

Jatakamala

sKyes-pa'i-rabs-kyi rgyud



Lord Sakyamuni Buddha

The Marvelous Companion: Life Stories of the Buddha

by Aryasura

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Dedicated to the Dharma students of the West:
May these teachings inspire their practice
and illuminate their understanding.

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Publisher's Preface

The present volume is based on the English translation of Arya Sura's Jatakamala by Joseph Speyer, published in England in 1895. While Speyer's work was a major accomplishment for its time, it was intended as a literal rendition of the Sanskrit, primarily for scholars; as a result, its diction and phrasing are not well suited to a general or contemporary audience. We have therefore made numerous changes in its language and style, and have spelled Sanskrit terms and names phonetically.

To assure the accuracy of this new version of Aryasura's work, we have carefully compared it to the Tibetan text of the Jatakamala as it appears in the Nyingma Edition of the sDe-dge bsTan-'gyur. Translated from the Sanskrit in the eighth century by Vidyakarasiṃha and the Tibetan lotsawa Manjuśrivarman, the Tibetan version is very close to the Sanskrit text used by Speyer, except that in isolated passages its meaning appears to be clearer. We are satisfied that the resulting text presented here is generally faithful to Aryasura's original work. Still, there remain difficult passages, and further study and research into the existing manuscripts of the Jatakamala by qualified scholars may lead to revisions in future editions.

Many people helped in the preparation of this work. Tarthang Tulku provided editorial direction and answered questions about difficult passages in the Tibetan. Deborah Black compared the English to the Tibetan, and she, Leslie Bradburn, and Leland Moss all took part in revising Speyer's earlier version. The illustrations, depicted in the traditional manner by Rosalyn White, were drawn under the guidance and supervision of Tarthang Tulku. They will likely be augmented by further illustrations in future editions.

All of us who have participated in the present work are most grateful for having had the opportunity to make Arya Sura's masterpiece available to a new audience.

Publisher's Introduction

After leaving home to strive for complete realization, the Buddha Sakyamuni seated himself beneath the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya and vowed not to arise until he had broken the bonds of samsara and gained enlightenment. As he sat in deepening meditation, he saw with absolute clarity the unending efforts he had made for others as a Bodhisattva in past lives, efforts that would now culminate in complete enlightenment and enable him to demonstrate to all beings the way out of suffering.

In later years, the Buddha often cited examples from his past lives to clarify the attitudes and actions that develop perfect compassion. These accounts, among the greatest treasures of the Buddha's teachings, became known as Jatakas, or 'birth stories'. Carried down through the centuries, they have retained their popularity as vehicles for the teachings and as subjects of sculpture and painting. There are many different collections of Jatakas, some containing as many as a hundred stories. The Jatakamala, a retelling of thirty-four Jatakas by the Buddhist master and poet Aryagura, is especially revered for its depth and its artistic beauty.

Although at first glance Jataka stories may appear similar to Western fables, they embody a sophisticated psychology and ethical system based on the Buddha's insights into the natural laws that govern all existence. For those who approach them with an open heart, the Jataka stories are powerful enactments of the operation of karma as it unfolds over successive lifetimes.

" Karma' is simply a word for action, but its wider meaning encompasses the causal connections between actions and their consequences. The concept of karma is well-known in many traditions, but the Buddha was the first to reveal the inner complexities of karma's workings, and to point out that one can, by understanding the nature of karma, change the course of one's life.

The Buddha taught that karma does not unfold in a simple linear progression with a single cause giving rise directly to a specific effect. The good do not always immediately prosper, and the evil do not always immediately pay for their actions. Yet, viewed from the perspective of many lifetimes, nothing is lost or dissipated; nothing appears from nowhere. Every action sets in motion forces that will produce results in precise accord with the nature of the action itself. A violent act brings violent consequences to its perpetrator, a generous act brings bountiful rewards, and so on. As illustrated in the Jatakamala, the seeds planted by a single action, and by the thoughts and motives that underlie it, will inevitably bear fruit, perhaps again and again over many lifetimes. Even the fact that we are born as human beings is a result of actions performed in past lives.

The tales of the Jatakamala allow us to glimpse the inner qualities of the Bodhisattva and to see how they came into being. All the Bodhisattva's actions were consciously directed toward benefitting others; he shaped his own character and circumstances through countless lifetimes of discipline, compassion, and selfless action. The Bodhisattva is the exemplar of virtue and nobility-with ever-deepening wisdom, he is aware of the basic patterns of the universe, and thus has full understanding of the workings of karma. He acts with certainty of the consequences of his actions, knowing what conduct will further

his intention to benefit the world. Through his deep knowledge of karma, he is able to show which actions will provide true benefit, and which actions will bring only misery.

The source of the Bodhisattva's power to instruct living beings is his ability to uplift awareness and aspirations through generosity and self-sacrifice. When the Bodhisattva gives up his body, his belongings, or his life for the sake of others, his actions are the natural response to the needs of sentient beings. The power of virtuous action untainted by personal concerns is clearly felt by all beings in his presence, who are often inspired to lead more virtuous lives. While the Bodhisattva's actions are not necessarily meant literally as examples to follow, the conduct of the Bodhisattva is proof that selfless action can transform one's being, even to the extent that one becomes an inspiration to others.

One of the results of virtuous action is the immediate ripening of karma. The Jatakas disclose a heightened reality, where cause and effect follow each other so closely that their relationship cannot be misconstrued. Perceiving this direct relationship increases motivation to act with even greater knowledge and mindfulness; as the inner joy arising from selfless actions increases, concern for the welfare of others grows stronger and leads to effortlessly natural moral conduct. When the cycle of thoughtless action is understood and then broken, deep transformation becomes possible.

In the everyday world, or even within a single lifetime, karmic consequences may be hard to trace. Events crowd together so quickly that we are often unable to perceive the connections between attitudes and actions and their results. We may wonder why good people suffer while evil men prosper, and rage at the injustices of life, concluding that actions do not have moral or psychological consequences. If we do sense the truth of karma without understanding its complexities, we may assume that all actions are predetermined, thus leaving no room for free choice.

Both these extremes—the belief that there is no such thing as karma and the belief that karma totally forecloses free will—can lead us to conclude that we have no control over our lives, and further, to believe that there is no moral order in the universe, and therefore no possibility of spiritual growth. Traditional religious beliefs do assert that our conduct will be rewarded or punished in the next life, but even this idea seems remote from everyday life. As a consequence, many people find themselves living in a moral vacuum. Values may become confused, shifting to objects and goals that bring immediate personal gratification, yet set the stage for later disillusionment and suffering.

The complexities, stress, and anxieties of modern living greatly contribute to this confusion, particularly among peoples of Western civilizations. A feeling of chaos is widespread, and many people now sense that social and political forces have gotten out of hand. With no guide to follow but personal desires, people tend to experience an underlying sense of dissatisfaction and emptiness. Some may try to fill the void by adopting the standards of one or another social group, but while this may offer some limited sense of purpose, it also undermines the sense of independence and personal worth. Ultimately how fulfilling can it be to spend precious time and energy trying to meet the expectations of others? How fulfilling is it to filter experience through a web of others' opinions and judgments?

Living in this way, we exchange the color, beauty, and significance life offers for, at best, a fragile and fleeting sense of security and physical comfort. When we attempt to fill our lives with happiness without understanding the source of lasting contentment, true peace and happiness seem somehow always beyond our grasp. We may become disillusioned, and 'accept' what we feel cannot be changed, yet in doing so we settle for far less than we are capable of achieving. Although we may consider ourselves realistic, and take pride in our 'worldly wisdom', we cannot escape the knowledge that something is missing in our lives.

Understanding the workings of karma can help to counteract this confusion and uncertainty. We can begin to gain such an understanding by truly exercising the Western spirit of scientific and objective inquiry, for karma is a basic pattern of nature, operating everywhere and in every moment. Modern science has demonstrated in countless experiments that in any physical or chemical process the matter and energy found at the end of the reaction are transformations of the matter and energy originally present. The Buddha's teaching of karma demonstrates that these laws of conservation and transformation operate reliably in the psychological, moral, and intentional dimensions as well. It is possible to observe how karma operates in our own lives and the lives of others.

If we look carefully and over a period of time, we will find that certain kinds of actions produce characteristic results. When we really see that this is so, without finding ways to deny or ignore what we see, this knowledge will change our conduct, releasing us from entrenched patterns. Then we can look at the consequences of this change in turn. Over time, we learn to have confidence in karma as a working principle.

Appreciation for karma seems especially critical in the present historical moment. Human affairs seem to move in stages, each about five centuries in length, and the present stage of constant and rapidly accelerating change is promoting the rapid disappearance of cultures unlike our own. In many parts of the world a fascination with Western lifestyles is undermining ancient and peaceful ways of life, where an awareness of the relation between actions and their consequences was widely shared. It is up to us to replace such basic wisdom with new understanding. If we do not, our culture's ignorance of karma could lead us into courses of conduct that will cause irreversible damage on a vast scale.

The Jatakas can serve as occasions to reflect upon the moral choices in our lives, and to open our eyes to the reality of karma, helping us develop the insight and discipline we need to acknowledge and change destructive patterns of behavior. The Buddha was a master psychologist; he understood the way the mind works and the conditions we all face, and he revealed directly and simply the forces that govern the course of our lives. The study of his teachings can always bring fresh, new realizations to inspire and guide our conduct. The Buddha's words can encourage us to reflect on the quality of our lives, understand the consequences of our actions, and open our hearts to the deep joy of selfless action.

1 - The Tigress



The compassion of the Buddha touches every living being. His perfect love, dispassionate and unlimited, resonates throughout all his former lives.

Before he became the Buddha, the Bodhisattva, in a series of lives too numerous to mention, through his wisdom blessed the world with countless demonstrations of his compassion, shown through giving, kind words, helpfulness, and consistency between words and deeds.

In one of his lifetimes, the Bodhisattva took birth in a family of brahmans which was renowned for purity of conduct and spiritual devotion. And as a result of merit earned in former lives, he found himself showered with wealth, distinction, and fame.

As a youth, the depth of his intellect was matched only by his eagerness to learn. He soon mastered the arts and sciences so well that the brahmans revered him as an authority dependable as the law itself; to the ksatriya warriors, he was as venerable as a king. To those thirsty for knowledge, he seemed a reservoir never empty; to ordinary people, he seemed a god.

But he did not delight in power or wealth or fame. His former actions and his constant reflection on the Dharma had purified his mind; he saw all too clearly the inevitable suffering that accompanies worldly pleasure, and the thought of renunciation was familiar to him. Without remorse, he shook off the householder's life as if it were an illness, and moved to a forest retreat which became ornamented by his presence.

There, detached and tranquil, he radiated serenity. He affected even the worldly who were unattached to virtue, turning them away from their attachment to harmful activities. His wisdom and benevolence spread everywhere, softening even the hearts of the most ferocious animals, so that they ceased harming one another and began to live like ascetics themselves. By the power of his pure conduct, control of the senses, contentment, and compassion, the Bodhisattva, while not associating with worldly beings, yet showed love to all.

Since his desires were few, hypocrisy was unknown to him; glory, gain, and pleasure held no interest for him. He gladdened even the gods, who came to pay him homage. Hearing of his renunciation, his closest friends, who had been drawn to him by his virtues, left their families and joined him as disciples. He received them gladly and taught them what he could of good conduct, chastity, purification of the senses, mindfulness, detachment, meditation on loving kindness, and similar teachings.

His joyful existence attracted disciples with qualities similar to his own. And so, through his teachings, most of his numerous disciples gained extensive realizations and were established in virtue the doors to lower states of being were closed, and the gates to happiness were opened wide.

One day, the Great Being, accompanied by his disciple Ajita, was walking up a mountain trail to a place well-suited for yogic practice. As they passed by a ravine concealed by shrubs, their contemplation was interrupted by the sound of fierce roaring.

The Bodhisattva peered over the edge of the trail into a yawning gulch far below and discerned the sunken eyes and emaciated body of a young tigress. It was clear she was exhausted and had not eaten for days due to the difficulty of giving birth. Maddened by hunger, she was beginning to eye her own offspring as food. The men watched as the thirsty cubs, fearless and trusting, approached their

mother while she glared at them and growled as if they were the offspring of another.

Though composed in mind, the Bodhisattva, like a great tree shaken by an earthquake, was shaken by the sight of such suffering. So are the truly compassionate affected by the slightest suffering of others, though unmoved by great suffering of their own.

Out of the depth of his compassion, he lamented to his disciple: "Alas, behold the ferocity of self-love: a mother will feed on her young to satisfy her hunger! This, my friend, is the worthlessness of samsara. Who would foster self-love if he could see what it produced! Go quickly and find her some food, so that she will not harm her young ones and therefore also herself. I will try to divert her until you return."

The disciple went off as he was told, not suspecting that the Bodhisattva had sent him away for an altogether different reason. For the Bodhisattva was thinking: "Why should I search for meat from the body of another when my own is at hand? Finding other meat is a matter of chance, and I would lose the opportunity to help. A body is frail, ungrateful, forever impure, and a source of suffering. How foolish not to rejoice at using it to benefit another.

"Two things alone cause people to ignore the grief of others: attachment to pleasure and inability to give aid. But I cannot feel pleasure while another being suffers, and if I have the power to help, how can I be indifferent?"

"Even if the one who was suffering had committed the greatest crime, I could not withhold my aid; my heart would burn with remorse as readily as dry shrubs catch fire. Thus, I will forestall this source of suffering by throwing myself over this cliff. My body will prevent the tigress from killing her young ones, and prevent the young ones from dying in the jaws of their mother.

"This act will encourage those who yearn to help the world, and set an example for those weak in effort. It will hearten those who understand the meaning of charity, and will stimulate the minds of the virtuous. This act will disappoint the demons, gladden the friends of Buddha-qualities, and shame the selfish, the proud, and the lustful. It will inspire faith in the adherents of the Mahayana, and fill with wonder those who sneer at charity. At the same time, it will clear the way to the heavenly states of being for those who find joy in giving. I will fulfill my greatest aspiration-to benefit others by means of my own body-and so I shall approach great Enlightenment.

"Just as the sun banishes darkness and bestows light, so may this act banish sorrow from the world, generating happiness forever. I do not perform this action for glory or royal dignity, not even for supreme and everlasting bliss-it is for the benefit of all the world, that its joy will increase each time this story is told."

And then, to the amazement of even the peace-loving gods, the Bodhisattva threw himself over the edge of the cliff, thus giving up his life. His body, in striking the ground, made a loud noise-and the startled tigress, forgetting her original intention, looked about her; seeing the Bodhisattva, she began to devour him.

Ajita soon returned empty-handed without having found any meat. He called for his teacher, but no answer came. Then his gaze fell to the chasm below, and he saw his teacher being eaten by the tigress. Sorrow and pain overwhelmed his heart, but the awe he felt at such extraordinary selflessness was even greater.

"How merciful the Great Being was to beings in distress, and how indifferent to his own welfare! How heroic and fearless his immense love! He has perfected the conduct of the virtuous and surpassed all others' glory. His body, already precious for its virtue, has now been transformed into a vessel worthy of the highest veneration.

"How steadfast and tranquil was his mind, as firm as the earth, yet how moved by others' sufferings! How imperfect my own mind appears next to his splendid act of heroism. In truth, beings need no longer suffer, for he is the Protector. With the strength of his renunciation, he conquers all suffering, and Mara, lord of desire, grows uneasy, dreading defeat. Let homage be paid in every way to that Great Being: to his unrestrained and boundless goodness, for he is the refuge of all beings."

In wonder at the Bodhisattva's great action, the disciples joined with the gandharvas, the yakshas, the nagas, and the chiefs of the gods to cover the earth that held the treasure of the Bodhisattva's bones with wreaths, bright cloths, jewelled ornaments, and sandal wood powder. Filling the air with songs of praise, they marvelled at the selfless act performed by the Bodhisattva.

In this story, we can see how the Buddha, even in his former births, showed his immense love for all sentient beings. Seeing this great love gives rise to the utmost faith in him, and with this faith comes joy directed towards the Buddhas. In this way, faith is developed.

This account is also useful in explaining why we should listen carefully to the Teachings since the Dharma was attained through many difficult hardships. Inspired by an account such as this, one can praise the qualities of compassion that will lead to actions that benefit all beings.



Shakyamuni Buddha - Jataka (previous lives)

Mongolia 1800 - 1899 Buddhist Lineage

1 - The Starving Tigress



A Tale of Compassion, Selflessness, and Generosity.

Born into a family of Brahmans renowned for their purity of conduct and great spiritual devotion, the bodhisattva became a great scholar and teacher. With no desire for wealth and gain, he entered a forest retreat and began a life as an ascetic. It was in this forest where he encountered a tigress who was starving and emaciated from giving birth and was about to resort to eating her own new born cubs for survival. With no food in sight, the bodhisattva, out of infinite compassion, offered his body as food to the tigress, selflessly forfeiting his own life.



Key Events in the Story

1. The bodhisattva sees a starving tigress.
2. Tigress is about to eat her own cubs.
3. The bodhisattva offers his own body.

2 - King of the Shibis



Only after hundreds of hardships did the Lord Buddha obtain the Dharma for our benefit. Knowing this, we should listen to the Teachings with deep respect and close attention.

Once when the Buddha was still a Bodhisattva, the vast store of meritorious actions amassed in many previous lives caused him to take birth as a king of the Shibis. Respectful toward the elders from earliest childhood and modest in his behavior, he was deeply loved by all his subjects.

Blessed with boundless energy, discretion, majesty, and power, knowledgeable in many sciences, and favored by fortune, he ruled his subjects as if they were his children. In the Bodhisattva, all the finest qualities, both spiritual and worldly, blended harmoniously despite their contrasts. Glory, which mocks those who win high rank by wrong means, glory, which brings calamity to fools and intoxicates the feeble-minded, had found a true dwelling place within him.

Overflowing with compassion even greater than his wealth, this best of kings was happiest when granting the wishes of beggars and when seeing their delighted faces. Throughout his realm, he had alms-halls constructed and stocked with all kinds of goods, provisions, and grains, fare to fulfill all hopes. Humbly and with great pleasure, he was forever pouring forth gifts like timely rain.

Every mendicant was supplied according to his need, with courtesy and dispatch. Food was provided for the hungry, and drink for the thirsty. In like manner, couches, dwellings, clothing, perfumes, wreaths, silver and gold were given to whoever wished them-whatever was requested was provided. Word of the king's great charity spread far and wide, so that people from remote lands travelled to his land with joyful hearts-surprised and delighted at his largess. As single-minded as wild elephants approaching a great lake, they had no thought to search for alms from any other.

The king always welcomed the beggars, though their outward appearance was anything but inviting, and their thoughts were only of gain. He welcomed them as if they were long-lost friends returned from abroad; his eyes wide with joy, he listened to their requests as if they were the happiest news. The beggars' delight was surpassed only by that of the king, and they spread the word of his sweet generosity throughout the countryside, thus reducing the pride of neighboring kings.

One day the king, on a tour of his alms-halls, noticed the small number of supplicants staying there and grew uneasy. The beggars' thirst for gifts was easily quenched, but not so the king's thirst for giving. "Soon there will be few left to give to," he thought. "If only they would ask for more! Blessed are those from whom the mendicants ask anything, even their limbs! Of me they ask only my wealth, as if afraid I might refuse a bolder request."

As he made this statement, the earth, aware of his peerless non-attachment to even his own body, trembled with love like that of a wife for her husband. So powerful was the trembling that even the lord of mountains, sparkling with jewels, began to waver, and Shakra, Lord of the Gods, was moved to inquire the cause. Told in reply that the king of the Shibis had given up all attachment to his own flesh, he thought in amazement:

"How can this be? Does the king's mind soar so high, does he rejoice so greatly in giving, that he would even part with his own limbs? I will put him to the test."

The king was seated on a throne in the midst of his assembly, listening as usual to those in need. Stores of wealth-silver, gold and jewels, open chests filled with clothing, as well as carriages drawn by well-trained beasts-stood revealed by the

treasurer. From all directions beggars crowded in-and among them, Shakra, Lord of the Gods, in the shape of an old, blind brahman.

The decrepit brahman caught the king's eye immediately; the king's calm compassionate gaze seemed to embrace the frail beggar. The royal attendants requested the brahman to state his needs, but ignoring them, he drew near the king.

"I, a blind old man, have come from a great distance, O Highest of Rulers, humbly wishing the gift of one of your eyes. Surely one eye is sufficient for ruling the world, O Lotus-eyed King, Lord of the World."

The Bodhisattva experienced a surge of joy: His heart's desire had been realized. Or was his wish so intense that he had merely imagined it? Hoping to hear the request again, he asked: "Who sent you, illustrious Brahman, to ask for one of my eyes? How could you think that anyone would even consider parting with such a thing? Who could believe that I would do so?"

Knowing the intention of the king, the disguised Shakra replied: "Shakra told me. A statue of the god spoke to me, and told me to come here and ask you. Prove him right and fulfill my deepest hope: Give me one of your eyes."

Hearing the name of Shakra, the king thought: "Surely divine power will help this brahman regain his sight." So in a clear and joyous voice he said: "Brahman, I shall fulfill your wish. You ask but for one eye? I shall give you both! And after your face has been adorned with these two bright lotuses, go your way; let this miracle amaze everyone you encounter!"

The king's counselors were aghast and terribly disturbed that he would even consider giving away his eyes. "Your Majesty," they said, "your generosity has led to misjudgment bordering on madness! You can't give up your eyesight! For the sake of one twice-born man, do not forsake us all! You will become a burning sorrow to us when previously you were a source of comfort and prosperity.

"Money, brilliant jewels, cattle, carriages, vigorous elephants of graceful beauty, dwellings fit for all seasons and echoing with the sounds of dancers-such gifts are proper. Give these, but do not give your eyes, you who are the only eye of the world!

"And consider this: Only through the intervention of divine power can the eyes of one man be put into the face of another. But even if this could come to pass, why should it be your eyes? And of what use is eyesight to a poor man, to one who can only witness the abundance of others? Give him money, by all means, but do not commit this desperate act!"

In reply, the king addressed his ministers in terms soft and conciliatory: "He who promises to give, and then withholds the gift, gains only the bonds of attachment he once cast off. He who promises to give, and yet, driven by avarice, does not keep his promise, must be held in the greatest contempt. He who raises the hopes of mendicants, and then rewards them with the harsh deception of refusal, deserves nothing but despair.

"As for the ability of divine power to bring sight to the transplanted eyes, know this: Even a god depends on certain circumstances to achieve a certain effect. Who among us can say what means are proper for what ends? No, do not attempt to obstruct my determination. I will give him my eyes."

The ministers replied: "We have not tried to induce Your Majesty to do anything wicked! We have merely observed that a gift of goods or grain or gold would be more appropriate than a gift of your sight."

"Whatever is asked for must be what is given," replied the king. "A gift not desired does not give pleasure. Of what use is water to one drowning in a stream? I shall give this man exactly what he requested."

In response, the first minister, who was more intimate with the king than the others, overstepped the bounds of propriety because of his love for the king, saying: "Do not do it! It takes great austerities and meditations to gain a kingdom such as this; your generosity has won you glory and a place among the gods. Your kingdom rivals in richness the enjoyments of Indra-yet you would give it up! And now you are willing to give up both your eyes-for what reason? Never on earth has such a thing been done! The crowns of kings ornament your feet; your sacrifices place you among the gods; your fame shines far and wide. What desire goads you to give up your eyes?"

The king replied with affection: "I crave neither dominion over the earth nor glory; I do not crave liberation or the heavenly realms. I undertake this act to give meaning to the beggar's request, with the intention of becoming the Refuge of the World."

Upon saying this, the king ordered one of his eyes to be removed by the physicians, gradually and intact. With supreme gladness he handed this single orb, bright as the bluest of lotus petals, to the beggar. Shakra, Lord of the Gods, then miraculously made the eye fill the empty socket of the old brahman, so that the king and all assembled saw the one opened eye. His heart filled with pure delight, the king then offered the brahman his other eye as well.

The king's face was now like a lotus pond bereft of flowers-yet his visage shone with joy-a joy not felt by the others, who saw only that the king was blind and that the brahman had the eyes of the king. From the inner rooms of the palace to the farthest reaches of the city, tears of sorrow flowed, but Shakra was transported with awe, having witnessed the king's unshaken intention to attain supreme enlightenment.

"What constancy!" he thought. "What goodness and desire to help all beings! What compassion! Although I saw it, I can scarcely believe it! It is not right that such virtue should endure this hardship long! I will soon show him the way to restore his sight."

When time had healed the wounds of the operation, and had almost lulled the sorrow of the people of the palace and the citizens of the land, the king, wishing solitude, went one day to his garden and sat down cross-legged by a pool of lotuses. All around him the fair trees bent low with the weight of their flowers, and swarms of bees hummed. A gentle wind blew, fresh and sweet-smelling.

Suddenly, the king felt a presence. "Who is there?" he asked. "Shakra, Lord of the Gods," was the reply. Bidding Shakra welcome, the king asked what he could do for him. And Shakra replied: "I have come to grant your fondest wish. What do you desire, Holy Prince? Tell me and it is yours."

The king was astonished, for he was accustomed to giving, not to receiving. "I already have great wealth, Shakra, and my army is large and strong. My blindness, however, makes it impossible for me to see the joyful faces of the

mendicants after I have supplied their wants. And so death would be most welcome to me now. Death is what I crave."

"Do not even think such a thing!" said Shakra. "Rather, tell me what you truly feel, O King, what you actually think of beggars, since they are the cause of your suffering. Come, speak! Tell me what is in your mind, and you may find immediate ease."

The king replied: "Why do you believe that merely regaining my sight would satisfy me? Hear this, however, if you must: As surely as the pleas of beggars are like blessings to my ears, so surely do I wish to regain one eye!"

No sooner had the king pronounced these words than, through the power of his truthfulness and merit, one eye reappeared, a lotus petal surrounded by a sapphire circle. Rejoicing, the king continued: "And as surely as I knew the utmost delight in giving both my eyes to the one who asked for only one, so surely may I obtain once more my other eye."

Once again, he had scarcely uttered these words before another eye appeared, rival to the first in beauty. Mountains trembled; oceans roared, and the beat of celestial drums sounded deep and rhythmically. The sky became clear and bright with autumn sunshine while myriad flowers and sandalwood powder rained down. Gods of all sorts rushed to the spot, eyes wide with amazement, and the hearts of all living beings were filled with joy.

From all the ten directions, songs of praise arose from crowds of beings endowed with magical power. With joy and exultation they sang: "How wonderful is his compassion! How lofty and pure his mind! How little he cares for his own happiness! Hail to thee, steadfast Hero! just as your shining lotus eyes have been renewed, so has the world now recovered its protector! After much too long a time, Virtue is victorious!"

"Well done! Well done!" Shakra applauded. "Because your true feelings were known to me, O King of Pure Heart, I have returned your eyes to you. And with these eyes you will now be able to see great distances in all directions, unhindered even by mountains." Then Shakra disappeared on the spot.

The Bodhisattva, accompanied by his officials who were speechless with astonishment, went in procession to his palace. There the citizens waved flags and banners as if for the finest festival, and the brahmins blessed their monarch with thousands of benedictions. Seating himself in the assembly hall before a great crowd of ministers, brahmins, elders, and folk from town and country, the Bodhisattva taught the Dharma from his own

"Who among you will now be slow to practice charity? For you have seen my eyes-eyes with the power of the gods come from the merit of giving. With these eyes I can see everything for thousands of miles; I can see through the highest mountains, as distinctly as I can see this room. What better prescription for bliss than charity, compassion, and self-discipline? By renouncing my human eyes, I have attained divine vision.

"Understanding this, my Shibus, multiply your riches by using them rightly. Such is the path to glory and happiness both in this world and the next. Wealth is worthless in itself, yet it has one virtue: It can be given away to benefit others. Only in this manner does it become a treasure; withheld, it is barren."

From this story one can see how the Buddha acquired the Dharma through the practice of many austerities, and how important it is to listen to the Dharma with respect. Seeing the greatness of the Tathagata and the results of his lifetimes of merit, one praises the qualities of compassion and generates respect. Thus, one accumulates merit, and can in this very lifetime obtain something of the blossoms of great power and the stream of glory.



2 - King of the Shibis A Tale of Charity.



Born a great king, the bodhisattva delighted in using his vast amount of wealth and power to give charity to the poor. He constructed massive alms halls stocked with various goods, provisions, and grains. He would even supply dwellings, clothing, perfumes, wreaths, gold, and silver to all who requested.



One day however, while touring one of his great halls, the king noticed that there was only a small number of supplicants and this troubled him. It seemed that the beggars thirst for aid was easily quenched but his thirst for giving was not. It was during this time that he started to question whether he would accept a bolder request, such as one of his organs or limbs. Shakra, the Lord of Gods, heard this and went to test the king. Disguised as an old blind brahman man, Shakra asked the king for one of his eyes. The king did not just accept the request but immediately gave the blind brahman both of his eyes, despite all of his closest advisors imploring him not to.



Some time later, the now sightless king was sitting cross legged in his garden by a pool of lotuses. Shakra once again approached him, this time in his true form and rewarded the generous king by restoring his eyesight. The king then addressed his awestruck kingdom, telling them that the only real value in wealth is that one can give it away to help others.

Key Events in the Story

1. A generous king.
2. Gives away his eyes.
3. Eyesight is restored.

3 - A Small Portion of Gruel



Any gift that comes from the heart and is bestowed upon a worthy recipient will produce a great result. No gift of such a nature, however small, is without merit.

Once, when the Buddha was still a Bodhisattva, he lived as a great king of Kosala. Energy, discretion, majesty, power-these and other royal virtues were his to the highest degree. Yet the strength of one quality surpassed all others: his talent for gaining prosperity. Enriched by this felicitous ability, his other qualities shone all the brighter, as the splendor of moonlight increases in autumn.

Fortune followed him everywhere like a lover, abandoning his enemies and holding his followers dear. Although his sense of fairness prevented him from harming any living being, his fortune was such that his adversaries did not flourish even though he refused to oppress them.

Now it happened one day that this king came to recall one of his previous lives, and was deeply moved. And with this recollection he increased the gifts of charity he was used to bestowing on the shramanas and brahmans, on the poor, on the wretched and the helpless. For giving is the basis and cause of happiness. More than ever before, he strove to practice good conduct; more than ever he followed the restrictions on holy days.

Intent on illustrating to his people the power of meritorious action, every day he made the same proclamation in his assembly hall as well as in the innermost apartments of his palace. These were the words that issued from his heart with deep feeling:

"Respect paid to the Buddhas, no matter how small it may seem, will never yield insignificant fruit. This has been heard before, but now look at the proof. Look around you, and behold the rich results produced by a small portion of gruel, saltless, coarse, and dry!

"My mighty army with its splendid chariots, its powerful horses, and its dark blue throngs of fierce elephants; my boundless wealth; Fortune's favor; dominion over the earth; my noble wife-behold the result of merit, all from a small portion of gruel!"

Even after the king had developed the habit of saying these words every day, no one-not the ministers, not the worthiest of the elder brahmans, not the most prominent townsfolk no one ventured to ask what he meant, although all were plagued by curiosity.

Eventually the queen also grew curious at the king's constant repetition of these words. Feeling free to question her husband, one day during full audience she seized the opportunity to do so:

"My lord, all the time now, day and night, you recite these words about a small portion of gruel. You speak with such heartfelt fervor that I am filled with wonder. Your words surely cannot refer to some secret, since they are proclaimed in such an open manner; what they refer to must be a matter for public knowledge. If I am allowed to hear it, I request humbly that you tell me what you mean."

The king looked on his queen, his face suffused with love. Smiling, he spoke: "You are not the only one curious about the meaning, the cause, and the circumstances of my words. All the officials, the queens, and all the townspeople are full of wonder and curiosity. Listen, then, to my words:

"Why I do not know, but as naturally as one awakens from a deep sleep, the memory of one of my past lives suddenly came to me. I was living as a servant in this very town. I was honest and trustworthy, but resigned to a dreary existence

working for people elevated by wealth alone. All was toil, contempt, and sorrow. Each day I struggled to support my family, forever in fear that I would be unable to sustain them.

"Then one evening I encountered four monks begging for alms. Their senses subdued, they radiated the glory of monkhood. My heart softened to them as if I were their disciple; I bowed to them and asked them into my home.

"Then I offered what I could, a small portion of gruel. And from that tiny sprout has sprung this tree of greatness-so immense that the glittering crown jewels of other kings are reflected in the dust at my feet.

"Such are my thoughts as I recite those words, my queen, and this is the reason I gain such pleasure in performing acts of merit, and in associating with spiritual people."

The queen's face shone with surprise and happiness. Respectfully raising her eyes to the king, she said: "Now I understand, Great King, why you are so intent on gathering merit-for you yourself have witnessed the result of virtuous action. Because of this, you strive to protect your subjects like a father, ever mindful to avoid evil actions and to attain all the qualities which bring forth merit.

"Today you shine with illustrious glory enhanced by charity-and your rival kings await your commands in willing obeisance. May you rule the earth with justice forever, from here to its wind-swept ocean borders."

The king replied: "Since I have seen its lovely signs, I will always attempt to point out the path of salvation. How could I not be liberal, my queen, having experienced myself the rewards of generosity? And now, having heard this tale of the results of charity, people everywhere will love the act of giving."

The king, looking lovingly toward his queen, noticed that she had begun to glow with a splendor almost divine. "You are shining amidst your attendants like the crescent moon amidst the stars. What virtuous act of yours has brought forth such radiance?"

The queen replied: "I, too, my lord, have had some memory of a former life, dimly recalled like something that happened when I was a child. I was a slave who, one day, after giving the remnants of a dish of food to a holy monk, fell asleep. And it is as if I woke up here.

"By that wholesome action of giving I won you for my lord and my protector, sharing you with the world. The very words you have spoken-'No benefit is small when given to those free of defilement'-those very words were spoken by that monk."

The members of the assembly were overcome by amazement; having witnessed such wonderful results of merit, they developed a high regard for meritorious action. Noticing this, the king said to them: "After seeing the splendid result of one good deed, however small, how could anyone not diligently practice charity and right conduct? Clearly the person who, wrapped in the darkness of avarice, declines to offer charity though wealthy enough to do so is not worth a moment's thought.

"Wealth, after all, must finally be left behind, and is then of no use at all. But by giving it up in the right manner, any good quality can be acquired. In truth, many

different virtues happiness, a good name, and so on-are founded on giving. Who, then, knowing this, would choose the path of selfish action?

"Generosity is a great treasure. No thief can steal it, no fire destroy it, no water can ruin it, no king can command it. Generosity cleanses the mind of selfishness and greed, relieving our weariness as we travel through life. It is our best and closest friend, constantly giving pleasure and comfort.

"Generosity can win you whatever you may wish: riches or power, beautiful body, or heavenly palace. Who then would not practice giving?

"Generosity is called the worth of riches, the essence of power, the way to glory. Even rags offered by the simpleminded are a gift well-bestowed."

The assembly respectfully listened to the king's discourse, and from that moment on, each one was more inclined to practice charity.

From this story one can see how any gift that proceeds from the heart and is bestowed on a worthy recipient produces a great result; no gift of such a nature can be considered small. Therefore, if one gives with a faithful heart to the Sangha, the congregation of the holy, those most excellent friends who sow meritorious action, one may obtain the utmost nobility, even an exalted state. Blessings even greater than these may occur as well.



3 - A Small Portion of Gruel

A Tale of Generosity.



In this lifetime, the bodhisattva was the king of Kosala. Beloved by all his subjects, the king possessed many good virtues but one quality surpassed all others: his talent for gaining prosperity.

While in a deep sleep one night, the king came to recall one of his previous lives and was deeply moved. He then began to mysteriously repeat to his subjects that all the prosperity of their kingdom was produced by "a small portion of gruel." Although intrigued, nobody in the kingdom understood what he meant and none had the courage to ask. He continued to repeat this and the curiosity of his people continued to grow until one day while in front of a grand assembly, the queen beseeched him to explain himself.



He stated that he had recalled a past life in which he had been a poor servant. He remembered working hard, barely being able to support his family, and becoming entangled in feelings of contempt and sorrow. Yet when he came upon a travelling group of monks he invited them into his home and offered them all he had, which was just a small portion of gruel. It was because of this one small act that he was reborn a great king. He proclaimed that no act of kindness is small if given from the heart. Having witnessed the wonderful results of generosity, the people of Koshala also developed a high regard for meritorious action. The prosperity of the kingdom continued to flourish even greater than before.

Key Events in the Story

1. King has a dream...
2. ...about "a small portion of gruel."
3. King recounts the dream to the people.

4 - The Merchant



Even in the face of imminent peril the virtuous never shrink from practicing charity. Who, then, when safe and happy, should not be charitable?

Once, when the Buddha was still a Bodhisattva, he took birth as the son of a good family. Blessed with boundless energy and great good fortune, he became head of his guild. He acquired a large estate, and by his fairness and integrity in business, earned the deepest respect of all. In addition, his study of various branches of the arts and sciences purified his mind and produced qualities which, together with his noble virtues, brought him honor even from the king.

Devoted to the precept of giving, he constantly endeavored to share his wealth with the people. The mendicants praised his name far and wide, spreading his reputation for charity in all directions; they trusted him entirely, becoming bold enough to tell him their desires freely. For his part, untouched by avarice, he never held back his wealth-either for his own pleasure or to gain influence over others-for he found it impossible to witness any sort of suffering and refuse to help.

One day a mendicant, a Pratyekabuddha in whom the fire of knowledge had burned away all fettering passions, approached the Bodhisattva's dwelling. Now this beggar's sole desire was to increase the merit of the Bodhisattva, and to that end he had appeared in the gateway at meal time, just as the Great Being, having bathed and anointed himself, was about to sit down to a feast. Many and various dishes had been prepared by the finest of cooks, dishes pleasing in their color, smell, taste, texture, and so on. In the quiet of the evening, the monk stood outside the house without apprehension or agitation, looking firmly and quietly a small distance before him, his lotus-like hands holding a wooden alms bowl.

Now the demon Mara, the Wicked One, could not bear to see the Bodhisattva about to enjoy the happiness which comes from giving alms. Determined to obstruct the act of giving, Mara manifested a deep hell several fathoms wide which separated the mendicant from the gateway. In that hell, hundreds of people were writhing among the flames, making ghastly sounds of great agony: It was truly a dreadful sight.

But the Bodhisattva, seeing only the Pratyekabuddha, said calmly to his wife: "Please go, my dear, and give this holy man some food." At once his wife approached the door carrying a bowl full of the best portions for the beggar. But close to the gateway, she turned on her heels, terror-stricken and utterly bewildered. So firmly was fear lodged in her throat that when the Bodhisattva asked her what was the matter, she could barely speak.

Uneasy at the thought that the holy man might turn away from his house empty-handed, the Bodhisattva paid no attention to the stuttering of his wife. Taking the bowl of food in his own hands, he had just started for the gate when he too caught sight of that horrifying hell. While he stood there, pondering the meaning of such a phenomenon, Mara the Wicked One suddenly appeared. Manifesting as a great god, Mara emerged from the house wall and, floating in the air, spoke in seeming kindness to the Bodhisattva:

"Householder, behold here the hell of Maharauvara, from which it is most difficult to escape! This is the hell of those lured by the praise of beggars, those who indulge in a vicious passion for charity and thus give away all their well-earned wealth. Here they must remain for thousands of years.

"Wealth is the cause leading to purification of the three worldly states. When one gives up one's wealth, how can one not injure the Dharma? He who injures wealth injures righteousness. Is it not fitting that one who destroys the Dharma by destroying wealth should go to hell?"

"And now this hell that looks like Narakantaka licks at your doorstep, eager to devour you-for you have sinned immeasurably by giving up your wealth, root of all Dharma. Henceforth cease from giving, lest you fall headlong into this pit of flames and share the fate of these piteous almsgivers-who writhe in pain and weep incessantly.

"The wealthy, however, who cease their bad habits of giving, attain the rank of gods! Desist from your charitable efforts, which are obstructions to heavenly bliss. Practice self-restraint!"

The Bodhisattva knew that anyone saying such things could only be an evil person. "Surely this is an attempt to thwart my almsgiving," he thought. Firmly yet kindly, and in accord with virtue, he replied:

"Most considerately have you shown me the path of the pious. Indeed, it is fitting that the gods should show their compassion by their actions and skill in helping others. Nevertheless, it would have been wiser to halt the disease before it took hold, or at least to apply the cure as soon as the first symptoms appeared. For if the wrong treatment allows a disease to develop, a cure applied too late can lead only to disaster. My passion for giving has grown, I fear, far beyond the reach of help-for my mind can now never turn from almsgiving, despite your counsel so well-intended.

"As for your words regarding the sin of charity and the righteousness of wealth, I am afraid my weak human understanding cannot grasp it. How can wealth without charity be called the path of virtue? When, please tell me, does wealth produce virtue? As buried treasure, perhaps? Or when violently taken by thieves? When lost at the bottom of the sea, or when used as fuel for fire?"

"Further, by saying that givers go to hell and that recipients go to heavenly realms, you only increase my longing to perform works of charity. May those words come to pass! May those who beg from me rise immediately to the heavenly realms! For it is not for my own happiness that I give, but for the good of all beings."

Then Mara the Wicked One bent toward the Bodhisattva and like the closest of friends whispered earnestly in his ear: "Decide for yourself whether my words are lies or are for your own good. Then do as you will. Happy or remorseful, you will not soon forget me."

The Bodhisattva replied: "Sir, you must forgive me. Of my own accord I will throw myself into this fiercely blazing hell and be prey to its flames. Rather this than be guilty of neglecting the kindly mendicants who show me their affection by begging from me."

And so the Bodhisattva, relying on the power of his good fortune (and knowing full well that the consequences of true generosity can never be evil), stepped forward into the hell gaping before him. And in doing so, his mind was untouched by fear and his desire to give was stronger than ever, despite the feverish entreaties of family and servants.

By the power of the Bodhisattva's merit, a lotus bloomed in the midst of that hell; its row of petals shaking as if in laughter at Mara, it carried the Great Being across the sea of fire. Standing before the Pratyekabuddha, the householder filled the monk's bowl with food, while his own heart overflowed with happiness and joy.

The Pratyekabuddha, demonstrating his satisfaction, rose high in the air, raining down glory and flaming with majesty like a cloud flashing with lightning. Vanquished and disheartened, Mara lost his splendor. Not daring to look upon the Bodhisattva's face, he disappeared completely, along with his hell.

From this story one can see how the virtuous do not shrink from giving even when they are in peril; who then when he is safe and happy would not be charitable? The brave and great-hearted can never be induced to travel the wrong path, even by fear.



4 - The Merchant A Tale of Diligent Resolve.



Born into a noble family and possessing great fortune, the young bodhisattva grew to be a successful merchant. Eventually becoming the head of his guild, he acquired a large estate, earned deep respect from all who knew him, and even was honored by the king. Devoted to the precept of giving, he constantly shared his wealth with the less fortunate. It was impossible for him to witness any sort of suffering and refuse to offer aid.



One day, while the bodhisattva was sitting down to partake of a magnificent feast, a seemingly poor and hungry man appeared at the front gate of his home. Although appearing as a beggar, this old man was actually a Pratyekabuddha whose only motive to receive alms was to increase the merit of the bodhisattva.



Witnessing this, Mara, the Wicked One, became intent on dissuading the Bodhisattva from all charitable actions. He created a deep hell several fathoms wide separating the bodhisattva's front gate and the mendicant. As the bodhisattva stood pondering the meaning of such a phenomenon, Mara appeared before him disguised as a powerful god. Mara attempted to convince the bodhisattva that what he saw before him was the hell of those lured by the praise of beggars. A hell realm solely for those who indulge in the vicious passion of charity, and who give away their hard earned wealth. The Bodhisattva however, knowing that anybody saying such things must be evil, boldly stepped into the fire. Lotuses suddenly appeared at his feet as he passed through. Upon reaching the other side he gave the food to the old man who, to show satisfaction, revealed his true form as a Pratyekabuddha and magically flew up into the air. Mara, disheartened and vanquished, disappeared along with his hell.

Key Events in the Story

1. A generous merchant.
2. Mara plays tricks.
3. The merchant is unperturbed.

5 - The Invincible One



Neither fear of fortune's loss nor hope of future gain can distract the virtuous from the practice of giving

At one time when the Buddha was still a Bodhisattva, he was born in an illustrious family and later became head of his guild. He radiated generosity and morality, and excelled in sacred learning, self-discipline, and spiritual knowledge, embodying both wisdom and humility.

Blessed with such boundless riches, he seemed like Kuvera himself. Charity was for him a perpetual practice-and so he became a constant source of wealth. Best of almsgivers, he lived only to benefit humanity; truly oblivious to all manner of greed and selfishness, he soon came to be known as Avishahya, 'the Invincible One'.

He was as happy to see beggars as they were to see him: At first sight, both knew that their fondest wish had been granted. He was, indeed, incapable of refusing any request, and his great compassion left no room in his heart for attachment to wealth. His highest joy, therefore, was to watch the mendicants carry off the finest objects from his home. He saw those so-called goods for what they were, sources of desire and discontent that would quickly lead to dissatisfaction without any apparent cause.

Indeed, riches joined with greed may be called swift caravans on the road to despair. His riches, on the other hand, brought true benefit both to himself and to others. The Great Being gave the mendicants whatever they desired and ornamented his gifts with respect and freedom from emotionality, in this way satisfying them wholly.

When Shakra, Lord of the Gods, heard of the Bodhisattva's benevolence, he was truly astounded, and instantly decided to test the firmness of the Bodhisattva's resolution. Day by day, little by little, quantities of money, grain, jewels, and clothes began to disappear from Avishahya's house. "Perhaps," thought Shakra, "concern for the loss of his property may tempt him to show a little self-interest." But the Great Being remained intent on giving. No sooner did his possessions vanish-like raindrops touched by the sun-than he would order more to be fetched from his house, as if saving them from a dangerous fire.

At this, Shakra was even more amazed, and prepared a test of greater severity. During the night he concealed the whole of Avishahya's wealth, except for a rope and a sickle. The Bodhisattva awoke to find everything gone-household goods, furniture, money, grain, clothes, even his servants. His house stood empty, desolate, and sad, as if plundered by rakshasas; searching about he found nothing but the rope and the sickle.

"Perhaps some poor person unused to begging has decided to use his initiative and help himself. In that case, he has done my house a favor and my goods are well spent," he thought. "If, however, by some fault of my destiny, someone who is envious of my good fortune has simply stolen all these things-and does not intend to use them-it is a great pity.

"The fickleness of Fortune is no surprise to me, but that the indigent should come to grief because of it, saddens me. They have long enjoyed my gifts and hospitality; now, finding my house empty, how will they feel? They are no better off than those who, dying of thirst, find a dry pond."

Yet maintaining his even mindedness, the Bodhisattva refused to succumb to sorrow. Unaccustomed to begging, he was not able to bring himself to ask others for help, even those he knew well. And so he realized how truly difficult it is to

beg. His compassion for beggars grew even greater, and with the thought of providing for these mendicants strongly in mind, he took up the rope and sickle and ventured out into the fields to gather grass. Day after day he toiled in the hot sun, and with the little he earned by selling his crop, he attended to the wants of many mendicants.

Witnessing such unshakable calm and devotion to giving in the midst of extreme poverty, Shakra was filled with astonishment and admiration. But he was not finished with his test. In a burst of dazzling rainbows of light, he appeared in mid-air before the Bodhisattva, and displaying his wondrous celestial form, attempted to turn the Bodhisattva from giving, proclaiming:

"Householder! Neither thieves nor water, neither fire nor princes have robbed you of your wealth. Your own profligate generosity has reduced you to this state, and your friends are much alarmed. For this reason I urge you to restrain your passionate love of giving. If you would stop your giving, it is possible that even as poor as you are now, you could yet recover your former riches. By constant consumption, possessions dwindle; but gathering ant hills can make a mountain. By practicing self-restraint you can increase your property."

In order to indicate his devotion to giving, the Bodhisattva replied: "O Thousand-Eyed One, the noble-hearted, however distressed, could never lower themselves to do anything ignoble. May there never be a time when I act like a miser. Beggars undergo great suffering-almost like death. As begging is their only hope, who could strike a mendicant with the hail stones of refusal? Indeed, who could accept any jewel, any wealth, even the realm of the gods, and not use it to relieve the misery of those grown pale with the task of begging? When one does not give, one strengthens greed. In strengthening generosity, one guards against such a danger.

"Wealth is as fickle as a flash of lightning. It may strike anyone, and when it does, it brings only pain and disaster; whereas only happiness and joy spring from giving alms. Knowing this, how could the noble cling to greed? Good Shakra, I thank you for your kind words and sympathy, but my heart is too accustomed to the joy brought by giving. How could I find delight in any other way? And do not be angry on my account; the fortress of my character is not easy to breach."

Shakra replied: "Householder, you speak as if you were still a powerful and wealthy man, attended by many servants, with treasury and granary overflowing, your future assured. Your conduct does not suit your condition. It is time you recovered your riches. Take up a line of work suitable for a man of your position! Soon you will gather riches as great as the sun-and with these riches you can eclipse your rival's fortunes. You will then be in a position to enjoy fortune's favor like the embrace of a lover. Having obtained the respect even of kings, you can display your opulence to the people, and gladden your friends with a gift or two. If, at that point, you should feel inclined to charitable actions, well, who then would blame you?

"But love of charity without the means to perform it is as foolish as a bird with half-grown wings attempting to fly. Your desire to give will ruin you; only through practicing restraint, pursuing humble aims, and giving up almsgiving can you

acquire wealth. Without wealth what can you give? What can be wrong in not giving, after all, when you have nothing to give?"

But the Bodhisattva replied: "Shakra, there is no time for what you suggest! Furthermore, even those who care more for their own interest than for the interest of others will find that by practicing charity they will benefit much more than they ever could from wealth. Great satisfaction arises by subduing greed through charitable actions. Keeping this always in mind, one sees how foolish it is to care for riches-for they will never lead one to the heavenly realms. Charity alone will earn one a holy reputation and suppress the tendencies toward greed. Knowing this, who would not practice charity?"

"Anyone moved by compassion, anyone who desires to protect beings surrounded by old age and death, would give away his very self as alms. Such a person has no use for ordinary happiness; the sufferings of others forbid him such enjoyment. For one such as this, what use is even the glory you possess in the heaven realms?"

"Hear this also, O Lord of Gods: The span of life is as uncertain as the duration of wealth. When one considers this, it is clearly senseless to care for gain when giving alms. By the time a single carriage has beaten a track on the ground, a second will go by with more confidence. For this reason, I will not move from this good way, nor will I shift my carriage to the wrong path.

"Should I once more acquire great wealth, it would certainly please the mendicants. For now, however, even in my lowly condition, I shall give alms as well as I can. May I never be lax in keeping my vow of charity!"

With these words Shakra was finally satisfied. "Well said! Well said!" he cried, and looking upon the Bodhisattva with admiration and love, he explained: "Most people chase after wealth by any conceivable means, no matter how low and rough and hurtful, no matter how harmful to their reputations. Mindless of danger, attached to pleasure, they blind themselves with their selfishness. But you do not worry about your lost wealth or your lack of pleasures. Nor are you lured by my temptations, being intent on increasing the good fortune of others. And so you show the greatness of your nature!"

"How your lofty heart shines! How completely you have removed the darkness of selfish feelings! Though your wealth is gone, your desire to give has not lessened with the hope of recovering it. So greatly do you suffer at the suffering of others, so great is the power of your compassion and your desire to benefit the world, it is no wonder I have been unable to deter you. Just so little are the Himalayas shaken by the wind!"

"It was I who hid your wealth, but only so that by trial your fame might increase. Only by trial can a gem, no matter how beautiful, gain the great value of a famous jewel. Forgive me, and henceforth pour your gifts on mendicants as freely as rainclouds fill pools. By my favor, never again shall you lose your wealth."

After obtaining the pardon of the Invincible One, Shakra returned his estate to him, and then vanished on the spot.

From this story one can see how the virtuous will not change their practice of giving either out of fear of losing their fortune or from a desire to gain more.

5 - The Invincible One A Tale of Unwavering Virtue.



Born into an illustrious family, the bodhisattva became the head of his guild and acquired a great deal of wealth. He was an impressive man, radiating generosity and morality, excelling in sacred learning, self discipline, and spiritual knowledge, embodying both wisdom and humility. He became known as Avishya, 'the Invincible One'.



With vast means at his disposal, charity was a perpetual practice for him and having no attachment to his great wealth, this became his only passion. He enjoyed nothing more than watching mendicants carry off the finest objects from his home.

Shakra, the Lord of Gods, heard of the bodhisattva's benevolence and decided to test him. Shakra then began to steal Avishya's possessions and before long, everything was gone except for a rope and a sickle. Now with almost nothing, and not being accustomed to begging himself, Avishya took the rope and sickle and went out to toil in the fields, gathering grass to sell as crops. He would take the little money he earned and immediately use it to give further aid to mendicants.



Shakra was astounded by the bodhisattva's unshakable calm and devotion to giving even while suffering from extreme poverty. Yet he was not quite finished testing him. He appeared before Avishya in a burst of dazzling rainbows, floating in mid-air in his wondrous celestial form, and attempted to turn him away from giving. Shakra proclaimed that Avishya was being irrational and that he should focus rebuilding his wealth. The bodhisattva humbly refused and stated that he had no desire for wealth and that the only joy he seeks is that of generosity. Further more, he firmly proclaimed that no matter what, he would never stray from his path of charity. This delighted Shakra who then promptly returned the bodhisattva's estate and then disappeared into the sky.

Key Events in the Story

1. A generous man gives everything away.
2. Content and happy.
3. Tested by the Lord of the Gods.

6 - The Hare



If even in lives as beasts the Great-Minded have been known to practice charity, who then, being human, should not be charitable?

In the middle of a forest was a clearing once frequented by ascetics. There the earth was carpeted with soft green grass; rich soil put forth flowers and fruits in lush profusion, and trees and greenery of all sorts abounded. Bordering this lovely spot was a sparkling river as blue as lapis lazuli.

In this forest, the Bodhisattva lived as a hare-an animal that shone with such goodness, such vigor, such strength and beauty that all the other animals in the forest looked to him as their king, none fearing him, none causing him fear. Satisfying his needs by simple blades of grass, wearing his own fur for the ascetic's garments, he glowed like a Great Being. Everything he thought, everything he spoke, everything he did was motivated by a friendliness so pure and simple that even those beasts usually given to wickedness became his students and friends.

Among his devoted following, three in particular were attracted by the love and respect which his eminent qualities inspired, and they grew to be his constant companions: an otter, a jackal, and a monkey. These three loved the hare as if he were their kin, their mutual bond of respect binding them together in joy. They spent all their days with him, soon forgetting their lower natures-and compassion for all living creatures flowed from their hearts. Greed no longer tempted them, they forgot how to steal, and their lives began to conform closely to the Dharma. Their minds became disciplined, clear, and strong.

How remarkable to hear of a human being who chooses the path of virtue from the two ways of action-action which accords with pleasure but goes against virtue, or action which is in harmony with virtue but not with pleasure imagine how astonishing it was to hear of four beasts who had made such a choice! Their fame spread quickly, especially word of the being in the shape of a hare, whose compassion for others was unexcelled. His renown travelled even to the realm of the gods.

One evening, the monkey, the jackal, and the otter were sitting in reverence at the feet of the hare, eagerly waiting for him to teach the Dharma. The moon was almost full, a silver mirror without a handle, and its bright beauty prompted the hare to say to his friends:

"Look! The moon tonight has a laughing face, almost fully rounded, reminding us that tomorrow is the fifteenth, a holy day. We must not forget to perform all the duties prescribed for that day. Above all, we must not even begin to think of the needs of our own bodies before we have honored a guest with good food obtained in the right manner.

"Remember: life is as unstable and fickle as a flash of lightning. Even the lives of those who have gained the highest rank will end in downfall. Every union ends in separation. Be mindful, therefore, and guard against carelessness. Endeavor to increase your merit by acts of giving, ornamented by good conduct, for meritorious actions are the strongest support for beings caught in the world. The brilliance of the moon outshines the glowing of the stars, yet the sun's rays outshine them all. Such is the power and beauty of merit.

"So it is that mighty kings, through the power of their merit, can hold in check the most presumptuous officials and the most arrogant princes, causing them to obey their commands willingly, like the finest of horses. Leaders who scorn the

path of virtue are foolish, for no matter how wise they may be in the ways of politics, they are sure to be hounded by misfortune and wrath all their days.

"Therefore, avoid the path of wrongdoing, which engenders only suffering and dishonor. Fix your mind on every opportunity for gathering merit, for merit is the true source and means of happiness."

The three students thanked the hare for his teaching and bowed to him with respect. After circumambulating him, they went off to their respective homes. Once alone, the hare began to reflect on his own situation:

"My three friends have ample means to honor anyone who might chance to visit tomorrow, but my situation is pitiful. The blades of grass I cut off with my teeth are far too bitter for any guest. Alas! How helpless I am! What use is life to me when a guest who ought to be cause for joy can only be cause for sorrow? How can my worthless body, which cannot even bring satisfaction to a guest, ever be of use to anyone!"

Then the hare found his answer: "Ah, wonderful! It is, after all, within my power to provide for a guest! I can use my own body! It does not belong to anyone else, and I will not harm any other by offering it. My very body can be food for my guest. Now I can truly rejoice!" As delighted as if he had been granted a great boon, the hare waited for morning.

At this sublime thought which arose in the Great Being's mind, all the powers of earth and sky rang with exultation. The Earth shook her mountains with joy; the Ocean shook its waves like a garment. Heavenly drums resounded in the sky, and the horizon glowed with a soft sheen. Clouds flushed with lightning pealed soft thunder and rained down a myriad of flowers. The god of the Wind blew the fragrant pollen of flowering trees into gossamer veils of ever-shifting patterns, like gatherings of offerings.

The astonishing resolution of the hare produced such a jubilant celebration among the gods that Shakra, Lord of the Gods, grew curious, and decided to see for himself if the hare's resolve was real.

The next day, exactly at noon, when the sun casts down its strongest beams; when a net of shimmering light hangs on the horizon; when the sun glows with radiant intensity and is unbearable to look upon; when shadows contract, and birds hide; when the woods echo with the shrill sound of cicadas; a time when travellers are oppressed with heat and fatigue-it was then that Shakra, Lord of the Gods, taking the shape of an old brahman, appeared at a spot not far from the dwellings of the four friends. Weeping and wailing, he perfectly imitated the sounds of a man who had lost his way, a weary traveller worn down by hunger and thirst, distress and sorrow.

"Please won't someone help me, please help me!" he cried. "My companions are gone; I have lost my way; I am wandering through this dark forest alone, hungry, and tired. I have completely lost all sense of direction; I cannot tell the right way from the wrong. I am suffering from heat, from thirst, from exhaustion. Who will help me? Is there no one to offer me refuge?"

The Great Beings, alarmed by such pitiful heart-rending sounds, ran quickly in the direction of the cries. As soon as they came upon the lost and miserable traveller, they approached him respectfully and spoke these words of comfort:

"Do not be distressed thinking you are lost in the wilderness. We are your friends, and care as much for your safety as would any of your followers. Please, gentle sir, grant us the favor of accepting our service, and tomorrow go on your way."

The traveller was silent, so the otter, taking this to mean acceptance, ran off joyfully, returning in no time with seven fish. As he offered them to the guest, he said:

"I found these seven fish lying on the ground, motionless, as if asleep. Either they were left there by some forgetful fisherman, or they jumped on the shore out of fright-in any case they are yours. Please eat them, and take your ease."

The jackal also brought what food he had available. Bowing with reverence, he said: "Here, traveller, is a lizard and a jar of sour milk left in the forest by someone unknown. Grant me the favor of watching you enjoy this food, and then rest here overnight, O virtuous one." With much love in his heart, he handed his offerings to the brahman.

Then the monkey drew near, bringing soft ripe mangoes perfectly round and of an orange hue so deep they might have been dyed, joining his palms in reverence, he said: "I have ripe mangoes for you, round and soft, refreshing as shadows, refreshing as the pleasure of good company. O great one who knows the Brahman, enjoy them and stay here this night."

Finally the hare approached, and, after paying his respects, said: "I am but a hare who has grown up in this forest; I have no beans, no sesame seeds, no grains of rice to offer. On the auspicious day a mendicant visits, one should provide such a fine guest with whatever will benefit him. My wealth is limited to my body: Take it, then; it is all I possess. Please prepare it on the fire and feast upon it, and then stay overnight in our hermitage."

Shakra replied: "How could someone such as I kill any living being-most especially a being such as you, who has shown me such hospitality?"

The hare replied: "It is clear you are a brahman inclined to compassion. You must at least grant me the honor of resting here tonight. In the meantime I will find some way of helping you."

Then Shakra, Lord of the Gods, understanding the hare's unspoken intention, conjured up a heap of burning charcoal-its blazing hot and smokeless fire, the color of pure gold, sent thin flames and sparks in all directions. The hare, who had been looking everywhere for such a means to work his intention, rejoiced upon seeing the fire, and said to Shakra:

"Here is the means to show you my good will. Now fulfill my hopes and enjoy my flesh. You must see, great brahman, that I am absorbed in the thought of giving. In you I have found a worthy guest, and my heart will have it no other way. Such an opportunity for giving is not easily obtained. Do not let my giving be wasted; it depends on you."

After thus showing honor and respect to his guest, the hare threw himself into the fire-like a poor man who suddenly spies a gleaming treasure, or like a goose diving into a lotus-covered pond.

The Lord of the Gods watched in great wonder as celestial flowers rained down from the sky and came to rest where the hare had been. Shakra then resumed

his own shape and praised the hare with suitable and melodious words. Then, with his delicate hands glowing like petals of a white lotus, his fingers resplendent like jewels, Shakra lifted the hare up to the heavens and displayed him to the gods.

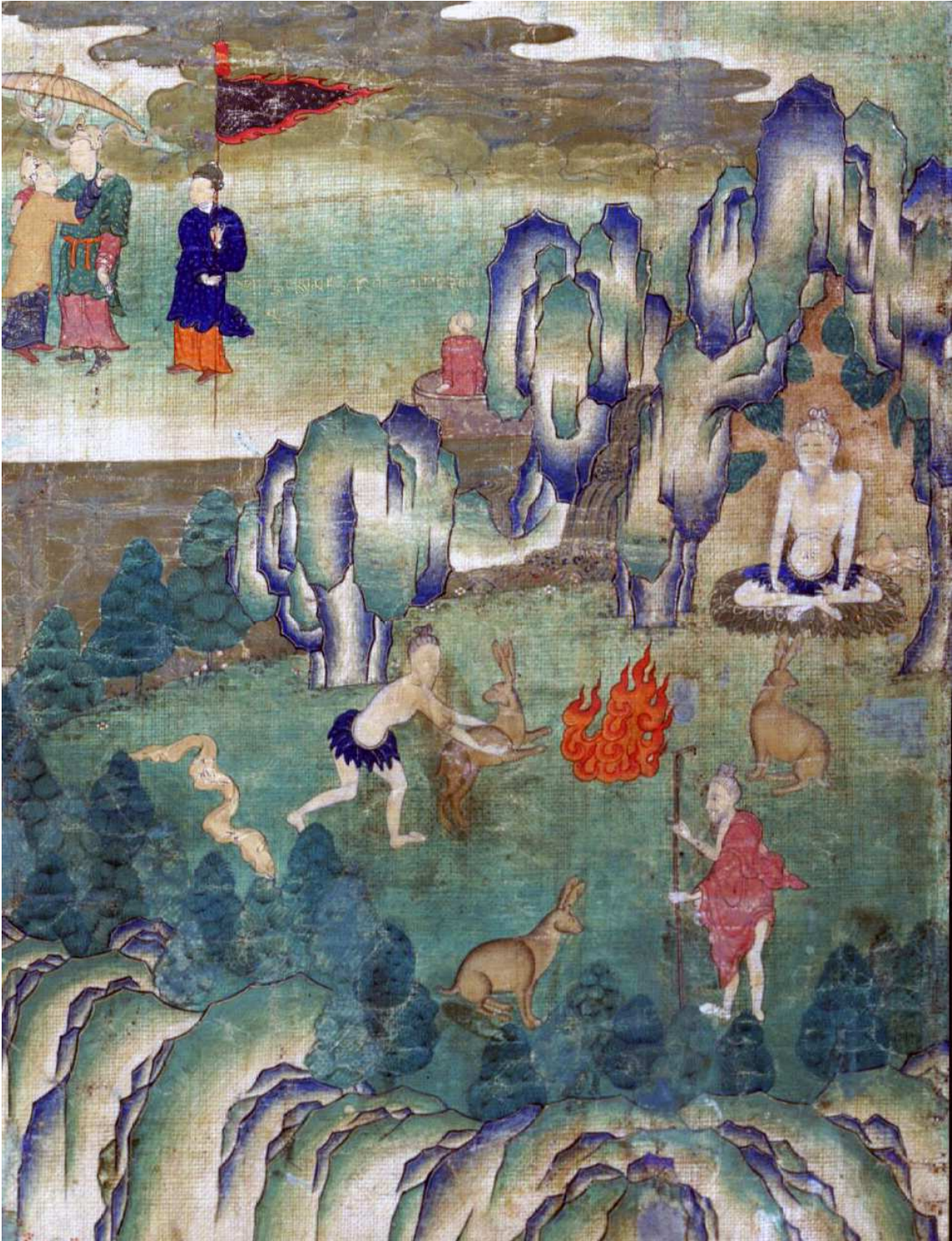
"Behold and rejoice at this astonishing deed, the heroic exploit of this Great Being! Today, at a time when most people-fools that they are-cannot give up even faded flowers without misgivings, this one, without hesitation, gave up his body as an offering of love to his guest. What a contrast between his animal body and the true loftiness of his self-sacrifice, the clarity of his mind! Indeed, he confounds all who are slow in striving to do good-gods as well as men. Sweet is the fragrance of a mind so dedicated to the practice of virtue! How well immersed in the practice of virtue he showed himself to be by his wonderful action."

Then, in order to glorify that extraordinary event, having in mind the good of the world, Shakra adorned the top of his own palace, Vayayanta, and Sudharma, the palace of the gods, with the image of a hare. And he also adorned the face of the moon with the same image.

Even today, at full moon, that image glows in the sky, as a reflected object shines in a mirror. Since that time, Candra, the moon, known also as the Ornament of the Night and the One who Opens the Evening Lotus, has also been known as Shashanka, the One Marked by the Hare.

And the other three-the otter, the jackal, and the monkey-due to their closeness with such a holy friend, soon after disappeared from the earth and were reborn in the realm of the gods.

From this story one can see how Great Beings, even in the form of beasts, practice giving in whatever way they can. Who, then, as a man, should not practice giving? Even beasts are worshipped by the pious if their qualities are virtuous. Thus one should be intent on virtue.



6 - The Rabbit

A Tale of Selfless Generosity



.In this lifetime the Bodhisattva was born as an animal, a rabbit. Yet even as a rabbit, he possessed incredible virtue, goodness, beauty, and vigor; so much so that the other animals viewed him as their king. None feared him and none caused him fear. Among his devoted following, three animals in particular became his closest students and companions. They were an otter, a jackal, and a monkey, who through the Bodhisattva's teaching, forgot their lower animal nature and became infinitely compassionate themselves.

As instructed by the rabbit in a teaching one night, it was customary that on the next day, a holy day, to offer alms to anyone who passes through their forest. Later that night, the rabbit was distraught as he realized he had nothing to offer. His three companions had ample means to feed a guest, but the rabbit had nothing but the meager blades of grass he ate to sustain himself, which were far too bitter to offer a visitor. Then he realized he could offer his own flesh as food and without hesitation, decided this was what he would do.

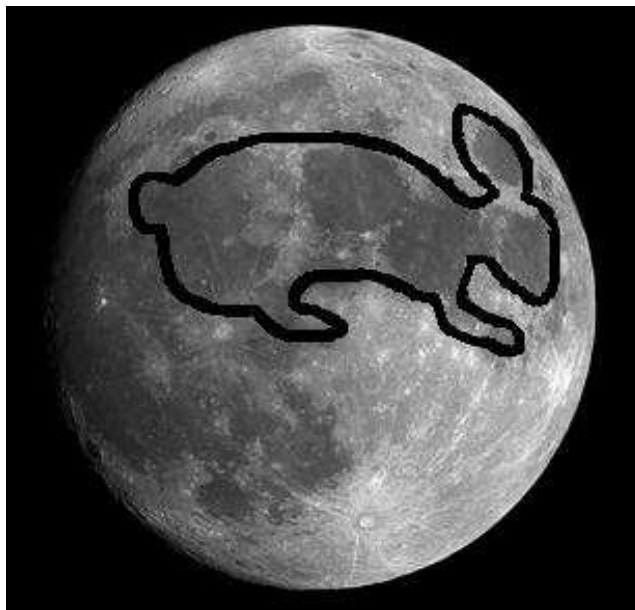
Hearing this, Shakra, the lord of gods, went to test the animals and disguised himself as a weary traveler who had lost his way. Hungry, thirsty, and crying with despair, the four beasts rushed to his aid. The otter was able to supply the man with seven fish, the jackal a lizard and some sour milk, and the monkey some soft ripe mangoes. Seeing that the man had built a fire, the rabbit explained that

he was offering his own body and then, without hesitation, leapt into the hot coals and swirling flames.



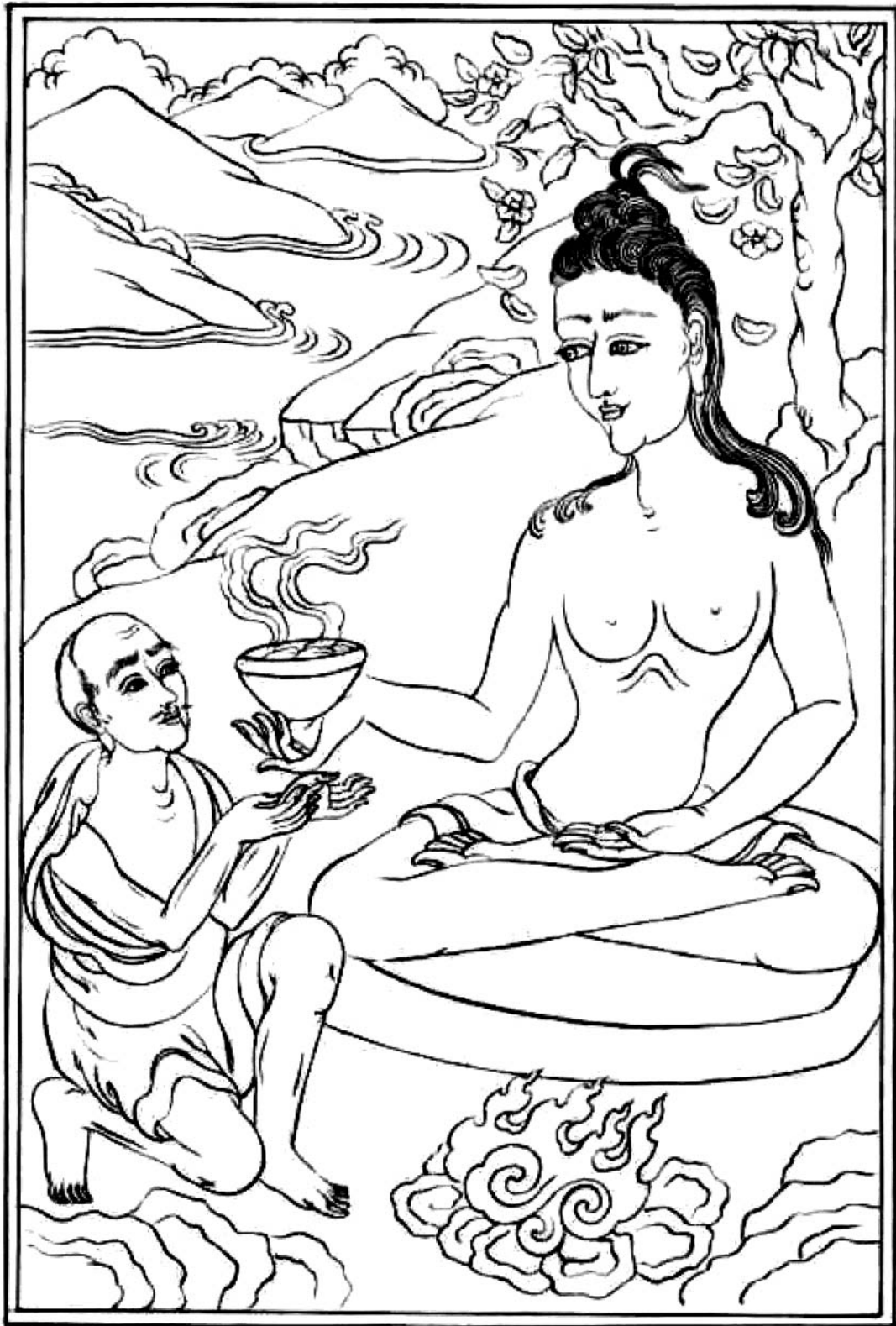
Shakra rejoiced, reached into the fire and pulled out the rabbit and then lifted him up into the heavens and displayed him before the gods.

Then Shakra, having in mind the good of the world and the glorious example of the animal bodhisattva, adorned the top of his own palace, Sudharma, the palace of the Gods, with an image of a rabbit. He also adorned the face of the moon with the same image. It is said that even today, the image of the rabbit can be seen in the full moon.



Shakyamuni Buddha, Previous Life Stories (Sanskrit: jataka. Tibetan: kye rab): from the famous Indian text presenting 34 morality tales drawn from the previous life stories of the historical buddha, Shakyamuni. The story below is about a selfless rabbit and the Indian god Shakra. In the early Buddhist texts the name Shakra is used as an alternate name for the god Indra.

7 - Ajastya the Ascetic



As generosity is such a great ornament even to ascetics, how wonderful it is when displayed by householders!

Once when the Buddha was still a Bodhisattva travelling through samsara for the good of the world, he was born as the child of an illustrious brahman family whose purity of conduct was an ornament for the earth. As the full and spotless autumn moon beautifies the heavens, so did the birth of Ajastya enhance the luster of his family. In due time, after he had obtained the sacraments called for by the sacred texts and traditions, and after he had studied the Vedas and their many rituals, fame of his knowledge spread far and wide.

The offerings he received from charitable lovers of virtue swiftly multiplied into considerable wealth. And, in turn, as an expansive cloud showers the fields, he regaled with treasures his relations and friends, beggars, guests, and teachers—the distressed as well as those worthy of honor. And so the bright glory of his learning, augmented by his generosity, shone forth all the greater, just as the beauty of the moon increases in autumn.

Yet the Great-minded One realized that the state of a householder is a source of sorrow, affording little comfort. A householder must involve himself in countless activities which lead to indiscretions and even greater difficulties. Turmoil surrounds the gaining of a fortune and the necessity of guarding it; struck by suffering's hundreds of arrows, one slowly becomes careless in spiritual affairs, until tranquillity is destroyed.

Having grown weary of all that surrounds a householder's life, Ajastya knew that renunciation of the world would bring him freedom from such evils, and provide true happiness. The life of denial, so favorable to spiritual needs, was the only proper vehicle for spiritual development and liberation. And so, although wealth had brought him high regard, he cast it away as if it were a straw and gave himself over to the restraint and discipline of the world-renouncing ascetics.

But even after he had left his worldly life, many still sought him out for guidance; both those who had heard of him, as well as those who remembered him from before—all visited him out of respect for his virtues and tranquillity. He found this contact with householders distracting and an obstacle to the detachment he desired. So, hoping for solitude, Ajastya moved to the island of Kara in the Southern Ocean.

Ajastya built his hermitage on Kara, an island encircled by white-flecked waves as blue as sapphire. The beaches were covered by the whitest of sands; the island was adorned by trees laden with flowers and fruit, and there was a lake of pure sweet water close to where he lived. In his hermitage he manifested ascetic practices and showed their glory by the emaciation of his body—he was like the crescent moon in the sky, which refines great loveliness to an ever smaller size. Seeing his tranquillity, attested to by his modest actions, even the wild beasts and birds of the forest understood that this man, absorbed in his vows and practice, was a Muni. And in their own way they strove to imitate his ways.

While living in this ascetic's grove, the Great Being continued to honor any guests who chanced to come his way. He would offer them roots and fruits gathered from the forest, fresh water, and words of welcome and blessing; he would then partake only of whatever food was left over, limiting his meals to what would barely sustain his body

The glory of his great asceticism spread everywhere, reaching even the ears of Shakra, Lord of the Gods, who in his joy upon hearing of such virtue, desired to

prove the constancy of the ascetic. To do so he made most of the roots and fruit disappear from that part of the forest. But the Bodhisattva, absorbed as he was in meditation, was insensible to the pangs of hunger; he was accustomed to being content with little, and was indifferent toward his body and his food. He was therefore unconcerned. Boiling a few leaves in water, he satisfied his body's needs without the slightest discontent. Calm as ever, he proceeded with his simple life. Indeed, those who have few needs find sustenance easy to obtain: Where are grass and leaves and ponds not to be found?

Shakra, Lord of the Gods, was amazed at the Bodhisattva's behavior, and his regard for him grew even greater, but still he decided on another trial. Like a summer wind Shakra stripped every leaf from every tree, shrub, and bush in that grove. But Ajastya merely picked the freshest of the fallen leaves from the ground, boiled them in water, and lived on the thin soup without a moment's discomfort. Enjoying the happiness of meditation, he might have been feeding on ambrosia. For truly, modesty in the learned, detachment in the wealthy, and contentment in ascetics are the greatest of their treasures.

Now the Bodhisattva's astonishing constancy prompted Shakra, almost as if he were angry, to go one step further. Assuming the shape of a hungry and thirsty brahman, Shakra appeared before Ajastya at the time deemed most propitious for guests, the time when prayers and offerings are made just before the main meal. The Bodhisattva, his face the picture of happiness, joyously went to greet his guest. Speaking kind words of welcome, he invited him to partake of a meal. With gentle words soothing to both mind and sense, Ajastya offered his guest all the boiled leaves he had gone to so much trouble to procure; he himself was satisfied to feast on joy alone. Then, leaving his guest, he retired to his modest meditation hut, and passed the day and night in an ecstasy of joy.

In the same manner, Shakra reappeared at the same time the next day, and the next, and the next, and the next. And each day Ajastya received his guest with still more joy; no suffering, not even peril to life, can compel the virtuous to renounce their love of giving, which is fostered by the practice of deep compassion.

Shakra, overcome with astonishment, knew that by such constant ascetic practice the Bodhisattva could easily gain possession of Shakra's own brilliant god-realm: All he need do was ask. Anxious and fearful, Shakra cast aside his mask of humanity and assumed the wonderful beauty of his celestial shape. Appearing before the Great Being, he questioned him:

"What do you hope to gain by giving up your beloved family, your household and possessions, all that brought you such great happiness? No trifling motive could make a wise man give up his happiness and wealth and afflict his family with grief by leaving them for a life of toilsome asceticism. Please, if you will, satisfy my curiosity and reveal the qualities to which you are so intently dedicated."

The Bodhisattva replied: "Listen, sir, to what I strive for. Repeated births lead to repeated sorrow, as do those fearful plagues of old age and illness; the inevitability of death is a great disturbance to the mind. I am living like this so that I might become a refuge for all sentient beings!"

Shakra, Lord of the Gods, realizing that his celestial abode was safe from the Bodhisattva's intent, was much relieved. "Well said!" he exclaimed, pleased by

the Bodhisattva's well-expressed statement of purpose. "Ascetic, for this fine pronouncement I grant you whatever you wish. Ask what you will."

The Bodhisattva, not wishing for anything connected with the pleasures of existence (indeed, finding painful the very act of asking, for he was truly contented), replied to Shakra: "If you wish to grant me what will truly please me, grant me this: May that fire of discontent which burns in the hearts of people the world over—even after they have won spouse, children, power, and riches beyond their wildest dreams—may that inexhaustible and all-consuming fire never enter my heart!"

The total contentment implied by this wish delighted Shakra. Praising the Bodhisattva, he urged him to make a second wish. Ajastva, in order to demonstrate how difficult it is to be rid entirely of the fettering passions, preached the Teaching once more under the guise of a request:

"Your qualities are truly great, O Master of the gods, if you can grant me this great gift: May hatred, which is like a conquering enemy army, destroying wealth, position, and reputation, always remain far distant from me!"

On hearing this reply, Shakra was even more delighted. "Justly does Fame, like a faithful lover, attend those who have renounced the world. For this wish so aptly phrased, please accept another gift from me."

And so the Bodhisattva, under the guise of accepting the bequest, because of his aversion to the fettering passions and the company of those afflicted by emotionality, asked: "May I never hear a fool, see a fool, speak to a fool, or endure the annoyance and pain of being in the company of a fool! For this I ask."

"What is this?" cried Shakra. "Anyone in distress is surely deserving of help from the virtuous. And ignorance is at the root of all suffering. How is it that you, the most compassionate of ascetics, could dislike the sight of a fool, one who is most in need of compassion?"

The Bodhisattva answered: "Because, friend, there is no help for a fool. Consider: If a fool could be helped, would I withhold anything that would benefit him? But a fool gains nothing whatsoever from my help. Burning with the fire of conceit, thinking himself wise, practicing wrong conduct as if it were right, he urges his neighbors to do the same. Unaccustomed to upright conduct and lacking in moral training, he becomes angry even when admonished for his own benefit, and is provoked by whoever wishes him well. Does there exist anyone in the world who can be of help to such a fool? For this reason, O most excellent of gods, I wish I did not even have to look at a fool! Because there is no help for a fool, he is a most unfit object for my efforts."

Shakra praised the ascetic again, saying: "The priceless jewels of your words cannot be suitably rewarded. But please accept another boon as if it were a handful of flowers, an offering of respect."

The Bodhisattva replied in words meant to demonstrate the happiness which comes from virtue: "May I obtain good judgment, hear only the wise, and dwell only with the steadfast. O Shakra, may I spend my days happily conversing with the judicious! May you grant me this wish!"

"You seem to be quite a partisan for the wise!" commented Shakra. "Tell me, what have they done for you? Why do you show such desire for even the sight of the wise?"

The Bodhisattva, in order to show Shakra the qualities of the virtuous, replied: "Listen, friend, to my reasons for desiring the sight of the wise. The wise walk in the path of virtue, and inspire others to join them. Words said for their good, even if harsh, never arouse their impatience, for they are adorned with the self-discipline of honesty and integrity. One can benefit such people. For this reason I admit a bias toward those with wisdom."

"Well put!" said Shakra. "Surely by now you have obtained everything you could ask for, wholly contented as you already are. Yet please accept one more gift, if only to gratify me. A favor offered from reverence, from abundance of power, and with the hope of bringing benefit becomes a source of great pain if not accepted."

Observing Shakra's deep desire to help and wishing to please and benefit him, and wishing also to show him the benefits of giving, the Bodhisattva answered: "Your food always free from corruption and decay, your mind made lovely by the practice of charity, and your followers adorned with the purity of their conduct—may you grant me these!"

"You are a jewel-mine of wisdom," said Shakra. "Not only shall everything you wish be granted, but because your answers have been so beautifully spoken, I shall grant you one more request."

"If you will be so kind as to grant me the highest favor, O most excellent of the gods," the Bodhisattva replied, "grant me this, O conqueror of Asuras: Visit me no more in your blazing splendor!"

Highly astonished, and somewhat offended, Shakra replied: "Do not say such things, dear sir. By every manner of ritual, every kind of prayer and vow, sacrifice and penance, people all over the world seek the sight of me. Yet you do not desire it! For what reason? I came only to grant your every wish!"

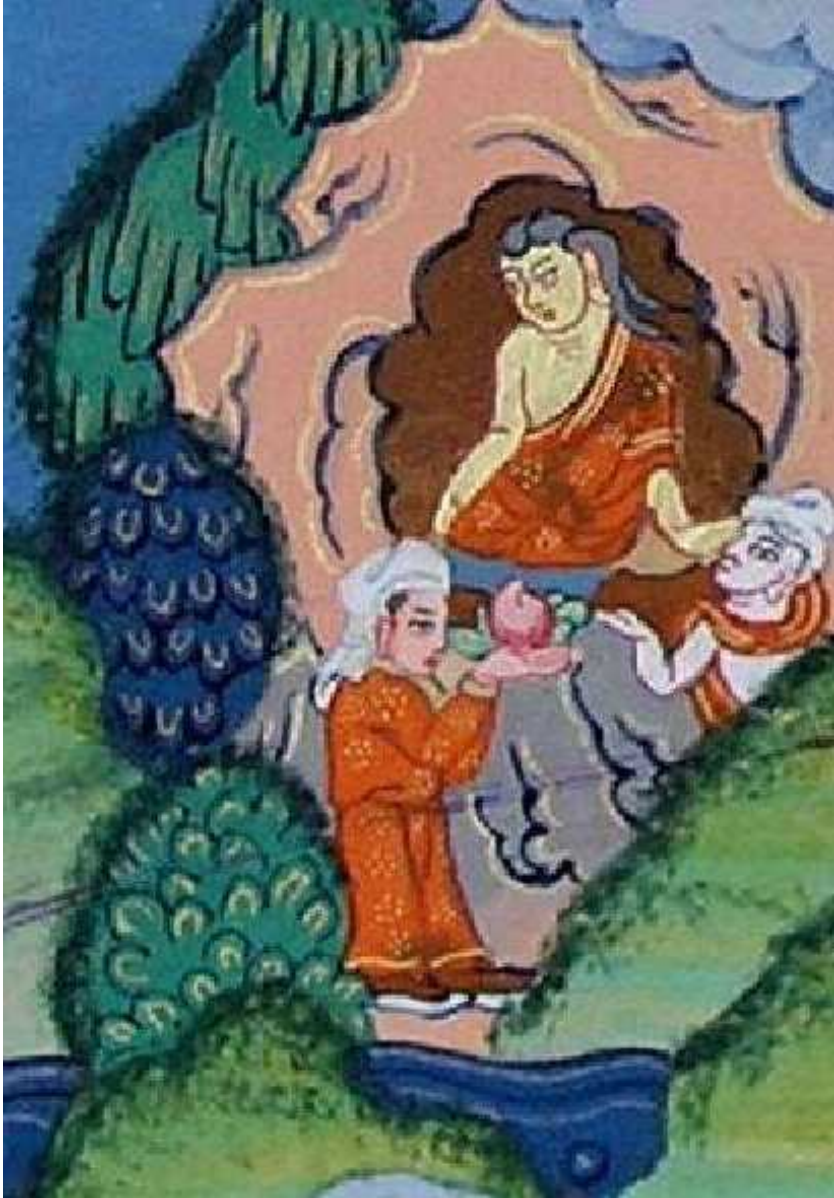
"Do not scold me, Master of Gods," said Ajastya. "I wish only to please you. Neither for lack of courtesy do I ask, nor for lack of honor or reverence toward Your Majesty. But your superhuman shape blazes with extraordinary brilliance even while shining gently, and I fear contemplating such a marvel might cause a lapse in adherence to spiritual duties."

Then Shakra bowed to the Bodhisattva, circumambulated him from left to right, and disappeared on the spot. And at daybreak Ajastya was feasted with divine food and drink brought to him by Shakra, who invited hundreds of Pratyekabuddhas and thousands of devaputras as well.

All this was seen by the Bodhisattva. Bountiful offerings were made, and the Muni obtained a joy most sublime. He continued to delight in a life suitable for ascetics and abided in meditation and utmost tranquility.

From this story one can see how the heroic practice of giving is an ornament even in ascetics, and is also greatly needed in householders. It also shows why men should adorn themselves with heroic and steadfast giving. This account may be told when blaming covetousness, hatred, infatuation, and foolishness; when preaching on the virtue of the spiritual friend, or on contentment. This story is likewise appropriate when speaking of the magnanimity of the Tathagata, and

of the wonderful discourses given by the Bhagavat in his previous existences-if he was, even then, an inexhaustible jewel mine of excellent sayings, what can be said of the Buddha after having attained perfection?



7 - Ajastya the Ascetic

The Virtues of Asceticism and Solitude.



Born the illustrious Brahman Ajastya, the Bodhistva was a wise, wealthy, and generous householder. Yet seeing that attachment to worldly possessions only leads to further suffering, he decided to take up a life as an ascetic and entered the forest and devote his life to spiritual development.

So as to not be bothered, he built his hermitage in the remote island of Kara in the southern ocean. As his ascetic practice flourished, even the wild beasts and birds understood he was a holy man. Although he limited his meals to only what would sustain him, he always honored any guests who passed through the island, offering them roots and fruit, fresh water, words of welcome and blessing. He would only eat what was left over.

The glory of Ajastya's great ascetisism spread everywhere, even reaching the ears of Shakra, the lord of gods, who decided to test him. First Shakra started making the roots and fruit of the island disappear, but Ajastya absorbed in meditation and having very few needs, barely noticed. Without food, Ajastya continued to sustain himself on nothing more than boiled leaves. So for a second test, Shakra, becoming slightly more extreme, stripped every leaf from every tree, shrub, and bush on the island. Once again, Ajastya barely noticed and by boiling only a few of the freshest fallen leaves, might as well have been feasting on ambrosia. For a third test, Shakra started to appear every day right at meal

time as a hungry and thirsty man, knowing Ajastya would offer him his only food for the day. Yet Ajastya was still content and it was as if he was feasting on nothing but the joy of generosity.



Shakra, knowing that such constant ascetic practice could gain one entry into the god realm, and fearing this, then appeared in his true celestial form and questioned the Bodhisattva's motivation. Ajastya responded that his motivation was to better the lives of all beings. Delighted, Shakra then said he would grant him one wish. Desiring nothing, the bodhisattva responded only with wishes for the good of all and nothing material for himself. Delighted further, Shakra continued to attempt to grant him something but every time he offered, the bodhisattva desired nothing until finally he wished that the great Lord of Gods go away and leave him to his asceticism. Seeing that Shakra was offended, the bodhisattva explained it was simply because his celestial god form was so beautiful that it might be an obstacle for his spiritual duties. Shakra was satisfied and rewarded Ajastya with a great feast and then promptly disappeared.

Key Events in the Story

1. An ascetic on an island.
2. Generous to all.
3. Tested by the Lord of Gods.

8 - The Strength of Love



The truly compassionate take no heed of their own pleasure; it is the suffering of others which concerns them.

At a time when the Bodhisattva was established in the practice of compassion, intent on becoming a refuge for all beings, he set his mind on increasing the qualities which benefit the world-giving, self-discipline, devotion, and love for all beings. And so he was born as a king named Maitribala, 'He Whose Strength is Kindness'.

Maitribala felt the suffering of his subjects as if it were his own, and protected his people skillfully. His sword was a mere ornament, for the other kings respectfully accepted his word as law—a law which was demonstrated in the measures he took to promote his people's welfare. He ruled with right action; even punishment was but a means to increase benefits for his kingdom. He was like a father to his people, in that he protected them with the Dharma. While his liberality, his tranquillity, his honesty and wisdom were all directed toward the welfare of others, he increased his own store of lofty actions, essential for the attainment of enlightenment.

Now, one day, five yaksha demons, exiled by their lord, Kubera, invaded the realm of Maitribala. Skilled in the art of sucking the life-force from others, the demons were gleeful at having discovered an idyllic kingdom, so prosperous, so free of any calamity, its people happy, healthy and thriving! They had only one desire: to drain the region of all its vigor.

But try as they might, using all their usual tricks, they were unable to steal the life-force from the people. The power of the king was too strong; his merest intention sufficed to protect his people. Finding that they could not debilitate even a single person living in that kingdom, the powerless yakshas huddled together in consternation.

"We are impotent. How can this be? These people possess no high learning, perform no extraordinary ascetic practices, are masters of no deep magic. How can they block our power? We are not worthy of our name!"

So, taking on the shape of brahmans, they roamed the land. By and by they came to the edge of a forest, where they came upon a cowherd resting in the shade of a leafy tree, sandals on his feet, a garland of flowers in his hair. Alone, his staff and axe on the ground to his right, he was singing and humming as he busied himself with braiding a rope.

The yakshas approached the cowherd and tried to speak, but at first they found it difficult, for they were not used to human speech. Finally, they croaked: "Friend, you there, guarding the cows, are you not afraid to stay in this lonely forest all by yourself?"

The cowherd, looking up, asked: "What should I fear?" The yakshas replied: "Have you never heard of the demons and yakshas, cruel by very nature? No one, no matter how blessed with learning, ascetic practice and charms, no matter how brave and fearless and surrounded by loving friends, can escape those grisly ghouls who feed on the flesh and juices of humans. How can you not be afraid, alone here in this remote and fearsome forest?"

The cowherd laughed heartily. "In this country," he said, "we have a good luck charm so strong that not even the Lord of the Gods can overcome it, much less some flesh-eating demons. Because of this, I wander through the wilderness as if it were my home, at night as if by day, alone as if in a crowd-fearless and secure."

The yakshas, now very curious, encouraged the cowherd by speaking to him with feigned respect: "Kind sir," they said, "gentle sir, you must tell us, if you please, what sort of extraordinary charm this is!"

And laughing again, the cowherd replied: "Listen to our charm's description: a chest as broad as the golden face of Mount Meru; a smiling face as beautiful as a clear autumn moon; arms like golden clubs, long and full; the eyes of a bull and the stride of a bull. This is our king! He is our extraordinary charm."

Confronted by the resentful and astonished faces before him, he added: "Ah, this is rather a wonder, is it not? Yet how strange! The power of our king is famous, yet you have not heard of him! Or is it that you have heard but could not believe?"

"I suspect that your countrymen are not greatly concerned with the quest for virtue. Or perhaps their store of good fortune has simply run dry, and so they have not heard of our king. In any event, since you have arrived here from such a savage land, some small good fortune must remain to you."

The yakshas spoke again: "Kind sir," they said, "gentle sir, please, tell us what it is your king possesses that renders spirits powerless to harm the inhabitants of this realm."

The cowherd replied: "Listen, O brahmans. Our king's power comes from his exalted mind. His strength rests on the shoulders of his loving kindness, not on his motley-bannered army, which is kept purely for custom. Right action is his code, not the base science of politics. He does not know anger; he never speaks harsh words. And so he protects his land in the proper way, and uses his wealth to honor the virtuous.

"And yet, although he is endowed with all these wonderful qualities, he is not tainted by pride or by the hope of reward for the protection he affords his people. He is blessed with many more such qualities; and so no calamity can touch the citizens of this land.

"But how little you can learn from me! If you wish to know more about the virtues of our excellent king, you had best enter the capital. There you will see the people in their everyday lives: You will see how firm is their morality and sense of duty, how merry, how thriving they are; how abundant their food, how constant their welfare, how splendid their dress, yet how modestly worn. And you will see how kind they are to worthy strangers who come to them as guests. They are enraptured by the virtues of their king, whose praises they never cease to proclaim with devotion, as if chanting the most auspicious charms and blessings.

"Once you see all this, you will understand how to measure the virtues of our king. And when you, too, begin to feel reverence for his qualities, no doubt you will soon thereafter witness them-for you yourselves will seek him out."

The cowherd smiled warmly, but his affectionate eulogy did not soften the hearts of his listeners. For praise of what they hate-as does truth itself-inflames the minds of fools. The yakshas grew angrier than ever at this king for obstructing their power, and leaving the cowherd, they hatched a diabolical plan.

Considering the king's love of charity, and wishing above all to do him harm, they managed to approach the king while he was holding an audience. Still in disguise, they asked him for some food.

The king quickly and joyfully ordered his cooks and servants to prepare his guests an elaborate meal. But when it was served, a feast fit for the royal table, the yakshas spurned it, as tigers would scorn green grass. "We do not feed on such dishes," they said. "Well, what sort of food would please you then, that we may prepare it for you?" asked the king.

The yakshas replied: "Raw human flesh, freshly cut, and human blood still warm-such is the food and drink of yakshas, O lotus-eyed monarch, you so strict in keeping promises." And as they spoke, they threw off their human guise and showed their true nature: their disfigured features, ferocious mouths with pointed gnashing teeth, fierce red eyes, flaming and squinting, flat ugly noses wide and grotesque, hair and beard the color of flames, complexions dark and ominous as rainclouds.

Looking at them, the king knew at once that they were demons, not men. Now he understood why they did not want his food and drink. And moved by his pure heart, he felt only compassion and pity for them. As he gazed at them, he pondered:

"The merciful could never obtain such food and drink, and if they tried, what untold grief that attempt would cause! The cruel in heart might or might not be more successful; if not, their efforts would not matter, but if they were to succeed, what benefit could come from the slaughtering of their own kind day after day?

"Indeed, such is the life of these yakshas-their hearts are wicked and pitiless. Every moment they do nothing but destroy their own happiness. When will their sufferings ever end? I must help them, but how is it possible for me to find such food? Not for a single moment could I injure another or destroy even one life.

"Yet I cannot remember a single time when I have disappointed a supplicant; no one who has ever come before me has ever left bereft, like a lotus withered by the winter wind.

"The flesh of animals who have died a natural death is cold and bloodless; it would not do. But how could I rob the flesh from any living being? On the other hand, how can I turn them away, dashing their hopes and causing them even more misery?

"But why consider a second longer? It is clear what I must do. From my own body I will give them blood, from my own body chunks of flesh, solid and fat. They are hungry, and they have come to me for food; I cannot seek the flesh from another. Their eyes are hollow, their faces pale, sick with the misery of their fruitless search. Therefore, it is time to act. What other use can this body be, forever prone to sickness like a festering ulcer, an eternal abode of pain? I will put that suffering to good use-I will perform a special action to bring joy."

With this resolution, the eyes and face of the Great Being began to glow with gladness. Bathed in splendor, he pointed to his body as he spoke to the yakshas:

"Feast on this flesh, this blood. I bear this body solely for the benefit of all beings. To entertain guests with it in this fashion would be good fortune for me and of great consequence for all the world."

The yakshas, though witness to the king's determination, could not believe it, so incredible did it seem to them. So they at once said: "After a mendicant reveals his need, it is the giver alone who must act."

With great happiness, the king called for the physicians to open his veins. But the royal ministers, terribly upset and agitated by the king's determination to give his own flesh and blood, pleaded repeatedly with the king out of the strength of their love: "Pray, Your Majesty, do not let your love of charity lead you to disregard the consequences of your actions! Consider the harmful results for your devoted subjects-you cannot but know the nature of demons. You have always toiled for the benefit of your kingdom; you have always been unattached to your own pleasure. Do not give your flesh-it is not right!

"You are acting with ignorance, Your Majesty. You know well these demons exult in anything that will disturb or distress your people. Their very nature demands that they injure others. Until now your strength has protected us, and they have had no power; unable to work their woe in any other fashion, they have thought up this scheme to cause us great calamity.

"Even the gods are happy with the offerings you are accustomed to giving-food excellent and pure, carefully prepared. Why should not demons too be satisfied with such offerings! We cannot fathom your thoughts! And so our attachment to duty forbids us our usual obedience.

"Can it be called right action to throw your whole land into chaos for the sake of these five? And why do you make us feel so unloved? How else could it be that our flesh, our blood has gone unnoticed? Why should you even think of offering your body when ours are whole and at your command?"

The king replied: "I have received a clear request. How could I say: 'I will not give it'? How could I speak falsely and say: 'I do not have it to give'? Am I not your guide in matters of right action? Well, then, if I myself should walk the wrong path, what would happen to my subjects? What example could they follow?

"Indeed, it is with my subjects in mind that I will cause the essence of my body to be drawn out. If I were fainthearted, bound by self-love, what strength would I have to promote my peoples' welfare?

"As for your loving suggestion that you give your own flesh-I do not mean to stop you from showing your love, nor do I wish to let a thicket of suspicion close it off. It is wonderful to give to friends, particularly if their wealth should be diminished through misfortune. But it is not fitting for the poor to aid the rich.

"My limbs are strong, solid, and full of flesh. I have sustained them solely for the benefit of supplicants. Moreover, if I can not bear the suffering of a stranger, how could I bear your suffering?

"It is I whom they ask, not you. And I will give my flesh. Therefore, though your love for me has given you the courage to try to stop me, do not oppose my actions any longer. Look well at what you do, for you do not know the proper way to deal with mendicants!

"How would you consider one who, from selfish motivation, restrained another from an act of giving? Would you consider such a person pious or impious? Is there any doubt? Look more closely at the situation, and your thoughts will follow the right path as befits those who work in my service. Approval would be now

more fitting than your anxious looks. Why? Because beggars craving money or goods can be met with every day, but mendicants like these cannot be encountered even by pleading with the gods.

"Furthermore, considering the frailty of a human body, and how much misery it is sure to cause, how could one hesitate at the appearance of such uncommon supplicants? Miserable self-love plunges us into deepest darkness. No, my lords, do not restrain me."

And having so persuaded his council, he sent for the physicians to open five veins. The king then spoke to the yakshas: "By accepting this offering of my body, you are acting as friends of the Dharma. You will give me the greatest pleasure by accepting this gift."

The yakshas let the king's blood flow into the hollow of their hands, and began to drink the dark red liquid, fragrant as sandalwood. And as they drank, the monarch shone with the splendor of gold, like Mount Meru encircled with heavy rain clouds glowing at twilight.

Because of the king's great joy, because of his forbearance and physical strength, his body did not weaken, nor did his mind grow faint, though the flow of blood did not lessen. Finally, when the yakshas had quenched their intense thirst, they told the king that they had had enough. And the king rejoiced that his body, source of misery, had finally found a proper use as a means to honor mendicants.

His face glowing with happiness, the king then raised his sword: It was a sharp sword, with a shining blade the color of a blue lotus, its hilt gleaming with lustrous jewels. Firmly the king cut pieces of flesh from his body and gave them to the yakshas.

Each time he cut his flesh, his joy was so intense there was no room for pain or sorrow. The pain, which pushed forward at each stroke of the sharp sword, was driven far back again by joy, and was therefore slow to penetrate his mind-as if it were tired from being compelled to and fro. So intense was this joy the king felt at his action that it touched and softened even the cruel hearts of the demons.

Thus those who, out of compassion and out of love for the Dharma, give up their bodies for the sake of others, regenerate hearts burned black by fires of hatred, transmuting them into the gold of tenderness and faith. Seeing the monarch as calm as ever, oblivious to the pain of his sword, his countenance a picture of unshaken serenity, the yakshas were overwhelmed with admiration and astonishment.

"What a wonder! What a miracle!" they cried. "Can it be true, or is it mere illusion?" The wrath they had nurtured so carefully was gone, and they began to praise and bow low to the Great Being. "No more, Your Majesty!" they cried. "Stop harming yourself! The wonder of the actions by which you have brought joy to other mendicants has satisfied us as well." With much agitation, bowing their heads with reverence, they pleaded with the king to stop. And when he did, they looked up with faces wet with tears of contrition.

"Rightly do people everywhere devoutly proclaim your glory-even Shri would abandon the lotus pond for your presence! If heaven, protected by Shakra himself, does not feel jealous of this earth guarded by your heroism, then heaven is truly deceived.

"What more can we say? Humanity is fortunate indeed to be under your protection! We are utterly distressed at having caused you such suffering. But despite our wickedness, it is certain that by depending on you we can gain our salvation!

"In that hope, we wish to know: What have you been striving for that you act without regard for your own happiness? By means of ascetic practices do you hope to gain dominion over the entire world? The wealth of Kubera? The rank of Indra? Whatever it may be, it cannot be far from your reach. If we may be allowed to hear, please tell us."

The king replied: "Hear, then, why I exert myself. High rank is impermanent; it takes great effort to obtain and is easily lost. It yields no satisfaction, so how could it give serenity of mind? For this reason I do not wish the brilliance of a heavenly lord's throne, much less that of an earthly king. Nor would my heart be content to end only my own suffering—my sole concern is for those helpless creatures undergoing unbearable suffering. For them I will attain allknowingness by means of my merit. And in vanquishing my enemies, the evil passions, I will save all these beings from the Ocean of Existence, that rough sea with its billows of old age, sickness, and death."

The very hairs on the bodies of the yakshas bristled with the joy of faith, and they bowed before the king. "Only a being as determined as you are could perform such an extraordinary action. Whatever you intend will certainly not take long to achieve. And as surely as all your efforts are for the benefit of all beings, pray do not forget us at the time of your liberation! Forgive what we have done. We did not understand even our own self-interest. We beg you now to guide us with some precepts we may follow. We will obey as surely as any of your officials."

The king, knowing that the hearts of the yakshas had opened, calmly said: "Do not worry. You have not harmed me; you have helped me. Indeed, since the path of right action is difficult, how could I forget my companions on that road when once I obtain enlightenment? My first teaching of liberation will be given to you; to you I will offer that ambrosia.

"And now, if you truly wish to please me, from this moment on do not harm others. Furthermore, do not ever covet their goods or their wives; speak no lies and drink no intoxicating liquors."

The yakshas promised to follow these injunctions, and after paying proper homage to the king, they disappeared.

Now at the very instant that the Great Being had determined to give his own flesh and blood to the yakshas, the earth had trembled in many places, and Mount Meru, the Golden Mountain, had begun to shake. And as the mountain trembled, drums began to sound. The trees cast off their flowers, and the wind blew them up into the sky where they took on forms—here a flight of birds, there a banner, there a well-arranged garland—and in these shapes, they descended to the ground, all around the king.

And as if to prevent the monarch from his action, the great Ocean had rolled and swelled its waves, like an ally rallying his helpful army, but to no avail.

The Lord of the Gods, disturbed by the agitation of the earth and ocean, saw the cause by signs. Filled with apprehension at the harm being done to the king, he quickly arrived at the royal palace, where he found everyone troubled with fear

and sorrow except the king, whose countenance was calm and clear, although his body was in a miserable condition.

Moved by gladness and joy, Shakra approached the king and eulogized him with his lovely voice: "What an extraordinary treasure are your virtues-how dedicated is your heart to helping others! Earth has indeed obtained a protector!"

Having praised the king in this way, Shakra, Lord of the Gods, applied herbs from both heaven and earth to heal the king's wounds. The pain ceased, the king's body was restored to wholeness, and the monarch was as before. Respectfully, the king paid homage to Shakra, who then returned to his heavenly home.

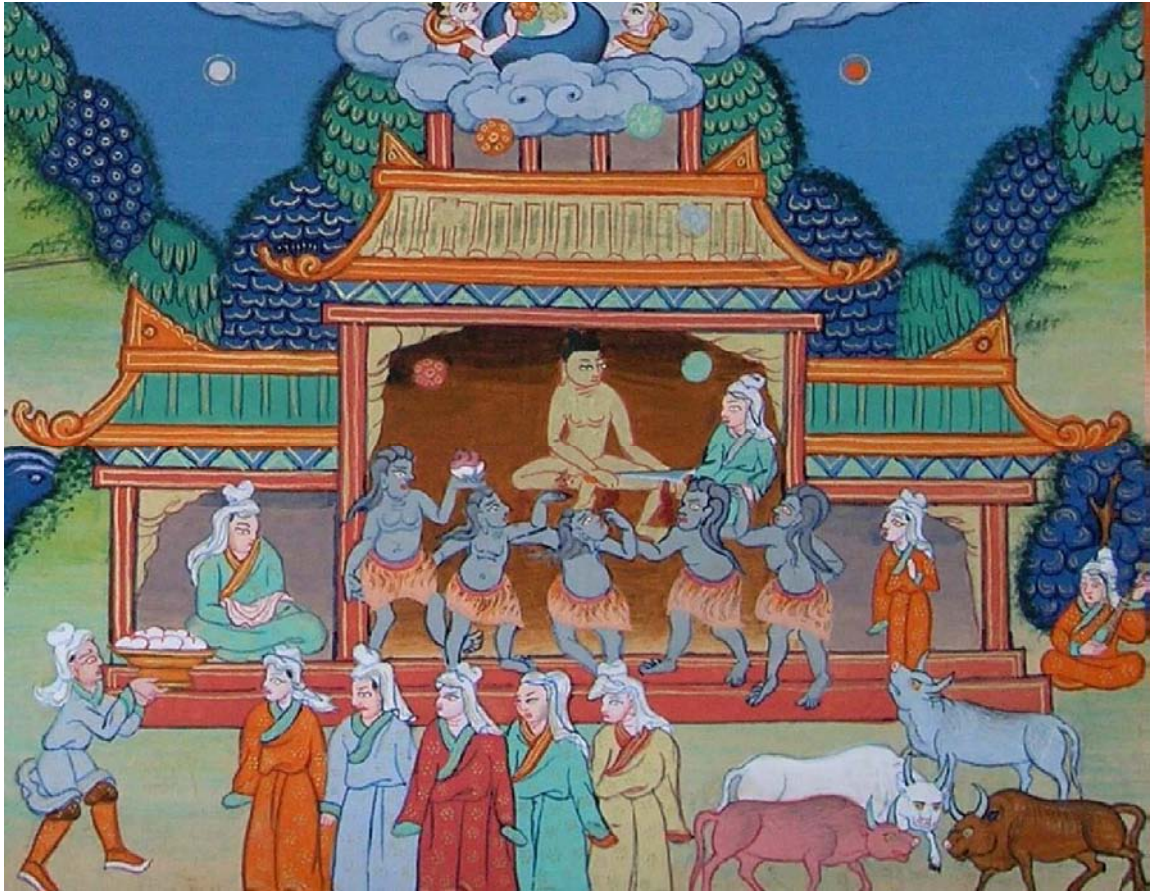
From this story one can see how the compassionate do not attend to their own happiness, and suffer only by the sufferings of others; who, then, ought not to set aside the attachment to anything so mean as wealth? This story should be told when inspiring the charitable, and also when explaining the virtues of compassion and the glory of the Tathagata. This story also shows why the Dharma should be listened to carefully.

"This account also explains the words said by the Buddha: "O monks, these five have done much, indeed." For the first five disciples of the Buddha were the five yakshas of this story. The Bhagavat imparted to them the first of the ambrosia of the Dharma just as he had promised.



8 - Strength of Love

A Tale of Loving Kindness.



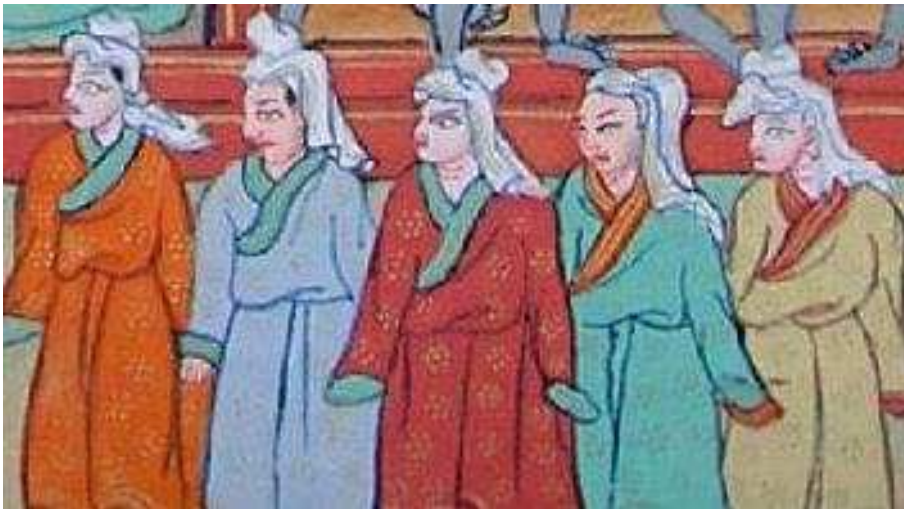
Being established in the practice of compassion, the bodhisattva was born as the beloved king Maitribala, which means 'strength of loving kindness'. Feeling the suffering of all his subjects, he ruled his people skillfully. Other kings held him in high regard and respected his word as law, so wars were never fought in his kingdom. He took great measures to promote his peoples welfare, ruled with right action, and even punishment of wrongdoers was done in such a skillful and compassionate way that it increased the fortunes of the entire kingdom.

One day however, five Yaksha demons, exiled by their lord, invaded Maitribala's lands. Skilled in sucking the life-force from others and bent on creating havoc, the demons were overjoyed to find such an idyllic kingdom to destroy. Yet all their attempts were unsuccessful and they did not know why. Disguising themselves as Brahmins they questioned a cowherd and learned of the glory of Maitribala. This great king was surely the reason their efforts to spread suffering were unsuccessful so they set off to the palace to create trouble.

Upon arriving in their Brahman disguises, the demons approached the king who was in the midst of addressing a grand audience. They stated that they were hungry and immediately the king ordered a great feast to be prepared for them. Yet when the elaborate meal was served, the demons scorned it and angrily exclaimed that they did not eat such dishes. The king then asked what sort of food would please them and seeing this as an opportunity, the Yakshas revealed their true demonic form. Their reply was that they needed to eat fresh human flesh and blood. The king,

unable to refuse a request even from demons, but also not able to kill any of his subjects to feed them, found himself stuck in a serious dilemma.

He then resolved that the only possible action was to feed the demons his own flesh and blood, despite his royal court imploring him not to. In fact, the sorrow over what the king was about to do was so great that the earth began to tremble and shake in many places. Never the less, Maitribala had his physicians open five of his veins and began to serve his fresh blood to the Yakshas. He proceeded to cut off chunks of his flesh and felt very little pain as he did so, for the joy of generosity overwhelmed the sharp physical sensation. Seeing this, the five Yaksha demons became awestruck with admiration and astonishment. All the anger and ill intent they had been nurturing vanished and they bowed in reverence to the great king, eventually taking vows themselves to follow right action.



Shakra, the Lord of Gods, having witnessed the great rumbling of the earth, arrived at the royal palace to find everybody filled with fear and sorrow, crying for the newly disfigured king. The king himself, although in the process of bleeding to death, was the only one that remained calm and clear. Seeing Maitribalas infinite compassion, Shakra then rewarded the king by gathering herbs from both heaven and earth and applying them to his wounds. In very little time, the kings pain ceased and his body was restored to its wholeness.

Key Events in the Story

1. A kindly King.
2. Five harmful demons.
3. Loving kindness subdues harmful intent.

9 - Vishvantara



If ordinary beings are not capable of even appreciating the Bodhisattva's actions, how can they follow his example?

Once the Shibis were ruled by a king whose every action was crowned with virtue. Samjaya was his name, a man whose valor, discretion, and modesty kept his passions firmly in check, and led him to become victorious and mighty. Because of his great virtue, Glory-faithful as an honest lover-followed him as fervently as a lion guards its den.

Due to his constant and strict respect for the elders, he had mastered the mysteries of the Vedas and metaphysics, and had become skilled in the administration of justice. His subjects therefore enjoyed the benefits of security and peace, and performed their tasks with the utmost joy and devotion. He honored all who came before him, whether they demonstrated their merit in spiritual practices, science, or the arts.

Next to him in rank, though in no way inferior in virtue, was his son and heir apparent, Vishvantara. Though still a youth, he possessed the tranquil mind of an elder; though full of energy, he was naturally disposed to patience; though learned, he was free of conceit; and though mighty and celebrated, he was without a trace of pride. The reputations of all others travelling on the path of virtue paled beside his; he was renowned throughout the three worlds.

Vishvantara could not passively endure the great sorrow and countless sufferings of humanity. Against these foes he waged a mighty battle, shooting innumerable arrows of giving from his mighty bow of compassion. Every day he gave to the mendicants, without question, and without restraint, more than they asked for; and he adorned each gift with the kindest of words.

The prince also strictly observed the holy days. After bathing and donning a garb of white linen, ornamented by tranquillity, he would mount his great white elephant, swift and vigorous, its body graced with auspicious marks, its color and size like a peak of the Snow Mountains. On this fabulous beast the prince would visit the alms-halls he had established all over the town-oases for mendicants where they would receive whatever they desired.

For those inclined to giving, riches yield the greatest pleasure when given to the needy. And the enjoyment of such giving cannot be compared to ordinary joy.

Word of such extraordinary charity, proclaimed everywhere by the happy beggars, spread far and wide. Soon a neighboring king heard of the prince's generosity and conceived a crafty plan to rob the prince of his royal elephant by deceiving him through his passion for almsgiving. To bring this about, the rival king dispatched a group of brahmans to the land of the Shibis.

As Vishvantara was inspecting the alms-halls-his happiness continually increasing the bright beauty of his face these shrewd brahmans, uttering benedictions with uplifted hands, placed themselves directly in his path. Respectfully, the prince stopped his great elephant and asked them their business: "Tell me what you have come for," he said, "and it shall be granted."

"We seek your joy in giving," said the brahmans, "as well as the qualities of your elephant with its graceful gait. These make us seem like the neediest of beggars. Fill the world with astonishment, O prince. Present us with this great beast, as beautiful as a peak of Mount Kailasha, and be joyful!"

The Bodhisattva was filled with happiness, for it had been a very long time since he had been asked for so great a gift. Yet he considered: "What use have these

brahmans for such an elephant? No doubt it is a trick of some king, whose sorry mind is clouded with greed, jealousy, and hatred.

"Still, he must not be disappointed. In presenting me with this opportunity, without care for his own reputation or the precepts of right action, he is advancing my welfare." Whereupon the Great Being stepped down from his magnificent elephant and, standing before the brahmans, golden pitcher uplifted, pronounced solemnly: "Pray accept this offering."

Even though the prince knew full well that the science of politics does not follow the path of right conduct where wealth is concerned, he joyfully gave away his elephant out of devotion to the Dharma. And he watched with delight as the great elephant, adorned with its lovely golden lattice seat a massive cloud radiant with the flash of lightning-walked off in the hands of strangers.

The citizens, however, who were politically attuned, hearing of their prince's gift, were overwhelmed by distress. The eldest of the brahmans, ministers, military men, and townspeople descended on the court of King Samjaya. Filled with agitation and resentment, they ignored the restraint due their monarch, and expressed their anger: "How can Your Majesty sit there and do nothing! The fortune of your kingdom is being carried off and your kingdom is being seriously weakened!"

The king, alarmed, asked what they meant, and they replied: "Are you not aware of what your son has done? That splendid beast, whose fragrant face intoxicates the bees and imbues the wind with the sweet perfume that maddens the other proud elephants; that war-elephant, whose brilliant strength subdued your enemies and lulled their pride to sleep; that embodiment of victory-was given away by Vishvantara and at this very moment is being led away!"

"Grain, clothes, food, gold-such are the goods fit to give to brahmans! Parting with our strongest elephant, symbol of great victory, is no act of charity, but an act contrary to reason! The prince could never rule with success, for he is oblivious to the most basic principles of politics. Forbearance is out of the question in this matter. Your Majesty, do something, lest he bring further comfort to your enemies."

The king loved his son deeply; on hearing such words, he was not kindly disposed toward the speakers. Nevertheless, bowing to expediency, in hopes of appeasing their anger, he told them they were right: "I know that Vishvantara at times indulges in his passion for charity too much, neglecting the rules of government. And it is true that such behavior is not the wisest for those in charge of ruling. But the act is done. He has tossed away his own elephant like so much phlegm, and who can bring it back? In the future you can be sure I shall make clear to him the limit of his almsgiving; may this suffice to cool your anger."

But the Shishis replied: "No, Your Majesty. That is not enough. He is not the type to be brought to reason by a simple censure." "Then what else can be done?" asked Samjaya. "It is not that he has sinned, but that his attachment to virtue is perhaps too great. As punishment for his giving away the elephant do you want his imprisonment? Or death? Calm yourselves. From this moment on, I shall prevent Vishvantara from any similar actions."

Still angry, the Shibis persisted: "No one would seek, O King, to ask for your son's death or imprisonment or flogging. But devoted as he is to spiritual matters, Vishvantara is not fit to bear the burden of royalty; the tenderness of his heart and his deep compassion are not suitable to such an office. Give the throne to a prince who has mastered the art of politics, whose martial prowess is beyond dispute. Your son, whose love for virtue ignores policy, is fit only to dwell in a grove for ascetics.

"When princes commit faults of policy, their subjects feel the pain. We can bear such mistakes, as we have throughout history, but a fault of this kind undermines the very roots of kingly power. Therefore, we are unable to stand by and watch your ruin, and we have resolved: The royal prince must withdraw to Mount Vanka, home of the Siddhas. There, where it will not harm the government, he may practice charity to his heart's delight."

So did the people, moved by affection and love for their sovereign, speak in the frankest possible terms. The king, ashamed and downcast, heaved a deep and sorrowful sigh, overcome by the thought of separation from his son. "So be it," he said. "What you wish shall be done. Yet allow my son at least one day and night with me; tomorrow at daybreak he shall comply with your request." Finally the Shibis were satisfied.

To his chamberlain the king said: "Go and tell Vishvantara what has come to pass." And so, his face wet with tears, the minister went directly to the prince and threw himself in despair at the Bodhisattva's feet. "What is the matter?" asked Vishvantara. "Has anyone taken ill?" The other replied in a voice thick with emotion: "No, the royal family is well." "What then is the trouble?" asked the prince. In a faltering voice full of tears the chamberlain uttered these words:

"My prince, the Shibis, disregarding the royal will although presented in the gentlest of terms, have angrily ordered you banished from the realm."

"Why are the Shibis angry?" asked Vishvantara. "What you say is beyond all reason. I have never strayed from the path of discipline, never been careless in my duties. What have I done to make the people so incensed against me?"

The chamberlain replied: "They are offended by the purity of your mind. Your giving away of the foremost of your elephants, O noble prince, tried their patience and moved them to overstep the bounds of duty. Though the satisfaction you experienced came from a complete lack of attachment, what moved those mendicants was nothing but desire. Ignoring that, you have provoked the anger of the town. Now you have no choice but to go the way of the ascetic."

Then to demonstrate his immense patience, as well as his deeply-rooted affection for mendicants-firmly established by his profound compassion-Vishvantara replied: "The Shibis are undependable, and they do not understand my nature. It is for the benefit of all sentient beings alone that I support this body; so what need have I for wealth? Since I would honor the request of beggars even with my own limbs, my eyes, my head if need be, why not my wealth? The Shibis, angry at the mendicants, try to restrain me out of fear, thinking I might give up even my body. But their actions only display their foolishness.

"Even if they were to kill or banish me, nothing would stop me from the practice of giving. With this firmly in mind, I will set out for the grove of the ascetics." Then the Bodhisattva turned to his wife: "You have heard the resolution of the Shibis?"

"I have," Madri replied. "Then put aside, fair-eyed one, all your property, all that you have received from me as well as from your father." "And what shall I do with it, my lord?" "Give it in charity to those of good conduct, embellishing your gift with respect. Goods deposited in this manner are imperishable, following us even after death. Be a loving daughter to your parents and mine, and a careful mother to our children. Continue to walk the path of right action, alert to any carelessness. But above all, do not mourn my absence."

In reply, trying not to arouse the displeasure of her husband, Madri suppressed her deep sorrow and said: "It is not right, Your Majesty, for you to go to the forest alone. Where you go, I must go, my lord. With you, even death would be a festival for me; life without you would be impossible to bear. Nor do I fear the forest life. Consider it well: We will be living far away from wicked people, befriended by deer, serenaded by birds. The groves with their carpets of grass, as lovely as floors inlaid with lapis lazuli, will be far more pleasant than our artificial gardens.

"Indeed, my prince, you will never think of lost royalty when beholding our children neatly dressed and crowned with garlands, playing among the trees. Brooks, overhung by bowers, their beauty changing with the seasons, will bring nothing but pleasure. Songs of birds longing for love, dances of peacocks inspired by desire, the sweet buzzing of the honey-bees-all will make a forest concert to delight you.

"Rocks veiled with the silk coverlet of moonlight, stroked by the soft wind imbued with the scent of flowering trees, rivulets flowing over rocks sounding like the sweet clatter of bracelets and rings-everything in the forest will gladden your heart."

With these words his wife filled Vishvantara with desire to start his journey. But first he prepared to give away all his wealth to the indigent.

In the king's palace, news of the banishment had caused great alarm, and the mendicants were almost beside themselves with sorrow and grief. As though intoxicated or mad, they lamented: "Alas! Injustice is awake and Virtue asleep or dead-Prince Vishvantara has been banished from his kingdom! Earth herself has become unfeeling! They have chopped down her foster-child, that refreshing shade tree, that provider of fine fruit, yet she does nothing. How can she feel no shame?"

"They have blocked off our well of sweet water, pure and cool! The guardians of the world are falsely titled, or else they do not exist, their names mere sounds! Who could be so malicious and so opposed to life itself that they would destroy our means of livelihood, we who are harmless, who survive only by begging?" But now Vishvantara appeared before them to give away his wealth.

And so the prince bestowed on the mendicants the contents of his treasury, which was filled to the brim with gold and silver and precious stones of priceless value. Then came stores of goods and grains, crammed to overflowing, slaves both male and female, beasts of burden, carriages, clothes, and more. All of this he distributed according to the merit of the recipients.

Finally, after paying his respects to his grief-stricken parents, he mounted his royal chariot, and with his wife and children took leave of the capital. The streets were as noisy as on holiday, as hundreds of people cried lamentations, following

him out of love and affection, shedding tears of sorrow. Only with the greatest difficulty did Vishvantara make the crowd turn back. Totally calm and clear, he took his last view of the outskirts of the city with its charming gardens and groves; then taking the reins, he turned toward the direction of Mount Vanka.

The crowds on the roads thinned out, and soon the chirping of crickets told the prince that the forest was near at hand. Groves of trees began to appear, and herds of antelope could be seen running in the distance. And then, as if by chance, a group of brahmans drew near. Approaching the prince, the mendicants asked the prince for the horses that drew the chariot.

Although he was undertaking a journey of many miles without attendants, although he was burdened with his family, Vishvantara nonetheless rejoiced at this opportunity for giving. Without a care for what would follow, he joyfully gave his four horses to the beggars, and fastening the harness tightly around his waist, he began to pull the chariot himself. But before he could move, four young yakshas in the shape of red deer appeared suddenly out of a thicket, and like well-trained horses took up the burden themselves.

"Behold the extraordinary power of those who live in the blessed groves, home of the ascetics," said the Bodhisattva. "Their feelings of loving kindness toward guests have even taken root in the beautiful deer!" But Madri, staring at the lovely beasts with joy and surprise, answered: "This is rather a result of your own virtuous accomplishments. Even the great practitioners are not your equal. When the shining reflection of stars in the water is surpassed by the luster of the laughing night lotuses, do you look to the flowers for the cause, or to the beams of the radiant moon?"

As they continued to speak sweet words of affection, another brahman came near and asked the Bodhisattva for his royal chariot. And the prince, as indifferent to his own comfort as he was a loving kinsman to all beggars, fulfilled the brahman's wish, joyfully he asked his family to dismount from the chariot, and gladly presented the vehicle straightaway to the brahman. The prince took Galin, the boy, in his arms, and continued on his way, while Madri, also free from distress, carried the girl Krishnagina, and followed by his side.

With gracious hospitality, the trees of the forest stretched out their fruit-filled branches to the Bodhisattva as if he were a welcome guest. Paying homage to the strength of the merit manifesting before them, the trees bowed like obedient disciples as he came into view. And when the Bodhisattva longed for water, lotus ponds appeared, sprinkled with pollen white and reddish brown shaken from flowers by wings of swans. As clouds spread their beautiful canopy and cool, perfumed winds blew softly, his path was shortened by yakshas who could not bear to see his labor or weariness. In this way their journey was transformed into a most leisurely stroll in a pleasure garden.

At last Mount Vanka came into view, and, shown the way by foresters, they climbed to the groves of the ascetics. There they found a lovely spot, encircled by a river of purest blue and blessed by a cooling fragrant breeze and an abundance of smooth-barked trees bedecked with brilliant flowers and luscious fruit. Birds singing lusty songs, many kinds of deer, and troops of strutting peacocks made the spot even lovelier. In the center of the grove was a hut

covered with leaves, beautiful to behold and comfortable in every season, built by order of Shakra himself.

In this garden, in the company of his beloved wife, enjoying the sweet prattle of his children, never thinking of the cares of royalty, the Bodhisattva devoted himself wholeheartedly to spiritual practices for fully half a year.

Then, one day, when the princess had gone to seek roots and fruit and the prince had remained at the hermitage watching the children, there appeared before him an old and tired brahman who had been sent by his wife on an urgent errand to acquire servants to do her work. His feet and ankles were stiff with the dust of his journey, his eyes and cheeks were sunken with weariness, and he bore on his shoulder the waterpot of mendicants.

Catching sight of this beggar, the first he had seen in so long a time, the Bodhisattva rejoiced. With sparkling eyes and smiling face, he went to greet the brahman. He welcomed him with kind words and then led the old man to his hermitage, where he treated him with the respect due a guest. The prince then asked the brahman: "What, kind sir, has brought you to this forest?"

The brahman, virtue and shame forgotten in the blind love he held for his wife, impatient to ask and obtain what he had come for, replied: "Where there is bright light and an even road, it is easy to travel. But in this world the darkness of selfishness prevails, so that no others would respond to my request. The fame of your heroic almsgiving has travelled all over the world, and so I have come all this way to beg from you. Give me both your children to be my servants."

And the Bodhisattva, that Great Being, accustomed to always giving joyously, and never having learned to say no, bravely and without hesitation said that he would give both his dear children to the brahman.

"Bless you!" said the brahman. "We will go now!" But the children, having overheard their father, began to weep in great distress. So strong was the love of the Bodhisattva for his children that he became heartsick with despair. "I have given the children to you-but their mother is not at home. She went to gather roots and herbs in the forest, and will not return until evening. Let her see them one more time, neatly arrayed as they are now; let her kiss them goodbye. You may rest the night here, and tomorrow you may take them away."

But the brahman replied: "Now things are changing! Women are beautiful, women are persuasive. She will hinder your resolve; I do not wish to stay here any longer."

"Do not think in that way," the Bodhisattva replied. "My wife will not obstruct this gift. She shares my practice. Do as you please, great brahman, yet consider this: How can these children be satisfactory servants? They are young and weak and have never done work of that nature."

"But if the king of the Shibis, their grandfather, should discover them in bondage, he would give you as much money as you desired in order to redeem them. If you take the children to his realm, you will win much wealth while walking in the path of virtue."

"No," said the brahman, "I have no intention of going near him. Such an offer is sure to anger him: He would be no more worth approaching than a snake. Surely

he would have the children torn from me by force, and probably punish me as well. No, I shall take them to my wife. She needs servants to wait on her."

"Then, as you will," said the Bodhisattva. And, after gently instructing the little ones on how to act as servants, he took the brahman's waterpot and tipped it over the brahman's outstretched hands, thus ratifying the gift. Water poured from the pot as tears fell from his eyes, eyes now the color of dark red lotus petals.

Overcome by the success of his greed, and charged with excitement, the brahman mumbled a short phrase of benediction. Then, with a harsh command, he ordered the children to go before him. But unable to bear the grief of separation, the weeping children embraced their father's feet, crying: "Please do not give us away while Mother is gone! Do not let us go until we can say goodbye!"

The brahman thought: "Once the mother returns, all is lost; if I do not leave this instant, in fact, the father's love will cause him to repent." And so with a vine he tied the children's hands as if they were a bundle of lotuses, and began to drag the children away with him, threatening them all the while. Krishnagina, the girl, never having experienced a moment's distress, cried out to her father: "This cruel man is hurting me, father! He is no brahman! Brahmins are virtuous people. He is an ogre in disguise! Once he gets us away, he will eat us! Why are you letting this ogre take us away, father?"

And Galin the boy cried: "The beatings of this brahman are not nearly so bad as never seeing my mother again. My heart is broken. When she comes back to find us gone, the hermitage empty, she will weep and weep, like the raindrop bird whose babies were killed. She has gone to the forest to pick fruit and gather roots-when she returns to the empty hut, what will she do?"

"Here, Father, take our toy horses, elephants, and chariots. Give half to mother, to comfort her. Tell her goodbye for us and don't let her cry, for it will be hard for us, father, to ever see you and our mother again.

"Come Krishna, let us go. Father wishes us to be this brahman's servants and has given us away. What does it matter even if we die?"

Then they were gone. The Bodhisattva, though his mind was shaken by these heart-rending cries, had not moved from where he was seated. He told himself over and over again that it was not right to regret having given, but his heart burned with grief, and his mind grew troubled and numb as if clouded with poison. But soon the gentle fanning of the cool wind helped him recover his senses.

Seeing the hermitage empty and silent, he said to himself in a voice choked with tears:

"How did he avoid piercing my very heart when taking my heart from me? That foul shameless brahman! How can they make such a journey, barefoot and tender? They are too young to bear such hardship. How can they be servants of that man? Who will comfort them when they are tired and weary? Who is there to help them when they feel hungry and thirsty? If this sorrow strikes even me, steadfast and firm, what will they feel, brought up in ease?"

"Alas! This separation from my children burns my mind like the hungriest fire! But who, following the path of virtue, could repent a gift once given?"

During this time, Madri had been disturbed by ill omens. Disquieted by her intuition, she had been attempting to return as quickly as possible with her fruits and roots to the hermitage. But her path was blocked by ferocious animals, and she was forced to take a long and circuitous route.

When her children failed to greet her at the usual place, when she failed to see them where they were accustomed to play, her uneasiness increased. Fearing the worst, anxious and distressed, she searched everywhere, calling out their names, but there was no reply. Full of grief, she cried:

"A hermitage resounding with the shouts of my children seemed to me a busy village; now when I do not see them it seems to me a frightening wilderness. Perhaps they have fallen asleep, tired from too much playing? Or maybe they are lost somewhere in the thicket? But perhaps in childishness they grew annoyed that I was so long in coming and are only hiding?

"Yet why are the birds no longer singing? Have they been witness to some awful mischief? Or could my young ones have fallen into that rapid stream, and been carried away by the dashing current?

"May my suspicions prove groundless! May the prince and children both be safe and well! May these feelings of foreboding find fulfillment on my own body! But why then is my heart heavy with sadness at the mere thought of my children? Why is my heart wrapped in this shroud of sorrow, like a stone about to sink? Why are my limbs so weak? My eyes grow dim-why does this very grove seem to spin about?"

Reaching the grounds of the hermitage, she put down her baskets of fruit and approached Vishvantara. Performing the usual salutation, she asked for the children. But the Bodhisattva knowing well the strength of a mother's love, was powerless to answer. Indeed, one who is kind finds it supremely difficult to bring suffering to another who is hoping against hope to receive pleasant news.

Then Madri thought: "His misery and silence can only mean one thing: Something terrible has happened to the children." In a daze she stood completely still and once more let her eyes search the hermitage; then in a voice broken with tears, she said: "I do not see my children. And you say nothing. Alas! Your silence speaks some great evil."

The sorrow piercing her heart completely overpowered her, and like a vine violently severed, she suddenly collapsed. The Bodhisattva, preventing her from falling to the ground, carried her in his arms to a grass couch where, sprinkled with cold water, she soon recovered her senses.

"I did not say anything, my Madri," he said, "for how can one expect firmness from a mind weak with love? A brahman suffering from old age and poverty came to me, and I gave him both our children. Be content and do not mourn.

"Look at me, Madri. Do not look for the children. Do not cry. Do not strike my heart again, for it is already pierced by the arrow of sorrow. When asked for my life, would I be able to withhold it? Think of this, my love, and rejoice at the gift I have made."

Hearing that her children were still alive, her suspicion of their death removed, Madri soon recovered from her fright. She was wiping away her tears in hopes of

strengthening her husband's resolve when, looking up, she beheld a sight that filled her with amazement:

"O wonderful! O strange! The gods have been swept away by admiration for your heart, which is forever untouched by selfish feelings. Listen to the drums of the gods, echoing in all directions with a hymn the heavens have composed to celebrate your glory!

"The earth shakes, trembling in exultation; the mountains heave with joy! Golden flowers, like lightning, are falling from heaven and illuminating the sky!

"Let us then put aside this grief and sadness. What you have done in charity should only brighten your mind. Become once more the well of benefit to all creatures, a giver as before."

Now the surface of the earth being shaken, Sumeru, the brilliant jewel-covered Lord of Mountains, began to tremble-so that even Shakra, Lord of the Gods, became curious and asked the cause of such disturbance. The Guardians of the World, eyes wide with amazement, told him the story of Vishvantara. And Shakra, moved by joy and surprise, went to visit the prince the very next day, after first taking on the appearance of a brahman.

As was his custom, the Bodhisattva showed the brahman the hospitality due a guest, and then asked what had brought him to the hermitage. "Give me your wife," said Shakra. "The virtuous never stop giving until the oceans run dry. For this reason I ask you for that woman there, who has the features of a goddess. Give her to me."

And still the Bodhisattva maintained his firmness of mind by promising his wife to the brahman. Taking Madri's hand with his left hand, holding the waterpot with the right, he poured water on the hand of the brahman-and so poured the fire of grief on the heart of the demon Mara who rules the realm of desire.

No anger rose in Madri's breast, nor did she weep, knowing her husband's nature. But her eyes remained fixed on him as she stood as rigid as a statue, stupefied by this fresh burden of suffering.

Beholding this scene, Shakra, Lord of the Gods, was touched by the most profound admiration, and he cried out: "Oh, the wide distance that separates the virtuous from the wicked! Could anyone without the purest of hearts even begin to believe this extraordinary sacrifice? To cherish a loving wife and children, yet to give them up to the vow of detachment-is it possible to even conceive of such nobleness?

"Once your glory is spread throughout the world by the tales of those devoted to your virtues, the brilliant reputations of others will pale beside yours, as even the brightest stars disappear in the splendor of sunlight. Your superhuman qualities are resoundingly applauded by all of the yakshas, the nagas, and the gods, including even Shakra himself." Shakra then assumed his own brilliant shape, and revealed himself to the Bodhisattva.

"I now return to you Madri, your wife. Where else should moonlight stay but with the moon? And do not grieve for the separation from your son and daughter, or for the loss of your kingdom. Before long your father will arrive, accompanied by both children, and reestablish you in the highest rank, thus providing his kingdom with its finest protector." Then Shakra vanished on the spot.

And the old brahman, bowing to Shakra's power, at once led the Bodhisattva's children to the land of the Shibis. When the people and their king heard of the extraordinary compassion of their absent prince, their hearts were softened with tenderness. Redeeming the children from the hands of the brahman, they went on a pilgrimage to Vishvantara, and, after obtaining his pardon, led him back to his home to sit in glorious splendor on his royal throne.

From this story one can see the marvelous behavior of a Bodhisattva. It is clear that the distinguished beings who strive for that state must not be despised or hindered. This story may also be applied when discussing how to listen to the Teachings with attention and when praising the qualities of the Tathagata.

9 - Vishvantara

A Tale of the Marvelous Behavior of a Bodhisattva.



In another lifetime, the Bodhisattva was born as the prince Vishvantara, son of Samjaya, the king of the Shibis. A virtuous prince, Vishvantara possessed a tranquil mind yet was full of energy, was well educated yet free of conceit, and though mighty and celebrated was without a trace of pride. Above all else, Vishvantara was incredibly generous, constantly giving alms to the kingdom's mendicants without question or restraint. He would tour the kingdom's alms halls on a magnificent elephant and provide anybody who asked with whatever they desired.



But it came to pass one day that a rival king, clouded with hatred, greed, and jealousy, devised a treacherous scheme to rob the prince of his royal elephant by taking advantage of his charitable nature. The rival king then dispatched a group of brahmans to the land of the Shibis who simply asked the prince for his mighty beast. Overjoyed to receive such a large request, the prince offered the Brahmans the elephant without hesitation even though he was fully aware that he was being tricked.



This act enraged the elders of the Shibi kingdom. They immediately beseeched Vishvantara's father, the great king Samjaya, to banish his son and heir into the forest of the ascetics. They stated that he was only fit for spiritual practice and that by foolishly giving away the royal elephant, he proved that he was not fit to be the heir to the throne. With sadness in his heart, the king agreed, and it was decided that the prince take his wife and two children into the woods and not return. Vishvantara accepted his father's decision, proceeded to give away his entire treasury to the mendicants, and then began his journey into exile.



At first, the traveling family had with them a horse drawn chariot but before long, Vishvantara offered the animals to beggars he met along the path. Witnessing that Vishvantara was pulling a heavy chariot on his own, four yakshas disguised themselves as red deer, who like well trained horses, relieved the prince of the heavy physical burden. This was the first of many auspicious signs in the environment during their journey. When they became hungry the trees would bend down and offer them fruit. When thirsty, lotus ponds would spring forth from the earth. When the air would become hot, clouds would form and create a cool breeze. Upon arriving at their destination, the Ascetic Groves of Mount Vanka, they were able to build their hermitage in a lovely location.



One day however, while the princess had gone to collect food, and the prince had remained at the hermitage with their children, a brahman man approached and requested that Vishvantara give him the children as servants. The Brahman claimed that he needed them to help care for his sick wife. Vishvantara, unable to refuse a request for help, agreed. It caused him great inner turmoil as it was nearly unbearable to see his beloved children cry for their mother while the man

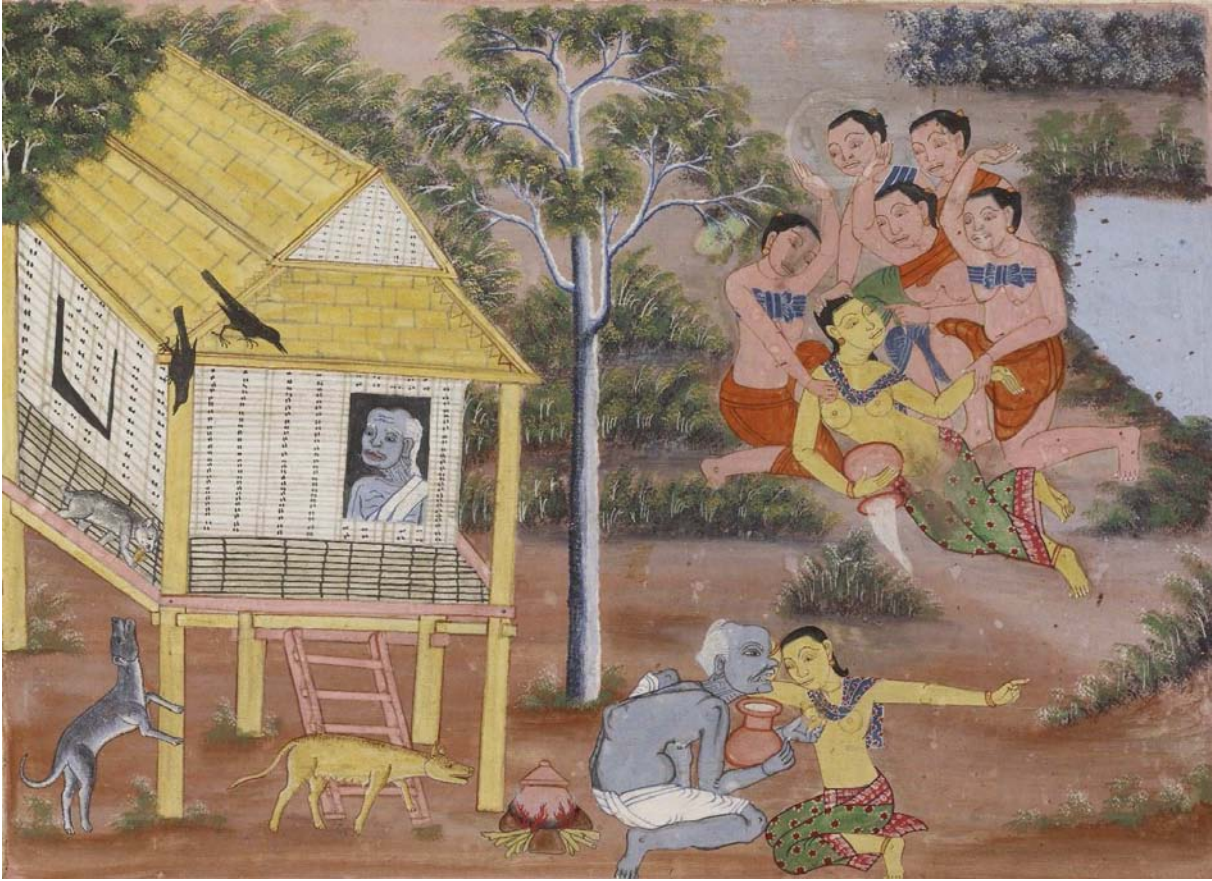
aggressively took them away, but he was steadfast in his generosity. When the princess returned and learned of what had happened, the combined grief of the couple was so great that it made the earth shake.

Witnessing this, Shakra, the Lord of Gods, then approached Vishvantara disguising himself as another Brahman and requested that he give him his wife as a servant. Once again, although distraught, the Bodhisattva was unable to refuse. Seeing his infinite generosity and astonishing lack of attachment, Shakra decided to reward him. The first old Brahman, bowing to Shakra's powers, at once led the princess and her children back to the land of the Shibus. When the people of the kingdom heard of the extraordinary compassion of the absent prince, their hearts were softened with tenderness. After redeeming the children from the Brahman and obtaining a pardon, the people of Shibi went on a pilgrimage to the ascetic woods. They found Vishvantara and led him back to the glorious splendor of the royal palace.

Key Events in the Story

1. A generous king.
2. Tricked by the greedy.
3. Generous to a fault.
4. Rewarded by the gods.

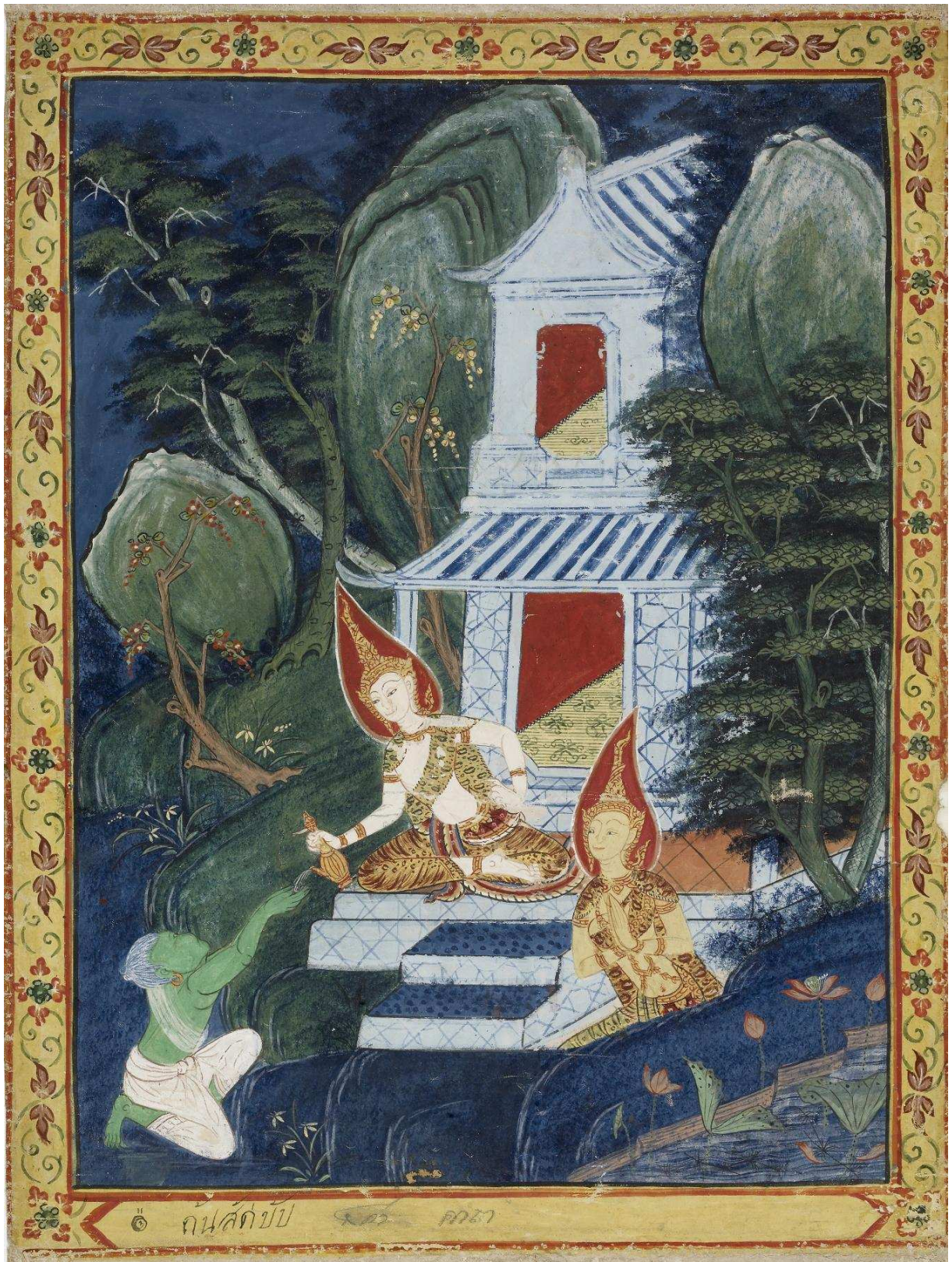












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10 - The Sacrifice



Those whose minds are virtuous cannot be seduced by the enticements of the wicked. Knowing this, strive to be pure in heart.

Long ago, the Bodhisattva, due to merit accrued during previous lives, was born a king. All the lesser rulers bowed before him, and so he ruled in peace, having no need to subdue either his own or other peoples. His claim to the throne was universally acknowledged, and his relations with other countries were calm and balanced. His land was free from every kind of disturbance, disruption, or disaster, and all his subjects obeyed his commands without question.

Having subdued his only enemies, the senses, and having become totally unattached to the fruits of his own labors, the king had as his sole object the happiness of his subjects. And this he pursued with all his heart. Like a true Muni, he made the Dharma the only purpose of his actions. He also knew that human nature was drawn to emulate the highest, and so was particularly intent on the performance of his religious duties. In order to bring about the salvation of his people, he practiced giving and moral conduct, cultivated forbearance, and worked for the benefit of all sentient beings. With a countenance as mild as his thoughts, he appeared to his people to be an embodiment of the Dharma.

Despite such powerful protection, there came a year when the king's realm was afflicted with a drought, due to both the laxity of the inhabitants and an oversight of the gods charged with the dispersion of rain. Convinced that some failure of his own or of his subjects had caused this calamity, and taking to heart the distress of his people-whose welfare was the constant object of his thoughts and cares-the king gathered together those elders renowned for their knowledge of religious matters and asked them for advice.

Led by the brahman priest and ministers of state, the elders told the king that he must offer a great sacrifice. "You must offer up many hundreds of animals," they told him. "Such an offering is sure to bring the rain we need." But the innate compassion of the king kept him from approving such slaughter. Discretely, unwilling to offend the elders by harsh words of refusal, he turned the conversation to other matters. Yet the very next time religious matters were discussed, the elders, unaware of the depths of the king's compassion, again strongly urged him to initiate the sacrifice.

"You have always been fastidious in performing your royal duties," they said. "You are skillful and steadfast in your observance of both religious and secular law-everything you have ever done has been done to benefit the people. How can it be that one so careful in such observances can be so careless, even lazy, when it comes to making the necessary sacrifice which is the ladder to the higher realms?"

"Even other kings respectfully heed your words. Like your vassals, they are confident that following you will guarantee their success. Now the time has come: The most exalted blessings of this sacrifice will bring you great glory! Your performance of the rituals, your boundless charity, and mindful restraint have prepared you for this undertaking. The Vedas prescribe sacrifice-so discharge your debt to the gods! When the gods are satisfied by a sacrifice faultlessly and properly performed, they will honor you in return with abundant rain.

"Think of your subjects' welfare and of your own. Think of your renown. Think of these, and you will make the necessary sacrifice."

The king pondered: "I am indeed badly served by such counselors. I could not follow their advice and still faithfully follow the Dharma; I would be untrue to all

those who have faith in me. Truly, those who are proclaimed the best refuge among men are often those who do the most harm, all in the name of religion. Alas for any who follow such a path, for they end in desperate straits, surrounded by the evils they think to avoid!

"What connection can there possibly be between virtuous behavior and the killing of animals? How could the gods or those in the world of the gods ever find pleasure in acts of slaughter? These men say that animals killed in sacrifice go directly to heaven, speeded on their way by the prayers of their murderers. In this way, they say, the act is performed according to the Law. Yet this has to be a lie. How can anyone ever reap the fruits of an action performed by another? A beast put to death on an altar has not abstained from wickedness or devoted itself to the practice of good by dying as a sacrifice.

"If it were true that a victim killed in sacrifice obtained immediate celestial bliss, would not brahmans everywhere sacrifice themselves? Yet this does not happen. Who then could take such words seriously?"

"As for the gods, the ambrosia they consume, served to them by lovely goddesses, is incomparably wonderful in scent and flavor, in magnificence and power. Would they abandon such fare to taste the guts of some hapless beast?"

"Now is the time to act."

And so, having made up his mind as to what he would do, the king enthusiastically pretended to take up the idea of a sacrifice.

"I am well served and thankful to have such counselors," he told them. "You are all so intent on my happiness and protection! I will begin the sacrifice at once, by sacrificing one thousand humans. Let you, my officials, arrange it. Find the most appropriate ground on which to raise the sacrificial buildings, study the constellations and the lunar movements, the different times of day, even the hours-determine the most auspicious time to kill our victims, so that what we desire shall come to pass."

Attempting to stall, the head priest replied: "Great King, to be successful, you must perform the necessary ablutions each time a sacrifice is performed. Furthermore, if the thousand victims are seized all at once, your subjects might become angry."

All the other brahmans vehemently agreed to these words. But the king replied: "Do not worry about the people's anger. I will take care to prevent any trouble."

The king convened an assembly of representatives from both town and country and announced: "It is my intention to perform a sacrifice of one thousand citizens. But the sacrificial victims must be like animals. Only those who have done grave wrong will be sacrificed-I do not want to use anyone else. With this in mind, I give you fair warning: From this day onward, whoever transgresses the boundaries of right conduct, becoming a stain to family and a danger to country, will be instantly brought before me and prepared for sacrifice. To carry out this resolution, I now dispatch sharp-eyed emissaries, faultless and careful, to report your behavior directly to me."

The principal members of the assembly put their joined palms to their foreheads and bowing, replied: "Everything you have ever done has been done for the happiness of your subjects. How could we oppose your will, O Lord of men? Your

deeds are esteemed even by Brahma. You, the authority of the virtuous, are our highest authority. Since you are satisfied with nothing but our enjoyment and our good, anything that pleases you pleases us as well."

And so, throughout the towns and countryside, the king dispatched emissaries who were charged with apprehending all evildoers. Everywhere and every day proclamations were issued to the beat of drums, bidding all to listen well: "The king, as guardian of security, promises safety and freedom to all who cultivate honesty and good conduct.

"But a drought is ravaging our lands. In order to help the people, a sacrifice of a thousand men must be made. Therefore, whoever disregards the command of our monarch, whoever delights in wrongdoing, shall, by the force of their own actions, be transformed into sacrificial victims. When their bodies are fastened to the sacrificial post, all shall witness their miserable suffering, their searing pain."

Hearing this proclamation and witnessing the king's men day after day soon led the inhabitants of the realm to abandon any attachment to wrongdoing. All the citizens grew intent on observing the moral precepts and exercising selfcontrol, so that every occasion of hatred or enmity was strictly avoided, and every quarrel or difference was settled in mutual love and esteem.

Children obeyed their parents and teachers. Hospitality, good manners, modesty, and a general spirit of charity and good will prevailed, and the undiminished watchfulness of the king's servants strengthened the people's resolve not to stray from right action. Fear of death awakened thoughts of the next world; fear of tarnishing the honor of their families awakened a desire to guard their reputations. The purity of their hearts was strengthened by their sense of shame, and they were soon all ornamented by spotless virtue.

Learning of these improvements in the people's way of living from his emissaries, the king rejoiced, and expressed his great happiness to those who brought him the good news. To his ministers he said:

"The protection of my subjects has always been my highest aim. Now, by the purity of their lives and the holiness of their conduct, my people have themselves become worthy to receive the gifts of sacrifice. Now my ultimate intention can be made known: Let anyone who seeks to fuel his happiness by wealth come and accept all he wishes from my hand. In this way true sacrifice will be performed, and the blight of distress and poverty will be banished from the land.

"With your assistance, I will protect the people. I cannot bear their poverty; it burns in my mind like a raging fire."

The ministers, following the royal command, constructed alms-halls in all the villages, towns, and markets, and at all the stations on the roads. Day and night all the poor were provided with whatever they desired. Poverty disappeared, and the people, now prosperous, clothed themselves in fine garments and precious jewelled ornaments in the manner of festival days. The king's fame, glorified by those who had been poor, spread in all directions, just as the pollen of lotuses spreads over ever-wider areas, riding on the small waves of a lake.

Due to the wise measures of the king, all his subjects now grounded their lives in virtue, and the powers of evil faded away. The seasons succeeded one another in due course, gladdening everyone with their regularity. The earth produced all kinds of food in abundance. Pure blue water and lotuses filled the waterbasins,

and medicinal herbs blossomed with greater potency than ever before. Plagues and calamities passed away; the monsoons came in due time, and the planets moved in auspicious paths. Due to the balance of all elements, there was no danger to be encountered anywhere-nothing to fear at home or abroad.

The people of that land indeed enjoyed the wonders of a Golden Age, for their practice of virtue, self-control, good conduct, and modesty continued unabated. The strength of the king's sacrifice, performed in accordance with the spirit of the law, put an end to the sufferings of the poor. The country teemed with a thriving and happy populace, and the people never wearied of extolling the virtues of their king. And so his fame extended in all directions.

One day a high royal official whose heart had been more than delighted by these occurrences said to the king: "In always seeing to the needs of your people, both great and small and in between, Your Majesty's wisdom grows greater and greater, surpassing that of any sage. As a result of your sacrifice performed in righteousness-free from the evil of animal slaughter-you have ensured the happiness of your subjects in both this world and the next.

"The days of drought and poverty are over; all suffering has been eased. Need I say more? Your subjects are happy, and fortune reigns supreme. Like the moon you are without blemish. You shine with a clear pure light; you shine with the moral force and beauty of the initiate. Your actions as head of state and head of spiritual matters have been without defect.

"You surpass in your majesty even Shakra, the Lord of One Hundred Sacrifices. Sacrifices performed for a specific goal are most often acts of vileness, entailing injury to living beings. Your sacrifices, on the other hand, are a monument to your glory, performed in complete accordance with your moral rectitude and your aversion to harm. Happy are the people who have you as protector! No father could be a better guardian to his children!"

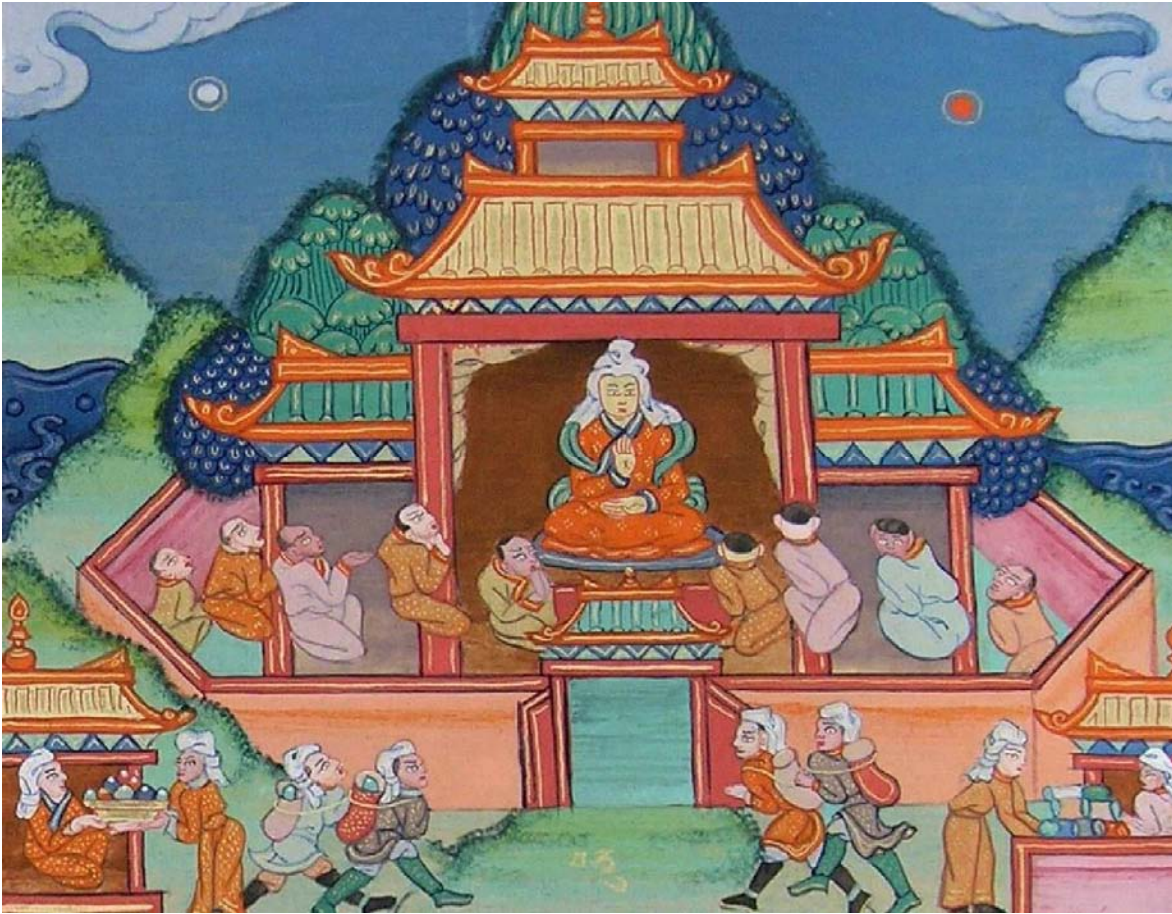
And another royal official praised the king: "The powerful and wealthy usually only practice charity when there is hope of great recompense. Their good conduct results from the desire for renown or for a place in heaven. But the kind of charity and moral conduct that you have shown comes forth only for the sake of others. It exists only in the wise and virtuous."

From this story one can see how those whose minds are pure cannot be enticed by the wicked. Knowing this, strive for purity. This is also a helpful teaching for princes, to whom it can be said: "Whoever wishes his subjects well and strives for their welfare brings about salvation, glory, and happiness. This is the true business of kings. Furthermore, the prince who strives for prosperity ought to act in accordance with the Dharma, as the virtuous conduct of his subjects is the true source of prosperity."

It can also be said: "Killing animals will never lead to happiness. Rather, charity, self-restraint, continence, and the like have this power. For this reason he who longs for happiness must devote himself to these virtues." This story is also to be told when expressing the qualities of the Tathagata, to show how the Bhagavat, in all his previous existences, dedicated himself to acting for the benefit of all beings.

10 - The Sacrifice

A Tale of Virtue and Generosity.



Born as a great king, the bodhisattva effectively ruled his kingdom. Times were prosperous and peaceful and other rulers bowed before him. He practiced the virtues of giving and right moral conduct, cultivated forbearance, and worked for the benefit of all sentient beings. His land was free from every kind of disturbance, disruption, and disaster, and he, devoted to spiritual truth, pursued nothing but the happiness of his subjects.

Despite all this, there came a year when his kingdom was afflicted by a severe drought, due to the laxity of its inhabitants and an oversight by the gods charged with the dispersion of rain. Convinced that the drought was caused by some fault of his own, the king gathered together the religious elders renowned for their knowledge in ritual matters and asked them for advice. Their advice was to sacrifice a thousand animals, that such an offering would surely appease the gods and bring the needed rain. The king did not see how this could be so. He didn't believe that sacrificing innocent animals would bring pleasure to the gods but not wanting to offend the elders, he simply changed the subject.



Struck with a plan, he proclaimed to the elders that a sacrifice was indeed required, but instead of animals, he would sacrifice a thousand humans! Decreeing that only the citizens who have done grave wrong would be selected, he made it known to the public that emissaries would be watching over them all and that anyone who deviates from the path of right conduct, or becomes a danger to the country, will be sacrificed.



The people of the land became well behaved. Children obeyed their parents and teachers and everyone observed moral precepts and exercised self-control. Hospitality, good manners, modesty, and a general spirit of charity and good will prevailed.



Observing all of this, the king then revealed his true plan and explained the real meaning of sacrifice. He set up alms halls throughout the land and gave away vast amounts of his own wealth to his subjects. The poor were provided with whatever they desired. Poverty disappeared and prosperity flourished. The kingdom entered a golden age.

Key Events in the Story

1. Drought effects a kingdom.
2. Animal sacrifice is recommended.
3. Virtue and generosity are offered as sacrifice.

11 - Shakra



Neither adversity nor the majesty of sovereign power will diminish the compassion of the noble-minded toward sentient beings.

For countless lifetimes, the Bodhisattva performed virtuous actions, thoroughly actualizing the meaning of giving, self-discipline, responsibility, and compassion. When his every action was directed toward the benefit of others, then, it is said, he became Shakra, Lord of the Gods.

During the time the Bodhisattva held this high rank, he displayed greater majesty than had any of his predecessors-just as moonlight is reflected more brilliantly from a newly painted palace. Such was his mighty state, such was his brilliance, that the asuras were willing to expose themselves to the tusks of his world-conquering elephants in order to challenge his position. But though he readily enjoyed the happiness and glory at his command, the bliss that was his due did not swell his heart with pride. Ruling heaven and earth in the proper manner, he acquired a glory that pervaded the entire universe.

Now the asuras could not bear the growing fame and glory of Shakra, and in their envy, prepared to wage war against him. Gathering an enormous army mounted on elephants and horses, driving chariots and on foot, they marched to the encounter, with a noise as awful as the roaring of a stormy ocean. The glittering blaze of the army brandishing their innumerable weapons was a sight too terrible to look upon.

Shakra, though he upheld the precepts of virtue, felt inclined to descend to the frenzy of fighting. The arrogance of his enemies, the threat to his men whose peaceful enjoyments had been interrupted, respect for his royal tradition, and political wisdom all decided him on battle.

A thousand splendid horses were harnessed to his golden chariot, its sharp weapons flaming in the sun, its jewelled surface reflecting the weapons flashing on either side. High above the chariot flew a brilliant banner, sparkling with jewels and emblazoned with the figure of a noble being. Then, amidst the vast host of his army mounted on elephants, on horses, and on foot, the Great Being stepped into his jewelled chariot, and standing upon a pure white carpet, led his forces to the ocean shore, there to encounter the great enemy force.

A tremendous battle erupted, in which the weapons of the mighty sliced through both the shields and the determination of the timid. Furious cries rang out above the tumult of the struggle: "Stay!" "Now!" "Not that way!" "Hold!" "Look out!" "You will never escape!" "Strike!" "You are a dead man!" And the shouting merged with the clashing of arms and the clamor of drums, until the sky itself shook almost to bursting-while the battle raged like hell itself.

Maddened by the smell of flowing blood, elephants on both sides rushed furiously at each other, like mountains uprooted by apocalyptic winds. Chariots swept across the field like ominous rainclouds, their banners flashing like lightning, their wheels rattling like rapid claps of thunder.

Sharp arrows flew among the armies of both the gods and the asuras, shattering the royal umbrellas and standards, the bows and spears, the shields and armor, and splitting open the heads of many men. Finally, overwhelmed by the fiery weapons of the forces of darkness, the frightened army of Shakra fled before the asuras.

Only Shakra, Lord of the Gods, remained on the field to bar the path of the enemy with his chariot. Matali, Shakra's charioteer, seeing the flight of the army of the gods and the exultant advance of the asuras who marched unrestrained

amidst the tumult of tremendous war cries and victory shouts, thought it time for retreat and turned the chariot around. But as they drove upward through the sky, Shakra noticed that they were about to crush some eagle nests resting on a tree directly in line with their chariot pole.

As soon as he saw this, he was seized with compassion and said to Matali: "You must drive the chariot so that the pole does not disturb the nest. We must not harm those unfledged birds." Matali answered: "But sire, the asuras will overtake us." "Never mind," said Shakra. "Make sure those eagle nests are saved." "O Lotus-eyed One," responded Matali, "only turning the chariot around can save those birds, and a host of enemies follows at our heels-they who have long awaited this chance to defeat us."

But Shakra, Lord of the Gods, moved by the utmost compassion, demonstrated the extraordinary goodness of his heart and the firmness of his intention. "It is no matter," he said. "Turn around. Better to die under the clubs of the asuras than to live dishonored by the murder of tiny terrorstricken creatures. Turn the chariot."

When Matali turned the chariot drawn by a thousand horses, the asuras, who had witnessed Shakra's heroism in battle, fell into confusion and fear. As they saw the chariot turn toward them, their ranks gave way like dark rain clouds dispelled by the wind. So it is sometimes that in the midst of defeat, a single man turning his face to the enemy can subdue the victor's pride by his unexpected heroism.

At the sight of the hostile army's broken ranks, the hosts of gods returned to battle; the asuras, fleeing in terror, thought no more of rallying and resistance. The gods, their joy mingled with shame, paid homage to their lord, whose face shone radiant with the brilliance and beauty of victory. Then quietly Shakra returned from the battlefield to his city and his joyful sons.

Thus the saying goes: "A low-minded man will commit wicked actions because of lack of compassion. An average man will act with mercy in moments of distress. But the virtuous, even when their lives are in danger, can no more transgress the proper line of conduct than the ocean its boundaries." Mindful that it does the wise no good to offend any sentient beings, much less to sin against them, the virtuous are forever intent on practicing compassion toward all. In truth, the Dharma ever watches over those who follow the laws of virtuous action. This story is also appropriate when describing the qualities of the Tathagata and when explaining how to listen to the Teachings.

11 - Shakra

A Tale of Bravery

After countless lifetimes of performing virtuous actions the Bodhisattva was born as Shakra, the Lord of Gods. As Shakra, the Bodhisattva displayed greater majesty than all of his predecessors. His greatness created tremendous jealousy among the Demi-gods, who were willing to face his legion of mighty world conquering war horses to challenge his rule. Gathering an enormous army, the Demi-gods marched towards Shakra's palace.



Shakra decided to take his army of gods and meet the Demi-gods in battle. A tremendous fight erupted, with both sides taking heavy losses.

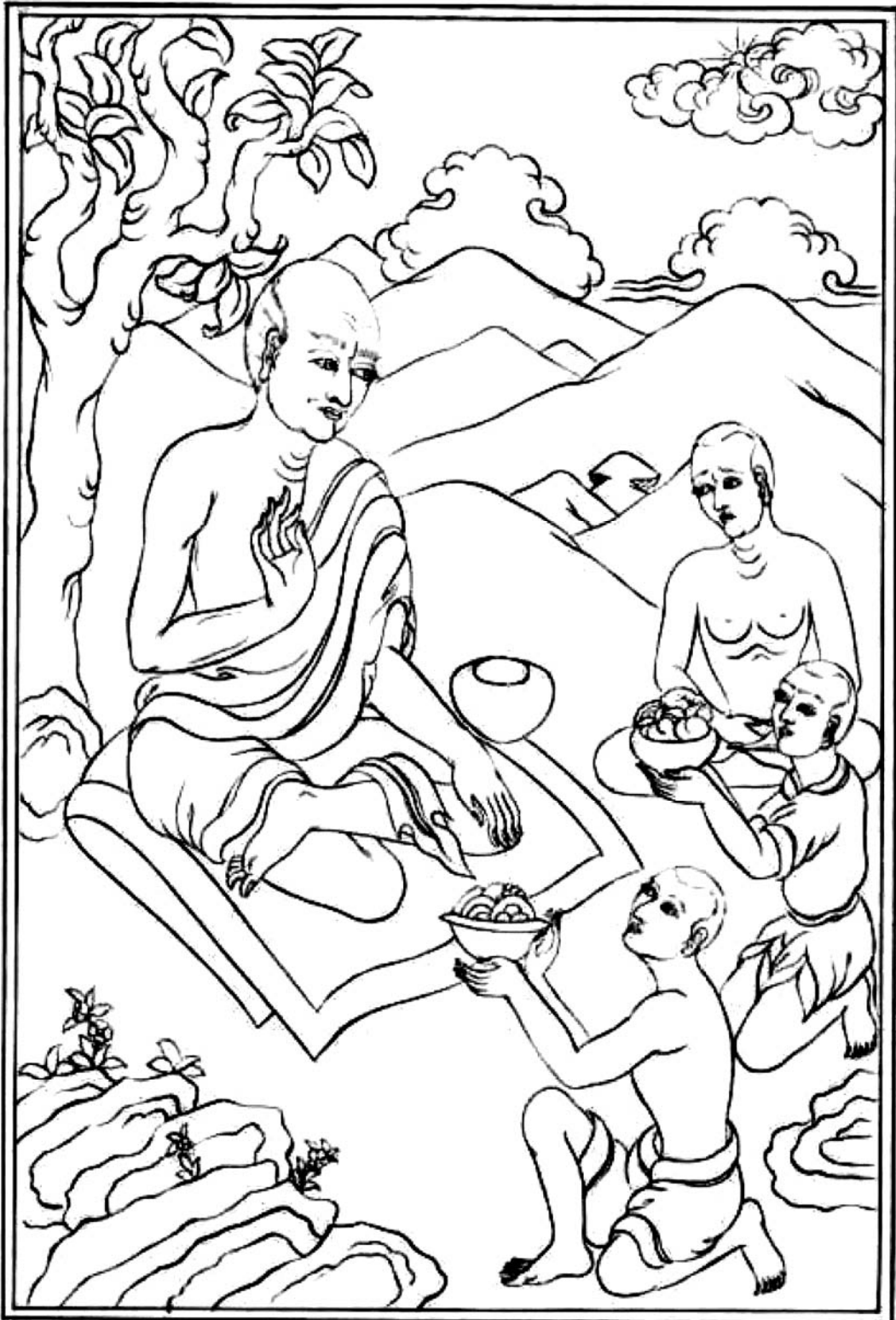
Shakra's army began to lose. The Demi-gods were advancing. Only Shakra and his charioteer, Metali, remained in their path. As they were preparing to make their last stand, they saw that directly in the path of the approaching Demi-gods was an eagle nest. Overcome with compassion for the eagles and the unborn eggs, Shakra told Metali to swoop down so they could save them. Metali resisted, for surely if they were to attempt to save the eagles they would make themselves vulnerable to an attack from above and would not survive. Shakra proclaimed that dying by the weapons of the Demi-gods was nobler than letting innocent terror-stricken creatures be killed.

As they flew down and rescued the birds and their eggs, the army of Demi-gods watched in amazement. They became confused and fearful. As Shakra's chariot turned towards them, in their confused state they did not know what to do and they broke their ranks. Seeing this, the army of gods returned to battle and before long, the Demi-gods were vanquished.

Key Events in the Story

1. Bodhisattva born as Shakra, the great god.
2. There is a conflict with Demi-gods.
3. Heroic compassion wins out.

12 - The Brahman



What is it that keeps the virtuous on the path of good conduct? Their sense of shame and decency.

Once the Bodhisattva took birth as the son of illustrious brahmans, well-respected for their ancestry and their conduct—a family which upheld traditional customs, self discipline, and practice. He received the usual sacraments and purification rites in due course, and at the proper age was sent to live with a teacher distinguished for his learning, his birth, and his exemplary conduct.

The boy's quick grasp of what he was taught, his sense of responsibility (for which his family was noted), his good manners, and his tranquil demeanor—all rare ornaments in a youth—led his teacher to look upon him with particular love and pleasure. Indeed, if the magic of virtue can charm even those burning with the fires of hatred, how much more will it affect those who are good-hearted?

The boy's teacher, to test the morals of his disciples, would often complain of his own sufferings and poverty. During periods of rest from sacred study, he would moan:

"To one who lacks a family's aid, there is no joy, not even on the holidays! Begging for alms leaves me weak. Poverty is a frightful state, and hopelessness its fruit. To be poor is to be disregarded, born to toil! Poverty is a powerless condition, devoid of joy, incessantly afflicting."

Like prize horses pricked by spurs, his disciples were so moved by their teacher's words that they did their utmost to beg ever more and better food for him. But he only discouraged them, saying: "Good sirs, do not go to so much trouble. Food scraped together by daily begging can never diminish the distress of poverty. If my hardship is such a burden to you, put your energy into increasing your wealth! That is the proper thing to do. Why do I say this?"

"As hunger is dispelled by food, and thirst by water, as illness is cured by medicine and the proper incantations, so the pain of poverty is dispatched by wealth. To dispel poverty, one should seek wealth by any means."

The pupils replied: "But what can we do? We are powerless. If wealth, like food, could be obtained by begging, we would never allow you to suffer this poverty. But well you know that brahmans can gain wealth only by receiving gifts—and the people in these parts are far from charitable. Hence, we are powerless and full of grief."

Replied their teacher: "Look in the books of the Law. There are other ways for brahmans to earn wealth! Unfortunately, I am not fit to practice them because I am old and weak."

"But we are young and strong!" they exclaimed. "So if you think we are capable of practicing these precepts, please tell us what they are. Then we can return the kindness of your teachings!"

"No!" said their teacher. "These ways of obtaining wealth are too difficult for young minds lacking strong resolve. But... well... since your Honors urge me so ... I shall divulge one such way."

"In the Teachings, it is said that in times of distress theft is a means of livelihood approved for brahmans. And what greater distress in this world than poverty? So what prevents us from enjoying the wealth of others? Indeed, all worldly goods belong to brahmans."

"Now, although you could doubtlessly seize such wealth openly, you must mind your reputations and not take anything in quite such a way. Use your skill unseen, in lonely places and lonely times."

Such language tore the bridle off the disciples, who at once approved that bad advice as if it were good—they were all more than eager to do as their teacher suggested. All, that is, except the Bodhisattva, whose innate goodness would not allow him to accept his teacher's advice, though it had been accepted as a duty by the other students.

Ashamed, with eyes downcast, the Bodhisattva sighed deeply and remained silent. The teacher, whose regard for the virtues of that youth was very high, noted that the Bodhisattva neither approved nor spoke out against his proposal. And so he thought to himself: "Why is he resisting? Does he lack courage? Is it that he does not care for me, or is it that he understands the Dharma and knows thievery for what it is—a wicked action?"

In hopes of discovering the nature of the boy's mind, the teacher questioned the Bodhisattva: "O Great Brahman! All these vice-born men, unable to bear my misfortune, are willing to follow the way of heroes, energetic and bold. In you I see nothing but laziness and sloth. You are clearly not affected by my distress. Is not my suffering evident? Have I not spoken of it openly? Still you sit there. How can you not be touched by my distress?"

Alarmed, the Bodhisattva respectfully bowed to his teacher and replied: "Pray, do not think that of me! Neither lack of affection nor a hard heart causes me to keep silent; nor am I unmoved by your sufferings. But the actions you suggest cannot be practiced. And why not? It is impossible to commit a wicked action without being seen.

"For the evil-doer there is no such thing as a lonely place: Nowhere can anyone be truly alone. Are not the divine eyes of invisible beings, are not the purified Munis always watching our actions? Not seeing them, the foolish commit wicked actions, thinking themselves alone. But thinking does not make it so.

"Furthermore, wherever there is no one else, is such a place empty of myself? And I am a witness far more reliable than any other. Someone else may not see me, being occupied with other business, but when I commit a wrong act, eagerly surrendering to my own desire, do I not know with total clarity exactly what it is I do? It is for this reason that I do not join the others."

Seeing that his teacher was satisfied with his answer, the Bodhisattva continued: "Nor can I persuade myself that you would deceive us in this way, simply for the sake of wealth. Who, knowing the difference between virtue and vice, could ever be seduced by wealth to murder virtue?"

"It is better to wear rags and take up the begging bowl even in the midst of one's enemy's opulence than to shamelessly turn against the Teachings, even to become the master of gods."

At these words, the teacher rose from his seat, overjoyed and full of admiration. Embracing his pupil, he said: "Very good, well said, O Noble Brahman! Such words are truly becoming to one with such a keen intellect adorned with tranquility. Fools may stray from the path of duty, tempted by almost anything. But the virtuous can never be misled, even when they are in the greatest distress. Ascetic practice, learning, and wisdom are wealth enough for them.

"As the moon in autumn crowns the firmament, so are you the ornament of your family. Your conduct shows that you have understood the meaning of the sacred texts, and my labor is blessed with the riches of success."

From this story we can see how Great Beings, following their conscience, do not transgress the boundaries of good behavior. For this reason, the noble-minded are always endowed with the power of shame and of decency. The noble Shravakas, well-protected by the moat of their conscience, avoid what is not virtuous and foster what is wholesome. This story is also referred to in texts praising decorum and self-respect.

12 - The Brahman A Tale of Conscience



As a son of illustrious Brahmins who were well respected for their ancestry and conduct, the Bodhisattva excelled in scholarly pursuits. At the proper age, he was sent off to live and study with a great teacher.

The teacher, to test the morals of his disciples, complained daily about living in poverty. His students then started begging even more intensely, but he stated that even with better food he will not be free from the pains of poverty. He said that for his situation to improve, they needed to gain wealth. Yet the laws of the land stated that no Brahmins were allowed to acquire wealth except when it was offered as a gift. The people of the region were known for their lack of charity. The teacher told them to look at the laws closer, and that the law also states that Brahmins are allowed to steal if in times of distress. Surely his poverty warranted such action.

All the disciples except for the Bodhisattva immediately started planning what they were going to steal and how they were going to remain unseen. Silent and ashamed, the Bodhisattva sat with his eyes downcast, neither approving of their scheming nor denouncing it. The teacher continued his test and challenged the Bodhisattva, saying that he was obviously not affected by his distress, and that while all the other students were heroically planning their missions he was looking slothful and impartial. The Bodhisattva responded that neither lack of

affection or a cold heart was keeping him silent, but the actions the teacher suggested could not be carried out. He explained that it is impossible to commit wicked actions without being seen, for nobody is ever truly alone. The divine eyes of the enlightened ones are always watching.

Hearing these words, the teacher arose from his seat full of joy and admiration and embraced the Bodhisattva. The teacher went on to explain that the virtuous can never stray from their path, even when in great distress. Ascetic practice, learning, and wisdom are all the wealth that is needed.

Key Events in the Story

1. Bodhisattva is one of many students of great teacher.
2. The teacher tests his students and tells them to steal for him.
3. The Bodhisattva is the only student who refuses and passes the test.

13 - She Who Drives Men Mad



The virtuous are always reluctant to follow a low road. Even when sick with heavy sorrow, their constancy allows them to maintain a steady course.

The Bodhisattva, during his many lives of striving to benefit beings by means of the special qualities of truthfulness, generosity, tranquility, and wisdom, once took birth as a king of the Shibis. Embodying the Dharma and self discipline, he was able to secure the welfare of his subjects much as a father cares for his children-influencing them to increase their virtuous qualities and to turn away from wrong actions. And so his subjects rejoiced both in this world and the next.

The king administered justice according to the Dharma, treating both kinsman and commoner alike. And because the people were encouraged to cultivate right action and to obstruct the path of wrongdoing, a ladder to the heavenly realms gradually came into being.

Understanding that the welfare of the world rested in righteousness, the king delighted in the path of the Dharma. Always acting in accord with the Dharma, not allowing others to violate its precepts, the king thus protected his people.

Now it happened that one of the principal townsmen in the capital had a daughter of extraordinary beauty, a maiden so exquisite that she appeared to be a goddess incarnate. The merest glimpse of her made it impossible for any but the truly dispassionate to look away, so powerful were the attractions of her charms. And for this reason, her family called her Unmadayanti, 'She Who Drives Men Mad'.

Needless to say, her father lost no time in telling the king of his daughter. "Your Majesty," he said, "the very pearl of womanhood has appeared in your realm. Pray, be so kind as to decide whether or not you will accept her as your wife."

Forthwith, the king ordered a group of brahmans wellversed concerning the auspicious marks of women to visit the maiden and determine her suitability as a wife. So the father of Unmadayanti led the brahmans to his house where they were to meet his daughter. Asked to attend on the guests, she began to serve them a meal in the proper manner, but no sooner had the brahmans beheld her than they lost all control of themselves-as if their eyes and minds had been taken over by strong drink.

Observing that the brahmans had lost all interest in the meal, and that their modesty and composure were quickly slipping away, the householder dismissed his daughter from view and served the brahmans himself. Upon leaving the dinner, the brahmans spoke among themselves:

"Her charms enchant like a magic spell. The very sight of her would distract the purest sage striving for wisdom; how much more a young prince who lives in pleasure? It would be unwise for the king to see her, much less make her his queen. Her beauty would drive him mad; his interest in his duties, both religious and political, would diminish. No good would come of it, and in the end, his subjects would suffer."

Having thus made up their minds, they reported to the king: "We have seen the maiden, Your Majesty. It is true she is attractive and possesses a certain loveliness, but no more; worse, she has inauspicious marks, forboding ruin and bad luck. Your Majesty ought not even to see her, much less think to wed her. A bad wife veils the glory and opulence of both families, as a cloudy night conceals the moon, obscuring the beauty and symmetry of heaven and earth alike."

Believing the maiden to be inauspiciously marked and thus unsuitable to his rank, the king lost all desire to possess her. Soon afterward, the householder married his daughter to Abhiparaga, an official of the royal court.

Some time later, the king decided to ride through his capital to observe a religious festival. He drove through the town on his royal chariot, delighting in the decorations and excitement. The streets had been sprinkled and cleaned, and the white ground strewn with blossoms of many colors, while aloft flew colorful flags and lively banners. Everywhere there was dancing, singing, pantomime, and music. The scent of flowers mingled with a rich profusion of odors-incense, powders, perfumes, ointments, and liquors. Lovely wares were being peddled among the crowds of merry citizens, who were dressed in their finest attire.

On his ride the king neared the house of Abhiparaga. There, Unmadayanti, angry with her sovereign because he had spurned her 'inauspicious marks indeed' stood atop the flat roof of the house, pretending to be curious to see him. As a flash of lightning illuminates a cloud, so did her presence charge the scene. And she wondered in her heart if this king would be able to remain firm and unshaken by such an inauspicious person as herself.

As she faced him, the king's eyes fell upon her. Now the king was accustomed to the wanton airs of harem beauties. He also possessed a modest disposition, great constancy, and a strong sense of shame. Attached to the path of virtue, and thus greatly afraid of the looks of young women attached to others, he was practiced in subduing the senses. But he was no match for the god of love. Powerless to turn away, he gazed at her for a long time.

"Is she perhaps the goddess of that house?" he thought. "Is she an apsaras or a demoness? Or Kaumuda, the lovely wife of the moon? Surely, she cannot be human." And thus he continued to ponder as his chariot drove on. Returning to his palace like one absent-minded, he thought of nothing but her, his firmness of mind utterly destroyed. After a few days, he took his charioteer Sunanda aside and asked: "Whose is the house that is surrounded by a white wall? And who is she whose beauty shines like lightning in a white cloud?"

Sunanda answered: "Your Majesty has a high official by the name of Abhiparaga. That is his house, and that woman is his wife. She is the daughter of Kiritavaba; people call her Unmadayanti, 'She Who Drives Men Mad'."

Discovering that she was the wife of another plunged the king into despair. Sighing long and deeply, his eyes fixed and unmoving, he said to himself in a low voice: "Alas! This creature is named all too well, for her sweet smile has driven me to distraction. That this weakness of mine concerns the wife of another means I must indeed be mad. If only I could forget her!

"Yet she is never far from my thoughts; she rules my mind. Shame has left me, and sleep as well. If only I could give myself over to thoughts of her graceful features, her eyes, her smile, her beauty. The gong striking to remind me of my royal duties arouses only my wrath."

Thus was the king's constancy deeply shaken by the power of passionate love. Try as he might to compose his mind, or disguise his state, his fixed and staring eyes, his emaciated body and languishing appearance manifested his heart's affliction for all to see.

Abhiparaga, the king's officer, a skilled judge of character, soon observed the changed behavior of his sovereign. Discovering the cause, and knowing well the excessive power of the god of love, he foresaw evil consequences unless some remedy were found. Since he loved his king, he sought a private audience and approaching his lord, he said: "During my morning prayers today, O Lotus-eyed Ruler, a yaksha appeared before me saying: 'The king has fallen in love with Unmadayanti. How can you ignore it?' And then he vanished. Immediately I came to you. If what he said is true, Your Majesty, why have you remained silent? Do me the favor of taking her."

The king was confounded and dared not lift up his eyes for shame. Nevertheless, even though he was caught in the clutches of love, he would not let his firmness falter, because of his deep knowledge of the Dharma, and a long and good practice.

"No, that cannot be," he said simply. "And for what reasons? First, all my merit would be lost, and I am not immortal. Second, my wicked deed would inevitably become known to the public. And finally, when you were separated from your wife, you would burn with the fire of sorrow—a fire which would consume you as surely as flames consume dry grass. The action you suggest would cause distress in both this world and the next. Although the ignorant would accept your offer, the wise would refuse it because of these reasons."

Abhiparaga replied: "Do not fear, Your Majesty, that you will transgress the teachings of the Dharma. Does not the Dharma tell us to accept all gifts that are offered? Therefore you do me a wrong by rejecting mine. You are obstructing my practice of generosity. Nor should you fear damage to your reputation: This is an arrangement purely between the two of us. Nobody else need know of it! Further, this transaction is a favor to me, not a grief. What harm can come to me when my greatest satisfaction lies in serving my king? I beg of you, quietly go and indulge your love. No harm will come to me."

"Stop!" cried the king. "No more of that wicked reasoning! Your attachment to me prevents you from right understanding. Every gift does not need to be accepted. The man who would give his life for me is my true friend, dearer to me than any kin; therefore, I must also respect his wife. You do me wrong to entice me so."

"And would it be any less sinful if nobody else knew? To commit a wicked action unwitnessed, expecting to find happiness, is as foolish as to drink poison unseen, expecting to live. Both the pure-sighted gods and the holy ascetics among men never fail to witness everything."

"Further, I ask you this: Who can believe that you do not love her or that you will not despair as soon as you have given her up?"

Abhiparaga replied: "You are my master, lord. I am your slave, along with my wife and children. What law is broken if you act as you please toward your female slave? What matter if I should love her? In fact, for that very reason I desire to give her to you! He who gives something highly prized receives all he might wish for in this world and exceeding happiness in the next. Therefore, pray, take her."

But still the king refused. "Do not say so! It is impossible! I would rather throw myself on a sharp sword or into a blaze of angry flames than offend against the

Dharma. For I have always followed its teachings; truly the Dharma is the source of all glory."

"Very well," said Abhiparaga. "Since Your Majesty will not have her because she is my wife, I shall command her to be a whore. Available to anyone who craves her, she will be yours for the asking."

"Are you mad?" asked the king. "To abandon your guiltless wife would force me to punish you-it would also begin a chain of events full of grief and sadness for many lifetimes to come. You must stop this. Direct your mind to justice and purity."

Abhiparaga persisted: "Whatever the consequences, I shall gladly face them for your happiness, even though my actions violate the Dharma, draw censure upon me, and destroy my own happiness. No one in the world is more worthy than you to be worshipped, O most mighty ruler of the earth. Like a priest, pray help me to increase my merit-accept my wife as your offering."

The king replied: "I know it is your great affection for me that prompts you to promote my welfare without concern for right or wrong. But such love encourages me to prevent you all the more. Indifference to the censure of others cannot be condoned. Look here! Whoever neglects virtue, who ignores both the censure of this world and the consequences to be experienced in the next, wins distrust now and gives up hope for happiness later. One must never take pleasure in what is wrong. The advantages are trifling and uncertain, the harm great and unquestionable.

"Also consider that the virtuous abhor all pleasures procured at the expense of others. Standing on the ground of right action, I alone bear the cost of my private interests, hoping never to cause pain to anyone else."

Abhiparaga countered: "But where is the injustice? Moved by attachment to my lord, I wish to honor him. Every Shibi, from town or country, would join with me to ask: 'Where is the injustice in this deed? Where the harm?' Be pleased, therefore, to take her, Your Majesty."

"Clearly, you have my benefit in mind. But stop and think. Who knows the Dharma best, the whole of the Shibis, you, or your king?"

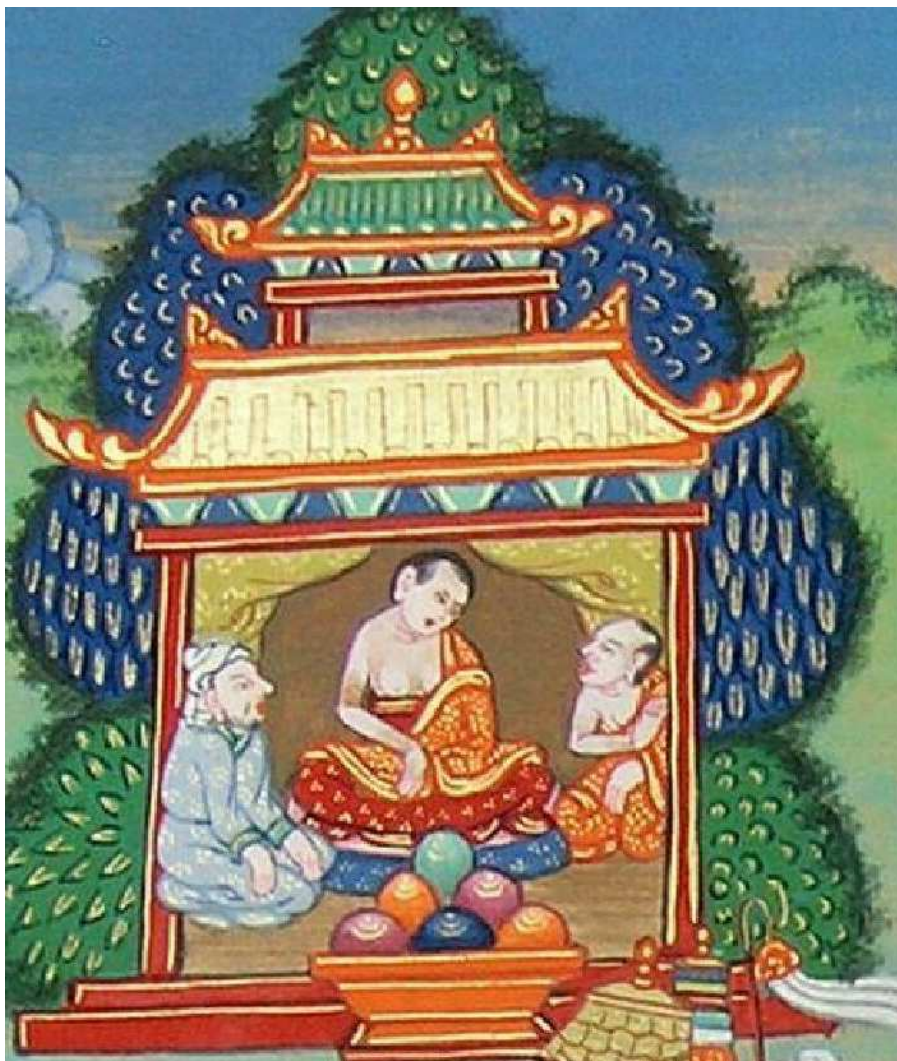
Hastily Abhiparaga answered: "In all matters, you, Your Majesty, are the most competent judge, equal to Brhaspati, the priest of the gods. Your assiduous study, your great regard for sacred lore, and the inherent wisdom of your mind are all unparalleled."

The king replied: "This being so, you should not attempt to mislead me. For remember, both the evil and the good of the people depend on the actions of their rulers. And because I am always thinking of the good of my subjects, I shall continue to love the path of the virtuous, in accord with my reputation. As cattle follow the leader of the herd in any direction, right or wrong, so will the people imitate their ruler without any scruples.

"Consider this as well. If I lack the power to rule myself, how could I lead my people, who long for my protection? Thus, in view of the Dharma and my spotless reputation, I can never allow myself to submit to my passion: I am the protector of my subjects, the leader of my herd."

Finally Abhiparaga, the king's official, bowed to the king, his hands folded in reverence. Appeased by the constancy of his king, he said: "Majesty! Your subjects are favored by destiny to have such a ruler, such a guardian king! Love of virtue so utterly disregarding of pleasure is seldom seen even in the groves of the ascetics. When Virtue is given as a name to one devoid of virtue, it has a harsh and grating sound, as if it were contempt instead of praise. But for you, O Great King, the name "Great" is a brilliant ornament. Yet why should I be astonished at your virtues, you who are as full of virtue as the sea is full of jewels?"

From this story one can see how the virtuous, even when sick with sorrow, because of their long and pure practice of the Dharma and their constancy, are ever disinclined to follow the path of the low-minded. Considering this, one ought to strive to practice the Dharma and to develop constancy.



13 - She Who Drives Men Mad

A Tale of Constancy



Born again as the king of the Shibi, the Bodhisattva ruled his subjects effectively, always keeping in mind the virtues of compassion, generosity, and righteousness.

One of the principal townsmen in the capitol city had a daughter of unmatched beauty. She was so exquisite that when men would see her, they would become entranced and infatuated, filled with desire to the point of insanity. Because of this, she became known as "She who drives men mad".

The father wasted no time in telling the king of his daughter. The Bodhisattva king sent a group of Brahmins who were well versed concerning the auspicious marks of women to go and determine if she would make a suitable wife. The Brahmins arrived at the home to be served dinner and immediately lost all control and became obsessed with the young maiden themselves. Upon leaving, they decided that such a woman was not fit for the king, for she was too beautiful for someone as pure as the king, and that her beauty would only cause him to be lost in desire. They returned to the palace and told the king that she indeed was beautiful, but was marked with inauspicious signs and naturally, the king decided not to take her as his wife.

Some time later, the king was on a tour throughout his kingdom and saw the woman. He was struck by her beauty and immediately fell in love. Upon inquiring who she was, he learned that it was the woman he had refused and that she had now been married to one of the king's own high officials, a man named Abhiparaga.

Abhiparaga noticed that his king seemed sad and when he discovered the source of his sorrows, he immediately offered the king his wife. After much debate, the Bodhisattva convinced Abhiparaga to retract the offer. He stated that even though he was in love, he could not carry out such a wicked action as taking one spouse away from another. He explained that the virtuous, even when sick with sorrow, can never stray from the path of right action.

Key Events in the Story

1. The Bodhisattva is King of the Shibi.
2. He falls in love with a married woman.
3. He maintains his virtue.



14 - Suparaga



When one dwells in the Dharma, the truth is enough to dispel destruction. What more could one say of the good that comes from observing the Dharma? Thus, one should follow the Teachings.

During one of his many lifetimes, the Bodhisattva was a very wise ship captain. Great Beings, because of their innate acuity and clarity of mind, invariably surpass any other great men in the world in whatever art or science they undertake. Thus it was that during his life as a helmsman, the Bodhisattva possessed all the extraordinary qualities one could imagine.

Knowing the course of celestial bodies, he always knew his exact location and was therefore never lost; knowing all the different types of prognostication, he was always in tune with the shifting pattern of events and therefore knew whatever was timely or untimely; by observing the color of the water, the composition of the shore, the shape of the rocks, the species of birds, fish, and other creatures, he could easily place himself in any sea. In addition, he was always vigilant and never dull-witted, and was able to endure great cold, heat, rain, and fatigue. Being always careful and observant, and so skilled he never deviated from course, he was in great demand among sea merchants to guide them to their destinations. And since his navigation was so very successful, he came to be known as Suparaga, 'Good Passage', after the seaport where he lived.

Even when he had reached old age, he was known to be a lucky and fortunate being, and sea traders anxious for safe passage would beseech him in the most respectful terms to captain their ships. Thus, one day, merchants from Bharukachehna, who traded with Gold Land, intent on a safe and prosperous voyage, stopped at the port of Suparaga to ask the Great Being to embark with them. Suparaga replied to them: "I am an old man. How much assistance do you think I can be? My mind wanders, my body is weak, and my eyesight is almost gone."

But the merchants persisted: "We do not care about your physical condition. Be assured we have no plans to ask you to work, nor will we put any task into your charge. We do not want you for your strength; we want you for your presence alone. The dust touched by your lotus-like feet will bring us luck and ensure our ship a safe course no matter what the danger."

And so, out of compassion, the Great Being, though old and ailing, boarded the vessel-and they set off, with all the merchants rejoicing, convinced that the voyage was bound to be successful.

Soon the ship lost sight of shore and found itself in the Realm of the Sea Serpents, that part of the Great Ocean haunted by strange fish-a sea which churned with surging waves buffeted by the whims of the screaming and crying wind. Precious stones lay in the hidden depths where nagas lived. On the surface, garlands of white foam glistened against a billowing sea of the most brilliant blue, shining with metallic luster as if it were the sky melted by the glowing heat of the sun's beams. The shore had long since disappeared; they had entered the open sea.

Near dusk, as the sun's rays began to lose their strength, without warning a fearful omen manifested. A great gale arose, lashing the waters forcefully, covering the surface with white foam from the billowing waves and disturbing the sea to its very depths. Shaken by the hurricane wind, the water rolled higher and higher as the winds rose until the ocean assumed the dreadful appearance of

mountains trembling before the apocalypse. Like many-headed hissing serpents obscuring the sun, bluish-black clouds swirled, their tongues of lightning crackling with a terrible thunder. As the sun set, the darkness took command, growing solid and dense, enveloping everything.

Attacked by sharp darts of pouring rain, the sea arose in a fury, and the poor ship trembled as if in fear, frightening its occupants to their very core. Each behaved according to his inherent qualities: Some, overcome, stood speechless with terror; some acted with courage, busily attempting to avert the danger; and some were deep in prayer.

For days the wind and sea ran high, and the vessel moved with the current. No land came in sight and no favorable sign came from the sea. The signs they did see were strange to them, and the merchants grew increasingly distraught, bedevilled by fear and despair. But Suparaga, the Bodhisattva, comforted them, saying: "For those who would cross the Great Ocean, such portentous turmoil is the rule. Why wonder at it and fall prey to fear and emotionality? Afflictions are never conquered by low spirits and dejection. Those clever enough to do what must be done can easily overcome all difficulties. Take courage!

"Come, shake off this gloom and dejection, and do what needs to be done, by whatever means. The wise, spurred on by firmness of mind, grasp success in all its glory."

The merchants, their spirits revived by the Great Being, looked down into the sea and saw beings like men arrayed in silver armor, diving up and down in the sea. Amazed by this phenomena, they ran to Suparaga. "We have never before seen anything like this in the ocean!" they cried. "Demon warriors wearing silver armor, with fierce looks and ugly, hoof-like noses, sport in the ocean, diving up and down!"

Suparaga replied: "There is no need to fear. These are no men, these are no demons, but fish. Still, they are a sign that we have been driven far from shore. This is the Sea of Hoofgarlands. You must try to turn back."

But the high-running sea and the gusting wind continued to push them farther in the wrong direction, and they could not alter their course. Before long, they found themselves approaching another sea, one shining with silver luster, bright with a mass of white froth. The merchants said to Suparaga: "What great sea is this, its waters veiled in foam like fine white linen? It seems covered with liquid moonbeams; it seems to show a laughing face."

Suparaga said: "This is difficult. We are driven too far. This is the sea called the Milk Ocean. We should go no further. Turn back if you can!"

But the merchants replied: "The ship goes too quickly; the winds are too strong. It is impossible even to slow down, much less change course. The current drives us too swiftly, and the wind blows contrary."

Then, having crossed that sea, they came to another, its rolling waves tinted with a golden splendor the color of flames. Filled with amazement, the merchants said to Suparaga: "Now the water appears like a huge, blazing fire! The waves are not blue, but seem tinged by the rising sun. What sea is this? Why is it this color?"

The Great Being did not think it advisable to reveal the reason for the ocean's hue, but said only: "The Sea of Firegarlands is its name. It would be wise indeed for us to turn back now."

But on and on they went, crossing that sea until the color of the water changed again. Like a field of ripe kusha grass, its waters were glowing with the radiance of topaz. Marvelling, again the merchants asked Suparaga: "What sea is this? Its waves are the color of ripe wheat, and when the waves break, the foam crowns the sea like a mantle of flowers."

Suparaga replied: "Alas! Make all effort, merchants, to turn back. It is not wise to go farther. This is the Sea of Grass. Its currents-like an elephant not heeding the goad-are difficult to master, and nothing good will come of it."

But they were unable to turn the ship, no matter how hard they struggled. And soon they were crossing into another sea, as green as the most brilliant emerald. The merchants said to Suparaga: "Now the sea has yet another appearance. Its waters are the color of emerald or aquamarine, and they shine like a beautiful meadow; the foam is as lovely as waterlilies. What sea is this?"

Hearing this, the Great Being heaved a long and deep sigh, his heart aching with knowledge of the calamity that was imminent. In a low voice he spoke: "We have gone too far. From here it will be hard to return. This is the Sea of Reeds at the end of the world."

When they heard these words, the poor merchants were plunged into despair. Minds lethargic, limbs without power, they sat in dull apathy and did nothing but sigh.

After crossing that sea, in the afternoon near twilight, when the sun seemed to be setting into the ocean, a fearsome and tremendous noise arose. The ear-splitting sound struck fear into their hearts. It sounded like the sea rising in anger, like bamboo groves crackling with fire, like thunderclaps. Jumping from their seats, they all stared in horror as they saw before them the immense mass of water falling down, as if into some enormous chasm. In utter terror, they ran to Suparaga, saying: "We hear a distant noise which is so loud it pierces our ears and strikes terror into our hearts it is as if the lord of the sea were angry, as if the entire ocean were falling into an awful abyss. What sea is this? What can be done?"

The Great Being, alarmed, cried out: "Alas! Alas! You have come to the dreadful place from which no one returns, the Mare's Mouth, the mouth of the lord of death!"

At this, the poor merchants were stunned by the fear of death. Realizing that all hope of life was lost, some wept; others moaned and cried aloud; some were unable to move; still others seemed out of their minds with fear. Some were humbly praying to the gods, some were praying to the Adityas or to the Rudras, others to Sagara, lord of the ocean. Others were muttering mantras, and still others were bowing down to Devi. Some again went to Suparaga and said: "You, who have the ability to help all beings, who have so often relieved those in distress, now is the time to use your power for action.

"We take refuge in you, for we are sorely distressed and without any protection. The wrathful waters are about to swallow us like a morsel of food. You cannot

abandon this poor crew, letting us perish in the rolling waters! The Great Ocean itself will obey your command. Please put a stop to its terrible rage!"

The Great Being, his heart almost bursting with compassion, comforted the poor merchants, saying: "I think I see a way to rescue us, but you must harness all your courage." The possibility that there was still some hope revived the merchants' confidence, and they became silent, fixing their attention on Suparaga.

The Bodhisattva threw his robe over one shoulder, knelt on the deck of the ship, and bowing down, paid heartfelt homage to the Tathagata. Then he said to the merchants: "You, honorable sea-traders, and you, sky and ocean dwelling gods, listen and be my witness. Since my first conscious deed, I cannot recall even one instance of ever having injured any living being. By the power of this act of truth, by the strength of my store of virtuous actions, may this ship turn safely around without falling into the Mare's Mouth of death."

And so great was the power of his truth, so great the splendor of his merit, that the current and the wind changed to the opposite direction, causing the vessel to return the way it came. Seeing the ship turn, the merchants were exultant with admiration and joy. They bowed to Suparaga with reverence and awe and told him that the ship was turning back. "Be calm," he said, "and hoist the sails quickly." And having regained their energy, the crew set to work at once.

And the ship, filled with the sound of her merry, laughing crew, her lovely white sails spread like wings, flew over the sea, a white swan in a pure and cloudless sky.

Now the ship was returning with great ease, favored by both the current and the wind, moving like a crystal chariot of the sky gods. As the dim glow of twilight turned to darkness, the constellations began to appear like ornaments in the heavens. Just then, at the moment when the reign of the night begins, Suparaga spoke to the merchants: "Now, traders, while crossing the Sea of Reeds and each succeeding sea, you must dredge up sand and stones from the bottom, storing as much as your ship can hold, so that in the future her sides will be firm against any storm ... not to mention the profit such auspicious gravel will bring."

The gods, out of affection and veneration for Suparaga, showed the merchants where to cast their nets, and the merchants loaded their ship with what they thought was sand and stones. But when they reached their port at daybreak, they found their ship filled with treasure-silver, gold, sapphires, and beryl. And having at last arrived in their own country, they were filled with joy and praised their savior.

This story demonstrates how when one dwells in the Dharma, even speaking the truth is sufficient to dispel calamity. What better demonstration of the good results of practicing the Dharma? Considering this, strive to practice! This story also shows the great advantage of having virtuous friends. As the saying goes: "Those who depend on virtuous friends attain happiness."

14 - Suparaga

Depending on the virtuous as friends



In one of his many lifetimes, the bodhisattva became a great ships captain. He had extensive knowledge of the constellations so he was never lost. He was known as Suparaga, meaning "Good Passage".

Even as an old man in retirement, a group of merchants still wanted him to captain their vessel. Out of compassion he agreed, and as they set off they rejoiced, trusting that their journey would be successful. Yet on the first night, after they had lost sight of the shore and began to travel into a deeper part of the ocean inhabited by strange sea creatures, they ran into a terrible storm. They were not able to control the ship in the fierce winds.

No matter how much they struggled, they were unable to maintain their course. They were blown through many seas. They passed through the Sea of the Hoof Garlands, the Milk Ocean, the Sea of Fire Garlands, the Sea of Grass, and eventually the Sea of Reeds at the end of the world. Suparaga had been warning them to turn back the whole time but no matter how much they tried, the wind was too strong.

After passing through the Sea of Reeds they heard a tremendous noise. It was like the sound of thunder. They looked ahead and saw the ocean falling into a seemingly infinite chasm, stretching to the horizon in both directions. They still

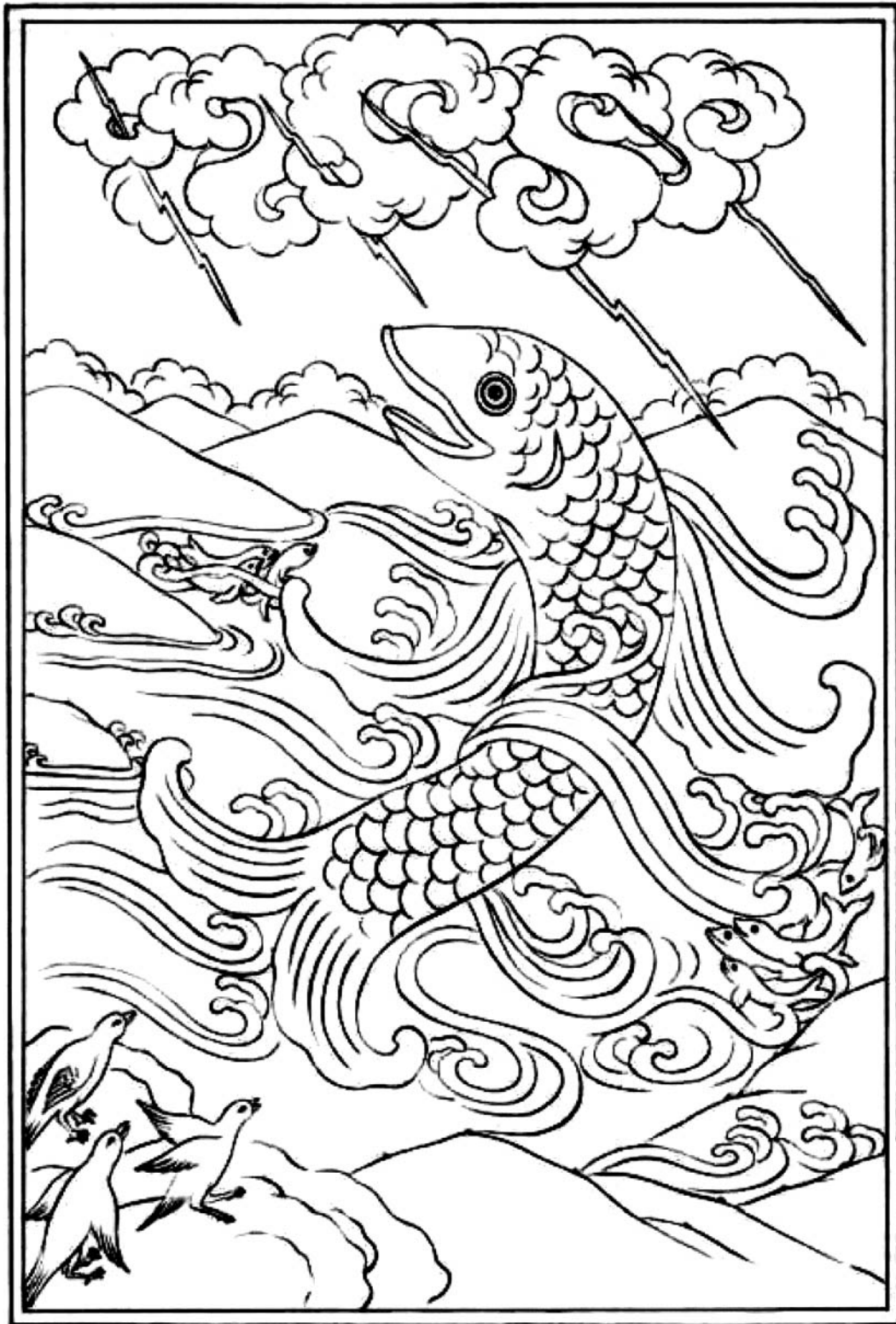
could not turn the boat around. They were doomed. Suparaga looked sadly at the men as he explained that they had reached the end of the world known as the Mare's Mouth, the mouth of the lord of death, the place where no one returns. The merchants began to cry and wail, begging various gods for aid as they continued on towards the deep abyss. At that point, Suparaga told the men to harness their courage and then bowed down, proclaiming to the men as well as the sky and ocean gods that he had never harmed a single being. He then asked the gods, by the power of his virtue, to turn the ship around and not let them fall into the Mare's Mouth. So great was the power of his truth that the current and winds immediately changed direction. The sky began to clear.

The ship moved smoothly across the seas. The gods told the merchants to lower their nets at a certain location and when they pulled them back up they saw that they had been filled with treasure, silver, gold, sapphires, and beryl. They reached their destination safely.

Key Events in the Story

1. Suparaga is a famous ship captain.
2. Ship gets blown off course into danger.
3. The Bodhisattva proclaims his virtue and they are saved.

15 - The Fish



If those who practice good conduct successfully realize virtuous ideals in this life-how much more will they be able to realize virtuous ideals in the next! Therefore strive for pure conduct.

Once the Bodhisattva was born as king of all the fishes that lived in a certain large lake—a lake with lovely waters adorned by waterlilies and red lotuses, by lotuses of white and blue, its surface sprinkled with the blossoms of neighboring trees. This was a lake much favored by swans and ducks and geese.

By long and sustained practice, good or wicked actions become inherent in one's nature to such a degree that in future existences they are performed without effort, as if in a dream. Thus it was that the Bodhisattva was intent on acting solely for the good of others, even in his existence as a fish.

The Great Being cared for his fellow fish as if they were his own offspring, ministering to their every need with gifts, the kindest of words, and the like. Through skillful means he gradually restrained them from desiring to harm each other, and so they gave up their cruel manner of feeding. In time, a mutual affection even developed among the fishes. He taught them the way of the Dharma, and under his protection the fishes came to know great prosperity and freedom from calamity, much as does a town whose magistrate follows the path of right action.

But because of bad luck and the general misfortune of beings, and because of the neglect of the gods in charge of rain, it happened that Parganya, the rain god, failed to dispense the proper quota of rain. Clear rain, tinged with gold by the flowers of the kadamba trees, no longer fell to replenish the lake.

With the onslaught of summer, the Sun burned ever more intensely; as if lazy and weary, it drank from the lake day after day, as did the Earth, heated by those rays, and the dry Wind, searching for coolness. As if to allay their wrath and fever, they all drank from the water until at last the lake was left a stagnant pond.

Now crowds of birds haunted the lake's dry borders, and even troops of crows appeared, all casting greedy eyes on the gasping fish, who could scarcely move in the murky water. The great distress afflicting his charges moved the heart of the Bodhisattva, and he thought:

"Alas, poor fishes! What a calamity has come to pass! The water is decreasing day by day as if racing to die before us, and still no clouds appear. We cannot escape, for who would take us elsewhere? Meanwhile our enemies, eager and menacing, throng the shore. As soon as the lake dries up, they will devour the prostrate fishes before my very eyes. But what can I do?"

Considering long and hard, the Great Being saw only one hope for relief: the blessings of the truth, plain and simple. Heaving a deep sigh of grief and compassion, he gazed up at the sky and spoke these words:

"I do not remember ever having harmed a single living being—not ever, not even when I was in great distress. By the power of this unassailable Truth, may the king of the gods fill the lake with the water of his rains."

As soon as those words were uttered, prompted by the power of the blessings of the Truth, by the store of the Bodhisattva's merit, and by the favor of the gods, nagas, and yakshas, who together exercised all their might, rainclouds suddenly converged from all parts of the sky, as timely as they were untimely. Hanging low, adorned by flashes of lightning, rumbling softly and deeply, the enormous dark blue thunderheads spread across the sky as if reaching out to embrace each other—until, like shadows of mountains mirrored in the heavens, they met the horizon on all sides. At the sound of the thunder, peacocks screeched in

delight and danced about as if to praise the storm. The clouds themselves seemed to rejoice, rumbling with laughter and giving forth great flashes of light.

Then the clouds let loose streams of rain-pearls. At once the swirling dust settled, and the strong, fresh smell of renewal was carried everywhere by the wind. The summer sun, which only a moment before had been at the height of its power, was now hidden from view, and rivulets flecked with foam rushed down from the mountains to fill the lake. Gold and yellow lightning brightened the firmament again and again, dancing to the drums of the clouds.

In great confusion the crows and other birds of prey flapped away, as currents of water flowed down the mountains, bringing new hope and joy to the schools of fishes. But the Bodhisattva, though heartened, continued to speak over and over again to Parganya the rain god, lest the rains should suddenly cease: "Roar, Parganya!" he cried. "Roar deeply and loudly! Dispel the raucous joy of crows! Pour down your splashing waters sparkling like jewels in the flaming brilliance of lightning!"

Hearing this cry, Shakra, Lord of the Gods, was much astonished. He appeared in person before the Bodhisattva and said: "O Mighty Lord of Fishes, it is through the power of your undeniable Truth that these clouds-like waterpots tipped upside down-have released their burden to the lovely sound of thunder. I would be much to blame were I not to approve the actions of beings such as yourself, who are intent on acting for the benefit of the world.

"Do not be anxious any more! I am the friend of the virtuous, whatever their tasks, and I hereby swear that this region, realm of your great virtue, shall henceforth never again be visited by drought."

After praising the fish in the kindest of words, Shakra vanished on that very spot. And the lake never again went dry.

From this story one can see how those who practice good conduct will be successful and thrive even in this world-and much more so in the next. One can also see how important it is to strive for complete purity of conduct.



15 - The Fish

The Rewards of Virtue



Through long and sustained practice, good or bad actions become inherent in one's nature to such a degree that in future lives they are performed without effort, as if in a dream. So even as a fish, the bodhisattva acted solely for the good of others. He cared for his fellow fish like they were his own offspring.



Due to an oversight by the gods charged with the dispersion of rain the lake in which the fish lived began to dry up. Flocks of birds circled the lake preying on the fish.



Out of concern and compassion for his fellow fish, the bodhisattva looked up to the sky in supplication to the gods, and proclaimed that he had never harmed a single being. The gods, hearing the true words of the virtuous fish, immediately created rain clouds. The birds of prey flew away. Drawing the attention of Shakra, the lords gods then appeared and explained that due to the tremendous virtue of the bodhisattva fish, he would protect them from drought henceforth.

Key Events in the Story

1. A fish in a lake.
2. The lake dries up and birds of prey swarm.
3. Gods make rain.

16 - The Baby Quail



Not even fire can destroy the power of speech purified by truth; knowing this, who would not always endeavor to speak the truth?

Once the Bodhisattva lived in a forest as a baby quail. Together with his many brothers, he lived in a nest built with great care by his parents on a vine in the middle of a thicket, firmly protected by a strong covering of grass. Having emerged from the egg only a few days before, his wings were not yet developed, and in his small, weak body his tender limbs were barely discernible.

Yet even in such a life, the Bodhisattva had not lost his awareness of the Dharma, and refused to feed on any of the living beings brought by his mother and father. Instead he sustained himself on the vegetable food they gathered, such as grass seeds, figs, and the like.

Nourishment so coarse and insufficient did not help his wings develop, nor his body to grow strong, so he remained weak and immature, while the other young quail, who ate anything given them, became strong and fully fledged. Such, indeed, is the way of the world: Those who avoid deciding what is truly right eat everything and thrive, while those who desire to live in accord with righteousness eat only certain foods, and endure hardships. As the Bhagavat has said: The shameless lead happy lives. It has also been said in the scriptures that the life of the brazen crow, bold and impetuous, is easy, though mired in wickedness. The modest who strive after purity, the humble who aim to be aware-these lead more difficult lives.

Now it happened that one day an enormous conflagration erupted in the forest not far from the quails' nest. First there was an awesome noise, then clouds of billowing smoke, and finally, moving tongues of flame shot forth in all directions, destroying groves and thickets. The poor forest animals were terrified.

Excited by the whirling wind, the fire danced and leapt, stretching its darting arms every which way, and shaking its dishevelled hair of smoke. Crackling and cackling, it stole the courage and strength of all in its path. Swiftly it jumped as if in anger on the grasses-which seemed to take flight before the roaring wind; but glittering sparks covered the clumps and blades of grass, and they were instantly consumed. The forest itself appeared to shriek with pain as crowds of birds took flight and beasts raced by trying to escape the thick, dark smoke.

Urged on by the violent winds, the flames followed the grasses and shrubs, and the blaze came closer and closer to the nest. The young quail, screeching wildly in confusion and fear, all flew up, every bird for himself, with no concern for one another. Only the Bodhisattva, whose body was so weak and wings so unformed, made no such effort. He knew his own strengths and was not disturbed.

As the impetuous fire approached and was about to seize the nest, he spoke calmly: "My feet are not strong enough to deserve their name, my wings are unable to fly. My parents you have put to flight. I have nothing worth offering a guest such as you. Therefore, fire, turn back!"

No sooner had the Great Being uttered these words, hallowed by Truth, than the fire subsided. Though fanned by winds, though raging in the underbrush, it stopped of its own accord, as if blocked by a swollen river.

To this day, any forest fire reaching that famous spot in the Himalayas, however high its flames, however strong the wind, will abate and lose its force like the most ferocious serpent when charmed by a spell.

The sea can no more transgress its boundaries, or the virtuous ignore the Dharma taught by the Muni, than can fire defy the Truth. Knowing this, the wise never abandon their devotion to true speech.

From this story, then, one can see how words purified by Truth cannot be overcome even by fire. And with this in view, one realizes the importance of speaking the truth. This story is also relevant when praising the qualities of the Tathagata.

16 - The Baby Quail

The Power of Honesty.



In a forest in the Himalayas the Bodhisattva was born as a baby quail. Together with his many brothers and sisters, he lived in a nest built with great care by his parents on a branch in the midst of a dense thicket. Being only a few days old, his wings had not yet developed and the limbs of his tiny body were barely discernable.

Yet even as a simple baby bird, the Bodhisattva had not lost his awareness of right and wrong. Unlike his brothers and sisters, he refused to feed on any of the living creatures brought by the mother and father birds. He would only eat from the small amounts of vegetable food they would supply him with, which was nothing more than grass seed and twigs. Insufficient and coarse, such poor

nourishment did not help his wings develop or his body to grow, so he remained weak and small as the other birds grew strong. Such is the way of the world for many, for many who practice righteousness are often only rewarded with hardship while those who choose to overlook right action often thrive. As the Enlightened Ones have said: the shameless lead happy lives



One day an enormous fire erupted in the forest not far from the quails nest. The fire rapidly spread throughout the dry thicket and all the forest animals fled in fear. Instantly, the family of quail took off in flight, each fending for themselves, except for the Bodhisattva who did not have the strength to leave the nest. The Bodhisattva quail remained calm and undisturbed.

As the fire quickly approached and was about to engulf the nest, the Bodhisattva, as a quail, calmly spoke to the fire with the words, "my feet are not strong enough to deserve their name, my wings are unable to fly. My parents you have put to flight, I have nothing worth offering a guest such as you. Therefore, fire, turn back!"

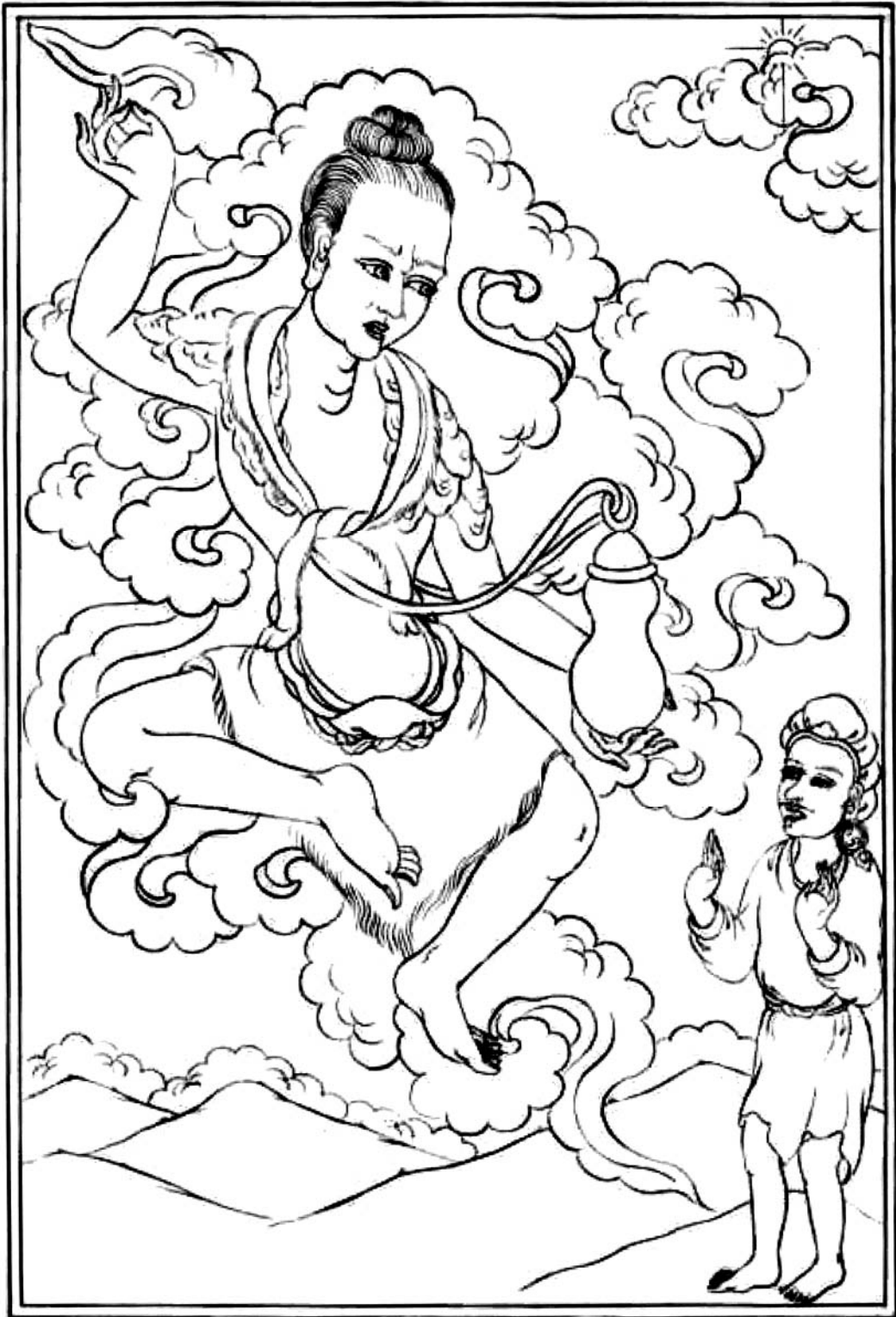
Because these words were true and honest, as soon as the bodhisattva uttered them, the fire subsided. Even though it was fanned by fierce winds and raging in the underbrush below, the fire stopped, as if charmed by a spell.

To this day in the Himalayas, it is believed that any forest fire that reaches that famous spot in the mountain forest, however high its flames and however strong the wind, will lose its force. It is said that the sea can no more transgress its boundaries, or the virtuous ignore what is right, than can fire defy the truth. Because of this, it is taught that the wise should never abandon their devotion to true speech.

Key Events in the Story

1. A quail lives in the forest.
2. The weak quail turns back a fire.
3. The power of honest words.

17 - The Jar



Drink is the source of many ills. Knowing this, the virtuous attempt to influence others against drinking even more so do they deter themselves.

Once the Bodhisattva manifested as Shakra, Lord of the Gods. Compassion having purified his mind, every one of his actions was directed toward fostering the happiness and good of others, through deeds of giving, morality, and self restraint. Although he deeply enjoyed all the sensual pleasures which were due the gods, not once did he relax his exertions for the benefit of the world.

As a rule, those who drink deeply of the strong liquor of glory lose their alertness and forget even their own interests. They are like those gone mad. Shakra, however, did not let the intoxication of power go to his head. On the contrary, his interest in the welfare of all others increased-for knowing his own nature well, he never forgot the interests of others. And his love for all beings was so great that he considered even the most miserable creature a kinsman.

One day, as the Great Being was casting his eyes upon humanity, his gaze, deep and strong like his nature, full of love and compassion, focused on a king named Sarvamitra, 'Friend of All'. This king, by keeping company with nonvirtuous folk, had developed an attachment to strong liquor, in which he indulged both with various citizens and with his retinue. Realizing that this king saw nothing wrong with drinking, the Great Being reflected with compassion: "What a great misery afflicts this people! Alas! A sweet delight at first, drinking leads to darkness and great destruction. It is a twisted path that looks enticing, but leads far from enlightenment; those who follow the lure of liquor never recognize the evils they embrace. But what can I do?"

After pondering deeply, Shakra soon saw what action to take. "Why, it is clear. It is the nature of people to imitate the foremost among them. The king, therefore, is the person to be cured, since it is from him that all the good and evil of his people flows forth."

And so the Great Being took the shape of a majestic brahman. Shining like pure gold, he nonetheless affected a stern demeanor, his hair matted and twisted, his body covered with the ascetic's austere bark-garment and deerskin.

While King Sarvamitra sat with his friends arguing the virtues of this or that liquor, Shakra appeared before them, standing in mid-air, ajar of moderate size hanging from his left side. Filled with surprise and veneration, the assembly rose from their seats and folded their palms with respect.

With a deep voice rumbling like a giant thundercloud, Shakra sang:

"Look at this vessel filled to the brim,
flowers laughing around its neck!
Hand engraved with splendid trim!
Who will buy this tempting gem?"

"This beautiful jar, wreathed with lovely flowers-how proudly it wears its graceful foliage. Come! Which of you wishes to buy it?"

Astonished at such an apparition, the king fixed his eyes on the brahman with reverence. Raising his joined palms, he replied: "You appear as bright as the sun, as graceful as the moon-yet like a great Muni. What name are you known by in this world? You manifest such disparate qualities that we are uncertain."

Shakra replied: "Just buy this jug. Afterwards you will know me. Buy, if you are not afraid of the sufferings in the next world, or the calamities still to come in this."

The king replied: "I have never before heard anything sold in such a way. Ordinarily merchants praise the value of their wares, all the while concealing their faults. Your way becomes you, for holy beings abhor falsehood. They say the virtuous never forsake the truth, even in distress.

"Tell us, then, Eminent One, what is in your jar? And what would a mighty being like yourself desire in return?"

Shakra replied: "Listen carefully, Mighty Sovereign. This jar does not hold water—not rainwater from the clouds nor water drawn from holy streams. It holds no fragrant honey gathered from the filaments of flowers; no clarified butter; not even milk the color of moonbeams that open kumuda flowers on cloudless nights. No, this jar is filled to the brim with pure mischief.

"And now, if you please, I will list the virtues of this drink:

"If you drink from this jug
all self-control will leave you.
Memory will forsake you,
and you will stumble even on smooth ground.
Confused and dull-witted, you will not care
if what you eat is edible or not—
such is the liquid held in this jug.
Pray buy this foulest of jars!

"Take leave of your senses, and act without heed!
Be like an animal, thoughtlessly rambling,
while your enemies laugh as you dance in their midst,
dancing to the drum-beat of your own senseless speech.
Please buy this jug! It is devoid of all good!

"When they drink from this jug,
even the bashful lose all decorum—
and throw off their clothes to prance in the streets.
Such is the liquor contained in this jar,
and now it is offered to you!
Drink and lie senseless, covered with vomit,
dogs brazenly licking your face.
What pleasure to buy what is found in this jar!

"Drink and drink madness held in this jar!
Beat your parents unto death, and kill the Lord of Wealth!
Pour your life down the drain, drink your mind away!
Like the brothers Andhakas and Vrishnayas,
take to each other with clubs.
Such is the madness found in this jug.

"If you desire what is held in this jar,

you will lose your position—
your dignity gone, you will lose your good name.
Your wealth and your home lost, your family in ruin—
in this jar is dissolution for sale!
Weeping and laughing with sudden abandon
eyes heavy and dull as if demons possessed one,
reduced to an object of utter contempt—
your muddled mind is found in this jug!

"Drink lays waste the minds of the aged;
it weakens the wish to do good for oneself,
Clear thinking forgotten, rash actions then follow.
Here in this vessel is all that and more!

"Because of this liquor the old gods grew careless,
and were shorn of their glory by the king of the gods—
and drowned in the ocean while seeking relief.
Such is the havoc wreaked by this jar!

"Speaking falsehood as if it were truth,
losing all sense of the right and the wrong of it
you knowingly do what you know shouldn't be done.
Here in this vessel are curses incarnate!
The mother of sin, and of folly and pain,
the source of all evil, the path of all madness
here in this jar is dreadful darkness of mind!
"I offer this purchase for the great king to buy!
Let him lose all his senses and kill the ascetics
without thought for the future—
and kill his own parents as well!

"O Lord of Men, known as a god in this world, such is this liquor. Let whoever is no friend of virtue buy it here.

"Whoever depends on this substance will grow accustomed to wrongdoing. He will fall headlong into hell, or into the state of animal or preta. Who then would even look at this jar?

"Even drinking a little has its effect on the path of existence, by slowly destroying good conduct and understanding, pointing one to the state of a beast or a specter, or to the doors of hell, there to burn in blazing fire.

"In short, drinking deadens good conduct, kills good reputation, banishes shame, and defiles the mind. O King, knowing all this, how can you allow yourself to drink?"

These powerful words and strong arguments persuaded the king of the destructiveness of liquor. Casting off all desire to drink, the king said to Shakra:

"You have affected me as surely as a loving father affects his son, or as a teacher moves his devoted pupil. You teach as if you were a Muni who knows the proper way. Your kindness has brought me great benefit; pray then accept from me something in return.

"I will give you five villages, one hundred slaves, five hundred cows, and ten chariots drawn by the finest horses: This and anything else you may wish is your due as my teacher. Whatever else you may ask for henceforth, Your Reverence, please accept as my gift."

Shakra replied: "I do not want villages, I do not need slaves. Know me, O King, to be the Lord of the Gods. And know further: The speaker of wholesome words desires nothing but acceptance of the teachings-and their practice-for this way alone leads to glory and renown, and after death to bliss. Therefore, throw off the habit of drinking. Hold fast to right action, and you will share in my heaven."

Having fulfilled his intention, Shakra disappeared on the spot. And the king and all his people refrained from drink forever after.

From this story one can see how much harm arises from drinking, and how the virtuous will attempt to turn others from this evil-and needless to say, themselves as well. This story is also pertinent when praising the qualities of the Tathagata and when showing how the Bhagavat benefitted beings in his previous existences.

17 - The Jar of Liquor

The Virtuous Turning Others from Evil

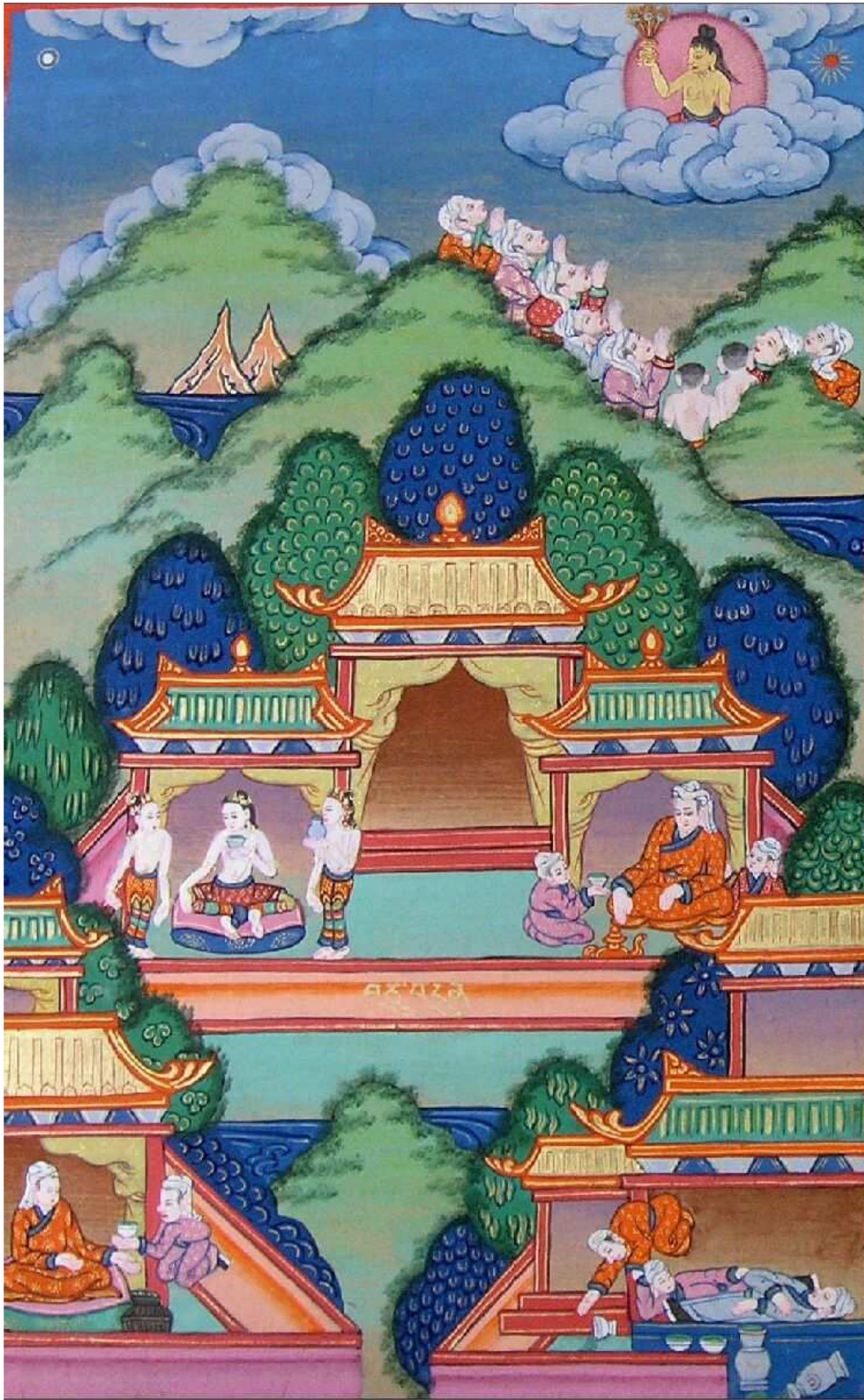
In this lifetime the Bodhisattva ruled the heavens as Shakra, the Lord of Gods, and throughout his entire reign he always worked for the benefit of the all beings.

One day, while gazing out upon the people of the world, he saw a king named Sarva who had a terrible affliction. This king, through having non-virtuous friends had developed a strong taste for liquor. Seeing that the king did not believe there to be anything wrong with drinking, Shakra decided to appear before the man as an apparition.

As the king was getting drunk with his friends and discussing the qualities of various liquors, Shakra manifested as a noble Brahman man, floating in the air above them. He had in his hands a jar and he told the king to buy it. When the king inquired what was in the jar, Shakra sang a woeful song about its contents. He described a liquid of pure mischief that turns whoever drinks it into a mindless fool. The entire time he was urging the king to buy it. The words of the song confused the king, making him fearful of the jar. When Shakra revealed that the liquid in the jar was nothing more than alcohol, he asked the king that how, now knowing the true nature of the substance, how he could continue to drink like he does. These powerful words persuaded the king to cease drinking entirely.

Key Events in the Story

1. A King that drinks too much
2. Shakra appears with jar of alcohol
3. The King quits drinking



18 - The Wealthy Prince



The life of a householder is beset with concerns that are in conflict with spiritual pursuits; those searching for the Truth gladly spurn such a life.

Once the Bodhisattva was born into a family of great wealth, renowned for its virtue and good conduct, and highly esteemed by the people. Like a refreshing well to those who led good lives, this family shared their store of treasures and grain with shramanas and brahmans, and opened their home to friends and kin. The poor and the needy were sustained by their gifts, while artisans received their patronage and protection. Even the king was pleased to secure their favor and hospitality.

As the Bodhisattva grew older, his scholarly interests led him to study all branches of the usual worldly sciences, as well as the more esoteric arts. His scholastic accomplishments, his physical beauty, and the worldly knowledge he displayed without infringing on the precepts of the Dharma won the hearts of his fellow citizens, who thought of him as kinsman. For not family ties alone, but the virtues or vices which bring esteem or scorn, are what make others friends or strangers.

Now it came about that the Great Being began to think only of the path of renunciation. Experience of the householder's life-with its painful struggle for gain-had shown him how inconsistent such a life was with spiritual practice. On the other hand, he understood well the happiness to be found in the groves of the ascetics. So gradually his mind grew detached from the pleasures of his home.

Upon the death of his father and mother, and while he was still in mourning, he left his splendid home and estate. Bestowing all he owned on friends and kin, on the poor, and on shramanas and brahmans, he left the city. He travelled through village and town, through kingdoms and capitals of kingdoms, until finally he settled in a wooded plateau near a small town. There he soon gained renown for his tranquillity, the quality of his contemplation, and his superior conduct.

His clear demeanor, a result of years of meditation practice, was natural and sincere. His language, though demonstrating his wisdom, was full of modesty, a delight to both mind and ear. Uninterested in any gain, he discoursed in a learned yet very gentle manner with his audience, skillfully tracing the boundary between what was to be accepted and what was to be rejected according to the Dharma.

In short, his behavior exemplified what is expected from the virtuous and homeless ascetic. And when people became aware that he had renounced high rank, they honored him all the more. Indeed, virtues invariably seem more appealing when found in persons of high birth, just as moonbeams grow lovelier when shining on a beautiful object.

After a time, a friend of his late father heard of his new dwelling place and came to visit, drawn by esteem for his virtue. After expressing the usual friendly concern for his health, the visitor told the ascetic of his love for his father, and there naturally ensued a long conversation, during which the friend said with much affection:

"Isn't it possible that Your Reverence acted too impulsively in renouncing the world at such an early age, ignoring both the needs of your family and the importance of continuing your line? What do you hope to gain here in the forest? You can lead a virtuous life in your home just as easily as in the wilderness.

"Why do you take on this difficult life, striving to incarnate Poverty itself? Here you must live off the alms of strangers who think of you as nothing but a beggar. Covered with rags, stripped of friends and relations, you hide here in the middle of the woods: Even your enemies' eyes would fill with tears to see you in this state.

"Return to your home; you do not need this misery. There you will be able to fulfill both spiritual and familial duties; there you can produce a fine son. After all, if the poor can find the comfort of a castle in their meager huts, how much more comfort can be found in a wealthy residence, resplendent with luxuries!"

But the Bodhisattva's mind had been purified by the sweet and comforting ambrosia of detachment. In his heart he knew too well the difference between the life of a householder and the life of an ascetic. And the encouragement to enjoy worldly pleasures only made him uneasy, as talk of a lavish meal affects those who are satiated.

"What you have just said was spoken out of sincere affection, and therefore does not truly distress me," he replied. "Nevertheless, I beg you not to use the word 'comfort' when speaking of one who lives in the world. The householder's state is like a prison, and whether one be rich or poor, such a life is full of pain. You see, the rich struggle to guard their wealth, and the poor struggle to gain it. No comfort exists for either rich or poor; only ill ensues!

"It is true that a householder can observe the precepts, but a task more difficult is hard to conceive. The householder's life is bound by concerns far removed from the Dharma, concerns which call for a great deal of attention. Consider this. How can the householder refrain from lying, from injuring others, from putting pressure on others? The householder is attached to happiness, and cannot but strive to secure it. Yet if you devote yourself to the Dharma, you must break away from the householder's concerns. So if you are attached to the home life, how can you achieve the Dharma?"

"The way of the Dharma has the taste of tranquility; the way of the householder tastes of busyness and distraction. The householder's life is in opposition to the Dharma—so who among those who truly care for themselves would stay in such a life? The householder is easily tempted to neglect the Dharma—he seeks pleasure by all possible means and soon feels no restraint. Loss of reputation, remorse, and misfortune are sure to follow. Surely the wise are right to avoid a state which seeks pleasure to the detriment of the Dharma. Moreover, I do not see how a householder's life brings joy, for the suffering caused by earning and guarding wealth never ends.

"The householder is always in danger of being killed or kidnapped or being subjected to other such terrors. Even a king is no more satisfied by his riches than the ocean is filled by the rains. How can there be happiness in a state where one continually longs for sense objects rather than for self-perfection? One could sooner soothe a wound by rubbing it with salt.

"Material prosperity makes the householder arrogant; noble birth makes him proud; strength makes him insolent. His anger is aroused by the smallest grief, his adversity brings deepest dejection. So when is there time for tranquility?"

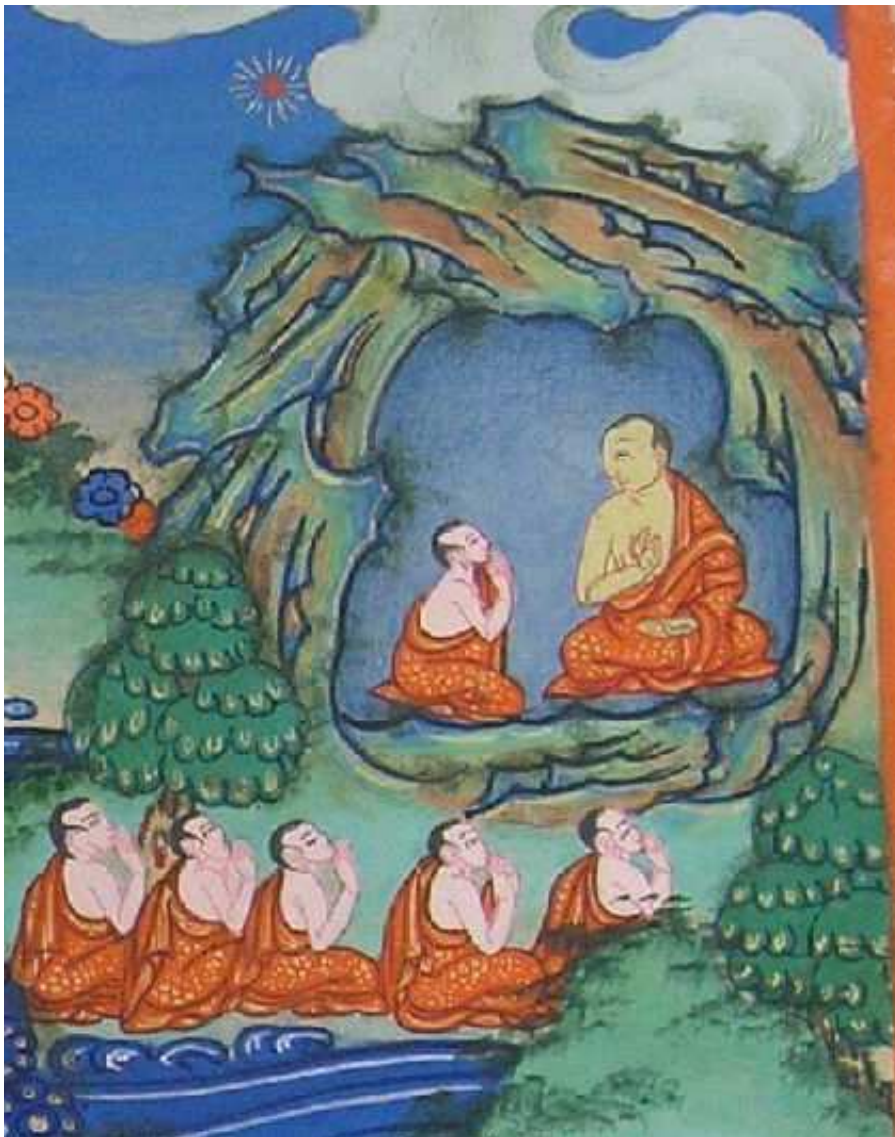
"Therefore, sir, do not speak against my determination. The house is home to much misery. Haunted by the serpents of arrogance, pride, and infatuation, it

destroys the possibility of happy tranquility. Who would choose to stay in a place so full of disturbances? In the forest, however, home of those who are content, the mind is calm and detached. Happiness such as this cannot be found even in Shakra's heaven.

"Though covered with rags and dependent on strangers, I delight to be here. How could I wish for happiness which is tainted by wrongdoing? It is like food tainted by poison. Here I have gained profound insight into the very heart of being."

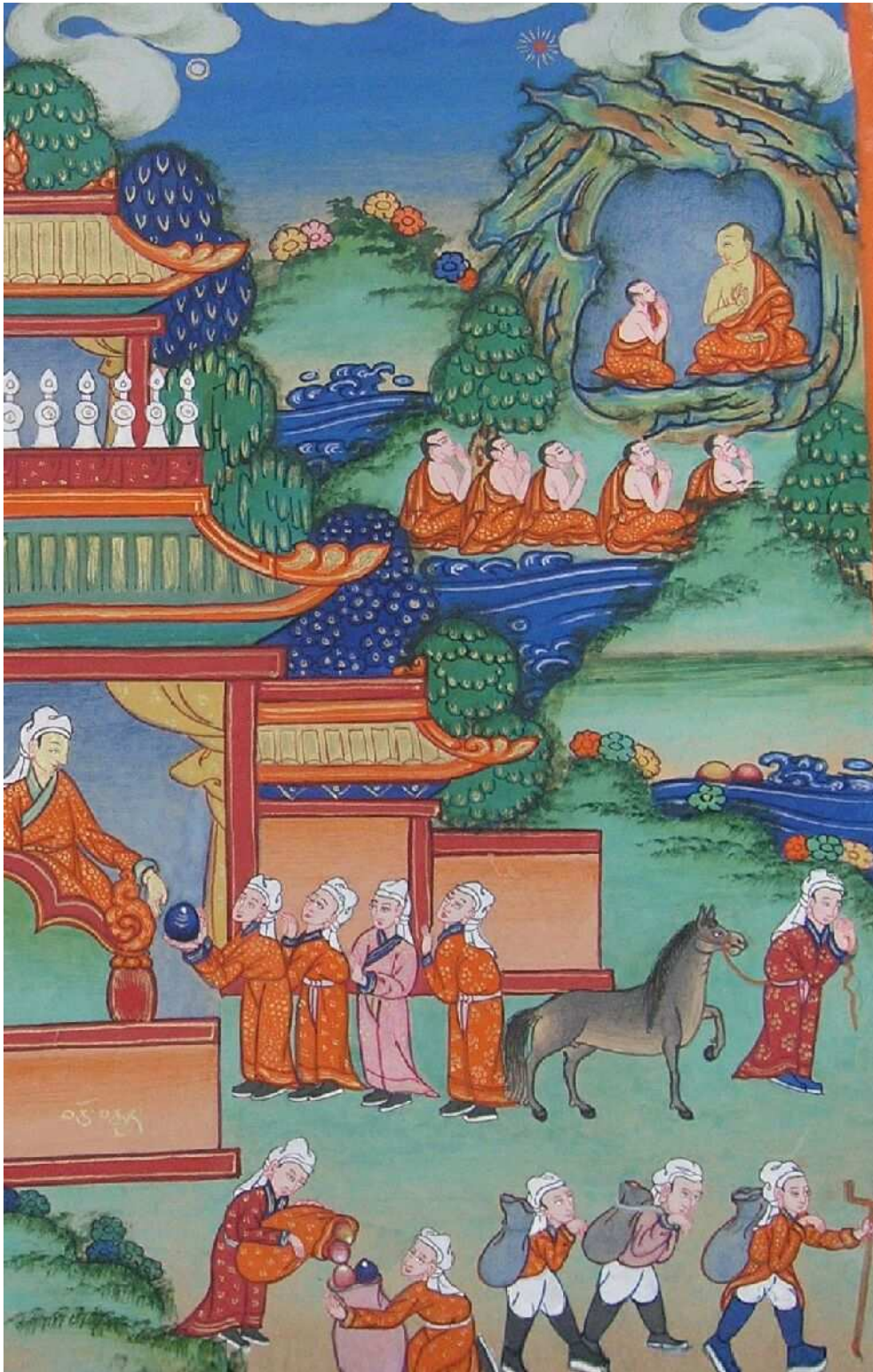
Such persuasive words did not fail to impress his father's friend. Showing respect for the Great Being, he humbly offered him what he could.

From this story one can see how those who truly wish to benefit themselves abandon the state of a householder, for they understand that such a state is in conflict with both the Dharma and tranquility. This account is also relevant when discussing the virtue of detachment to show how those who have once tasted the joy of detachment do not revert to worldly pleasures.



18 - The Wealthy Prince

The Virtue of Detachment from Worldly Concerns



In this lifetime, the Bodhisattva was born into a family of great wealth. Renowned for virtue and good conduct and esteemed by the people, his scholarly interests led him to study all the branches of the usual sciences, but as he got older he

began to study more esoteric arts. His studies eventually led him to think only of renunciation. After his parents died, he moved to a forest plateau near a small town to live the rest of his life as an ascetic.

As an ascetic, the Bodhisattva became known among all the villagers for his clear demeanor, modesty, and selflessness. Uninterested in any gain, he was a skillful teacher and was precise when explaining spiritual concepts to whomever asked. When people became aware that he once held a high rank, their admirations grew even more. Ultimately, his behavior was a perfect example of what is expected from a virtuous and homeless ascetic.

After a few years, a close friend of his late father heard of his new dwelling and went to visit. The old man expressed concern for the health and wellbeing of the Bodhisattva. The man stated that the Bodhisattva was ignoring the needs of his family as well as the importance of continuing his family line. The Bodhisattva did not succumb to the man's pleas for his return to civilization, stating that although it is possible for one living the life of a householder to live in accord with the Dharma, it is much more difficult. He explained that the householder's life is in conflict with tranquility and is bound by many concerns far removed from the Dharma. The Bodhisattva did not want to be engaged with the busyness and distraction of civilization. He thanked the old man for his concern but remained in the woods as an ascetic.

Key Events in the Story

1. Wealthy prince becomes an ascetic
2. Family friend pleads for him to return to family
3. The bodhisattva refuses

19 - The Lotus Roots



One who has learned to appreciate the happiness of detachment will turn away from worldly pleasures, avoiding them as if they were bringing him disgrace or harm.

Once the Bodhisattva was born to an illustrious family of brahmins renowned for their virtues and freedom from vice. He had six younger brothers whose bearing and traits were similar to his own, and a sister, all of whom imitated him in every way, out of affection and esteem.

Having studied the sacred Vedas and mastered the sciences of medicine, martial arts, music, and craftsmanship, he was highly regarded by all the people. He was a devoted son to his parents, respecting them as if they were gods; to his brothers he was like a spiritual teacher or a father, instructing them in all the sciences. He was skilled in worldly affairs and distinguished by his impeccable discipline and way of life.

When, in the course of time, his parents died, the loss deeply moved him. After the funeral ceremonies, and after some days spent in mourning, he assembled his brothers and spoke to them: "Although we wish to remain together for ever, death is sure to separate us from those we love. This is the way of the world, and it is a source of deep grief and pain. And so I wish to renounce the householder's life, so that death will not seize me while I am still attached to a worldly life. I intend to walk homeless on the road to Enlightenment.

"Having so decided, I wish to give you some parting advice: Our family has a good deal of wealth earned in an honest fashion; with it you can easily sustain yourselves. Dwell here as householders then, in a right and proper manner. Love and respect each other; take care to follow the moral precepts, and maintain the practice of virtue. Study the sacred texts and always be prepared to meet the wishes of your friends, your guests, and your kin. In short, apply yourselves to the Dharma. Always act in a disciplined manner and in harmony with one another; delight in study and in giving alms. Let restraint ornament your lives as householders. Your good reputations will increase, along with your virtues and wealth, bringing you happiness in this life and in your future lives as well."

But this talk of the householder's life and of separation greatly distressed his brothers. Overcome with grief, their faces wet with tears, they bowed respectfully and said: "Our father's death is still fresh in our minds. Pray do not inflict a new grief upon us. The misery of our parents' death is still with us; your decision is like salt rubbed into an open wound.

"If you are truly convinced that attachment to the householder's life is unwise, and the forest life is the only path to true happiness, why do you wish to depart alone, leaving us here without our protector?

"The life you choose will be ours as well. We, too, will renounce the world."

The Bodhisattva replied: "Those unaccustomed to detachment cannot but follow blindly after worldly desires; they see no difference between giving up the world and jumping off a cliff. Knowing this, I restrained myself from urging you to follow. But if it would truly please you, well then, let us leave home together!"

So all seven brothers, together with their sister, gave up their wealthy estate and enjoyments. Taking leave of weeping friends and relatives, they became homeless ascetics. And with them into the forest there went, out of affection, one of their friends and two of their servants, one male and one female.

They discovered a large lake in the forest, its water purest blue. By day the lake was alight with beauty: Masses of open lotus blossoms floated in the sparkling

water and swarms of bees hummed above the waves. By night the kumuda flowers opened their blossoms.

There on the shore they built huts out of palm fronds at some distance from each other—each hut solitary and hidden in the shadows of the trees. And there they lived, devoted to their vows and practices, their minds focused on meditation.

Every fifth day, they would go to the Bodhisattva, all together, to hear a discourse on the path to tranquillity and the subduing of the mind. Often the Bodhisattva would speak of the benefits of meditation and the destructive effect of desire, or explain the satisfaction resulting from detachment, warning against hypocrisy, idle talk, laziness, and the like. In this way he made a profound impression on his listeners.

Now their maid servant, full of respect and affection, continued to attend on them even in the forest. Every day she would pull edible lotus roots from the lake and divide them up equally on large lotus leaves. When the food had been properly prepared and placed on a clean place by the shore of the lake, she would knock two pieces of wood together to announce the meal, after which she would quietly withdraw.

The holy ones, after performing the usual prayers and libations, would walk to the lakeside one by one according to their age. Each in turn would take his share of the roots and then return to his hut, there to enjoy the meal. The rest of the day they spent in meditation. By this practice they avoided seeing each other at any time except when listening to the sermons.

Such extraordinary moral practice, such a refined way of behaving and living, and such love of detachment, brought them great renown.

When Shakra, Lord of the Gods, heard of this holy family, he went to their dwelling place for the express purpose of testing them. Seeing their disposition to meditation, their freedom from bad habits or cravings, and their remarkable calm, his high opinion of them increased, making him all the more intent on testing them. For so it is that those who are free from desire, those who dwell in the depth of the forest intent solely on calmness of mind, always cause reverence to arise in the hearts of the virtuous.

Invisible, Shakra watched while the serving girl gathered the lotus roots, which were white as the tusks of a young elephant. She then washed them and divided them equally onto emerald-green lotus leaves, decorating each leaf with flower petals and pollen. He watched as she announced the meal to the holy ascetics by knocking together pieces of wood, and watched as she withdrew. At that very moment, Shakra caused the first share to vanish from the lotus leaf. For when trouble arises and satisfaction disappears, the constancy of the virtuous is best measured.

When the Bodhisattva saw that the roots were missing from his leaf, their decoration of petals and pollen disturbed, he thought: "Someone has taken my share of food!" But feeling neither anger nor agitation, he returned to his hut as usual and began to meditate. He felt no need to inform the others of the matter, not wishing to distress them. And they, of course, believing that he had eaten his share, took their portions as usual and ate them alone in their huts, after which they returned to their meditations.

In the same manner Shakra concealed the Bodhisattva's portion on the second day, the third, the fourth, and the fifth. But the effect was always the same; the Great Being remained calm and completely untroubled. Indeed, to the virtuous, it is agitation of mind and not extinction of life that is the true death. Therefore, the virtuous remain forever undisturbed, even when in mortal danger.

On the afternoon of the fifth day, the ascetics went as usual to the hut of the Bodhisattva to hear his teaching. But on seeing him, they were astonished: His body was so lean, his cheeks so hollow, his eyes so sunken. The splendor of his face had faded, and his voice had lost its strength. Still, no matter how emaciated, he was as lovely as the crescent moon-for his virtues, wisdom, constancy, and tranquillity had not diminished.

After paying the Bodhisattva the usual homage, the family then asked him anxiously about the cause of his condition, and the Bodhisattva told them of the missing food. Unable to imagine any of them capable of such a deed, and quite alarmed at their brother's suffering, the ascetics spoke their sorrow, their eyes fixed on the ground in distress. But since Shakra's power had inhibited the very workings of their minds, they were unable to guess at the cause of the strange disappearances.

Then one brother, next eldest after the Bodhisattva, revealed both his alarm and his innocence by this extraordinary protestation: "May whoever took your lotus roots, O Brahman, win a house displaying signs of wealth and a wife who suits his heart's desire. And may he have many children and grandchildren!"

Said the second brother: "May whoever took your lotus roots, O foremost Brahman, be marked with a strong attachment to worldly pleasures. May he wear wreaths and garlands and fine perfumes, exquisite garments and jewelry; may he always be embraced by his affectionate children!"

Said the third brother: "May whoever took your lotus roots become a wealthy householder with a large family. May he delight in the home life without a thought for the time when he must pass from the world!"

Said the fourth brother: "May the greedy person who took your lotus roots rule over the entire earth, and be worshipped by princes humble as slaves who bow their trembling heads to him!"

Said the fifth: "May whoever took your lotus roots become a high priest in the court of a king! May he possess knowledge of powerful incantations, and be treated with the utmost distinction!"

Said the sixth: "May the person who was more eager to possess your lotus roots than your qualities become a famous teacher well-versed in the Vedas, enjoying the worship of many followers who view him as a great ascetic!"

Said the friend: "May the person who could not subdue his craving for your lotus roots be given a fine village by the king, a village filled with prosperous folk who have large stores of corn, wood, and water-and may he die without ever subduing his desires!"

Said the manservant: "May the one who destroyed his own interest for the sake of those lotus roots become the head of a village. May he have numerous friends, and be entertained by many women dancing and singing, and may he never be harmed by the king!"

Said the sister: "May whoever took your lotus roots become a woman of exceptional beauty, with figure and form unmatched in the world; may a king take her for his wife, and place her at the head of his harem of one thousand!"

Said the maidservant: "May the one who set her heart on gaining those lotus roots rather than on gaining the Dharma take great delight in eating sweetmeats alone and in the dark. May she disregard all virtuous things, and rejoice whenever she is presented with a dainty dish!"

Now three creatures of the forest had also come near to hear the sermon: a yaksha, an elephant, and a monkey. Overhearing the conversation, they were overcome with dismay and confusion. So the yaksha avowed his innocence with this solemn protestation:

"May whoever failed you for the sake of those lotus roots be in charge of a great monastery. May he be responsible for all the repairs for the town of Kakangala, and be obliged to construct one window each day!"

Said the elephant: "Most excellent Muni, may the one who took your lotus roots be dragged out of this lovely forest into the company of men. May he be fettered with six hundred solid chains, and suffer degrading pain from the goad of his driver."

Said the monkey: "May whoever was moved by greed to take your lotus roots wear a garland of cheap flowers and a tight tin collar around his neck! May he be beaten with a stick and forced to dance in front of a serpent! May he spend his days in the houses of men!"

Then, with persuasive and kind words, the Bodhisattva showed the depth of his dispassionate nature: "May the one who falsely said: 'They have disappeared', though he had them, win every pleasure of the world he has ever longed for, and die a householder. And may the same fate befall any who suspect another of such an action!"

Such extraordinary protestations, demonstrating their abhorrence of all worldly pleasures, greatly astonished Shakra, Lord of the Gods. Taking on his own brilliant shape, he approached the ascetics and said, as if with resentment:

"You ought not to speak in such a manner. Everyone in the world longs for happiness, some striving for it so intensely that they never sleep; for the sake of happiness people will undertake all manner of penance and toil. Yet you slander these enjoyments, calling them 'worldly pleasures'! How can you make such a judgment?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "Sensual enjoyments bring with them endless suffering, sir. Listen now, and I will tell you precisely why the Munis shun desire. People will undergo captivity and death, grief, fatigue, danger, and innumerable calamities, just to gain their desires. In order to gain what they desire, kings will eagerly oppress virtue, and fall into hell upon death.

"When friendships are suddenly broken; when wrong roads and unclean paths are travelled for the sake of expediency; when good reputations are lost and suffering arises it not always the result of desires?"

"Worldly pleasures tend to destroy everyone, the highest, the middling, and the lowest, both in this world and the next. Therefore, O Lord Shakra, in order to

benefit themselves, the rishis keep their distance from desires as if from angry serpents."

Pleased with the words of the ascetics, Shakra responded: "Well said!" and thereupon he confessed that he himself had committed the thefts. "High virtue can be tested only by trial; therefore, I hid the lotus roots. How fortunate the world is that such glory is proven by action! Here, take these lotus roots from me as proof of your constant and holy behavior."

With these words he handed the Bodhisattva the lotus roots. But the Great Being, with true dignity free from pride, scolded Shakra for his unbecoming and audacious behavior:

"We are no kin to you, nor are we your friends. We are neither actors nor buffoons. What then is your reason for coming here, O Lord of Gods, to play with rishis in this fashion?"

Swiftly Shakra shook off his divine appearance, his brilliant earrings, his diadem and his lightning bolts. Bowing with much respect, he spoke these words to the Bodhisattva:

"O Great Being, you who are free from all selfishness, please forgive my thoughtless actions as would a father or a teacher. It is not unusual for those whose eyes of wisdom are closed to offend against others, even their equals. Please pardon my offense, and pray do not close your heart to me." Having thus appeased the Bodhisattva, Shakra vanished on the spot.

From this story one can see how those who have learned to appreciate the happiness of solitude are adverse to worldly pleasures: They will turn from them as one turns from a disgrace or harm.

This Jataka was explained by the Bhagavat: "I was the eldest brother of that time. Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, Kashyapa, Purna, Aniruddha, and Ananda were the other brothers. Utpalavarna was the sister, and Kubgottara was the maid servant. Kitra the householder was the male servant, Satagiri the yaksha, Pariliya the elephant, Madhudatar the monkey, Kalodayin the Shakra of that time. Bear this Jataka well in mind."

19 - The Lotus Roots

A Tale of Understanding



After the death of their parents, a group of six brothers decided to become ascetics. Accompanied by their younger sister and two servants, they found a forest near a lake and began their individual solitary meditation. They each had their own hut built from palms and they would only meet every fifth day to hear the eldest brother teach. This eldest brother was the Bodhisattva.

They excelled in their meditative practice. They sustained themselves on nothing more than lotus roots. The servants would fetch the roots from the lake every morning and lay them out on large lotus leaves. Each ascetic would then one by one go and take their portion, so as to remain in solitude even when leaving their hut.

Shakra, the Lord of Gods, witnessed this family and became impressed with their dedication to the Dharma. To see if they were truly as free from desire and attachment as they seemed, he decided to test them. At every meal, he would secretly steal the Bodhisattva's portion of lotus roots. The Bodhisattva remained calm and completely untroubled and therefore said nothing, even as he began to starve. Then, after five days with no food, it came time for the groups meeting. The brothers saw the Bodhisattva was not well, with an emaciated body, hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes.

Instead of becoming angry and making accusations, one brother demonstrated true compassion and recited a prayer for whoever stole the roots. The other brothers did so as well and the sister and servants all followed their lead, reciting their own prayers for the anonymous thief. The Bodhisattva himself said a prayer. A yaksha spirit, an elephant, and a monkey all witnessed this.

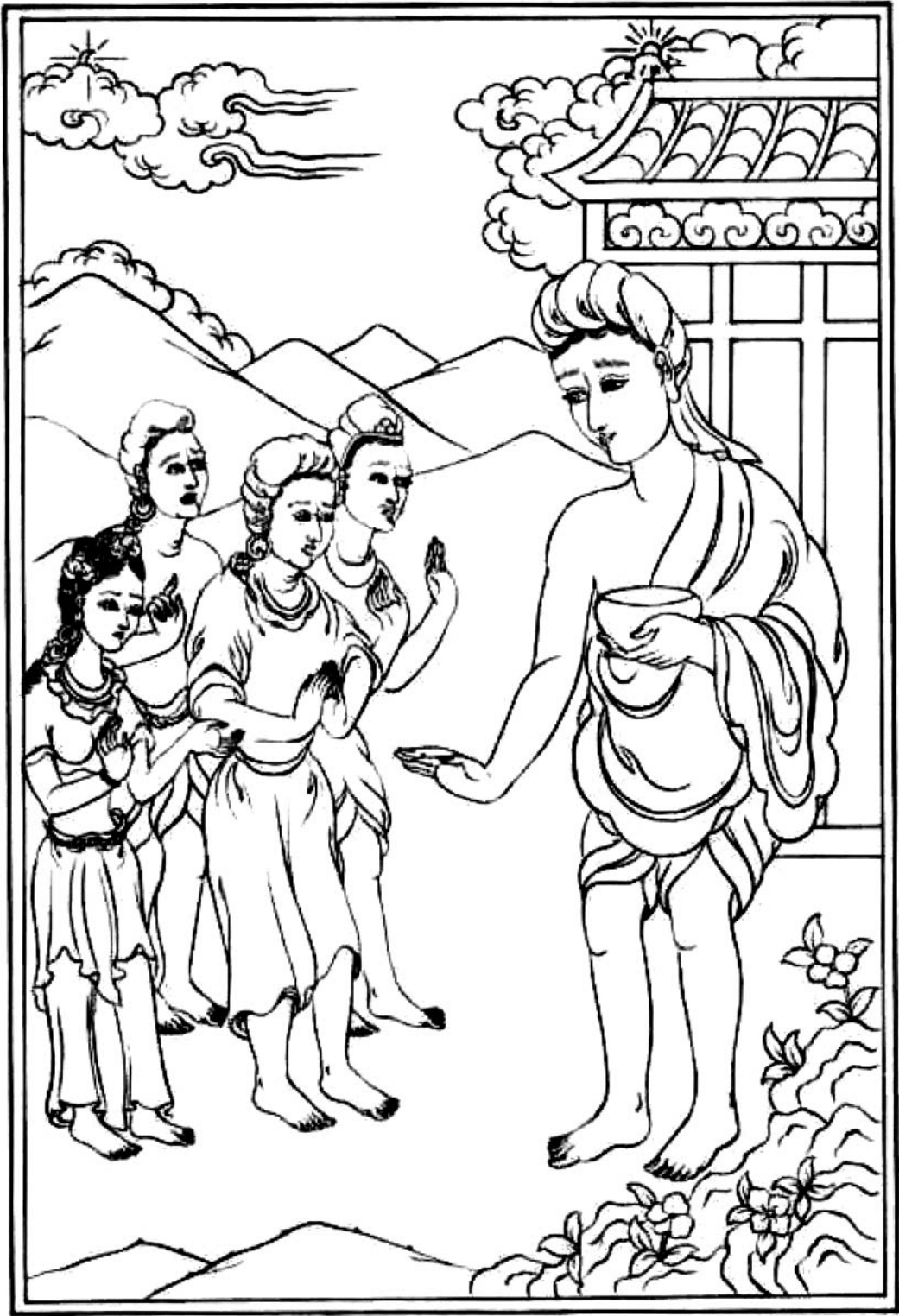
After watching with astonishment, Shakra manifested in his divine appearance and approached the ascetics and admitted he had taken the roots. Shakra stated that high virtue can only be tested by trial and that they had passed his test. Yet as Shakra returned the lotus roots the Bodhisattva scorned him, saying that they did not need his approval. Upon hearing this, Shakra was even more impressed, for they had conquered their desires to point where even praise from the Lord of Gods meant nothing to them. Shakra then shook off his divine appearance and bowed before the Bodhisattva. He then vanished.

It is said that the six brothers were all reborn as important students of Shakyamuni Buddha, Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, Kashyapa, Purna, Aniruddha, and Ananda. The sister was reborn as Utpalavarna and the servants as Kubgottara and Kitra. The Yaksha was reborn as Satagiri, the elephant as Pariliya, the monkey as Madhudatar, and Shakra, after his life as the Lord of Gods, as Kalodayin.

Key Events in the Story

1. The Bodhisattva lives on Lotus Roots
2. Shakra tests the Bodhisattva
3. The Bodhisattva doesn't care

20 - The Treasurer



Assumed to possess a virtue they lack, the virtuous are spurred on to attain it. Considering this, all should strive for virtue.

Once the Bodhisattva lived as a king's treasurer, renowned for his learning, his nobility, and his modest behavior. He had both lofty aspirations and a fine intellect, and a love for honesty in business as well as for the study of the many branches of science. These virtues gave his speech an eloquence for which he had become well-known. His compassion overflowed; through gifts of charity, he dispersed his wealth in all directions-it was no wonder he was considered the jewel of householders. The many virtues which ornamented his nature, a love of spiritual things and the like, caused the people to revere him above all others.

One day, when the Great Being had gone to the king's palace on business, his mother-in-law appeared at his door to visit her daughter. After the usual welcome and inquiries about each other's health, the mother, being alone with her daughter, plied her with questions: "And your husband, my dear?" she asked. "Does he love you? Does his work rob you of his time? Does he show you the proper attention? I do hope he never does anything to cause you grief?"

The daughter answered bashfully, in a soft voice and with downcast eyes. "Virtuous conduct such as his," she murmured, "would be hard to find in the greatest mendicant who has renounced the world."

The mother's hearing and understanding were impaired by age, so she did not quite catch all her daughter's words, spoken as they were in such a quiet tone. Hearing only: "mendicant who has renounced the world," she concluded that her son-in-law had in fact become one. Overcome by shock and grief, she burst into tears, wailing: "What kind of virtuous behavior is that? To heartlessly abandon his affectionate family? Is it virtuous conduct to throw off one's home? What interest could he possibly have in renunciation? How could someone so young and handsome, so vigorous and healthy, a great favorite with the king, feel drawn to the forest life?"

"How could he do such a thing? No one from our side of the family has done him wrong. Now, long before old age, before sickness has seized him, he suddenly takes it into his head to leave the enjoyments of his home! His wisdom and sense of responsibility have always been his ornaments-he has always shown great compassion for others. How could he be so thoughtless and unkind to his family?"

"He has always showed respect to the shramanas and brahmins and been generous to his friends, to his king, and to all the poor. So what does he seek in the forest that he cannot obtain in the world? He is endowed with wealth, purity, and morality, he is a friend of the Dharma, he lives according to the teachings. He has no bad habits to give up; he has great faith and belief in the Dharma, and his views never run counter to the Law. Alas! By loving the law too well, he violates its very spirit! How can he leave those who love him without the slightest hesitation; how can he abandon his chaste and devoted wife, the companion of his religious duties? What success can he hope to achieve on a path begun with such heartbreak?"

The Bodhisattva's childish wife, hearing her mother's piteous and sincere lament for a son-in-law who had renounced the world, grew alarmed. Shaken by this sudden assault of sorrow and grief, she totally forgot the origin of their conversation and thought: "My husband has forsaken the world, and my mother, on hearing the sad news, has come to comfort me." With this fixed in her mind,

she too began to cry and moan, reaching such a feverish pitch that with a loud sigh, she swooned dead away.

On hearing the disturbance, the other residents of the household, both family and attendants, burst into lamentations of their own. In quick succession, neighbors, friends, and other kin, clients and holy ones-in short, most of the town-gathered around the house, all concerned for their friend the treasurer. As he had always shared in their fortune both good and ill, the people, having learned such behavior from him, now came to show like sympathy.

Returning from the palace, the Bodhisattva, upon approaching his dwelling, heard the sounds of distress echoing from his house and saw the multitudes assembled there. Curious, he ordered his attendant to go on ahead and find out what had occurred. The servant returned shortly to tell him: "There is a rumor, I don't know from where, that Your Honor has given up your fine home to become a mendicant. News of this has caused everyone to gather here out of affection and concern."

The Great Being felt something like shame, his naturally pure heart alarmed by what seemed almost a reproof. "Oh!" he thought. "How they honor me, to think me worthy of such a life! If after being held in such high regard, I continued to cling to the home life, I would not be considered even a man. The people would look upon me as someone addicted to vice, a despiser of virtues, and I would lose any esteem they now have for me. Life would become unbearable.

"Therefore, in return for this honor bestowed upon me, I shall honor them by realizing their mistaken thought. I shall at once leave my home and all its potential for engendering the fettering passions, and devote myself to the forest groves."

Having made this decision, the Great Being immediately turned back to the palace and asked to see the king once more. After being admitted, and performing the usual salutations, he said to the king: "I wish to renounce the world, Your Majesty, and I beg you to grant me your permission."

Hearing this, the king was troubled. With deep affection he said: "Surely you must know that we hold you in deeper regard than any friend or kinsman! We would spare neither wealth, policy, nor power to relieve you from any grief

"Is it money you need? Take it. Is it some grievance that is causing you to suffer? Let me amend it. Or is it for some other reason you desire to withdraw to the forest, abandoning your relatives and friends, who humbly entreat you not to leave them?"

The Great Being answered his king with love and humility: "Who could undergo harm when under your protection? Who could weep for want of wealth? I go to the forest not out of sorrow, but for another reason altogether.

"Your Majesty, there is a rumor that I have taken the vows of a religious mendicant-in fact, a crowd is, this minute, mourning outside my house, wailing in sorrow. And now, being judged a person capable of such a life, I must pursue it. For this reason I wish to live alone in the forest."

The king replied: "Please do not leave on this account. Rumor is the result of unrestrained imagination; once set loose, it runs wild, free and unchecked. Your worth does not depend on public opinion-virtue is neither won nor lost by idle

gossip. They who take such gossip to heart are foolish; and more foolish still are they who act upon it."

The Bodhisattva replied: "Pray do not speak so, Your Majesty. A reputation must be lived up to. Consider: A reputation for holiness, no matter how obtained, is nothing to hide behind; in fact, those endowed with any real virtue must assume all its burdens. Then, if one's actions are seen to support that reputation, one's high repute increases all the more. But ignoring such an opportunity renders a man as dry as the driest well. If he does not act according to his reputation, the current of preconceptions will destroy his good renown. Therefore, I plan to renounce both family and property-they are the source of strife and trouble, to be avoided like the black hooded snakes when their heads are raised to strike. It does not become Your Majesty to oppose my decision.

"And please do not try to supply me with funds. I know you are accustomed to demonstrating your gratitude to loyal servants, yet what use would wealth be to a homeless mendicant, free of both passions and worldly goods?"

So speaking, the Great Being persuaded the king to give his consent, and set out immediately for the forest. But on the way he was met by his friends, relatives, and associates, who, shedding tears and embracing his feet, tried to dissuade him from leaving.

Some tried to block his way, hands respectfully folded; others with gentle force tried to turn him back toward home, embracing him and speaking sweet words. Some in their misguided affection were attempting to intimidate him, using various threats and words of blame; others spoke to him of his friends and family, trying to kindle some feelings of compassion. Some bombarded him with logical arguments based on the sacred texts, attempting to prove that the state of the householder is the holiest one. And others urged him to 'tie up loose ends first', not to go 'just yet' to the forest so dark, so dangerous, so unknown. Yet still others wondered out loud whether there was really anything very important to be found in the forest; and others expressed their doubts as to the truth of accumulating merit and the reward of a future life.

Looking on his weeping friends who were attempting-by any means at all-to turn him from his renunciation and a life in the forest, he thought: "It is the duty of friends to help one to live in the manner of the holy ones. A friend must point out the way, no matter how harsh it may seem. And so the joys of a forest life are usually extolled. But my friends fear the forest life as if it were some hideous evil; is this the way to act? It is appropriate to weep for the dead, for the near dead, for those fallen from virtue-but I only wish to live in the forest! Why all these tears? Why weep for one alive and well?"

"If they grieve at our separation, why don't they join me? If they prefer their homes over me, then why weep so wildly? If attachment to family prevents them from becoming ascetics, why didn't they use these arguments when as soldiers they marched to battle?"

"I have experienced the solidarity of their friendship in adversity, and I see their friendship embodied even now in their tears. Yet I do not see them follow me to the forest as they followed me to battle. Instead, they try to hinder my departure, their eyes full of tears, their heads bowed in reverence as if to a guru. If they truly loved me, they would follow me in the path of renunciation-rather than posturing

like actors. Anyone in distress, no matter how wicked, can find two or three friends to weep with him. But for the virtuous setting out for the forest, it is hard to find one single comrade.

"Behold the friends who once stood fearlessly by my side in battle against the charge of maddened elephants; even they do not follow me into the forest. Am I, are they, the same as before? I cannot recall ever having done them wrong. Perhaps they are concerned for what they think to be my happiness. Or is it my lack of virtue that hinders them from joining me? For hearts won by virtue cannot be deterred.

"But why am I indulging in these idle thoughts? They are as blind to the evils inherent in home life as to the virtues of the forest groves. The eye of wisdom is shut to them. Incapable of giving up their worldly pleasures, the very cause of suffering, they reject both me and the forest that would free them. How foolish is such infatuation! With the power I will gain in the forest of the ascetics I will crush the very passions that keep my friends and all others from tranquillity."

And thus having made up his mind, he gently and kindly put aside the entreaties of his friends. Making plain his firm resolution, he set out for the forest.

From this story one can see how an unfounded opinion that they possess some virtuous quality acts upon the virtuous like a spur. One can see how important it is to strive for virtue. This account is also suitable for explaining how a pious man-esteemed for his virtues as a monk or as a lay devotee-must strive to be in fact adorned with the virtues fit for that state. Further, this story may be used to show how difficult it is to find companions for a religious life.

20 - The Treasurer

A Tale of a Pious Man

The Bodhisattva lived as a king's treasurer. He was renowned for his learning, nobility, and modest behavior. His lofty aspirations and complete honesty caused him to be revered above all others.

One day, the treasurer's mother in law came and visited his home while he was away at the palace. She asked the treasurer's wife if she was happy in their marriage and the wife responded that virtue such as her husband's would be hard to find even in the greatest mendicant who has renounced the world. The mother was hard of hearing and only heard the word "mendicant" and therefore misinterpreted her daughter's words, thinking that she had said her husband was going to leave her and enter the forest to live as a mendicant. The mother started wailing in sadness, and seeing this, the daughter assumed her mother knew something she did not and in turn started to also believe that her husband was going to leave her. The rumor spread rapidly through the kingdom and before long, all the treasurer's friends and family were overcome with grief, believing he was about to leave them all.

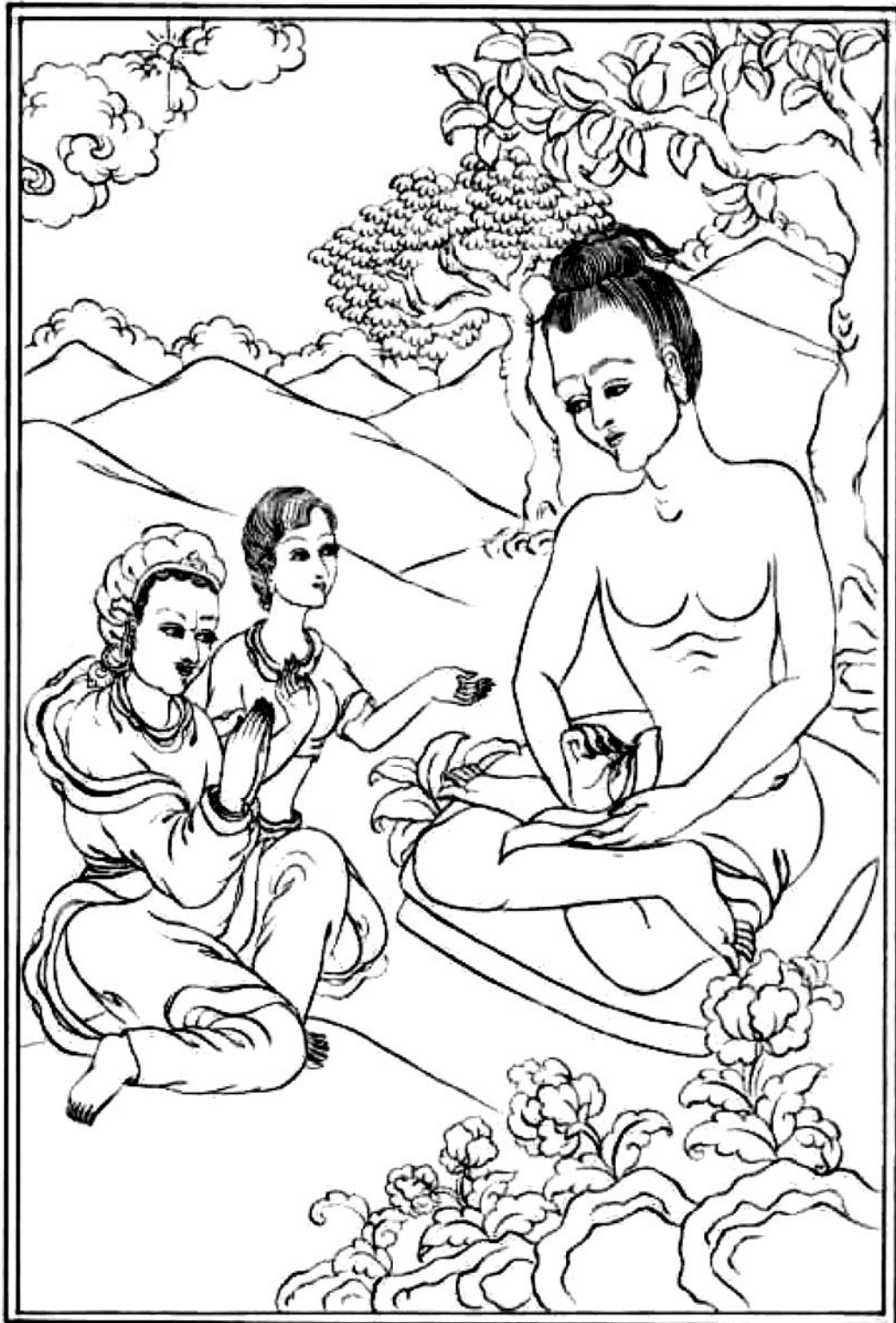


When the rumor finally reached the treasurer, he was confused but at the same time, he was honored that all these people viewed him as virtuous enough to live an ascetic life. He felt that after being held in such high regard, if he were to say it was just a rumor and continue to cling to the home life, he would not be worthy of their praise. Thus he decided to actually renounce the world and live in the woods as a mendicant and pursue nothing but meditation and cultivation of virtue.

Key Events in the Story

1. Bodhisattva is a treasurer
2. A misunderstanding starts a false rumor that he is to become an ascetic
3. The treasurer becomes an ascetic

21 - The Story of Kuddhabodhi



Those who can master their anger are able to pacify their enemies; those who cannot, inflame them.

Once the great Bodhisattva was born in this world to a certain noble family of brahmans renowned for their practice of virtue. Favored by the gods and honored by the king, they owned a large and flourishing estate. From early youth, the Great Being devoted his energies to cultivating the virtue of learning, so that by the time he was fully grown, his fame had already spread widely. As swiftly as a hero becomes known on the battlefield, as rapidly as a beautiful jewel gains note among collectors of gems, so quickly did his reputation grow among the learned.

Because of the Bodhisattva's constant practice of the Dharma in previous existences, he soon reached the stage of wisdom where the idea of renunciation was so familiar that home life no longer gave him pleasure. He understood that worldly pleasures can never give true satisfaction-that they are attended by the suffering of greed, quarrels, wars, and a host of other evils; that worldly pleasures are forever threatened by the fear of loss from acts of kings or thieves, from water, fire, one's enemies, and so forth. Therefore, avoiding worldly pleasures like poison and longing for the Truth, he cut off his fair hair and beard, and exchanged the brilliant dress of a householder for the saffron robes of an ascetic. He embraced the ascetic life, its disciplines, and its vows.

His wife, who loved him deeply, followed his example by cutting off her hair, and giving up her beautiful clothes and jewelled ornaments. Adorning herself solely with the natural beauty of her form and her virtues, she dressed herself in saffron robes and followed her husband.

The Great Being knew that the delicate constitution of women was unsuited for the ascetic life. So when he saw his wife's determination to join him in the forest, he said to her: "My dear, you have already proven your love and affection. Let that be sufficient. Please do not persist in your determination to join me-it is better for you to live among other women who have forsaken the world.

"Ascetics sleep wherever they find themselves at sunset in cemeteries, deserts, mountains, even in wild forests where ferocious beasts roam. Besides, ascetics avoid even the sight of women; they prefer to walk alone, intent on their meditation. Please change your mind. What good would come from your attempting such a life?"

But his wife's eyes grew dim with tears as she answered: "If I thought my going with you would cause you weariness rather than joy, do you think I would desire what would bring suffering to myself and displeasure to you? But I cannot bear to live without you, and so I beg you to pardon my disobedience."

Again and again he repeated his entreaties, but she would not change her mind. Finally, the Bodhisattva relented, and in silence allowed his wife to join him. And so she accompanied the Bodhisattva in his wanderings-like the wild goose who accompanies her mate through villages, towns, and markets.

After a time they found themselves in an isolated part of a forest. It was a splendid spot: Sunlight filtered through the groves of trees with the softness of moonlight shining on masses of flowers; everywhere, pollen lay strewn upon the ground. After eating, the Bodhisattva performed his usual meditations; in the afternoon he rose and began to sew a few rags together for clothes.

Not far away, his companion meditated according to her husband's direction, the splendor of her beauty embellishing the tree in whose shade she was seated. It

was spring, when gardens and groves are at their loveliest. On all sides young and tender shoots peeped through the earth; drunken bees hummed softly and lascivious cuckoos called out in joy. Lotuses adorned sunlit lakes and glistening ponds, while soft winds blew, scented with the perfumes of innumerable blossoms.

What wonderful joy arises when the forest glades are like the playgrounds of the god of love, when the drunken bees murmur, and the sweet soft grass covers the earth, when waterlilies cover the lakes in profusion and the cuckoos and peacocks sound their calls!

That very day, the king, enjoying the freshness of spring in all its glory, chanced to be exploring the forest and came to that very spot. On seeing the Bodhisattva, the king approached respectfully, and, after the usual ceremonial greetings, sat down a little ways apart. A few moments passed before his eyes lighted on the female ascetic. Struck at once by her great loveliness, the king, his passion aroused, began to contrive a plan to carry her off-knowing full well that she must be the ascetic's companion.

Having heard of the power of ascetics-that their wrath burns like fire-the king refrained from doing anything rash, despite the force of his desire. He thought: "If I can discover the extent of his power, I will know how to proceed. If his mind is ruled by passionate affection for her, it will be clear that he has gained no power from his practices. But if he proves dispassionate, I must beware."

To ascertain the Bodhisattva's state of mind, the king spoke to him as if he wished him well: "Your Reverence, it is clearly not suitable to travel with such an attractive companion in a forest like this. The world abounds in rogues and adventurers. If she came to harm, I would be censured as well.

"Suppose some rogue, disregarding both you and what is right, were to carry her off by force. What could you do but grieve? To indulge your anger would stir up your mind and destroy the glory of your religious life. It would be best for her to live in a city. What use, after all, is a woman to an ascetic?"

The Bodhisattva answered: "Your Majesty has spoken the truth. Yet listen to what I would do in such a circumstance:

"Whoever were to act in such a way against me, though pride or thoughtless rashness moved him, I would, in truth, while living, not release him, as the rain cloud binds the dust within."

So the king reflected: "He is infatuated with her; therefore he has no power." His contempt for the Great Being led him to lose all fear-he listened to the dictates of his passion, and ordered his attendants to take the woman to his harem.

As soon as the ascetic's wife heard the order, she trembled like a deer stalked by a ferocious animal. In fear, alarm, and dismay, her eyes filling with tears, her voice trembling, she cried out: "The king is supposed to be the best refuge-a father to those overcome by suffering. Whose help can be called upon when the king himself is acting like the worst thief? Alas! The guardians of the world are derelict in duty! They have gone off or are dead. The Dharma itself is a mere sound.

"But why reproach the gods when my lord himself keeps silent? My husband, how can you be so undisturbed by my fate? Are you not bound to protect even

strangers in distress? By the thunderbolt of your curses, you can change a mountain into dust-but you do not speak! Must I live to see this? Am I such a wicked person that I am scarcely deserving of pity? Is it not the duty of ascetics to give refuge to the pitiful?

"Is it that you still remember my refusal to leave you? Alas! Is this catastrophe the happiness I yearned for? The fulfillment of my wish which was contrary to yours? Alas! Where are you taking me!"

Oblivious to her pitiful and heartrending cries, and before the very eyes of the Great Being, the royal attendants placed her in the chariot, to carry her off to the harem. Still calm, still serene, the Bodhisattva remained seated, sewing his rags, his powerful anger bound up by the thread of his tranquillity.

"Where are your threats now?" asked the king. "Come, show us your wrath as you promised. You have seen your woman ravished before your very eyes. Could it be that you are powerless? Is that why you keep so silent? Have you gained nothing from all your practices? He who, not knowing his true capacities, makes promises he cannot keep, loses all the dignity he ever had."

The Bodhisattva replied: "Oh, but I did keep my promise, Your Majesty. The one who tried to taunt me into action struggled mightily-and I did not release him. By firmness of mind I forced him to keep quiet. So you must admit I have kept my promise."

The Bodhisattva's tranquillity and confidence affected the king deeply. He was beginning to understand the extent of the ascetic's virtue, and he pondered: "This brahman must have been hinting at something else when he spoke; I misunderstood him, and therefore acted most foolishly." And so he asked the Bodhisattva: "Who was it that acted against you? Who was it you did not release-but held in the same way the raincloud holds dust? Who was it that you quieted, despite his great struggle?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "Listen, and listen well, Great Prince. He who robs insight and prevents clear vision rose within me. But I did not release him. Anger is his name: anger, who would have made my enemies rejoice. When bursting forth he fosters nothing good. He is the one I subdued, O King: Anger is his name.

"Yes, I have transformed that hideous monster rising from within-anger, who causes his victims to give up their virtue and even to lose any positive gains they have made in this life. As fire rising from a stick of wood will destroy that very log, anger born of wrong thinking will lead to ruin.

"Those who are not able to calm the burning fever of anger when it flares up with fierceness will find that they are little esteemed. Their reputations fade as moonlight fades in the blush of dawn.

"But those who can ignore insults, harm, and the taunts of others, those who consider anger their real enemy, will have reputations that shine like the luster streaming from the moon. Anger is attended by many other evils-no matter how many jewels bedeck your form, the fire of anger will burn away your radiance. Who can find ease when his heart is wounded by anger's arrows, though he lie on a jewelled couch?

"Anger creates pain and misery. It causes you to forget what is truly in your own interest, and directs you to wrong paths and into darkness. Happiness is forgotten, just as the moon loses its splendor in the dark part of its monthly journey.

"In the end, though your friends may try to restrain you, anger will cast you headlong into the abyss of ruin, for rage impairs the power of the mind, and leaves one unable to distinguish between the beneficial and the harmful. Carried away by anger, one commits actions that may take centuries of misfortune to atone for. Can one's enemies, themselves provoked by anger, do anything worse?

"This I know: Anger is the enemy within us. Who can withstand its unbridled power? And so I carefully kept in check the anger struggling within me. Who indeed can safely ignore an enemy capable of so much mischief?"

Such moving words revealed the wonderful patience of the Bodhisattva and softened the heart of the king. "Your words are proof indeed of your tranquillity!" he said. "But what can I say? I did not understand you, and so was deceived."

Then, praising the Bodhisattva, the king bowed to his feet and confessed his wrongdoing. After obtaining pardon, he released the Bodhisattva's wife and offered himself to the Great Being as his attendant.

From this story it can be seen that by controlling one's anger, one can appease one's enemies-while doing other wise will inflame them. This story also demonstrates how important it is to strive to suppress anger. This account is also to be told in connection with sayings that praise the precept of forbearance, for it shows how unfriendly feelings are soothed by forbearance, and how, by self-restraint, hatred is not allowed to grow. This story shows how he who banishes anger benefits both himself and others. Likewise, this account can be used when explaining the perniciousness of anger, and when expressing the greatness of the Tathagata.



21 - The Story of Kuddhabodhi

A Tale of Subduing Anger



Born to a noble family of Brahmans who owned a large flourishing estate, the Bodhisattva devoted his life to learning. His name was Kuddhabodhi. By the time he was fully grown his fame among the learned had spread far and wide. He married a beautiful woman who loved him deeply.

Because of his constant practice of the Dharma, he eventually reached the stage of wisdom where the idea of renunciation was so familiar that the life of the householder no longer gave him pleasure. Disturbed by the suffering of greed, quarrels, war, and attachment that are inherent in the householder's life, he decided to take up the life of an ascetic.

His wife insisted that she join him and become an ascetic as well. Although he tried to dissuade her, saying the ascetic life is difficult and dangerous and not suitable for a woman, she entered the woods with him anyway. She looked brilliant and attractive in her simple robes as she meditated in the shade of a tree. One day a king passed through their forest domain and after the usual ceremonious greeting with Kuddhabodhis, he saw the beautiful women and was poisoned with lust. She seemed to glow, enchanting the world around her. The king became utterly lost in desire, contriving a plan to take the young woman away to his palace. However, the king had heard about the terrible wrath that

can ensue from wronging an ascetic and was afraid of being cursed. He decided he needed to test Kuddhabodhi's power. Because ascetics are supposed to live the life of non-attachment, the king decided that if he saw Kuddhabodhi was still attached to his companion, that he surely had no exceptional power and would not be able to harm him. He questioned Kuddhabodhi, asking what he would do if someone kidnapped his wife. The bodhisattva replied that if that happened, he would never let his enemy escape. This reply seemed to indicate that he was still full of attachment and passion and therefore was no true ascetic. The king ordered his men to carry off Kuddhabodhi's wife to his palace in the city.

Kuddhabodhi watched them take his wife away and appeared oblivious to her cries. Confused by this, the king then taunted Kuddhabodhi, asking why he was not following through with his threat, and how he was going to attempt to keep them from leaving. Kuddhabodhi replied that the enemy he was to keep imprisoned was not them, but that the enemy he was referring to was anger. He would not let his anger escape from him, telling the king that even in the face of such a crime, he would keep his rage controlled while focusing his mind on the virtue of forbearance. The king realized that he had been mistaken about Kuddhabodhi and that he was in fact a powerful ascetic. He bowed to Kuddhabodhi and apologized, returned his wife, and vowed to serve him from then on.

Key Events in the Story

1. Kuddhabodhi and wife become ascetics
2. A King kidnaps the wife
3. Kuddhabodhi's virtue impresses the king who then returns the wife

22 - The Noble Geese



Even when in distress, the virtuous display right conduct of a kind impossible for the non virtuous. How much more perfect their conduct must be when they are favored by fortune.'

Once the Bodhisattva took birth as a king of the geese named Dhritarachtra, ruler of a vast flock living on Lake Manasa. Sumukha was his commander-in-chief, the protector of the king's hundreds of thousands of subjects. Only slightly less exalted than the king himself, Sumukha was well skilled in the management of the king's affairs, for he knew clearly what constitutes correct policy, and had a prodigious memory for events spanning vast extents of space and time.

Born of an illustrious family, Sumukha was endowed with constancy, honesty, and courage, his natural nobility embellished by talent, courtesy, and modesty. Distinguished by the purity of his conduct and mode of life, he was always vigilant, always clever, and his skill in management was faultless. Capable of enduring endless hardship, in military matters he was fearless, and he loved his king deeply. Sumukha was, indeed, a previous incarnation of the Buddha's disciple Ananda.

Together, the king of the geese and his commander instructed their flock like a teacher and his principal disciple, or like a father and his eldest son. As they taught the birds peaceful conduct and practices, their obvious mutual respect and affection caused their perfections to shine all the brighter. They were an example for all, and were admired by gods, nagas, yakshas, vidyadharas, holy men, ascetics, and many other beings.

As wings know no purpose but to support a bird in flight, so these two had no goal but to support the Dharma and to protect their flock. Thus favored, the flock gained great happiness and prosperity, just as men do when upheld by righteousness. Lake Manasa thus became a place of magical splendor. Massed together, the birds resembled an expanse of shimmering lotuses; in flight, they were like banks of clouds drifting across the sky. Their voices, clear and lovely, brought to mind the sound of the anklets of women dancing.

Enchanted by the wonderful virtues of the King of Geese -so intent on benefitting all beings-and by the glory of Sumukha, crowds of siddhas, rishis, vidyadharas, and gods gathered above the lake to extol their qualities: "Their majestic bodies are like pure gold, their speech is articulate and clear. Virtue rules their conduct and their policy. Though in outward form they are geese, their conduct indicates an identity far more exalted."

Full of wonder, yet free from jealousy, the deities spread word of these two perfect geese throughout the world. The news reached even to the councils of kings-and Brahmadata, ruler of Varanasi, began to hear about the king of the geese and his commander-in-chief from his trustworthy advisers and from the foremost brahmins. The king became increasingly curious about these two geese, and so he said to his ministers-of-state who were expert in many branches of science:

"Gentlemen! Now is the time to put your cleverness to the test. You must discover some way for me to catch at least a glimpse of these two most amazing geese."

The ministers let their thoughts roam the paths of devious action, and in a short time they returned to their king with a suggestion:

"Your Majesty," they said, "because all beings seek happiness, the promise of happiness is an irresistible lure. Therefore, in one of your forest glades, let Your

Majesty build a beautiful lake like the one where the geese now reside. But let it surpass the brilliance of their Lake Manasa. If you loudly proclaim it a sanctuary for all birds, perhaps news of the beauty of the lake and its possibilities for pleasure will excite the curiosity of the geese and draw them near. Consider, Your Majesty: A pleasure once obtained loses its charm, but pleasures merely heard of are irresistible."

The king accepted their proposal. Soon a great lake rivaling the magnificence of Lake Manasa was created in a park not far from the capital.

A basin of purest water embracing a rainbow of flowers-
lotuses and water lilies, white lotuses and red.

Flowering trees, their leaves shimmering in the light,
encircled the lake as if they had come to gaze upon it.

Hovering over the surface was a swarm of bees
attracted by the laughing lotuses
rocking on the gently trembling waves.

The kumuda flowers, opening

at the gentle touch of the moonbeams,
seemed like patches of moonshine
piercing through the foliage.

The pollen of the utpala blossoms
ornamented the shore,
as if drawn there by the finger-like waves.

Like a painting made with golden lines,
the leaves and filaments of the lotus flowers
covered the shore with a golden sheen.

The calm transparent water
revealed the contours of the many fish
as clearly as if they were swimming through the sky.

Elephants, dipping their trunks in the cloistered pools,
blew forth cascades of spray like broken strings of pearls;
the waves driven onto the rocks and scattered into the air
seemed to dissolve in sparkling dust.

The pollen of the flowers, the musk of the elephants,
and the sweet perfumes of goddesses scented the waters.

So brilliant was the lake at night
that the stars, the wives of the moon-god,
gazed in the waters as in a mirror
while myriad birds sang their sweet songs.

Such was the lake created by the king, and given by him to the birds for their sole use and pleasure.

In order to gain the birds' trust, the king ordered a proclamation to be repeated day after day throughout the region: "This lake, covered with lotuses and water lilies, has been created solely for the enjoyment of the birds. The king guarantees their total safety."

It was the time when autumn draws back a dark curtain of clouds and reveals a horizon clear and shining; a time when lakes with their brilliant water and clusters

of lotuses are lovely to behold. It was a time when the moon is at its fullest, her rays sending forth their greatest power; a time when the earth is covered with the glory of harvest. It was a time when young birds feel the urge to wander. Soon the king's lake was alive with the songs of thousands of birds, carefree and gay.

Not long after, a pair of geese from the Bodhisattva's flock, in their autumn explorations, happened to fly over Brahmadata's realm and spied the lake. They saw its shining and sweet-scented lotuses open and glowing like flame; they saw its white lotuses, unfolding as if bubbling with laughter. They heard the echoing calls of many birds, the humming of the bees; they smelled the scent of the pollen scattered by the cool gentle breeze gliding over the waves. Although accustomed to Lake Manasa, the two geese were wholly captivated by the loveliness and splendor of this lake.

"Our whole flock must come here!" they thought (since we all generally think first of closest friends when we find some such pleasure). In order to enjoy themselves a while, they stayed at this lake near Varanasi until the next rains. Then, when armies of clouds advanced like hosts of the Daityas; when lightning began to flash like brandished weapons; when the festive troops of peacocks performed their dances, parading their fans and crying out as if exulting at the triumph of the clouds; when even smaller birds became loquacious; when brisk winds blew cool with the scent of the forest trees; when flocks of cranes were silhouetted against the sky like the teeth of dark clouds; at that time, when flocks of geese cried out softly, impatient, anxious, eager to move on, then it was that the two returned to their home on Lake Manasa.

After paying respect to their king, they told of their travels: "South of Mount Himavat, Your Majesty," they said, "in a place called Varanasi, a human king named Brahmadata has bequeathed to the birds a lake of marvelous beauty, filled with the most indescribable delights. All the birds can enjoy themselves there as fearlessly as if they were at home. Once the rains are over, Your Majesty should travel there."

On hearing about the lake, the whole flock of geese grew eager to see it, but the Bodhisattva fixed an inquiring gaze on Sumukha, his commander-in-chief, and asked: "What do you think of this, O my commander?"

Sumukha bowed his head and replied: "I think it unwise for Your Majesty to go. What reason is there to leave our bountiful home? We have everything we need here. The delights described are nothing but temptation.

"Moreover, human hearts are false, and the compassion they proclaim is deceitful-under the guise of sweet words, men conceal a cruel nature. Birds and beasts express their true feelings in their calls; men are the only animals who produce sounds with meaning contrary to their intentions. My lord: Men's words may seem wholesome and full of good intention, but remember that merchants spend money only in hope of future gain. By relying on men's words, we will surely come to harm. No matter what they say, we must be very careful.

"But should the lure prove irresistible, let us not stay long-let us resolve beforehand simply to go to the lake, enjoy its beauty, and return in short order. Such is my advice."

As it happened, the flock of geese could not restrain their curiosity. Again and again they pleaded with the Bodhisattva to set out for the lake, until finally, one

bright autumn night, under the purest rays of moon and stars, the king of geese complied with their request. Accompanied by Sumukha and all the other geese, he set out like a moon-god attended by white autumn clouds.

As soon as the flock beheld the splendor of the lake, they were overwhelmed with wonder and gladness. And so they glided gracefully to its surface, where their beautiful forms added to the brilliance of the lake. Their delight soared as they wandered over its waters-as we would wander through a park, delighting in its great variety. And there upon the lake the geese heard the king's proclamation of safety, and witnessed the freedom of the birds already living there. Soon they forgot Lake Manasa entirely.

The guardians of the lake quickly reported the geese's appearance to the king: "Your Majesty, two of the most perfect geese have appeared at the lake; they must be the ones of which we have heard, such are their qualities. They are surrounded by a retinue of thousands, and their wings shine like gold; their beaks and feet shine even brighter. They are of great size, and beautifully formed. No other birds could be as beautiful."

At once the king ordered his most skilled fowler, a man renowned for his expertise in snaring birds, to trap the geese. Promising to do so, the fowler carefully surveyed all the places where the two were most frequently seen. Then, while the rest of the flock wandered over the lake, cheerful and free and trusting, the trapper set strong snares well-concealed.

In no time at all the king of the geese was caught by the foot in a trap. Such is the perniciousness of misplaced trust: Aroused by the subtle machinations of those who falsely inspire confidence, it dispels all thought of danger, breeding carelessness and lack of awareness.

For fear a similar misfortune might befall the others, the Bodhisattva issued a special cry, warning the geese of danger. In an instant, alarmed at the capture of their lord, the geese, shrieking discordant noises like soldiers whose chief warrior has been captured, flew into the sky wildly, without any regard for each other.

But a heart bound by love does not notice imminent peril: Sumukha, commander-in-chief, did not move from the side of his king. To such a one, sorrow aroused by the distress of a friend is worse than death.

"Go quickly, Sumukha," said the Bodhisattva. "It is not wise to linger. How can you be of any help to me while I am in this state? Consider your own life."

Sumukha replied: "If I were to leave, I would still be bound by old age and death-but if I stay, no final death can ensnare me. I have always attended you in prosperity, my lord. How could I leave you in calamity? If I were to abandon you for the sake of such a small thing as my life, where would I find shelter from the rain of blame? How could I leave you in your distress? Whatever fate befalls you, I will gladly share it."

"What fate awaits a bird ensnared but the kitchen?" asked the Bodhisattva. "How can that prospect tempt one who is in free possession of body and mind? What profit do you see for me or for yourself, or for our flock in both our deaths? One might sooner distinguish level and unlevel ground in the dark than find the gain in such a course of conduct. What benefit, what profit in your death?"

Sumukha replied: "How is it, O king of birds, that you cannot perceive the profit in following the path of right action? Honoring the Dharma always reaps the greatest gain. Knowing the great benefit of the Dharma, I see great good for myself. And so I do not cling to life."

"Truly," replied the Bodhisattva, "such is the Dharma of the virtuous, that a dutiful friend will never abandon a friend in distress, even at the cost of his life. You have observed the law of right action well. But grant me this last request, and fly away. It is your duty, O wise one, to fill the gap I leave."

And so the two of them were expressing their mutual affection when the fowler, Nishada, burst upon them, rushing forth like the lord of death. When the geese saw him coming, they fell silent. Having watched the flock as they flew away, the fowler had suspected some were caught, and was dashing from trap to trap in search of his prey. Upon discovering the two geese, he gazed upon them, enthralled by their beauty. Thinking the two were caught, he reached down and shook the snares. But when he realized only one was trapped, the other loose and free, his astonishment multiplied. Approaching Sumukha, he spoke:

"That bird is caught, its freedom lost. He cannot fly, though I approach. But you have not been ensnared; you are free to go! Your wings are under your own power! Why did you not fly up into the sky as I approached?"

In human language distinct and clear, its beauty showing the firmness and virtuous nature of the speaker, Sumukha replied: "You ask why I do not leave although I am able to fly? The answer is simple. You may have gained power over this great bird by means of your trap-and caused him great suffering by ensnaring his feet. But his power over me is stronger still: He has ensnared my heart with his virtues."

Awestruck, the hairs on his body standing on end, Nishada asked once more: "What is this bird to you that you stay by him? All the others, in great fear of me, flew straight into the sky and left him."

Sumukha answered: "He is my king, my friend, my benefactor, and I love him no less than life itself. He is in great danger. And so I will never leave him, even to save my life."

Observing a feeling of wonder and admiration growing in the fowler, Sumukha continued: "Now, dear friend, if only our talk might have a happy ending. What glory you would win in setting us free!"

"I wish you no harm," said the fowler. "It is not you I have caught. Why don't you just fly away and join your kin? How happy they will be to see you!"

But Sumukha did not move. "If you truly wish me no sorrow, then grant me this request: Take me and let him go. Our bodies are of equal size, our age the same. If you are content to capture only one bird, taking me will cost you nothing.

"Think this over well! Wouldn't you like to have me for your very own? Tie me up first, if you wish, and then release the king. By granting my request at no loss to yourself, you will gain the undying friendship of the whole flock. Set their lord at liberty, that they may once more see him shining like a moon in the clear sky."

The fowler, accustomed to a cruel trade, was hard-hearted by nature. But he was deeply touched by Sumukha's clear expression of selfless love and in a tone so sweet but firm. Overcome with admiration and respect, he joined his palms and

bowed to Sumukha, saying: "Well said, well said, O Noble One! Even in the realm of gods and men such selflessness-to give up one's life for another-is most rare. I will pay you homage and set your king free. Who could harm one who is dearer to you than your life?"

And so the fowler, listening more closely to the voice of compassion than to the orders of his sovereign, released the king of the geese from the snare. Seeing his king set free, Sumukha fixed a look of love on the fowler, and said: "By releasing the king of geese, you have made all of us who are your friends eternally grateful! May you be blessed with beneficent friends for thousands of years! But for the present, so that your labor will not have been in vain, come take us both on your shoulder pole, free and unbound, and carry us to the palace to present to your king. When he sees the king of the geese and his commander-in-chief, he will no doubt be so pleased that he will shower you with more riches than you ever dreamed of."

Thinking that the king at all events should see this wonderful pair of geese, the fowler agreed to the request. Placing the birds in baskets, unbound and unharmed, he delivered them to the king.

"May it please Your Majesty to accept this wondrous gift," he said. "Here is the famous king of the geese and his commander-in-chief."

The king gasped in amazement and pleasure at the sight of the two geese gleaming like two pieces of new-minted gold. "How did you manage to capture them unhurt and untied? Why do they willingly stay in the hands of one on foot when they are able to fly away?"

The fowler bowed to the king and related his miraculous tale: "Upon arriving at the lake, I set many cruel snares in pools and ponds, at the places where the geese tended to gather. Proceeding unsuspectingly, this foremost of geese caught his foot in a hidden snare. The other, though free, stood steadfast by his side when I arrived, and in a human voice articulate and sweet, pleaded with me to take him instead-in ransom for the life of his king. His plea, springing from his readiness to sacrifice his own life, carried great power.

"The effect of his soft words and great actions on behalf of his master was so great that I was converted to respect; and so I freed his lord, binding instead my own cruel temper. Rejoicing at the release of his king, the other addressed many thanks and blessings to me. In gratitude, he instructed me to carry them both to you so that my labors should not go unrewarded. Thus he has arrived at your palace of his own accord, together with his master. These two, though they have the form of birds, possess the nature of Dharma masters."

These words filled the king with joy and wonder. He gave the sovereign goose a golden throne spread with a costly cover, soft cushions at its back, its headrest covered with lustrous jewels, a throne well-suited to a king. For Sumukha, he offered a throne of bamboo, one fit for a chief minister. Then the Bodhisattva, considering the time appropriate for speech, addressed the king in a voice that rang like a bell:

"I hope you are in good health, O health-deserving prince, and that your glorious body glows with strength. I hope your other body bides as well-the one comprising your virtues. Does it often breathe forth the breath of spiritual words and discourses? Have you dedicated yourself to those in need and to the task of

protecting your subjects? Do you justly administer rewards and punishments, increasing both your own glory and your people's affections? Do you encourage your people's welfare?

"Have you the assistance of honest and devoted ministers who are devoted to the welfare of your people and skilled in management? I hope you attend to all these matters well?"

"Do you set free the impulse of compassion when your vassal-kings plead for mercy-yet all the while refrain from falling into that insidious sleep of carelessness, unthinking trust? Do the virtuous applaud your efforts to secure the Dharma, and is your fame increasing? Do your enemies have but sighs to hurt them?"

The king answered all these questions in the affirmative, his pleasure showing his calm and tranquil ways. "Now having met with your holiness," he added, "my joy and welfare are complete in all respects. For I have long wished to meet with you. But this fowler who captured you in his snare did you no harm, I hope, with his pain-inflicting stick? It so often happens that knaves are excited to sinful action when birds fall as their prey"

The Bodhisattva replied: "I did not suffer, O great king, nor did the fowler treat me in any way like an enemy. Seeing Sumukha resolute by my side, seeing him stay by my side out of love for me though not caught himself, your fowler was amazed and addressed me with great kindness. After releasing me from the snare, he showed me both respect and honor. For this reason Sumukha asked him to bring us here, wishing him only good. May our arrival signal his great happiness!"

"Having shown such kindness to you, this fowler deserves a high reward," the king replied. "I have longed for the sight of you, and I bid you both welcome. You are indeed a feast for my eyes." And so the king showered Nishada with fabulous wealth, after which he again addressed the king of geese: "This whole realm is yours-pray put aside all formalities and tell me how I may serve you. My riches are at your disposal. Desires of friends frankly expressed give more pleasure than wealth itself; honesty among friends is a great virtue."

Then the king, wishing to converse openly with Sumukha, gazed with admiration on that noble face, and said: "But perhaps, as a new acquaintance, you feel such openness is not quite suitable. Still, we may at least speak as equals, and with words not unsweet. I hope that you will favor me with conversation. Grant me the gift of your friendship, and increase the joy in my heart."

On this invitation, Sumukha, commander-in-chief of the geese, bowed respectfully to the human king and replied: "A conversation with Your Highness who is the equal of Indra is a great joy indeed. Who would not feel grateful for such an opportunity? But would it not have been outrageous insolence for a mere attendant to interrupt the dialogue of two great kings? Such behavior is not for the well-bred. Therefore, great prince, I was silent. I ask your pardon, if you will grant it."

The king smiled warmly. "Justly does the world delight in the greatness of your virtue. Justly has the king of geese made you his friend. Modest behavior such as yours is displayed only by those who have subdued their inner self. I hope with all my heart that this friendship now begun will never be broken. Indeed, the meeting of the virtuous always leads to friendship."

The Bodhisattva, understanding the strength of the king's love and desire for friendship, replied: "Following your most generous impulse, you have treated us both as your dearest friends, though we have just met. Whose heart would not be won, illustrious prince, by such treatment? No matter what you may later ask of us, no one can dispute that here and now you have demonstrated the essence of hospitality.

"But this is no wonder for one who has subdued the self, one who cares only for the interest of his subjects, one who is as firmly intent on asceticism and contemplation as a Muni. You had only to follow the promptings of your nature to become a storehouse of virtues.

"Virtue is the source of the satisfaction which comes from such praise as I have now given you. In the strongholds of vice no bliss endures. Knowing this, what sentient being would ever resort to the wrong path?

"Military might, strength of wealth, successful polycynone of these will carry a prince to the heights he may obtain simply by walking the path of virtue. Virtue is accompanied by even such joy as attends Indra, the king of gods. Virtues alone are the wellspring of humility, the source of glory. Increasing like the moon, lovelier than moon glow, virtues appease the ferocious, the jealous, the angry, and the proud no matter how deeply their selfishness is rooted in hatred. The magnificence of sovereignty rests upon virtue alone.

"O sovereign, instill the love of virtue in your people. Set them an example by the unparalleled splendor of your modesty, for the people love to imitate their leaders. The first concern of a king is the good of his subjects-the path leading to virtue brings bliss in both this world and the next.

"Rule with love for the Dharma, and may the lord of the gods watch over you always. But now, O King, though your presence erases the sorrows of all who remain near, we must leave you. The sorrow of our fellow geese draws us to them."

The king approved the words of the Bodhisattva, and dismissed the holy geese with words both honorable and kind. Followed by Sumukha, as if by his reflected image, the Bodhisattva rose into the sky-which was as dark-blue as a spotless sword blade-and soon rejoined his flock. And all who saw him were filled with utmost joy.

Some time later, together with his flock, the king of geese, his heart completely filled with compassion for his neighbor, once more visited the king to discourse more fully on the Dharma. And the king, with head respectfully bowed, honored him in return.

From this story one can see how the virtuous, even when fallen into the state of animals, will behave in a manner which the impious can never hope to imitate. What can one say of the acts of the virtuous when favored by fortune? This account is also relevant when praising the qualities of spiritual friends-to show how one with such a friend can be successful even in the most difficult circumstance. This account also exemplifies the fact that Ananda was a companion to the Buddha in many previous births, sharing the vicissitudes of the Bodhisattva, cherishing him with affection and veneration for a long time.



22 - The Noble Geese

A Tale of Friendship



In this lifetime the Bodhisattva was the great king of Geese, Dhritarachtra, who ruled his vast flock benevolently. He was always accompanied by his commander and chief, Sumukha. The two were the closest of friends.

Tales and rumors of the glory of the flock, and especially of its king and commander in chief, spread far and wide. Intrigued by what he had heard, a human king named Brahmadata, the ruler of Varanasi, said to his ministers of state that he would like to see these birds. The ministers hatched a devious scheme to create a beautiful lake at which would be proclaimed daily to be a sanctuary for all birds. It was to be so beautiful that no flock could resist its temptations, and once the king had lured the marvelous Geese there under a false notion of safety, a skilled hunter would spring traps to ensnare the king of geese.

Word of the lakes beauty eventually reached the flock and they became excited and curious. Although slightly weary, the King agreed to travel there. When they arrived, the flock marveled at the glorious lake and all the different types of birds that were taking refuge there. Once the flock became comfortable, the hunter sprung the trap. The king was caught and when the other geese saw this they

began to flee in fear. The only one who stayed behind was Sumukha, refusing to leave his masters side.

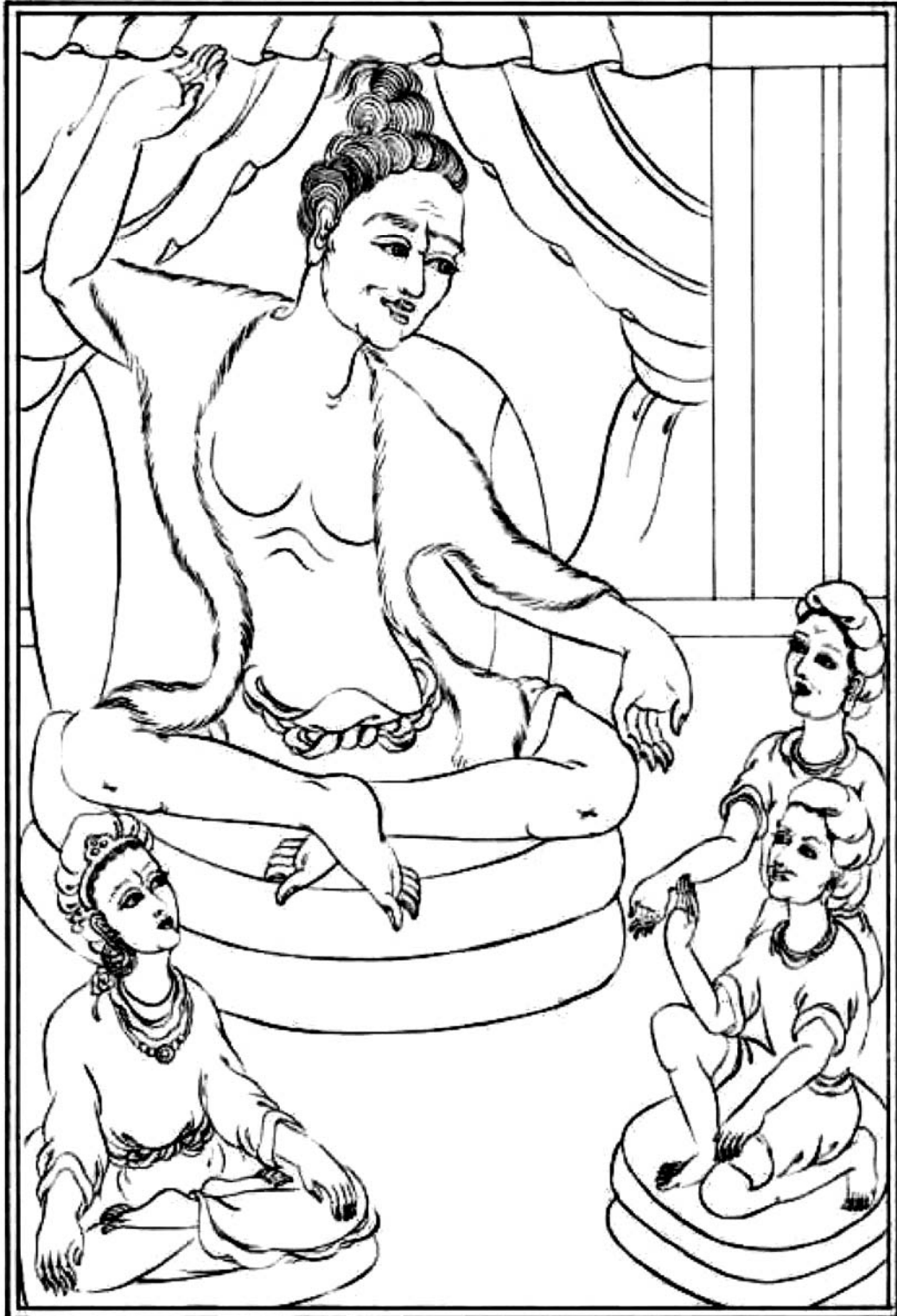
The hunter approached the pair and at first he thought his traps had caught both the geese. Yet when he saw that Sumukha was staying behind with his king out of love and loyalty, his heart overflowed with compassion and amazement. The hunter asked the noble bird why he did not flee and Sumukha, in a clear human voice, stated that he would never abandon his master and friend and that he had stayed with him in times of prosperity and would never even consider leaving him in times of trouble. Sumukha then pleaded with the man to take him instead, explaining that the flock needed their king but could survive without their general. Listening more to the noble words of the goose than to the orders from his human sovereign, the man freed the Goose king. The geese were overjoyed and then told the man that in return for his kindness and mercy, they would both return to the capitol with him on their own accord.

The man and the two geese met with the human king Brahmadata and were put on thrones in the royal court. After they praised the compassion of the hunter, the three of them all sat and spoke of Dharma and how to properly rule a kingdom, whether it be human or animal. The king declared that although they were mere geese, they were as virtuous and wise as the holiest of teachers. The geese were honored and after a short and pleasant stay in the capitol, they returned to their flock.

Key Events in the Story

1. The bodhisattva is the King of Geese.
2. The King of Geese is caught by a trap.
3. His best friend stays with him until freed.

23 - The Wise One



The compassion felt by the virtuous for their benefactors does not diminish, no matter what injuries those benefactors might later inflict upon them: Such is the gratitude shown by the virtuous, such their forbearance.

Once when the Bhagavat was still a Bodhisattva, he took birth as a wandering ascetic known as the Wise One, Mahabodhi. While still a householder, he had acquainted himself thoroughly with most branches of worldly learning, particularly the fine arts. After renouncing the world, however, he directed his mind exclusively to the study of the Dharma, in hopes of bringing benefit to all sentient beings.

Soon he had become a master in that field as well, and this accomplishment, when added to his already great store of merit, his knowledge of the world, and his lively intelligence, brought him great renown. And so it was that wherever Mahabodhi went, in whatever land he found himself, he was highly praised by the learned, by royalty, by brahmans and householders, as well as by those who lived in forest groves. For so it always is: Although virtues are always highly respected, it is their graceful practice that gains the affection of the people. Such grace will win even the praise of one's enemies, who cannot respond otherwise for fear of their reputations.

With the aim of benefitting others, the Great Being travelled through villages, towns, and markets, country sides, kingdoms, and royal estates. After a time he came to the realm of a king who, having heard of the splendor of the Wise One's many virtues, rejoiced greatly at word of his approach. Indeed, knowing in advance of his arrival, the king had built a special residence for Mahabodhi in the loveliest spot in his pleasure gardens.

Upon the Bodhisattva's arrival in that realm, the king greeted him in the most honorable fashion. He showed him many tokens of esteem by joyfully attending on the Wise One and listening to his teachings as a pupil listens to his teacher. For to a lover of virtue, the arrival of a virtuous guest is a kind of feast.

For his part, the Bodhisattva was delighted to oblige the king. He discoursed daily on spiritual matters, pleasing to both mind and heart, as he prepared the king for the road to enlightenment. Those devoted to the Dharma will, out of compassion, instruct even beings who have not shown interest; how could they refuse any who are eager for guidance, who open their hearts like the purest vessels?

Although the king highly honored the ministers-of-state and counselors for their learning and also treated them with respect, they could not bear the constantly growing reverence accorded the Bodhisattva, for jealousy had tainted their minds. Such is the way of the world, that when superior virtues attract attention, those honored for mere professional skill burn with envy.

Disturbed by their inability to surpass the ascetic in learned discourse, the ministers became upset by their king's increasing interest in the Teachings. In order to subvert their sovereign's feelings about the Bodhisattva, they said to him: "Your Majesty, you should not put so much confidence in the teachings of that wandering monk Bodhi. Anyone can see he must be some kind of spy sent by a neighboring king to use Your Majesty's love of virtue and attraction to the Dharma to trap and trick you. His clever mind, abetted by his soft, smooth, and lying tongue, will confuse you and lead you into disaster.

"How is he doing this? Pretending to be a devotee of virtue, he urges you to practice compassion and foster feelings of love and modesty. He will encourage

you finally to adopt vows incompatible with your royal and military duties, turning you aside from material interests and pleasures, and damaging your policies. It may be out of pure charity he speaks, yet is it not curious how well read he is in manuals of political science; how much he enjoys conversing with the messengers of foreign kings?"

Such language, often repeated to the king by those feigning to have his best interests in mind, did not fail to leave its mark. Gradually the king's attitude changed, his veneration of the Great Being wavering under the influence of his growing distrust. In such a manner does calumny, roaring thunderbolts of discord, pierce the ears. Does there exist one person in this world who can remain unshaken, trusting, and confident in his own power under such an influence?

The king's show of affection for the Great Being lessened, and he ceased to pay the Bodhisattva due honor. But the Bodhisattva, because of his pure mind, was untroubled, thinking: "Kings cannot help but be distracted by their infinite duties to their subjects." Soon, however, the previous respect of the courtiers turned into coolness and disrespect, and Mahabodhi realized he had aroused the king's displeasure. Therefore, the Great Being collected his three utensils of a wandering ascetic, the staff, the waterpot, and the begging bowl, and prepared to depart.

The king, hearing of Mahabodhi's resolution, and moved partly by a remnant of affection and partly out of duty, pretended to try to detain him. Hurrying to his pleasure garden, he said to the Bodhisattva: "What could make you decide to leave us now, so suddenly and without warning? Could it be some lack of attention on our part that has aroused your displeasure? Let us assure you it is completely unintentional."

The Bodhisattva replied: "I would not leave for such a reason, nor would I ever become angry for lack of respect. But because of your deceit you have ceased to be a vessel for virtuous teachings, and so I must leave."

At that moment the king's favorite dog rushed forward in a hostile manner, barking loudly at the Bodhisattva and baring his teeth. "This animal proves my point. Not too long ago he was fond of staying by my side, following your example. Now his barking betrays your true feelings, for he does not know how to dissemble. Surely he has heard you speak harsh words of me as happens when affection has been destroyed, and now he acts upon your words in order to please you. Such is the behavior of servants who eat the bread of their master."

The king was filled with shame at this reproof. His heart was struck by the acuteness of the Bodhisattva's perceptions, and he could only lower his eyes. Thinking it unfitting to pretend further, he replied: "It is true you have been the subject of such conversations. People have indeed used harsh language when speaking about you in my council, and I, absorbed in matters of state, let it pass. Please forgive me, and stay here. Pray do not leave."

But the Wise One replied: "As I have said, I am not leaving because of ill treatment, Your Majesty, nor am I leaving because of resentment. It is simply time to go. Consider: If, out of attachment or apathy, I did not leave now, surely in time, as all hospitality faded, I would find myself expelled."

"Therefore, it is time to go. I do not leave you with bad feelings; but I must follow the proper course. One affront could never erase your former kindnesses; yet withered affection is no more helpful than a dried up pond to a man who is thirsty. The benefit from such a relationship is meager and troublesome at best. The one who wishes happiness, who does not wish to fall prey to conflicting emotions, will rely only on those with minds like clear lakes in autumn. The conduct of the wise is well known to be like this. To be timid in taking the part of one who is devoted, to attend on those filled with disaffection, or to be slow in remembering former kindnesses-these are not the actions of a true man.

"Love is destroyed not only by lack of attention, but also by too great dependence and frequent requests. It is to protect the remnant of our friendship from such dangers that I now take my leave."

The king replied: "If you are determined to go, I think you should return one day to favor us once again with your great vision. Did you not just say that friendship ought to be kept safe from lack of attention?"

"Your Majesty, living in the world one is subjected to all sorts of obstacles, detours, and adversaries. I cannot promise that I will come this way again. I can only express my wish that I might be able to meet with you once more when there is good reason for such a visit."

These sweet words satisfied the king, and he bade farewell to Mahabodhi in a most honorable fashion. The Bodhisattva then resumed his journey. Troubled by contact with worldly folk, he retired to the forest, where he directed his attention to the practice of meditation. Before long he attained the four meditations and the five transcendent knowledges.

Some time later, while he was enjoying this exquisite tranquillity, a memory of the king, accompanied by a feeling of compassion, came to his mind. Concerned about the present state of the king's virtue, he focused on that monarch, and with his mind's eye discerned that the king was caught up in the intrigues of his many counselors, each of whom was urging the king to adopt the precepts of various false doctrines.

One was trying to persuade the king against the teachings of causality, using examples in which the causality is difficult to follow. "What," said he, "is the cause of the shape, the color, the arrangement, the softness, and so on of the stalk, the petals, and the filaments of a lotus? What causes the gorgeous variety in the plumage of birds? You cannot say, for these things exist by their very nature. The entire universe exists for no other reason than itself: Everything has its own essential and inherent nature."

Another believed in a Supreme Being who created all things: "It is absurd to say that the universe could exist without a cause. There is a Being who is master of the universe, a Being who is Eternal and One. And it is in consequence of this Being's transcendental volition that the world is cyclically created and destroyed."

Another counselor attempted to persuade the king of his own doctrine: "The universe is as it is because of karma, former actions, which bring us happiness or unhappiness. Personal initiative has no power to alter this. Nor is there such a thing as a Supreme Being, for how, indeed, could one being at one time create all the boundless variety of the elements found in this existence? This universe is clearly the product of former actions. Why else would even those skilled in doing

what should ensure happiness suffer so much misfortune? Clearly all these things come from previous karma."

Yet another was enticing the king to care for nothing but sensual pleasure, following the theory of annihilation: "Look closely at the various constituent parts and colors of a tree. Can these be traced to past actions that have been taken? Yet they exist, and, once destroyed, will never exist again. So it is with everything. And for this reason we should consider pleasure the main goal of life."

Another counselor, pretending to instruct the king in his royal duties, recommended that he follow the tortuous path of political expediency, a path marked by lack of compassion, by cruelty, and by all things contrary to the Dharma. "Use your supporters as you would use your shade trees," he said, "for as long as they prove useful to you. Extend your glory by showing them gratitude only so long as it is to your advantage; when someone is no longer of use, cut him off, as you might an object intended for sacrifice. This is the way to renown and security."

In this manner did the ministers try to lead the king astray on paths of false doctrine. And, owing to his association with wicked people and his eagerness to be guided by those he trusted, the monarch was about to fall into the chasm of wrong views. Seeing this, the Bodhisattva was filled with compassion and concentrated on a means to reverse this process. So it is that the virtuous always keep in mind the good done to them, whereas the wrongs they experience slip from their thoughts like water from a lotus petal.

Having decided on his course of action, the Bodhisattva conjured up a large monkey. As soon as the monkey appeared in his hermitage, he caused all but its hide to disappear, and this he used as a cloak. Clothed in this cloak he had magically created, he presented himself at the entrance to the king's palace.

He was announced by the gatekeepers, and ushered past the guards, past the waiting officers, brahmans, soldiers, messengers, and notables, through the doors to the audience chamber which was guarded by doorkeepers holding swords and staves.

The king was seated on his throne, surrounded by his council of learned and wise men, all magnificently attired and seated by rank. The ruler welcomed the Bodhisattva, and showed Mahabodhi every honor due a revered guest. Only after the ascetic had taken the seat offered him did the king express his intense curiosity about the monkey skin. "Who offered this extraordinary monkey skin to your reverence, thereby winning enormous merit?" asked the king.

The Bodhisattva replied: "Your Majesty, nobody gave it to me. I won it for myself. Sitting and sleeping on the hard ground-strewn only with thin straw-is very painful for the flesh, and makes it very difficult to perform religious duties with ease. One day a large monkey appeared in my hermitage, and I thought: "Aha! Here is just the thing to ease my pain and help my religious practice! If only I had that monkey skin-then sitting or sleeping would be as comfortable as upon any royal couch spread with the softest of silks. And so, after subduing the beast, I skinned it."

Hearing this story, the king was filled with dismay, but being polite and well-bred, he said nothing to the Bodhisattva, but merely cast down his eyes in shame. The

ministers, however, still bearing a grudge against the Great Being, seized the opportunity to sneer at the Bodhisattva, and with laughing faces directed at the king, said:

"Look at him! How devoted he is to his religion, his only delight! How constant to his precepts! How adept at achieving his aims! How wonderful that, alone and emaciated by ascetic life as he surely must have been, he was able to kill so large a monkey! May his practice now be doubly successful!"

The Bodhisattva turned to the ministers with utmost calm and said: "In blaming me so harshly, take care lest you disregard the fair tenets of your own doctrines. Such is not a very skillful way to advance your own theories. May your reverences please consider! He who uses words contradicting his own doctrine to attack the doctrine of his adversary, undermines his own position, and invites rebukes from others." Having countered the ministers collectively, the Bodhisattva then countered them individually. He said to the minister who denied causality:

"You hold that the universe exists by reason of its inherent nature. But if this were so, then why blame me for anything? Surely if this ape died in consequence of nothing but his own inherent nature, then I have rightly killed him. If, however, as you imply, I committed a sin in killing him, his death must have been produced by a cause. Therefore you must either renounce your doctrine of non-causality or cling to a reasoning that does not befit you.

"You say that the color, shape, and so on of a lotus are not the result of some cause. Yet is it not true that a lotus is produced only by lotus seeds in water? Where this condition appears, a lotus may grow; where not, not.

"Finally, consider this: Why do those who deny causality attempt to use logic if logic is causeless? They defy their own beliefs! On the other hand, if they prefer not to use logic, how can they support their stand? Their words are empty. And further, those who say causality does not exist when they cannot perceive the cause of some particular event-do they not become angry when they learn what does cause something, and contradict themselves most heatedly? Simply because you cannot see a cause is no reason to say with such conviction that it does not exist. At sunset you can no longer see the blazing white of the sun, but you do not need to point out a cause to prove the sun's continual existence.

"Furthermore, for the cause of happiness you pursue objects of pleasure, and for the same cause you avoid whatever blocks your way. Indeed, for these very reasons, you support or contradict the king. In the face of all this, do you still deny causality?

"To return to the case of my monkey. Should you persist in your doctrine-if you truly do not see the existence of causes -it would follow that the death of that monkey had no cause. Then why blame me?"

Thus with clear arguments did the Great Being confound the advocate of non-causality. Then, turning to the believer in a Supreme Being, he said: "You, too, who are so religious, ought not to blame me. According to you, your Lord is the cause of everything.

"Look here. If a Supreme Being does everything, then he alone is the murderer of that ape, is he not? How can you blame me on account of another's actions?"

If, however, you would say that he would never do such a thing because of his compassion, why do you loudly proclaim that he is the cause of all things?

"Moreover, why do you bow down before him with hope and prayer since that Lord of All, your 'self-created being', must have already created every action, both good and evil? Even your worship of him was his action. You cannot deny he is the author of all you do. Where is free will, then, my friend? If there is none, how can you blame me for anything?"

"Indeed, if a Supreme Being is the creator and performer of all sinful acts, why should those who fear sin bother to foster devotion to him at all, after seeing this quality of his? And if he is not the one who commits evil-since you say he abhors evil-then you err in saying that he is the creator of all things.

"Further, your Supreme Being, in existing, must have come forth from something-from either the Dharma (the lawful order of things) or from something else. If he came forth from the Dharma, then he could not have existed before that order existed. If he came forth from something else, then he himself is in bondage, and is not sovereign, being infinitely dependent.

"You may say that he exists without a cause-if this is so, then you are attached and devoted to one who is outside the natural order of things and therefore amoral. If you accept your Supreme Being as the sole cause of all things, should you blame me for the murder of that chief of monkeys since his fate was already decided by the Supreme Being?"

So crystal clear were the Bodhisattva's arguments concerning causation by a Sovereign God that the minister was struck dumb. Then, turning to the partisan of the doctrine of former actions, the Bodhisattva continued: "No more does it become you, sir, to censure me. According to you, everything is the result of immediately preceding actions. If this is true, I say to you that I am proud to have done this-I rightly killed this monkey. If everything is due to preceding karma, why should you blame me for killing this monkey? If, because of karma, a temple should burn to the ground, why blame me? On the other hand, if you say I committed a bad action in killing the monkey, then I must be the cause of his death, not the monkey's immediately preceding action. And if, as you assert, karma always produces more karma, there can never be final emancipation.

"If, however, misery could change into happiness-and if established happiness could change into the state of suffering-then we could infer that good and evil fortune depend exclusively on immediately preceding karma. But if misery and happiness cannot become each other, preceding actions cannot be the only cause of events. If one can never generate new, fresh karma, then how could one ever have had the 'old' karma-that which came before? If, nonetheless, you persist in this way of thinking, how can you judge that I killed the monkey?"

In the face of this powerful logic, the minister was so still that he seemed to have taken a vow of silence. Then the Great Being turned to the adherent of nihilism and smiled. "How eager your honor is to blame me," he said, "but if there is really nothing after death, if each moment is totally annihilated after it exists, why should we bother to be concerned with good or evil? Why care at all about doing good? The wise would do whatever gives them most pleasure-and therefore it was not at all -wrong for me to kill the monkey.

"If, however, fear of public opinion should lead someone to abandon sin and follow a path of virtue, he will not escape criticism, due to the contradiction between his words and actions-nor can happiness be easily obtained by relying on public opinion. And is this not a silly and meaningless doctrine? Are not those who follow it the most childish of fools?"

"As for your statement regarding the various constituent parts and colors of a tree as not being caused by karma, but as existing by their own nature-once such a tree is gone, how can you explain how another like it arises? In your view anything could be the cause of something like that arising. Yet if, not withstanding this, you persist in your attachment to this doctrine, how can you censure the killing of a monkey-or even of a man?"

By means of this elegant refutation, the Bodhisattva silenced another of the ministers. Then to the one so skilled in the science of politics, he said: "For what reason do you censure me, you who believe so firmly in political expediency? According to that doctrine, good or evil deeds are to be performed according to their expediency. Moreover, you feel that only after having reached the pinnacle of power should one bestow anything on others-and even then only for one's own benefit.

"If, for the sake of personal gain, you can forswear honesty even with your closest relations, how can you blame me for killing an ape when I wanted his skin? Is this not a textbook example of your philosophy?"

"On the other hand, if you should blame me for cruelty and point out that misery is the fruit of such action, how can you reconcile that with your logic? How can you decide what is a correct judgment and what is not? Alas for those shameless ones who, in the name of expediency, oppress humanity and extend amorality. I do not see that such actions have gained you either pleasure or joy.

"Nevertheless, if you insist on maintaining your philosophy, do not blame me for killing the monkey, but blame your own system!"

And so, one by one, the king's counselors were conquered by the Bodhisattva, in spite of their influence over the assembly, and in spite in their usual boldness. Confident of his success with the entire assembly, the Bodhisattva continued: "In truth, Your Majesty, I have never killed even a single living creature. This skin I wear comes from a monkey I created solely for the purpose of this conversation. So do not judge me falsely." And so speaking, he dissolved the illusion of the monkey skin.

Then, seeing the king and his company in a receptive state of mind, he continued: "He who perceives that all things emanate from causes yet believes in free will, who looks to a future life beyond this, who maintains virtuous action, who cherishes compassion-how could such a person kill any living being?"

"Indeed, Great Prince, do but consider: How could one who believes in the Truth commit a deed which would not be performed by the denier of causality, or the believer in an absolute being, or the materialist, or the politician, not even for the sake of a little glory?"

"A person's creed, be it true or false, prompts action in accord with it. Through what a person says and does you can learn much of what a person is. For this reason it is important to rely on right views and doctrine both in words and deeds.

From bad views corruptions come forth; therefore one should keep company with the virtuous and avoid the wicked.

"Yet there are monks, better called demons, who wear the garb of the self-restrained, but who are unconstrained. They lead simple folk astray with their false views, as surely as serpents inject harm with the poison of their venom.

"As jackals are betrayed by their howling, so do adherents of false doctrines betray themselves by their harsh ways of speaking. Therefore the wise do not depend on such persons, but rather work for their good if they are able to do so. No one, no matter how illustrious, should make friends with such people, even if they are famous and you have need of them. For even the moon is overshadowed by the gloom of a winter's day.

"Therefore, avoid the company of those who avoid virtue, and stand instead by those skilled ones who foster virtue. Make your glory shine by arousing in your subjects a love of virtuous qualities that will lead them to be unattached to wrongdoing. By so doing your fame and good reputation will shine and extend widely.

"When you act in accord with the Dharma, you can lead your people for the greater part to be intent on virtuous action and take the path to higher states of being. When you exert yourself to protect your people by relying on the Dharma, you will find that its rules and disciplines make it the loveliest path of all. Purify your conduct, learn to embrace charity, open your heart to strangers as if they were your closest kin, and rule your land with virtue and responsibility. May you govern your land with righteousness, never ceasing the observances of your duties. In this way you will gain renown and high states of being.

"But if a king fails to protect his realm, his peasants, his farmers and herders—those who, like the wish-granting tree, bear flowers and fruit—if he does not protect the people who are the source of his revenue, he will have difficulties with his crops. If he fails to protect the merchants, traders, townspeople, and palace retinue who pay their share of customs, he will lose his support and have difficulty with the treasury. If he fails to honor his stalwart army and ignores the soldiers valiant in battle, he will lose the helmet of victory. And if a king disdains the virtuous, those blessed by morality or learning or supernatural power, he will forfeit the joys of the higher realms.

"As one who plucks an unripe fruit kills the seed without gaining the benefit of the juice of the fruit, so a king who does not act in accord with the Dharma will bring ruin to his land without gaining any benefit. On the other hand, as a tree abounding in fruit yields a great crop when the fruit is left to ripen, so can a country well protected by its ruler provide him with spiritual and material prosperity and enjoyment.

"Surround yourself with faithful ministers, clever and wise, as well as with honest friends and family. Secure their affection with giving, agreeable words, and respect. Focus your mind on the good of all your subjects, and let the Dharma guide your actions. While protecting your people from attachment and hatred, and purifying their ways, may you secure all worlds."

Thus did the Great Being lead the king and his attendants from the wrong road of false doctrines to the Excellent Path. And, as the assembly bowed with palms joined, he ascended directly into the sky to return to his hermitage in the forest.

In this way, the compassion the virtuous feel for those who were once their benefactors is not diminished even by wrongs later done to them. Such is their gratitude, and such is their practice of forbearance. Considering this, one must not forget a former benefit because of such a trifle as a personal injury. This account is also relevant when discoursing on how the Buddha, even before he reached supreme Wisdom, defeated the doctrines of other teachers and taught the Truth. This account is also useful when censuring erroneous doctrines or inversely when praising righteous views, for it shows how a false doctrine cannot bear up under strong arguments because it has no firm foundation and is thus to be avoided.



23 - The Wise One A Tale of Teaching



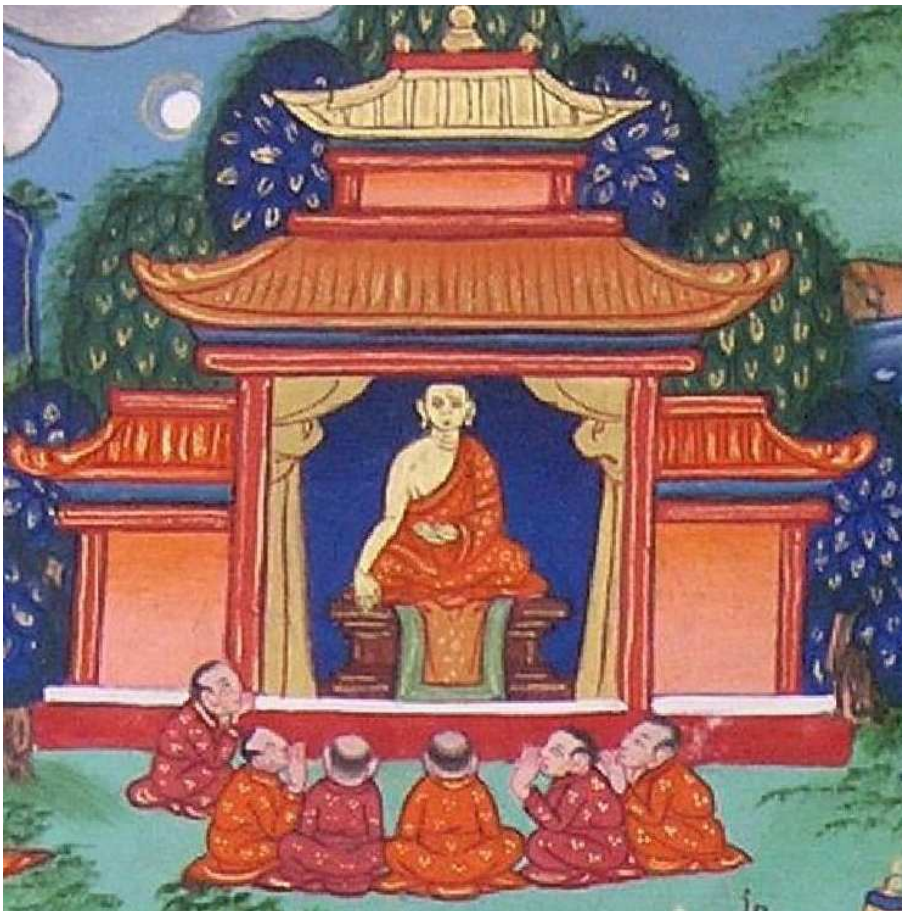
The Bodhisattva once became a wise ascetic who wandered throughout the land teaching the spiritual truths to all who would listen. He eventually reached the land of a king whom took a great liking to him and invited him to the capitol to give daily discourses. The Kings affection for the Bodhisattva continued to grow.

The royal ministers, seeing how fond of the Bodhisattva the king was, started to feel threatened. They began to plant seeds of distrust in the king's mind, telling him that the Bodhisattva was a spy sent by a rival king. The king's affection for the Bodhisattva began to fade. Noticing this, the Bodhisattva left the kingdom and returned to the forest to continue his ascetic practice.

While meditating in the woods, the Bodhisattva had a vision and saw that the king was being misled by his advisors. He saw that each of them had a different outlook on the world and how the king should rule, and that none of these views were in accord with the Dharma. One minister denied cause and effect, one believed in an all powerful supreme being that ruled and controlled everything, one believed that free will and personal initiative have no power over the laws of

karma, and one minister was a hedonist, who believed that sensual pleasure is all that mattered.

The Bodhisattva decided he needed to free the king from such advisors and proceeded back to the capitol. He created the illusion of a monkey skin shawl out of thin air and when he returned to the king, the ministers started to insult him for wearing it. He explained that their disapproval of the garment contradicts each of their own philosophies, and that if the views they were pushing on the king were true, they would not have a problem with it. They were hypocrites. They abandoned their ideologies and requested the Bodhisattva teach them. Thus, the Bodhisattva led the king, his attendants, and the entire kingdom, away from their false paths and showed them the true spiritual path.



Key Events in the Story

1. King befriends ascetic teacher
2. Royal ministers slander the ascetic
3. The ascetic points out wrong views

24 - The Great Ape



When the virtuous are injured by others, they cry less for their own pain than for the merit things forfeited by those who have injured them. At one time the Bodhisattva showed just this.

Near the Snow Mountains lies a blessed region, rich and inviting, fragrant as the sweetest of aloes, its mantle of magnificent forests as lush as dark silk. Birds of myriad colors and shapes enhance the landscape, which is so harmonious in shape and color that it appears to express a grand design. Here celestial beings sport in the clear waters of spring-fed mountain streams that flow over rocky ledges and tumble down cliffs in great waterfalls. Humming bees abound, and breezes fan the flowering trees. Here, the Bodhisattva once took birth as a great ape that lived alone.

Even in that animal state, the Bodhisattva had not lost his awareness of the Dharma: Kind, infinitely patient, and of a sweet and firm nature, he was blessed with an imperishable compassion boundless as the sky. For though the earth, with its forests, great mountains, and deep oceans, has perished countless times though water, fire, and wind, the great compassion of the Bodhisattva is never destroyed. This huge ape lived like an ascetic, subsisting exclusively on the simple fare of leaves and fruits, and bringing whatever aid he could to the creatures within his sphere.

One day it came to pass that a certain farmer, having gone in search of a stray cow, completely lost his way. Unable to determine his location from the star map of the sky, he wandered utterly at random, until finally he reached the domain of the great ape. There, exhausted by hunger, thirst, heat, and fatigue, his heart ablaze with a fire of misery and his mind oppressed with the weight of his despair, he threw himself down at the foot of a tree. Casting hungry looks here and there, he spotted a number of sour tinduka fruit lying scattered on the ground. The pangs of his hunger made their bitterness seem sweet-so sweet, in fact, that he began to search for their source.

He did not have far to look. Rooted in a rocky slope at the edge of a waterfall, the tree grew out over the precipice, its branches laden with the heavy clustered fruit, tawny and inviting. Filled with craving, the farmer mounted the slope and, climbing the tree, reached a branch heavy with fruit. In his eagerness to obtain the fruit he crawled out to the very end of the branch. Suddenly, unable to bear his weight, the branch snapped, as if chopped off by a hatchet.

With a great cry he fell headlong over the cliff. Holding onto the branch for dear life, he fell into the ravine and into a pool of deep water which was surrounded by steep rock walls. The leaves of the branch cushioned his fall, preventing any broken bones, and he was able straightaway to climb out of the cold water. But looking in all directions he could find no escape from the forest chasm.

Realizing that he would soon starve to death, he burst into tears, the arrow of despair piercing his heart. Overwhelmed by distress, he cried out: "Alas! Here in the midst of a remote forest, far from any human ears, I have fallen into a pit-like a wild beast caught in a trap. No one, no matter how carefully they search, will ever find me-except Death.

"No relatives or friends can hear my cries-only the swarms of mosquitoes who come to drink my blood. I shall never again see the loveliness of gardens and groves, arbors and streams, the sky resplendent with its jewel-like stars. I sit here in total darkness, while the black night of this pit hides me from the world." Thus lamenting, he passed many days in the deep pit, sustained solely by the water of the pool and the few tinduka fruit that had fallen with him.

Now, the great ape happened to wander through that part of the forest in search of food. Beckoned by the branches of the tinduka tree rustling in the wind, he climbed the tree, and peering over the waterfall, saw the emaciated body of the man lying at the bottom of the pit, eyes and cheeks sunken and pale, obviously weak from hunger. The compassion of the great ape was instantly aroused. Entirely forgetting his own search for food, he fixed his gaze on the man far below and, in a human voice, called out:

"You there, what are you doing in this pit inaccessible to men? Who are you and how came you to be here?"

The man in the pit, casting his eyes on the great ape, bowed with folded hands in awe and supplication. "A mere man am I, O glorious god," he replied. "I lost my way in the forest. Trying to obtain fruit from that tree, I found only disaster. In this awful place, far from friends and kin, catastrophe has befallen me. I beseech you, O protector of monkeys, to rescue me."

A person in distress, without friends or family to help, imploring assistance with anxious face and folded hands, would evoke feelings of mercy in the heart of even his greatest enemy. For a Great Being, such a one arouses the greatest compassion. Filled with boundless pity, the Bodhisattva comforted the man with kind words:

"Do not think that all is lost because you have fallen into this pit and have no friends to help you. Whatever friends could do, I can do as well. Do not be afraid."

After these soothing words, the Bodhisattva threw down more finduka and other fruit, and then went off a little way to prepare himself for the task before him. First he found a stone the weight and size of a man, and attached it firmly to his back to test his ability to carry the man up out of the pit. Learning the measure of his strength and convinced that he could do it, he returned to the cliff and descended to its bottom.

Gently he said: "Climb upon my back and cling fast while I draw forth both you and my body's usefulness. For indeed, as the wise know, the body is a useless thing unless it can be of service to others."

After bowing with reverence to the great ape, the man climbed upon his back. Then the ape, stooping with the pain of his heavy burden, yet with unswerving firmness of mind, climbed with great difficulty up the sides of the rock, thus succeeding in the rescue. Though he felt profoundly elated, the Bodhisattva was so exhausted that his gait was unstable and wavering; finding a slab of cloud-gray stone, he lay down to rest. Pure of heart, suspecting no danger from the one he had just saved, he trustingly said:

"This part of the forest is full of fierce beasts of every kind. Therefore, while I recover from my efforts, please keep watch lest some animal destroy both me and its own future happiness. Keep careful guard over us both. I am utterly weary and must rest."

With feigned sincerity the man promised: "Do not fear. I will stay here and guard both of us. Sleep, sir, as long as you like, and do not awaken until you are fully refreshed."

But as soon as the Great Being had fallen asleep, evil thoughts sprang up in the man's mind. "Why should I stay here any longer?" he thought. "What can I live on-roots acquired with great difficulty or fruit found by chance? With such food I will never recover my strength. If I am weak and hungry, how can I ever escape this wilderness?"

"The body of this ape would give me ample food for my journey. True, he has done me a service, but the teachings which provide for times of distress surely apply here-therefore I may feed upon him. But I can kill him only while he sleeps this sleep of quiet trust; not even a lion could conquer him once he is awake. There is no time to lose."

That scoundrel's mind was so caught up in dark greed that his gratitude, his knowledge of what is right, and his innate compassion were utterly destroyed. Ignoring his body's weakness and heeding only his desire to kill, he took a huge stone and threw it on the head of the great ape.

But his body was still weak and trembling, and he acted too hastily; the stone, far from sending the ape into the deeper sleep of death, merely roused him. Rather than dashing the ape's head to pieces, it only bruised a temple, and fell to earth with a loud thud.

Jumping up quickly, the Bodhisattva looked around to discover his attacker. But he saw no one except the man he had saved-his face ashen, his manner dejected, he betrayed himself by his shameful dismay. Sudden fear had tightened the man's throat, drops of sweat fell from his body, and he could not lift his eyes. It did not take long for the ape to realize who had meant him harm.

Forgetting his pain entirely, the Bodhisattva felt only sadness and compassion for this man who had thrown away all hope of happiness by his action. Without anger or agitation, eyes filled with tears, the Bodhisattva said in a sorrowful voice: "Friend! How is it that you, a human being, could be capable of such an act? How could you conceive it, much less attempt it, you who swore you would make every effort to protect me from danger?"

"Had I felt the smallest bit of pride in accomplishing your rescue, you have hereby destroyed it-for you have done something far more difficult than I have done. Having been saved from the mouth of Death, scarcely back from one abyss, you have fallen headlong into another!"

"How could this have come to pass? O foul ignorance, vile and cruel, that draws the miserable into far deeper distress with false hopes of gain. You have ruined yourself, and kindled a fire of sorrow within me. You have tarnished your reputation, contradicted your love of virtue, and destroyed your ability to be trusted. Now you are a target for every arrow of reproach. Is all this worth what you hoped to achieve?"

"The pain of my wound grieves me far less than the thought that on account of me you have plunged into evil, and no one, not even I, has the power to erase that deed."

"Now come with me. Stay by my side. Do not stray from my sight, for you are not to be trusted. I will guide you out of this dangerous forest to the path that leads to civilization. Roaming here alone, weak and not knowing your way, you would be assailed by those who would do you great harm and undo all I have done."

And so the Great Being led the man to the border of the forest. Having shown him the way, he said once more: "Now, friend, you have reached the edge of civilization, and you can leave this dangerous forest. May you have a happy journey, and may you avoid evil actions-for the harvest of evil is very painful."

Thus, filled with compassion, the great ape taught the man as if he were a disciple. Then he returned to his home in the forest. But the man, tortured by the blazing fire of remorse, was no sooner left alone than he was struck by a hideous attack of leprosy. His face and skin became covered with bursting sores that spread putrid matter all over his body. From that moment on, no matter where he went, he became an object of fear and loathing. So hideous was his distorted form that in neither appearance nor voice did he resemble a human being-so clearly embodied was his pain. Thinking him to be a demon, people everywhere, out of fear, drove him away with stones and clubs and the harshest of words.

One day as he wandering like a deer through a forest, he was discovered by a king who was hunting in the woods. Seeing the man's most horrible appearance, his garments reduced to dirty rags that barely covered him, the king spoke to him in a curious voice tinged with fear:

"Your body is disfigured with leprosy, your skin spotted with ulcers. A more pale, emaciated, and miserable creature I have never seen. What are you? Preta, ghost, demon, or ghoul? What living being could display such a host of diseases?"

Bowing to the king, the man replied in a tremulous voice: "I am a man, Your Majesty, not a spirit."

The king then asked him how he had fallen into such a wretched state, and the leper confessed his wicked action, and added: "My suffering now is simply the blossom of the tree I planted-an act of treachery against a friend. I do not doubt the ripened fruit will come to be more miserable still. Therefore, O king, you must consider a treacherous deed against a friend to be your greatest enemy. Always look with kindness upon all who are kind to you.

"Those who turn against their friends will surely find a wretched existence in this world, not to think of the next. As their minds are stained with covetousness and other vices, what will befall them then cannot be imagined. Those, however, whose minds are filled with love and affection for friends, reap the trust of all, and enjoy great benefits. A firm mind will gain them great happiness. With tranquillity and humility they will confound their enemies and ultimately win the path to the higher realms.

"Knowing the consequences of good and bad conduct toward friends, O king, hold firm to the path of the virtuous, for whoever walks that road will undoubtedly attain happiness."

From this story one can see how the virtuous grieve for the loss of virtue incurred by those who injure them rather than for their own pain. This account can also be used when discussing the great-mindedness of the Tathagata and when talking about the importance of listening with attention to the Dharma teachings. It is also to be recounted when dealing with the subjects of forbearance and faithfulness toward friends, and also when demonstrating the perniciousness of evil deeds.

24 - The Great Monkey

The Consequences of Turning Against a Friend.



In a blessed region near the snow mountains of the Himalayas, the bodhisattva lived alone in the form of a large monkey. Although born into a lower state, the bodhisattva had not lost his awareness of a spiritual life and was kind and patient, and possessed of a sweet yet firm nature. He lived like an ascetic, sustaining himself on nothing more than leaves and fruit. He treated all the creatures he encountered with compassion and kindness.

One day it came to pass that a farmer, having gone in search of a stray cow, became completely lost. Unable to determine his location using a star map, the farmer wandered at random and eventually entered the forest of the great monkey. Searching for food, the man noticed a tree laden with fruit on the side of a rocky slope. Having reached the tree, as he was standing on a branch grasping for fruit, the branch suddenly snapped and he fell into a dark pool at the bottom of a chasm. Surrounded on all sides with steep rock walls, there was no escape.



The man had been in the dark chasm for several days before the great monkey, gathering fruit from the same tree, noticed the farmer's emaciated body lying below. The monkey called out to the farmer who responded by begging for help. The monkey bodhisattva, having deep compassion for the man's situation, started to descend the rock face. Once he reached the bottom of the chasm he had the farmer cling to his back as he climbed up out of the deep hole. Once they reached the top, the monkey was exhausted from carrying such a heavy weight and asked the man to guard him as he rested. The farmer gave the monkey his word that he would protect him as he slept.

Although grateful to the monkey, the man began to think that if he were to kill the great beast that he would then surely have enough meat for his journey home. The man became so caught up in this dark greed that his sense of gratitude, as well as his knowledge of right and wrong, was utterly destroyed. Ignoring his frailty and driven only by his desire to kill, the farmer then took a large stone and struck the head of the bodhisattva monkey. Not having the strength to deliver a fatal blow, the rock merely bruised the monkey's temple. Abruptly awoken and startled, realizing the wicked act the man had just attempted, the monkey burst into tears of sadness and pity.

Never-the-less, still feeling compassion in his heart, the monkey led the man back to civilization. As soon as he was left alone, filled with feelings of remorse, the farmer was suddenly struck with a hideous attack of leprosy. His face became covered with putrid sores which spread to the rest of his body until he no longer looked human.



Banished from society, one day as the disfigured man was wandering through the forest, he encountered a king who was in the midst of hunting. The king asked what kind of demon or ghouel he was. Shocked that the ghouel was actually a man, and a farmer, the king then inquired how he had fallen into such a wretched state. The man confessed his treacherous actions against the kindness of the great monkey. He explained that a deed against a friend is such a horrible act that the king should consider it his biggest enemy and that he should always look with kindness upon those who are kind to him.

Key Events in the Story.

1. The Bodhisttva was born as a large Monkey.
2. A farmer gets lost and falls into a chasm.
3. The monkey saves the farmer.
4. The farmer returns injury for kindness, but the monkey forgives.
5. The farmer contracts leprosy.
6. Confessing to a king, the farmer regrets his actions.

25 - The Fabulous Sharabha Deer



The truly compassionate show love even for those with murder on their minds; even when they themselves are in great distress, they would never desert such beings.

Once the Bodhisattva took the shape of a sharabha deer who lived in a forest far away from the sound of man, a forest inhabited by many different kinds of animals. Trees and shrubs and thick high grass covered this remote land, which was untrod by travelers and bare of any trace of carts or other vehicles. It was, indeed, a land traversed only by rivulets and ant trails.

This sharabha was no common deer. Extraordinarily vigorous and swift, he was also distinguished by his beautiful color. Full of compassion, he felt nothing but friendliness towards all animals; he lived happily in the forest, always content, subsisting totally on grasses, leaves, and water. Although he had the shape of a forest creature, he nonetheless possessed the firm intellect of a man. The qualities of this deer, demonstrated by his mercy toward every sentient being, his forest retreat, and his simple fare, were like those of a yogin longing for total detachment. Thus he ornamented the forest by his presence.

Now it came to pass that the king who ruled that land entered the forest on a hunt one day and travelled very near the dwelling place of the sharabha. Astride his swift horse, the king was eager to practice his hunting skills. Swift were his arrows, and swift was the chase. Drunk with excitement, carried away by the joys of the sport, he was soon separated no small distance from his retinue of elephants, chariots, and footmen.

Suddenly the king spotted the Great Being from a distance. Immediately resolving to kill the deer, he strung his bow with a deadly arrow, and spurred on his horse. But the Bodhisattva no sooner perceived the armed rider approaching than he took to flight-not because he was powerless against his assailant, but because he wished to avoid any violence.

Running swiftly from his pursuer, the sharabha came upon a gaping chasm in the earth; leaping across it as if it were only a crack, he continued his flight. But when the king's horse, following in quick pursuit, came upon the crevice, it hesitated, and without any warning whatsoever, stopped still. The king, bow in hand, was thrown from his seat headlong over the edge, just as a celestial warrior falls into the ocean. His eyes fixed on his prey, he had not noticed the ravine, and through lack of awareness, had been flung from his horse.

No longer hearing the sound of hooves at his back, the Bodhisattva thought: "Perhaps the king has quit the chase." Looking behind, he saw the riderless horse standing on the brink of the great ravine, and he considered: "No doubt the king has fallen over the edge. No tree spreads its luxuriant foliage as an invitation to rest; no lake with water blue and pure as a lotus invites one to bathe. Certainly the king did not dismount to hunt on foot in this place of wild and ferocious animals; nor is there any brush in which he might be hiding. Without a doubt, the king has fallen into that ravine." Upon reaching this irrefutable conclusion, the Great Being at once felt great compassion for the one who had sought his life.

"Until a moment ago, the king possessed all the signs of royalty. He commanded a host of chariots, horsemen, footmen, and elephants armed with glittering weapons. Worshipped like the Lord of the Gods by crowds of devotees, he was sheltered by the loveliest umbrellas, and comforted by cool breezes from jeweled fans.

"Yet now he lies below in that great pit. Perhaps the fall has broken his bones; perhaps he has been knocked unconscious; perhaps he is moaning in pain. Alas! To what distress has he fallen? Common folk, inured to suffering, do not suffer nearly so much from their misfortunes as those of high rank. When princes are visited by calamity, they plunge into despair, accustomed as they are to great comfort.

"He will certainly be unable to escape by himself. If there is still some remnant of life left in the man, it would not be right to abandon him." And so, impelled by his compassion, the Great Being approached the edge of the precipice and looked over the edge. There lay the king, his armor covered with dust, his diadem and garments in disarray, his body wracked with pain, his mind in abject, total despair.

Seeing the king in such a wretched state, the sharabha no longer thought of him as an enemy, but felt the monarch's pain as his own. Tears welled up in his eyes, and his sweet and kind words showed his innate virtue as he spoke with courtesy and respect to the king:

"I hope you have not suffered any great harm, Your Majesty, when falling into this hell-like pit. Have you broken any limbs? I hope your pains are not extensive, O most distinguished of men. I am but a forest creature of these parts, reared upon your grass and water. Do not hesitate to trust in me, and do not be afraid. I have the power to rescue you. If you wish my help, simply command me, and I shall come to your aid."

Such amazing speech from an animal touched the king deeply. Shame rose within him as he turned the situation over in his mind: "Is he speaking truth or falsehood? How can he possibly show mercy to me, his enemy, when only moments ago I was trying to kill him? And how could I have acted so wrongly toward this innocent one? How confounding is the sharp reproach of the gentle! It is I who am the brute; he bears but the shape of one. Surely he deserves to be honored by my acceptance of his offer."

Having made his decision, the king replied to the deer: "My armor spared me any major injury; the pain I feel is bearable. Yet nothing caused by my fall is half so painful as the offense I have committed against such a pure-hearted being as you. Pray do not hold it against me that, relying on your outward shape and thus unaware of your real nature, I took you for a forest creature."

Happy that the king had accepted his offer of help, the sharabha, to determine the extent of his strength, put a stone the weight of a man on his back and walked here and there for some time. Confident at last, he descended into the ravine and spoke to the king most respectfully:

"You will have to put up with the necessity of touching me so that I may obtain joy by bringing you happiness. Mount my back, Your Majesty, and hold on tight!" The king did as he was told, climbing upon the deer's back as if mounting a horse. With surpassing vigor and speed, the sharabha, holding his chest high, leaped up the cliff like some carved stone horse shown rising in the air.

After carrying the king out of the abyss and reuniting him with his horse, the deer told the king the way back to the capital, and, with joy in his heart, started to turn back to his forest. But the king, overcome with gratitude for this service so modestly rendered, embraced the sharabha and said:

"My life is yours, O Sharabha. You must consider as yours all that is within my power. Grant me the pleasure of visiting my capital and, if You will, come to live there. How could I set out for home alone, leaving you here in this dreadful place haunted by hunters, exposed to the elements night and day! Come, let us return to the city together!"

The Bodhisattva replied with sweet and humble words: "Your offer is suited to a lover of virtue such as yourself, O king, for virtues constantly practiced become an essential part of one's nature. But please do not think that I could be happy taking up residence in your home. The pleasures of humanity are one thing, and those of forest creatures quite another.

"If, however, you truly wish to do something for me, what I ask is quite simple: Stop your hunting, O hero. Desist forever! The poor beasts of the forest, their minds dull and heavy, are deserving of your pity, not your arrows. Understand, O mighty ruler, that animals have the same feelings as men, desiring happiness and the absence of suffering. Keeping this in mind, is it not wrong for you to do to others what would cause unhappiness to yourself?"

"Contemptible actions lead to loss of reputation, censure by the virtuous, and endless suffering. Root out that evil within yourself; attend to it as you would an illness, for it is truly your greatest adversary.

"O king, by pursuing meritorious actions, you will obtain the most highly esteemed royal dignity, and glory itself. Strengthen the ranks of benefactors, and enlarge your store of merit. Be bountiful, taking care to distribute gifts at the proper time and in the proper manner. Asking guidance from the virtuous, study well all the ways of right action. Transform your attitude toward all creatures, making it one of beneficence such as you would wish directed toward yourself. In this way you will achieve great merit, fame, and happiness."

Thus did the Great Being bless the king, teaching him all that was necessary to ensure a blissful future life. And the king, thankfully accepting his words, watched with deep respect as the deer sped away to his home in the forest.

From this story one can see how the intensely compassionate show pity even to those who would harm them. When evil doers are in distress, the virtuous never abandon them, but always show compassion. This account is also to be told when praising great compassion, when praising the qualities of the Tathagata, and when discussing how to listen with attention to the Dharma.

This story is also helpful when demonstrating how enmity is appeased through forbearance, and also when treating of the virtue of patience. It shows that the high-minded, even when in the state of beasts, always behave mercifully—even toward those who attempt to kill them. So how could a human being who has taken the vow of a homeless life be wanting in mercy toward animals? Thus a truly pious man must show mercy to all living beings.

25 - The Fabulous Sharabha Deer

Having Compassion for an Enemy



Virtuous beings show compassion even to those who seek to harm them. When evil doers are in distress, the truly compassionate never abandon them. This was the case when the Bodhisattva was born in the forest, as a fabulous Sharabha deer.



During a large hunt, a local king who was distracted by his passion for sport became separated from his retinue of elephants, chariots, and footmen. Because the horse he was riding was swift, he crossed a great distance without realizing it and became lost in the remote woods inhabited by the Sharabha Deer.

The king spotted the impressive deer and immediately strung his bow and started to pursue it. The chase continued until they reached a gaping chasm. The deer leapt across with ease but the king's horse abruptly halted, and the jolt threw the king from the horse. When the deer turned around he saw the horse at the chasm's edge and quickly realized what had happened. His heart overflowed with compassion for the man who was surely on the rocks below badly injured or even dead.

Completely forgiving the man's attempt to kill him, the deer climbed down and offered aid. The deer's kind action moved the injured king deeply and he apologized with tears in his eyes, saying that he had mistaken the deer for a low minded beast when in fact it was himself who was the brute.



The deer carried the King to his horse and the king, overcome by gratitude and remorse told the deer that he was forever in his service and beseeched the great being to come live in the capitol. The Sharabha deer declined the offer but said that he did have one request, that the king and the people of his kingdom stop hunting. He stated that the forest animals are worthy of his compassion and protection and not his arrows. The king agreed and from that day on, hunting was outlawed in the kingdom and the forest animals lived in safety.

Key Events in the Story

1. King falls into a chasm.
2. Deer saves king.
3. Hunting is outlawed.

26 - The Ruru Deer



It is not their own, but Others' suffering that the virtuous cannot bear: To the open-hearted, no suffering exists but that of others.

Once the Bodhisattva lived as a ruru deer in a remote forest, part of a vast wilderness far from the paths of men. All manner of plants bloomed there in glorious abundance: salas, bakulas, pivalas, hintalas, tamalas, naktamalas, vidula and nikula reeds, shrubs, thickets of shimshapas, tinisas, shamis, palashas, shakas; stands of kusha grass, bamboo, and reeds; kadamhas, sarjas, arjunas, dhavas, khadiras and kutajas. And everywhere the creeping tendrils of vines veiled the outstretched branches of the trees.

A great many forest animals lived there as well: the ruru, prishata, and srimara deer, yaks, elephants, javava oxen, buffaloes, harina and nvanku antelopes, boars, panthers, hvenas, tigers, wolves, lions, bears, and many more.

But the rarest and most unusual of all the animals was one ruru deer, tis color was as brilliant as pure gold; his soft fur was dappled with spots of every color, shining like rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and aquamarines. With his mild blue eyes, incomparably large and bright, with his horns and hooves gleaming like gems, he seemed a moving treasury of jewels.

Knowing his body to be an extremely desirable object, and aware of the pitiless nature of man, the ruru deer frequented only the unknown forest paths. His keen intellect led him to avoid places made unsafe by hunters with their traps and nets, their snares and holes covered with twigs and baited with grain. He taught those animals who followed him to avoid such places also, leading them like a father and a teacher. Would not any creature, longing for happiness, honor such great beauty combined with such fine intelligence and such wonderful behavior?

Now at one time, in that wild part of the forest, the Great Being heard cries for help from someone who had fallen into a river swollen by the rains. Carried away by the swift current, a man was crying out:

"Help me! The river is carrying me off! There is no one to help me, no boat to save me! Quickly! My arms are so tired -I am sinking! There is no shallow place! Help me! There is no time to lose!"

These piteous cries of distress struck the Bodhisattva to the core. As he rushed through the thicket he called out the comforting words he had used in hundreds of past lives to banish fear, grief, sadness, and fatigue. Even now, living as an animal, he succeeded in saying repeatedly and loudly in a human voice: "Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid!"

When the deer came out of the forest, he saw the drowning man in the distance, like a precious gift borne along by the river. As a brave warrior attacks a hostile army, the deer plunged into the swiftly flowing river, the thought of rescue more important than his own life. "Hold fast!" he told the man, who, overcome by fear and exhaustion, still managed to climb onto the ruru deer's back.

Despite the added weight of his burden and the violence of the current, the deer's extraordinary nobility gave him the strength to reach the riverbank. Once safe on the shore, his pleasure at having saved the man was so great that he felt no weariness. He warmed the man's cold limbs with the warmth of his own body, and then pointed the way out of the forest.

The extraordinary help the deer had provided, unusual even from the closest of friends, touched the man deeply; and the beautiful form of the ruru deer intensified his admiration and respect. Bowing his head to the deer, he said: "Neither kin nor childhood friend would have been capable of the action you have

just performed for my sake. My life is yours. If it could be used to bring you even some small benefit, I would be deeply honored. Whatever you would have me do, I would do to repay your kindness."

The Bodhisattva replied respectfully: "Gratitude is never to be wondered at in the virtuous, as it proceeds from the very nature of the Dharma. But nowadays the world is so corrupt that even gratitude is considered a great virtue. Therefore, I ask only one thing: Do not tell anyone about the marvelous animal that rescued you. My beautiful form makes me too desirable a prey. As a rule, people's hearts, filled with greed, have little mercy or self-restraint. And so, take care to guard your own virtue and my life as well. And remember! Treachery to friends can never lead to happiness.

"Do not be angry because I speak so bluntly. I am but a deer, unskilled in the deceitful human art of diplomacy. In deed, the clever and talented who feign honesty are precisely those who bring even the sincere under suspicion. So you will make me happy simply by doing as I have asked."

The man promised to protect the deer, and, after bowing and circumambulating the Great Being, set out for home.

Now it so happened that the queen of that country was endowed with the power of prophetic dreams. Whatever she dreamt, no matter how extraordinary, always came to pass. And at that time, one morning about daybreak, she dreamt of the ruru deer. Sparkling with the brilliance of a heap of jewels, the deer, surrounded by the king and his assembly, stood on a lion throne, preaching the Dharma in an articulate and human voice. Fascinated by this vision, the queen awoke only when the drums were beaten to rouse the king. As soon as she could, she ventured to the king's apartments where the king received her with the honor she deserved as well as with sincere affection.

Her bright eyes wide with wonder, her lovely cheeks flushed, her voice trembling from happiness, the queen presented the king with the account of her marvelous dream. "My lord," she said at the end, "please try to find that deer. Its beauty will make your palace as resplendent as the sky which sparkles with the constellation of the deer."

The king knew from experience to trust his wife's visions. Partly to please her and partly to satisfy his own desire, he ordered all his huntsmen to search for the ruru deer. A proclamation was also made in his capital day after day:

"Somewhere in this kingdom exists a deer with skin of gold, its coat spotted with many colors shining like hundreds of jewels. This deer is celebrated in the sacred texts, and some have even seen it. Whoever can reveal the whereabouts of that deer to the king will be provided with fourteen acres and ten lovely women."

And the man who had been rescued by the Bodhisattva heard this proclamation day after day, again and again.

He was a poor man, much afflicted by the sufferings of poverty, but he was also a mindful man, remembering the great gift he had received from the ruru deer. Torn between greed and gratitude, his thoughts swung from one direction to the other:

"What should I do—follow Virtue or Fortune? Should I uphold the promise to my benefactor rather than the duty to maintain my family? Which is more important,

the worldly existence or the heavenly one? Which code should I follow, that of the pious or that of the worldly? Should I taste glory or the modest joy of the anchorite? Which is more important, the present time or the time hereafter? Should I strive for riches or the good cherished by the virtuous?"

At last his mind, overcome by greed, came to this conclusion: "Once I have obtained great wealth, I shall be able to honor my kin and my friends, guests, and beggars; I will gain not only the pleasures of this world, but also happiness in the other." With this resolve, he put out of his mind entirely the gift of the ruru deer and went to the king.

"Your Majesty, I know where the ruru deer dwells. To whom should I reveal it?" The king, full of joy, answered: "Friend, you may show him to me." And so the king put on his hunting clothes and left the capital, accompanied by a large part of his army. Directed by the poor man, they arrived at the river. The king then encircled the surrounding forest with his forces, and joined by a few resolute and faithful men, the king himself, armed with bow and arrow, entered the thicket.

In a short time the man caught sight of the ruru deer, quiet and unsuspecting. He whispered to the king: "Your Majesty! There! There is the glorious deer. Look and be careful." But as he raised his arm to point out the animal, his hand fell to the ground, as if cut off at the wrist with a sword. Thus do one's actions, when directed against those honorable ones who perform great deeds, bear immediate fruit, provided there is little to counterbalance them.

So curious was the king to catch a glimpse of the ruru deer that he did not notice this strange happening. Peering into the middle of the forest which was dark as rain clouds, the king perceived a form shining with the splendor of jewels, brilliant like lightning flashing from the center of a black cloud.

Seeing the qualities of the ruru deer and entranced by its beauty, the king resolved to have the deer for himself. Drawing his bowstring, he crept up on the animal to be certain of hitting his target.

The Bodhisattva, however, hearing the noise of people on every side, already knew that he was surrounded. Seeing the king approach with his arrow ready, he realized there was no escape. In words distinct and articulate, he addressed the king in a human voice:

"Stop for a moment, mighty prince. Do not shoot me, Hero among men. First satisfy my curiosity, and tell me who revealed my home to you, far as it is from familiar paths. Who told you there existed a deer such as myself?"

The king, amazed by the human voice coming from the deer, turned the point of his arrow toward his guide. "This man," he said. And the Bodhisattva, recognizing the guide, replied: "Alas! It is easier to pull a tree from a raging river than to save from drowning one who is ungrateful. This is how he returns the favor bestowed on him. How sad he could not see that this is not the way to benefit himself!"

The king became curious: "Your words alarm me," he said. "I do not understand your meaning. On whose account do you speak so roughly? Is it human or spirit, bird or forest animal?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "No desire to point blame prompted my sharp words, O King. I spoke in order to prevent your guide from doing such a thing ever again.

Who would use harsh language against those who have committed wrong actions? It is like rubbing salt into the wounds of their faults. Yet, even to his beloved child a doctor must apply whatever medicine the illness requires.

"Your guide was once swept away by the current of the river, and his plight moved me to pity; he whom I rescued has now created this mortal danger to me, O Best of Men. Truly is it said that contact with the wicked can never lead to happiness."

The king turned to his guide and, with a look of harsh reproach, asked: "In truth, were you rescued from disaster by this deer?" And the man, sweating with fear, pale with misery and despair, answered shamefully: "Yes, I was."

"Evil man!" cried the king. Placing his hand upon his bowstring, he added: "Do not think this a mere trifle. Anyone whose heart could remain unsoftened by such a gesture is a vile representative of his fellow men. He brings them only dishonor. Why should this vilest of men live one moment longer?"

With these words, the king grasped his bow in the middle and bent it back, intending to kill the miserable guide. But the Bodhisattva, moved by great compassion, placed himself in front of the man, saving: "Stop, Your Majesty. Pray, do not strike one already stricken!"

"When he listened to the enticements of his enemy desire, at that very instant he was ruined, his good name lost, his virtue destroyed.

"Such is the way of the world: Like foolish moths drawn to a flickering light, people are lured by the prospect of riches. Little by little, the suffering they cannot bear erodes their integrity, until one day they fall, deluded by their desire. Take pity on this man, and restrain your anger. Indeed, if you promised him some reward for leading you to me, give it to him. For look, here I stand with bent head, awaiting your command."

Such compassion and sincere desire to benefit the person who had caused him such great harm had a powerful effect on the king. The king's heart was converted, and, looking with veneration at the ruru deer, he spoke softly: "Well said, well said, holy being. In showing such mercy to one whose cruelty against you is so clear, you display true humanity while we bear but the shape of men.

"Since you deem this knave worthy of your sympathy, and since he has been the cause of my meeting such a virtuous being, I will give him the wealth he so craves. To you I give permission to roam freely and safely in this kingdom, wherever you so desire."

The ruru deer answered: "Illustrious King, your royal gift is not offered in vain: I accept. But first, tell me how I may be of service to you, that your coming here will prove fruitful."

In response, the king honored the deer as his teacher, and then asked him to mount the royal chariot. Returning to the capital, he gave the deer a reception due an honored guest, and invited him to sit on the royal throne. There, the king, together with his wives, his officers, and attendants, urged the deer to preach the Dharma. Gazing upon the creature with reverence and gladness, they asked:

"People say many different things about the Dharma; you clearly understand it completely. Please explain it to us."

The Bodhisattva, raising his voice and speaking distinctly and elegantly, with soft words said to the king and the assembly: "The Dharma, and all its divisions and subdivisions, all its rules and precepts, can be summed up briefly: Generate compassion for all living beings; abstain from killing, from stealing, and so on, and give pleasure to all.

"Consider, Your Majesty, if, through such mercy, people treated each other as they would treat themselves or their families, whose heart would ever harbor wicked thoughts?

"The cause of all disturbance is lack of compassion. It corrupts the body, speech, and mind; it harms the family no less than strangers. If those who strive for Virtue will only remember compassion, only good can result. Compassion engenders virtue, as a fruitful rain causes the crops to grow.

"Once impressed upon the mind, compassion destroys the inclination to harm any other; and the mind being pure, neither body nor speech can be corrupted. The desire to benefit others increases with pleasure, and from that pleasure, love, charity, patience, and other virtues flow, bringing tranquility and a good reputation.

"Because of their tranquility, those who are merciful will never arouse suspicion or apprehension in others. Trusted by everyone, they are treated by all as kin. If one's heart is steeped in compassion, no dissension can bring disruption; if one's heart is strengthened by compassion, the mind enjoys sweet coolness-like a clear pool which no passion can agitate, no fire of anger destroy.

"Why say more? The wise firmly believe that all of virtue is contained in compassion. What virtue is there that is not the consequence of compassion? Always strive to show compassion to every living creature, treating them as if they were your own children, or as if they were yourself. By such pious conduct you will win the hearts of your people and glorify your royal station."

The king praised these words of the wonderful ruru deer and, together with his citizens, grew intent on practicing the Dharma. And he granted his protection to every animal and bird throughout the realm.

From this story one can see how for the virtuous no suffering exists except that of others-it is this they cannot bear; they do not mind their own suffering. This story is also to be recounted when praising the qualities of compassion, and when showing how the truly virtuous will benefit others even at their own expense. It also treats of the great harm which comes from harming those who are full of love.

26 - The Ruru Deer

A Tale of Betrayal



The Bodhisattva once lived as a Ruru Deer in a lush forest. His fur was the color of pure gold and contained patches of every color, shining like rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and aquamarines. His eyes were bright blue and his horns and hooves gleamed like jewels.

Knowing his body was an extremely desirable object to hunters, the Ruru Deer frequented only the most unknown forest paths. One day, in a particularly wild part of the forest, the Bodhisattva heard the cries of a man who had fallen into river swollen by rain. The man was pleading for help and his piteous cries struck the Bodhisattva to his core. He plunged into the river, the thought of rescue more important than his own life, and although nearly drowning, he dragged the man to the shore.

The man was deeply touched. He thanked the deer again and again and proclaimed that he was now forever in his service. The Bodhisattva deer replied that neither his gratitude nor services were required, but he did have one request. He asked the man never to tell anybody of his existence, explaining that if he did, hunters would surely come take his life as a trophy. The man agreed and made a vow to never tell a single person.

It so happened that the queen of this country was endowed with prophetic dreams and during her sleep one night, she had a vision of the ruru deer. She asked the king to find the deer, and trusting his wife's instincts, he set out to do so. He proceeded to post a proclamation throughout the land saying that if anybody can lead him to the deer, they will be rewarded with gold, wealth, and land.

The man the deer had saved heard this proclamation each and every every day and became increasingly tempted by it. He was a good man, still aware of the pledge he had made, yet extremely poor. Torn between desire and gratitude, he was eventually overcome by greed he went to the king and told him he could lead him to the deer. A hunting party was formed and then embarked for the woods of the Ruru Deer. When they arrived the man pointed to where the deer was and to his surprise, his hand fell off.

The deer heard footsteps approaching from all sides. The king, drawing his bowstring, was about to hit his target when the Bodhisattva, in a human voice, beseeched him to stop. He asked the king who had betrayed his location. The king pointed to the man the deer had previously saved. The deer scorned the man, explaining that by such ungrateful actions he is only harming himself. The king inquired as to what he was speaking of and when the deer explained that he had saved the man's life, the king was surprised and cursed the man. He was to receive no reward.

The Bodhisattva further explained to the king that he should not be angry at the man and that his words of scorn were only to prevent him from acting in such a way again. He explained how people lured by the thought of riches are like moths drawn to a flame, and that desire erodes integrity. The king replied that since such a wise being views the greedy man worthy of sympathy, that he would in fact reward him with the wealth he craves. The king then also proclaimed that the deer shall, from that point on, be able to walk the kingdom freely.

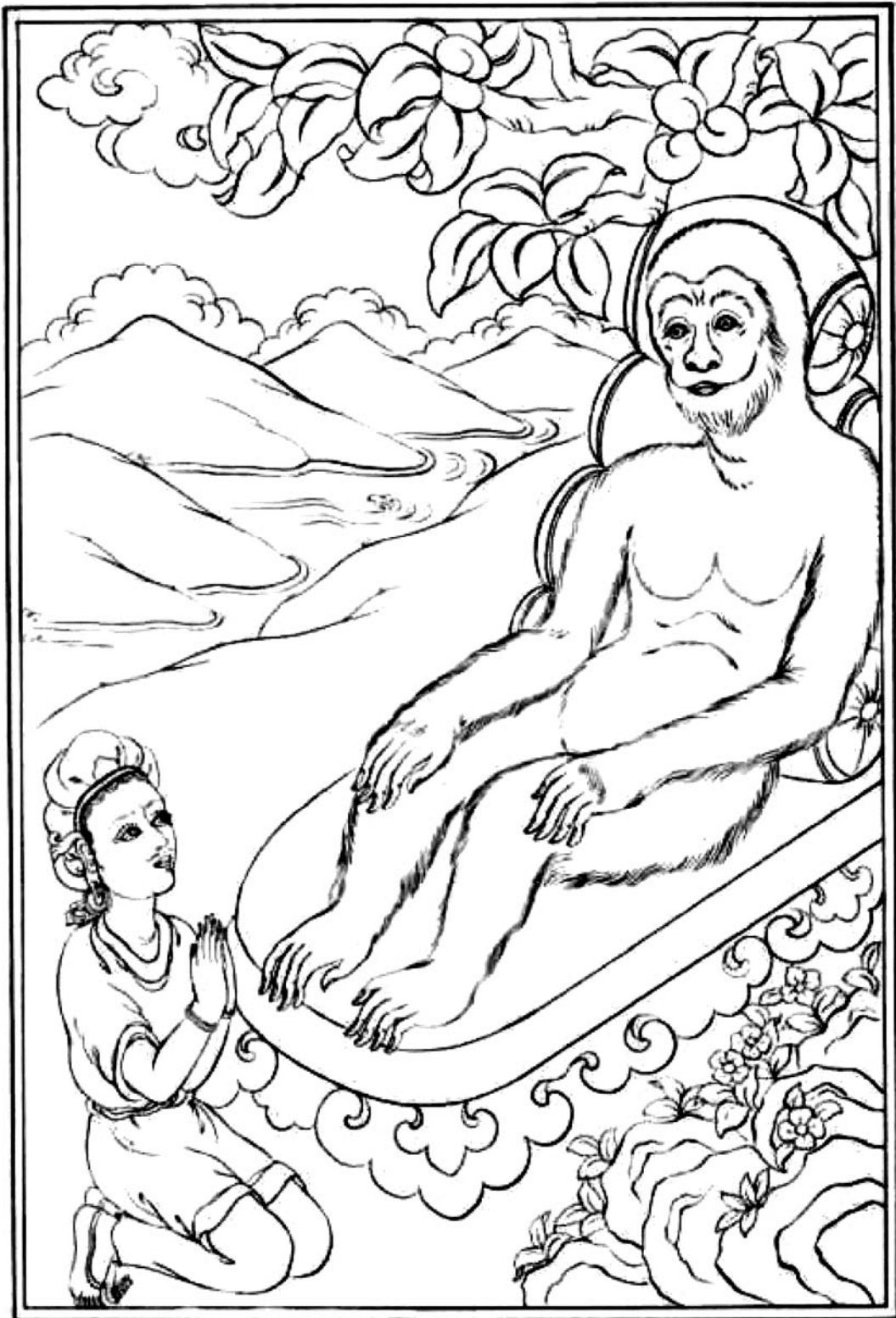
In gratitude, the deer asked the king what he could do in return so that his journey to the woods was worth the trouble. The king then honored the deer as a teacher and asked him to mount the royal chariot and come back to the capitol to teach the Dharma. The deer accepted and was given a grand reception as an honored guest. The deer sat on the royal throne and in front of a great assembly, gave a very clear teaching. He explained that the Dharma, in all its complexity, with all its divisions and subdivisions, with all its rules and precepts, was actually very simple: generate compassion for all living beings, abstain from killing, from stealing, and so on, and give pleasure to all.

The king proclaimed that from then on, all the animals in the kingdom would be protected.

Key Events in the Story

1. Deer saves man.
2. Man betrays deer.
3. Deer survives and teaches.

27 - The Monkey King



Those who walk the path of virtue can win over the hearts of even their fiercest enemies.

In the heart of the Snow Mountains is a blessed region. Watered by mountain currents clear as crystal, its soil is finely carpeted with herbs of healing powers. Hundreds of forest trees display an extraordinary variety of fruit and flowers, and throngs of birds fill the air with song.

In that forest the Bodhisattva lived as a monkey king. But even in that bestial form, his mind was formed by the constant practice of giving and compassion; depending on such friends as these, jealousy, selfishness, and cruelty would have nothing to do with him.

The monkey lived in a banyan tree, so tall that it seemed the lord of the forest. Like a mountain peak, it seemed to touch the sky; its thick, deep foliage was like a mass of clouds. Its long branches arched under the weight of large fruit, sweet and fragrant, and of a lovely bright color.

Now it so happened that one branch of this fruit tree hung over a river. The Bodhisattva, in his wisdom, told his troop of monkeys: "You must always prevent this one branch from bearing fruit; the day it does, none of you will taste the fruit of this tree again." And so they took great care that this should not happen. For so it is that the virtuous, though fallen into the realm of animals, often retain a vestige of good fortune which they invariably use to increase the happiness of their comrades, just as humans care for close relations.

But then it happened that the monkeys overlooked one young and not very big fruit, hidden in the cavity of a leaf which had been curled up by ants. As that fruit developed, so did its fine color and aroma, its flavor and softness. Finally, when it had fully ripened and its stalk had loosened, it fell into the river and floated downstream, to where a king was accustomed to swim in the river with his harem.

There the fruit stopped, caught in the top of a net which marked the boundaries of a pond. And there the fruit rested, its aroma drifting through the air, overpowering all other odors. The sweet liquors, the flower garlands, the perfumes of the bathing women—none had a fragrance so alluring as this fruit. The women breathed deeply with half-closed eyes, intoxicated by the aroma. They cast their eyes about to find the source, looking curiously in all directions. When, at last they caught sight of the fruit trapped in the net, they could not keep their eyes from it. Even the king was curious to know its nature. He had the fruit brought to him, and, after having his physicians examine it, tasted it himself.

Its marvelous flavor provoked the king's amazement as powerfully as a spectacle provokes the gasps of a crowd. Just as its color and smell had stirred his senses, now its flavor filled him with desire. Accustomed to the finest delicacies, the king became intent on storing an endless supply of this wonderful fruit.

"If one cannot enjoy such fruit, what benefit truly accrues from royalty?" he thought. "One who obtains such fruit is surely a king, and this without exercising royal power."

Having decided to find the source of the fruit, he thought: "Most likely the tree that bore it is not too far away, and must stand on the riverside. That fruit could not have been in the water for long, for it kept its color, smell, and flavor, and showed no trace of damage. It should not be hard to find."

Desiring to taste that flavor again, the king ceased his sport in the river. After having quickly secured the safety and order of his capital, he set out for the

forest, surrounded by a large body of armed men. Up the river they marched, clearing their way through thickets haunted by wild beasts and passing through woodlands of great natural beauty, enjoying the rich experiences of the forest, frightening elephants and deer with the sound of their drums. Finally they reached the vicinity of the tree they sought, until then unseen by human eyes.

From a distance the foliage of the lord of trees appeared to be like a mass of clouds heavy with water, hanging low over the peak of a mountain; the other trees surrounding it looked as if they were nobles surrounding their sovereign.

An aroma more fragrant than that of ripe mangoes wafted from the tree toward the army as if bidding it welcome. The king at once knew this was the tree he sought. Then, as he came closer, he saw hundreds of monkeys running among the tree's boughs and branches, devouring the fruit. Fury arose in him toward the creatures for robbing him of what he so craved, and he ordered his men to attack. "Beat them off! Get rid of them!" he cried harshly. "Drive them away, destroy them all, the scoundrels!"

The warriors strung their bows with arrows, all the while uttering loud cries to frighten away the monkeys. Some of the men picked up stones and sticks and spears and rushed at the tree as if attacking a hostile fortress.

The Bodhisattva, however, had heard the tumultuous approach of the royal army, for it moved with the uproar of a sea assaulted by violent winds. He saw the attack being made on all sides of his wonderful tree, saw the arrows, spears, stones, and sticks flying like showers of thunderbolts. And he beheld his monkeys, unable to do anything but shriek discordant cries of fear while looking up to him, their faces pale with terror and dismay.

Unafraid, unperturbed, overcome by compassion, the monkey king reassured his group. Then, intent on their rescue, he climbed swiftly to the top of the tree, and in one giant leap, flew to the hilltop nearby. It would have taken any other monkey many jumps to reach that spot, but the heroic one crossed it in a single bound, as if he were a bird: He jumped as if he flew. Compassion produced his strong determination, but heroism gave him strength and carried it to perfection. By the earnestness of his effort, he found the way to do it in his mind.

Once on the mountain slope, he found a bamboo cane, tall, strong, and deeply-rooted, longer than the distance between the hill and the tree. Fastening its top to his feet, but leaving the root in the earth, he jumped back to his home. The distance was great, and with his feet so encumbered, the Great Being barely succeeded in seizing the nearest branch with his hands. But holding fast, he managed, by using his utmost strength, to keep the cane stretched taut, a link between the tree and the hilltop. Then, urgently, he ordered the troupe of monkeys to evacuate the tree.

Desperate for safety and bewildered by fear, the monkeys wildly scrambled over the body of their king, escape their only thought. But though his limbs grew weak and numb, his mind remained firm.

Beholding this, the king and his men were overcome with astonishment. Such a splendid display of strength and wisdom, combined with such great self-denial and compassion for others, would amaze any who heard of it; imagine, then, the effect on those who witnessed it!

The king said to his men: "That magnificent monkey has maintained his position for far too long—he must be at the breaking point. His limbs are torn and bruised by the feet of the hordes of frightened monkeys escaping over his body. Surely he will be unable to extricate himself safely. Go, quickly, stretch a canopy underneath him; then shoot off the cane and the banyan branch simultaneously with your arrows." And so it was done.

When the monkey fell, the king then ordered that he be gently lifted off the canopy and placed on a soft couch. There the monkey lay unconscious from pain and exhaustion. But after his wounds had been salved and lightly washed with butter and other medicinal ointments, he recovered his senses. The king approached, full of curiosity, admiration, and respect.

"You made a bridge for those monkeys with your own body, and rescued them without regard for your own life. What are you to them; what are they to you? If you consider me a person worthy of such confidence, pray tell me, foremost of monkeys. No small bonds of friendship could give one the strength to do such a deed."

The Bodhisattva, in return for the king's attempt to heal him, respectfully made himself known in the proper manner: "Those monkeys charged me with the task of being their ruler. And I, bound to them with the affection of a father for his children, accepted. They have always been quick to obey my orders. O mighty sovereign, such is the relationship between the other monkeys and myself. Rooted over time, it has strengthened the natural ties of friendship which exist between animals of the same species. Dwelling together, we have strengthened our bonds to the mutual affection of kin."

The king, filled with wonder, spoke again: "Yet ministers and officials are meant to serve their lord, not the king to serve his servants. Why did Your Honor sacrifice yourself for mere attendants?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "Yours is the way of political expediency, Your Majesty, but to me such is a bad lore. I find I cannot overlook suffering, even if that suffering belongs to strangers. How much more difficult it is to overlook the sufferings of those who are as close to me as the closest relations, their minds intent on worshipping me!

"When I saw the monkeys in great danger and overwhelmed by distress and despair, a great sorrow swept over me, leaving me no room to think of myself. I saw the bows bent, I heard the dreadful noise of their strings. I saw the glittering arrows fly up on all sides. Swiftly and without a moment's hesitation, I jumped to the hill. There, a well rooted cane tied to my feet, I jumped once more, returning to my terrorized subjects, and reached out with my hands to grasp a branch which seemed to reach out to me.

"And while I lay stretched out between branch and reed, my comrades happily made their escape, running without hesitation over my body." The king, wondering at the joy now emanating from the Great Being, questioned him again: "But what good have you obtained, spurning your own welfare and absorbing the disaster meant for others?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "My body may be broken, O king, but my mind is totally sound, having saved from suffering those I ruled for so long. I bear these pains patiently just as conquering heroes wear their ornaments.

"Now I have repaid my followers for their reverence and affection, repaid them for the prosperity we shared. Bodily pain does not grieve me, nor separation from my friends. Destruction of my pleasure does not grieve me, nor does death, whose approach I welcome as one would the coming of a festival.

"Look what I have won by falling into this wretched state: satisfaction, serenity, fame, fearlessness of death, honor from a king, and approval from the virtuous. But a ruler who does not show compassion will never know such virtues: He will obtain their opposite. For if a ruler be devoid of virtue, if he has destroyed his good renown, if vice has taken up an abode in him, what can he expect in his future besides the fiery flames of hell? For this reason I have explained to you, O powerful Prince, the power of both virtue and vice. Rule, therefore, with right action, for Fortune has the fickle nature of a woman. Protect your kingdom with the Dharma.

"A king must try to provide happiness for all: the men and animals of his army, his officials, his subjects in both town and country, those without protector, brahmans and shramanas-each and all, as if he were their father.

"Acting in such a way a king will enjoy prosperity, and his merit, wealth, and glory will increase both in this world and the next. With such action as distinguished the holy kings of old, may you always show compassion to your people, and may you be illustrious and happy!"

After thus instructing the king, who listened with the devout attention of a pupil, the monkey king departed his broken body and ascended into the heaven realms.

From this story one can see how those who act with virtue win the respect of all, even of their enemies. How important it is for those wishing to gain the affection of men to follow the way of the virtuous! This account is also appropriate when praising the qualities of the Tathagata, and when explaining how most beings cannot even bring about their own benefit, while the Bhagavat can bring about the benefit of everyone. This story is also relevant when explaining the importance of listening with attention to the preaching of the Dharma, when praising the qualities of compassion, and also when instructing princes how kings must be merciful toward their subjects. This story is also told to demonstrate how the virtuous show their gratitude.

27 - The Monkey King

A Tale of Leadership and Self Sacrifice.

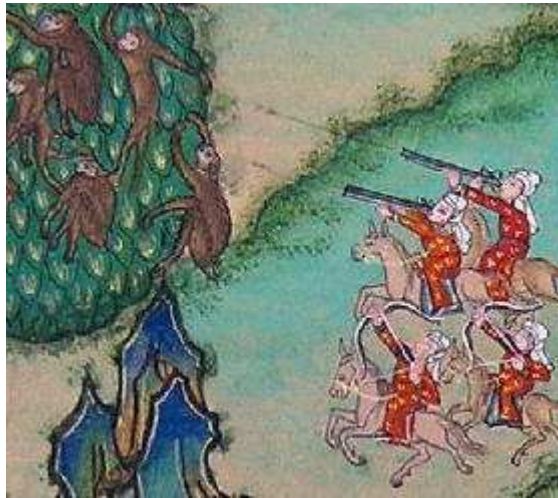


Deep in a beautiful and blessed region of the Himalayas, the Bodhisattva lived as the king of the Monkeys. The whole Monkey kingdom inhabited a large banyan tree that was so tall it was believed to be the Lord of the Forest. Its large branches swelled with beautiful and fragrant fruit that sustained the entire kingdom.

One branch of the tree hung over a river. The Bodhisattva, in his wisdom, told his troop that they must always keep that branch from bearing fruit, for if it did, they would never taste the splendor of its growth again. They indeed took great care that this should not happen, yet one day a small fruit far out on the branch that was curled up in a leaf fell into the river. It traveled downstream to where a king was bathing with his harem. Never having smelled such a fragrance, or seen such a food, the king tasted it and was amazed by its wonderful flavor. He proclaimed that such a marvelous fruit was fit only for royalty and decided to find the source.

The king then set off upstream with a large body of armed men. He knew it could not be far because the fruit was still fresh when it reached him, and before long the tree was in sight. An intoxicating aroma more fragrant than ripe mangoes wafted through the ranks of men, but when the king saw monkeys running among the tree's boughs and branches, he became enraged. He saw them

devouring the fruit and felt that they were robbing him of what he craved. He ordered his men to attack.



The warriors strung their bows with arrows and began to shoot, all the while yelling war cries to frighten away the monkeys. The noise was tremendous and the monkeys were frightened, looking to their king for guidance. Some of the men picked up stones, sticks, and spears and rushed the tree as if attacking a hostile fortress. The Bodhisattva however, seeing that his frightened subjects were depending on him, reassured the group. Quickly climbing to the top of the tree, and in one giant leap, he flew to a nearby hilltop where he found a bamboo cane that was tall, strong, and deeply rooted. Fastening the top of the cane to his feet, and leaving it rooted in the earth, he jumped back to his tree home. Holding a branch of the tree taut, he ordered all the monkeys to evacuate across his body and down the cane to safety. Desperate and bewildered by fear, the monkeys wildly scrambled across the body of the king and down the cane. Although his body grew weak and numb, his mind remained firm, for the survival of his subjects was his only concern.



Witnessing this, the human king and his men became overcome with astonishment. They had never seen such strength and wisdom combined with such great self denial and kindness for others. The human king ordered his men to stop attacking. Seeing that the great monkey would not be able to hold his position much longer, as the hordes of frightened monkeys had bruised and torn

their leaders limbs, the king ordered a canopy be held up to catch the monkey when he fell. After the monkey landed in the canopy, the king had him carefully lifted onto a soft couch. As he lay there unconscious from pain and exhaustion, the human king had the monkey's wounds salved and washed with butter and medicinal ointments and before long he recovered his senses.



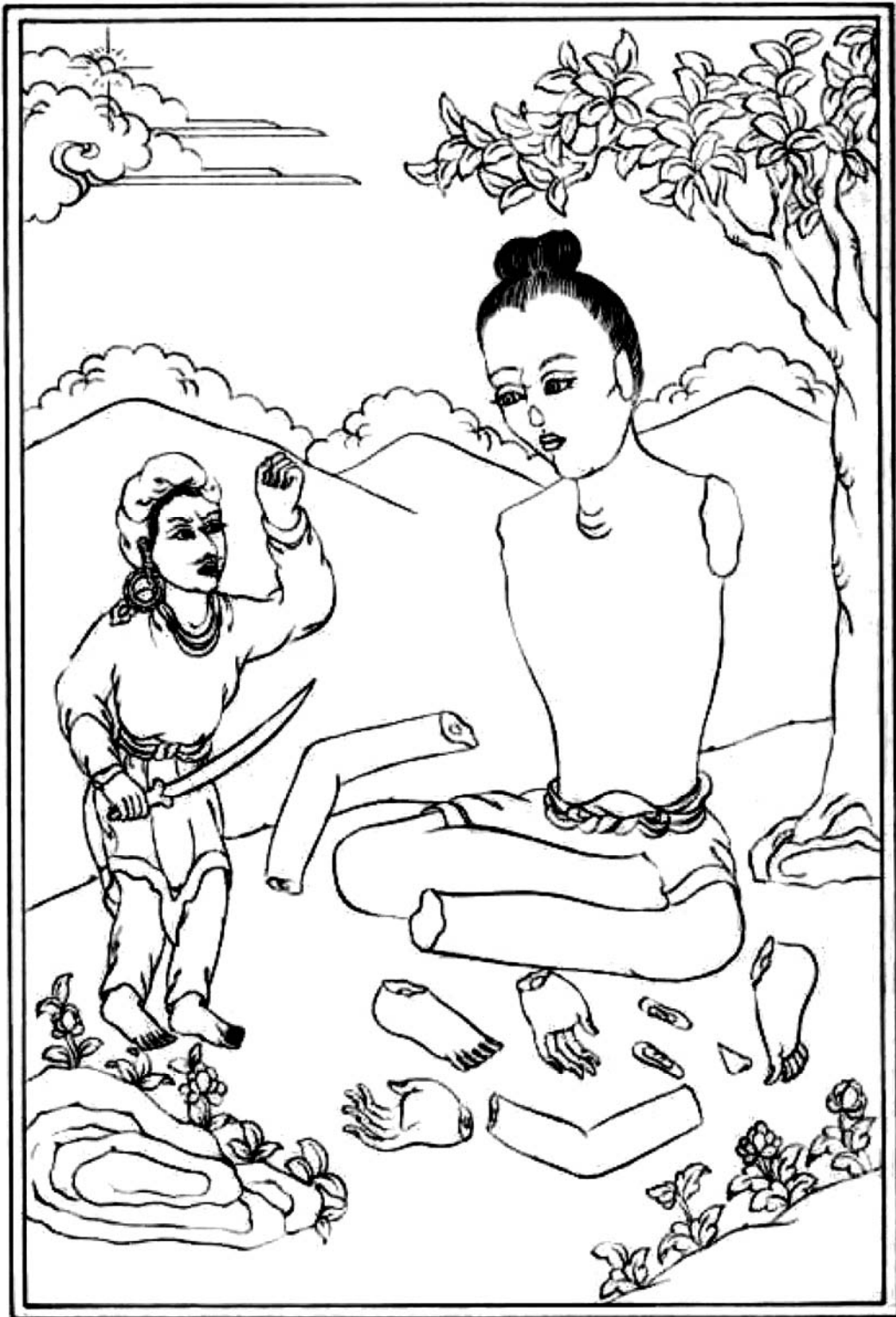
The human king approached, full of curiosity, admiration, and respect, and asked the great monkey who he was in relation to all the monkeys he had saved. To his great surprise, the monkey replied that he was their king. He explained that as their ruler, he was bound to them with the same affection that parents have for their children. The shocked king retorted that subjects are meant to serve their king and not the other way around, and then inquired why he would dare sacrifice himself for mere servants. The monkey stated that he was unable to overlook suffering in strangers, much less kin, and especially not in those who are intent on looking to him as their leader. He explained to the man that although his body was broken, his mind is totally sound, and that he would happily and patiently wait through the pain of his injuries because the discomfort was nothing in comparison to the joy of saving his subjects. He then asked the human king to look at all that has come from his physical sacrifice, he had now achieved satisfaction, serenity, fame, and even the admiration and honor of a king of men! He continued to explain to the human king that a ruler who does not know kindness will never know such virtues and will in fact, obtain their opposite.

The Monkey King's last words to the human king were that he must always protect his kingdom with spiritual truth, and to view all subjects, from officials to peasants, humans to animals, as if they were his own children. The great Monkey King then peacefully passed away and ascended into the heavenly realms.

Key Events in the Story

1. A wise Monkey King in a fruit tree.
2. A selfish Human King.
3. A lesson in kindness and leadership.

28 - The Teacher of Restraint



The immense forbearance of those who practice patience makes nothing too great to bear.

In a previous lifetime, the Bodhisattva once became a certain ascetic. He had seen that the life of a householder was full of suffering, and he knew that such a life was not conducive to spiritual pursuits. Beset with temptations, the householder's life was exposed to the inroads of material and sensual pleasures which entailed the loss of modesty and spiritual goals. Such a life, in emphasizing the passions, was sure to lead to desire, hatred, impatience, anger, arrogance, pride, and greed.

But for one who renounced the world, there were the joys of the homeless state with its peace and freedom from the evils of a householder's life. With this in mind, the Great Being became an ascetic well-known for his strength of character, self-restraint and tranquillity, his learning and moral conduct.

Because he always preached restraint, living in strict conformity to his vows and teaching the Dharma from that perspective, he came to be known as Kshantivadin, 'Teacher of Restraint'. Often those who demonstrate excellence in the arts or who have some distinguishing physical strength or peculiarity are given a new name. And so it was with this ascetic-in no time at all only a few could even remember his true name. Soon his original name was forgotten altogether, and he was known to everyone simply as Kshantivadin. With his wish to ornament mankind, as well as himself, with that virtue, his very nature became imbued with forbearance, making him incapable of harming others. And so he became renowned as a Muni. His unshakable calm, his goodness and great endurance even in the face of injury by others, together with his excellent sermons, served to spread his fame widely.

Kshantivadin lived in a forest glade encircled by a lake of purest water adorned with white and blue lotuses. Lovely in its solitude, the glade was beautiful as a garden, and bore flowers and fruit all year round. By his very presence, the Great Being gave the place the sanctity of a hermitage, for wherever they make their home, the qualities of a holy being make that place auspicious, both lovely and sacred.

The Great Being was revered by the gods of the forest, as well as by all those who loved virtue and desired liberation. Such beings would visit him often, taking pleasure in his qualities and receiving the benefit of his holy company. He would preach to this multitude on forbearance, pleasing both their minds and hearts.

One summer during a great heat wave, the king of the land decided to amuse himself in the waters of that clear forest lake. Accompanied by his harem, he travelled to that cool and charming garden spot in the forest, increasing its splendor with the graceful sport of his wanton wives.

In the arbors, under the bowers, between the flowering trees and in the water with its blossoming lotuses, the king delighted in unrestrained dalliance with his wives. Laughing, he watched them flee from the buzz of bees attracted by their perfume, their garlands, and the odor of sweet liquors. As he watched, the women, never seeming to tire of picking the flowers, adorned their ears with the most exquisite blossoms and covered their hair with lacy vines.

Nor could the king have enough of watching their erotic playfulness. Smiling, the king followed every move of the women as they ran in twos and threes here and there, hovering around the lotuses and the flowering trees. The cuckoo's lascivious cry, the peacock's proud strut, the humming of insects in the heat-all

were outdone by the murmur, the dance, the song of the women. At the thunderous rolling of the royal drums, the peacocks uttered their piercing cries and opened the widespread circle of their tails as if they were actors making offerings to the monarch by virtue of their art.

Having savored all the pleasures of the forest garden with his harem, having sported to his heart's content, the king, overcome with drowsiness and drink, lay down upon his jewelled couch and fell asleep in the forest shade.

Seeing that the king was asleep, the queens, growing bored with that part of the forest, ran to and fro, the sweet murmur of their voices accented by the tinkling sound of their ornaments. Unable to get their fill of the loveliness of the forest, they wandered on and on, indulging their wanton natures.

Ignoring the remonstrance of their servants who followed them bearing the royal umbrella, the royal fans, and the royal throne decorated with golden ornaments, the women greedily plucked all the flowers and pretty leaves from every plant within reach. Although the queens were covered with garlands of flowers, no shrub was left unshorn, no tree unclipped, no flower was left along their path. Gradually, their course through the forest led them near the hermitage of Kshantivadin.

Those in charge of the wives knew well the power and high-mindedness of ascetics, but dared not dissuade the women from proceeding for fear that the king might resent any intervention. The royal wives approached the hermitage, attracted by the splendor and beauty of the glade, a splendor heightened by the supernatural power of the ascetic. Full of mindless merriment, the women flocked within. At once they saw the holy man sitting cross-legged under a tree, his glory almost too bright to behold, his face shining with tranquillity and the greatness of his mind. Through the practice of profound meditations, the holy man's senses were subdued and well-controlled, even when objects of attachment drew near. Endowed with such great merit and virtue, he was like the embodied Dharma itself.

The royal wives were struck by the austere luster of the one seated beneath the tree, and their minds became subdued. The very sight of the Great Being was sufficient to cause them to cast off their frivolity and pride. In silence they sat humbly in front of the ascetic who welcomed his guests in his usual kind and courteous manner, responding to their questions with a gift of religious discourse and preaching to them in terms the women could readily understand, using many examples.

"Once we obtain the human condition, once we are born with sound mind and body free of defects, if we then neglect to perform good actions every day of our lives, we are much deceived. Are we not all subject to death? No matter how fine our birth, face, age, power, or wealth, we can never enjoy happiness in the next life unless we first purify ourselves through giving, good conduct, and the other virtues.

"Even if one lacks noble birth and fortune, by merely abhorring wickedness and practicing virtue, one will be visited by every kind of bliss, as surely as the sea receives water from the rivers.

"For one of noble birth and face, of proper age, endowed with power and wealth, virtue is the best ornament. As blossoms decorate trees, and as lightning

ornaments rain clouds, as lakes are adorned by lotuses and water lilies by drunken bees, so are living beings brought to perfection by the ornaments of virtue. By contrast, golden garlands are only the outward sign of wealth.

"The differences in human fortune, in health and length of life, in beauty, wealth, and birth may be divided into three classes: low, middle, and high. These differences are not caused by external influences, nor are they natural properties. Such differences are purely the result of one's actions, of karma. Knowing this to be the law of human existence, and remembering the fickleness and frailty of life, one must direct one's heart to right behavior and avoid wickedness. This way leads to both happiness and a good reputation.

"A mind full of hatred is like a fire, burning away the good of oneself as well as that of one's neighbor. Avoid all wrongdoing, and cultivate actions that can serve as an antidote to what is wrong. No matter how fiercely a fire burns, when it meets a great river filled with calming waters, it must die out. The fire which blazes within will lose its power when met by self-restraint.

"Restraint is of enormous benefit. Whoever practices patience will naturally avoid wickedness and enmity, for their causes have been vanquished. Such a person will encourage friendliness everywhere and become a person honored and loved. In the end, being so attached to virtue, he will attain heaven as easily as walking through his own front door.

"Moreover, ladies, this virtue of restraint is considered the highest development attainable by merit, the highest degree of a virtuous nature. It is purification brought about without using water; it yields the greatest possible wealth of goodness. Restraint is the lovely firmness of the virtuous mind, always indifferent to injuries inflicted by others. With its many properties restraint is also known as forbearance; allied with mercy, it benefits the world. It is the ornament of the powerful, the strength of ascetics, the extinguisher of the fire of harmfulness in this world and the next.

"Restraint is a coat of mail for the virtuous, for it blunts the arrows shot by wicked tongues and transforms those weapons into flowers of praise, garlands of glory. Restraint is a conqueror of delusion (the adversary of the Dharma), and an easy way to win salvation. Who, then, would not do his utmost to practice self-restraint, the virtue which inevitably leads to happiness?" Such was the sermon the Great Being employed to entertain his guests.

Meanwhile, the king had awakened from his slumber. His lassitude gone, but his eyes still clouded by the dullness of drink, he angrily demanded of the female servants who were watching over his couch where his wives had gone, for he wished to continue his amorous sport. "Your Majesty," they answered, "their Highnesses have moved on to another part of the forest to drink in its splendor."

Eager to behold his women laughing and jesting, dancing free and unrestrained, the king arose from his couch. Accompanied by his servants carrying his parasol, his outer garments and his sword, followed by the eunuchs of his harem carrying staves, he marched through the forest after his wives.

They were easy to follow, for their path was strewn with a multitude of blossoms, flowers, twigs, and the red sap of the betel nut they had been chewing. In no time at all the king arrived at the hermitage of Kshantivadin.

The moment the king saw the ascetic surrounded by his royal wives, he was seized with a fit of rage. Partly because of animosity carried over from previous lives, partly due to his drunkenness, desire, and jealousy, he lost all semblance of decorum and surrendered to unbridled wrath. As he lost all vestiges of self-restraint, whatever loveliness or grace his figure once possessed now disappeared.

Drops of sweat formed on his face, his limbs trembled, his brow wrinkled, his eyes reddened, squinted, rolled, and stared in fury. Pressing his hands together, squeezing his finger rings, shaking his golden bracelets, he hurled invectives at the saintly ascetic:

"Who is this knave who insults our majesty, casting lustful eyes upon our wives? This hypocrite acts like a common poacher under the guise of a holy man!"

Disturbed by these words, the eunuchs broke in: "Your Majesty, do not say such things. This is a hermit who through a long life of restraint and spiritual practice has purified his very Self: Kshantivadin is his name."

But the king was not inclined to take their words to heart. "Oh, it is wonderful what you say! This hypocrite has been at it a long time, deceiving everyone, setting himself up as a holy man and teacher. It is for us to reveal the true nature of this fake who practices the art of delusion and false holiness while cleverly hiding beneath the veil of his ascetic's dress and fancy speech." And seizing a sword from the hand of a female guard, he rushed at the ascetic, determined to kill him as he would his worst enemy.

The royal wives, upon noticing the king's arrival, had arisen from their seats upon the ground. Disturbed and anxious at seeing the king's fine features transformed with anger, they bowed to the great rishi with joined palms and then went to greet the king. Standing before him, they were like a glowing mass of lotuses in autumn, the brightness of their flowers beginning to open.

Yet such graceful demeanor, such modesty, such honest beauty and humility could do nothing to appease a mind so incensed by the fires of rage. Perceiving that the king in his anger was continuing toward the ascetic with eyes full of hate and with weapon raised, the queens bravely and without fear surrounded the king in order to placate him, saying: "Your Majesty, pray, do not commit this reckless act. This man is the reverend Kshantivadin."

But the king's mind was full of poison, so their words only further enraged him. Thinking, "He has already won their hearts," he shot furious looks at his wives, looks as fierce as the jealousy that overwhelmed his mind. Not listening to the brave and sweet words of his wives, his head shaking so hard that his earrings and diadem trembled, the king turned in anger to his eunuchs and said with a glance at his harem: "This man preaches self-restraint, but see how he practices it! See for yourselves how easily he succumbed to the temptation of contact with women. His tongue does not agree with his actions, still less with his wicked mind. By what right does this satyr stray in our forest, feigning religious vows and pretending to be a saint?"

The king in his wrath showed a hard-heartedness inaccessible to persuasion, and the queens, knowing the stubbornness of his ferocious nature, knowing his pure savagery, were filled with sorrow and distress. The eunuchs, who were

likewise alarmed, gestured for the women to withdraw. Heads lowered in shame, they dispersed, lamenting for that best of ascetics.

"We are the cause of the king's wrath against this selfless holy man who is widely renowned for his virtues. How will this end? Our monarch, in directing his anger toward the virtuous one, will perform some unspeakable act. In one horrible moment our king will not only destroy this holy man but also his royal lineage, his hard-won glory, and our guiltless minds."

As soon as the lamenting and grieving women were gone, the king fiercely approached the holy man, threatening him with sword raised. Seeing the Great Being unperturbed, his calmness quietly constant, the king grew even more incensed: "How skilled he is in playing the holy one! See how he looks at us as if he were a Muni, persisting in that guileful arrogance!"

Still the Bodhisattva, due to his constant practice of forbearance, remained undisturbed, even under such harsh abuse. He at once understood that the quickness of anger had moved the king to act this way, leading him to renounce all restraint and decorum, and even to lose the ability to distinguish between his own benefit and harm. With compassion in his heart, the ascetic attempted to remind the king of his position and to appease the king's anger with sweet words:

"Meeting with disrespect is nothing new in this world. As it is one's own fortune, how could one mind it? But it does concern me that I cannot offer you—even by my words—the welcome due one who comes my way. However, consider, O Sovereign: You are duty-bound to right the wrong of evildoers and to act on behalf of all sentient beings. Pray do not act rashly! Reflect well upon your actions.

"Think first. Something good may appear to be evil; something evil may appear to be good. The truth about what to do at any particular moment often cannot be discerned at once. One must explore all possibilities. The ruler who, through reflection, gains true insight into his conduct and then carries out his plan with right action will never fail to benefit the Dharma, benefit his people, and bring joy to himself.

"Rid your mind of 'rashness; turn your mind to actions that will gain you good repute. Transgressions committed in arrogance by persons of high rank are subject to great criticism. In a forest protected by your mighty arm, in the dwelling of an ascetic, you would never allow anyone to harm the pious. How then can you act in this way yourself?"

"If your harem came to my hermitage by chance, what fault of mine could cause you to be so consumed with rage? Even were there such a fault, restraint would become you all the more. Restraint is indeed the chief ornament of the powerful, for it shows cleverness at guarding a treasury of virtues. Nothing adorns a king so much as self-restraint neither dark blue earrings resplendent in their luster, nor the brilliant, jewels of' kingly crowns.

"Cast aside impatience which can never be relied upon, and turn to forbearance which can only benefit you; maintain self restraint as carefully as you would your kingdom. Esteem shown to ascetics will gain a prince a life rich in joy."

This sweet admonition by the holy Muni had no effect on the king, whose mind had run wild. The king persisted in his accusations: "If you are no hypocrite," he

said, "if you are truly preoccupied with maintaining your vow of restraint, why then do you beg safety under the pretext of this sermon?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "Hear, O Prince, the reason for my plea. I speak so that it might never be said of you: 'That king killed an innocent ascetic, a Brahman.' Such an act would bring you endless blame and utterly destroy your reputation.

"All creatures must die. That is the way things are; it is a certainty. When I consider my behavior, I know it is just, and I have nothing to fear. It is for your sake alone that I praise restraint, so that you should not suffer by injuring right action, the source of all happiness. Forbearance is a mine of virtues, an armor against vice. I gladly praise it and offer it to you as an instrument for attaining salvation."

But even these gentle words of truth were disregarded by the king. The Muni's words, although they were like flowers, left the monarch untouched. "Let us now see your attachment to restraint!" the king shouted. And lifting his sword, in one stroke he cut off Kshantivadin's right hand which had been lifted toward the king, the five fingers pointed upward in a gesture of restraint. In one stroke the king severed the hand from its arm, like a lotus from its stalk.

At that moment the Bodhisattva saw the future of the swordsman, so terrible and irredeemable that he felt more sorrow than pain. "Alas," he thought, "his transgression is irredeemable. He has passed beyond my power to help him, and has ceased to be a person worthy of my words." Feeling pity as toward a patient given up by doctors, he kept silent. And still the king continued to hurl his threats: "Unless you desist from your hypocrisy and renounce your villainous deceit, I will cut your body to pieces until you die!"

The Bodhisattva made no answer, for he understood the king to be deaf to all good sense, to all admonition. One by one the king cut off the limbs of the Great Being. First he cut off the other hand, then both arms, then the ears, the nose, and the ascetic's feet. Still neither sorrow nor anger touched the ascetic as the sharp sword fell upon his body. The certain knowledge that the machinery of his body must one day come to an end, together with his ingrained practice of selfrestraint combined to keep the Muni strong and unperturbed. Even while watching his limbs fall away, he remained unshaken, though sore with grief at the sight of a king so fallen from right action.

In such a manner do the compassionate find it hard to bear not their own pain, but the sufferings of others.

The king, as soon as his cruel deed was done, fell prey to a fire-like fever. A fearsome noise shook the forest, and he ran blindly from the garden. Beneath his feet the earth opened, flames burst forth, and the king was gone.

The king's attendants, confused and alarmed, called out in distress, assuming that the ascetic's power had caused this catastrophe to happen; they were afraid that the ascetic would burn down the entire country in angry revenge. Fearfully approaching the ascetic, they bowed to him with joined palms and cried: "May the foolish king alone be fuel for the fire of your curses. His tortured mind alone has done this to you. Pray do not burn down his city! Do not destroy innocent people, women and children, the old and the sick, the holy and the poor! Being a lover of virtues, preserve both the realm of the king and your own righteousness!"

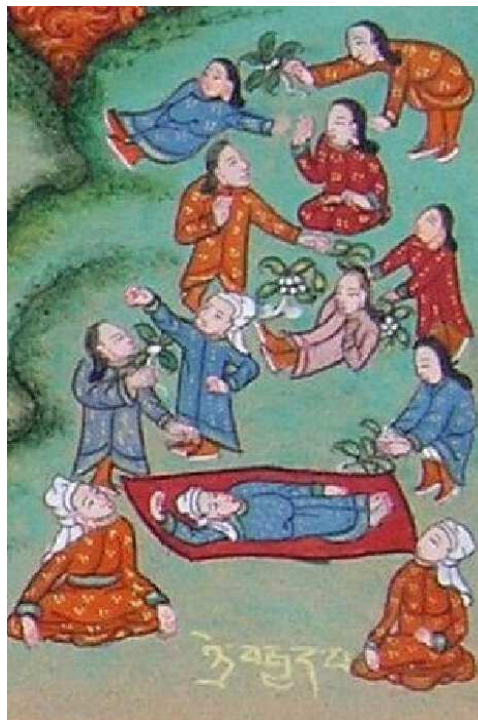
The Bodhisattva comforted them. "Good sirs, do not fear. Although the king saw fit to maim an innocent ascetic of the forest-and so cut off my hands, feet, ears, and nose-how could someone of my sort wish him harm, or even conceive of such a thought? May his life be long, and may no evil befall him.

"Subject to sorrow, death, and sickness, overcome by desire and hatred, consumed by evil actions-your king is to be pitied. Who would wish him to suffer? Who could be angry with him? Rather, let his sinful actions ripen on me! For one used to pleasure, meeting with misfortune is unbearable, even if it is not for long. Nonetheless, I am powerless to protect him. He has destroyed his own happiness. So why should I feel hatred toward him?

"Everyone born must deal with the suffering which arises from death and the like. It is birth alone which one must strive to avoid. For without existence, from what does suffering arise? Kalpa after kalpa I have lost my worthless body in innumerable ways. For what reason should I give up self-restraint on account of yet another poor frame? It would be like giving up a jewel for a straw. Dwelling in the forest, bound to my vow of renunciation, a preacher of forbearance, the prey of death, how could I feel desire for revenge? Do not fear me; depart in peace."

And so, his constancy unshaken owing to his reliance on forbearance, this foremost of Munis accepted his audience as disciples. He then left his earthly dwelling and ascended to the heavenly realms.

Using this story, with the Muni as example, one can express the qualities of forbearance. With the king as example, one can express the harm which comes from impatience and rashness. This story is also to be told to explain the miserable consequences of sensual pleasures, saying: "In this manner sensual pleasures lead a man to become addicted to wicked behavior which will bring him to ruin." This account also may be told with the object of showing the inconsistency of material prosperity.



28 - The Teacher of Restraint

A Tale of Patience



In one of his many previous lifetimes, the Buddha turned away from the householder's life and became a wise ascetic. He was renowned for his many saintly virtues, and especially for his patience and restraint, thus earning the name Kshantivadin, 'the teacher of restraint'. He lived in a forest glade and devoted all his time to spiritual practice.

One day, a king from a nearby realm was out on a trip to a beautiful lake with his entourage of young wives. After indulging in various hedonistic activities, the king was quite drunk and fell asleep while his wives roamed the region picking flowers. The women strayed further and further away from the lake until they reached the dwelling place of Kshantivadin. They were awestruck by his saintly presence. They asked him to teach them, and Kshantivadin proceeded to give a talk on the virtues of modesty, patience, and restraint.

The king woke from his sleep and when he saw that some of his wives had left the lake, he immediately had his servants lead him in the direction they traveled. When he arrived at the ascetic's glade and saw his wives sitting before Kshantivadin, he became filled with a terrible jealous rage. He accused the Bodhisattva of being a hypocrite who pretended he was saintly while coveting his wives. Kshantivadin and the women all tried to explain that his actions were

innocent, but the king's rage was impenetrable. He stated that he was going to torture Kshantivadin until he admitted that he was a hypocrite, a fraud, and a false ascetic, and then proceeded to chop Kshantivadin's hand off with a sword. He then to chopped off Kshantivadin's arms, nose, ears, and feet as well. Aware of the inevitability of death, the Bodhisattva said nothing to stop him.



When the king was done and began to walk back towards the lake, the earth opened up and swallowed him into a fiery pit. Seeing this, one of the servants was scared that Kshantivadin had cursed the king and started to beg him to spare the innocent people of the kingdom. Kshantivadin explained that he did not cause the earth to swallow the king and that he had no ill will towards him or his people. Kshantivadin said that he only pitied the king's jealous mind because it was going to hurt him more than anyone else. The Bodhisattva then died. Word that the king had slaughtered an innocent ascetic spread throughout the kingdom, and his reputation was destroyed, and his royal line ended.

Key Events in the Story

1. An ascetic teaches to the wife of a king.
2. The king becomes jealous and kills the ascetic.
3. The king is ruined and swallowed up by the earth.

29 - A Visitor from Brahmaloika



Because wrong views have hellish consequences, those who follow such views are especially deserving of the compassion of the virtuous.

In one of the Bhagavat's previous lives as a Bodhisattva, his constant practice of meditation and his vast store of good karma led him to take the shape of a Devarshi dwelling in the realm of Brahmaloaka, the region of heavenly delights. Through the ripening of merit engendered in countless past lives, he had earned the privilege of enjoying the blissful meditations of the gods. However, because of his practice of compassion in previous lifetimes, even this supreme joy did not turn him from the desire to benefit others.

Worldly people, absorbed in things sensual or material, become thoughtless; but the virtuous, even when absorbed in the delight of meditation, are never distracted from their task of helping others.

And so it happened that the Great Being was gazing down on the desire-realm below, a sea of moral illness, disaster, and calamity, where hundreds of painful occurrences, evils, and sufferings continually afflict living beings. In this realm where compassion finds its sphere of action, he perceived the king of Videha, Angadinna by name, wandering in a wilderness of harmful views.

Partly from association with bad company, partly from his own strong attachment to wrong views, the king had come to believe that there is no other world than this one, and that no one can be certain of the results of good or evil action. Following this view, he lost all interest in spiritual pursuits and turned his back on acts of charity. He scorned good conduct and, because of his lack of faith, felt nothing but contempt for the holy books and for those who led virtuous lives. Laughing at tales of other realms, disrespectful of everything holy, he showed little honor to shramanas and brahmans and gave himself over to sensual pleasures.

He who steadfastly believes in a life hereafter where good and evil ripen naturally into happiness and suffering finds balance and stability. But he who rejects faith is caught in the web of desire.

Consequently, Angedinna's conduct and views were creating problems and suffering for his people—a state of affairs that aroused the compassion of the high-minded Devarshi. One day, when the king was enjoying himself in a lovely arbor, AN, pursuing his pleasures, the Bodhisattva descended in his brilliant chariot before the king's very eyes. On beholding the luminous being blazing like fire, pulsating like a ball of lightning, radiant as a million suns, the king, overwhelmed and alarmed, arose from his seat and with palms respectfully joined, asked the Being who stood before him:

"Who are you, you whose form delights the eye, O Being with lotus feet, O Being who walks in the sky and shines with the luster of the sun?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "Know me, O king, as a Devarshi of the Brahmaloaka who has gained the region of heavenly delights through the power of my mind's clear composure which vanquishes both desire and hatred, those two proud foes resembling chiefs of hostile armies in battle."

On hearing this, the king, with kind words of welcome, offered the Great Being the hospitality due a worthy guest: water to wash his feet, and various offerings. Gazing admiringly on the devarshi's face, the king asked the holy one: "You are wonderful indeed to be able to float in the air so effortlessly, even passing through walls! Tell me, O being bright as lightning, how came you by this supernatural power?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "Such powers are a natural result, O king, of meditation, moral conduct, and restraint of the senses. After countless lives and constant practice, I have achieved such results as this."

Angadinna sighed. "Do you really think there is such a thing as a world beyond?" "Certainly there is," replied the Bodhisattva. "But how can I believe it?" asked the king.

"Your Majesty, this truth may clearly be proven in many different ways: through the various forms of logic, through perception of the senses, through inference, and through analogy.

'Just look at the heavens, with their ornaments of sun and moon, their stars in myriad constellations! Look, and see worlds beyond in concrete form. Do not let your mind be so numbed by scepticism that you cannot raise your eyes!

"To go further: Now and again you can find people who, through diligent practice and keen memory, can recall their former lives. From this it can be inferred that there exists a life hereafter. Am I not myself evidence of such a fact:'

"Or consider the intellect. The achievements of the intellect presuppose a previous existence of that intellect. The intellect of the foetus in the womb is an uninterrupted continuation of the intellect in the preceding existence. And since the intellect is that which realizes objects of knowledge, there must have been objects to have been realized. But a young foetus has no eyes or other organs of the senses, so the objects must have existed and been realized in another existence. Therefore, there must have been a previous existence.

"Furthermore, experience teaches that different children of the same parents have different natures. How may this be, unless their basic character is shaped in part in previous lives?

"That the newborn babe makes the effort to take the breast without any instruction, and with unformed mental powers, almost in a state of deep sleep, is proof enough of former existences; how else could a baby know how to take food? Only practice can sharpen the mind's faculty for acquiring knowledge; whence comes this practice?

"Perhaps, since you are not accustomed to believe in existences beyond this world, you may still be uncertain, perhaps thinking: 'The lotus that opens and closes each day-has it too had past lives and practiced these actions in previous existences? How could anyone who says that such an idea is ridiculous still believe that the knowledge of how to suckle comes from previous experience?' But I say, put aside your doubt. The lotus is compelled to open and shut during certain definite times through the power of the sun. The urge to take the breast, however, is an action both conscious and free, and not limited to certain times.

"In this manner, Your Majesty, by close and careful examination it is possible to realize that there is a future life."

But the king, because of deep attachment to his false views and the great extent of his wrongdoing, felt uneasy when hearing about other lives. "O Great One, if the next world is not the inferno we scare children with, if you think it so important for me to believe in it, why not lend me five hundred gold pieces? I promise to pay you back a thousand in the next world-if and when I get there."

Now, when the king, with his habitual boldness, had uttered this unbecoming speech-the vomiting of the poisons of wrong views-the Bodhisattva calmly replied: "In your world, is it not rare for one who has wealth to loan to the wicked, to gluttons, or to blockheads? Wealth given to such folk leads swiftly to ruin. No, the wise loan their money only to those of fine reputation, skilled in business, with their senses thoroughly subdued. To such men they offer loans, even unwitnessed, for they know that such transactions will increase their wealth. This is the way the wise bestow their wealth.

"It is the same in the world hereafter. Therefore, it is not suitable for me to contract a loan with the likes of you. Because of your cruel actions, which originate from your wrong views, you will find yourself propelled headlong into hell. And when you lie there sore with pain, your mind paralyzed with fear, who would think to call on you to return the debt of a thousand coins?

"There the sky is veiled in darkness, untouched by the rays of the sun and moon. There the stars, glowing lotuses on a cool dark lake, are forever hidden from view. The icy winds of pain howl in thick darkness, touching the very marrow of your bones. Who, I ask you, would enter that hell just for the sake of retrieving a few coins?

"Crowds wander hopeless on the bottom of hell, in clouds of dense obscurity, choking in pungent smoke. Dragging along rags fastened with leather thongs, they cry out with pain as they stumble over each other. Others, in the Hell of Flaming Chaff; run with burning feet in endless circles, searching for an escape impossible to find. They discover neither the end to their misdeeds, nor an end to their life in hell.

"Terrible demon carpenters, servants of Yama, gleefully carve arms and legs, sculpting flesh like fresh timber with the sharpest of knives. Yet even so, their victims-stripped of their skin, deprived of their very flesh, left living skeletons-these poor unfortunates cannot die; they are kept alive by their evil actions.

"Some are strapped to harnesses of fire, and like bullocks with flaming bits in their mouths are forced to draw blazing chariots across plains of molten iron. Others have their bodies crushed by mountains and ground to dust, the karma of their evil actions strengthening their pain to this intense degree. But they cannot die until their evil karma is annihilated.

-Some are ground to dust in blazing pestles; in glowing troughs they burn for a full five hundred years. And still they cannot die. Some are hung by head or by foot on red hot coral trees and beaten with flaming iron thorns by shrieking and cursing demons, the servants of Yama. Others howl as they are tied to racks of spears, a dreadful scene illumined by garlands of flames. Still others enjoy the fruit of their actions cradled on coals like burning nuggets of gold-they can do nothing but lie and weep. Some howl, their tongues extended, their bodies wracked by the pain of being pierced by hundreds of sharp spears on a flaming ground. Here they know there is a life beyond.

"There are others who wear diadems of flaming brass; still others boil in bronze pots. Some are felled by showers of arrows and devoured by packs of ferocious beasts who with ravenous hunger gnaw them down to the bone. In reaping the fruit of their earthly misconduct, perhaps they will begin to understand that there exists a world beyond our own.

"Exhausted by their toil, some run to bathe themselves in salt water for relief, only to find the water as painful as fire. It erodes their flesh, but it never threatens their lives, which are kept going by the momentum of their evil actions. Still others seek relief in the hell of unclean corpses-as we would enter a pond of fresh water-only to have their bones nibbled away by hundreds of hungry worms. Some are burnt in seemingly endless fire; their bodies burn like iron staves. Although they are engulfed by flames, they do not burn to ashes, because their karma keeps them alive.

"Elsewhere fiery saws rip others asunder, and sharp razors cut them through. Heads are crushed by iron hammers as throats scream out in anguish. Some are forced to swallow liquid metal. Over smokeless fires others roast on iron spits burning for thousands of years. Kept alive to taste the fruit of their evil actions, their flesh never reduces to ashes.

"And then there are the huge, spotted dogs, shredding flesh with sharp fangs as their victims fall screaming to the ground. Such are the tremendous torments of the different hells. I ask you, who would think of calling on you therewhen your mind and body are in torment-merely to collect a debt?

"Perhaps you will find yourself in the hell of iron vessels, crowded with boiling corpses, so fiery hot they cannot be approached. Who then would call on you for the debt? Or you may be tied to flaming iron pikes, or strapped to ground heated red hot with blazing coals. Who would call on you for the debt while you are burning and weeping, or when you are suffering so intensely you cannot speak?

"Or perhaps you will land in a place where your bones are pierced by icy wind so sharp you have no power even to groan. When you are prey to the taunts of maddened demons, with dogs and crows feasting on your flesh and blood, who would think of calling on you then?

"Besides, while you are tortured by striking or cutting or beating or cleaving, by burning or carving or grinding or splitting-tell me, how would you find one thousand gold pieces?"

The king was not unaffected by this account. Hearing of these hells in store for the wicked, he became alarmed. Quickly renouncing his wrong views, he devoutly assumed belief in a world hereafter. Bowing to the Bodhisattva, he spoke:

"My mind almost dissolves in fear on hearing of those torturous hells. Even now I feel a burning anxiety to discover how I might escape such agony. In my shortsightedness I have travelled the wrong road, my mind unbalanced by wrong views. Let Your Reverence be my guide: You know the right way. Be my protector and my refuge.

"As the rising sun dispels the darkness, you have dispelled the clouds of my false views. In the same fashion, please teach me the path by which I can avoid such misery after death."

The Bodhisattva, seeing the king transformed, a suitable vessel willing to accept the Dharma, felt compassion for him like a father for his child, and instructed him in this way:

"The glorious path you wish to follow is the very road trod by the kings of old who in their love of virtue were like disciples of the shramanas and brahmans. In their every action they manifested compassion for their subjects.

"Subdue injustice, most difficult to subdue; conquer the most unconquerable greed, and you can enter the jewelled gates of the heaven realms. Take up the virtuous views followed by the wise; abandon the views which scoundrels use to gratify fools; take up the teachings of the Dharma. Now, with virtuous views as your kingly way, destroy all harsh feelings against pious behavior, and you will travel the way of the superior ones, those who have achieved all virtuous qualities.

"Let your wealth be an instrument for obtaining virtue; by generating compassion for all, you will benefit both yourself and others. By restraining your senses and your conduct, you can avoid misery in the next life. Let the brilliance of your rule, O king, emanate from the glory of your actions. May your kingdom be a harbor for those who practice virtue; let its beauty come from purity. Ruling in this way, you will find true happiness, as well as material prosperity. Your luster will increase as you put to rest the anguish of all beings.

"Here on earth you stand on a royal chariot. Let worship of virtue be your charioteer, and let your own body, desiring righteous acts, be your chariot. May friendliness be its axle, self-restraint and charity its wheels, and the desire for gathering merit its spokes.

"Control your horses, the organs of the senses, with a bridle of purest awareness. Make prudence your whip and take your weapons from the arsenal of sacred learning. Let modesty be the chariot's trappings, humility its poles, and forbearance its yoke. Then, firm in self-command, you will be a driver of infinite skill.

"By restraining harsh words, you can keep the wheels from rattling; with lovely language, you can make them sound deep and solemn. Maintaining self-restraint, you can keep the chariot fit and ready, and by avoiding the winding roads of wicked ways, you will always move steadily in the right direction.

"This vehicle, brilliant with the luster of wisdom, adorned by the flag of good renown and the high-flying banner of tranquillity, followed by mercy in attendance, will help you travel swiftly toward liberation, the highest goal. O king, never shall you descend to the infernal regions on a chariot such as this."

Then, his brilliant words having dispelled the darkness of wrong views from the mind of the king, the Great Being vanished from that spot.

And the royal monarch, now thoroughly enlightened in matters of the next world, embraced the Dharma with all his heart. Along with his officials and the people of both town and country, he became intent on the practice of charity, self-command, and self-restraint.

Thus is it demonstrated that those who cling to false beliefs are fertile soil for sowing the seeds of salvation.

From this story one can see how those clinging to false beliefs, being in great trouble, are especially worthy of sympathy. This account may also be used to show how listening to the words of the Dharma will fill one with overflowing faith. Or how hearing the Dharma preached by another arouses faith productive of

right belief. Further, it can be presented when praising the virtuous. Likewise, when one wishes to speak on the subject of forbearance, one can say: "In this way the virtuous parry even the most hostile attack by counseling their enemy for his good; and they will do so without harshness, because they are accustomed to forbearance." This account may also be used when praising the qualities of the Tathagatas, and when dealing with feelings of deep weariness, to show how weariness makes a man inclined to care for his salvation.

29 - The Visitor from Brahma A Tale of Celestial Guidance



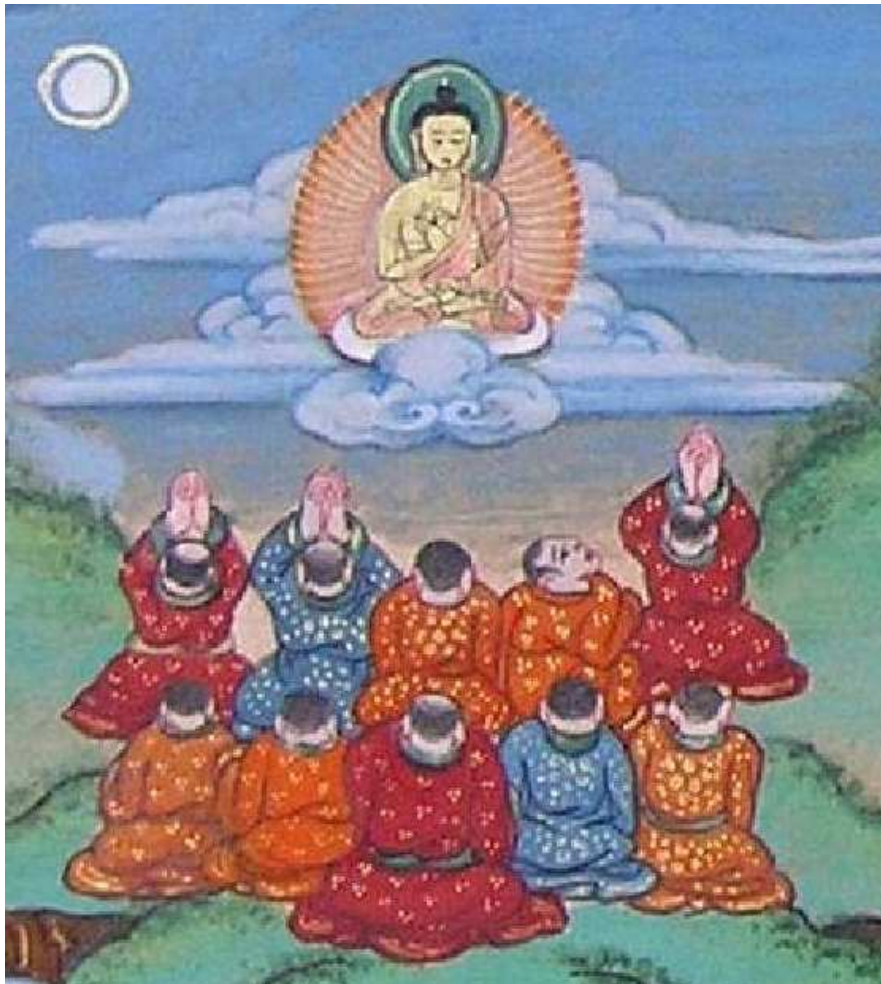
From lifetimes of diligent meditation and innumerable good deeds, the bodhisattva was born as a god from the celestial realm of Brahma, the region of heavenly delights. Yet even in this blissful realm, due to his infinite compassion, the sweet joy of the heavens did not turn him away from his desire to benefit others.

One day while gazing on the human realm he saw a king named Angadinna who had wrong views of the world. This king did not believe that there were any other realms or an afterlife and therefore had become lost in desire, greed, and sensual pleasure. The Bodhisattva manifested floating in the air before him in his

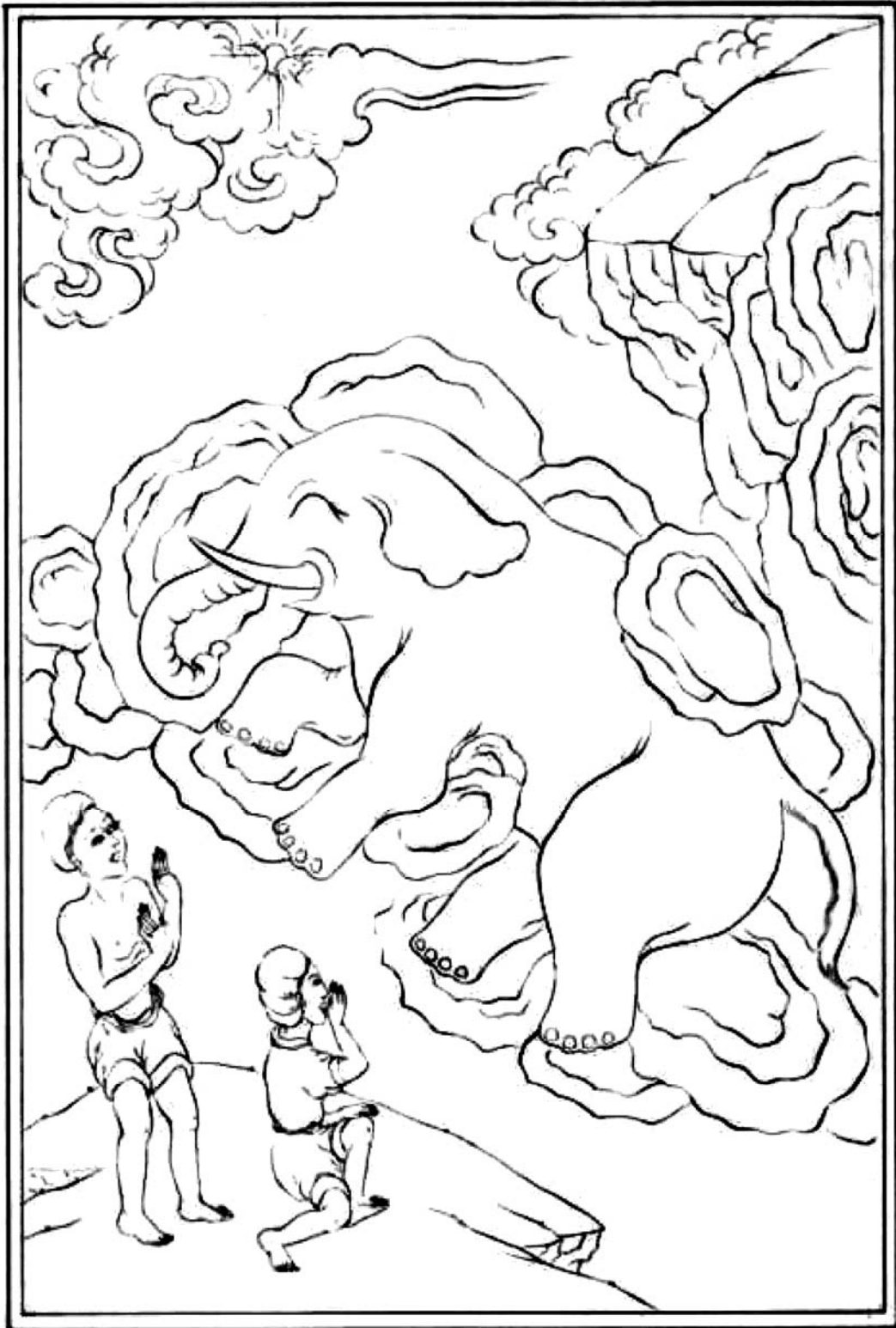
celestial form. The shocked and fearful king asked the bodhisattva where he had learned his supernatural powers and the bodhisattva responded that the only way to attain such ability is by living numerous lifetimes devoted to meditation, moral conduct, and restraint of the senses. The king sighed and stated that he did not believe in other realms and then mocked the Bodhisattva, saying that he should lend him five hundred gold pieces and that he would pay him back in the next realm. The Bodhisattva continued to reason with the man and began to explain the various hells where wicked people are reborn. Angadhinna was convinced and he bowed to the Bodhisattva, pledging to practice the Dharma for the remainder of his days.

Key events in the Story

1. A king doesn't believe in an afterlife.
2. A god shows him the error of his ways.
3. The king changes his mind.



30 - The Elephant



Pain is a prize to the virtuous, if its end be the happiness of others.

Once the Bodhisattva took birth as a huge elephant who lived in a forest far remote from civilization. A lake both deep and wide ornamented this wilderness, which was surrounded on all sides by a barren desert. But the forest of this oasis was well-suited for elephants and many other forest creatures. The trees were laden with flowers and fruit; young shrubs and grasses carpeted the earth. Mountain ridges and plateaus bordered the forest, as if detained there by its charm.

Here in the forest the elephant lived the solitary life of an ascetic, satisfied by the leaves and lotus roots, the clear lake waters, and the virtues of contentment and tranquility.

One day while wandering near the edge of the forest, the Great Being heard what sounded like cries coming from the desert. "What can this be?" he thought. "No road, no path, no trail leads here, and it is unlikely a hunting party would cross a desert so large as this.

"No one would take any such trouble to come here to capture my fellow elephants. Surely, then, this sound comes from people who have lost their way ... or perhaps from people who have been banished because of a king's anger or their own misconduct. Yes, such is the nature of the noise I hear: not joyful cries and laughter, but sounds of weeping and great grief I will investigate the cause of this."

Rushing toward the sound compelled by feelings of compassion, the Great Being heard ever more distinctly the sad and piteous laments of people in distress, crying for help. He ran still more swiftly, compassion urging him on.

Once out of the thicket the elephant could see a large body of men, women, and children, numbering in the hundreds, headed toward the forest. Although they were still a great distance away across the open desert, he could see they were all clearly afflicted by hunger, thirst, and fatigue. When the wanderers saw the Great Being bearing down on them like a snow-covered mountain, a mass of white fog, an autumn cloud driven by strong wind, they thought: "Alas! Now we are certainly lost!" Though peril seemed imminent, they were unable to move-for hunger, thirst, and fatigue had drained all their energy away.

Perceiving their fear, the Bodhisattva called out: "Do not be afraid! You have nothing to fear from me." Coming closer, he lifted his trunk, showing its broad tip as dark red as copper, and spoke compassionately to them: "Who are you, and how have you come to this state? Clearly you are suffering from sorrow and despair, your faces weathered by the fierce dust and harsh sun. What cruel misfortune has brought you here?"

On hearing the elephant speak such peaceful, comforting words in a human voice, the people regained their composure and bowed humbly to him.

"O lord of elephants, our king's explosive anger has blown us hither, far from the eyes of our kin, who, full of sorrow, were forced to behold our banishment. Yet some shred of good fortune must have remained to us, for now we have come to your attention, you who are greater than friend or relation. The very sight of you tells us we have passed through the worst. Having seen a being such as you, though even in a dream, who would not feel relieved from distress?"

"How many are you, good people?" asked the elephant. "We numbered a thousand at the time the king banished us, O fair one. But many have already

perished from hunger, thirst, and sorrow. Now, O lord of elephants, we estimate only seven hundred are still alive. About to sink into the mouth of Death, we look to you as refuge embodied come to help us."

These words moved the Great Being to tears. Commiserating with them, he cried: "Alas! Alas, how heartless, how shameless this king, how little concerned for the next world! Entranced by royal power, which is as fleeting as lightning, his senses must be blind to his own good. He must not know that Death is always near; he must never have learned the unhappy end of wickedness.

"Alas for those poor and helpless kings whose judgment is so weak and emotions so strong that they will not listen to words of good counsel! How is such lack of compassion possible-all for the sake of one single body-which is nothing but a breeding ground for illness! O ignorance is terrible!"

As his eyes, full of pity and tenderness, surveyed the group before him, the chief of the elephants thought: "Being so tortured by hunger, thirst, and exhaustion, with bodies so weak, how can these humans pass through the desert to the other side? The desert extends for hundreds of yojanas with no food or water or shade. Even this forest contains no proper food for them, not even enough for one day. Their only hope would be to take their provisions from the flesh of my limbs and use my bowels for bags to carry water. Otherwise there is no way for them to survive as they cross the desert.

"I will therefore use this body, abode of many hundreds of ills, to help these people who are so overwhelmed by suffering. May my body be a raft to carry them over the desert of their suffering! How difficult it is to attain a human body with which one can reach enlightenment. May they not lose this advantage!

"Since they have come within my dominion, they are by all rights my guests. As they are bereft of kin and in great distress, they need my pity all the more. This vessel of infirmities, this ground of unceasing toil, this assembly of miseries whose name is 'body' now at last will find its proper employment: serving to help others."

As the elephant was thinking this, some of the people who had suffered most intensely from hunger, thirst, fatigue, and heat bowed low to him. Their eyes wet with tears, they made signs to show their need for water.

Others spoke to him with pitiable words: "We have lost our families-to us you are the closest kin remaining, our recourse and our refuge. Shelter us as you think best, O Illustrious One."

Others with more energy asked where water might be found-a pond or river, a waterfall, a shady tree or a plot of grass. "Pray tell us, O chief of elephants," they said. "Show us mercy and point the way out of this desert. For many days we have wandered in this wilderness! Show us mercy! Pray help us, O lord, to get across it."

The Great Being felt his heart almost burst with pity at their prayers. Raising his trunk-which was as big around as the coils of a mighty cobra-he pointed out a mountain beyond which they could escape the wilderness. "Below that mountain is a large pure lake adorned with red and white lotuses. Go by way of that lake. The pure water will quench your thirst and dispel your fatigue, and relieve the suffering caused by heat. Not far from the lake you will find the corpse of an elephant, fallen from the mountain top. Its flesh will serve as provisions for your

journey, its bowels as bags for water. Then continue on in the same direction, and you will pass through the wilderness without much hardship."

With these words of comfort the Great Being encouraged the group to set out, while he, going quickly by another route, climbed to the top of that very mountain. Standing at its peak, about to give up his body for the sake of the banished ones, he strengthened his resolve by thinking in this way:

"Not to obtain a high state for myself, not to win the magnificence of a sovereign's power or heaven with all its enjoyments, not to experience the bliss of Brahma's world, not even for the happiness of nirvana do I perform this action. If there be any merit in my act, may it serve to make me the Savior of the World and of all beings wandering in the wilderness of samsara!"

Then, in great joy, oblivious to the painful death below, the Great Being gave up his body by throwing himself over the precipice—thus fulfilling his design. Like a shining autumn cloud he fell, like the moon sinking behind a mountain, like an avalanche of snow stirred up in the wake of a garuda's wings. With the wild sound of a whirlwind he fell, shaking the earth and the mountains, shaking as well the mind of Mara, self-infatuated lord of the desire realm.

As forest vines bowed low under the weight of his body, so forest deities bowed low in awe at his act. The gods of that forest were utterly astonished. So great was their gladness that the hairs on their bodies stood on end, and they raised their arms high, hands reaching to the sky.

Some showered the Bodhisattva's body with sweet-scented flowers and powders of sandalwood, others covered him with unwoven celestial cloth, resplendent with gold and jewels. Some worshipped him with hymns newly composed, their folded palms like opening lotus buds; others honored him with bowed heads, their beautiful diadems lowered in veneration.

Some fanned him with a breeze perfumed by the pollen of flowers, like the wind that arranges garlands of foam on ocean billows. Others held a canopy of dense clouds in the sky above his head. Some beat celestial drums to make the heavens sound out his praise; others ornamented the trees with new twigs, flowers, and fruit, all appearing out of season.

The sky assumed the splendor of autumn, the rays of the sun grew longer, and the ocean trembled and shook, as if to visit him in joy and gladness.

Meanwhile, the group of exiles had reached the lake and had refreshed themselves, recovering from heat, thirst, and exhaustion. Following the Great Being's directions, they discovered the body of the elephant not far away. "How like that chief of elephants he looks!" some said. "Is he perhaps a brother, or perhaps some other kin? One of his sons perhaps? Though the body is crushed, it is the self-same figure, beautiful as a snow peak, like the luster of water lilies, the tangible form of moon glow—like his image in a mirror."

But those with keener perception thought: "As far as we can see, this elephant, whose beauty surpasses that of any other elephant in any part of the world, is in fact that selfsame elephant. He has thrown himself from the mountain in order to save us." To their friends, they said: "That noise we heard like a whirlwind, like an earthquake, was certainly caused by his fall. This body is his: It has the same yellowwhite hue of a lotus root, the same hairs white as moonbeams, the same

tortoise-shell-like feet with alabaster nails, the same backbone, like a bow gracefully curved.

"This is the same face, long and full, this the same head, noble and auspicious, furrowed by sweet-smelling juice, and untouched by the driver's goad. These are the same honeycolored tusks, covered with the red dust of the mountain slope, as a mark of his glorious deed. And this is the same trunk, with its finger-like tip, with which he pointed out the way to us.

"What a wonder! What great friendship he has shown us, total strangers, without the slightest concern for our name, our conduct, or our faith! How great must have been his kindness to his friends and relatives!

"Let all revere this Illustrious One who embodied the finest behavior of the pious. How he assisted us, we who were overcome with fear and misery! How he benefitted us! What Great Being has appeared as an elephant? From what teacher could he have learned such fine behavior?

"Of him it is justified to say: 'The only beauty that truly pleases is the beauty of virtue.' Look how he has manifested the lofty nature expected from such an auspicious figure! Even his corpse shines like the snow mountains, as if it laughed with joy. Who would dare feed on the body of this virtuous being, the one who helped us with a love greater than from any kin, who sacrificed even his life for our benefit? No, rather we should pay our debt of gratitude by offering him a proper cremation."

Thus they mourned, as if a family disaster had occurred, their eyes dim with tears, their voices faltering.

But some, whose frame of mind was stronger, comprehended the true nature of the situation, and said: "By cremation we would neither be worshipping nor showing respect for this elephant. Only by accomplishing his design can we truly honor him. He gave up his body with the intent of rescuing us; he died out of affection for his guests. If we do not fulfill his hopes, his action will have been fruitless. He offered us everything he had, and with affection. We should accept his body with respect, like the word of a teacher, and thus secure our welfare.

"Once we have overcome our difficulties, there will be time enough to worship him and perform for this wonderful elephant all the funeral rites due a deceased kinsman."

And so the exiles obeyed the words of the elephant. Taking their provisions from his body, filling his bowels with pure water, they followed the path he had indicated, and safely crossed the wilderness.

From this story one can see how the virtuous hold even suffering in high esteem as if it were a benefit-if by suffering they may also bring happiness to others. This account is also relevant when praising the qualities of the virtuous, when praising the qualities of the Tathagata, or when discoursing on how to listen with attention to the Dharma. When explaining how to acquire a good nature, this may be said: "A good nature obtained by the practice of virtue will stay with you even in the next life." This story also demonstrates the virtue of habitual charity and shows how the habit of giving up material objects makes it easy to give up even self-love.

This account is also useful when telling of the Bhagavan's final words at the time of his Parinirvana. When he was worshipped with celestial flowers and celestial music, the Tathagata said: "In truth, Ananda, this is not the right way to honor the Tathagata." And so he explained that true worship consists of fulfilling the design of the person honored, not in offerings of perfumes, garlands, and the like.

30 - The Elephant

A Tale of Self Sacrifice.



At one time, the Bodhisattva took birth as a large Elephant. He lived in a forest far from civilization. The forest contained a lake that was both deep and wide and the entire wilderness was surrounded on all sides by an expansive desert. This beautiful oasis was well suited for the elephant as well as other smaller creatures. Delicious fruit grew on the trees, young shrubs carpeted the earth, and the whole area was bordered with high mountains. The Elephant lived alone as an ascetic and sustained his large body only on leaves and lotus roots, dedicating his time to contemplation on the virtues of contentment and tranquility.

One day while wandering along the forest's edge, the Bodhisattva Elephant heard the cries of humans coming from the desert. Their cries began to get louder; surely they were approaching the oasis.

Urged by compassion, he ran towards them swiftly and when they came into sight he saw that it was a large group of men, women, and children, all nearly dead from starvation and thirst. Noticing that they were fearful of him, he called out in a human voice and stated that they need not be frightened. Upon hearing such peaceful and comforting words the people regained their composure and humbly greeted him.



The elders explained that they had been banished by an angry king and that many of them had already died in the desert. The kind Elephant realized that all the fruit in the forest would not be enough to feed them for even a day. He resolved that he must offer his own flesh as food and his organs and intestines as bags to carry water on their journey. He then instructed the people on how to find the great lake and said that just beyond it they would find the corpse of an elephant that had fallen from a mountaintop, not telling them that it would be his own corpse. As the group set out towards the water, he quickly, by another route, started to ascend the mountain. Upon reaching the top he then, feeling great joy and oblivious of the impending painful death below, hurled himself over the edge of the precipice. The impact sounded like an earthquake throughout the entire forest.

Meanwhile, the group of exiles had reached the lake and refreshed themselves with the cool water. Following the Bodhisattva's directions, they discovered the body of an elephant not far away. At first, they were surprised that the corpse so closely resembled the kind Elephant they had just met. Before long, a clever one in the group determined that it was in fact the same Elephant. Awestruck by the incredibly generous and selfless act of the great beast, they burst into tears of gratitude.



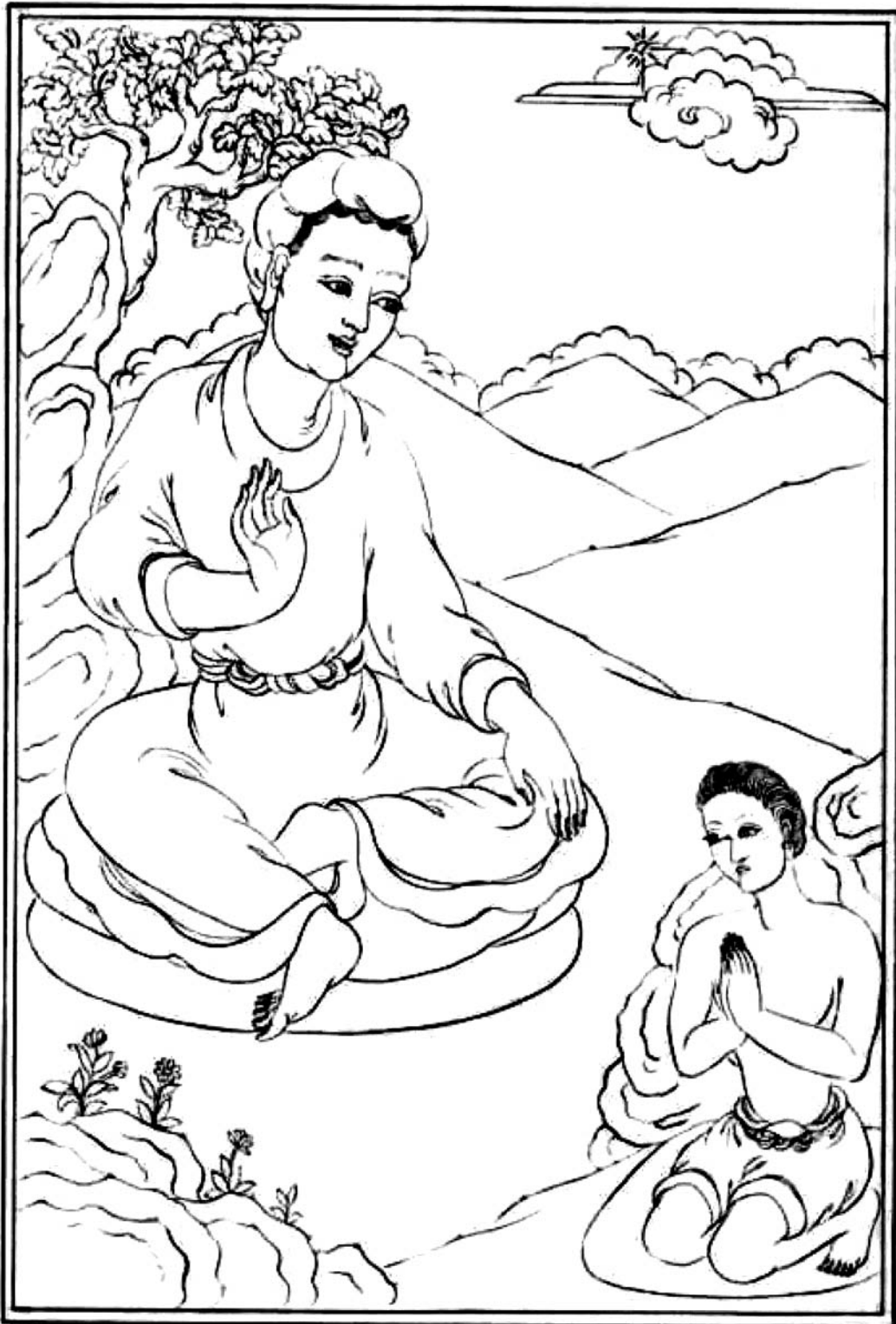
Some in the group thought that they should not eat such a great Bodhisattva, stating that such a magnificent and compassionate being deserves nothing less than a proper cremation ceremony. Once again, the clever one explained that the true way to honor the elephant would be to eat his flesh as the Elephant had intended. The people ate until they were full, made bags to hold water, and crossed the rest of the desert without trouble.

Key Events in the Story

1. An elephant lives in a remote oasis.
2. A group of starving humans arrives.
3. The elephant sacrifices his body for the humans.



31 - Sutasoma



Even a chance meeting with a virtuous person promotes well-being. For this reason alone, those who long for awareness and balance in their lives should seek out the virtuous.

Once the Bodhisattva was born into the illustrious royal family of the Kauravas, into a dynasty known the world over for its glory. It was a family held in deep affection by the people; even their proud neighbors had become their vassals, partly because of the sheer splendor of the Kauravas' power, but also because of the purity of the family's intentions.

Because the Bodhisattva was blessed with a face that reflected his hundreds of virtues, he was named Sutasoma, 'Lovely as the Moon'. And like the moon in the bright half of the month, his glory and grace increased every day.

Having attained supreme knowledge of the sacred texts, as well as a thorough understanding of the worldly arts and sciences, he came to be known as the kinsman of virtue, and as such was esteemed and loved by all the people. Indeed, he had become the greatest partisan of virtue-his regard for virtues ever increasing, his preservation of virtues assured by self-restraint.

His virtues, like the sixteen phases of the moon, were his many aspects-good conduct and learning, charity and compassion, humility and clarity, forbearance, wisdom and firmness, love, modesty, civility and purity, strength, selfcontrol and pureness of mind-all these and more proliferated within his being. The loftiness of his personality, his high aspirations, and the greatness of his nature were further embellished by his youth. For all these reasons and more, his father the king judged him capable of ruling the people, and so designated him heir-apparent.

Fond of learning as he was, the prince particularly enjoyed hearing spiritual ideas aptly expressed. And, indeed, he paid quite a princely sum to hear those who could recite such maxims.

One spring the month of flowers brought forth lavish foliage that decorated the parks of the capital. The young shoots of shrubs and trees burst forth in soft brilliance, and the opening blossoms seemed full of heady laughter. Fresh grass smoothly carpeted the grounds and meadows; pools and ponds with water of purest blue were covered with dazzling white lotus petals. Humming bees roamed here and there, while crowds of bold cuckoos and brazen peacocks displayed their beauty. Mild breezes, fragrant and cool, refreshed the air. The splendor of the gardens brought happiness to all who came near.

The Great Being, escorted by his personal guards, often went forth to these pleasure gardens in order to divert himself. The garden groves, resounding with the chants of cuckoos, were gracefully bedecked with artfully arranged arbors, and beautiful trees bent under the weight of their flowers.

Wandering through these groves in the company of his wives, the Bodhisattva resembled a god enjoying the fruits of bliss in the garden of Nandana. He listened raptly to the women's songs which blended sweetly with their soft-toned instruments, watched their coquettish and graceful dances, and enjoyed their amorous play, made more intoxicating by the beauty of the gardens.

Now while he was deeply enjoying himself, a certain brahman who was known as a fine spiritual aphorist came to call. Received with due respect, the brahman approached the prince, and was immediately struck by the Bodhisattva's great beauty. The Great Being, in turn, rejoiced at the presence of the holy man, although he postponed the business of the holy man's visit until he should finish with the sport appropriate to his age and due his merits.

But before this came to pass, a loud and confused noise erupted, a noise which cut short the sound of song and music and the joyous play. The commotion provoked great fear and trembling in the women, and destroyed in an instant the merriment of the company. Quietly the prince bade the guardians of the harem to investigate. Just then, the gatekeepers hurried up in confusion and alarm, their faces marking their terror as they cried: "Your Majesty, it is the man-eater Kalmashapada, the son of Sudasa, whose cruelty exceeds even that of the rakshasas!

"He is like the God of Death himself, destroying hundreds of men at a time; he is the Terror of the World embodied! His strength is superhuman, and his insolence outrageous. At this very moment he is approaching! The guards have run off, terror has sapped the courage of the warriors! The chariots, the horses and elephants have fled in total disarray.

Your Majesty, you must be on guard for your own defense. Pray advise us-what is to be done?"

The Bodhisattva, although he knew full well, asked: "Who is this man you speak of as the son of Sudasa?" Quickly the gatekeepers replied: "You must know, Your Majesty, that years ago a king, Sudasa, was carried away by a runaway horse to the very heart of the forest, where he took up with a lioness. The child she conceived and delivered was human, more or less, and male.

"He was later discovered by some foresters, and was carried to Sudasa, who raised him as his son. Sudasa then left him as successor when he went to the realm of the gods. In this manner Kalmashapada legitimately achieved royal status, but his craving for raw meat, his mother's legacy, would not be forgotten. Once he tasted human flesh, desire for it overwhelmed him, and he has fallen to killing and eating the people of his own capital.

"The townspeople prepared to put him to death, but Kalmashapada swore an oath to the demons who enjoy offerings of human flesh and blood, promising them one hundred royal princes as sacrifice if he were saved. The demons saved him, and he has already carried off many, many royal princes, and now he comes for you. Your Majesty, what are we to do?"

Now the Bodhisattva, who, in truth, already knew of Kalmashapada's obsession, felt only compassion for him. Indeed, he had already thought of a way to cure him. He knew he had the power to destroy the monster's evil habit, so to hear that Sudasa's son drew near was like hearing welcome news-news bringing happiness. And so he said:

"This fondness for human flesh has rendered the man lunatic. Unable to govern even himself, how could he fulfill his royal duties? He has destroyed his good repute and all his merit. Such a person is in need of the utmost sympathy. I could never use force against such a person, never feel fear at his coming. In a peaceful manner, without force or violence, I will utterly destroy his obsession.

"Look how he has come to the very place I reside. It is my duty to show him hospitality, as the virtuous would to any guest. Go, each of you, and resume your posts."

The prince then turned to his female bodyguards, who, eyes rolling with fright, throats choked with terror, were preparing to bar the path of the monster. With comforting words he asked them to step back. Walking calmly toward the terrible

noise, he suddenly saw his army in full flight, pursued by the son of Sudasa, whose appearance was indeed dreadful.

Stinking garments hung loose around his waist, and a diadem of bark crowned his filthy, dust-covered hair, which hung matted around his face. A thick and dishevelled beard shrouded his face like darkness. His eyes were swollen with tremendous and awesome wrath, as he brandished his sword and shield.

The prince, wholly unafraid, called out: "Hail, son of Sudasa! Here I am! Sutasoma! Why are you tormenting those poor people? Come here!" Hearing this challenge, Kalmashapada, like a proud lion, reared and turned to see the Bodhisattva standing alone, unarmed, and with a gaze remarkably calm.

Feverishly, Kalmashapada dashed up the hill to the young prince. "You are the very man I seek!" he thundered, and threw the prince over his shoulder to carry him off.

Realizing that the creature having just put so many royal forces to flight was still bloated with violence and arrogance, the Bodhisattva thought it not the proper time for admonition and so said nothing. The son of Sudasa, on the other hand, was ecstatic with his success, and greatly rejoiced as he entered his stronghold.

The stronghold where the monster lived was as dreadful as a cemetery full of dancing demons—a source of horror to all who caught a glimpse of it. Bones of slain men lay tossed on the stinking ground still wet with blood. The frightful cries of jackals sounded everywhere; vultures and crows perched on the nearby trees whose leaves were tinged dark red by the smoke of funeral pyres.

Putting down his captive, the monster sat for a moment, staring intently at the face of the prince, transfixed by his extraordinary beauty. But the Bodhisattva was recalling the poor brahman still waiting at his residence: "Alas!" he thought. "That brahman came from a great distance hoping to be rewarded for his elegant sayings. What will he do now when he hears of my capture? His mind will burn with misery. He is sighing in sympathy for my fate or bemoaning his own destiny. Either way he is surely despairing at his misfortune."

While the Bodhisattva was reflecting in this manner, his eyes welled with tears of compassion for the suffering of the brahman. Seeing the tears, the son of Sudasa laughed out loud and shouted: "Stop your crying! You are renowned the world over for your many virtues, and yet as soon as you are in my power you begin to cry! How true it is: 'Constancy collapses in the face of calamity! In sorrow learning is of no use! No creature can be found that does not tremble when stricken!'

"Tell me now, what are you crying about? Your precious dear life? Your wealth which is the instrument of your pleasures? Your relatives? Your lost royalty and your rule over men? Or do you weep for your poor father who loves his son? Or for your pretty children who right now are crying for you? Come, tell me what makes these tears gush from your eyes."

The Bodhisattva replied: "I am not mourning for my life, or for my parents, my children, relatives, or wives. Nor am I mourning for the pleasures of royalty, or for the joys of power. What moved me to tears was thinking of a brahman who came to me hopeful that his well-turned phrases might bring him some reward.

"He must have been quite overcome with despair when he heard that I was carried off. This thought makes me weep. For this reason you should free me—that I might ease his misery by pouring the cool water of due reward upon his burning heart—and too, that I may receive from him the nectar of his holy words.

"After paying my debt to the brahman, I will return, bringing joy to your eyes and repaying my debt to you. Do not think that this is a contrivance to escape you, O king. People such as I have no fear. We follow a different path from that which most others walk."

"Do you expect me to believe such nonsense?" asked the monster. "It goes beyond belief! Who, once released from the jaws of Death, would willingly return there? Once free from the Lord of Death so difficult to escape, once you are safe in your joyful palace again, what reason in the world would induce you to return?"

"You must know what would cause me to return," replied the Bodhisattva. "Have I not given you my promise? Do not suspect me, for when you do so, you think me no better than a villain. And am I not Sutasoma?"

"Perhaps there are some who, out of fear and greed, would forsake the truth as easily as if it were a straw. But Truth is the sole possession of the virtuous, their very life; even in distress, they would not forsake it. For neither life nor all the pleasures of this world can save those who forsake the truth from the lower realms. Truth is a mine of praise, glory, and happiness; who would give these up for the sake of a few worldly objects?"

"I suppose that to the deceitful—those unconcerned with the holy life, those on the road of wrong action—truthful action is hard to believe. But how could you suspect me of fear? If I had been truly afraid, or attached to my pleasures, or if my heart had been devoid of compassion, don't you think I would have met an adversary so famous and fierce as you in full armor, prepared to fight as becomes one proud of his valor?"

"But in truth, I desired conversation with you. And so I still do. After satisfying my visitor, I shall return. One such as I never lies."

The Bodhisattva's words greatly irritated the son of Sudasa, who took them to be mere artifice. Nevertheless, he thought: "Certainly he boasts of his truthfulness and righteousness. Well, then, I will see this love of truth and virtue! And really, whether he returns or not is no matter, for I have already subdued by the strength of my own arm the hundred princes I require. With these princes I can perform my sacrifice to the demons."

Speaking to the Bodhisattva, he said: "Well, then, go ahead. We will see your great truthfulness in action, we will see how you keep your promises. We will see your great righteousness. Having done whatever you intend for that brahman, return quickly! Meanwhile I will prepare your funeral pyre."

Promising again that he would return, Sutasoma set out for his palace, where he was greeted with ecstatic joy by his household. Immediately he sent for the brahman, and learned from him four verses of beautiful sayings. Praising the brahman with kind words and great marks of honor, he also gave the brahman one thousand pieces of gold for each verse, the wealth which the brahman so desired.

Sutasoma's father, thinking to halt such extravagance, scolded his son in a friendly way: "My dearest son," he said, "should there not be a limit to the offering given for such verses? You have a large retinue to maintain, and the splendor of kings depends on their treasury. Rewarding a pretty proverb with one hundred gold pieces is too much already; to give more is pure folly.

"No matter how wealthy you may be, if you are too liberal you will not retain your riches long. Wealth is the chief and most effective instrument for success, and you can achieve nothing without it. That is why they say fortune is like a harlot—she disregards even the most glorious king if he lacks wealth."

The Bodhisattva replied: "If it were actually possible to set a value on moral sayings, Your Majesty, I could give my royal rank as the reward and not incur your displeasure. For sayings such as these bestow faith and calmness of mind, strengthen love of enlightenment, and dispel the darkness of ignorance. Ought they not to be bought even at the price of one's own flesh?"

"Sacred texts are a shining light destroying the veils of ignorance. They are the highest wealth, beyond the reach of the craftiest thieves; the finest weapon against the enemy delusion; the best counselor and advisor of conduct; the truest friend in times of distress; the surest medicine against the disease called sorrow; the strongest army against vice; the highest treasure of glory and bliss.

"Sacred learning is the best teacher of eloquent speech. When meeting with virtuous beings, sacred learning affords the opportunity to make a gift of great value. In assemblies such learning gives pleasure to the wise. Sacred learning casts light as bright as the sun on the murkiest disputes, and destroys the arrogance of jealous adversaries. Such verses bring delight to the eyes and faces of even the most common people; rapt with amazement, they applaud with vigor when such words are spoken. One can use sacred learning to teach clearly, and to demonstrate with proofs; holy words from scriptures are a wonderful means to give teachings.

"The loveliness of eloquent and cultured speech gleaned from sacred books is like a string of unfaded garlands, or like the blazing luster of a shining lamp which constantly gains glory for its owner. Making use of sacred texts is a most pleasant way to gain renown.

"What is more, those who hear such words grow eager to walk the road of propriety and virtue which never contradicts the Teachings. Following the sacred learning, adapting their behavior to these sacred precepts, they easily cross the most dangerous passage through their lives.

"For so many wonderful qualities are the sacred texts rightly renowned. Having received them like a present, how could I not honor my benefactor in return? But how can I transgress your order? And therefore I now must return to the son of Sudasa. I do not need the royal duties I would fulfill by compromising my virtue and senselessly entering the path of error."

These last words much alarmed the prince's father, who, moved by earnest affection, replied: "It was for your own good, my son, that I spoke. There is no need to take offense. May your enemies come under the power of the son of Sudasa! Although you promised to return, and, desiring to guard your honor, intend to fulfill that promise, I cannot allow it. No wickedness will come from following a path of untruth, if in so doing one may save one's own life or benefit

one's parents or other venerable persons. This very precept is found in the most sacred texts; why should you ignore it?

"Furthermore, those skilled in the science of politics have often said that an attachment to Dharma in cases where it causes damage to material interest or pleasure is nothing but mismanagement, an evil habit in kings. No more of that, then! Do not grieve me; stop ignoring your own interests!

"I know you will object that this is dishonorable and a contradiction to truth, that it is not right to break your promise. But, listen to me! You need not break your promise. I have prepared an army to go to your rescue: a great cavalry, elephants, chariots, foot soldiers—a dreadful force, an army of heroes who have distinguished themselves in many battles. You can go to him surrounded by this army, and bring him to submission or to death. In this way you can fulfill your promise and save your life as well."

But the Bodhisattva replied: "Your Majesty, I am not able to promise one thing and do another. Nor can I strike one who deserves only pity, who is immersed in the mire of wicked habits and who is falling headlong into hell. Both friend and family have abandoned him, and he has no one left to protect him. Moreover, that man-eater did something generous and noble in releasing me from his power, relying solely on my good faith. And thanks to him I received those holy stanzas, father, and for this reason he is my benefactor, particularly entitled to my support.

"Your Majesty, pray, think no more of any misfortune threatening me. How could he be capable of harming me when I return just as I went?" With these sweet words the Great Being persuaded his father to let him go. Putting aside the pleas of friends and his faithful army, he set out for the dwelling of Sudasa's son. Alone and free from fear—for he was keeping his faith—he went joyfully, in order to help Sudasa's son and to provide benefit for all sentient beings.

When Kalmashapada saw the Great Being coming from afar, his astonishment was great, and his esteem for the prince was magnified. Not even his cruel nature, however deeply rooted in his defiled mind, could prevent him from thinking: "Ah! Ah! Wonder of wonders! Truly a miracle! The truthfulness of this prince exceeds the most that could be expected of gods or kings. To me, a man as cruel as Death, he returns of his own free will, without fear or anxiety. What constancy!

"Rightly has his renown for speaking the truth spread throughout the world! Now he has even given up his life and kingdom just to keep a promise!"

When the Bodhisattva drew near, he saw the monster clearly affected with amazement and admiration, and said: "I have received a great treasure of holy learning from that wandering brahman. I experienced much happiness, thanks to you. Now I have returned. Eat me, if you wish, or use me as a victim in your sacrifice."

The son of Sudasa replied: "I am in no hurry to eat you. What's more, this funeral pyre is still smoking, and flesh isn't worth eating unless it's roasted on a smokeless fire. Tell me some of what you heard."

"Of what use would it be to you," asked the prince, "to hear such sacred words, you who adopted this merciless mode of living solely for the sake of your belly? The words I heard praised righteousness. The Dharma does not mix with

unholiness. You follow the wicked manner of life of rakshasas and have given up the path of the virtuous. You possess no truth, still less any virtue. What would you do with holy words?" Such contempt roused the impatience of the man-eater. "How can you say such things? Show me the king who does not kill for sport the mates of the hinds in the forest! So I kill men for my livelihood; what is the difference between me and the killers of deer?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "I would never say that those who aim their arrows at frightened and fleeing deer stand in Virtue. But an eater of men is infinitely more reprehensible. Human beings occupy by birth the highest station in the circle of life; they should never serve as food."

Now, although the Bodhisattva had spoken harshly to the son of Sudasa, his loveliness outweighed the other's temper. Therefore the beast merely laughed and said: "Tell me, Sutasoma: After I released you, you went home to your resplendent royal palace, to your royal enjoyments-yet you came back! Do you know nothing of the science of politics?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "On the contrary, I am much skilled in its ways, and therefore have no desire to put them into effect. What is the value of being adept in an art which, properly executed, brings about certain fall from virtue without producing happiness? Do not the wise in the ways of politics most often find disaster after death? Therefore I have avoided the crooked paths of politics, and that is why I kept my faith, returning to you here.

"You may indeed say that it is I who am truly skilled in politics. Forsaking falsehood, I delight in the truth, and thus win what everyone agrees are the fruits of a well-managed action: good repute, satisfaction, and true benefit."

"Whose interest have you gained by holding to truth?" asked the son of Sudasa. "You have sacrificed your life, your family (who shed great tears at your departure), and all the pleasures the world can offer. What did you gain in return for the truth when you returned to me?"

"Many kinds of virtues rest on truth," said the prince. "Listen to but a small account of them. Truth surpasses the most splendid garlands by its grace, every sweet flavor by its sweetness. A moment of truth can produce merit effortlessly and without toil or troublesome pilgrimage-it is better far than any kind of penance. Truth increases glory among men; it is the way to pass from the three worlds, it is the entrance to the celestial abodes, and the bridge to cross the swamp of samsara."

"Very good! Very good!" exclaimed the son of Sudasa, praising and gazing admiringly on the Bodhisattva. "Every other man who has come into my power was paralyzed by fear, completely robbed of courage. Yet you are unperturbed. I suppose death does not frighten you, my prince?"

"Of what use is cowardly fear, the most useless of all means of prevention, against that which cannot be avoided even with great effort? People are well aware of this natural course of events, and yet they fear death; because they have done wicked actions, they are full of repentance. Because they neglected to perform good actions, because they tremble at the suffering that lies ahead, they are full of anxiety.

"But I do not recollect ever having done anything but pure actions. These are, indeed, ingrained in my nature. Who, abiding in Virtue, can fear death? I cannot

recall one gift made to a mendicant which did not procure happiness for both the mendicant and myself. Who, having obtained this kind of contentment, could fear death? Indeed, even after reflecting for a long time, I cannot recall ever having taken one step toward evil, not even in my thoughts. The path to enlightenment is clear for me; why should I fear death?

"I have bestowed much wealth on brahmans, on family and friends, on the poor, on ascetics who are the ornaments of hermitages, on each according to their worthiness and need. I have built hundreds of magnificent temples, hospitals, hermitages, ponds and halls. With such satisfaction, I have no fear of death. So prepare me for your sacrifice and eat me now!"

On hearing these words, the son of Sudasa was moved to tears. The hairs of his body stood on end; the darkness of his wicked nature vanished. Looking with reverence on the Bodhisattva, he exclaimed: "Beware! May evil be averted! O foremost of princes, may those who wish evil on beings such as you willfully swallow the poison of Halahala! May they eat venomous serpents and drink flaming iron! May their heads and hearts explode into a hundred pieces!

"O prince, I have been touched by your words like a rain of flowers; pray tell me also those holy verses. Having seen the ugliness of my conduct in the mirror of Truth, moved by the deepest emotion, may I not perhaps be a person who yearns to hear the Dharma? Tell me now those sacred teachings you heard recently!"

Now the Bodhisattva, knowing the urgency with which the son of Sudasa desired to hear the Dharma, knew the monster to be a fit vessel for his words. "Well then," he said. "If you wish to hear these Teachings, you must listen in the proper attitude.

"Sit upon a lower seat, symbolizing modesty; enjoy the sweetness of the sacred words with eyes full of happiness as if you were drinking in the nectar of the Teachings; bend your mind, calm and pure, to the finest attention. This is the way to listen to the preaching of the Dharma: as a sick patient heeds the doctor."

Quickly the son of Sudasa threw his upper garment over a slab of stone. Offering this higher seat to the Bodhisattva, he sat beneath on the cold earth in front of the Great Being. Keeping his eyes fixed on the face of the Bodhisattva, he requested the Great Being to speak.

And the Bodhisattva consented, filling the entire forest with a voice deep and resonant, like the lovely sound of a newly formed rain cloud:

"One chance meeting with a virtuous man
Needs no further assurance
To assure friendship forever."

"Well said, well said!" the son of Sudasa cried out. Nodding his head and waving his hand, he urged the Bodhisattva: "Go on, go on!" The Bodhisattva then gave the second verse:

"Always stay close to holy men,
Offering them what services you can.
Let the sweet essence of virtuous men
Rub off on your being like pollen."

"Indeed, you have used your wealth well in rewarding such beautiful sentiments; your effort has been well-spent!" said the son of Sudasa. "Please tell me more of these verses! "And so the Bodhisattva continued:

"With jewels and gold the royal chariot gleams,
But like the king itself its luster fades with age.
Yet virtue conquers time's decay;
So holy men attach themselves to virtue's way."

Again Kalmashapada cried out: "A shower of ambrosia! O how great the satisfaction you give me with these noble words. Pray say more!" The Bodhisattva spoke again:

How distant the low earth from heaven high,
How far from sunset the eastern sky.
The distance between the ocean's shores
Marks the gap between evil and sacred lores."

Then the son of Sudasa as a result of his faith and wonder became full of affection and reverence for the Bodhisattva, and said: "Lovely are these sayings you give me, the elegance of their words surpassed only by the brilliance of their content. By reciting them you have given me much happiness. Let me honor you in return and grant you four requests. Choose whatever you want, and it shall be yours."

Astonished at this offering, yet valuing its motivation, the Bodhisattva asked: "Who are you that you can grant wishes? Dominated by a passion for evil, you have no power even over yourself. What could you possibly give to another, you whose heart avoids all virtuous behavior?"

"Were I to declare my wish, you might be averse to granting it. Who, being compassionate, would wish such a calamity on you? Enough. You have done enough for me already."

But the son of Sudasa grew ashamed. Lowering his eyes, he murmured: "I beg Your Honor not to hold such a mean opinion of me, I swear I will give you what you ask, even if it costs my life. Tell me what you want, O Prince, whatever it may be that will please you."

"Well then," said the Bodhisattva, "grant me these four things. First, take a vow of truth; second, give up injury to all living beings; third, release your prisoners, every one; and fourth, never again eat human flesh, O hero among men!"

"I grant you the first three," said the son of Sudasa. "But pray choose a different fourth. Don't you understand I cannot keep from eating human flesh?"

"There you are! Did I not say it? Who are you to grant wishes? Moreover, how can you keep a vow of truth and refrain from injuring others, O king, if you do not give up eating human flesh? Did you not just now swear you were willing to grant these wishes even at the risk of your own life? Yet already you act quite otherwise. And how could you refrain from injuring and killing to obtain human flesh? Therefore of what value are the three without the fourth?"

The son of Sudasa replied: "How can I give up eating human flesh? For the sake of that addiction I renounced my kingdom, endured hardships in the wilderness, and forced myself to kill virtue and truth, murdering my own reputation."

"For these very reasons you should give it up," said the Bodhisattva. "Why do you wish to remain in a state which caused you to lose your virtue, your royal power, your pleasures and your good repute among men? Why cling to such a mass of misfortune? Consider further: Only the vilest among men retract their gifts. Is it right to let this meanness of mind subdue a person like you? Stir yourself and cease your wicked actions. Are you not the son of Sudasa?"

"Much good meat prepared by skillful cooks is at your disposal, for you may partake of the flesh of domestic and wild animals, and fish. Satisfy yourself with these, and desist from eating human flesh.

"Hounded by your wretched need, you stay in the wilderness, separated from your friends, your children, your family and attendants, all once much beloved. Do you not miss them? Do you not miss the sweet songs of the night, the rumbling sound of the royal drums?"

"How can you allow yourself to be so dominated by your desire? Follow instead the path of conduct compatible with virtue and true self-interest. Singlehanded you have vanquished kings and great armies. Do not now be a coward in this battle with your desire!"

"Keep in mind as well the next world, O Lord of Men. Do not cherish what is bad because it pleases you to do so. Pursue instead the way most favorable to your good reputation, the way of virtue. Accept this for your own good, though you do not like it; swallow it like medicine!"

The son of Sudasa was moved to tears, which caught at his throat with emotion. He threw himself before the Bodhisattva and embracing his feet, exclaimed:

"Justly your fame has pervaded the world in all directions, carrying with it the seeds of your virtue and the perfume of your merit. Who but you alone would have compassion for an evildoer such as I, who have become a messenger of death?"

"You are my master, my teacher, my very god! I will honor your words and accept them all with bowed head. Never again will I feed on human flesh. Everything you have told me to do, I will do.

"Now, those princes I have brought here to be victims of my sacrifice, who have, by their imprisonment, lost their splendor, whose faces show their mind overwhelmed with grief, let us release them all, none excepted."

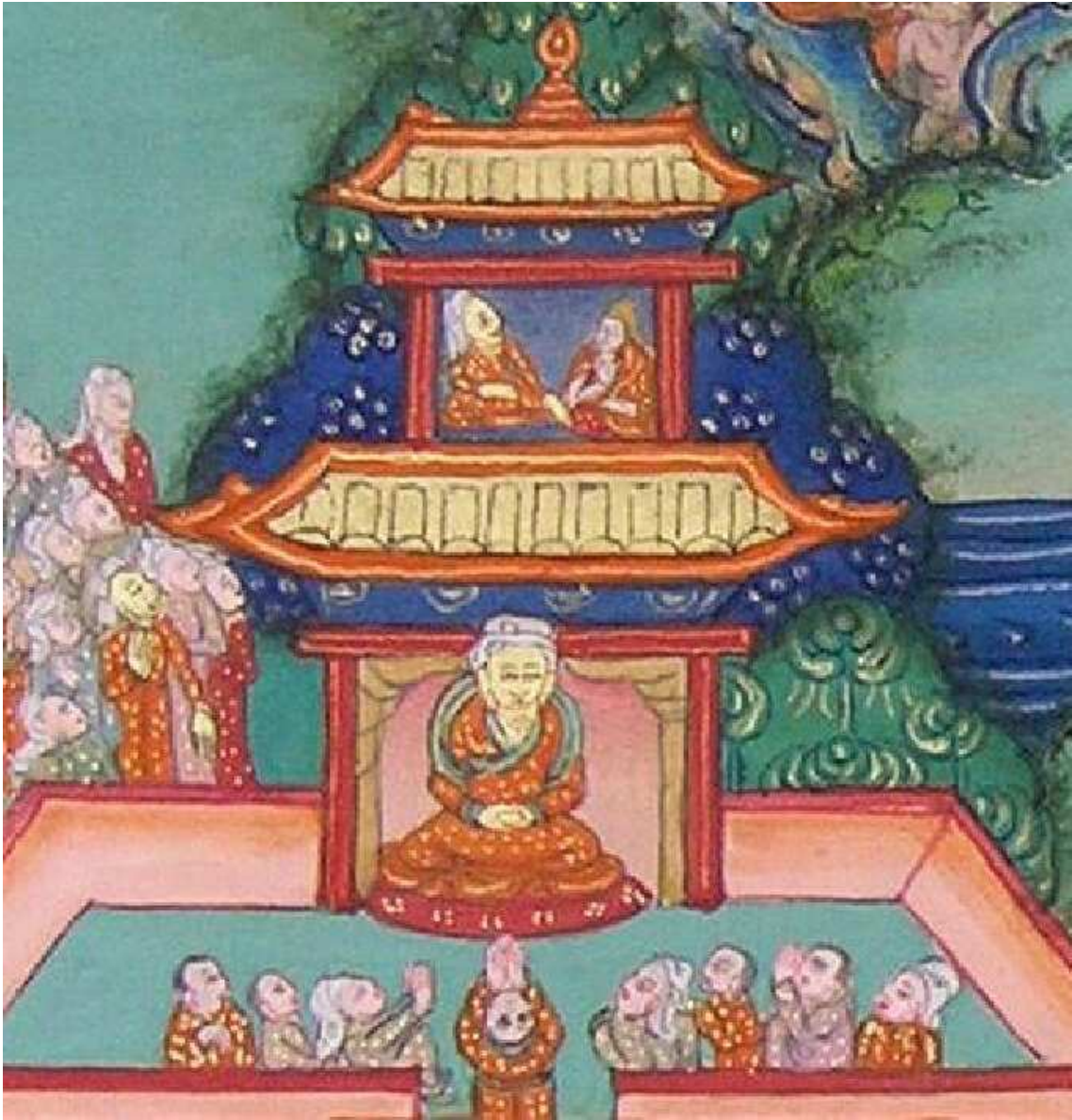
The Bodhisattva promised to help him in this, and together they went to the prison where the royalty were confined. No sooner did the princes see Sutasoma than they knew they would be released. Filled with utmost joy, their faces grew radiant. Laughter beyond measure burst forth from their throats as vibrantly as waterlilies burst open at the onset of autumn, invigorated by moonbeams.

The Bodhisattva spoke comforting and kind words to them, and obtained from them a vow that they would bring no harm to the son of Sudasa. Then, having released them all, he set out for his kingdom, followed by Kalmashapada and the other princes. There a reception was held for all, according to rank, after which the Bodhisattva reestablished each of the princes on their royal thrones.

In this way one can see how meeting with the virtuous, in whatever way it may have been occasioned, promotes salvation. Thus considering, he who longs for salvation must strive for association with the virtuous. This story may also be

recounted when praising the qualities of the Tathagata: So the Buddha, always intent on doing good, was a friend even to strangers in his previous existences.

Likewise this story is to be told when discoursing on listening with attention to the preaching of the excellent Dharma, to show how hearing the Dharma diminishes wickedness and increases virtues. It also shows the many advantages to sacred learning. Likewise it is to be told when discoursing on veracity, to show how speaking the truth is guarded by the virtuous and procures great merit. This account is also relevant when glorifying veracity, to express how the virtuous keep faith without regard for their life, pleasures, or status, and also when praising the qualities of holy beings.



31 - Sutasoma
A Tale of Salvation



The Bodhisattva was once born a prince in a royal family of Kauvaras. Known for his beauty, virtue, and learning, he was well liked and respected among the people of the kingdom.

One spring day, while the prince was in one of his family's pleasure gardens waiting to meet with a great poet, he was informed that the man-eater Kalmashapada was on his way to eat him. Kalmashapada was said to have once been a prince himself, conceived by a king and a lion. It was said that Kalmashapada was a good prince up until he took one taste of human flesh. Upon his first taste of blood he became badly addicted, casting away virtue and his royal rank, condemned to a life of murder and cannibalism. When local townspeople were about to put the man-eater to death, he made a deal with demons that if they could free him, he would sacrifice one hundred princes to them. He was now on his way to take the Bodhisattva and add him to his collection of abducted royalty.

The Bodhisattva told his guards to let Kalmashapada enter. When the man-eater approached, the Bodhisattva did not flee. He confronted the cannibal and convinced him to let him meet with the great poet he had invited to the capitol first, and then he would return to be eaten. Kalmashapada was skeptical but let

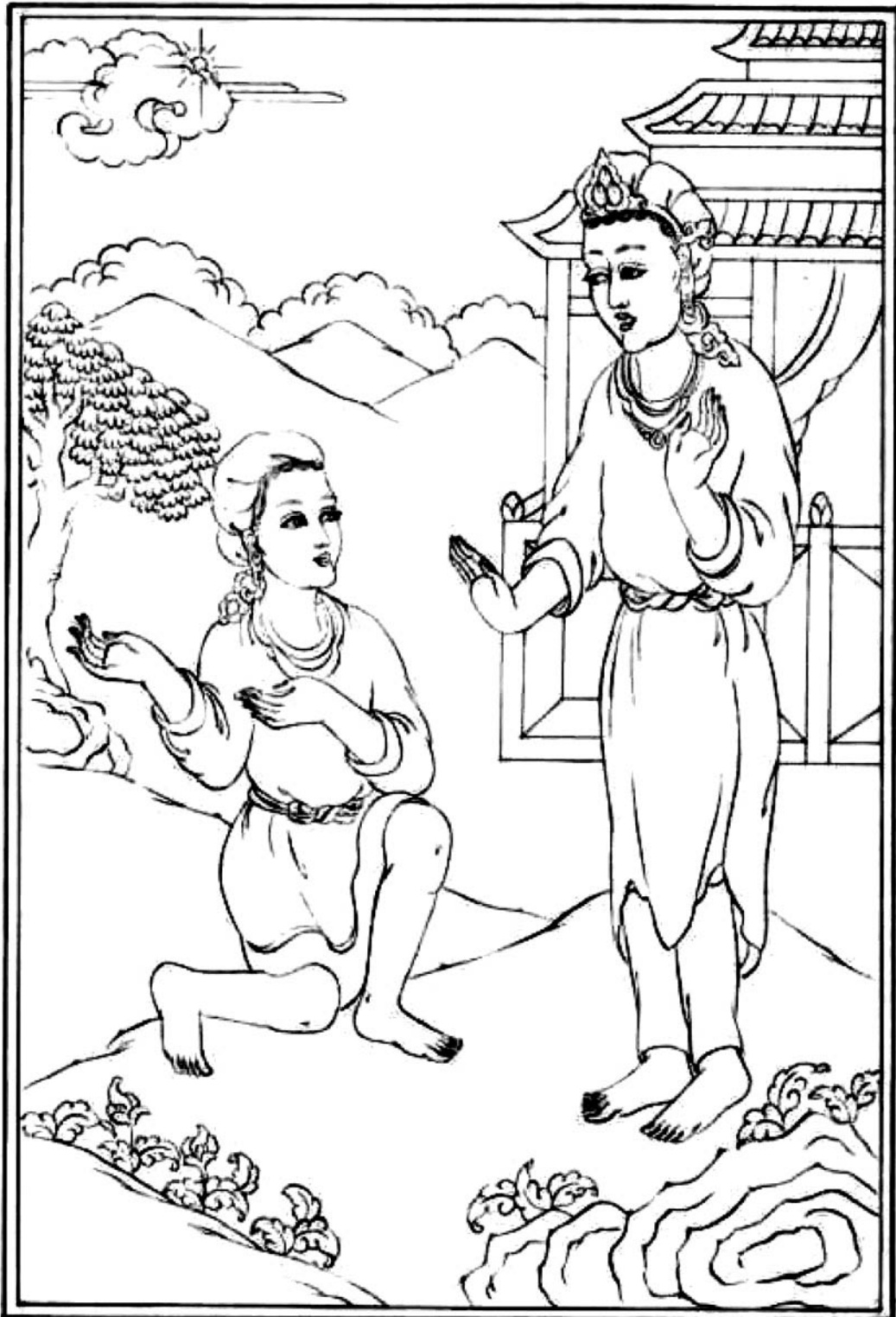
him go. The bodhisattva paid the poet well for his work and set off the return to Kalmashapada. When he returned, the man-eater was impressed that he kept his word and his esteem for the bodhisattva grew. The virtuous prince spoke of the beautiful verses he had just heard. Kalmashapada was intrigued and wanted the Bodhisattva to recite the poems for him, but he replied that a murderous cannibal would not be able to understand the beauty of such work. Kalmashapada was upset, but the prince continued to reason with him. His words touched Kalmashapada deeply, and he convinced him to stop eating flesh and work to regain his virtue. Kalmashapada agreed and set the princes he was holding captive free.



Key Events in the Story

1. A cannibal kidnaps a prince.
2. The prince reasons with the cannibal.
3. The cannibal releases the prince.

32 - Prince of the Iron House



Those once struck by the weariness of existence are distracted by nothing on their road to enlightenment not even by the brilliance and lure of royalty.

At one time when our Lord was still a Bodhisattva, he looked upon the world and found it full of the sufferings of disease, old age, and death, of separation from loved ones, of the calamity upon calamity which beset every sentient being. Knowing that beings had no refuge, no guidance, no protection, he was moved by compassion to work for their liberation; he wished to gain the highest happiness even for those unknown to him and averse to his teachings.

At this time, the Bodhisattva was born to a certain royal family distinguished by both modesty and splendor. Their prosperity insured by the affection of their subjects, the family grew wealthy with ease and without oppressing their vassals, who proudly paid them homage. And so their fame and glory spread far and wide. All the citizens shared in both their joy and their grief, so it was no surprise that the child's birth occasioned a festival for the court and capital.

At the court, gifts were showered upon the brahmans, more than enough to fill their hands and gratify their minds, and all the royal attendants were presented with brilliant garments. Outside the palace, songs, jests, and laughter resounded in the streets and blended with the music of many instruments. The heartfelt joy of the people expressed itself in merriment, dancing, and abandon; they told one another exultantly of the happy news, as though they themselves had received a magnificent gift.

The happiness of the king grew even greater at their delight. The doors of the prisons were opened, and all the prisoners set free. Flags flew from the tops of houses, and the ground was sprinkled with spirits and liquors and covered with precious powders and fragrant flowers. The city looked as beautiful as on a major holiday. From the splendid dwellings of the wealthy came a cascade of gifts: clothes, gold, jewels, and more, as if happiness itself, like the River Ganges, had overflowed into the world.

Now it so happened that every son born to this king had died soon after birth. Attributing these deaths to the action of demons, the king determined to protect this child from the same fate. He ordered a house to be constructed entirely of iron, though ornamented with magnificent jewelled sculpture of gold and silver. Rites for the destruction of demons, as well as rites for protection and auspicious ceremonies to bring about prosperity and purification, were performed in the manner set forth in the sacred texts.

The young prince grew up in this iron house, and owing to the careful watch, as well as to the strength of his nature and his own great store of merit, no demons touched this Great Being. In the course of time, after the sacraments and initiatory rites had been performed, he was instructed by teachers revered for their knowledge of the sacred texts, and renowned for their morality, wisdom, reverence, tranquillity, discipline, and virtue. From them he learned the many branches of science.

Each day, as the prince grew to manhood, his modest and pleasing nature inspired the increasing affection of the people. For so it is that the brilliance of the virtuous attracts the peoples' love as strongly as does their most beloved friend or relative just as the smiling autumn moon in the heavens, showering its beams freely in all directions, wins the love of all.

Thus the Great Being enjoyed the happiness and godly enjoyments due him as the result of his merit. And over time his father, who loved him deeply and held him in the highest esteem, lost his anxiety over his safety.

Now, during one flower festival, the Bodhisattva expressed a desire to see the beautiful and brilliant decorations in the capital. With the permission of the king, the prince mounted the royal chariot, a splendid vehicle embellished by shining ornaments of gold, jewels, and silver, and flying flags and banners of many colors. The horses were well-trained and swift, adorned with golden trappings; the charioteer was distinguished for his skill and purity, his honesty, modesty, and firmness.

Preceded by the sounds of drums and other musical instruments, surrounded by a retinue in brilliant attire, the prince passed through the capital, his eyes eagerly roaming the decorated streets which overflowed with crowds in their lovely festival garments. Everyone was as intent on catching a glimpse of the prince as he was on gazing upon them; all along the way, the people uttered words of praise and respect, bowing their heads, joining their palms, and reciting blessings.

Though contemplation of such a beautiful spectacle would ordinarily have produced great rejoicing within the mind, the prince was so familiar with the suffering of existence that the festival served only to remind him of his former lives.

Overwhelmed with sadness, he lamented: "Alas! How full of emotionality is this world, how dissatisfying its undependable nature. The wonder of this flower festival will soon be over and exist only in the memory. And yet, how heedless of dissolution beings are, rushing after every momentary delight with untroubled minds, though every path they follow ends in death.

"From their merriment one would think they had nothing to fear, yet three enemies of unconquerable strength—disease, old age, and death—stand always near. And there is no escape from the dreadful world hereafter. What reason, therefore, can the intelligent find to be merry?

"Clouds let loose their torrents of rain with the uproar of an angry sea. Yet, being composite, such clouds soon disappear, along with their golden garlands of flashing lightning.

"Rivers powerful enough to sweep away trees and outrun their own banks, in time ebb away to a trickle, as though wasted by sorrow.

"Violent winds blow down mountain peaks, disperse masses of clouds, and stir up the waves; yet in the end, they too die out.

"The blazing fire that destroys the grasses of the beautiful forest eventually abates and disappears. As time moves on, great groves and forests come and go.

"What union does not end in separation? What youth does not grow frail and old? Inconstancy rules all worldly things, and the mirth of the multitude is truly thoughtless."

By such reasoning the Great Being turned his attention away from the gay spectacle before him. No longer was he enthralled by the groups of people thronging the capital. And in this frame of mind he realized that he had already

arrived back at the palace.

His feelings intensified. In his certainty that there was no refuge other than virtue, he made up his mind to embrace a life of good conduct, free from sensual pleasure. As soon as he had determined this, he went before the king his father, and, with joined palms, asked permission to set out for the forest of ascetics.

"By taking a vow of renunciation I hope to bring about my own benefit. Your approval will guide me; you could bestow on me no greater aid."

But because of the king's great love for his son, he was struck to the heart upon hearing this request, and trembled like an elephant wounded by a poison arrow, like a deep sea buffeted by the wind. Unwilling to part with his beloved son, he embraced the prince, and said in a voice choked with tears: "My son, why have you decided to leave us so suddenly? Who has caused such displeasure in you that it arouses this desire to leave? Whose family will have to weep tears of sorrow at having caused such misery?"

"Or could it be that you have seen or heard of something improper that I have done? Tell me what it is that I may stop it forthwith, for I myself can see nothing of the kind."

The Bodhisattva replied: "Who could possibly inflict such grief upon me? And what wrong could there possibly be in you who show such love?"

"But why then do you want to leave us?" cried the king. And the Great Being answered: "Because of the imminence of death. Do but think, Your Majesty. From the very night we find ourselves in the womb, we move relentlessly toward the Lord of Death, marching without interruption day after day. No matter how skilled we are in the management of our affairs, no matter how strong, not one of us can escape. Old age and death infest every atom of the world. For this reason I wish to go to the forest, to lead a spiritual life.

"Proud princes can vanquish whole armies of foot soldiers, horsemen, chariots, and elephants all in finest battle array. But no prince can defeat that enemy we call Death, though he enters battle alone. And so I take refuge in virtue.

"Guarded by their horses, their elephants, their foot soldiers and chariots, princes can escape from any foe—but every prince since Manu, together with every single soldier of every single army, has succumbed helplessly to the enemy we call Death.

"Furious elephants with pestle-like tusks can crush the gates of fortresses, trample people under foot, destroy chariots and even other elephants. Yet their tusks, so victorious against town walls, cannot repel Death when it chooses to attack them.

"Skilled archers can pierce their enemies with arrows, no matter how well-protected their enemies may be by strong and well-wrought armor, no matter how distant and sheltered they may be. But no archer can hit that ancient enemy we call Death.

"Lions can destroy even the luster of elephants, plunging their sharp cutting claws through those majestic heads. The lion's roar pierces the ears and frightens the hearts of every adversary. But when the lion encounters the Lord of Death, his pride and strength are broken, and he, too, succumbs to death's sleep.

"Kings naturally punish those who act against them according to the measure of the guilt displayed. But if that enemy is Death, they do not think of enforcing their laws, though Death's harm may be great. Kings can conquer their long-standing foes through treaty and conciliation, but Death is strengthened by the duration of its hatred. Death is not one to be subdued by craft.

"When serpents strike man in anger, the poison of their pointed fangs burns like the most terrible blazing fire. But against Death no serpent's sting will be sufficient.

"Doctors can allay the snake's poison by mantra or medicine, but Death's poison is too quick-no charm or medicine has the power to counteract it.

"A Garuda strikes fear into whole schools of playing fish when it shakes the seas by the furious flapping of its wings; with outstretched claws it seizes its prey. Yet not even this extravagant attack can thwart Death.

"Tigers in the forest can easily overtake the frightened deer and crush them as if in jest, drinking the blood spilled by their lightning-fast claws. But they are not so bold when Death appears. Or a deer may escape the tiger's jaws by less than a hair-but who, having reached the mouth of Death, with its huge fangs of disease, old age, and grief, can ever make good his escape?

"Deformed and ferocious demons can sap their victim's vital strength, and with one bold stroke drain off all life. Yet when their time has come to wage war with Death, they too will lose the battle.

"Masters of magic arts can subdue demons with powers developed from austerities, with spells and herbs; but against the demon Death they have no remedy. Those skilled in illusion can perplex the eyes of great assemblies; yet Death is more powerful still-and cannot be tricked by even the cleverest magician.

"All who have checked the virulence of poison with powerful austerities, all the excellent physicians whose cures have halted the diseases of men, even Dhanvantari and such as he-each and every one has disappeared. Therefore I am bent on practicing virtue in the forest.

"The Vidyadharas with their powerful spells and magic can make themselves visible or invisible at will, fly through the air, and descend to the earth. Yet they too lose their might when confronted by Death.

"The gods drive back the asuras, and in turn are themselves driven back. Yet both armies combined are nothing in the face of Death.

"Understanding the ferocity of Death, our greatest enemy, I no longer find pleasure in my life at home. I am not leaving from anger, nor do I love you any less, but I have resolved to make a life of virtue in the forest."

The king replied: "What do you hope to find in the forest, the danger of death being so undeniable? Why take the vows of a holy life? Shall not Death find you even there? Do not the rishis who keep their vows in the forest also die? The life you wish to lead can be practiced anywhere. Why must you leave your home and go to the forest?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "I do not doubt Death comes to those in the forest as it does to those who live at home; to the virtuous as well as to the vicious. Yet the

virtuous have no reason for remorse, and virtue, to be sure, is easiest obtained in the forest. Do but consider, Your Majesty:

"The home is a den of infatuation, sensual love, and hatred, of jealousy and everything contrary to virtue. It is an abode of carelessness. What opportunity is there to apply oneself to virtue when a householder is distracted by so many petty concerns? The toil of earning and guarding property disturbs a mind already troubled by untold numbers of arising or approaching calamities. When then is there time for tranquillity?

"In the forest, however, having abandoned that host of toilsome endeavors, free from the care of worldly goods, one maybe at ease and strive for tranquillity with a clear mind. In time, happiness, virtue, and glory will naturally appear.

"Neither wealth nor power guard us, but virtue alone. It is virtue that brings happiness, not the possession of a large estate. To the virtuous, death can bring only gladness, for there is no fear of what will follow. The characteristics of good and evil are clearly distinguished by their results: in the one case happiness, in the other misery."

In this manner the Great Being persuaded his father to grant him permission to leave home. Renouncing his royal bliss as if it were nothing but a straw, he took up residence in the grove of the ascetics. There, he acquired immeasurable levels of meditation and used them for the benefit of all sentient beings. Afterwards he rose to the realm of Brahma.

From this story one can see how even the glory of royalty will not draw one from the path of goodness once one's mind is seized by the weariness of existence. Thus considering, one should become familiar with this weariness. This story is also to be told when indicating the right way to perceive death, and when praising the virtues attendant on the consciousness of mortality. It is also useful when explaining the value of ever-present awareness of death, and when teaching impermanence. Also one can use this teaching when indicating that we should not be attached to anything in the world, as nothing which has form is reliable. And also with this conclusion: that in the world we are helpless and friendless. Also this maybe propounded: "It is easy to obtain righteousness in the forest, but not as a householder."

32 - Prince of the Iron House

A Tale of Renunciation



There was once a king of who wanted an heir, but every time he conceived a male son, the child would die at a young age. The deaths were attributed to malicious demons. He resolved to build a house entirely of iron in which to raise a prince, so that the prince would be protected from anything that would harm him. A child was born, this prince was the Bodhisattva, and although isolated, he excelled in learning and cultivated virtue.

The Bodhisattva spent his entire youth in the iron house until one spring when he ventured out into the city to attend the yearly flower festival. Although the festivities were beautiful and full of joyous people, the prince, due to his knowledge that everyone suffers and dies, became quite sad. Because of his knowledge that being attached to worldly life only brings suffering, he decided that he must become an ascetic.

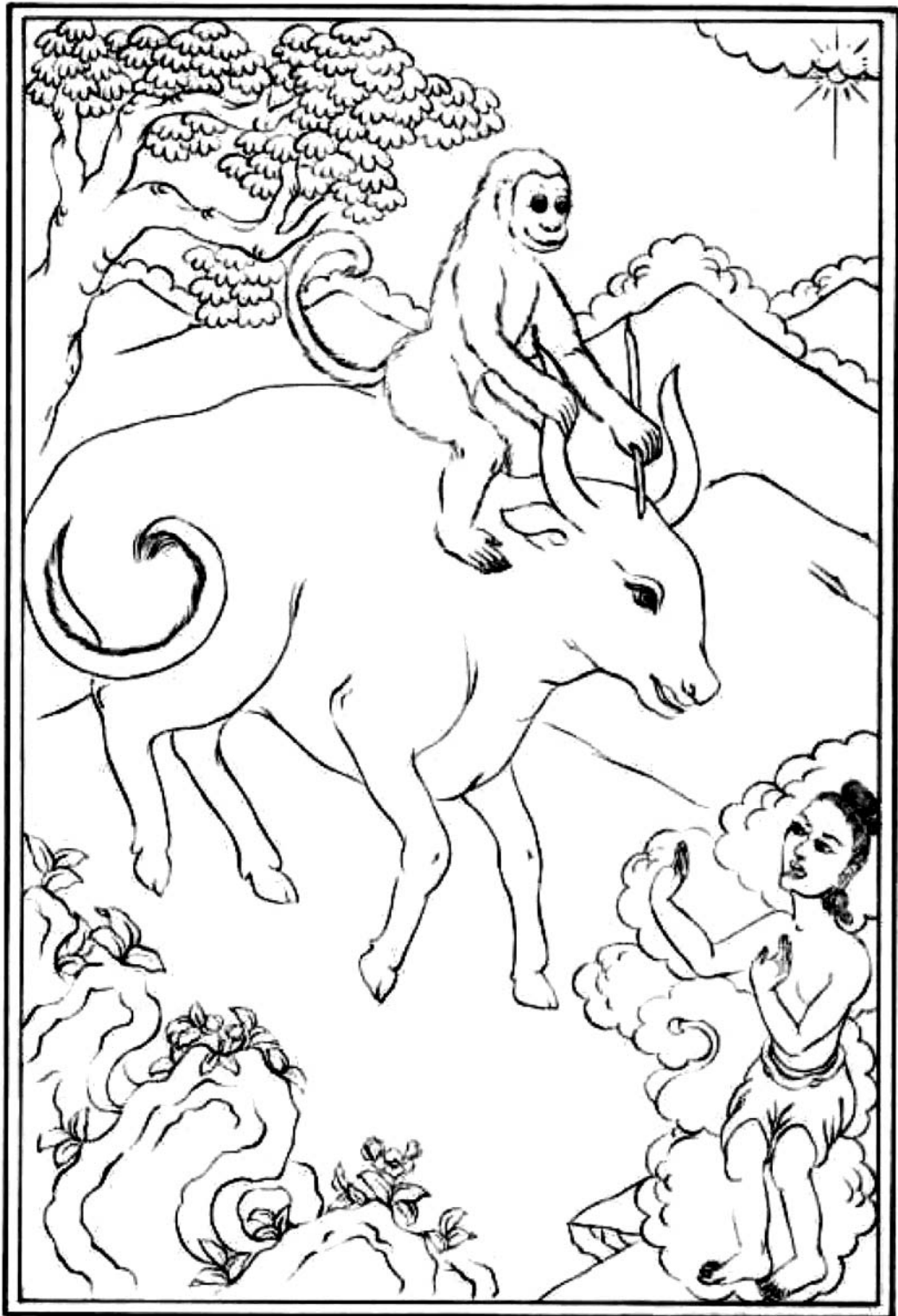
When he told his father he was going to leave home to start a life of ascetic meditation in the forest, the king was stricken with grief. Yet after conversing about the nature of true virtue, the king accepted that his son was not leaving out of bitterness and that he truly believed he was acting for the benefit of all. This story shows how even wealth and royalty will not draw the virtuous away from the path of goodness once they have glimpsed the inherent suffering of existence.

Key Events in the Story

1. A prince is raised in an iron house.
2. He witnesses the sufferings of others.
3. ... and enters a forest to become an ascetic.



33 - The Buffalo



Forbearance exists only if there is an opportunity to show it. Knowing this, the virtuous appreciate those who would harm them, considering them benefactors.

Once the Bodhisattva took birth as a wild buffalo in a remote forest. Grim of appearance and caked with mud, he was as forbidding as a rolling thunder cloud of darkest blue. But even in that brute animal state where ignorance prevails and the concept of virtue is difficult to come by, his keen understanding led him to practice virtuous actions vigorously. He had served compassion so long it would not leave him.

Yet some influence, either of karma or of nature, must also be taken into account to explain his state. It is in reference to just such situations that the Buddha declared that the ripening of karma is inscrutable. For although the buffalo's very nature was compassionate, he had obtained the state of a beast, albeit a beast who retained a knowledge of virtue. A series of existences cannot exist without karma-and yet virtue (which leads to freedom from karma) could never lead to an animal birth, for its effects are always good. So it must be that even with the Bodhisattva's consciousness of Dharma, some small residues of karma caused him, now and again, to find himself in such low states.

Now a proud and malicious monkey, aware of the buffalo's natural goodness, liked nothing better than to tease the Great Being. The monkey knew that he had nothing to fear from the buffalo, that anger and wrath had no power over such a being. So it is that rascals are never more eager to insult and annoy than when faced with the meek and merciful. Against those with kind hearts, they perform their worst tricks, anticipating no danger. But toward those who might retaliate, however slight the possibility, they will behave as modestly as the most scrupulous monk. Oh yes, their malicious nature is quite subdued then.

Sometimes while the Great Being calmly slept or nodded in drowsiness, the monkey would suddenly leap on his neck. At other times the monkey would climb upon the buffalo's back and swing back and forth from his horns. Or noting the buffalo's hunger, he would stand right at his feet, to keep him from grazing. And now and then he would poke the buffalo's ears with a stick.

Often when the buffalo was longing to go into the water, the monkey would climb on his head and cover his eyes with his hands. Or, having mounted the buffalo's back, the monkey would force him to take him for a ride, holding a stick in his hand like a counterfeit Yama. And the Bodhisattva, that Great Being, all the while endured these tricks without displeasure, anger, or annoyance, being quite untroubled, for in fact he considered them a benefit.

So it is that the wicked consistently walk the path opposed to discipline, while the good-hearted, due to their practice of virtue, patiently aim to benefit even the wicked.

One day a yaksha, scandalized at the indignities being heaped upon the Great Being and wishing to discover what the Bodhisattva could possibly be thinking to let these indignities occur, placed himself in the path of the buffalo as the wicked monkey was riding him. "Stay a little," he said. "Why are you so patient with that creature? Are you the slave of that wicked monkey? Did he buy you or win you at a game of chance? Or are you for some reason afraid of him? Don't you know your own strength? Why do you allow him to abuse you and make you his riding animal? What is going on, my friend?"

"A toss of your head and your pointed horns could pierce a diamond or cleave a mountain like a thunderbolt; your hooves in fury could trample mountain rock to

sand. That body of yours, as solid and compact as stone, bulges with strength. Your powerful nature is well-known to the brave; even lions fear to stir your wrath.

"Go ahead! Crush him with your hooves! Destroy his insolence with those sharp horns of yours! Why suffer that rogue to torment you, to cause you pain as if you were powerless? Have you ever found that evildoers can be brought to reason by modesty and kindness? Some diseases are best cured by harsh remedies, pungent and burning. Without such a cure, his insolence will only increase, like a disease."

The Bodhisattva gazed steadily at the yaksha and spoke soft words extolling the virtue of patience: "Of course I know this monkey is devious, unstable, and powerless, but it is for this very reason that I put up with him. What is patience when directed toward one of greater strength, or toward one impossible to conquer? What is there to endure when encountering those firm in virtue and decent behavior? We ought to endure injuries by those weaker than ourselves, though we have the power of putting them off. Better to bear insults than to lose all one's virtue.

"Ill-treatment displayed by the powerless is the best opportunity for displaying virtue. Why should the lover of virtue use his strength to lose his firmness of mind? Besides, an opportunity to show patience is difficult to obtain, depending as it does on others. Who then would resort to anger? Would I not be ungrateful if I did not summon patience against those who act to clear away my shortcomings, all the while ignoring the damage to their own well-being?"

"Then you will never be free from his persecutions," said the yaksha. "How can one subdue a rascal without laying aside humble patience?"

The Bodhisattva replied: "Desiring to destroy the source of one's suffering or desiring happiness by inflicting grief on another will never bring good. Happiness cannot be achieved in such a way. My persistent patience is an attempt to awaken his conscience. If he does not learn, he will sooner or later attack some creature with a hasty temper who will no doubt turn him from his misdeeds. After he has been ill-treated in turn, he will no longer do these things to me: Once punished, he will not act this way again. And so will I be rid of him."

These words amazed the yaksha and filled him with joy. Respectfully he exclaimed: "Well said, well said!" and, bowing his head to the Bodhisattva and snapping his fingers, he praised the Great Being with kind words:

"How is it possible for a beast to possess conduct such as this? How do you come by such regard for virtue? You are animal in form alone; you must actually be a higher being practicing austerities in this forest!"

With this, the yaksha threw the wicked monkey off the back of the buffalo, and, after teaching the buffalo a protective charm, vanished on the spot.

From this story one can see how forbearance exists only if there is some opportunity for showing it. The virtuous appreciate even the one who harms them, deeming such harm a great service. This account is also appropriate when describing real patience, and when demonstrating the imperturbable tranquility of the Bodhisattva even when in the state of a beast. How could a human being or one who has vowed to lead a homeless life lack patience? This story may also

be told when praising the qualities of the Tathagata and when explaining the importance of listening with attention to the teaching of the Dharma.



33 - The Buffalo

A Tale of Patience



Despite countless lifetimes of selfless and virtuous action, perhaps due to the ripening of karma from ancient and forgotten misdeeds, the bodhisattva was once born in a low state as a large buffalo. Yet even in this brute animal state where ignorance prevails, he treated all who he encountered with compassion.

With a grim appearance and always caked with mud, the buffalo was quite intimidating. One malicious Monkey however, aware of the buffalo's natural goodness, was not afraid and liked nothing more than to tease him. The monkey knew that the Buffalo would be forgiving and not take action against him. The Monkey would climb on the Buffalo and swing from his horns, stand at his feet and keep him from grazing when hungry, and would even poke the buffalo's ears with a sharp stick. The monkey would mount the Buffalo's back and ride him, holding a stick in his hand like the Lord of Death. It is said that the wicked consistently walk the path opposed to discipline, while the good-hearted, due to their practice of virtue, patiently aim to benefit even the wicked.



One day a yaksha spirit saw the monkey riding that buffalo and was scandalized by the indignities being heaped upon the great being. He wanted to know why the buffalo would not defend himself from such torture. The yaksha appeared in the path of the two and told the Buffalo that he would easily be able to kill the monkey if he chose to and asked him why he had not done so already. Did he not know his own strength? Was he the monkey's slave? Did the monkey win him in a game of chance? Was he for some reason afraid of the monkey? Was he not aware the monkey was wicked? The Buffalo replied that none of these were the case, and the fact that the monkey was devious, unstable, and powerless was actually the reason he put up with him. He wanted to help the monkey.

The Buffalo stated that it is easy to be patient with those who are more powerful but that when enduring injuries from the powerless, it is an opportunity to show real patience and virtue, however uncomfortable it may be. This satisfied the Yaksha who then threw the monkey from the buffalo's back, taught the buffalo a protective charm and vanished.

Key Events in the Story

1. Buffalo is harassed by a monkey.
2. Yaksha spirit asks buffalo why he does not defend himself.
3. Buffalo says he has patience for the monkey.

34 - The Woodpecker



Even when provoked, the virtuous, being unaccustomed to such conduct, are incapable of committing a wicked act.

Once the Bodhisattva lived in a forest as a woodpecker, renowned for his beautiful feathers, so brilliant and many-colored. Owing to his inherent compassion, he refused to follow the sinful instincts of his kind, and abstained from injuring other living beings. He fed on sweet and savory flowers, fruit, and young shoots, and was content.

Manifesting his concern for others, he found occasion to teach the precepts of right living to help the distressed and to prevent the low-minded from untoward action. The multitudes of animals in that part of the forest thrived, protected by the Great Being in whom they had found a spiritual teacher, kinsman, physician, and king. The more they found themselves protected by the greatness of his mercy, the more their virtue increased.

One day when the Great Being was flying through the woods feeling compassion for all beings, he spied a lion with mane dishevelled and dirty with dust, writhing painfully on the ground as if struck by a poisoned arrow. Moved by compassion, the woodpecker drew near and asked: "What has happened, O King of Beasts, to distress you so? Have you been too bold fighting elephants, or run too long and hard after some deer? Have you been hit by a hunter's arrow? Or struck by some disease?"

"Please say what grieves you, and what can be done. If it is within my power, I will do anything to benefit my friends. Anything I can do to cure you or bring you ease is yours for the asking."

The lion replied: "O virtuous and best of birds, neither disease nor exhaustion has caused this discomfort, nor am I the victim of any hunter. A fragment of bone is sticking in my throat like the point of an arrow, and I am in agony. I can neither swallow it down nor throw it up. I need help from friends. If you know of any way to assist me, please try it!"

Because of the keenness of the Bodhisattva's intellect, he quickly thought of a method to extract the bone. Lifting up a piece of wood, he said: "Open your mouth as wide as you possibly can." Then, placing the stick tightly between the two rows of the lion's teeth, the woodpecker hopped to the bottom of the lion's throat. He seized the fragment of bone by one edge with the tip of his beak, and by gradually working the bone loose, he was able finally to pull it free. As he came out of the lion's mouth with the bone, he kicked away the stick which had held the lion's mouth open.

No doctor, however skillful and clever, would have succeeded in this operation; only the Bodhisattva, his keen intellect developed over hundreds of lifetimes, had the skill to accomplish it.

As soon as the woodpecker had removed the bone-and with it, the lion's anguish-he felt no less happy than the lion at having relieved the suffering of a fellow creature. Such is the spiritual nature of the virtuous: They feel more happiness at easing another's pain than at gaining their own happiness; they experience the misery and happiness of others as their own. Thus the Great Being, having relieved the lion's pain, felt great joy. Having received the lion's thanks, the Great Being took leave of the lion and went his way.

Some time later it happened that the woodpecker, though wandering far and near, was unable to find any suitable food for many days, and he ached with hunger. Flying through the air on his wings of exquisite beauty, he saw the same

lion feasting on the flesh of a young antelope newly killed; the lion's mouth, mane, and claws were stained with blood, tinged red like a cloud in autumn twilight.

Now, though he was the benefactor of the beast, he could not bring himself to utter one word of request; modesty kept him silent. But because his need was great, he walked bashfully up and down in front of the lion.

The lion, though well aware of the woodpecker, did not invite him to join his meal. A benefit bestowed on the ungrateful is like an offering placed on cold ashes, like a seed sown on rock. Such a seed ripens into the fruit of ingratitude.

Then the Bodhisattva thought: "Surely the lion does not recognize me." Approaching with more confidence, pronouncing the blessings spoken by mendicants, he asked for a share: "O Lord of Beasts, you who earn your livelihood by means of Your prowess, great blessings will come to you in honoring a mendicant, one who provides the means by which you may gather merit and good repute."

But the lion's innate cruelty and selfishness left him unacquainted with the behavior of the pious, and so he shrugged off the sweet words of this blessing. Fixing a sidelong look at the Bodhisattva as if to consume him with the anger blazing from his eyes, he roared: "No more! Is it not enough that you are still alive after entering the mouth of a creature such as I? I can devour anything I please! I know nothing of mercy. Is it to insult me that you bother me again? Or is it that you wish to see the next world? Are you weary of life?" This harsh refusal filled the Bodhisattva with shame. Up into the sky he soared, speaking to the lion in the language of wings of the freedom and power of birds, and went his way.

A forest deity, indignant at the lion's treatment of the woodpecker, followed the Great Being to the clouds to see what the bird himself felt. "O Exalted One among the birds, why do you, the lion's benefactor, suffer this injury? You have the power of revenge; what good is it to show patience with such a shameless one? Though he may have great strength, you have the power to blind him in a flash, or to pluck the food from between his very teeth. Why suffer such insolence?"

The Bodhisattva, notwithstanding the lion's ill treatment and the provocation by the god, replied in a way that showed the extreme goodness of his nature: "Enough of that talk. Such a way is not for me. The virtuous help those in distress out of mercy, not out of desire for gain. They do not care if the other understands this or not. What reason then for anger? Ingratitude can only harm the ingrate, for who would do them a second good turn? As for the benefactor, forbearance unquestionably leads to much renown in this world, and infinite merit in the next.

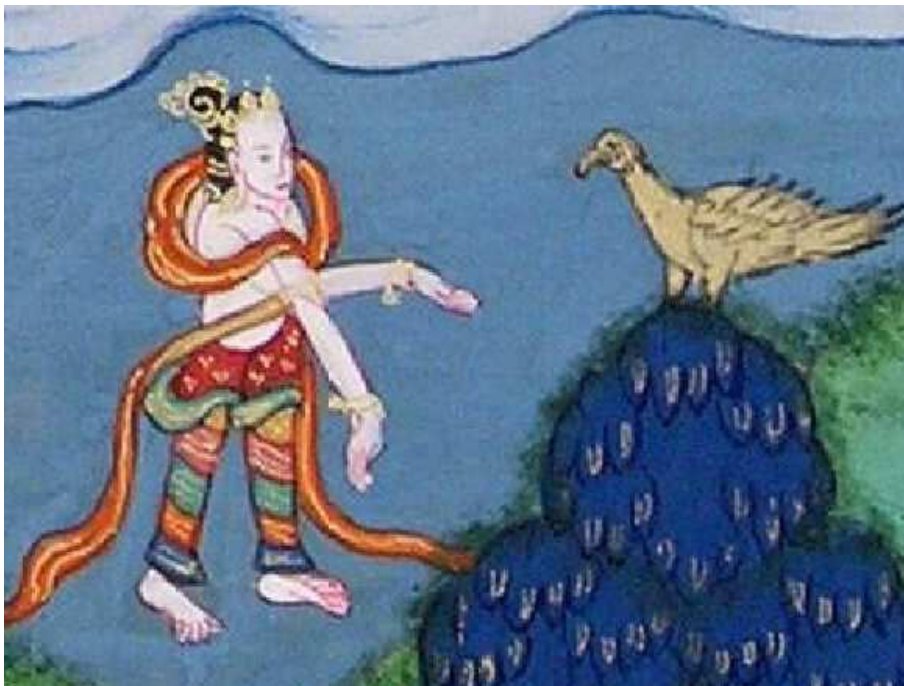
"Moreover, if a benefit is performed for its own sake, how can it be regretted? If done in hopes of receiving something in return, it is no benefit, but a loan. One may gain a spotless reputation through practice of virtue, but if one desires to retaliate against the ungrateful, one becomes like an elephant who, after bathing in the river, covers himself with dust.

"The one who does not know how to return a kindness will never know the glory inherent in gratitude-but is that reason to destroy one's own happiness?"

Whoever receives a service from the virtuous without returning friendship is simply to be left alone, but gently, without harshness or anger."

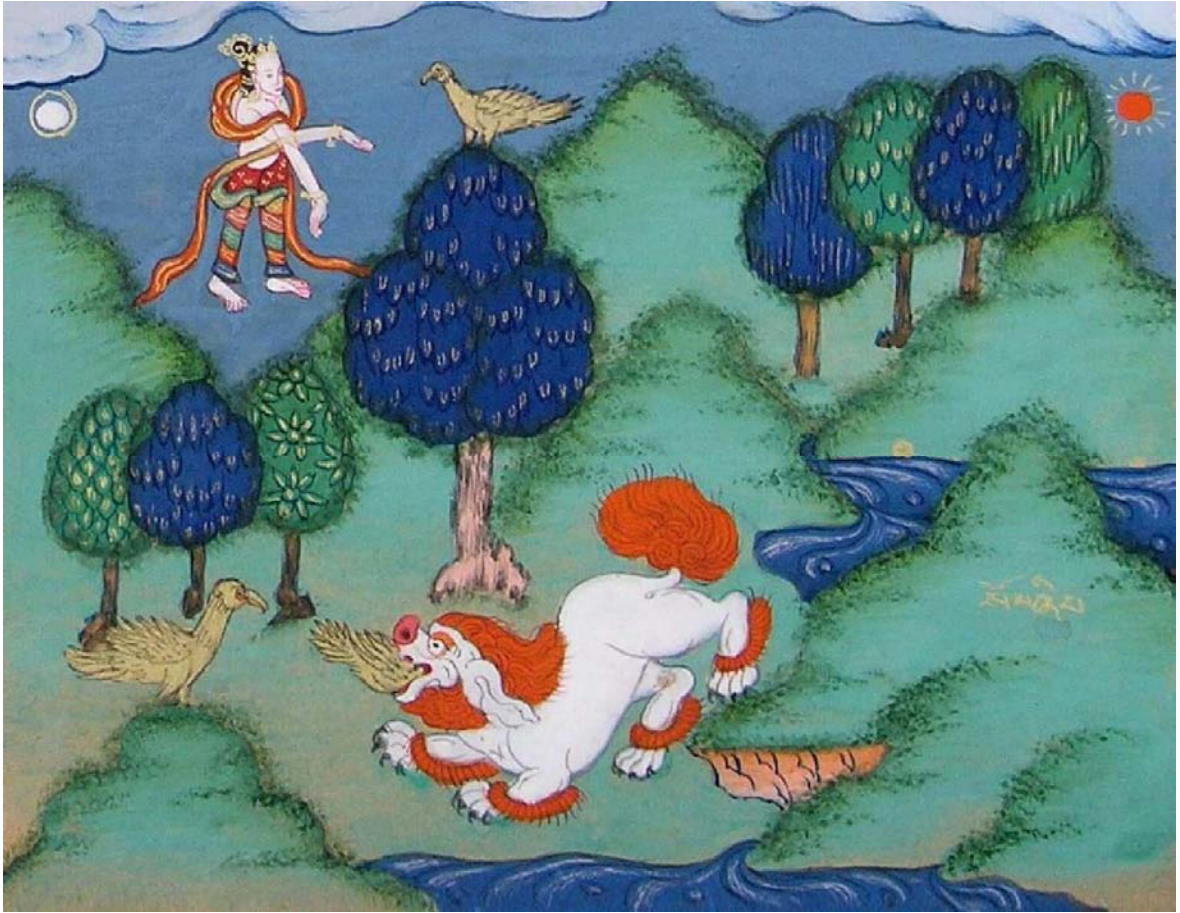
The deity, rejoicing at such wisdom, exclaimed repeatedly: "Well said! Well said! Though you do not have matted hair or wear bark garments, you are a true ascetic. It is not dress that makes a Muni; those who practice virtue are those who have the purest hearts." And after honoring the woodpecker in this way, the deity disappeared on the spot.

This story praises the qualities of the virtuous, showing how the virtuous, even when provoked, are incapable of acting badly, having never learned to do so. This story is also relevant when describing forbearance, to show how one who practices forbearance will rarely meet with enmity, rarely encounter reproach, and will be beloved and welcomed by many people. This account also praises adherence to tranquillity. It demonstrates that the wise, by guarding their tranquillity, preserve their own splendor. This story can be told when glorifying the Tathagata and praising the cultivation of good nature, to show how good nature, when truly cultivated, will never be lost, even if one falls to the state of a beast.



34 - The Woodpecker

Kindness without Thought of Reward



Born as a woodpecker, a notoriously sinful bird, the Bodhisattva had not lost sight of virtue. He always showed compassion to every being he encountered.

One day, as the woodpecker was flying in search of food, he saw a lion on the ground below, writhing in pain and discomfort. The lion was suffering greatly. He asked the lion what was wrong and the beast replied that he had a bone stuck in his throat and that the pain was agonizing. The woodpecker offered his assistance and at great personal risk, crawled in inside the lion's mouth and dislodged the bone with his beak.

Some time later, as the woodpecker was near starvation from not being able to find suitable food, he saw the lion eating a deer. Although too proud to simply ask the lion he had saved if he could share in the meal, he hinted that he was starving. Surely the lion would share his food with him, for the woodpecker had saved his life and was also so small he would only require the tiniest morsel. Seeing the woodpecker, and aware of his intentions, the lion became angry and threatened him. The ungrateful lion proclaimed that the woodpecker was lucky to be alive after being in his mouth and that if he did not fly away, he would kill him right then and there. The woodpecker did as he was told and left.

A local forest god, having witnessed the woodpecker save the lion, saw this rude and selfish behavior and became enraged. The god then flew up in the air and

questioned the woodpecker. The god told him that he could easily pluck out the lion's eyes and blind him for being so ungrateful, and would not be wrong in doing so. The woodpecker responded that he would never do such a thing. The woodpecker explained that when he saved the lion it was an act of pure compassion, and that he did not feel he deserved anything in return. The woodpecker further stated that generosity with the thought of reward is not generosity at all, it is nothing more than a loan.

Key Events in the Story

1. Woodpecker saves life of ungrateful lion.
2. Forest god encourages.
3. Woodpecker reproaches the forest god.



Glossary

of the Buddha who became the Buddha's close disciple and attendant; Ananda held in his memory all the Buddha's teachings, and propagated the Dharma after the Buddha's Parinirvana.

mythology, brothers of the Lunar race who fought with each other. They are considered ancestors of the Andhaka-Vrishnis, a celebrated Indian family.

residing in the heavenly realm of the Four Great Kings.

of the desire realm characterized by intense striving for the prerogatives of the gods; the envious or jealous gods.

^the Illustrious One' or ^the Blessed One'; one of the titles of the Buddha.

being who has formed the intention to strive for complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. After practicing the Dharma for countless lifetimes, a perfected Bodhisattva is reborn to demonstrate the way to enlightenment by becoming a Buddha.

of the gods residing in the lowest heaven in the realm of form; often described as the creator of world systems.

inhabited by great gods.

member of the highest of the four traditional Indian varnas; the educated, priestly class.

"awakened"; the Enlightened One; the title of the great Bodhisattva after his enlightenment.

race of demons and giants who warred against the gods; they were at first victorious, but later were vanquished.

lowest of the three realms (desire realm, form realm, and formless realm) that make up a world system; the desire realm is inhabited by hell beings, pretas, animals, humans, asuras, and the lower gods.

who have attained perfection through ascetic practices on earth, and are thus exalted as demigods in the heaven realms.

Indian mythology a great physician who was said to be exempt from human infirmities, even death; he was considered a master of universal knowledge.

Teaching of the Buddha, the truth, the true law; individual things, elements, or phenomena are referred to as dharmas.

state of Buddhahood which is achieved after one perfects the two accumulations (merit and wisdom) and removes the two obscurations (emotionality and wrong views), kind words, helpfulness, consistency between words and deeds.

winged beast with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle; great enemy of snakes.

who reside in one of the heavens of the three realms; a form of existence characterized by increasingly refined pleasure and happiness that last a great length of time.

Himalayas, the mountain range separating India from Tibet.

Shakra.

mountain in the Himalayas, north of Lake Manasa.

day and a night of Brahma; 4,320,000,000 years.

Indian mythology, descendants of Kuru, prince of the Lunar race. He ruled the northwest of India.

member of the second of the four traditional Indian varnas; the warrior class.

known as Vaishravana; one of the Four Great Kings, Lord of Wealth, and ruler of the yakshas.

particularly beautiful type of lotus.

'the great vehicle'; path toward enlightenment followed by those inspired by the Bodhisattva ideal.

Indian mythology, any of the fourteen mythological progenitors of mankind, each of whom rules for no less than 4,320,000 years.

of the gods of the highest heaven in the desire realm, and therefore lord of the entire realm of desire; the tempter of the Buddha at the time of his enlightenment.

of the Buddha's principal disciples. At the time the Buddha gained enlightenment, Maudgalvayana was himself a great teacher; after meeting with the Enlightened one, however, he became a disciple of the Buddha along with all of his own students. In depictions of the Enlightened One, Maudgalyayana and Shariputra are often shown on either side of the Buddha.

mountain at the center of a world system, ringed by chains of lesser mountains and lakes, 'a sage'; a title of the Buddha.

serpent-like beings who reside in the desire realm; they live in lakes and oceans, and often guard great treasure.

'blowing out'; extinguishing of the emotional fetters; the unconditioned state, free from birth and death.

"full nirvana"; the complete and final release attained by a Buddha at the time of his death.

who practices the Dharma without a teacher and thus never appears in the world during the time of a Buddha. The Pratyekabuddha investigates the laws of existence for himself and may teach through gesture or example, but never with words.

spirits, often known as hungry ghosts, demons residing in the desire realm.

practitioner of traditional Indian disciplines who has gained psychic powers; the Buddha is often called the Great Rishi.

cycle of birth, death, and rebirth within the six realms of existence, characterized by suffering, impermanence, and ignorance.

of the Thirty-three gods who reside in a heaven of the desire realm; also known as Indra or Kaushika.

one of the great teachers in India at the time the Buddha gained enlightenment, but became a disciple of the Buddha, together with his own students. Shariputra and Maudgalyayana are often depicted on either side of the Buddha.

commentary which explains religious teachings, monk who has taken preliminary vows.

known as Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu. When the ocean was churned up by warring gods and asuras, Shri arose from its depth holding a lotus in her hand.

"accomplished one"; one who has obtained either the eight common siddhis or the one uncommon siddhi.

are eight 'common' siddhis developed by the practice of yoga. Among these are clairvoyance, clairaudience, the ability to fly through the air, the ability to read thoughts, and the ability to control and transform both the body and the external world. All siddhis are samsaric except the supreme siddhi, enlightenment.

'thus-gone' or ^thus-come'; one of the titles of the Buddha, type of very beautiful blue lotus.

'divine knowledge'; the Vedas are the holy books which are the foundations of the Hindu religion.

They consist of hymns written in an old form of Sanskrit, and according to generally accepted opinion were compiled between 1500 and 1000 A.D.

^wisdom holder'; one who has attained great spiritual and magical abilities, of the desire realm, inhabiting trees and mountains; usually benevolent.

