survive and that this is a great source of suffering.

During the Festival, the Prince sat cross-legged under a nearby rose-apple tree and began to meditate. It was then and there that he attained the meditative absorption known as the First Jhana,³⁶ a highly developed state of consciousness in which the mind is perfectly concentrated and becomes capable of higher levels of insight. This was an early experience of meditation in the life of the Buddha, which would lead to his eventual Enlightenment many years later.

At age sixteen Siddhattha married Yashodhara, a beautiful princess of the same age, who was from the Koliya³⁷ clan, a neighboring state of Kosala. His father had three palaces built for him to keep him comfortable year round -- one for winter, one for summer and one for the rainy season. For many years, he continued to live a pampered life surrounded by every form of worldly pleasure. But deep inside him, Siddhattha had felt something was missing, something more fulfilling than worldly pleasure.

Siddhattha's curiosity about the conditions in the outside world began to grow and slowly ate away at him. King Suddhodana could no longer hold back his son. He arranged for him to be driven down to the local village by a charioteer, but he first ordered that all people with any kind of disability and suffering be kept out of sight so as not to upset the prince's compassionate nature.

Upon Siddhattha's first three visits to the village, he saw some-

thing that he had never seen before: a decrepit old man, a sick man, then a corpse surrounded by grieving relatives. At the sight of each, he asked his charioteer the meaning of what he saw and whether it happened to everyone. Channa, the charioteer, told him that what he saw was indeed a natural phenomenon that happened to everyone who was born into this world and no one could escape from it.

For the first time, Siddhattha was initiated into the reality of suffering in three of its most significant forms: old age, sickness and death. He, himself, was not immune to these conditions. Although he had spent his entire life surrounded with luxury, this recognition led the Prince to develop a sense of detachment from the transient pleasures of this world and prompted him to seek the ultimate truth about existence.

Then, on the fourth drive to the village, Siddhattha encountered a homeless ascetic who had renounced his worldly possessions. The air of serenity and nobility of his bearing suggested that he had found a degree of peace and freedom from the influences of the mundane world. Although homeless and without possessions, the ascetic appeared blissful, content, and fulfilled.

It was a moment of awakening for Siddhattha. The first three encounters showed him the universal suffering of humanity. The fourth revealed to him the means to overcome the ills of life and to attain calm and peace. He felt a deep pity for humanity who had to endure suffering as an intrinsic quality of life. A sense of compassion awoke within him and he felt the call to find an answer to the problem of human suffering and to seek a path to liberation. After much contemplation, he resolved to renounce the world and to seek the Truth and Eternal Peace for the benefit of all mankind.

Renunciation

When his one and only son was born, it became clear to him that it was time to leave the palace to pursue his Path of Liberation. He was not overjoyed at news of the birth of his son like other fathers but knew that this love for his son would become an impediment to his quest for universal liberation. The infant son was accordingly named Rahula, meaning "Bound by a Fetter."

At the age of twenty-nine, the Prince renounced his worldly life and left the palace to become a homeless mendicant. His compassion for his wife and son was great at this moment of parting; but greater still was his compassion for the suffering of humanity. He was not worried about the future welfare of the mother and child as they had every luxury in abundance at the palace and were well protected.

Leaving everything and all behind, he left the palace at midnight and rode into the dark with Channa, his loyal charioteer. He journeyed far and wide, and upon arrival at the river Anoma³⁸, he cut off his hair and assumed the simple yellow garb of an ascetic. He handed over his royal garments and ornaments to Channa and instructed him to return to the palace.

The ascetic Siddhattha, who once lived in the lap of luxury, now became a penniless wanderer, living on alms-food. He had no permanent abode. A shady tree or a lonely cave sheltered him by day or night. Bare-footed and bare-headed, he walked in the scorching sun and in the piercing cold. With no possessions to call his own but an alms-bowl and robe to cover the body, he concentrated all his energies on the quest for Truth.

Spiritual Quest

Siddhattha spent the next six years on an intensive spiritual quest inside jungle retreats. He studied with the best yogic teachers of the time and learned everything they had to teach him but soon realized that their knowledge would not lead him to find the highest Truth. So he left them and decided to attempt to try his own way.

In the ancient days in India, great importance was attached to rites, ceremonies, penances and sacrifices. It was a popular belief at that time that no deliverance could be gained unless one leads a life of strict asceticism. Accordingly, for six long years, the ascetic Gotama made a superhuman effort to practice all forms of the severest asceticism. He experimented with various extreme ascetic practices of self-mortification: clenching his teeth until his gums bled, pressing his tongue against the palate until his body perspired, holding his breath until air came out of his ears, eating almost no food, frying in the midday heat and freezing beneath the moon at night. He starved and punished his body with the hope that all his desires could be rooted out and wisdom could be gained. His graceful form wasted away almost beyond recognition. His golden skin turned pale and blue, his blood dried up, his sinews and muscles withered, his eyes became sunken and blurred. To all appearances, he was a living skeleton and on the verge of death.

³⁶ **Jhana:** meditative absorption, a state of consciousness achieved through attainment of full concentration or oneness of mind (Samadhi). Attaining Jhana is the beginning pathway to achieving Awakening and eventual Enlightenment.

³⁷ **Koliya:** one of the clans in ancient Nepal. The Sakya and the Koliya clans were both of warrior caste (khattiya) of the "Solar Dynasty". There was no other royal khattiya family equal to them in the region, and therefore, members of the royal families of these two kingdoms married only among themselves.

³⁸ **Anoma:** a river in southern Nepal, near Kapilavatthu. Chinese pilgrims have also recorded the position and the importance of the Anoma River in Nepal.

The Middle Way

Realizing that these prolonged painful self-mortifications proved utterly futile and only exhausted his valuable energy, the ascetic Gotama decided to abandon that practice. By then, he had already experienced first hand both ends of the extreme: self-mortification, which tends to weaken one’s intellect, and self-indulgence, which tends to retard one’s moral progress. He became conscious that the Middle Way – avoiding either end of the extreme – was the right path to reaching wisdom and the Truth. So he turned to the experimentation of pure meditation practice.

He recalled the memory of the incident at the Plowing Festival when he was seven years old, how he sat in the cool shade of the rose-apple tree and meditated. He remembered how he had attained the First Jhana, a developed state of consciousness that led to a supreme bliss, and felt certain that meditation was the path to the Awakening. He knew that Enlightenment could not be gained through an utterly exhausted body; physical fitness was essential for spiritual progress. So he decided to nourish the body and began to eat some food. His five disciples felt disappointed at his change of direction, believing that he had abandoned and had returned to a life of comfort, so they left him.



The Enlightenment

After having regained his strength, the ascetic Gotama sat down under a Bodhi³⁹ tree and was determined to sit immovable upon that spot until he found an answer to his question or die in the attempt.

He easily reached the First Jhana which he had already experienced in his youth. Then, through sheer determination and the perfections he had already attained in his many past lifetimes, he reached the Second, Third and Fourth Jhana as well, his consciousness contracting to a perfect single point leading to clarity of sight. His mind was now like a polished mirror where everything is reflected in its true perspective.

Thus with thoughts tranquilized, purified, cleansed, free from lust and impurity, alert, steady, and unshakable, he was able to have clear insight into the basic mechanisms that created and sustained samsara,⁴⁰ the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. He achieved the ability to recall his past existences. He relived his own innumerable past births in the different ages of the world, how he went through the many cycles of rebirths and finally came into the present existence. Then, turning his attention to others, he saw how they too circulated through samsara, and that the way in which they passed on was determined by the moral quality of their actions (kamma⁴¹).

He saw that suffering is a part of all unenlightened beings and that suffering is caused by defilements, which consisted of attachment, aversion and ignorance. He then considered how the defilements that cause suffering could be eradicated and that it was indeed possible to do so. This reality is known as the Four Noble Truths⁴², and the path to end suffering is known as the Noble Eightfold Path⁴³.

He surveyed the process how birth inevitably leads to aging, sickness and death, which is a prelude to yet another birth -- and one that will merely turn the wheel of life through another repetitious revolution unless the process is stopped. He saw that the ultimate and eternal happiness (Nibbana) can be attained through the building of perfect virtues (Paramis).

He saw that a person is caught up in the notion of separate, individual being or person – self – with a name, history, social role, memories, relationships, and so on. Beneath this veneer of identity, the reality was very different. A person’s true self was in fact vast, open, unconditioned and beyond the dualities of pain and pleasure, space and time, life and death.

When, toward dawn, Siddhattha looked up, he saw the morning star rise with new eyes – not the eyes of Siddhattha Gotama but those of the Buddha’s, the “One Who is Awake,” or the “One Who Knows.” He was Enlightened!

Siddhattha became a Buddha at the age of 35.

³⁹**Bodhi Tree:** also known as Bo tree, was a large and very old Sacred Fig tree (Ficus Religiosa) located in Bodh Gaya in the Indian state of Bihar, under which the Gotama Buddha achieved Enlightenment. The Bodhi tree is recognizable by its heart-shaped leaves.

⁴⁰**Samsara:** the repeating cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. The concept of samsara is closely associated with the belief that one continues to be born and reborn in various realms in the form of a human, animal, or other being.

⁴¹**Kamma** (Sanskrit, Karma) is the concept of “action” or “deed” which causes the entire cycle of cause and effect and rebirth.

⁴²**Four Noble Truths** (Noble Truths of Suffering) The Buddha’s first and most important teaching. It explains the reality and nature of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to freedom from suffering.

⁴³**Noble Eightfold Path** The Path to end suffering, consisting of Right View, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

⁴⁴ **Dhamma** (Skt. Dharma)
This word has many meanings: the Truth; the natural condition of things or beings; the law of their existence; the ethical code of righteousness; the whole body of religious doctrines as a system; the Teachings of the Buddha; the eternal truth that the Buddha realized, his verbal expression of that truth, and the phenomena or elements that comprise reality.

The Great Teacher

For the next forty five years until his death, the Buddha travelled between the towns, villages and cities of the middle Ganges plain, giving wise and compassionate teachings. Though many of his followers were lay people, there were also those who wished to give up the worldly and family life in order to devote their time and energy entirely to the Dhamma.⁴⁴ Thus emerged the Sangha, the community of Buddhist monks. At first the Sangha lived lives of extreme simplicity as homeless mendicants, dressing in rags, living only on alms-food and seeking shelter in caves and beneath the roots of trees. Later, wealthy lay benefactors which included kings, aristocrats and rich merchants provided permanent residences during the Monsoon season. This was the beginning of Vihara, Buddhist monasteries.

The Buddha died at the age of eighty in the year 543 B.C. in Kushinagara,⁴⁵ not far from his birthplace at Lumbini. Surrounded by his disciples, both monastics and laity, his last words to them summarized the heart of his teachings:

“Impermanent are all created things. Strive on with awareness.”



Dhammakaya Meditation

HOW TO MEDITATE



Dhammakaya Meditation Tradition

The Dhammakaya meditation method was initiated in Thailand 60 years ago by the Great Master Phra Mongkolthepmuni, famously known as Luang Pu⁴⁵ Wat Paknam⁴⁶. It is one of the most popular meditation techniques practiced by Buddhists and non-Buddhists around the world. The method is simple, easy, and effective. Everyone can learn how to do it and can achieve inner peace and happiness that you may never know existed.

“Dhammakaya” is a Pali word which means “Body of Enlightenment”. The term appears in many places in the Buddhist scriptures of Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana (Tibetan) schools. The uniqueness of the Dhammakaya meditation is that it teaches about the center of the body as the natural home of the human mind as well as the inner gateway to enlightenment. The stiller the mind is at its natural home, the deeper the happiness one experiences.

Dhammakaya meditation also has a moral impact on the mind. A person who meditates regularly will become gentler, kinder, and more peaceful.

Step-by-Step Instructions

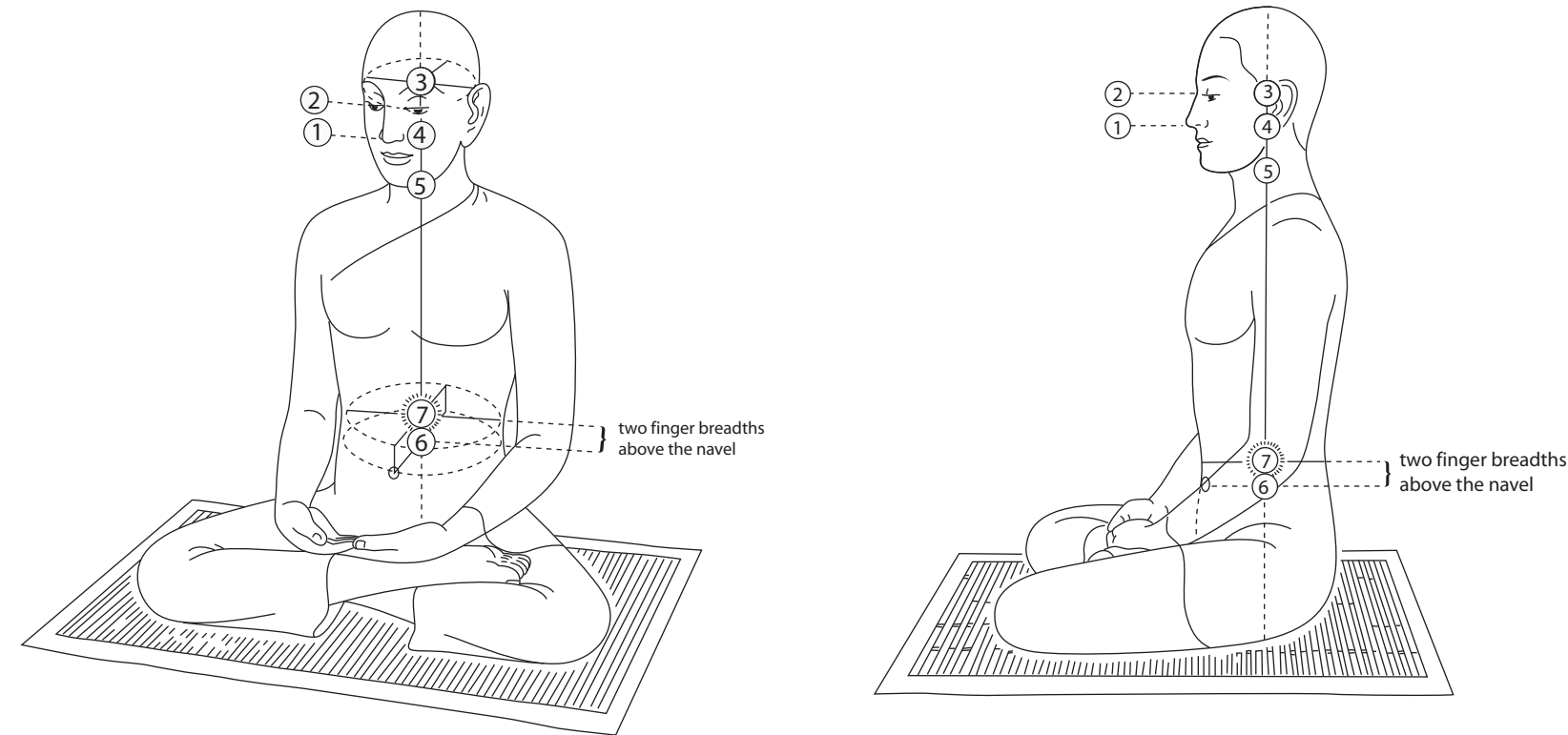
1. The sitting posture, which has been found to be the most conducive for meditation, is the half-lotus position. Sit upright with your back straight, cross-legged with your right leg over the left one. You can sit on a cushion or pillow to make your position more comfortable. Nothing should impede your breathing or circulation. Your hands should rest palms-up on your lap, and the tip of your right index finger should touch your left thumb. Feel as if you were one with the ground on which you sit. Feel that you could sit happily for as long as you like.

2. Softly close your eyes as if you were falling asleep. Relax every part of your body, beginning with the muscles in your face, then relax your face, neck, shoulders, arms, chest, trunk and legs. Make sure there are no signs of tension on your forehead or across your shoulders.

3. Close your eyes gently but not completely. Stop thinking about any worldly things. Feel as if you were sitting alone; around you is nothing and no one. Create a feeling of happiness and spaciousness in your mind.

⁴⁵ **Luang Pu:** Thai word for Venerable Grandfather

⁴⁶ **Wat Paknam:** one of the most famous Buddhist temples in Thailand, known for meditation teaching and practice



The Seven Bases of the Mind

Before starting, it is necessary to acquaint yourself with the various resting points or bases of the mind inside the body.

- The first base is at the rim of the nostril, on the right side for men and on the left side for women.
- The second base is at the corner of the eye, on the right side for men and on the left side for women.
- The third base is at the center of the head.
- The fourth base is at the roof of the mouth.
- The fifth base is at the upper center of the throat.
- The sixth base is at a point in the middle of your abdomen, the meeting point of an imaginary line between the navel through the back and the line between the two sides.
- The seventh base of the mind is two fingers' breadth above the navel. This base is the most important point in the body. It is the very center of the body and the point where the mind can come to a standstill.

4. Feel that your body is an empty space, without organs, muscles or tissues. Gently and contentedly rest your attention at a point near the seventh base of the mind at the center of the body. Whatever experience arises in the mind, simply observe without attempting to interfere with it. This way, your mind will become gradually purer and inner experience will unfold.

5. If you find that you cannot dissuade the mind from wandering, then your mind needs an inner object as a focus for attention. Gently imagine that a bright, clear, crystal sphere, about the size of the tip of your little finger, is located inside at the center of the body. Maybe, you cannot imagine anything, but later, you'll be able to see a crystal ball with increasing clarity. Allow your mind to come to rest at the center of the crystal ball. Use the subtlest of effort and you'll find that the crystal ball becomes brighter and clearer.

6. If you find that your mind still wanders from the crystal ball, you can bring the mind back to a standstill by repeating the mantra, "Samma-arahang" silently, as if the sound of the mantra is coming from the center of the crystal ball. Repeat the mantra over and over again without counting.

7. Don't entertain thoughts in your mind. Don't analyze what's going on in the meditation. Allow the mind to come a standstill. That is all that you need to do. If you find that you cannot imagine anything, repeat the mantra "Samma-arahang", silently and continuously in the mind. If you are not sure about the location of the center of the body, just know that anywhere in the area of your abdomen will do. Don't be disappointed if you find your mind wandering. It is only natural for beginners. Make effort continuously, keep your mind bright, clear and pure, and in the end, you will achieve success.

8. Keep repeating the mantra. Eventually the sound of the mantra will fade away. At that point a new bright, clear, crystal sphere will arise of its own accord. This stage is called "pathama magga" (primary path). At this stage the shining crystal sphere is connected firmly to the mind, and is seated at the center of the body. You will experience a great happiness that you have never known before. With a perfectly still mind focused at the center of the crystal sphere, it will give way to a succession of increasingly purer transcendental inner bodies, until it reaches the "Body of Enlightenment" known as "Dhammakaya". This is the highest meditative attainment which enables the practitioner to achieve super knowledge and supreme happiness.

Glossary

Anoma a river in southern Nepal, near Kapilavatthu. Chinese pilgrims have also recorded the position and the importance of the Anoma River in Nepal.

Arahat (Sanskrit, Arahant) a person who has eliminated all the unwholesome roots who upon death will not be reborn, since the bonds that bind a person to the samsara have been finally dissolved; one who is fully enlightened and attained Nibbana, including the Buddha himself.

Aryan a nomadic people from Eastern Europe, perhaps the steppes of modern Poland & Ukraine, who invaded the subcontinent of India around 1500 B.C. The Aryans worshiped a number of gods. Their religion was Brahmanism, an early form of Hinduism. When the Aryans arrived in India, they very soon became the dominant civilization.

Asuras demonic titans, former devas that have been cast away due to wrongdoings while in heaven. The world of the asuras is the space at the foot of Mount Sumeru, much of which is a deep ocean. It is not the asuras' original home, but the place they found themselves after they were hurled from Tavatimsa where they had formerly lived. The Asuras are always fighting to regain their lost kingdom on the top of Mount Sumeru, but are unable to break the guard of the Four Great Kings. The Asuras are divided into many groups and have no single ruler.

Bodhi Tree also known as Bo tree, was a large and very old sacred fig tree (ficus religiosa) located in Bodh Gaya in the Indian state of Bihar, under which the Gotama Buddha achieved Enlightenment. The Bodhi tree is recognizable by its heart-shaped leaves.

Brahma the most superior form of celestial being with the longest lifespan than any other deities. There are two types of Brahmas, those with form and those that are with non-form. Brahma heavens are the highest levels of heaven in Buddhist cosmology.

Brahmanism religion of the Vedic period (1500 BC to 500 BC), a historical predecessor of modern Hinduism. The religious practices centered on a clergy administering rites and sacrifices. The mode of worship was worship of the elements like fire and rivers, worship of numerous gods, chanting of hymns and performance of sacrifices.

Brahmins individuals belonging to the priestly caste who practiced Brahmanism, a predecessor of modern Hinduism. The religious practices centered on a clergy administering rites and sacrifices. The mode of worship was worship of the elements (e.g., fire and rivers), numerous gods, chanting of hymns and performance of sacrifices. In some cases, certain persons were born into other castes but dedicated themselves to such an austere life that they were also recognized as Brahmins in ancient India.

Buddha “One Who is Awake,”one who is fully enlightened and who has realized Nibbana without the benefit of a Buddha's teaching in the lifetime in which he attains it. Those who attained Enlightenment by following the Buddha's teachings are called Arahants or Arahats. The name Buddha is a title, not a proper name. Buddhas appear at vast intervals of time. There are countless numbers of past, present and future Buddhas.

Catumaharajika a celestial realm, also known as The World of the Four Great Kings, located on the lower slopes of Mount Sumeru, though some of its inhabitants live in the air around the mountain. Its inhabitants include devas (angels), gandhabas (celestial musicians), nagas (serpent-like beings), yakkhas (ogres, earth sprites), and other celestial creatures.

Celestial beings former human beings, who have accumulated abundant merit through acts of good deeds. After death they are reborn into heavenly realms to enjoy the fruits of their merit. The length of their existence in heaven and the magnitude of their celestial wealth depend upon the degree of their merit. They are forever young and do not experience any illnesses although they are still subject to rebirth.

Dasajati Jataka Dasajati is a Pali word which means “Ten Births” or “Ten Lives”. Jatakas are stories that tell about the previous lives of the Buddha. There are more than five hundred stories of the Buddha's previous lifetimes, of which the final ten are regarded as the most important. These are called Dasajati Jataka, which means Ten Birth Stories of the Buddha.

Defilements (kilesa) mental impurities consisting of greed, anger, and delusion; hindrances or poisons that cause beings to perform undesirable deeds.

Devadaha a township of the Sakyans in what is now the Rupandehi District of Nepal.

Devadatta a cousin and disciple of the Buddha who created a schism in the monastic order. Due to jealousy and thirst for power, he attempted to murder the Buddha. Devadatta became a symbol of a bad monk.

Devas celestial beings

Dhamma (Skt., Dharma) the Truth; the natural condition of things or beings; the law of their existence; the ethical code of righteousness; the whole body of religious doctrines as a system; the Teachings of the Buddha; the eternal truth that the Buddha realized, his verbal expression of that truth, and the phenomena or elements that comprise reality.

Dhammakaya a Pali word which means “Body of Enlightenment” or “Body of Truth”. The term appears in many places in the Buddhist scriptures of Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana (Tibetan) schools.

Dhammakaya Tradition (vija Dhammakaya), also referred to as Dhammakaya Knowledge, is a method of meditation founded by the Great Master Phramongkolthepmuni, former Abbot of Wat Paknam, one of the most famous Buddhist temples in Thailand. According to Dhammakaya Tradition, it has been established that each individual person possesses eighteen transcendental inner bodies, which can be reached through advanced stages of meditative absorption. Once a person reaches the Dhammakaya, the purest of all transcendental bodies, the person achieves a higher form of insight and knowledge not available through ordinary means.

Fools (pala) spiritually defective people. A fool is someone wicked, weak, or feeble in moral sense. His discretion is faulty, not knowing right from wrong, good from bad. A fool is one who gives bad influence. You can't tell a fool by his looks. He could be well educated and be from a good family. You can tell him by his action or behavior. The opposite of a fool is a wise.

The Four Great Kings celestial beings who are the protectors of the world and fighters of evil. They live in the Catumaharajika heaven on the lower slopes of Mount Sumeru, which is the lowest of the six worlds of the devas.

Four Noble Truths (Noble Truths of Suffering) The Buddha's first and most important teaching. It explains the reality and nature of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to freedom from suffering.

Garudas a type of celestial being that is half-bird, half-human, with the face and lower body of a bird and the upper body of a human. They live in the celestial forest of Himavanta and feed on nagas. They possess supernatural powers and can change their physical forms at will.

Great Brahma (Mahabrahma) title of a higher celestial being in Buddhist cosmology; inhabitant of the higher heavens. A Brahma state is achieved through a high level meditative attainment and the practice of the Four Divine States of Mind consisting of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity

Heaven celestial realm; in Buddhism there are six levels of heaven which offer a temporary respite from rebirth in the human realm; however, only Nibbana offers a permanent state of bliss. Unlike heaven, the human realm is the only place where merit can be acquired and Perfections achieved.

Himavanta a celestial forest which surrounds the base of Mount Sumeru. It is the home of an assortment of supernatural creatures, such as the nagas, the kinnaris and the garudas.

Jatakas stories that tell about the previous lives of the Buddha before he was born for the last time as the Enlightened One. In Thevarada Buddhism, the Jatakas are a textual division of the Pali Canon, included in the Khuddaka Nikaya of the Sutta Pitaka. The Jatakas were originally amongst the earliest Buddhist literature dating their average contents to around the 4th century BCE.

Jambudvipa one of the four continents (worlds) that surround the celestial mountain Sumeru. It is the region where the humans live, and is the only place where a being may become enlightened and attain Buddhahood. Jambudvipa is shaped like a triangle with a blunted point facing south. It is in Jambudvipa that one may receive the gift of Dhamma and come to understand the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path and ultimately realize the liberation from the cycle of life and death.

Jhana meditative absorption, a state of consciousness achieved through attainment of full concentration or oneness of mind (Samadhi). Attaining Jhana is the beginning pathway to achieving Awakening and eventual Enlightenment.

Kamma (Skt, Karma) action or deed of body, speech and mind. Every willed action brings future consequences, including future rebirths; the consequences of past deeds largely determine one's general life situation. Under the Law of Kamma, by which all creatures must live, a person bears the consequences of his or her own actions. Bad actions cause bad consequences and good actions bear good consequences.

Kapilavatthu capital city of the ancient Sakyans, located in present day Nepal.

Kinaris (female) and **Kinaras** (male) a type of celestial being that appear half-bird, half-human, with a face and upper body of a human and a the lower body of a bird. They are gentle creatures that live in the celestial forest of Himavanta.

Koliya one of the clans in ancient Nepal. The Sakya and the Koliya clans were both of warrior caste (khattiya) of the "Solar Dynasty". There was no other royal khattiya family equal to them in the region and, therefore, members of the royal families of these two kingdoms married only among themselves.

Kosala an ancient state situated on the northern border of Ancient India.

Kushinagara a celebrated center of the Malla kingdom of ancient India. Later, it would be known as Kushinagara, one of the most important four holy sites for Buddhists.

Luang Por Thai word for Venerable Father.

Luang Pu Thai word for Venerable Grandfather.

Lumbini Gardens in the Buddha's time, Lumbini was situated between Kapilavatthu, the capital city of the Sakya clan, and Devadaha, an ancient city in Nepal.

Mahout an elephant rider; he is usually assigned to an elephant early in its life and they would be attached to each other throughout the elephant's life.

Mara evil, both as a concept and as a personification. In Buddhist cosmology, Mara is a supra-natural being responsible for hindering people from performing meritorious deeds. Mara can also mean obstacles for doing good deeds.

Merit result of good deeds, a positive energy that gives rise to good kamma. Merit is something that can be accumulated as well as used up. When someone is enjoying his good fortune, he is using his old merit. A wise person should not let his merit run out by acquiring more new merit whenever he can.

Merit Sphere each person possesses a sphere of merit within; the more merit accumulated the larger the merit sphere.

Mount Sumeru a celestial mountain considered to be the center of all the physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes. Sumeru and its surrounding oceans and mountains are the home of many extraordinary beings. On top of Mount Sumeru is Tavatimsa Heaven. On the lower slopes is Catumaharajika Heaven. At the foot of Mount Sumeru is the realm of the asuras (demonic titans). The mountain range that encircles Mount Sumeru is surrounded by a vast ocean. In this ocean there are four continents (or worlds) inhabited by humans and human-like beings. One of these continents is Jambudvipa, which is the dwelling of ordinary human beings.

Mundane Merit merit gained through performance of good deeds such as sweeping the temple, helping the poor, making charitable contributions.

Nagas magical serpents that live in the lower celestial realm known as Catumaharajika. They possess great supernatural powers and can change their physical forms at will. Although nagas are known for their powers and magical abilities, they are no match for garudas, their arch enemies.

Nibbana (Skt, Nirvana) the state of ultimate happiness, the happy condition of Enlightenment, the highest spiritual attainment. This is not the sense-based happiness of everyday life; nor is it the concept of heaven as interpreted by Western culture. It is an enduring, transcendental happiness integral to the calmness attained through Enlightenment. Once a person has attained Nibbana, he has reached the end of the cycle of rebirths—the final and total release from cyclic existence—never again to be subject to rebirth. Nibbana is a supramundane state that cannot be expressed by words and is beyond space and time. This is the state of perfect Enlightenment realized by Buddhas and Arhats. Those who have gained this realization no longer accumulate karmic consequences and will no longer be reborn into samsara, the cycle of existence, when they die.

Noble Eightfold Path The Path to end suffering, consisting of Right View, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

Pacceka Buddha a Buddha who has attained Enlightenment by himself but does not teach others or lead others to Enlightenment; a private Buddha.

Pali an ancient language used in India, now no longer an active language; the original Buddhist scriptures were written in Pali; Pali texts are used by the Theravada school of Buddhism.

Perfections (parami) perfected virtues; transcendental virtues. In Buddhism, Perfections are transcendental virtues cultivated as a way of self purification, purifying kamma and helping the aspirant to live an unobstructed life while reaching the goal of Enlightenment.

Precepts (sila) moral principles that form the framework of Buddhist ethical conduct and the baseline of one’s virtue.

Right View View and wisdom in accordance with the Truths, consisting of the following beliefs: generosity is virtuous; it is necessary to honor those worthy of honor; it is good to be hospitable; actions produce consequences (Law of Kamma); a child has debt of gratitude to his parents; this world and the next exist; there will be afterlife and rebirths; there are heavenly and hell beings; monastics are able to purify themselves of all defilements (to become enlightened).

Sakka ruler of Tavatimsa Heaven, sometimes referred to as Indra, a god who often comes to the Bodhisatta’s aid at the time of need.

Sakya an ancient kingdom of Iron Age India, situated at the foothills of the Himalayas in South Nepal and extended over much of modern Oudh. Kapilavatthu was its capital.

Samma-Arahant (samma-araham) a Pali word which means “The Buddha Who Has Properly Attained Enlightenment.” This mantra is used during meditation to help focus the mind.

Samsara the repeating cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. The concept of samsara is closely associated with the belief that one continues to be born and reborn in various realms in the form of a human, animal, celestial being, or hell being.

“Stop” stop in this sense means stopping the mind from wandering or stop doing bad deeds. The key to success in meditation is to stop the mind from wandering.

Sudra servant class in Brahmanism.

Tavatimsa Realm of the Thirty-three Devas; name of the second heavenly abode, of which Sakka is the sovereign. It is a wide flat space on the top of Mount Sumeru, filled with the gardens and palaces of the gods (devas). Aside from the Thirty-three Devas, many other devas and supernatural beings dwell here.

Ten Virtues of the Sovereign ten royal duties of kings and monarchs, consisting of charity, morality, self-sacrifice, honesty, kindness, austerity, non-anger, non-violence, forbearance, and righteousness.

Tipitaka (Skt, Tripitaka) Buddhist scripture. Tipitaka means the Three Baskets. They consist of the Basket of Discipline (Vinaya Pitaka) – rules and regulations of the Order of monks and nuns; the Basket of Discourses (Sutta Pitaka) – discourses concerning social, moral, philosophical and spiritual significance; and the Basket of Ultimate Things (Abhidhamma Pitaka) – dealing with psychological and philosophical aspects of the Doctrine, the four ultimate things, i.e., mind (citta), mental properties (cetasika), matter (rupa) and Nirvana.

Transcendental Merit merit acquired through mental cultivation and the practice of meditation.

Tusita known as the “World of the Joyful Devas”, this world is best known for being the world in which a Bodhisattva lives before being reborn in the world of humans. The beings of this world are 3,000 feet tall and live for 576,000,000 years.

Universal Monarch Monarch of the Four Great Continents, of which Jambudvīpa is one.

Vedas a large body of Sanskrit texts originating in ancient India. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the texts constitute the oldest Sanskrit literature and the oldest scriptures of Hinduism.

Vessa traders, merchants.

Wat Thai word for a Buddhist temple.

Wat Paknam one of the most famous Buddhist temples in Thailand, known for its meditation teaching and practice.

Wise (pundita) A wise is someone who has wisdom. Being wise is not the same as being educated. A wise can be a person who is highly educated or one with no formal education at all. He is righteous and ethical by nature. A wise is someone who possesses the Right View and the ability to separate right from wrong, good from bad. A wise is the complete opposite of a fool.

Wrong View View that is in contrast with the Truths, for example, having the notion that generosity is not good, parents are not worthy of gratitude, the Law of Kamma does not exist, there is no afterlife and rebirth, heavens and hells do not exist, etc.

Yakkhas (male) and **Yakkhinees** (female): are earth sprites with gigantic bodies and fearsome appearances. They live in the lower celestial realm of Catumaharajika and are often projected as bad characters in Buddhist cosmology.

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